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# THE BEGINNING PRINCIPAL;

# NEEDS, CONCERNS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Robin Matthews, Geoff Beeson, Jenny Baker, Margaret Mallia

Deakin University

Symposium presented at the Joint Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education and the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Geelong, Victoria, 22-26 November, 1992.

Paper 1Becoming a Principal: Marjorie's First Six Months

Jenny Baker

Paper 2The Beginning Principals Study: Background and Research Design

Geoff Beeson

Paper 3The Beginning Principals Study: Selected Major Findings from Phase 1

Margaret Mallia

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

Paper 4The Beginning Principals Study: Design for Phase 2 Induction and Professional Development

Robin Matthews

# THE BEGINNING PRINCIPAL: NEEDS, CONCERNS, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Robin Matthews, Geoff Beeson, Jenny Baker, Margaret Mallia

Deakin University

This "mini-symposium" consists of four short papers from the Beginning Principals Study, a longitudinal research study which commenced in 1989. The purpose of the symposium is to provide an overview of the design and nature of the study, to outline findings relevant to the professional development needs of beginning principals, and to describe a research plan for the trial and evaluation of a new, research based approach to induction and professional development. Discussion and comment on the findings and the research plan will be invited.

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
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for Research in Education

SYMPOSIUM THE BEGINNING PRINCIPAL:

NEEDS, CONCERNS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Paper 1 Becoming a Principal Marjorie's First Six Months

Jenny Baker, Deakin University

"I've inherited an unenviable situation as there is a constant undercurrent amongst the staff. They are constantly undermining my decisions."

At the beginning of 1989 Marjorie took up her appointment as Principal of a small suburban school. This government school is situated in a high socio-economic area and is close to several prestigious private schools. Over the several years prior to Marjorie's appointment, enrolments had declined. This was particularly so in the upper grades, as parents moved their children from this government school to private schools to ensure a place for their children's secondary education. For several years the school had had no permanent Principal.

## Initial Steps

Following her appointment Marjorie visited the school and met with the staff and children. She asked if she could attend School Council meetings as an observer in order to gain further insight into the school's operation, but permission was refused. Near the end of the 1988 school year she circulated questionnaires to returning staff so that she could establish an understanding of their values, priorities and needs. Marjorie followed up the questionnaire with individual interviews, then on the last day of the school year she met with the staff and together they agreed on a list of priorities for the 1989 school year.

Throughout the long vacation Marjorie, with the help of family and friends, spent many days cleaning out the administration area of the school. She then set about establishing the infrastructure necessary for a workable system of administration. Marjorie explained why:

The administration structures were nebulous and out of touch so I needed to start from scratch. There were almost no physical resources - no files, no bins, not even a sticky tape holder. I am unable to see where the money has gone as there is no inventory and there is an unequal distribution of equipment. It appears that some teachers are very well set up, whilst others do not even have the bare essentials...

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

By the end of the vacation Marjorie had established the procedures necessary to operate the administrative side of her task and she had established her goals for the first year. These were ambitious but she felt that they were achievable. She aimed to "Establish a challenging

Symposium paper presented at the Joint Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education and the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Geelong, Victoria, 22-26 November, 1992.

curriculum with good learning outcomes, set co-operative teaching structures in place and create a positive community image".

February

At this early stage Marjorie expressed frustration with regard to several areas. Her relationships with the staff had not begun well and many of her preparatory steps, such as setting up an efficient daily communication system, were being ignored by the staff. She had established a daily diary system and had asked staff to contribute items of general interest, notice of meetings, and daily classroom happenings. By late February she reported that " ...to date I am the sole contributor".

Marjorie felt that this lack of co-operation resulted from the power structure that had emerged amongst the staff whilst they had been without a permanent principal. She explained that the staff consisted of strong and weak people organised into cliques; therefore her first real challenge was to establish staff cohesion. This she foresaw as a major undertaking and the initial steps taken had been met with hostility and resentment. She commented:

I had high expectations but they are not open and honest, they're not receptive and are wary. ...One staff member has organised the timetable to suit her self-interests. I confronted her and she drew up an alternative timetable. This is still not the best and I have accepted it as the best compromise.

In addition to the lack of staff unity, the school had no clearly defined curriculum and teachers had developed individual programs to suit themselves, with little heed having been taken to vertical progression. Marjorie's vision for the future was to work co-operatively with the staff and school community to create a challenging curriculum with sound learning outcomes. Staff agreed that the school needed to develop school-based curriculum, and Language was selected as the first area to address. However, Marjorie knew that little progress would be made until some of the existing staff problems had been resolved. She also expressed concern about the outdated policy documents in the school and she was aware that these needed a complete overhaul, but this too she felt would not be possible until the working environment had improved.

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

Although staff relationships hindered progress, Marjorie's initial contacts with parents and children were positive.

Parents responded positively to Marjorie's suggestions for involving them in the day-to-day operation of the school. In the first week of the school year Marjorie wrote a letter to each child in the school introducing herself, welcoming them back to school and encouraging them to work hard and enjoy school. Many children responded to this letter and Marjorie pinned their responses on display boards in the administration area.

Late in February when asked how she felt as Principal, Marjorie expressed concern and disappointment over the lack of staff cohesion but this was lessened to a degree by the warmth of welcome from parents and students. She had not decided what steps must be taken to resolve the difficulties she faced but she felt that they were problems that only she, as Principal, could resolve.

March

When interviewed in March, Marjorie's concerns still centered around staff. She reported that they refused to co-operate with any initiative that she proposed and this was exacerbated by the attitude of the Deputy Principal. He had been the previous acting principal and was an unsuccessful applicant for the Principal's position.

The following excerpts illustrate how she felt staff were attempting to thwart her:

.I cannot get any staff representatives to go on to council and nominations close today. No staff are looking for assessment this year, therefore they have made it clear that they do not want to give up their time. ...It seems that they are not interested in working with parents.

.I asked the teachers to fill in details for an inventory but they haven't done this. They are just blocking.

.I have organised weekly meetings with individual teachers in the lunch hour or after school. ...One teacher refuses to participate and I haven't decided how to deal with this.

The influence of the Deputy Principal on staff relationships and his attitude towards her appointment, evident throughout this interview, were illustrated by the following comments:

.I've attempted to discuss the reallocation of funds with the staff. The second in command exploded and became extremely hostile. There was a complete lack of professionalism.

