How is teacher underperformance constructed by principals of Lutheran schools?

by

Shane Anthony Paterson

Masters of Education, University of Southern Queensland, 1998;

Bachelor of Education, University of South Australia, 1993;

Graduate Diploma of Lutheran Education, Australian Lutheran College, Adelaide, 1985;

Diploma of Teaching, SACAE (Magill), 1984

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Glossary

Constructionism: Knowledge is viewed not only as being constructed by the individual through their interaction within their own experiences, but as a social activity where co-creation occurs through their interaction with others, who are sharing the same experiences.

Creation: Lutheran theology proposes that each individual is unique and has distinctive characteristics, gifts, and abilities. Individuals use these and are encouraged to grow in their vocation (work).

Grace: A Lutheran term for forgiveness which is freely given to all people and is not earned.

Interpretivist perspective: A focus on understanding the meanings used in the actions of, and the interactions between, people.

Neo-liberalism: An economic ideology which is viewed as impacting on the current educational context. Neo-liberalism favours free trade, privatisation, minimal government intervention in business, and reduced public expenditure on social services. This philosophy has encouraged schools to operate as businesses and required them to meet certain efficiencies and accountabilities. Also known as economic rationalism, libertarianism and the new right.

Performance management: Effective continuous strategies and practices (including appraisal, feedback, and goal-setting) which ensure that the individual is being supported to grow and develop in their profession, so that the aims and goals of the organisation will be met.

Performativity: Where good teaching practice is defined in a set of pre-defined skills or competencies, with very little or no acknowledgement given of the moral dimensions of teaching.

Pressure: Real or perceived serious demands imposed on one person by another individual or group. When and if the pressure remains too long or becomes excessive, stress may occur.

Significance: In the context of this research, significance refers to the importance of what is being discussed rather than holding any statistical meaning.

Standards: The parameters or expectations of a position which are expressed in a document to inform and guide the development of professional learning goals and provide a framework which can be used to assist self-reflection and self-assessment. In this research, the Standards refer to the "Australian Professional Standards for Teachers".

Stress: Viewed as a reaction people may have when faced with factors such as excessive work pressures and conflicts between individuals, for which they have inadequate resources to cope. It can also be influenced by a mismatch between the demands or expectations of the job and the capabilities of the person to meet those demands.

Two kingdoms: A Lutheran term for the two ways in which God works in the world — through order and justice (left hand) and mercy and forgiveness (right hand).

Abstract

In his study on the health and wellbeing of school principals across Australia, Dr Philip Riley discovered that managing teacher underperformance was one of the top stressors identified by principals in their work. This finding was substantiated with further research by Dr Mark Worthing and Shane Paterson of Lutheran Education Australia (LEA), who explored this issue amongst principals of Australian Lutheran schools. The findings of these two projects provided the genesis for this study, which explored the ways principals construct underperformance within the context in which schools currently operate.

It is Connell's assertion that schools currently operate within the context of the dominant ideology of neo-liberalism (2013), where teachers' work is observed, recorded and managed (performativity), and where government accountabilities, such as NAPLAN, place schools' and teachers' performance under an intense spotlight. Within this context, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) "Australian Professional Standards for Teachers" were developed to provide a framework for teachers to assess their own effectiveness and to reflect on their future capabilities (AITSL, 2012). These are some of the contextual factors that appear to be impacting on the work of the principal and on the expectation that they manage teachers and provide an environment that encourages the highest possible student outcomes.

The core feature of this study is teachers who may not be meeting the expectations required of them in improving student outcomes — teachers who could be considered to be underperforming. This study therefore explored how teacher underperformance is constructed by principals of Lutheran schools, and investigated why managing it is a major cause of stress for principals. It explored the use of the AITSL (2012) standards and identified behaviours in determining underperformance, along with the application of three theological beliefs of the Lutheran faith — grace, creation and the two kingdoms. Little work has been

undertaken within the Lutheran education sector to understand the issue of underperformance, the application of Lutheran theology to underperformance, and the impact that dealing with underperformance has on the health and wellbeing of principals; this project addresses those gaps in knowledge and understanding.

Underpinned by a constructionist lens, the project used a mixed-methods approach and, more specifically, a sequential explanatory design procedure to explore the research question. After surveying all principals (*n*=85) in Lutheran schools, questions for the open-ended, semi-structured interviews were developed. Through purposeful sampling, five principals with five or more years of experience and experience in dealing with two or more cases of teacher underperformance were purposefully selected for the interview stage. These interviews provided rich data which was used to answer the research question.

Through coding of the interview data, the themes of Awareness, Process, Effect, Relationships and Motivation were identified. These five themes led to the development of a model which illustrates the process of identifying and managing teacher underperformance in Lutheran schools. The results highlighted the particular importance of Relationships and Motivation within these themes, which was an unexpected finding.

The findings together with the research literature led me to suggest that principals in Lutheran schools are confident in their ability to identify and deal with underperformance — they do so with the understanding that it is a part of their role. The use of the term "stress" is therefore questioned as a result of this research, and I suggest that consideration needs to be given to the alternative term "pressure", which may more accurately describe what is experienced when dealing with underperformance. The thesis concludes with a number of recommendations for Lutheran education.

The findings of this project will be of assistance to Lutheran education as it seeks to support the health and wellbeing of its principals. This research made significant findings about the importance of relationships, the consistent application of Lutheran theology, the motivation of principals, and principals' confidence in dealing with underperformance. Further, this project leads to the recognition that there is a need for a consistent approach to and understanding of the process of performance management, while clarity is needed around use of the terms "stress" and "pressure" before strategies are employed to assist principals.

This project was limited to conducting interviews with experienced principals, and further research could be conducted to include principals with less experience. Further research using the term "pressure" to investigate any impact that managing underperformance has on principals and their health and wellbeing should also be undertaken.

LEA is mindful of the health and wellbeing of principals, and it seeks to support principals where possible. The findings of this research will assist in the ongoing support of principals as they lead in their complex and demanding role.

Key words: Lutheran education, schools, teachers, principals, stress, performativity, neo-liberalism, Standards, constructionism, mixed-methods, pressure, performance management.

Signed Declaration

I certify that this research project entitled, 'How is teacher underperformance constructed by principals of Lutheran schools?', submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education is my own work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any previously published or written work by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

Date: 26th February 2016

Acknowledgements

The journey to reach this point has been long but on the whole enjoyable, and there are a number of people whom I would like to thank for the support they gave me as I travelled this path. It is amazing to think that this journey began five years ago and has now culminated in this project which has been written in airports, on planes, and in hotel rooms.

First of all, I would like to thank my two doctoral supervisors, Dr Michael Bell and Dr Shane Pill, who have encouraged and challenged me throughout this whole process. Michael and Shane have been terrific teachers and mentors, enabling me to reach heights that at times I thought were unattainable. I am also indebted to my "study buddy" Peter Scragg, who began this journey with me; we shared notes and challenged, critiqued, and supported each other when the going got tough. Thanks, gentlemen.

I am indebted to Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) for their support during this journey. I began travelling this path while I was principal at St Michael's Lutheran Primary School, Hahndorf and completed it in my current position as the LEA Assistant Director: Leadership, in the national LEA office. I sincerely thank the School Council of St Michael's and Mr Stephen Rudolph, LEA Executive Director, for their financial support and the granting of study leave to complete this study. I expect that the support given to me will benefit Lutheran education in the future.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to a number of people who have assisted and supported me in a variety of ways. Thanks to my LEA work colleagues: Joan Scriven, for your authentic interest in my progress and for your wonderful proofreading skills; Kate Bourne and Tanya Wilson, our "office ladies", who helped with a range of administrative tasks that were beyond my capabilities; and Anne Dohnt, who always kept encouraging me and showed particular interest in the project findings.

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The journey is drawing to an end. I have grown considerably and look forward to continuing to use the skills I have learnt over the past few years (but first of all a good break will be had!). Thanks, everyone — you have all been a part of the journey with me.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The role of a principal in a school today has become, over the decades, much more complex and demanding. Contributing to this complexity is an endless litany on the poor state of education in our schools. For example, recent media headlines include "Failing Teachers Stay with Classes", (Williams, 2014, October 27), "Better Teacher Appraisal and Feedback: Improving Performance" (Jensen & Reichl, 2011), and "The Human Cost of Leadership" (Riley, 2012a). These are a sample, but they are reflective of the contested environment in which education operates. It is within such a context that principals lead and manage schools today.

The Changing Work of the Principal

Leadership has been widely acknowledged as one of the key factors in improving student outcomes (AITSL, 2015a; Gurr, 2008; Hattie, 2003; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marsh, 2012). However, in recent years the changing roles and increased expectations of school leaders have been acknowledged as possibly having an impact on the health and wellbeing of principals. With their more complex role, research is needed to identify the factors that may be causing principals increased stress that could potentially impact on their role and their wellbeing.

Research, both globally and nationally, into the changing role of the principal (Cranston, 2007; Matthews, Moorman, & Nusche, 2008; Phillips, Sen, & McNamee, 2007; Riley, 2012a) highlights such areas as the development of national curricula, national testing, local management of schools, financial accountability, and community relations as recent additions to the "portfolio" of a school principal. Cranston (2007) perhaps best described the

evolving role of principals when he equated it to that of a chief executive officer in the private sector.

Phillips, Sen, and McNamee (2007) drew attention to the fact that prior to 2007 only two studies relating to the health and wellbeing of principals were able to be found, and it is only in the last decade that comprehensive research has occurred around the changing nature of the principal's role (Phillips et al., 2007; Riley, 2012a). One aspect that featured in these two studies (particularly Riley, 2012a) is that stress levels experienced by principals have been increasing. Phillips et al. (2007) argue that work-related stress "lead(s) to reduced productivity and impacts significantly on the head teachers themselves and the school, its staff, children and the community as a whole" (p. 373), a notion with which Riley (2012a) concurs.

Stress. Definitions of the concept of stress are contested. This research is focused on work-related stress (Australian Safety and Compensation Council, 2006; Beheshtifar, Hoseinifar, & Moghadam, 2011; Blaug, Kenyon, & Lekhi, 2007; Health and Safety Executive, 2015; Pates, 2012). While definitions are contested, a distinction may be made when exploring the concept of stress, as noted by Blaug et al. (2007), the authors who discuss the concept of pressure as part of the narrative around stress, its positive and motivating influence, and its development into stress when pressure becomes excessive (p. 5).

This research explores work-related stress. Specifically, stress related with the principal's role in performance management of staff, and particularly where underperformance may be an issue. The Health and Safety Executive (2006) defines "work-related stress" as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work" (p. 120). Indicators of stress can include such things as an

increase in heart rate, sweating, numbness, and anxiety. In short, an inability to respond adequately to a perceived demand leads to stress (Chaplain, 2001).

This research was undertaken within that context, in order to focus on one of the identified factors which contribute to increased stress levels in principals — that of teacher underperformance (underperformance in the context of this research includes the concept of incompetence). The research aimed to give an understanding of how underperformance is constructed and managed by principals in Lutheran schools (for the purposes of this research, Lutheran schools are those which are located in Australia).

Background and Context of the Study

Personal narrative. With more than 30 years of experience within the Australian Lutheran education system, I have worked in a small rural primary school as a teacher and teaching principal, I have been principal of a regional medium-sized primary school, and now work in the national office for Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) as Assistant Director: Leadership. My current position has a combined portfolio which includes leadership development and the role of Executive Officer of the national Lutheran principals' association, Lutheran Principals Australia. While working within the Lutheran school system, I have also been contracted by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) to conduct school evaluation visits, both nationally and internationally, across all educational sectors, to support the implementation of the IBO Primary Years Programme.

As a principal, I have had to address two significant cases of underperformance. Through these experiences, I became aware of the stress which dealing with such cases can cause. Personally, I found that a number of consequences arose from dealing with these issues of underperformance. The impacts on the community, staff, parents, and students were noticeable to varying degrees. For myself, there was a narrowing of the focus on school

matters as I was consumed by dealing with each of these cases; this redirected my thinking away from the bigger picture of leading the school. Emotionally, they were both draining experiences. Both cases were resolved satisfactorily, for both the individual and the school. However, these experiences showed me that there was ambiguity around how underperformance was defined, by me and by others. This ambiguity caused tensions within myself, and between me and others, thus resulting in what I would describe as a stressful working environment.

I have, therefore, had the opportunity to observe, within my own work environments and those of other schools, the performance of teachers. I have also had opportunities to meet with principals and leadership teams, both in the Lutheran system and in other education sectors, and I have listened to their stories about their schools and teacher performance concerns. My interest in, and questions about, teacher underperformance evolved through these observations, my personal involvement in dealing with teacher underperformance, and listening to the concerns and frustrations of other leaders.

Although my experiences have been broad, this study had as its focus principals in Australian Lutheran schools. This is a system with which I am familiar. As a faith-based school system, it perhaps has some unique characteristics, which will be explored as part of the research. The research was motivated by personal experience and addresses a clear gap in the existing research literature, which will be demonstrated in the literature review (Chapter 2).

Important factors. A number of factors featured quite strongly in the genesis of this study. While they were quite separate, these events, when coupled together, provoked a number of questions and issues for me around understanding, constructing, and managing

underperformance. This section lists these factors and provides explanations of their contribution to the genesis of this study.

Dr Philip Riley. The journey for me to explore underperformance was spawned by the research of Dr Philip Riley (2012a; 2012b). He has undertaken longitudinal research to explore the health and wellbeing of Australian school principals — principals from all educational sectors were invited to participate. Dealing with underperforming staff — or, as Riley (2012b) codes it, "poorly performing staff" (p. 26) — was identified as one of the main stressors faced by principals. Statistically, 60% of the total respondents to Dr Riley's study rated "poorly performing staff" as a stressor at 6 or higher on a scale of 1 to 10, while 40% rated it at 8 or higher.

Comparatively, two other identified sources of stress in Dr Riley's survey ("sheer quantity of work", and "a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning"), were rated by most principals at 8 or higher (Riley, 2012a). It could, therefore, be argued that this source of stress (poorly performing staff) is in the top three or four stressors.

Lutheran education survey. To supplement Riley's (2012a; 2012b) survey, in my role as the Executive Officer of Lutheran Principals Australia I conducted a similar (but briefer) survey (Worthing & Paterson, 2013) amongst Australian Lutheran school principals. The results of this survey paralleled the findings of Riley's survey (2012a; 2012b), with the top stressors being identical. "Dealing with underperforming staff" (Worthing & Paterson, 2013) received an average score of 7.32 (on a scale of 1 to 10) from the respondents. The top source of stress as identified by Lutheran principals was "lack of time to fulfil my role as instructional leader" (score: 7.49), with "quantity of work" (score: 7.28) coming in slightly behind.

"Australian Professional Standards for Teachers". Around the time Riley (2012a) was releasing his results, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

(AITSL) published the "Australian Professional Standards for Teachers" (the Standards) (2015b), a set of standards which defined expected teaching competencies for teachers at different career stages. Anthony Mackay (2013, May 3), Chair of AITSL, when discussing the goals of the Standards, stated in an article in the Melbourne *Age* that "its goal remains straightforward and practical: to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in schools".

The Standards have their genesis in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which in 2008 stated their commitment to supporting quality teaching and school leadership (Ingvarson, 2010). Prior to this, several discipline-based associations (e.g., science teachers) had written their own standards, which had resulted in the education sector having more than 20 different versions of standards (Ingvarson, 2010). State and territory ministers, through the release of the "Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians" (MCEETYA, 2008), committed to supporting this policy initiative of COAG. In 2010, Professor Diane Mayer and Associate Professor Margaret Lloyd were commissioned by AITSL to review the literature and evidence-based research on the features of high-quality, effective professional learning and development for teachers and school leaders. These findings were published in the paper "Professional Learning: An Introduction to the Research Literature" (AITSL, 2011).

Around the time Lloyd and Mayer were commissioned, Ingvarson and Rowe (2007) and Jensen and Reichl (2011) were focusing on the need for common standards to increase the quality of teaching. The focus of these writers, and also the premise behind the Standards, was to promote benchmarks for teachers to strive for, with the attainment of these to be reflected in professional learning plans. Typically, it was envisaged that some form of recognition be attached once a nominated standard was attained by the individual (Ingvarson, 2010; Ingvarson & Rowe, 2007; Jensen & Reichl, 2011).

