

# **THE PRINCIPALSHIP**

## **A STUDY OF PRESCRIPTIONS, PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS WITHIN A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL CONTEXT**

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<b>Reference</b>	<b>ERRATA Existing</b>	<b>Amendment</b>
Page 6, 5 <sup>th</sup> line from bottom	Gorton & McIntyre 1978; Williams 1978	Gorton & McIntyre, 1978; Williams, 1978.
Page 16, 2 <sup>nd</sup> paragraph, 5 <sup>th</sup> line	Hausman (2000)	Hausman, Crow & Sperry (2000)
Page 25, third line from bottom	Dr	Delete
Page 53, second paragraph	Greenfield (1988)	Greenfield (1987)
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Page 68, 2 <sup>nd</sup> line from top	(National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001)	(Ferrandino, 2005)
Page 82, three lines from bottom	(...; Gronn, 2003)	(...; Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003)
Page 173, second paragraph, second line	(Maund, 20003, p. 16)	(Maund, 2003, p. 16)
Page 192, second line from bottom	Doctorate or Ph.D.	Doctorate, or Ph.D.
Page 193, beginning of last paragraph	A 38% frequency of staff	Almost 38% of staff

For a revised version of the bibliography, refer to the attachment to the inside back cover.

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Principalship occupies a unique and defining position that influences the shape of schooling. It is the role of the school principal that has great significance for determining the quality of the education that students receive, and for securing the best outcomes from the educational enterprise in modern society. This portfolio of research explored a deeper understanding of the role of the principal via a three part investigation of the prescriptions, practices and perceptions of the principalship.

In Section One, a study of the literature on the principalship was used to define the prescriptions, as a theoretical basis for understanding the principalship. Observation and personal journals were used in Section Two, to document and subsequently analyse 338 hours of day-to-day principalship practice, in five Christian schools. Section Three focussed on perception as a powerful dynamic in the field of social discourse, which has particular relevance for principalship interactions. Perceptions of the principalship from staff, parent, student and board members, in the five Christian schools, were analysed from a total of 840 survey responses.

Previous studies, in the area of perceptions of the principalship, have undertaken to identify congruence in the various interest-group's perceptions of the principalship. In contrast, this study examined the perceptions of the principalship in relation to principalship prescriptions in the literature and principalship practice in the field study. The analysis of data was focussed on the nature and extent of variance and congruence between the perceptions of the principalship and the prescriptions, on the one hand, and actual practices, on the other.

The results of this study established that there was variance in the prescription, practice and perception data of the principalship. Idealized concepts of the principalship, concerning curriculum and visionary leadership, were challenged by principalship practice which was overwhelmingly administrative. While patterns of perceptual congruence were identified in prescriptions of personal qualities and professional skills for the principalship, there was considerable variance in the perceptions of what the principal actually did. The perceptual variances identified were relevant not only to existing principalship practice, as regards expectations and performance assessment, but also, to the recruitment of future principalship candidates and the development of training strategies for pre-service programs.

## **DEDICATION**

For the furtherance of the effectiveness of the school principalship, which presides over the great responsibility and task incumbent on each generation to train and educate the next.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A debt of gratitude and thanks is acknowledged to those who have contributed to making this portfolio of research possible;

- The University of Adelaide and the School of Education for the opportunity to undertake doctoral study at such a distinguished tertiary institution.
- The Scholarship of those who have preceded me in the study of the principalship, and the benefit that their research endeavours and outcomes have provided for this study.
- The late Professor Kevin Marjoribanks whose recognition of the value of this study was an inspiration, and whose advice in his supervisory role an encouragement.
- The supervision of Dr Margaret Secombe in particular, and latterly Emeritus Professor Robert Crotty, whose graciousness towards emerging scholarship and whose advice and direction to assist that scholarship become a reality were invaluable.
- The five participating Christian School communities that opened themselves to the research strategies and tasks that sourced the data for this study.
- The five participating school principals who, as colleagues, risked vulnerability and disruption to allow for my incursion into their principalship.
- The endeavours of my father, Alan Sears, and his wife Jean who assisted with collating the survey data.
- The very special technical assistance of Adam Connell whose expertise made possible the graphical data displays.
- The Board of Management of Craigmore Christian School who during my twenty-five year principalship at Craigmore Christian School supported and encouraged my research endeavours.
- Outstanding beyond the acknowledgement of the above contributions to this portfolio of research, two contributions are acknowledged with special reference and appreciation. My wife, Chris, was a constant encouragement and support throughout the eight year realization of this research portfolio, providing typing and information processing skills, but more so, the patience and fellowship of a true companion. The Lord Jesus, who is my life, I own as the source of the inspiration that began this study, the encouragement to continue and the insights to sharpen and shape the resulting study of the principalship. Thank you, Lord.

## **DECLARATION**

This Research Portfolio contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and that, to the best of my knowledge, belief and intention, the portfolio contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the portfolio.

I give consent that this portfolio, when deposited in the University Library, be made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education.

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George A. Sears  
July 2006