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

.One staff member continues to be a real concern... he is unable to control his reactions and borders on violence through verbal abuse. He makes personal attacks and is unable to cope if things are not going his way.

.Many staff members find his (Deputy Principal) outbursts amusing.

Marjorie reported that staff relationships were not her only relationship problems. She found that her relationship with the School Council to be fraught with difficulties. Conflicts between her expectations and Council's expectations had arisen. Some council members felt that Marjorie should be available when it suited them, whereas she felt that they needed to have more understanding of the complexity of the Principal's work. Marjorie explained:

I was contacted during the long weekend and asked if I would go up to the school and sign the school magazine so that it could be sent to the printer. I felt this was unreasonable and said I'd do it early on Tuesday morning. Twenty minutes later I was contacted again and asked if the material could be brought to my home. I refused because it was a long weekend and I knew that the printer would not be available until Tuesday.

We changed the time of the finance meeting from 7.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. in order to accommodate the Secretary and it turned out that no council member could attend but they did not notify their inability to attend until the meeting was due to start. Not one apology was received.

They are nice people but lack an understanding of the work involved and thus take the time I work for granted and feel I must be available when it is convenient for them. They do not appreciate that a school Principal has many commitments... I've got another life away from school.

The other issue overwhelming Marjorie at this early stage was the problem of coping with the workload and allocating time. At one stage she commented, "I've worked all weekend... It's not what I expected. I know I have to come to terms with what is happening and I must be realistic and logical, but this is difficult. ...I need to rationalise the use of time".

The related problem of organising her time created yet another concern for Marjorie. At one stage she expressed the difficulty through the following comment: "I must find out what is happening in the classrooms but this creates a dilemma. If I'm in classrooms how does the office work get done?".

When asked about curriculum Marjorie explained:

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

There are all sorts of tricky problems tied up with curriculum and thinking. Here the curriculum is in the 50's and nothing is very satisfactory. ...There is constant undermining and things that shouldn't be difficult are impossible.

By mid-March Marjorie had made the first major foray into curriculum change by organising a curriculum day focussed on the Ministry of Education's "School Curriculum and Organisation Framework". She explained that,

The material was presented slowly and in a non-threatening way. The main antagonist, an extremely rigid traditional teacher, was absent and this improved the atmosphere. For the first time I left school feeling satisfied.

Prior to the end of term one (Easter). Marjorie reported that she had reached a resolution concerning staff representation on School Council. On her third attempt to cajole staff into participating she reasoned with them by explaining that there would be a maximum of nine meetings for the year and if they attended at least six it would only involve a total of 12-15 hours. Marjorie said, "It was necessary to arouse their feelings of guilt in order to get staff representation".

At the end of term one Marjorie again met with staff individually and, using a structured interview, elicited their views on school climate, school community relations, office and staff administration and staff relationships. Many teachers saw this as an opportunity to air their grievances and their responses provided Marjorie with a clear picture of the interpersonal relationships existing between staff members.

Marjorie looked forward to the Easter break for she was feeling very tired from the demands of the workload and depressed by her inability to make inroads into the problems created by her relationship with the staff.

April

In an interview in mid-April early in term two and Marjorie appeared refreshed from the vacation and the interview began on a positive note: "I can see some light at the end of the tunnel. The response to the curriculum day was positive and seems to be the turning point. Since then I've had two professional development days that went well".

Despite evidence of improvement Marjorie was quick to point out that there were still conflicts. She commented that: "There is still resentment to having to give up time for meetings. They did not have regular staff meetings in the past".

When asked if there were any changes in priorities as a result of the staff interviews Marjorie explained that, "...there are some moves in place to

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

prepare a school-based language curriculum and staff felt that it is time to begin work on a school-based discipline policy".

Interviews with individual staff members conducted by a researcher in mid-April confirmed that Marjorie's perceptions were correct. Staff agreed that the main issues confronting them were curriculum development, staff cohesion and development of a discipline policy. Most staff seemed satisfied with the administrative changes Marjorie had introduced. However the perception of Marjorie's progress as Principal showed two distinct groups - those who felt she had been extremely supportive and those who felt that she had not consulted the staff enough. These perceptions corresponded with Marjorie's comments and the negative comments came from those who had held power previously. Overall, the staff appeared to be adjusting to Marjorie as Principal and her progress was summed up by a new teacher to the school who likened her acceptance to the motion of a see-saw. One commented, "The school is now at the brink of accepting or not accepting Marjorie as Principal... the tilt is towards acceptance".

May

By May Marjorie reported that she was "...still pushing ahead with curriculum development... the goals for curriculum are identified and are being addressed..." However, as on earlier occasions, she was also thinking a lot about staff relationships and expressed her concerns by commenting that, "I've still got the old guard. Some have applied for promotion out of the school. ...There's lack of humour in the school... no sense of fun".

The Deputy Principal remained a concern but she appeared to be adjusting to his apparently unpredictable behaviour: "The Deputy Principal is still being obstructive but his reactions are predictable because they are unpredictable".

Marjorie indicated that by now she had established a routine though she conceded that her routine was not really a desirable one. Time management was still a concern:

I'm trying to sort out my time management. I need to rationalise my time so that the role of Principal is not dominating my life seven days a week. I've given up too much. ...I've begun to network with other Principals about time management. I'm trying to get a picture of how others cope.

She also commented that communication was beginning to improve: "We held two parent evenings and we're communicating through the newsletter and getting positive feedback".

This interview heralded some progress for Marjorie. Staff appeared to be

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

settling into the new regime, even if reluctantly. With the slight change in staff attitude, progress had begun on addressing curriculum development and, as a result of the more settled environment, Marjorie had begun to be more realistic about her problems with time management.

Towards the end of May Marjorie summed up her progress by saying: "At this stage I can't say it's terrific or dreadful but it's working."

June

At a mid-year interview it was clear that Marjorie was beginning to come to terms with the role of Principal and was beginning to make positive progress in the areas of staff relationships, time management and curriculum development. The following comments illustrate how she had become more assertive in her approach to staff problems:

At present I'm meeting with each teacher individually and presenting them with the objectives that they came up with earlier in the year and discussing their progress. This time I'm giving them my ideas about how we should go. I'm trying to push on to achieve the goals set.