The process of validating these Standards, through teacher collaboration and consultation within the teaching profession, took 18 months and used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The Standards (AITSL, 2015b) set out what teachers should be able to know and do, with knowledge, skills, and attributes explicit at each of the four career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead. (AITSL, 2015b; Pegg, McPhan, Mowbray, and Lynch, 2011)

Contest of ideas. It was within the context of my experiences (personal and third party) in dealing with teacher underperformance, the two surveys which identified dealing with teacher underperformance as a significant stressor for principals, and the release of the AITSL Standards (2015b) with its aim of defining teachers' work that I began to have questions about a possible disconnect between such advisory and guiding documents as the Standards and the stress felt by principals in dealing with underperformance.

The notion of disconnect is raised due to the fact that the Standards had been available across the country for nearly three years. It is conceivable that implementation of these may have assisted principals to define underperformance in a consistent and regulated way so that they would then be able to manage it through the use of the Standards. If dealing with teacher underperformance is causing principals to suffer stress, research — which at the time of this project was not available — was needed to understand the reasons for the occurrence of stress when dealing with underperformance.

What reasons exist as to why principals suffer from stress when dealing with underperformance? If the Standards are not of assistance, how are principals constructing underperformance? I formed the view leading into this research that there was ambiguity around the phenomenon of underperformance, how it was understood, and how it was being

constructed by those who are managing and dealing with it. An exploration of this ambiguity became the primary focus of this study.

The Current Educational Context

To understand the increasing focus on teacher performance in the last few decades, one must be cognisant of the economic influences which have impacted on not only all levels of our society but also education. With the global economic changes that have occurred since the 1970s, education has been forced to reshape itself according to an economic imperative rather than a social democratic one (McGregor, 2009).

As Ellison (2012) stated, "the concept of globalization has risen to prominence as a key justification for the implementation of sweeping education reforms" (p. 119). These sweeping education reforms brought with it a focus on accountability — on student results, school performance and teacher performance (Boyd, 1992; Codd, 2005; Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005).

Historically, schools in the Western world had until the 1970s or mid-1980s been operating within a paradigm where there was an understanding of, and policies centred in, a social-democratic ideology where welfare was the dominant narrative; this has been described variously as "welfarist" or "welfarism" (Boyd, 1992; Codd, 2005; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006).

The role of government in operating within such a welfare paradigm in education focuses on such things as equal opportunity or equity, social transformation, developing critical citizens, and valuing all children equally (Gerwitz & Ball, 2000); it is an attempt to meet the needs of all citizens, and where possible it aims to eliminate the economic inequities of capitalism (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006).

Concomitant with these features was educational policy's emphasis during this time on student needs (as opposed to achievement) and on what the school did for the student, rather than what the student could do for the school. There was a focus on the needs of the learner, rather than the needs of the institution (Apple, 2001; Boyd, 1992; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000).

Neo-liberalism. The shift from a social-democratic ideology to that of an economics based ideology can be traced from the mid-1970s. During which time there was an oil crisis; recession and stagflation; the rise of Pacific Rim countries (with their ability to produce goods at a cheaper rate); the decline of communism; and loosening of banking controls, currency exchange, and capital movement between countries (Boyd, 1992; Connell, 2013; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). This economic ideology, "neo-liberalism", is the context in which schools now operate, as they have for the last few decades.

Connell (2013) wrote, "Neo-liberalism broadly means the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of a free market" (p. 100). It is within this ideology that such words and concepts as "marketplace", "standards", "performance", "enterprise", "excellence", "accountability", "choice", and "quality" have become a part of the discourse on education (Boyd, 1992; Ellison, 2012; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000; McGregor, 2009).

As part of this current discourse in education, the term "managerial" is being used to describe the work undertaken by principals as they manage outcomes in the school. It is principals who will embody the attributes of a manager in striving for quality within the workplace, who will engage in goal-setting, plan, review, internally monitor, report, market the school, and control a budget (Codd, 2005; Connell, 2013; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000). This managerial discourse provides a tension with the parallel discourse of the principal as the lead educator (AITSL, 2015a) in a school.

We now have an environment in which we expect schools — not just students — to get results, and where the focus is on outcomes and products rather than inputs and processes (Boyd, 1992; Codd, 2005). Students are characterised as "human capital", and a quality education will ensure that the students are provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed within the labour market. There is now a focus on economic benefits those students' can give to society rather than moral, social, or ethical contributions (Connell, 2013; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; McGregor, 2009).

In such a market-focused context, the performance of teachers and their ability to teach comes under close scrutiny. According to Codd (2005), "teachers have become increasingly 'managed' so their *productivity* can be measured in terms of the test results and examination performances of their students" (p. 194). This management of teachers through scrutiny "that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change" (Ball, 2003, p. 216) is commonly known as performativity (Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005).

Performativity. Performativity is characterised by what is produced, observed, and measured (Codd, 2005). Under a neo-liberal, managerial ideology the work of the teacher is under constant scrutiny, to ensure that they are "delivering" what is expected of them, with the nature of their work having become more performance-orientated, audit-driven, and accountable to a range of stakeholders (Day et al., 2005). Codd (2005), provides a clear definition of performativity when he writes, "[t]his dominant culture is more concerned with what can be recorded, documented and reported about teaching and learning than it is with the educative process itself … ends are separated from means and where people are only valued for what they produce" (p. 201).

In the current educational climate, one of the key roles of the principal is to observe teachers and assess their performance (AITSL, 2015a). This role, however, is performed within this ideology of neo-liberalism and a resultant focus on performativity, which arguably provides a different colour to the manner and purpose of this task than when a social-democratic ideology was the dominant influence.

The work of the principal. While principals perform a variety of tasks in leading and managing a school — such as setting goals and visions, and budgeting — the theoretical backdrop for the purposes of this research is the recognition that principals are also the formative supervisors and summative evaluators of teachers (Range, Duncan, Day Scherz, & Haines, 2012). With the outcomes of students being a high priority (AITSL, 2015b; Hattie, 2003; Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003; Strong, Gargani, & Hacifazliog, 2011), it is the principal's role to determine the effectiveness of the teaching program (and teachers) within the school. It is their role to assist teachers to develop into strong(er) practitioners and to encourage those who need support in reaching the minimum standards expected of them (AITSL, 2015a; Ovando & Rameriz Jr, 2007; Range et al., 2012; Tuytens & Devos, 2010). Thus, they have a dual role which is formative and summative.

Range et al. (2012) highlight the difficulty that principals face in this role of instructional leadership. In discussing effectiveness, they state that it "is an elusive concept to define when we consider the complex task of teaching and the multitude of contexts in which teachers work" (p. 2). This then leads to consideration of how satisfactory performance and poor performance is articulated so that the principal can work towards improving student outcomes — whether it be through building on good performance or addressing teacher underperformance.

Teacher performance. The focus of this research is underperformance and how it is defined or constructed by principals. An in-depth analysis of this phenomenon will be the focus of the literature review in Chapter 2, however, it is relevant at this point to provide some brief explanation and definition to some elements of teacher performance discussed later in more detail.

Hattie (2003), in writing about satisfactory or effective teaching performance, speaks of five dimensions in identifying expert teachers: "[they] can identify essential representations of their subject, can guide learning through classroom interactions, can monitor learning and provide feedback, can attend to affective attributes, and can influence student outcomes." (p. 5). Jones, Jenkins, and Lord (2006) quote the work of Muijs and Reynolds in defining good performance as "(good teachers) ... have a positive attitude, develop pleasant social/psychological climate in the classroom, have high expectations, communicate lesson clarity, have a variety of teaching strategies" (p. 5). This is reflective of much of the research in this area.

There is, however, less clarity around the definition of "underperformance". Wragg, Haines, Wragg, and Chamberlain (1999), in their work, would argue that underperformance is not defined by one characteristic but is displayed in "clusters" of evidence, while Jones et al. (2006) argue that to arrive at a precise meaning of "underperformance" one must first define "good performance". This, Jones et al. (2006) say, is gauged by both student behaviour and student outcomes.

Several researchers have offered as common indicators of underperformance such indicators as complaints from parents, students and colleagues; poor classroom discipline; lack of student progress and/or underachievement; lack of lesson planning and preparation; poor subject knowledge; low expectations of students; lesson delivery that does not capture

interest or enthusiasm; and curriculums that are not adjusted for learning abilities (Jones et al., 2006; Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003; Wragg et al., 1999).

The Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) (2015), an employer of approximately 17,000 teachers in South Australia (SA), defined underperformance as occurring when "an employee is not performing the duties of their role to the required standard or otherwise is not performing in a satisfactory manner" (DECD, 2015, p. 6). DECD also defined four types of underperformance: inability (to perform to expectations); indolence or lack of application/effort; misconduct; and mental or physical incapacity (DECD, 2015).

In comparison, the New South Wales (NSW) Government Department of Education and Communities (2014), which employs 84,000 teachers, in describing underperformance stated, "Generally, unsatisfactory performance means not meeting agreed tasks, or timeframes or standards of work. The agreed standards can be in a work plan or in any other documentation" (New South Wales Government, 2006, p. 35).

These policy statements, from two large employers of staff across all levels of schooling (including TAFE), require principals to determine "agreed tasks" or "the duties of their role". Such statements raise the following questions: What are the agreed tasks and duties of the teacher? How does a teacher exhibit satisfactory performance in the carriage of those duties and tasks? Without clear answers to these two questions, it is difficult to be clear about the system definitions of underperformance.

Questions are raised in the literature, however, about the ability of the principal to identify and deal with underperformance (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Ovando & Rameriz Jr, 2007; Strong, Gargani, & Hacifazliog, 2011). Exploration is, therefore, needed to uncover any connection between the stress being experienced by principals when dealing with

underperformance and the possibility that they are unable to define and deal with it. This has been explored further in Chapter 2.

It is important to state that this research will not discuss the concept of misconduct in the workplace. "Misconduct" is defined by the Australian Government's Fair Work Ombudsman (2015) as "[c]onduct by an employee that is intentional and causes serious immediate risk to the health or safety of a person, or the reputation, viability or profitability of the business. For example, theft or assault in the workplace."

This research will concentrate on underperformance as outlined earlier and not intentional acts (misconduct) which may cause harm to others. This focus on underperformance is clarified further in the following section.

Purpose of the Study

From the results of two surveys, (Riley, 2012a; Riley, 2012b; Worthing & Paterson, 2013), it is apparent that dealing with underperformance is causing principals stress. While examples of satisfactory teacher performance and how to further improve and strengthen it can be determined, there appears to be a lack of consistency around having such a definitive view of underperformance. The literature is clearer on what constitutes satisfactory or good performance, rather than around a definitive view of underperformance and, subsequently, how to deal with it.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how principals understand or construct underperformance and, in dealing with it, the effect it may have on their health and wellbeing. The central phenomenon of the study is teacher underperformance, and it was researched within the context of the Lutheran education system.

Australian Lutheran Education System

The Australian Lutheran school system comprises 85 schools across all the states and territories of Australia (except the Australian Capital Territory) and has three jurisdictions or regions which are based in Brisbane, Melbourne, and Adelaide. The system consists of early childhood centres, primary schools, secondary schools, and combined primary/secondary schools, educating just over 40,000 students. The schools range in size from 26 students through to 2,065 students, and they service areas which can be considered remote, rural, or urban. (Lutheran Education Australia, 2015)

Lutheran schools, while receiving support from their respective regions, operate with a high degree of autonomy and are responsible for staffing, finance, resource management, and facilities. While exercising a level of independence, the 85 schools also operate under the guidelines and expectations placed on them by the Lutheran Church of Australia (the Church).

Lutheran schools. A Lutheran school is a faith-based school; it is a school of the Lutheran Church of Australia and therefore has a point of difference when compared with other schools and school systems. This difference, according to Bartsch (2013), is exemplified in a set of core values and beliefs which do not change or are compromised, irrespective of the current educational context. Christenson (2004) takes this further when he discusses a specific Lutheran anthropology and epistemology: "[w]e are Lutheran by means of our educational vision, a theologically informed orientation that manifests itself in what we do as we learn and teach together and our understanding of why we do it" (p. 28).

It is essential that leaders of Lutheran schools have an understanding of these fundamental and core values and beliefs, that they have a theologically informed orientation that guides their practice because the Lutheran Church has set theological expectations

through its various policies for its leaders. They are to "uphold the teachings of the church" (Lutheran Education Australia, 2001, p. 1) and to "have a clear understanding of the mission of the Lutheran school" (Lutheran Education Australia, 2006, p. 1).

The view of underperformance and the way in which it is handled could clearly be informed by some of the theological teachings of the Church. While the Church has numerous teachings, three have been highlighted as being essential in dealing with this phenomenon: creation, the two kingdoms, and grace.

Creation. The core of this teaching is to be found in Genesis 1:27 *(*Revised Standard Version), where we read that humans were created in the image of God. In the book of Genesis, while our perfect relationship with God was fractured due to sin, each individual has worth and value in the eyes of God (Lutheran Education Australia, 2005, p. 38); we are unique and have distinctive characteristics, gifts, and abilities. Lutheran teaching thus emphasises that we are valued for who we are, not our utility (Bartsch, 2013; Christenson, 2004). An acknowledgement of our vocation, or of the service we undertake for others, is part of the Lutheran understanding of God's continuing creation where we use our gifts and talents to serve the needs of others (Bartsch, 2013). Such a belief emphasises the way members of a Lutheran school community are viewed and treated.

The two kingdoms. A uniquely Lutheran perspective, the two kingdoms or the two hands of God, delineates the way God works within the world; while seen as separate, these two hands work together. The left hand, the realm of justice, ensures that peace and good order are kept within the world. It is recognised that there are accountabilities to governments and civil authorities and consequences for failing to follow these. From a school perspective, there are regulations to follow, curricula to be taught, teaching standards to be met, and

behaviours to manage as the school serves the community and society (Bartsch, 2013; Lutheran Education Australia, 2005).

The right hand is often depicted as the realm of mercy, where God operates through the Church, the community of Christians, with the gospel of forgiveness. It is within this context that Christian practices (e.g., worship, confession, absolution) occur within Lutheran school settings.

Grace. As Christenson (2004) emphasises in discussing an understanding of grace, "if anything is the central theme of Lutheranism it is this: we are justified by grace through faith" (p. 45). Put simply, Lutherans believe that there is nothing they can to do to earn God's forgiveness for their sin: It has been already been given through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are only called to believe to receive this. Within the school community it is recognised that, while all people in the eyes of God are sinners, they have freely received this forgiveness (Bartsch, 2013; Lutheran Education Australia, 2005).

As Christenson (2004) explains when speaking of church doctrine, "grasping the Lutheran understanding of these gives an adequate view of what the Lutheran theological tradition is and how Lutherans think about things" (p. 37). I believe that a clear understanding and subsequent application of these doctrines by Lutheran school leaders should inform the handling of teacher underperformance.

Research Question

Through the contest of ideas as described, the significant factors outlined earlier, and my own experiences, the research question that has evolved for this study is articulated as:

How is teacher underperformance constructed by principals of Lutheran schools?

Using a mixed-methods approach, the research has been designed to encourage participants to share their perspectives and to avoid narrowing the research to any perspective I hold (Creswell, 2012, p. 132). The procedural subquestions which have been developed for this research are:

- How is underperformance constructed by principals in Lutheran schools?
- What processes are involved in dealing with underperformance and how adequate are these?
- What is the influence of Lutheran theology in addressing teacher underperformance?
- What are the implications for the health and wellbeing of principals in addressing underperformance?

Significance of the Study

This study has grown from a desire to support principals in the Lutheran education system in understanding the phenomenon of underperformance. It appears that dealing with underperformance is causing them, along with colleagues in other educational sectors, stress.

The primary focus of this research is to explore how principals construct underperformance. This is perhaps significant in itself, as there is less literature around defining underperformance than around satisfactory performance. However, there is little, if any, research which extends into any connection with an understanding of Lutheran theology.

While situated in the context of the Lutheran education system, the learnings from this study may have applicability not just to other Christian faith based schools, but as all school sectors now deal with teacher performance management on a continuing basis, they will possibly have applicability across all school sectors.

Conclusion

It is expected that this research will benefit principals in Lutheran schools as they deal with issues of underperformance. These benefits will be seen in a number of ways:

- underperformance defined — the research will aim to document the ways in which principals construct underperformance, so that a commonality in understanding and terminology may be offered;
- management of underperformance — clearly defined steps in the management of underperformance will be articulated;
- impact of Lutheran theology — exploration of the understanding and application of three major theological teachings will be undertaken to consider the impact these have on practice; and
- health and wellbeing — the research will explore how and why dealing with underperformance tends to be a major stressor for principals and, in so doing, offer suggestions that may lessen the impact on principals.

It is expected that the findings of this research will enable system authorities to support principals in their roles as they deal with underperformance. This support may be offered through program initiatives based on the research findings or through the work of Lutheran Principals Australia, which has a focus on supporting principals in their health and wellbeing.

Through a well-structured research process investigating the identified questions, it is anticipated that this project will be of great benefit to LEA. The final chapter of this project will assist and guide decision-making, strengthening the work that already occurs in Lutheran schools.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature review that follows illustrates the complexities of "the construction of underperformance". The literature defining underperformance is sparse, with a focus more on the discussion of teacher performance or effectiveness (as opposed to underperformance) and themes such as how to define teacher performance, why and how to evaluate it (and who should do so), and how to improve teacher performance so that student performance is raised. Underperformance itself is not discussed in detail, and at times practitioners and researchers must draw their own conclusions and a definition of the concept through their own understanding of effective performance.

To begin to understand and construct underperformance, it is necessary to understand the context in which education operates, as this impacts on the way teacher performance is understood; the concepts of neo-liberalism and performativity are key considerations at that point. This section explores the processes used in dealing with teacher performance, in particular the impact that the principles of performance management have on these processes. The literature review concludes with a discussion on underperformance as explored in the literature.

Contextualising Teacher Performance

In discussing teacher performance it is necessary to consider the environment in which schools operate. By understanding the current context, sense can be made of the narrative contained in the literature when performance is discussed. The following discussion will be grouped using the concepts of neo-liberalism and performativity.

Neo-liberalism. The concept of teacher performance is situated within the current ideology of the market economy, or neo-liberalism. This market economy discourse has

arisen over the last 40 years (Hyslop-Margison, 2000; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006) and has shaped current educational narrative. While this research does not aim to critique and add to the discussion around the neoliberal ideology I believe it is important to provide a brief discussion on this ideology as it provides environmental context.

Until the 1970's schooling was based largely on social-democratic values and was considered to have been transformational for students. It encouraged citizenship and collective responsibility and tended to be egalitarian in nature. (Codd, 2005; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000; McGregor, 2009). The discourse in this social-democratic or 'welfarist' ideology tended to, "revolve around ideological commitments: to equality of schooling, valuing all children equally, equal and supportive relationships, child-centredness…." (Gerwitz & Ball, 2000).

Such an ideology is certainly connected to the philosophy of Lutheran education which in their relevant belief statements on learning indicated that, "Learning goes beyond the academic: it includes the spiritual, physical, emotional and social and has a transforming role" and, "Learning has affective and volitional dimensions as well as cognitive" (Lutheran Education Australia, 2005, no page). Essentially Lutheran education has grounded its beliefs in the importance of the development of the whole learner.

This social-democratic or welfarist ideology can now be contrasted to current education provision which could be seen to be influenced and guided by a market economy narrative of neo-liberalism (Codd, 2005; Ellison, 2012; McGregor, 2009; Patrick, 2013; Zajda, 2013). The language around this narrative has influenced and directed practices and thinking in education: for example, principals are managers who are required to assess and evaluate teachers; students and teachers are viewed as "human capital"; efficiencies and accountabilities need to be met; and schools are viewed as enterprises.

While a social-democratic ideology promoted equality and focussed on the development of the whole child (Gerwitz & Ball, 2000), neo-liberal ideology focussed on creating learners who could be adaptable in the workplace, be successful, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens (Angus, 2015; Patrick, 2013). Concepts such as quality, excellence, enterprise, human capital learning and competition all feature heavily in the lexicon of the neo-liberal educational narrative (Angus, 2015; Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; McGregor, 2009; Patrick, 2013; Zajda, 2013). The neoliberal ideology promoted competitiveness to seek improvement and as Zajda (2013) states, "Education raises the productivity of workers by imparting useful knowledge and skills, improves a workers socio-economic status, career opportunities and income" (p.165).

In noting the impact that the neoliberal ideology has had on current educational thinking and practices Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006) provide a critique stating, "human capital learning, with its narrow instrumental teaching and learning practices dominates contemporary educational discourse" (p. 14). Further, Hyslop-Margison (2000) highlights the impact of neo-liberalism on education when he states, "when individuals live inside the linguistic confines of one discourse, that is the market economy version, they are defined and limited by the particular world in which it operates" (p. 206). This condition would have of course played out regardless of which ideology was dominant. So his critique on neo-liberalism would have equally have applied to social-democratic ideology views of the 1970's.

It is not my intention to critique the benefits or shortcomings of either ideology. What is important to note is that the role of the principal is influenced by the dominant ideology of the time. Concomitant with this is the basic philosophical beliefs, which have been discussed, on which Lutheran education is grounded. It is at this point that a tension perhaps arises and

the principal of a Lutheran school could possibly find his or her work in conflict — working within an educational environment influenced by neoliberal ideology with its accountabilities and improvement focus, while holding onto a social-democratic ideological belief concerning the purpose of education. The work of the teacher is then emphasised for the principal as they respond to the demands placed upon them.

Performativity. It is within a neo-liberal ideology that a strong focus is placed on how a teacher's work is managed and observed. This management of performance, where a teacher's work is observed, recorded, and measured, is commonly referred to as "performativity" (Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005). Codd (2005) elaborates on this concept further, stating that "within a culture of performativity, good practice is defined in a set of pre-defined skills or competencies, with very little or no acknowledgement given of the moral dimensions of teaching" (p. 201).

Teachers over a number of years have increasingly found their work to have become more performance-orientated, more impersonal, and more accountable to a range of stakeholders in the pursuit of raising student standards and results (Day et al., 2005; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000). Connell (2013) perhaps provides the best summary of the current educational context which impacts on the work of a teacher in these words:

> … neo-liberalism has a definite view of education, understanding it as human capital formation. It is the business of forming skills and attitudes needed by a productive workforce – productive in the precise sense of producing an ever-growing mass of profit for the market economy. (p. 104)

As Hyslop-Margison (2000) highlighted earlier, if we operate in a particular ideology, with its resulting narrative and concepts, then we become defined and limited within that. Performance is an important component of the market economy discourse and, within the

education sector, the better the performance by the teacher, the higher the student outcomes. What is at contest is what is included within an understanding of "better performance".

The purpose of this study was to arrive at a clear understanding of teacher performance and conversely underperformance — which was the phenomenon focussed upon. Hyslop-Margison (2000) would perhaps would have led us to consider that in acknowledging that education operates in a neoliberal ideology, that an understanding of underperformance would be coloured by the narrative and concepts around this particular ideology. However, this study occurred within the context of Australian Lutheran schools and the impact of the Christian / Lutheran beliefs underpinning these schools needed to be explored to ascertain the understanding of underperformance also within that realm.

National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). An example of this notion of performativity, where a teacher's performance is potentially evaluated, can be viewed in the Australian context through the administration of the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests. A series of tests where students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9 are assessed on their literacy and numeracy standards, "NAPLAN tests the sorts of skills that are essential for every child to progress through school and life, such as reading, writing, spelling and numeracy" (ACARA, 2015, online). These tests have been administered since 2008, with school results published in the public domain since 2010 — a move which has enabled various stakeholders to analyse and compare results from one school to another, thus providing a situation where an individual teacher's performance can be compared to another's. As a result, I believe that teachers may consider that their performance is being evaluated on the success (or lack) of students' achievements.

Some authors suggest that NAPLAN testing can be criticised for potentially narrowing the view of education through pressure to achieve certain student test outcomes. It

is claimed that schools have encouraged teaching to the test (to improve results), schools have asked less able students to stay home on the day of the test, and arguably have set up the expectation that the student results from these tests are the most important data in assessing a teacher's performance (O'Mara, 2014; Thompson, 2013; Thompson & Lasic, 2011). Thompson (2013) argues that the NAPLAN policy logic, "it seems, is that test-based accountability encourages improvements in teachers and schools" (p. 31).

While Thompson (2013) interprets the policy as such, advocates of NAPLAN alternatively suggest that it, "provides consistent processes and comparable results across the nation" (Masters, 2010, p.22). Some of the strengths of NAPLAN are seen in its identification of individuals who are not meeting minimum literacy and numeracy standards, monitoring the performance and progress of social inclusion minority groups (e.g., Indigenous students), and providing longitudinal data to monitor changes in literacy and numeracy standards (Gable & Lingard, 2013; Masters, 2010). Testing in itself is not bad and teachers need data to determine student progress. However, the tension is created when the test data is used to rate and rank schools and teachers.

It is essential that students are taught by competent professionals who know how to assist them to reach their potential. However, in evaluating a teacher's performance to determine their effectiveness for student learning, the debate is centred on how one defines and understands the concept of performance (Hinchey, 2010; Little, Goe, & Bell, 2009). From a purely input–output model, which is grounded in neo-liberalism thinking (i.e., increasing productivity), the sole focus is on one indicator — test scores — and the question is: Have they increased? My view is that, in order to provide students with the best teaching possible so that they can reach their potential, a cluster of indicators should be used to determine the level of teacher effectiveness (Hinchey, 2010; Ingvarson & Rowe, 2007; Kamener, 2012; Little et al., 2009; Weisberg et al., 2009).

Therefore, in the current context education is influenced by a neo-liberal ideology, with a discourse reflecting this, and is focused on performativity, which is driven to some degree by NAPLAN testing. However, a debate can then ensue about the most comprehensive and effective way of evaluating teachers' performance. Hinchey (2012) highlights the difficulty of evaluating teacher performance when she states, "Despite decades of research on how best to assess teacher performance, no consensus has evolved on any single assessment strategy or collection of strategies — indicating that the problem of designing adequate and appropriate assessment is inherently complex and controversial" (p. 1). Such a statement highlights the difficulty that principals face when constructing underperformance — what processes or strategies are available to them?

Performance evaluation. AITSL, in its publication "Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework" (2012), provides a clear purpose for the evaluation of performance when it states, "Performance and development is about creating a culture of professional improvement, feedback and growth within a school, with the ultimate aim of improving student outcomes" (p. 4).

The model of performance management practised in the business world is being subscribed to by the education sector as a way of reaching the ideals espoused by AITSL in the above quote (Hinchey, 2010; Kamener, 2012; Little et al., 2009; Weisberg et al., 2009). Performance management is located within the field of human resource management (HRM), with education relying on the concepts and rationale of performance management, using many of the practices and much of the lexicon of the business sector.

While research on performance management tends to be situated in the business literature, there is an increasing recognition of its usefulness in the education sector, as Yariv and Coleman (2005) observe: "Performance management in schools is a vital aspect of

managing an effective school, yet it is perceived as difficult and tends to be ignored or sidelined by those who manage and those who research educational management" (p. 344). There are many elements in this approach which would resonate with this research being undertaken — for example, how do performance management principles assist in the construction of underperformance? This literature review will now explore the concept of performance management and aim to make connections with its use in education.

Performance Management

Performance management has as one of its underlying principles the belief that the success of an organisation relies on the performance of its individuals (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Selden & Sowa, 2011). Effective performance management practices will ensure that the individual is being supported to grow and develop in their role, so that the aims and goals of the organisation will be met. Within education, one would correlate these effective performance management practices with the improvement of teacher performance, resulting in an improvement in student outcomes (Jensen & Reichl, 2011). An understanding of effective performance management practices and how to implement these are discussed widely in the literature.

As part of the discussion in the literature of performance management, performance appraisal is mentioned as a tool which can be used to manage the performance of an individual (Aguinis et al., 2011; Kuvaas, 2011; Palaiologos, Papazekos & Panayotopoulou, 2011; Thurston Jr & McNall, 2010). However, a number of writers argue that performance appraisal by itself is ineffective and should be viewed as an integral component of a suite of performance management practices (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Aguinis et al., 2011). Performance appraisal, as defined by Aguinis et al. (2011) "is the depiction of the strengths and weaknesses of employees in a noncontinuous manner, typically just once a year" (p.

504), whereas performance management is a continuous process used to identify, measure, and develop the performance of individuals and teams (Aguinis et al., 2011).

Broadly speaking, Pulakos and O'Leary (2011) suggest "[w]hen done effectively, performance management communicates what's important to the organisation, drives employees to achieve results and implements the organisation's strategy" (p. 147). The literature positions an effective performance management program used to enhance the performance of its employees as being continuous in implementation, featuring goal-setting (for individuals and teams), and meeting organisational aims (congruency). It has an appraisal or review process (against benchmarks or standards) so that the employee can evaluate their success in meeting goals (and then determine new goals), and will highlight strengths and weaknesses of the employee (which may feed into a development plan). It has continuous feedback (formal and informal), has a coaching component, and is typically "owned" by the employee (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Aguinis et al., 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2010; Seldon & Sowa, 2011).

It is important to clearly understand the terminology that is used when describing the process used to determine a teacher's performance (or underperformance). Quite often, the term "appraisal" is used to describe this process. However, a distinction around the concept of appraisal is important here. Quite often, appraisal is used as a purely summative tool in reference to a noncontinuous, one-off event (the annual performance appraisal). This is in contrast to a formative approach, where appraisal is part of a larger suite of tools in a performance management approach that also includes goal-setting, continuous feedback, and professional development activities to improve the performance of the employee.

Writers in the field of performance management caution against the one-off appraisal or evaluation, arguing that it has a negative effect on staff, who see little or no value in it

(Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Aguinis et al., 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011). This caution can also be extended to the education sector. AITSL in its consultation paper "Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework" (2012) quotes an Organisation and Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) report that states, "63% of Australian teachers report that appraisal of their work is done largely to fulfil administrative requirements" (p. 2). It is conceivable that there is confusion around the terminology and practices that are being used. The view held in this research is that appraisal is not an end in itself but should be part of a performance management process. Any further reference to "performance appraisal" in this research is to be taken in the context that it is complementing other performance management practices.

Returning to the question that underpins this research — "How do principals of Lutheran schools construct teacher underperformance?" Confusion around the terms "performance management" and "appraisal" may influence how one constructs underperformance. Is the principal constructing their view on the capabilities of a teacher through a noncontinuous, once-a-year appraisal approach, or is it being formed through a performance management process which gathers data from a variety of sources over a period of time? This confusion is exacerbated when one is faced with literature that has such titles as, "The Influence of School Leadership on Teachers' Perception of Teacher Evaluation Policy" (Tuytens & Devos, 2010), or "A Thoughtful Approach to Teacher Evaluation" (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). I believe clarity around the understanding and use of these concepts of appraisal and evaluation is important to ensure consistency when determining teacher underperformance.

As highlighted earlier, education, rightly or wrongly, operates within a neo-liberal ideology, with the discourse around a market-driven environment dominating and influencing practices. Various components of the performance management process are clearly seen in

practice in schools, and these will be explored in more depth in the following pages. The review will now turn its attention to another of the recognised elements of a performance management process — standards.

Standards. One of the key elements in performance management is the recognition that goals are set, reviews or evaluations are undertaken, and feedback is given which is referenced to a set of descriptors which indicate effective practice. These descriptors can also be expressed in a document which defines the parameters or expectations of the position (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Jensen & Reichl, 2011; Selden & Sowe, 2011). Commonly, these parameters or expectations are articulated in a set of standards.

Teaching standards. The "Australian Professional Standards for Teachers" (the Standards), were released by AITSL in 2011. In a discussion of the reason for their development, AITSL stated:

> Teacher standards also inform the development of professional learning goals, provide a framework by which teachers can judge the success of their learning and assist self-reflection and self-assessment. Teachers can use the Standards to recognize their current and developing capabilities, professional aspirations and achievements. (AITSL, 2015b).

Such a statement is congruent with the use of descriptors as described above.