I had a confrontation with Mary. I came across her discussing me when she should have been in class. She 'didn't feel like teaching' and got someone to take her grade. I talked to her and asked her point blank if she was going to apply for a transfer. She got the message and wept a bit, I've had enough!

The Deputy has transferred to another school (next year). I'm delighted. I danced around the office when I heard this - it made my day. What a big difference it will make.

Time management was also improving, as she explained,

I'm getting better with time management. On reflection I now have one day at the weekend not doing school work. I'm now able to try not to get everything done at once. Many of my problems were due to the previous lack of structure and organisation within the school.

Marjorie's experiences during her first six months as Principal highlight some areas of major concern. Central to all concerns was staff to Principal and staff to staff relationships. This concern was exacerbated by the conflict that arose from her appointment in preference to the Acting Principal who was still on staff.

The need to develop a curriculum relevant to the needs of the school was an added pressure for Marjorie, as was the establishment of workable administrative structures. The existing systems and procedures were

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

unsatisfactory and Marjorie's attempts to make changes here met with resistance at staff and Council level.

Establishing an effective system of communication between the various groups in the school community involved change. Staff meetings, daily briefing sheets and parent meetings were strategies implemented with varying degrees of acceptance.

For Marjorie, coming to terms with the workload and prioritising her time were also major concerns that weighed heavily upon her. Her own personal need to get everything done at once led to her working extraordinarily long hours for seven days a week.

These initial concerns made Marjorie's first six months as Principal very lonely. At the start of her second year when asked to reflect on her first year and comment on what she felt she had learned, she replied:

I had to draw upon my own resources. It was a lonely role, especially without a Deputy Principal to rely on. The established Principals in the area did not help me, the new Principal, and I had no support or assistance.

She then added:

A very important aspect of 1989 was meeting with the researcher in B.P.S. This was wonderful. It made me think and reflect. ...It was also very supportive because without someone, not involved in my personal or professional life, to talk to, the job would have been even harder. Sometimes I felt foolish admitting to problems, failures, etc., but it was a worthwhile process.

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

# Paper 2 The Beginning Principals Study:

## Background and Research Design

Geoffrey Beeson, Deakin University

To what extent is Marjorie representative of beginning school principals? In what ways are her experiences typical? Which of her experiences and concerns are common to beginning principals and which are idiosyncratic? Does the development of her principalship have anything in common with that of other beginning principals? How might the professional development of beginning principals be facilitated?

These are some of the questions we set out to answer through the Beginning Principals Study. They were prompted by our interest in leadership and decision making in education, and especially by the lack of systematic knowledge about the worklife, professional concerns, development, and sources of support for those taking on the principalship for the first time. While Thomas and Muscio (1984), Thomas (1987), and Harvey (1988) focussed on beginning principals in their Australian research, their findings have not gone far in extending knowledge about the new principal's first months. Thomas and Muscio identified "the arriving principal" as a topic in need of research following interviews with 87 principals in three capital cities, and Thomas (1987) investigated some aspects of the entry of new appointees into the principalship. Harvey's extensive study (Harvey, 1988) was designed to provide information for the planning of professional development of principals in Western Australia, especially in relation to school development. It focused less on the description of the worklife of the new principal and the identification of concerns to be addressed, than on the establishment of generalisations relating to skills and capacities new principals need to develop in order to meet the requirements of their position in the Department of Education.

Until quite recently there was a similar lack of research on the beginning principal in both the U.K. and the U.S. (Hall & Mani, 1989). An important study by Weindling and Earley (1987) in the U.K. followed by research in the U.S. (Parkay & Hall, 1992) has helped to overcome this deficiency. Our study was designed to overcome the lack of knowledge of the beginning principal's role in the Australian context, and to fill a significant gap in our knowledge about the principal's role in a more general sense. This gap concerns the way in which effective practice and role orientations develop and change, and the factors that influence these developments and changes. It has more recently been specified by Leithwood and his co-workers (Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1990).

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Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

## Purpose of the Beginning Principals Study

The purposes of the Beginning Principals Study were:

Phase 1. to develop a picture of the worklife of the first-time principal. In particular, to identify expectations and concerns held, challenges faced, and strategies adopted by the new principals in adapting to their new role;

Phase 2. to develop, trial, and evaluate a professional support system for beginning principals, based on the research findings from Phase 1.

The study has been planned to run for six years, over the period 1989-1994, and involves both male and female primary and secondary school principals.

## Context of the Study

The last few years have been a period of significant and continuing change in Victorian education. Some of these changes have been common to other states of Australia, including restructuring of education bureaucracies, the closing or grouping of schools as a response to declining enrolments in some areas, a restructuring of teachers' career and salary structures, an increased emphasis on accountability, and a focus on students with special needs (Harman, Beare, & Berkeley, 1991; Macpherson, 1991). In particular, there has been a devolution of responsibility for many matters from the central authority to individual schools. In Victoria, these matters include responsibility for curriculum, the selection of principals, employment of ancillary staff, and minor building works. A large part of the devolved responsibilities to schools resulted from the implementation of a range of policy principles adopted by the Cain Labor Government soon after it came to power in 1982 (Minister of Education, 1983).

Of particular interest in Victoria has been the negotiation of agreements on conditions and staffing between the Government of Victoria and the Ministry of Education on the one hand, and the teacher unions on the other (Beeson, forthcoming). Amongst other things, these agreements require the establishment of formal consultative procedures for decision-making on matters such as teaching allotments, staffing allocations, class sizes, the lengths of periods, curriculum, the allocation of higher duties allowances, and other administrative matters.

These changes at the system level and the school level have had dramatic effects on the role of principal.

## Research Design and Methods

The Beginning Principals Study has involved both case study and survey

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

methods in gathering data about the worklives of beginning school principals. The major part of the study involved interviews with individual beginning principals starting from the time they first took up the position of principal. These interviews have been supplemented by interviews with teachers in the principals' schools, collection of documents from the schools, and meetings with the group of principals at the end of each year.

To complement this part of the study, and to provide additional information, all beginning principals who have taken up an appointment in a Victorian state primary or secondary school since January 1989 have been surveyed using a nine-page questionnaire. For each cohort, questionnaires have been mailed towards the end of the principals' first year - in mid-October for those commencing their principalship at the start of the year, and in mid-May for those appointed from July. The questionnaires sought information about the principals themselves, their professional preparation and appointment, the tasks they set themselves in their first year, the problems they faced, and their sources of support.