However, with the promotion of the AITSL Standards as a tool to improve the quality of teaching so as to improve student attainment (AITSL, 2015b), a number of writers provide cautionary comments on the acceptance and use of any form of standards (Dinham, 2013; Doecke, Martin & Wagner, 2013; Gannon, 2012; Sachs, 2003; Tuinamuana, 2011). While various writers express a number of concerns around the use and development of standards,

questions are commonly raised around standards being promoted from a neo-liberal ideology, with the resultant practices of performativity and managerialism being evident (Sachs, 2003; Tuinamuana, 2011). These authors, in critiquing the development and use of standards promoted from within a neo liberal ideology, are essentially questioning the purpose or motivation for which the standards are used.

The Standards themselves have sustained critique. For example in aiming to be all things for all people, Gannon (2012) suggests the Standards do little to address "the complex relational and material contexts of teachers' work" (p. 74), while Doecke et al (2013) question whether the Standards take into account the "challenges of addressing the needs of children from socially disadvantaged communities, their struggle with government mandates as well as the day-to-day grind of meeting the plethora of demands placed on them" (p. 2).

Ownership of a set of standards by the profession is seen as an important element in increasing its effectiveness and successful use within the organisation (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Aguinis et al., 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011). Such ownership of the Standards is debated by a number of writers who argue that the consultation process undertaken by AITSL was insufficient to create the desired connection with the profession. Despite AITSL's claim that the Standards are owned by the profession, the ownership exercise entailed consultation with state regulatory bodies (for development), and the Standards were only then validated by 6,000 teachers (Gannon, 2012; Tuinamuana, 2011). I suggest that the validation process involved an acceptable number of respondents for consultation. However, I agree with Sachs (2003) who despite cautionary comments about teaching standards sees the potential in the use of standards when she states, "[p]rofessional standards for teachers have significant potential to provide the necessary provocation for teachers to think about their work, classroom activities and professional identity in quite fundamentally different and generative ways" (p. 185).

My view is that, despite the criticisms levelled at the Standards, they have an important role to play in the area of teacher performance and how it is viewed. The Standards are an important element in a performance management process where they form part of the dialogue between teachers and leaders about the nature of the pedagogical process. In using a set of standards to evaluate performance, as described earlier, the purpose of the evaluation needs to be clear. Is it a summative exercise (where one needs to meet basic standards of professional accomplishment) or a formative exercise (where it is used with the aim of developing teachers) (Ingvarson, 2010; Jensen & Reichl, 2011) and furthermore who is a part of this process?

Evaluation. The review will now turn its attention to the notion of evaluation and how it is used in managing performance. The literature defines two clear purposes for evaluation: summative and formative (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Hinchey, 2010; Ovando & Rameriz Jr, 2007). Summative evaluation, in the words of Hinchey (2010), is "used to make a judgement, often a high-stakes decision — whether to award a teacher merit pay, for example, or whether to continue or terminate a teacher's employment" (p. 6). Ovando and Rameriz Jr (2007) in defining formative assessment say they are "judgements (which) lead to actions related to needed improvements" (p. 89).

When the purpose of the evaluation is clearly articulated, it has the potential to improve teaching and learning. However, when there is confusion about the purpose or the process of the evaluation, it will be received with cynicism and mistrust (Jensen & Reichl, 2011; Kersten & Israel, 2005; Ovando & Rameriz Jr, 2007). This is an essential point to note when one is exploring how a principal may construct teacher underperformance. Is the underperforming teacher being labelled from a summative appraisal, or has a formative approach been undertaken with the aim of assisting the teacher to improve? Is the summative appraisal an end point after formative processes? Whatever the purpose, the end result

should be a focus on teacher performance which then has a resultant effect on student performance.

One of the core components of the performance management process is to have standards against which to evaluate. Evaluation, whether summative or formative, can then be undertaken. However, there needs to be clarity around the purpose of the evaluation. When constructing underperformance, a principal needs to be clear about the purpose of any evaluation that will be undertaken. At what point does evaluation move from formative to summative (assuming that both forms of evaluation are used)? How do principals use these forms of evaluation within their school? At what point is a teacher regarded as underperforming? Is it through lack of growth as a professional (formative evaluation)? Or will they have a summative evaluation process placed on them if they are considered to be underperforming? What role do the Standards have in the evaluation process, whether summative or formative?

As highlighted earlier, a summative evaluation for the teacher may lead to retention, promotion, or dismissal (Ovando & Rameriz Jr, 2007), while an outcome of formative evaluation should see the development of goals, quite often negotiated with the evaluator (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Aguinis et al., 2011). This clarity for the purpose of the evaluation is an important role of the evaluator (in most cases in schools, the principal or member of the leadership team), along with provision of continuous feedback related to the attainment of the goals (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Aguinis et al., 2011; Cooper, Ehrensal, & Bromme, 2005; Larsen, 2005; Ovando & Rameriz Jr, 2007; Range, Duncan, Scherz, & Haines, 2012).

Ongoing feedback. A further element discussed as being important in the process of performance management is that of ongoing feedback with Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Joo (2012) stating a clear purpose in providing feedback ,“the purpose of performance feedback

is to improve individual and team performance, as well as employee engagement, motivation and job satisfaction" (p. 110). A strong and clear performance management process will have ongoing feedback, both formal and informal, in support of the employee so that goals are met (Aguinis et al., 2012; Aguinis et al., 2011; Seldon & Sowa, 2011).

Kuvaas (2011), in his study on the importance of regular feedback, found that high levels of regular feedback from the manager resulted in higher levels of engagement and performance from the employee. Through qualitative research, Seldon and Sowa (2011), in investigating performance management in not-for-profit organisations, came to the same conclusion — that regular feedback to employees increases performance and commitment to the organisation.

While it is recognised that regular feedback is an integral component of a strong performance management process, I argue that it is important to give thought to the delivery and structure of the feedback provided. Feedback can be ineffective when it focuses on the weaknesses of the employee, offers little relationship to the negotiated goals of the individual, is not followed by the offer of coaching or mentoring to address identified improvements, is seen to be subjective in nature, or rarely recognises the strengths of the employee (Aguinis et al., 2012; Gruman & Saks, 2010; Seldon & Sowa, 2007).

In providing effective feedback, I agree with Aguinis et al. (2012) who suggest that a focus should be placed on strengths-based feedback so that the recognition and use of these strengths can benefit others and that the employee can further grow and develop these strengths. Aguinis et al. (2012) go on to contend that this does not negate the need for a discussion about weaknesses, but weaknesses should be discussed in terms of knowledge and skills, not talents, as it is difficult for an employee to substantially improve in areas where they lack talent — improvement in this area may be minimal. Feedback must relate to the

standards on which the employee's goals are set and should be delivered in a considerate manner.

Perhaps one of the most influential factors in providing feedback is the ability of the evaluator to deliver it in an objective, clear, concise, and supportive manner. As Aguinis et al. (2012) state, "the credibility of the feedback provider can be quickly lost if feedback is given improperly" (p. 108).

The behaviour of the evaluator and the level of trust between the evaluator and the employee are viewed as important determinants in how feedback is received by the employee and the effect that it then has on improvement in the employee's performance (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Harris, Caldwell, & Longmuir, 2013; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). Behaviours of the evaluator, including notions of support; expressing their value of and trust in employees; assisting in goal-setting; being clear about the employee's role; and displaying integrity, commitment, and honesty, are characteristic of a strong employee–employer relationship and will assist in the employee receiving positively any feedback given to them (Harris et al., 2013; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). These are all areas in which trust and respect are built by the evaluator and the employee.

The term "evaluator" is not commonly used in the education setting. However, the concept of someone evaluating the work of the teacher is not uncommon, and more often than not it is the role of the principal to perform this responsibility.

The principal as the evaluator. It is widely recognised that one of the principal's roles is to evaluate or appraise the work of the teacher (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Kersten & Israel, 2005; Ovando & Rameriz Jr, 2007; Range et al., 2012; Yariv & Coleman, 2005). As the instructional leader of the school, it is the principal's responsibility to ensure that teachers are teaching effectively so that student learning is optimised (Ovando & Rameriz Jr; 2007;

Robinson & Timperley, 2007). The principal can be seen as having a dichotomous role in the evaluation of teaching performance: that of instructional or educational leader providing formative feedback to teachers, and also that of "unit manager" providing teachers with summative feedback (Cooper et al., 2005).

The principal is identified as the key person in the evaluation process, but the question arises as to whether they are carrying out evaluations in an effective manner. As Kersten and Israel (2005) state, "teacher evaluation when conducted appropriately has the potential to improve teaching and learning" (p. 62).

Evaluation in practice. "The process by which most teachers are supervised and evaluated is inefficient, ineffective and a poor use of principal's time", claims Marshall (2005). This is a claim that is echoed by a large number of commentators in this area (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Little et al., 2009; Range et al., 2012; Yariv, 2006; Yariv & Coleman, 2005). Bias, lack of training in conducting evaluations, lack of time to conduct evaluations effectively, lack of clarity around the purpose of the evaluation, and lack of trust between the principal and the teacher are issues raised which can result in an ineffective evaluation.

Goodhew, Cammock, and Hamilton (2008), while not directly discussing principals, note two themes which are evident in the literature in dealing with underperforming staff: the reluctance of managers to deal with poor performers, and a lack of consistency when they do deal with it. Goldstein and Noguera (2006) seek to place this in the educational realm by stating that many administrators fail to carry out regular and meaningful evaluations. Even though instructional leadership encourages principals to increase their presence in the class and conduct observations and evaluations on a regular basis, "they are too busy, lack

expertise, seek to avoid conflict, or could lack specific knowledge in a subject or discipline area" (p. 36).

Further, if the feedback is summative and intended to inform a teacher of their ineffective teaching practices, questions can be raised about the principal's reluctance to proffer feedback. Is it that the principal is concerned about adverse reactions from the teacher? Are they are concerned that it may make things worse, that it could damage a working relationship, that there is a personal cost involved (for both the principal and the teacher)? In short, is it worth the effort (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Gildea, 2014; Little et al., 2009; Range et al., 2012; Yariv & Coleman, 2005)? Gildea (2014) reminds us that it is important to provide feedback when he states that by avoiding giving feedback "we are doing a disservice to both colleagues and young people in our care" (p. 1). To understand the purpose and use of evaluation in a performance management process, our attention will now turn to what is considered as effective evaluation practices.

Effective evaluation. Kamener (2012), in his consultancy work for the Victorian Department of Education and Training, advocated strongly for the use of performance management in schools. He also observed that teachers are historically resistant to feedback from a variety of stakeholders and wrote, "I believe the professional services model is applicable to schools" (p. 2).

It is apparent that this is a view that has resonated with a large number of researchers and commentators in this area. When discussing the evaluation of teachers, much of the literature is now encouraging the use of evaluation against standards and subsequent goal-setting, gathering data from multiple sources (not just from observations), and continuous feedback with the emphasis on formative evaluation (Gildea, 2014; Hinchey, 2010; Little et al., 2009; Marshall, 2005; Ovando & Rameriz Jr, 2007; Smith, 2005; Yariv & Coleman, 2005).

AITSL (2012), in developing strategies and processes for improving teacher effectiveness, published the consultation paper "Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework". The purpose of the paper, and its connection with the process of performance management, is expressed in a list of frequently asked questions (AITSL, 2015c): "The purpose of the Framework (Teacher Performance and Development Framework) is to improve teacher effectiveness through a culture that focuses the practice in all schools on continuous assessment, feedback, and performance appraisal and the development of all teachers" (p. 1). The AITSL paper (2015c) draws a direct link between the use of performance management as understood in the business sector and performance management in schools.

Performance management is identified as a model for principals to employ when managing teacher performance (AITSL, 2015a; Kamener, 2012; Marshall, Cole & Zbar, 2012). The terminology that is used must be clear and indicate that it is an ongoing process and not just the annual appraisal process, which tends to be summative in nature. Marshall et al. (2012) were commissioned by AITSL to map the approaches to teacher performance and development across all educational sectors in each Australian state and territory. The authors found that, while elements of performance management (feedback, standards, goal-setting, and data-gathering) were being used across the nation in all sectors, the use of these elements was inconsistent. They reflected on this and called for greater consistency.

While the scope of the mapping exercise did not include underperformance and how it is managed, Marshall et al. (2012) did note that this is an area that needs to be addressed: "The need to identify teacher underperformance is another imperative" (p. 4). Adelaide's *The Advertiser* on October 27, 2014 cited Mr O'Loughlin, Deputy Chief Executive for Resources, as stating that annually in SA less than 1% of the 17,000-strong public teaching work force

was investigated for unsatisfactory performance. Yariv and Coleman (2005) quote research in the United States that identifies 5% to 10% of the teaching work force as underperforming.

Jensen and Reichl (2011) claim that underperformance in schools is not addressed, with over two-thirds of teachers reporting that underperforming teachers in their school would not be dismissed, and over half reporting that underperformance would be tolerated in their school. These statistics certainly need close attention, especially when "poor performance on the part of teachers can destroy the efforts of students, other staff members, principals and parents" (Yariv & Coleman, 2005, p. 331).

Defining Underperformance

Given the ambiguity in defining and framing underperformance in the sources discussed so far, I sought guidance from a wider variety of material. The Australian Government's Fair Work Ombudsman (2015), in providing resources for businesses to deal with underperformance, defines underperformance as: unsatisfactory work performance (failure to perform duties or perform them to an acceptable standard), noncompliance, unacceptable behaviour, or disruptive or negative workplace behaviour. The reasons for underperformance include: lack of clarity around work tasks, the employee's inability and/or incapacity to carry out the tasks assigned to them, motivation or morale issues, lack of feedback on performance, family issues, and workplace bullying.

As stated in Chapter 1, both the SA DECD (2015) and the NSW Department of Education and Training (2006) in their definitions of underperformance include not performing duty to a required standard and not meeting agreed tasks or time frames. The tension that begins to exist is how to define "meeting agreed tasks" or "performing in a satisfactory manner". The principles of performance management would provide some direction for constructing underperformance: evaluation against standards, setting goals,

gathering data from a variety of sources, continuous feedback, and an appraisal at some point in time. Preferably, this would be undertaken by a principal or a member of the leadership team who has received training in the performance management process. At some point in this process, it would be expected that underperformance may be identified and further processes put in place to manage it.

Wragg, Haynes, Wragg, and Chamberlin (1999), in their work on incompetent teachers, speak of underperformance being a cluster of behaviours; this observation is supported by Marshall (2005) and Yariv and Coleman (2005). These behaviours could include poor classroom organisation, poor class control, low student expectations, inability to deliver the curriculum through lack of planning processes, poor subject knowledge, low student achievement, poor relationships with colleagues, and not adhering to school policy. This research will use the term "underperformance" (as opposed to "incompetence") and will explore the question of how principals construct underperformance by focusing on the ability of the teacher to teach rather than misconduct (which quite often results in immediate dismissal) or mental/physical incapacity (see also Misconduct, in Chapter 1).

Range et al. (2012) provide clear direction and purpose for this research when they state:

> In order to fairly evaluate all teachers and remove incompetent teachers from the system, school leaders must be able to identify ineffective teachers … most importantly, school leaders must understand effective teacher evaluation rests on their ability to adopt technically sound evaluation instruments, provide adequate training for all supervisors and intervene immediately if they sense teachers are ineffective. (p. 16)

It is acknowledged that principals need to identify and manage ineffective or underperforming teachers (Range et al., 2012) and that a range of strategies can be developed for this to occur. However, current research (Riley, 2012a; Riley, 2012b; Worthing and Paterson, 2013) indicates that dealing with and managing teacher underperformance causes principals to experience stress. As a broad concept, an understanding of stress in the context of this research needs to be explored.

Stress

Definition. A precise understanding of the term "stress" is difficult to determine (Beheshtifar, Hoseinifar, & Moghadam, 2011; Blaug, Kenyon, & Lekhi, 2007; Pates, 2012), as it is a concept that tends to be used loosely and inconsistently, and it takes on various meanings (Dewe, O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2010). In popular usage, "stress" is used to describe individual responses to innumerable everyday pressures, as well as to larger life events (Blaug et al., 2007). It is important, however, as Dewe et al. (2010) state, that we articulate an understanding of "stress" because "[f]ailure to capture the essence of the stress experience will simply trivialize encounters that have an adverse impact on people's psychological well-being" (p. 3).

Blaug et al. (2007) provide a summary of what they see as the common elements of stress as discussed in the literature and devolved from popular usage. These elements include a level of personal experience, pressure, or demands, and the individual's ability, or perceived ability, to cope with those pressures or demands.