Towards the end of 1988, eight first-time principals (four primary and four secondary) were selected from Ministry of Education lists of principals appointed to schools from the start of 1989. The principals were selected at random, with adjustments to the selection process to ensure that there was at least one female principal amongst the primary and the secondary principals, and that the schools selected were reasonably representative of Victorian state schools in terms of geographic location and socio-economic level. Beginning principals were defined as those who had not held a principal appointment in the past, and who had not acted as principal for a substantial period. (A total of one semester was used as a guide.)

The beginning principals identified in this way all agreed to take part in the study. Each of the four researchers in the study was assigned two principals. Four school visits were made to each principal during the first year, including one at the start and one near the end of the year. These visits involved interviews with the principal lasting approximately one hour, (usually) the collection of documents such as newsletters, planning papers, information sheets, and, on two occasions, short interviews with a sample of teachers. As well as school-based interviews, telephone interviews were held every three or four weeks. Interview guides were used with all interviews, and the researchers completed written reports following each interview. The development of the interview guides was heavily influenced by similar research in the U.S. being carried out at the same time (Parkay & Hall, 1992). The use of open-ended questions gave more scope for the principals to answer in the ways which were most appropriate for them. Significant issues arising out of one interview were picked up in subsequent interviews, as appropriate. A five-page questionnaire designed to provide factual information about the school was completed early in the year.

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

The research team met at least monthly to discuss the progress of the study, to ensure consistency of approach in the interviews, and to analyse what was happening at each data collection site (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This part of the study was designed to be non-evaluative, and principals were given as little feedback as possible in order to minimise the impact of the study on the normal work and progress of the principal. The meetings provided an important opportunity to check the researchers' adherence to these principles, and to make any necessary decisions concerning approaches to data collection. Furthermore, they enabled discussion of particular issues on which attention needed to be focused, as guided by recent events at each site. A report of each meeting was made and distributed to each researcher.

At the end of the year a meeting of the researchers and the eight principals was held to gain feedback on the research approach used, to gather more data, and to report progress of the research to the participants.

Towards the end of 1989 a new sample of four beginning principals was selected from those appointed to Ministry schools from the start of 1990, using the same procedures as for the previous sample. The new sample consisted of two primary and two secondary school principals, and two men and two women. Interviews with these principals were carried out during 1990 following the same procedures used in 1989.

Following the completion of their first year, the interviewing of the principals continued with three school-based interviews and 4-6 telephone interviews each year until the end of 1991. During 1992 fewer interviews have been carried while the planning of the second major phase of the study is being completed. The 12 principals in the two samples have contributed to this planning (see Paper 4 of this symposium).

Analysis of the Data

The interview data gained were analysed using methods relevant to grounded theory (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Hutchinson, 1986). In keeping with such methods, data from the interviews with principals and teachers were developed into portfolios, one for each principal, together with observational data and documents collected from the school.

The initial aim of the analysis was to identify areas of significant concern for the beginning principals, and, in particular, any areas of concern common to all the principals. We reasoned that these concern areas would consist of issues and problems on which the principals focused effort and attention, and on which they expended a considerable amount of energy in resolving the problems and arriving at strategies to deal with the

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

issues. We also considered that the principals would be likely to mention these matters more frequently than others in discussion whenever they got the opportunity. This reasoning guided our approach to identifying the principals' professional concerns, as well as asking them directly. From the work of Weindling and Earley (1987), we also considered it likely that the areas of concern might involve issues and problems that were internal or external to the school.

We chose the principals' first six months as the first period of analysis for each sample of principals. Major areas of concern were identified using two converging analyses. The 1989 sample and the 1990 sample were analysed separately. The first analysis required each researcher to develop a summary of approximately 600 words for each of his or her principals, identifying what were considered to be their major concerns in the process. All four researchers then read all interview reports and summaries relevant to all principals. Subsequently, at a meeting, the researchers identified through intensive discussion areas which were seen to be of major concern to all the principals. They included issues requiring significant effort and attention to overcome existing deficiencies, to solve pressing problems, or to make needed improvements. Other concern areas were also identified which were of importance to some principals but not all. This analysis was a continuation of the constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) undertaken in the monthly meetings of the researchers.

In the second analysis, carried out quite separately, a research assistant conducted a content analysis of the interview reports using methods described by Holsti (1969). The recording unit chosen was the appearance of a statement indicating concern about a particular issue or problem. The written reports from each principal were coded in turn, with major areas of concern identified on the basis of frequency of mention, informed by context. That is, the context of a written report was used to identify whether or not a particular mention was "trivial", before any coding of the record was made. The coding system was developed during the content analysis. A list of common areas of concern was compiled, together with a list of other concerns not common to all principals.

The outcomes of these two analyses were then merged at a meeting of the researchers and the research assistant where the documents derived from the two analyses were examined. There was a high level of agreement between the two, and some small differences. The differences involved details of the descriptions of the areas of common concern, and the specifying of concerns that were significant to some principals but not all. They were resolved through further discussion and reference to illustrative examples in the data where necessary. Drafts produced as a result of this meeting were amended through two further revisions before an agreed final statement was reached. Finally, interview data from periods following the principals' first six months were coded in preparation for later analyses

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

using codes for the concerns identified.

Results

The analysis of the data obtained from the interviews with the new principals during their first six months resulted in the identification of seven major areas of general concern for the beginning principals. There was strong agreement between data from the two years 1989 and 1990. While these seven areas of concern were common to all the principals interviewed, the way in which they were viewed varied from principal to principal. The range of views extended from regarding an area as presenting major problems and producing a considerable level of anxiety, to seeing the area in a more positive sense as one of key importance in which significant improvement was needed. However, all areas of concern identified were considered by the principals to require substantial and persistent effort and attention, often at a high level of intensity, over an extended period occupying all or most of their first six months.

The seven areas of common concern identified were: relationships with staff, policy and curriculum review and development, image of the school in the wider community, administrative structure and financial management, communication within the school community, time management, and student discipline. The principals also had an underlying concern about establishing their leadership in the school, usually expressed through one or more of the other concerns. To the extent that they addressed the same issues, the questionnaire surveys resulted in findings which supported the findings from the analyses of interview data.

A further general finding was that all the principals experienced continual and varied demands on their time, and that there was a multitude of tasks to be completed at any one time. While these findings emphasise commonalities between the experiences of the 12 beginning principals, in many ways their experiences were very different. The detailed nature of

the problems confronted, the context in which they occurred, and the pattern of individual and institutional needs were idiosyncratic to each school.

We also found some important commonalities relating to professional preparation for and support in the role of principal. In particular, both interviews and questionnaire surveys showed that the beginning principals did not rate highly the nature of the principal induction programs conducted for them by the Ministry of Education, or the level of support they received through Ministry structures or through the principals' professional networks available to them.

One of the general matters of interest to us was the overall reaction of the beginning principals to our continuing contact with them. We tried to interrupt their worklives as little as possible, and as far as we could

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association for Research in Education

detect, we provided them with very little feedback, verbally or non-verbally. However, as the first and subsequent years progressed, we began to realise that they valued the times they spent talking to us about their concerns and problems, their joys and successes, and the general run of their lives as new principals. This was emphasised in one case where, at the start of his second year, the principal introduced the researcher to his new deputy as his "therapist", explaining that, in a sense, he talked to the researcher about all his troubles. In later years the principals spoke openly at the end-of-year meetings about the value of being asked periodically to reflect on their actions and decisions and on the ways they had used their time, and to explain why they had adopted certain courses of action.

The major findings from this first phase of the Beginning Principals Study are outlined in the next paper, together with an elaboration of the nature of the beginning principals' professional concerns, as identified.

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PAPER 2

SYMPOSIUMTHE BEGINNING PRINCIPAL:

NEEDS, CONCERNS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

# Paper 3 The Beginning Principals Study:

## Selected Major Findings from Phase 1

Margaret Mallia, Deakin University

The Beginning Principals Study sought to identify the concerns of principals as they took up their new role. The common concerns identified included: relationships with staff, policy and curriculum review and development, image of the school in the wider community, administrative structure and financial management, communication within the school community, time management, and student discipline.

In this paper a number of matters related to some of the above concerns will be examined. Cutting across the common concerns was a feeling of isolation and a lack of preparedness in areas such as industrial relations and community relations. These issues will also be looked at as they affect the life of the beginning principal.

### Administrative Structure

Although the identified areas of concern related to administrative structure and financial management, each of these strands will be addressed separately.

Much of the time taken to bring a sense of order and direction for the beginning principals revolved around issues connected with people, including the lack of secretarial and support staff and the principal's lack of experience in staff recruitment. Secondly, there was the time consuming task of receiving information and disseminating information to the most appropriate people. A third factor, related to the problems of inadequate and outdated filing and information retrieval systems.

Initially, each beginning principal had a very different story as they came to understand their school and community. The focus of some of these stories related to the knowledge about the school, access to the school, in addition to the personal and professional support they received prior to taking up the position as principal. As a result of the various contexts in which the principals would be working, very different scenarios were described by each of the new principals, even though there would be a similarity in the jobs they were to perform.

Like Alan, several of the principals had been promoted from a senior teacher position. He had not only to come to grips with the principal role

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Australian Association
for Research in Education

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itself, but with his own capabilities in responding to the numerous challenges that lay ahead. Similarly, some of the other beginning principals were unaware or unprepared for many of the administrative demands that would be placed upon them, not only in the first few weeks, but in the first few days.

In a recent publication, Mallia (1992) noted several of the principals spent considerable time during the last few weeks of the Christmas vacation at the school sorting through policy documents, reading the mail that had come from the Ministry of Education, going through material that had been left by the previous principal, talking to staff who were preparing for the coming year and generally trying to come to terms with the complex task at hand. This was certainly the case with Marjorie as was evidenced in Paper 1 of this symposium.

However for one of the principals, there was a more pressing demand than coping with the sheer bulk of the paper-work, and coping with the "fiddly bits of paper". She expended a great deal of time and energy in maintaining staffing levels, because the previous acting principal had underestimated the number of children to be enrolled at the beginning of the year and had this matter not been addressed immediately, she would have been two teachers short. A further implication of this lack of foresight and planning, necessitated the incoming principal spending time arranging for portable classrooms to be placed on site to accommodate extra classes at the commencement of the school year.

Another serious concern for some of the principals was the fact that former administrative support personnel, for example the secretary or the bursar, were no longer at the school. As a result of this, the principal had no one who could assist or share the knowledge of structures and routines to be followed in this important aspect of managing the school. This frustration is described in the following two comments:

.The bursar transferred out, the school secretary left and the treasurer (a teacher) resigned before school started. Therefore the people who knew about the school had left. This created a big gap - the jobs are being advertised now and we are in the process of selecting people to start. (George)

.Because there had been a temporary secretary at the school the previous year, there was a lack of communication, and there was really no-one who could inform the new principal how the school had operated before. (Sue)

However, while these situations seemed to be untenable, one of the

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

principals made the most of having new support staff and set about devising new support systems that would work effectively for all concerned.

All of the principals found themselves having to cope with other time-consuming aspects of the job including: establishing routines for handling information, particularly the mail; overcoming unprofessional practices, such as duty not being done and rolls not being kept, lack of policies and little concern for accountability. In one of the schools the administrative structure was very difficult to work within, particularly when the bursar had been given control over the non-teaching staff and was unable to deal with the power that had been entrusted.

However, there was at least one school where the administration system was working well:

I was most impressed by the innovative organisation. It is easy to locate things and the networking arrangements work very well, the newssheet, diary etc. The record books are easy to access and set up for use - all areas are covered from children leaving the school to potential agenda items. There is phenomenal organisation throughout. (Marjorie)

This situation was in stark contrast to what most of the principals found in their schools. The immediate task for many of them, was to actually establish a computerised filing system which gave them access to not only details of the children, but most importantly, access to information regarding the school's financial status. This too presented problems for the newly appointed principals, because they had to seek out personnel who had expertise in this area of computing. Even though the principals had attended induction programs, generally found they these programs of little value in the area of financial management, because at the time of the induction programs the incoming principals had little experience in this area and did not realise the value of the sessions till much later.