Blaug et al. (2007) and the Health and Safety Executive (2015), when discussing stress, also refer to the concept of "pressure" being a part of the narrative around stress. Pressure can be positive and motivating and help people to achieve their goals; popular vernacular would more than likely refer to this as "stress". If pressure remains present for too

long or becomes excessive, stress may occur. Stress can show itself through such symptoms as raised blood pressure, nausea, fatigue, low self-esteem, and irritability (Health and Safety Executive, 2015).

Work-related stress. The Australian Safety and Compensation Council (now known as Safe Work Australia) in 2006 defined work-related stress as a reaction people may have when faced with factors such as excessive work pressures and conflicts between individuals, for which they have inadequate resources to cope (p. 6). Work-related stress could also be influenced by a mismatch between the demands or expectations of the job and the capabilities of the person to meet those demands.

In their report "Work-related Mental Disorders in Australia" the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (2006) identify nine characteristics (or stressors) of the work environment which are possible risk factors in affecting the level of pressure or stress (p. 9). Of these, one speaks directly to this research: interpersonal relationships. In dealing with and managing teacher underperformance, the principal is relating to another person. How this relationship operates could determine the level of pressure or stress that the principal experiences when managing underperformance.

It is important to understand the concept of stress in the light of this research. Data shows that dealing with underperformance is one of the main stressors for a principal (Riley, 2012a; Riley, 2012b; Worthing & Paterson, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to explore this area in order to determine the levels of pressure and stress that principals' experience in dealing with the phenomenon of underperformance.

Conclusion

The literature review began with a short précis on the different ideologies in which schools have worked. Historically, schools operated within a social-democratic or welfarist

ideology and then recently have been influenced and impacted upon by an ideology of neoliberalism or the market economy. The impact of the more recent ideology of neoliberalism on the work of the principal was then explored, especially in the area of managing and observing teacher's work (performativity).

The literature review shows that the notion of underperformance is not clearly defined within the education sector. There are significant gaps in the knowledge in reference to this notion, and this study was developed to increase knowledge in the area of teacher underperformance. In particular, underperformance within the Lutheran education sector was addressed, as principals in these schools are required to have a deep understanding of, and be able to apply, the theological teachings of the Lutheran Church in their work. The literature around underperformance in this context was non-existent.

As managing underperformance was identified as one of the main stressors for principals (Riley, 2012a; Riley, 2012b; Worthing & Paterson, 2013), it was evident that research needed to be undertaken to understand the extent that dealing with underperformance had on the health and wellbeing of principals. It was stated in Chapter 1 the original purpose of this research was to investigate this effect. However, it became clear that the concept of underperformance needed to be explored to understand any connection between the two. The research focus therefore shifted to understanding how principals construct underperformance, how they deal with it and the impact this had on their health and wellbeing. The concepts of pressure and stress framed this discussion.

The model of performance management, as espoused primarily in the business sector, will be investigated in this research, to determine if and how it is used in the education sector to deal with underperformance. Chapter 3 will describe the study design used to explore the research question: How do principals of Lutheran schools construct underperformance?

Chapter 3

Study Design

This chapter will explain the theoretical framework used to answer the research question. Processes used and actions taken are set out so that decisions can be made about the quality of the research.

The design for this research study used constructionism (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 2009; Jha, 2012) as its theoretical underpinning. An interpretivist approach (Chowdhury, 2014; Greene, 2010; O'Donoghue, 2007; Vrasidis, 2001) was used to make sense of the data, which was gathered using mixed methods. The mixed-methods approach in this research, using both surveys and interviews, focused on exploring principals' constructions of underperformance. The data was gathered in a survey and interviews, and was coded to define the themes of the research. Through these processes, knowledge was gained in order to answer the research question.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Interpretivist perspective. An interpretivist perspective has been used to understand the reality and experiences of principals as they construct their understanding of underperformance and how to manage it. The researcher using an interpretivist approach is particularly interested in relationships, how they are manifested, and the context in which they occur.

Vrasidis (2001) explains the use of this perspective when he states "interpretive research is appropriate when one wants to find out more about certain structures of experience, the meaning-perspectives of the actors and specific interrelationships between actors and environment" (p. 8). This is attempted in this research.

As the researcher, I have taken the view that reality or understandings are constructed through lived experiences (Crotty, 1998; Talja, Tuominen, & Savolainen, 2005, Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Through an interpretivist approach I focused on understanding the meanings principals used in their actions and interactions, of how principals constructed the world, and the interpretation and negotiation that occurred to make sense of this (Chowdhury, 2014; Greene, 2010; O'Donoghue, 2007; Vrasidis, 2001). This is explained by Thanh and Thanh (2015), who, when discussing the interpretive approach, state "(it) usually seeks to understand a particular context, and the core belief of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is socially constructed" (p. 25).

In looking for "culturally derived and historically situated interpretation of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67), and in viewing this through an interpretivist perspective, I sought to understand or interpret the events that produced certain actions (processes) and the relationships between the people involved in these actions. The exploration of the phenomenon was guided by dealing with those involved (principals of Lutheran schools) and their choices and actions, as they made meaning of teacher underperformance (Vrasidis, 2001). As Chowdhury (2014) tells us, "Interpretivists look for meaning and motives behind people's actions like: behaviour and interactions with others in the society and culture" (p. 433).

Within the context of this research, I interpreted how principals made meaning of, or constructed, underperformance. The study investigates the processes involved, the actions and interactions that occurred between principals and teachers in the evaluation of performance (from the principal's perspective), and the interpretations that were made around this in constructing the phenomenon of underperformance.

Constructionism. The phenomenon explored in this study is actively constructed through the social practices engaged in by people, and their interactions (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 2009; Jha, 2012). I viewed knowledge not only as being constructed by the individual through their interaction within their own experiences but also as a social activity where co-creation occurs through their interaction with others, who are sharing the same experiences (Jha, 2012). As Crotty (1998) states, "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42).

Constructionism is therefore an appropriate theoretical underpinning for this research. Jha (2012) defines constructionism as follows:

> Constructionists assert that knowledge is not only constructed by an individual's interactions with his or her own world (or experiences), but also co-created by his or her interactions with other individuals within a specific social community. This implies that both cognitive and social processes are involved in knowledge construction and expansion through the process of reflecting and sharing their own experiences and others' experiences or ideas as well. (p. 171)

The construction of knowledge, or making meaning of the world, involves both cognitive and social processes and is shaped by the cultural, historical, political, and social norms that operate in a particular environment or context at that point in time (Allen, 2005; Jha, 2012). Language is also central in constructing knowledge and making sense of a phenomenon (Burr, 2003; Jha, 2012; Lock & Strong, 2010). It is through ongoing conversations and sharing of experiences and meanings with each other that clarity and understanding occurs and helps to produce and reproduce knowledge.

In researching the phenomenon of underperformance, I explored how principals in Lutheran schools construct or define underperformance. During this research, principals were encouraged to share with me their reality or understandings of underperformance and discuss how they came to these understandings — particularly through the social interactions they have with others in and outside of their community as they made meaning of this phenomenon.

As the researcher, I was also aware that I had the potential to intervene in the construction of the principals' understandings of teacher underperformance; as they talked about the phenomenon, their understandings could have modified or changed (Allen, 2005; Chowdhury, 2014). As Chowdhury (2014) states when speaking of the interpretive approach:

> … it is argued that value free data cannot be obtained, since the inquirers use their own preconceptions in order to guide the process of inquiry, and furthermore, the researcher interacts with the human subjects of the inquiry, changing the perception of both parties. (p. 433)

Given that all data gathered in this study were shaped by the inquirer, resultant understandings of the central phenomenon of underperformance have been described in rich detail, allowing readers to hear, as much as possible, through the voices of the principals how they experience that phenomenon. The processes of collection, analysis, and interpretation are made transparent for readers.

Mixed Methods

The purpose of this research is to explore how principals construct teacher underperformance. A mixed-methods approach was chosen for the research design to gain a richer understanding of how principals experienced the phenomenon.

Summarising a number of leaders in this field, Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner (2007) offer the following definition of the mixed-methods approach:

> Mixed-methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (eg. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (p. 123)

Mixed-methods approach. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods in a mixed-methods approach capitalises on the respective strengths of each approach (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009). In choosing to use this approach, I combined information from complementary sources and used the results to enhance the insights gained from both, producing a more complete picture of the phenomenon.

The quantitative data collected through the survey (or phase 1) was used to guide and construct the questions for the qualitative phase of the research (phase 2). Short-answer, open-ended questions were included as part of the survey tool, and these added to the construction and development of questions used in phase 2. The interviews in the qualitative phase were used to gather the majority of the data used to answer the research question.

This mixed-methods approach provided richer data and therefore expanded my understanding of the phenomenon of underperformance, as neither qualitative nor quantitative methods alone were sufficient to truly capture the phenomenon under research (Curry et al., 2009; Denscombe, 2008; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007; Ritchie & Ormston, 2014). As Sale, Lohfeld, and Brazil (2002) state in discussing the choice of a mixed-methods approach, “the complexity of the phenomenon requires data from a large number of perspectives” (p. 46).

This was the rationale I applied in choosing to use a mixed-methods approach. I wished to gain broad perspectives from a number of sources and data-gathering techniques to gain a richer and fuller picture of the phenomenon of teacher underperformance and how it was constructed by principals in Lutheran schools.

Procedure design. After choosing to use a mixed-methods approach, it was necessary to design the procedure that would be used to collect and analyse the data. The methodological issues surrounding this design included, firstly, indicating the sequencing and priority given to both the quantitative and qualitative elements and, secondly, determining the stage in the research process at which the two elements were connected and the results integrated (Denscombe, 2008; Ivankova et al., 2006). The mixed-methods design used for this research is identified as a "sequential explanatory study" and is recorded in graphical form in Figure 3.1 (Creswell, 2012; Ivankova et al., 2006).

Phase 1 (survey). Figure 3.1 identifies that there were two distinct phases in this research. The first phase used a quantitative element (survey – data set A) which provided general data on which the qualitative phase was based. Through the use of the web-based survey tool SurveyMonkey, percentages were generated from the data to provide an analysis of the questions asked. Some short-answer questions were also included and collated using SurveyMonkey. The answers to these short-answer, open-ended questions were used, along with the survey data, to develop the interview questions.

Phase 2 (interviews). Phase 2 (semi-structured interview – data set B) built on the analysis of the data from phase 1 and elaborated on those results. This phase was the more significant phase of the research, as it explored the data provided by the quantitative phase in more detail. Through the analysis of the data generated from the quantitative phase, interview questions were generated for the qualitative phase. The data from the interviews helped refine

and explain the statistical results by exploring participants' experiences and views in more depth, thus resulting in a deeper and richer exploration of the phenomenon (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Findings. The findings of the two phases were integrated in the final analysis of the data in light of the research questions raised. The use of a mixed-methods approach, and in particular the sequential explanatory design, provided rich data from which I was able to draw recommendations.

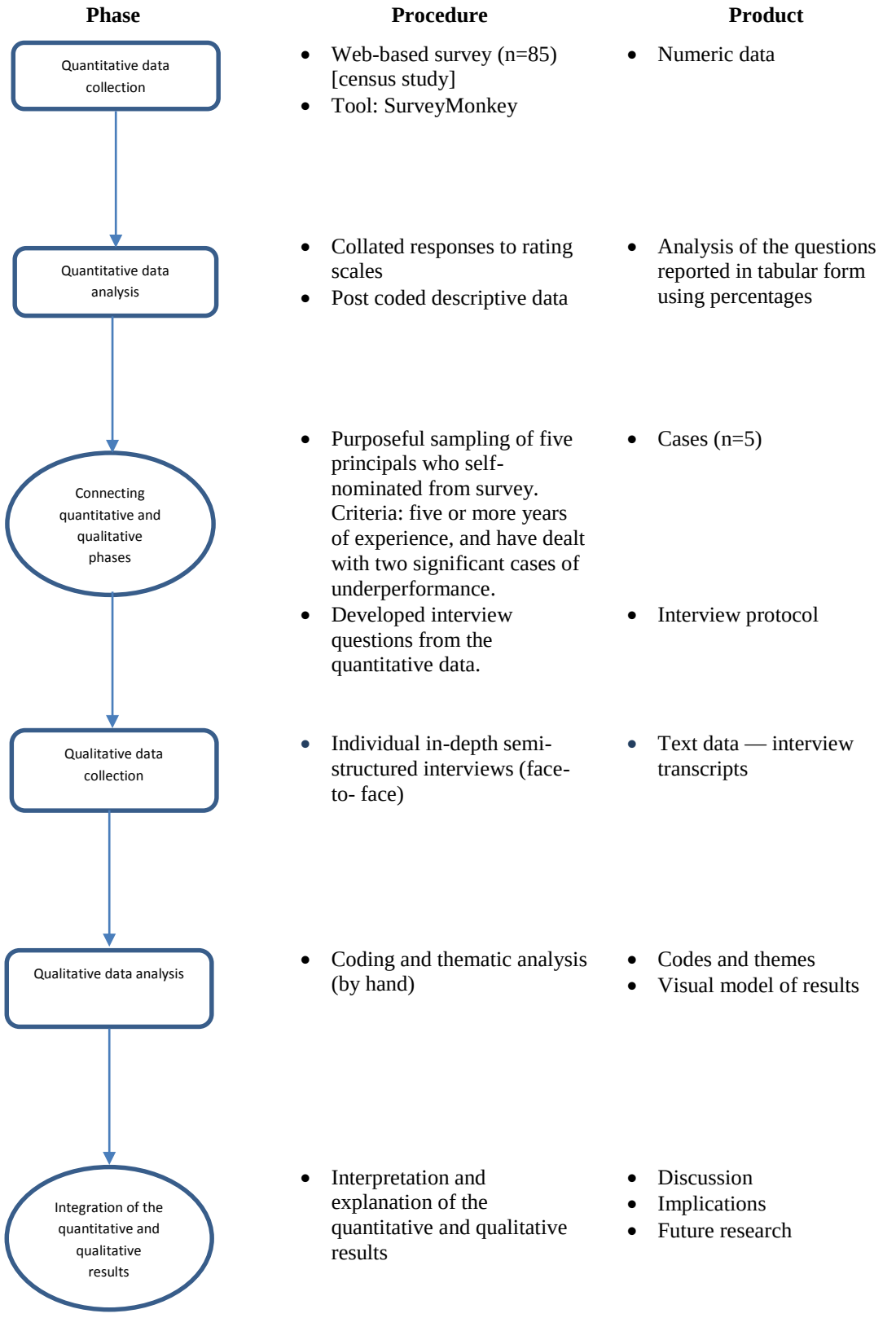

Figure 3.1. Visual model for mixed methods: sequential explanatory design procedure

Research Method

As discussed earlier, a mixed-methods approach was used for the collection and analysis of data. The specific design used, sequential explanatory, was defined in Figure 3.1.

Data collection tools.

Survey tool. A survey tool was decided upon as the most appropriate for data collection, as it sought to describe trends in principals' experiences in constructing and dealing with underperformance (Creswell, 2012; Fowler, 2014). A web-based survey (SurveyMonkey) was administered to gain a general sense of the phenomenon of teacher underperformance, as it is constructed across a broad array of principals, and to explore some of the concepts and findings that had been identified by Riley (2012a; 2012b) and Worthing and Paterson (2013) in their research

Nationally, there are 85 Lutheran schools. Due to the relatively small number, it was decided to conduct a census study, where conclusions were drawn from the entire population. The survey was completed anonymously. Questions that formed the survey are included in Appendix A.

The survey was constructed with questions framed around both the research question — "How is teacher underperformance constructed by principals of Lutheran schools?" — and procedural subquestions. These questions were developed considering the gaps in knowledge in teacher underperformance and also in reference to the theological teachings of the Lutheran Church, which were discussed in Chapter 2. As managing underperformance has been identified as a major source of stress for principals (Riley, 2012a; 2012b; Worthing & Paterson, 2013), procedural subquestions were also developed:

- How is underperformance constructed by principals in Lutheran schools?
- What is the influence of Lutheran theology in addressing teacher underperformance?

- What processes are involved in dealing with underperformance and how adequate are these?
- What are the implications for the health and wellbeing of principals in addressing underperformance?