Financial Management

Lack of knowledge and experience in the area of financial management was very common among the beginning principals. The problem was outlined very clearly by one principal, "I was aware that I hadn't studied the Operations Manual and that I was quite ignorant of many of the documents which the Ministry sends out. I was also fairly ignorant of aspects of financial management". (Yvonne)

It has been documented in several instances throughout the study that the principals needed ongoing support with regard to financial matters. Assistance from the bursars, where they were appointed, to explain details of the financial procedures would have been advantageous. This situation was exacerbated in many instances, because some of the principals could not

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

get any satisfaction from the Ministry personnel or get assistance to teach staff how to operate the accountancy package. But one principal did comment on the level of assistance received from the Regional Financial Manager and two others when they checked the books, organised the accounting package and assisted the staff in getting the package working.

Coming to grips with the financial aspects of running a school created some serious concerns for the principals, as many had little experience and knowledge of managing finances at this level. When principals were asked how were things progressing, the response from one was; "Fine. The budget for 1990 is a bit of a fag, this is the first time I have had to do it," (George) and another stated that the biggest headaches were the financial ones (Max). Other issues related to the financial management of the school included; no budgeting had been done by the previous principal, no information about the amounts of money carried over from the previous year, the lack of insurance documents for goods purchased by the school, inadequate records, lack of knowledge and understanding related to the auditor's report and therefore the recommendations could not be implemented until assistance was given. One principal commented, "it is a common thing, it appears, for schools to be up the creek in this area". (George)

Another aspect of financial management which has taken a considerable amount of time to establish was program budgeting. Usually there is a sub-committee of the finance committee to address this area. Attempting to redress this disadvantage one principal set up support for staff in this way:

The whole area of program budgeting was a problem for me early on as was the whole area of school finances. However the process is going quite well. The staff have completed their program budgets although they wanted to stop during the bans period. However I gave up some time at a staff meeting as well as some of the curriculum day and they managed to get the job done. Rather than individuals doing them I encouraged a team approach so that none felt isolated by the task. (Alan)

There are other implications which impinged upon successful financial management such as, teachers have had even less exposure to financial matters than the principals, many of the school staff had never been involved in this aspect of school-life, inservice relating to finances is required as understanding and knowledge of financial matters underpin curriculum decisions to be made throughout the year, and the prospect of budget cuts from state and federal levels.

One point that was mentioned by the majority of principals was that there was a great need for inservice, not only for the new principals but also for secretaries and bursars, in learning more about the financial aspects of school management, but also the computerised accounting packages and the

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

importance of strategic planning.

Relationships with staff

Peters and Waterman (1982) and Sergiovanni (1990) emphasise the people, with whom we work on a daily basis as being "our greatest assets" but for a number of the incoming principals, including Marjorie, they were frustrated in their early efforts to harmonise staff relationships. This was compounded in several of the schools where the acting principal or deputy principal had unsuccessfully applied for the position and was still a member of staff. In one instance, tensions began to arise between the principal and one of the staff who had been on the selection panel as the principal began to feel more confident and comfortable in the new role. The teacher concerned felt "left out" as the principal began to form closer relationships with other staff.

Because the principals did not know the staff very well, they were also unaware of the capabilities of staff members who could be trusted to follow through different projects. So delegation from the principals was not forthcoming. Although one principal said,

I try to give them responsibility, that is, delegate downward. I consider that if they are to achieve something this will increase their self-esteem and that "something will happen" - at least I hope so. This is better than ticking them off and telling them they are lazy buggers. (Max)

Initially some of the principals found it difficult to reprimand teachers for not being on time, for not being professional in their approach to

their work, for wearing inappropriate clothes (a scanty leotard on a hot day after taking physical education classes and refusing to change), for inaccuracies being recorded on reports. After a while they were not intimidated by this type of task, and accepted that the reprimands just had to be given.

The principals had many concerns with regard to staff. The following are examples: in some schools the staff seemed to be too comfortable having been there for quite some time, thus making it difficult to bring about change, staff in one of the other schools were reluctant to become involved in school issues, such as taking the chair at meetings, accepting co-ordination responsibilities, or spending time on one of the many committees that operate in the school. For another principal, she had inherited an unenviable situation where her authority was continually undermined, and there was a constant undercurrent amongst staff and a constant undermining of decisions.

This area of staff relationships is a vital one, and a short paper such as this can only give a minute glimpse of the total realm of interpersonal

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

relationships that operate in any one school. A more detailed account of staff relationships has been discussed in a recent paper by Matthews, Beeson and Baker (1990).

Industrial Issues and Staff Relationships

In Victorian schools, the Ministry has a formal industrial agreement with the teacher unions which specifies certain decision-making structures that must be established in every school. However, there are different unions and different agreements for primary and secondary schools. The Local Administration Committee (L.A.C.) is made up of representatives from the staff, the unions and nominations of the principal. The principal may choose to be an active member of the committee or act upon the advice and recommendations given. This committee makes recommendations about teaching loads, staff in excess and other Ministry requirements. The Curriculum Committee, constituted in a similar manner to the L.A.C., makes recommendations regarding organisation and operation of the curriculum. It is worth noting that in some schools, the union influence was much stronger than in other schools. In these situations, the union representatives tried to wield a great deal of power and influence with varying degrees of success.

As industrial relations issues are evident in all schools, some of the principals have dual membership of the principal associations and the teacher unions in order to understand the positions of both parties. Generally, the principals try to work in partnership with the unions, particularly if there are problems with any staff, such as teachers in excess, dismissal of teachers and non-teaching staff or if there are any grievance procedures. As one principal said, "I am not a union principal, but I am sympathetic to many of their causes and I am a member. However, I do not automatically support union directives" (Yvonne). This stance was evident in some of the schools when there were directives to stop-work. The principals gave the staff the choice, but also pointed out the implications if they stopped work.

Sometimes the staff were not certain what the union position was and expected the principal to know all the union conditions. While most of the principals would adhere to the conditions, they were not expected to know them at a moments request. This has sometimes caused tension between the principal and the staff. Working through industrial relations issues has taken a considerable amount of time, firstly because the principals were not familiar with the conditions and the negotiations which had to follow, and secondly many of the principals had not been placed in these situations previously.

Principals were also unfamiliar with the union agreements relating to non-teaching staff such as the cleaners and the gardeners. Cleaners are represented by the Miscellaneous Workers' Union. One instance of the

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

involvement of this union involved 'an alcoholic' cleaner being given a choice between being sacked or retiring on medical grounds. Principals were not at all confident in dealing with this particular union and enlisted the assistance of the Industrial Relations unit.

In spite of all the "people emphasis" that is paramount in education, no one could have prepared the principals to be specialists in all people related area, and in particular, issues related to industrial relations (Mallia, 1992). One of the principals commented that she felt she had good people skills, particularly when she was a teacher, but she now feels, that she needs to attend courses in general people management to assist her to cope with and manage all the "people associated problems".

Community Relations

The importance of community relations is but one factor arising out of one of the beginning principals' major concerns, that is, the image of the school in the wider community. One of the many demands on the principal's time is devoted to attending the various meetings associated with the running of the school, for example the School Council and the associated sub-committees that are part of that structure. As one principal said, "Council work is demanding. It takes a week to prepare and a few days to follow up after the meeting and that does not include the innumerable phone calls" (Peter). Few people realise the enormous amount of nervous energy that is expended at School Council Meetings, but more so when procedures are not in line with Ministry documents. One principal was faced with the task of "putting the president in place and explaining very clearly and firmly the role of the School Council President" (Terry). It is incidents like this, that have the potential for creating ill-feeling between the principal and the parent community.

The principals also had to maintain a very high and positive image of the school in the wider community. This was achieved through a range of strategies including inservice sessions for parents helping them to understand teaching strategies or why there would be composite classes the following year, organising an Open Forum for the parents, being involved in discussions with other schools on District Provision and curriculum audits and promoting the school to possible new families. All these extra tasks demanded more of the principal's time, but gave them the opportunity to extend their networks.

Conclusion

For the many of the principals, each one of them at some time felt a sense of isolation. In the early days of their appointment, there were several

instances where the beginning principals had commented, that not one principal had contacted them to see if assistance was required, or if there was a need for someone to talk to them and explain some of the issues they

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

were about to face. The beginning principals confirmed that there were many times when they would have welcomed someone not connected with the everyday management of the school to discuss issues. Initially, many of the principals were uncertain where they could find support and someone to whom they could easily relate. This isolation often increased the pressure on the principals. In similar vein to participants in Kotter's (1982) study, the principals began to establish both formal and informal networks. These became valued communication pathways, as one principal indicated the importance of these networks, he said,

(this is) where we often share policies, curriculum programs, items of interest and assist each other in any way we can. Apart from the meetings, we are often in contact by phone. In the last few months we have installed facsimile machines and often use these as a means of transmitting information very quickly. (Terry)

The isolation factor was certainly felt by the principals as they tried to grapple with issues that previously were not in their domain of responsibility. None more so, than in the industrial relations arena where they had to contend with issues from both teaching and non-teaching staff and the ever increasing demands of wider community involvement and participation.

One of the biggest dilemmas facing beginning principals was knowing who to contact for information and the availability of ready support for the new role they had accepted. The following section will present a focus for a research based induction and professional development program for the beginning principal.

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Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

7 October, 1992
PAPER 3

SYMPOSIUMTHE BEGINNING PRINCIPAL:

NEEDS, CONCERNS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Paper 4 The Beginning Principals Study:

## Design for Phase 2 Induction and Professional Development

Robin Matthews, Deakin University

One of the underlying themes from the research findings was the sense of isolation felt by the beginning principals as they sought to "learn the ropes" of their new role. Interestingly, although the researchers in the project adopted a relatively passive and reflective role, the interactions they had with the researchers were regarded as very beneficial by the principals.

In discussing the extent of their feelings of isolation and the impact of the researchers' presence, the beginning principals identified a need for someone who could act as a sounding board for their experiences. They proposed that a scheme incorporating a "friendly" principal would be appropriate. This scheme would materially assist the induction of new principals into their new position. The purpose of this next phase of the study is to develop, trial and evaluate a professional development support system for beginning principals based on the research findings from the early phase of the study.

The proposals for Phase 2 grew naturally out of the findings from Phase 1. It was clear from both the extensive interviews with the principals and from the state-wide surveys that the new principals' professional development needs were not being met, that a structured support system was needed in the early period of the principalship, and possibly beyond.

Principals surveyed each year consistently indicated that the greatest support had been gained from other principals even though the Ministry offered induction programs at both regional and central levels. Unfortunately, it seems that while the content may have been suitable, the timing of the sessions was not appropriate.

Furthermore, the findings from Phase 1 of the study indicated that to be effective, any process for preparation and continuing professional

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

development of new principals must:

(a)address the major professional concerns held by beginning principals;

(b)address other concerns held by individual principals and relevant to their particular situations;

(c)provide ongoing support early in their principalship, and cause them to articulate, reflect on, and evaluate their decisions, actions, and progress;

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(d)be strongly participative, both in terms of content and implementation;

(e)be confidential to the immediate participants, and non-evaluative, apart from the professional self-evaluation of the participants;

(f)work in a way which will tend to strengthen professional links and networks;

(g)be productive in terms of clarifying issues for further, more focussed professional development.

The Beginning Principal Support Scheme (BPSS)

The particular support system to be developed and evaluated on the basis of meeting requirements (a)-(g) above, consists essentially of pairing a new principal ("the beginning principal") with a principal of three to five years' experience (the "support principal"), and arranging that the support principal provide on-going professional support for the beginning principal in accordance with established guidelines and training. The details and operation of this system, the Beginning Principals Support Scheme (BPSS), are described below.

The nature of the BPSS draws significantly on research and experience in the use of mentors in the fields of education Daresh and Playko (1989) refer to applications of mentoring in the fields of education, management and psychology. The concept of mentoring has been receiving a considerable amount of attention in Australia recently (Carruthers, 1991). A number of the commonly assumed characteristics of the mentor-protege relationship are present in our concept of the relationship between the support principal and the beginning principal in the proposed BPSS. These include the relationship being a helping relationship focussed on achievement, the more experienced principal acting as a support, discussant, encourager, and to some extent an adviser and information provider.

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

However, after considerable discussion the terms "mentor" and "mentoring" have been discarded. It is suggested that the peer support program for principals be called Beginning Principals Support Scheme (BPSS). One of the main reasons for rejecting the term mentor is that the principals who will be providing the support to the beginning principals do not share the usual characteristics of mentors. They are not very experienced principals nor much older; they are principals with 3-4 years recent experience of the trials and tribulations of coming to terms with the principalship.