Some of my colleagues trialled the survey to ensure clarity of ideas, clarity around the questions, the amount of time needed to complete the survey, and confidence in the data-gathering tool. Through this process, the survey was refined twice before it was finalised.

The data was collated by the SurveyMonkey tool and was analysed using percentages from a four-point Likert scale. My analysis of the data gained from the survey informed the questions which were developed for the semi-structured interview.

Interviews. The use of interviews was appropriate for phase 2 of the research, which centred on five principals' experiences with underperformance. To gather data for the qualitative phase of the research, I decided to use semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Seidman (2013) provides a clear reason for the use of interviews as a data-gathering tool when he states, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of it" (p. 9).

Interviews were used to gather data and expand on the findings gathered through phase 1, and they gave insights into the attitudes, experiences, processes, and opinions of principals around the phenomenon of teacher underperformance. In the interviews, I aimed to learn what others knew and thought about teacher underperformance and for them to share their perspectives on it (Mears, 2012; Rowley, 2012; Seidman, 2013).

Of the interview methods, the semi-structured and one-on-one interview was chosen for use as it provided scope for flexibility in the questions asked. The semi-structured

interview comprised six main questions which had further probes, or prompts, recorded so that the questions were fully explored (Rowley, 2012). These questions are included in Appendix B.

The one-to-one structure was chosen due to the nature of the research topic. The reasoning centred on the survey data showing the apparent stress experienced by principals in dealing with underperforming teachers. Principals were to be encouraged to share their experiences, and their openness may have been compromised if the interviews were conducted in a group setting (Creswell, 2012; Rowley, 2012; Seidmann, 2013).

Interview process. Prior to the interviews being conducted, the questions were piloted with a trusted colleague who I knew had dealt with two cases of teacher underperformance but who could not nominate to be involved in the interview phase. After this pilot, some of the questions were redrafted to ensure clarity. From this, the interview protocol was developed; I followed it throughout the data-gathering process. This protocol included such aspects as a project description, an explanation of the consent form, an explanation of the purpose of the study, and a list of expected outcomes (Creswell, 2012).

Once the five interviewees were identified, they were invited via email to be part of the interview process. All those identified agreed to continue their participation in the research and provided this consent via the "Consent Form for Participation in Research by Interview", as approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University (see Appendix C).

Each of the participants was invited to nominate a venue at which they would be interviewed. Four chose to be interviewed at their school, while the fifth, due to geographical reasons, suggested a venue where that principal was to attend a meeting. Each of the

interviews was digitally recorded, and a professional transcription service was employed to transcribe them.

Sampling/participants.

Sampling. Interviewees for the next stage of data collection were chosen through purposeful sampling of the entire cohort of principals in Lutheran schools. Purposeful sampling was used as there was an intentional selection of individuals and sites (i.e., principals of Lutheran schools) to explore the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2014).

An invitation was extended to all participants to participate in an interview for the second, qualitative, phase of the research. This invitation was extended through the survey: a call to action was included at the completion of the survey so that those who were interested could indicate their willingness to be considered for an interview. In nominating, the participant needed to meet two criteria: they were to have had five or more years of experience as a principal and have had to deal with what they considered to be two or more significant cases of underperformance.

Five years of experience was chosen because this is when principals complete their first contract as a principal (five years is standard for a contract in most Lutheran schools). Within Lutheran education, an individual is considered after five years of service to be beyond the phase of an early career principal. I determined that two significant cases of underperformance experienced by the principal would have given them experiences to draw upon for the purposes of the interview.

Purposeful sampling. The study used homogenous sampling, a variation of purposeful sampling, as the principals to be interviewed had two similar characteristics: length of service and having dealt with a minimum of two significant cases of underperformance (Creswell, 2012; Wiersma, 1995). The criteria for selection enabled a

subgroup to be identified, with 16 of the 43 respondents indicating their preparedness to be interviewed.

The total of five participants was chosen for the interview stage, as I believed that this cross-section of principals would provide enough data to produce findings for this research. Although the concept and understanding of saturation is debated (Mason, 2010; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012), I determined that five interviews would more than likely reach saturation, providing depth and breadth of information in the data so that the research question was answered (Merriam, 2014; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant, & Rahim, 2014). This decision proved correct, as the most useful data emerged in the first two to three interviews, and the latter interviews corroborated much of the information that had been initially shared.

Participant selection. In determining which participants to invite, maximal variation sampling was used to ensure that, where possible, the participants represented a mix of region in which they worked (Brisbane, Melbourne, and Adelaide), gender, and school size and structure. The method of data collection for this qualitative phase was one-to-one interviews, and the sample size was kept to five participants.

The 16 principals who had expressed in the survey that they were willing to be interviewed were divided into the three regions, then into gender, and school size and structure. From this distribution, five participants were selected for the interview, ensuring maximal variation was evident (Creswell, 2012; Silverman, 2013). Due to the small number of principals within the Lutheran system (n=85) the decision was made to not profile each of the interviewees separately but provide a generic profile. The profile of the group of interviewees is as follows:

The interviewees all had five or more years of experience (this ranged from five years to over 20). There were three females and two males from the three regions. The schools in which they worked covered a broad range of size and structures, ranging from a small rural primary school through to a P–12 college.

Data Analysis

Phase 1 (survey). The data generated from the survey was recorded using percentages. This numerical data was used descriptively to analyse the findings of the survey (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of conducting the survey was to gain trend information in reference to principals' experiences with underperformance (Creswell, 2012; Fowler, 2014). From the analysis of this data, interview questions were determined to explore further the results that were generated from the census study.

Phase 2 (interviews). The process of analysing data in qualitative research assists in gaining an understanding of the data gained so as to describe the phenomenon and to form answers for the research question (Creswell, 2012; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014; Rowley, 2012; Merriam, 2014; Wiersma, 1995).

Interviews with the participants were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. Once the transcriptions were received, I read them through several times so I could get acquainted with the data (Creswell, 2012; Rowley, 2012). Due to the small number of interviewees, I decided to analyse the data by hand using the process of "open coding" (Creswell, 2012). Wiersma (2012) describes coding as "a process of organising data and obtaining data reduction" (p. 217).

Coding. The first task I undertook was to read all the transcripts thoroughly several times, without highlighting or making notes on any of the transcripts. I began the process of coding on the third reading, while also segmenting and labelling the data (figures 3.1 and

3.2). As can be seen in figures 3.1 and 3.2, (selected pages from two transcripts) codes were recorded in the right-hand column of the transcript.

The coding highlighted in blue reflects patterns of thinking or words and phrases that assisted in answering the research questions (Creswell, 2012). As part of this process, quotes which I thought would be useful to support the findings were highlighted in green and numbered. I also recorded on the pages of the transcripts my ideas, thoughts, and connections that came to light.

I then conducted the further inductive step of aggregating the codes from all the transcripts into categories. Categories that emerged from the codes were:

- recognition of underperformance;
- perceptions of the principal;
- expectations of the principal/school;
- processes to deal with underperformance reasons/context for underperformance;
- role of the principal and others;
- recruitment;
- the strength and nature of the professional relationship between the principal and the teacher; and
- support structures/processes in place to deal with underperformance.

The categories were further collapsed to create the themes Awareness, Process, Relationships, Motivation, and Effect. Once these themes were established, I began to interpret and make sense of the data, to, as Creswell (2012) states, “form some larger meaning about the phenomenon based on personal views, comparisons and past studies” (p. 257).

The three theological concepts of grace, creation, and the two kingdoms were not coded, categorised, or placed into themes. However, when they were used and addressed specifically in the interview, the patterns of thinking, words, and phrases around them were noted, and an analysis was undertaken to determine how they impacted on the research questions.

CODES	Transcript section of interview with Principal C	THEMES (AND OTHER IDEAS)
	SP: *How do you think this understanding plays out in dealing with staff and in particular underperformance?* *In the survey, I highlighted 3 areas: Grace, Creation Theology and the Two Kingdoms.*	
	C:	
Relating to others *How someone is treated* *Attitude taken*	I think I alluded to that before when I said you've got to stay in the conversation with the person and you've got to keep their relationship. And I'm managing 3 or 4 different performance matters, which are underperformance. They're not big ones – just areas in which these teachers need to improve in I think. I don't exclude them from anything. I still talk to them. I still love them. And I think it's that *hate the sin - love the person* sort of thing. So I don't have a tension with any of that sort of stuff. And I think if you can be objective, not subjective, in those sorts of things, I don't think it's all that hard. I don't think being the 'spiritual' head is compromising to being the 'administrative head'. In fact I think they go really well together. Because, I've got those things I can fall back on. Like – in this situation -if this was me, would I want what was done to that person done to me? Would I want to be treated the same way JP was being treated if I was perceived to be underperforming – say to the School Council? I say to the School Council Chair every time I get a new one, *your job is to actually be kind to me by telling me if things aren't going well.*	*Good quote (5)* *Potential theme: relationships*
	How do you use grace?	
	SP: You can't just keep forgiving people if they don't want to turn around. I think grace is about trying to understand. You know, if grace is balanced by the law; we say grace and the law are balanced on a sort of pendulum; then you can tackle performance just by the law, and just make it a lawful disconnected, arbitrary thing. But I think it's got to be a pendulum – seesaw sort of thing – where you work from a position of grace, where people know they're loved and forgiven, but	*Idea: grace will need to be connected with one or more themes*
Understanding of grace *Effect of grace*	**C:** *Historically we've probably been accused of being too graceful.*	
	SP: Well, I've changed that a bit with the kids. These days – probably in the last 5 years – kids come to school with two really clear rights: 1 is to feel safe, and 1 is to access the learning program. And, anything that compromises that, needs to be dealt with. And so, for those kids (probably in the last 5 years) I've probably expelled – managed out – 'x' number of students who – you know, it's that performance management thing – we've been really clear with the expectations; we've given every opportunity for things to change. We haven't had the support of the families, or we've said, this can't continue, because you're actually taking away the rights of the other kids.	*Potential theme: process* *Good quote (6)*
Reasons for dealing with underperformance *Clear expectations* *Support given*	**C:**	

Figure 3.2. Transcript section of interview with Principal C

CODES	Transcript section of interview with Principal E	THEMES (AND OTHER IDEAS)
	SP: *I'll just go back to the first one, and it may be similar to the third one. You said that the person "had good capabilities but they were underachieving". How did you ascertain that they had good capabilities? On what were you judging that they had that?*	
Talking about the capacity of the person as a teacher	**E:** They had the knowledge. In talking with them; in talking about things, they actually had the knowledge; they had the understanding. They simply were choosing not to do it. So, when we'd sit down and talk about – and going into a new school you go into some of the basics, you know, like – what is good practice; what is it that lifts us. She could do all the talking, but she wasn't doing it in the classroom. So, I knew that she had those capabilities. She was also a teacher who – one of my best teachers to work with those students that are really difficult. She had very high skills with those children. And I think that, in the end was the catalyst of her going "I actually am quite good, you know". I think there was another teacher that she had co-worked with who was *so* good that she didn't see herself as being as good as she was. It wasn't until we started to point out "you do like these things; I do have these skills, but you're not using them. It was those conversations. And it really came down to conversation after conversation. It was just building their view and image of themselves in that case.	*Possible quote (3)* *Possible theme: awareness* *Possible theme: relationships* *Good quote (4)*
The relation-ship between principal and teacher		
	SP: *If we take the case that you're dealing with at the moment, how did you come to the view that they were underperforming?*	
Capacity of the person	**E:** It was very obvious from about the third week that they simply weren't coping at all. Now the person had come from a quite different situation – it was actually [redacted]. So, it was a different teaching situation.	*Possible theme: awareness*
Possible explanations for under-performing *Support given*	**E:** Initially I simply put it down to just changing culture and expectations because they had come so highly recommended. But then in the next [redacted] weeks it became apparent that there were bigger issues there than what we had thought. So, I suppose being a younger teacher – we then made that decision that it would invest in this person, rather than just go *No*. But, hindsight tells me that was probably the wrong decision.	
	SP: *When you say "we" – who is we?*	
	E: The leadership team.	*Idea: connection between principal perception (recognising capacity) to offering support for a change in behaviour*
	SP: *The leadership team that consists of?*	
Support structures	**E:** We don't have a Deputy, but just senior staff from our PAR roles and her mentor[redacted]	

Figure 3.3. Transcript section of interview with Principal E. Some information redacted.

Research Rigour

As this study used a mixed-methods approach, it will be validated by those who read it, who will make their own judgements about whether it accurately represents their reality of the social phenomenon, and its relevance and truth to them (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Hoepfl, 1997; Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston, & Morrell, 2014; Merriam, 2014). Validity and reliability, which are ostensibly quantitative concepts to show the quality and rigour of the research, cannot be established for qualitative research. Assessments of qualitative research cannot be made using the quantitative validation measures of scores, instruments, or research designs (Lewis et al., 2014; Merriam, 2014; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Silverman, 2013).

Reliability and validity. Judging the reliability and validity of qualitative research is a contested area, as exploring others' constructions of reality is always in a state of flux — therefore, findings cannot be easily generalised or transferred (Lewis et al., 2014; Merriam, 2014; Silverman, 2013). The difficulty in generalising the findings of qualitative research is influenced by the construction of reality for each individual, and this is dependent on a range of factors. As Merriam states, "there will be multiple constructions of how people have experienced a particular phenomenon, how they have made meaning in their lives or how they have come to understand certain process" (p. 214).

The view taken in this research is that it is necessary for quality and rigour to be established so that the findings, insights, and conclusions reached "ring true to readers, practitioners and other researchers" (Merriam, 2014, p. 210). The reader of this thesis will be presented with rich detail to show that the findings make sense and so that they can determine whether the findings could apply to them and their setting. As noted, the terms "reliability" and "validity" are accepted concepts in quantitative research; however, they can be redefined

and used to establish quality and rigour in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Lewis et al. 2014; Merriam, 2014; Silverman, 2013; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

Reliability. Reliability in this research refers to the consistency and dependability of the data — that is, whether its key features have been consistently and rigorously analysed (Golafshani, 2003; Lewis et al., 2014; Merriam, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Through this critique of the process, it is possible to determine whether, if the study were to be repeated using the same or similar methods, it would in a qualitative sense, replicate the findings. In this research, reliability is established through the strategies of an audit trail and peer review.

Validity. Validity refers to the credibility of the data and the extent to which it is plausible and trustworthy. In this research, validity is established through rich, thick description, member checks, and an understanding of my position in relation to the research (reflexivity). In establishing the validity of this research, the reader will be able to reflect on the phenomenon being studied and be able to draw inferences, generalise, or transfer the findings to a similar setting (Lewis et al., 2014; Merriam, 2014).

Survey validity. To ensure "face validity", the survey instrument for this research was initially scrutinised by my supervisors at Flinders University. The questions were then previewed by colleagues with whom I had professional contact. This scrutiny resulted in minor changes to some of the questions to address some issues with clarity (Creswell, 2012).

Audit trail. An audit trail was established for readers to provide clarity around the documentation of data, methods used, decisions made, and activities undertaken to determine the trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lewis et al., 2014; Merriam, 2014). The audit trail consisted of raw data, analysis notes, reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, and personal notes (Hoepfl, 1997). It is through these strategies that the consistency and dependability of the research's trustworthiness is established.

Thick description. Thick description requires a rich, dense, and detailed description of the setting, the participants, and themes of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lewis et al., 2014; Merriam, 2014): "The purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced or could experience the events being described in the study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). Rich, thick description in this research has been established through such strategies as the use of the participants' words, and saturation in the number of participants interviewed.

Member checking. Member checking, where participants have the opportunity to respond to both the data and the final narrative, occurred throughout the research. In taking the data and subsequent interpretations back to the participants, credibility was obtained by gaining confirmation from them on the accuracy of the information collected (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Hoepfl, 1997; Tracey, 2010).

Ethics

Ethics approval (Project No. 6661) (see Appendix C) was granted by the SBREC, Flinders University, on September 30, 2014. This approval covered both the survey and the interview process.

Through the survey, participants gave permission to be approached for consideration for the interview stage if they met the criteria. From this group, maximal variation sampling occurred and participants were chosen. Following ethics approval, anonymity was assured for the interviewees and a number was assigned, so that identification outside of the study was not possible.