In this context, it is necessary to look beyond the traditional literature on mentoring when defining the role of the principal in the supporting role. One of the first issues is to find names for the participants in the process. We have decided to use the term "support principal" for the principal providing the support since much of that role can be described in terms of what characterises helping behaviours, e.g., guides interaction, provides nurturance, has a repertoire to draw from.

What to call the principal protege was more difficult to determine. This principal is, at least initially, a recipient of interventions, but not necessarily, nor desirably, a passive partner in the process. A simple solution would be to call this principal, the beginning principal, as this

would also be consonant with the overall title of the program being the Beginning Principal Support Scheme.

The Role of the Support Principal

In redefining the role away from that of traditional mentoring, different emphases appear. In this study, the role of the support principal can be described in the following terms:

ˇproviding assistance to someone to assist their growth in a highly personalised way

ˇ stimulating the personal and psychological growth of individuals

ˇ promoting personal and professional development

ˇ assisting a person through a career transition

ˇskills required include some or all of encouraging, counselling, assisting, advising, communicating, modelling, guiding, protecting, listening.

A further element in the description of the role relates to the nature of the interactions that may take place. Again, since the role of the support principal is not that of "experienced expert", the relationship with the beginning principal is not that of expert-neophyte. Rather, as suggested

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NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

above, it is best described as a helping relationship. However, in using this term, it should not be assumed that gains will only be made by the beginning principal. As the literature suggests (Daresh and Playko, 1989, Barnett 1990), both parties in the relationship stand to gain considerably from the experience. A further aspect deriving from the somewhat looser definition of the role, and certainly from a program far less structured than many traditional mentoring programs, is the acceptance of the notion of "networking mentoring" (Barnett 1990). This concept suggests that the privacy of individuals involved in the helping relationship may change over time according to issues and the needs of the beginning principals.

Guidelines for Support Principals

To ensure consistency between the support principals and also to assist in the research process associated with the program it is desirable that a set of guidelines is agreed upon. The following guidelines have been developed:

ˇ guarantee of confidentiality for both parties in the process

ˇestablishing agreed upon protocols with respect to meeting times and contact times

ˇagreement as to the precise nature of the interaction i.e., roles and goals

ˇthe process is developmental, needs may vary over time and is more than "showing people how to do it"

ˇthe relationship should not be characterised by feelings of dependency, protectiveness nor controlling (?)

ˇfacilitating principals, within protocols established, need to be readily "available"

ˇthe relationship is a reciprocal one

ˇthe need to recognise that the beginning principal may develop some higher level skills than the facilitating principal possesses

ˇthe support principal should act in a non-judgmental way.

Training for Support Principals

It is planned that training will be provided for the support principals to assist them in their role. This training will comprise an initial one-day workshop followed six months later by a further one-day workshop. The issues covered in the initial workshop will be based on both mentoring research and practice, and the findings of Phase 1 of the Beginning

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

Principals Study. The specific skills required will be drawn to a significant extent from the work of Daresh and Playko (1989) on mentoring.

The following issues and topics will be included in the workshop:

˘ orientation to the support process

˘awareness of possible stages in the support process: an initial defining period; an intensive period of interaction; dissolution stage

˘skills development including active listening, conferencing, questioning

˘how to recognise the growth of a dependency relationship

˘awareness of the potential of a "networking mentoring"

˘summary findings from Phase 1 focussing on new principals' professional concerns and their professional development needs.

An important aspect of the BPSS is that it is to be seen as one component of the total professional development of the new principal. It is not designed to replace education and training in specific areas such as leadership, financial management, and decision making.

Consequently, it is not the role of the support principal to act as "expert", "coach", or "teacher". This is a fundamental aspect and one that will underlie the training program for the experienced principals participating.

The follow-up one-day workshop after six months will be designed to refine the BPSS approach, to further develop skills as required, and, in the case of the study, to make such adjustments to guidelines as are found necessary.

## Matching of Support and Beginning Principals

In determining the BPSS pairs it is anticipated that there will be some capacity for the parties to have a say in who is the other half of the pair. Six of the potential support principals will be selected although it may be necessary to make further selections if satisfactory pairings with selected beginning principals cannot be made.

The selection process relating to the support principals will attempt to ensure that there are at least two males and two females, and at least two secondary and two primary. The beginning principals will be selected at the end of 1992 on the basis of (i) geographic location - normally within

Paper Presented at the Joint AARE/
NZARE Conference, Geelong, 1992
Australian Association
for Research in Education

30 minutes travelling time from a support principal, and (ii) random selection where there is more than one principal who meets condition (i) above. The selected beginning principal will be invited to accept the nominated mentor, but it is anticipated that some negotiation and changes may be needed at this stage in order to match support and beginning principal in a way acceptable to the parties involved. This negotiation is seen to be a part of the study on the use of applicability of support principals working with beginning principals.

Research and evaluation of the BPSS

The research will focus on the provision of collaborative support systems for the beginning principals. The data will be collected by a research assistant. This will involve three site visits, early, middle, and late in the year to the six new principals, and six telephone interviews in order to (i) identify expectations, concerns, challenges, and keys to success, in the same way as was done for the twelve principals already in the sample; (ii) monitor the progress of the arrangement, with the assistance of a specially prepared interview guide based on the role of the support principal as outlined above. Other possible sources of data which will be considered are the use of a diary in which principals may record reflective comments, and the use of a semi structured questionnaire.

The data analysis will use methods as outlined in Paper 2 which are relevant to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in order to determine common issues and generalisations. There are two levels of data: information relating to the content of the interactions between the principal pairs, and perceptions about the process itself. The range of issues discussed between the pairs of principals will provide another picture of the concerns of the beginning principals. Research by Barnett (1989) suggests that principal pairs discuss administrative actions, clarify their goals, plan staff development, and learn how to develop budgets and grant applications. These issues will then be compared with the common concerns of beginning principals identified in Phase 1 of the study. Further questions about the support process itself will also be asked.

As part of the ongoing research program, the researchers will continue as previously their regular interviews with the twelve principals who make up the study sample.

Information will also be sought from those in this group who are support principals with respect to their experiences in this role. The plan is to undertake the process in 1993 and 1994 with the activities in 1994 being strongly guided by the data derived from the 1993 experience.

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PAPER 4