While full disclosure of the purposes of the study were stated in writing and provided to the participants, further verbal discussion and explanation of this was undertaken with the interviewees who signed a further interview consent form. Beneficence for the participant

was explained. Assurances were given that signed consent forms and recordings of the interview would be kept in a locked cupboard for five years. All participants invited to be interviewed agreed to continue with the process and were interviewed as describer earlier.

Assumptions, Strengths, and Limitations

The underlying assumptions of this study are consistent with characteristics of qualitative research: evolving design, presentation of multiple perspectives, the researcher as an instrument of data collection, and a focus on the participants' views (Creswell, 2010, p. 285). The study also assumed that reality was constructed by the participants, in this case the principal, and that the relationships that were being explored were interpreted by each individual referencing their particular context (Allen, 2005; Jha, 2012; Talja, Tuominen, & Savolainen, 2005).

Limitations. The word limit for the publication of the findings of this research limited the depth and breadth of the research and resulted in a project that had been scaled back in order to comply. As the Lutheran system is national, the research intended to seek views of principals from each of the three regions. Time and funding were finite resources, and the need to visit three states and travel to each interviewee's school needed to be managed carefully.

While it was not evident, it was anticipated that principals may not have given full disclosure. However, during the interview process I felt that the interviewees were open and honest in their discussions, thus providing me with rich and deep data.

A further limitation could be seen in the sampling process used. Through maximal variation sampling, a cross-section of principals (across school structure, experience, and school size) participated in the data collection. This limitation, along with others, will be discussed further in Chapter 6, Conclusion.

Delimitations. Only principals who were active in their roles were chosen to be a part of this study. This decision was made by me so I would be able to manage the cohort and ensure that the findings were contemporary and did not reflect historical practices.

Strengths. This research explored how principals in Lutheran schools constructed teacher underperformance, how they managed or dealt with it, and the impact it had on their health and wellbeing. No research was found that explored this relationship, which is viewed as one of the main strengths of this study. Further, the application of three theological teachings of the Lutheran Church in regard to teacher underperformance by principals was of particular note.

This study was generated on the understanding that principals experienced stress when dealing with underperformance and that it was a major stressor for them (Riley, 2012a; Riley, 2012b; Worthing & Paterson, 2013). The exploration of the concepts of stress and pressure as they relate to the impacts on the health and wellbeing of principals is noted as a further strength of this study.

It is expected that the strength of this study will be highlighted in the recommendations generated from the research, which form part of Chapter 6. Implementation of these recommendations by LEA, to support the principals of its schools, will give value, strength, and currency to this project.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical underpinning of the research methodology and outlined the process of data collection and analysis most appropriate to investigation of the research question. Through the research design of this project, data was gathered to answer the research question “How do principals of Lutheran schools construct underperformance?” The quality of data will be determined by the readers and their connection with it. Chapter 4 will discuss these findings and explore the issues that impact on the research question.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

This chapter discusses in depth the data collection process, which used a survey and interviews (as discussed in Chapter 3), and the findings that have emerged through this. This chapter details the application of the mixed-methods approach and, more specifically, the sequential explanatory design procedure (Creswell, 2012; Ivankova et al., 2006) for the collection of data to answer the research question: How is teacher underperformance constructed by principals of Lutheran schools?

The data from phase 1 (survey) of the data-gathering process was used to inform and guide the construction of the questions for the interviews in phase 2. The findings of the interview phase were analysed and discussed through the emergence of three major themes and two subthemes.

Phase 1 (Survey)

Respondent profile. The survey was distributed to each principal of the 85 Australian Lutheran schools. The survey had a response rate of 51% [n=43]. Principals received the invitation to complete this survey via email from a third party through SurveyMonkey (the link was supplied in the email). A further reminder email was sent to all principals one week prior to the survey closing. There is no record of those who did or did not complete the survey.

The response rate of 51% is viewed as acceptable. As Johnson & Wislar (2012) state, "There is no scientifically proven minimally acceptable response rate. A response rate of 60% has been used as the threshold of acceptability by some and has face validity as a measure of survey quality" (p. 1805).

Respondents were asked to identify the region within the Australian Lutheran system in which they worked. Of the respondents, 33% (all percentages have been rounded off) [*n*=14] were from schools in the Lutheran Education Queensland region (LEQ), 26% [*n*=11] from schools in Lutheran Education Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania region (LEVNT), and 42% [*n*=18] from schools in the Lutheran Schools South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia region (LSA) (Table 1).

Table 1

Respondents by Lutheran education region

Lutheran education region	%	*n*
LEQ	33	14
LEVNT	26	11
LSA	42	18
Total		43

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

These results are reflective of the proportion of Lutheran schools in each of these regions. LEQ has 31% [*n*=27] of the 85 Lutheran schools (33% response), LEVNT has 23% [*n*=20] of schools (21% response), and LSA has 45% [*n*=38] of schools (42% response). This is viewed as a proportional spread across the regions. It is important to note that school numbers do not equate to the proportion of the national student enrolment, where LEQ has 45% of the national enrolment in Lutheran schools nationally, LSA has 39%, and LEVNT has 15%. For the purposes of this research the view is taken that the number of principals is more important than the enrolment quantum.

Respondents were asked to identify the "school structure" in which they worked. Nationally, there are 47 primary schools, or 55% of the total Lutheran schools (35% of the total respondents [*n*=43] were primary principals, [*n*=15]); 9 secondary schools, or 11% of the total (14% of the respondents were secondary principals, [*n*=6]); and 29 combined primary and secondary schools, or 34% of the total (51% of the respondents were composite school principals [*n*=22]) (Table 2).

Table 2

Respondents by school structure

School structure	%	*n*
Primary only	35	*15*
Secondary only	14	*6*
Composite (primary and secondary)	51	*22*
Total		*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

The research does not attempt to analyse data from respondents of different school structures. The aim of the research was to explore with principals of Lutheran schools, as a cohort, how they constructed teacher underperformance, and the research did not differentiate on school structure. Further research could be undertaken to determine if school structure was a variable when answering this research question.
The final piece of data required from the respondents asked for an indication of years of experience as a principal (Table 3).

Table 3

Respondents by years of experience as a principal

Years of experience	*n*	*n*	*n*	Total
0–5	*12*			*12*
5–15		*16*		*16*
15+			*15*	*15*
Total				*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Data analysis. The analysis of the data was made using percentages, with the use of this numerical data being used descriptively to generate the questions for phase 2 of the research, the interviews. Nil responses were excluded from the calculations and indicated in the tables of results. It is noted that there were variances in the numbers of respondents for some questions, with the number of respondents ranging from 39 for one question to 43 for another question.

Question 4: In regard to defining teacher underperformance, how significant are the following areas?

The descriptors used as possible indicators of underperformance for this question were identified from the literature (Jones, Jenkins, & Lord, 2006; Range et.al, 2012; Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003; Wragg et.al, 1999). Principals were asked to indicate the importance of these descriptors when defining underperformance (Table 4).

Table 4

Significance of identified descriptors in defining underperformance

Identified behaviour	Very significant		Significant		Somewhat significant		Not significant		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
Working with colleagues	31	*13*	48	*20*	21	*9*	0	*0*	*42*
Behaviour management	60	*25*	31	*13*	10	*4*	0	*0*	*42*
Lesson/unit preparation	39	*16*	51	*21*	10	*4*	0	*0*	*41*
Working to agreed tasks	43	*18*	50	*21*	7	*3*	0	*0*	*42*
Parent, student, peer complaints	60	*25*	29	*12*	12	*5*	0	*0*	*42*
Student progress	62	*26*	31	*13*	5	*2*	2	*1*	*42*
Expectations of students	33	*13*	56	*22*	10	*4*	0	*0*	*39*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Student progress was identified by participants as the most important factor in identifying underperformance. This was closely followed by behaviour management and parent, student, and peer complaints. All of the indicators used in the question were identified as having some degree of significance, except for one respondent, who identified student progress as being *not significant* in defining underperformance. Pedagogy and professional traits were added by principals in the short-answer section as important factors in defining underperformance.

An analysis of the responses by experience revealed that the three subgroups identified all indicators used as either *very significant* or *significant* in defining underperformance. Working with colleagues (Table 5a), working to agreed tasks (Table 5b),

and expectations of students (Table 5c) were identified as being more significant for principals in the 0–5 years of experience range than for the other two subgroups.

Table 5a

Working with colleagues

Years of experience	Very significant		Significant		Somewhat significant		Not significant		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	55	*6*	36	*4*	9	*1*	0	0	*11*
5–15	25	*4*	44	*7*	31	*5*	0	0	*16*
15+	20	*3*	60	*9*	20	*3*	0	0	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 5b

Working to agreed tasks

Years of experience	Very significant		Significant		Somewhat significant		Not significant		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	64	*7*	27	*3*	9	*1*	0	*0*	*11*
5–15	38	*6*	56	*9*	6	*1*	0	*0*	*16*
15+	33	*5*	60	*9*	7	*1*	0	*0*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 5c

Expectations of students (by years of experience)

Years of experience	Very significant		Significant		Somewhat significant		Not significant		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	55	*6*	36	*4*	9	*1*	0	*0*	*11*
5–15	29	*4*	64	*9*	7	*1*	0	*0*	*14*
15+	21	*3*	64	*9*	14	*2*	0	*0*	*14*
Total									42

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Comment. Overall, the results from this survey question highlight the fact that these indicators, as identified in the literature, are important for principals when defining underperformance. The respondents added a further two indicators: pedagogy and professional traits. During the interviews, exploration was undertaken to determine if the indicators used in this question composed an exhaustive list.

Question 5: What resources do you draw upon to gain your criteria in determining underperformance?

The list of resources used as indicators for this question (Table 6) were compiled through conversations with experienced principals (15+ years) and my own professional experiences as a principal. The question invited respondents, under the title "other", to add any further resources used for determining underperformance, which were not identified in this list. The responses for this introduced "school guidelines and contracts" (5), "observation" (2), and "student feedback/results" (4) as other resources used. The response "student feedback/results" was viewed as being included in "feedback from community members", while the response "observation" did not fit the criteria of resources which this

question focused upon. The use of "school guidelines and contracts" was explored during the interview phase but did not feature strongly in the final data collection.

The two resources "advice/discussions with colleagues/leadership teams" and "my experience" drew the two highest responses and were *always* used by 79% [*n*=34] and 67 % [*n*=29] of principals, while the least used resources indicated by the entire cohort were "documents and guidelines provided by other organisations".

Table 6

Resources used to determine underperformance

Resources	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
Documents and guidelines provided by my regional Lutheran education office	31	*13*	36	*15*	26	*11*	7	*3*	*42*
Documents and guidelines provided by other organisations	17	*7*	59	*24*	22	*9*	2	*1*	*41*
AITSL Standards	49	*21*	40	*17*	12	*5*	0	*0*	*43*
My own experience	67	*29*	28	*12*	5	*2*	0	*0*	*43*
Advice/discussions with HR consultants	38	*16*	45	*19*	5	*2*	12	*5*	*42*
A 'gut' feeling	17	*7*	36	*15*	38	*16*	10	*4*	*42*
Feedback from community members (student, staff, parents)	51	*22*	49	*21*	0	*0*	0	*0*	*43*
Advice/discussions with colleagues/ leadership team	79	*34*	19	*8*	2	*1*	0	*0*	*43*
Other	82	*9*	0	*0*	0	*0*	18	*2*	*11*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

The AITSL Standards were introduced and discussed at length in the first two chapters of this thesis, and the relationship on their importance in determining and managing underperformance has been explored (refer to shaded box in Table 6). Of the 43 principals who responded to this question, 49% [*n*=21] *always* used the Standards while 40% [*n*=17] used them *sometimes*, with more principals in the 0–5 subgroup being more likely to use the Standards than other principals (Table 7a).

Table 7a

The use of the AITSL Standards

Years of experience	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	67	*8*	25	*3*	8	*1*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	44	*7*	44	*7*	13	*2*	0	*0*	*16*
15+	40	*6*	47	*7*	13	*2*	0	*0*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Further investigation will be undertaken during the interview phase to explore the reasons why the Standards were relied upon less by more experienced principals compared with those principals who had 0–5 years' experience.

The highest identified resource by the 5–15 and 15+ subgroups was "advice/discussions with colleagues/leadership team", which at 87% [*n*=13] is viewed as a high response rate (Table 7b). Using "my own experience" as a criterion to determine underperformance was the second highest used resource by these two subgroups. Feedback from community members was also rated highly in responses to this question (Table 7c).

Table 7b

Advice/discussions with colleagues/leadership team

Years of experience	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	58	*7*	42	*5*	0	*0*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	88	*14*	6	*1*	6	*1*	0	*0*	*16*
15+	87	*13*	13	*2*	0	*0*	0	*0*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 7c

My own experience

Years of experience	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	75	*9*	17	*2*	8	*1*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	56	*9*	38	*6*	6	*1*	0	*0*	*16*
15+	73	*11*	27	*4*	0	*0*	0	*0*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

The nominated criterion “a gut feeling” was used least by all subgroups (Table 7d). This would suggest that principals, when determining if a teacher is underperforming, gather evidence rather than rely on their intuition. Alternatively, they prefer to label their individual opinion on this as “my own experience” rather than in the colloquial manner in which this has been phrased.

Table 7d

A 'gut' feeling

Years of experience	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	9	*1*	36	*4*	55	*6*	0	*0*	*11*
5–15	13	*2*	50	*8*	25	*4*	13	*2*	*16*
15+	27	*4*	20	*3*	40	*6*	13	*2*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

An analysis of the responses by experience reveals that the 0–5 group, with more responses in *always* and *sometimes*, tended to rely on explicit data-gathering sources: "documents and guidelines by regional Lutheran office" (Table 7e), "document and guidelines from other organisations" (Table 7f), "AITSL standards", and "discussions with HR consultants" (Table 7g). This is in comparison with the more experienced principals in the other two subgroups, who tended to gather evidence from the more tacit sources such as "feedback from community members" and "leadership team" to determine underperformance (Table 7e).

Table 7e

Documents and guidelines provided by my regional Lutheran education office

Years of experience	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	55	*6*	18	*2*	18	*2*	9	*1*	*11*
5–15	25	*4*	44	*7*	25	*4*	6	*1*	*16*
15+	20	*3*	40	*6*	33	*5*	7	*1*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 7f

Documents and guidelines provided by other organisations

Years of experience	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	27	*3*	64	*7*	9	*1*	0	*0*	*11*
5–15	25	*4*	38	*6*	31	*5*	6	*1*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	79	*11*	21	*3*	0	*0*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 7g

Advice/discussions with HR consultants

Years of experience	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	58	*7*	42	*5*	0	*0*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	47	*7*	20	*3*	7	*1*	27	*4*	*15*
15+	13	*2*	73	*11*	7	*1*	7	*1*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

However, the highest response for the 0–5 subgroup was "my own experience", which was identified by 75% [*n*=9] (see Table 7c) of the respondents as being used *always*. Such a high response to this indicator may be a reflection that this group is confident in evaluating the performance of others, as their transition from a senior leadership role to that of principal was relatively recent and they may feel they are not too far removed from the classroom at this point. Interviews for this research were conducted with principals with more than five years' experience, so this observation was not tested.

The analysis of the data indicated that the more explicit forms of resources are preferred by the less experienced (0–5) principals than those principals with more experience (5 –15+), although all subgroups indicated that their "own experience" was a preferred resource in determining underperformance. The more experienced principals (5–15+) indicated a willingness to discuss determining underperformance with others and to draw on advice. This apparent recognition of the importance of drawing from the experience of others was explored further in the interview stage.

Exploration occurred during the interview stage to determine at what point a principal considered a teacher was underperforming. The interview phase also attempted to determine whether the resources or criteria identified in this question were used in a reactive (i.e., to confirm a suspicion that underperformance was occurring) or proactive manner (i.e., through a predetermined process to identify underperformance as early as possible).

Subsequently, what was the significance of the high response rate for "my own experience" in determining underperformance? Once again, was it reactive or proactive?

Question 6: How useful/adequate have you found the following in determining teacher underperformance?

This question was designed to complement the previous question, which sought to identify which resources were used to identify underperformance. The resources listed for this question were identical to those in question 5. Respondents were asked to signify how useful these resources were in determining underperformance (Table 8).

Table 8

Usefulness of resources in determining underperformance

Resources	Very useful		Useful		Somewhat useful		Not useful		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
Documents and guidelines provided by my regional Lutheran education office	15	*6*	41	*17*	29	*12*	15	*6*	41
Documents and guidelines provided by other organisations	21	*9*	55	*23*	19	*8*	5	*2*	42
AITSL Standards	21	*9*	56	*24*	16	*7*	7	*3*	43
My own experience	42	*18*	40	*17*	19	*8*	0	*0*	43
Advice/discussions with HR consultants	44	*19*	33	*14*	12	*5*	12	*5*	43
A 'gut' feeling	19	*8*	33	*14*	35	*15*	14	*6*	43
Feedback from community members (student, staff, parents)	35	*15*	47	*20*	19	*8*	0	*0*	43
Advice/discussions with colleagues/ leadership team	65	*27*	28	*12*	7	*3*	0	*0*	43

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

As a group, the resources viewed as the most useful were "advice/discussions with colleagues/ leadership teams", "advice/discussions with HR consultants", and "my own experience", with the Standards being viewed more as *useful* than *very useful*. While 56% [*n*=24] of principals viewed the AITSL Standards as being *useful*, 23% [*n*=10] indicated that the Standards were *somewhat useful* or *not useful*. In question 5, approximately half of the respondents indicated that they *always* used the Standards to assist in determining underperformance. However, it is noted that nearly a quarter of the respondents indicated that

they do not rely on this resource in determining underperformance. An analysis of the responses by experience revealed that all subgroups indicated that the AITSL Standards were more *useful* than *very useful* (Table 8a).

Table 8a

AITSL standards

Years of experience	Very useful		Useful		Somewhat useful		Not useful		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	25	*3*	58	*7*	17	*2*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	19	*3*	50	*8*	25	*4*	6	*1*	*16*
15+	20	*3*	60	*9*	7	*1*	13	*2*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

The 0–5 subgroup identified "advice/discussions with HR consultants" as the most useful resource in determining underperformance, while the 5–15+ subgroups indicated "advice/discussions with colleagues/leadership teams" as their most useful resource. These results support those from question 5. However, a difference is noted when comparing the resource "my own experience" for the 0–5 subgroup. In question 5, the majority of this subgroup indicated strongly that "my own experience" was a resource used in determining underperformance, but in question 6 the 0–5 subgroup considered it a less useful resource than did the other two subgroups (Table 8b).

Table 8b

My own experience

Years of experience	Very useful		Useful		Somewhat useful		Not useful		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	25	*3*	33	*4*	42	*5*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	44	*7*	44	*7*	13	*2*	0	*0*	*16*
15+	53	*8*	40	*6*	7	*1*	0	*0*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

"Documents and guidelines from the regional Lutheran education office" decreased in usefulness according to experience, with 70% [*n*=7] of the 0–5 subgroup indicating that they were *very useful* or *useful*, and 47% [*n*=7] of the 15+ subgroup (Table 8c). "Documents and guidelines from other organisations" (as compared with the regional Lutheran office) were viewed more favourably by all the subgroups (Table 8d). It had been my intention to investigate the findings of this question further, however, time limitations and the emergence of other findings during the interview phase meant that this did not occur.

Table 8c

Documents and guidelines provided by my regional Lutheran education office

Years of experience	Very useful		Useful		Somewhat useful		Not useful		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	40	*4*	30	*3*	20	*2*	10	*1*	*10*
5–15	13	*2*	44	*7*	38	*6*	6	*1*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	47	*7*	27	*4*	27	*4*	*15*
Total									*41*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 8d

Documents and guidelines provided by other organisations

Years of experience	Very useful		Useful		Somewhat useful		Not useful		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	27	*3*	64	*7*	9	*1*	0	*0*	*11*
5–15	25	*4*	38	*6*	32	*5*	6	*1*	*16*
15+	13	*2*	67	*10*	13	*2*	7	*1*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Generally, the analysis of the data from question 6 supported the findings from question 5, where the principals with more experience tended to find it more useful to use their experience, discussions and interactions with others as a way to define underperformance. Documentary resources (explicit resources) were important in determining underperformance by all subgroups but appeared to be relied upon more by those

of less experience. The interview phase examined respondents' opinions on the usefulness of the Standards in determining underperformance.

Question 7: Please respond to the following questions

Question 7 explored the principals' use of Lutheran theology in dealing with underperformance. The Lutheran Church of Australia (under which schools are constituted) expects all principals to have a sound knowledge of the Church's teachings and practise these in leading the school. After discussion with several of the Church's key theologians, three central theological teachings were used for this study (see Lutheran theology, Chapter 1). The results indicated that grace was seen as the most important theological teaching, followed by the two kingdoms and then creation (Table 9). There was little variation between the subgroups for each of the three statements (tables 9a, 9b, and 9c).

Table 9

The application of theology in dealing with underperformance

Theological understanding	Very important		Important		Somewhat important		Not important		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
A Lutheran understanding of grace emphasises that all people have received forgiveness freely through Christ. How important is this understanding of grace in dealing with teacher underperformance? **(Grace)**	45	*19*	36	*15*	17	*7*	2	*1*	42
A Lutheran understanding of creation affirms that we are all unique, created in the image of God and have gifts and talents which can be used in our service to others. How important is this understanding of creation in dealing with teacher underperformance? **(Creation)**	38	*16*	26	*11*	31	*13*	5	*2*	42
A Lutheran understanding of the two kingdoms encourages us to see that God works through both the realms of civil order and the church. How important is this understanding of the two kingdoms in dealing with teacher underperformance? **(The two kingdoms)**	60	*25*	17	*7*	19	*8*	5	*2*	42

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 9a

The application of 'grace' by years of experience

Years of experience	Very important		Important		Somewhat important		Not important		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	50	*6*	33	*4*	17	*2*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	33	*5*	53	*8*	13	*2*	0	*0*	*15*
15+	53	*8*	20	*3*	20	*3*	*7*	*1*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 9b

The application of 'creation' by years of experience

Years of experience	Very important		Important		Somewhat important		Not important		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	42	*5*	25	*3*	33	*4*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	27	*4*	27	*4*	40	*6*	7	*1*	*15*
15+	47	*7*	27	*4*	20	*3*	7	*1*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 9c

The application of the 'two kingdoms' by years of experience

Years of experience	Very important		Important		Somewhat important		Not important		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	67	*8*	8	*1*	25	*3*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	47	*7*	33	*5*	13	*2*	7	*1*	*15*
15+	67	*10*	7	*1*	20	*3*	7	*1*	*15*
Total									*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

The intent of this question was to determine the importance that principals in Lutheran schools placed upon the theology of the Lutheran Church when dealing with underperformance. As grace is one of the key theological teachings and discussed regularly within the Church, it is understandable that this was viewed highly, as was an understanding of the two kingdoms, which refers to our responsibility to civil authorities. The lower importance attributed to the understanding of creation was explored further during the

interview phase, as this theological underpinning can be of great assistance when dealing with underperformance, as it deals with the talents and abilities an individual has and how they use these.

Further investigation was undertaken to explore why a number of principals responded in a manner which would signify that the teachings of the Church are either *somewhat important* or *not important*, with around a third signifying this for creation, a quarter for the two kingdoms, and a fifth for grace. The interview questions explored whether the reason was a lack of understanding of these theological underpinnings, meaning that the principals did not know how to apply them effectively, or whether the theology was understood but not viewed as important. Further, the interview questions explored how an understanding of theology as described above is applied when dealing with underperformance.

Question 8: To what extent do the following factors influence the way (or impact) how you deal with teacher underperformance?

The respondents were invited to indicate the level of influence certain factors had on the way they deal with teacher underperformance. These factors were compiled from those which were identified in the literature as influencing management of underperformance (DECD, 2015; Jones, Jenkins, & Lord, 2006; Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003; Wragg et al., 1999) (Table 17).

Table 10

Influence of nominated factors in dealing with underperformance

Factors	No influence		Some influence		More influence than not		Quite influential		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
Union involvement	9	*4*	42	*18*	30	*13*	19	*8*	43
Workplace agreements	0	*0*	19	*8*	21	*9*	60	*26*	43
Industrial/legal requirements	0	*0*	7	*3*	23	*10*	70	*30*	43
Wider staff expectations	5	*2*	53	*23*	37	*16*	5	*2*	43
Community expectations	2	*1*	49	*21*	28	*12*	21	*9*	43
Leadership team	0	*0*	28	*12*	35	*15*	37	*16*	43

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

This question required the respondents to move from defining or constructing underperformance to the factors that influence the way they deal with it. Noticeably, the group had indicated that existing documents and guidelines influenced their handling of underperformance. As a group, “industrial/legal agreements” and “workplace agreements” were identified as the most influential factors in dealing with underperformance.

Question 5 asked principals which resources they used to determine or construct underperformance. “Feedback from the community” and “discussion with the leadership team” were two of the resources which were identified as having a large influence. It is noted that responses to this question indicate that when dealing with underperformance these factors played a lesser role.

An analysis of the responses by experience revealed there was little variance in the responses, with “workplace agreements” (Table 10a) and “industrial/legal requirements”

(Table 10b) being the most influential for each subgroup. The 0–5 subgroup, however, were less likely to be influenced by both staff (Table 10c) and community expectations (Table 10d) than the other two subgroups.

Table 10a

Workplace Agreements

Years of experience	No influence		Some influence		More influence than not		Quite influential		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	0	*0*	8	*1*	17	*2*	75	*9*	*12*
5–15	0	*0*	19	*3*	19	*3*	63	*10*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	27	*4*	27	*4*	47	*7*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 10b

Industrial/legal requirements

Years of experience	No influence		Some influence		More influence than not		Quite influential		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	0	*0*	8	*1*	17	*2*	75	*9*	*12*
5–15	0	*0*	0	*0*	25	*4*	75	*12*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	13	*2*	27	*4*	60	*9*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 10c

Wider staff expectations

Years of experience	No influence		Some influence		More influence than not		Quite influential		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	8	*1*	75	*9*	17	*2*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	6	*1*	44	*7*	50	*8*	0	*0*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	47	*7*	40	*6*	13	*2*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 10d

Community expectations

Years of experience	No influence		Some influence		More influence than not		Quite influential		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	8	*1*	75	*9*	17	*2*	0	*0*	*12*
5–15	0	*0*	56	*9*	19	*3*	25	*4*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	20	*3*	47	*7*	33	*5*	*15*
Total									*43*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

The manner in which principals deal with underperformance is not a subquestion of this research. Answers to this survey question, however, highlighted that the resources at hand can be more or less influential depending on the stage in the cycle of underperformance. When this question was developed, there was a presumption that underperformance had been identified and was being addressed. The responses identified that there may be some form of

transition in thinking and practice, by principals at all levels of experience, between the time that underperformance is identified and the time it is dealt with.

Question 9: In your professional development as an educational leader have you received any specific training to deal with underperformance?

In response to this question, 52% [*n*=22] of principals indicated that they had received some training to deal with underperformance, while 48% [*n*=20] had not (Table 11).

Table 11

Training received to deal with underperformance

Answer choices	%	*n*
Yes	52	*22*
No	48	*20*
Total		*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Further analysis was undertaken by subgroup to determine if years of experience as a principal impacted on this finding (Table 11a). Principals with 5 years or less experience appeared to have accessed training to support them in dealing with underperformance, while those with 5–15 years of experience had least accessed training. This is a notable finding; however, it does not fall within the scope of this research.

Table 11a

Training received to deal with underperformance (by years of experience)

Years of experience	Yes		No		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	67	*8*	33	*4*	*12*
5–15	33	*5*	67	*10*	*15*
15+	60	*9*	40	*6*	*15*
Total					*42*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Question 10 (if yes): Please comment on the training you received

In this question, respondents were invited to identify any training they had received to deal with underperformance. Respondents were given the opportunity to identify more than one training opportunity. There were 28 recorded responses from 22 survey participants (52%), who in answering the question identified that the following training had been undertaken (Table 11b).

Table 11b

Training received to deal with underperformance

Training	%	*n*
Industrial relations training	27	*6*
Courageous conversations	54	*12*
Coaching / mentoring	27	*6*
Restorative practices (including mediation, conflict management)	18	*4*
Total		*22*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

This question prompted respondents to identify the training they had received on **how** to deal with underperformance. Further exploration occurred in the interview stage to determine the training principals had received to **identify** underperformance.

Question 11: Please comment on any support that could be offered to enable or assist you to deal more effectively with teacher underperformance.

In response to this question, 48% [*n*=21] of principals indicated that the following areas of support would be helpful:

- regular professional development sessions (10), including recording, role plays, scenarios, discussions;
- training in dealing with legal issues/union (4);
- ongoing assistance from the regional office (4); and
- none (2).

Further exploration occurred during the interview phase to investigate these results. However, due to the time constraints of the project and the significance of other findings, this question was not fully explored.

Question 12: When I am dealing with underperformance I feel….

Dealing with underperformance is seen as one of the top stressors for a principal (Riley, 2012a; Riley 2012b; Worthing & Paterson, 2013). This survey question aimed to seek data on the feelings that a principal experienced when managing a case of underperformance. The emotions chosen for this survey question were a mixture of negative (anxious, worried, and physically ill) and positive (energised, concerned, supportive, useful, and pastoral) feelings (Table 12).

Table 12

Feelings experienced when dealing with underperformance

Feelings	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
Worried	3	*1*	13	*5*	51	*20*	33	*13*	*39*
Energised	25	*10*	40	*16*	33	*13*	3	*1*	*40*
Physically ill	38	*15*	25	*10*	30	*12*	8	*3*	*40*
Concerned	5	*2*	5	*2*	38	*15*	53	*21*	*40*
Supportive	0	*0*	15	*6*	60	*24*	25	*10*	*40*
Useful	0	*0*	25	*10*	63	*25*	13	*5*	*40*
Pastoral	0	*0*	18	*7*	54	*21*	28	*11*	*39*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

While dealing with underperformance results in a range of negative emotions in the principal, it is not evident from this data if dealing with it is causing stress, as typified in feeling physically ill, or generating a level of pressure which the principal can manage. With a relatively high response rate for positive emotions, the question that arose was whether dealing with underperformance on the whole, while identified as stressful, is a motivator for principals to do the best they can for the person they are counselling (Table 12).

There was little variation between the subgroups for the responses to this question — especially with the emotions considered negative. However, the more experienced the principal, the more likely they were to experience positive emotions when dealing with underperformance, such as "concerned" (Table 12a), "supportive" (Table 12b), "useful" (Table 12c), and "pastoral" (Table 12d).

Table 12a

Concerned

Years of experience	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	20	*2*	0	*0*	40	*4*	40	*4*	*10*
5–15	0	*0*	13	*2*	44	*7*	44	*7*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	0	*0*	29	*4*	71	*10*	*14*
Total									*40*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 12b

Supportive

Years of experience	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	0	*0*	20	*2*	60	*6*	20	*2*	*10*
5–15	0	*0*	13	*2*	75	*12*	13	*2*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	14	*2*	43	*6*	43	*6*	*14*
Total									*40*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 12c

Useful

Years of experience	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	0	*0*	30	*3*	60	*6*	10	*1*	*10*
5–15	0	*0*	19	*3*	75	*12*	6	*1*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	29	*4*	50	*7*	21	*3*	*14*
Total									*40*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

Table 12d

Pastoral

Years of experience	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always		Total
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	
0–5	0	*0*	22	*2*	44	*4*	33	*3*	*9*
5–15	0	*0*	25	*4*	56	*9*	19	*3*	*16*
15+	0	*0*	7	*1*	57	*8*	36	*5*	*14*
Total									*39*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; n = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

It was evident that dealing with underperformance did generate negative feelings (anxiety and worry), and this was explored further in the interview phase to determine whether this was a work pressure (which in itself is not destructive) or stress. A distinction was sought here because over 60% (*n*=25) of the principals *never* or *rarely* felt physically ill when dealing with underperformance.

Perhaps the most intriguing data from this question was the strong response to the positive indicators, where principals were more likely to feel "concerned", "supportive", "useful", and "pastoral". This response raised the notion of "costly discipleship", where dealing with underperformance is costly to a principal and their emotions, but it is important to address the issue for the sake of the individual, the students, and the community. This was viewed as an important finding, as previous data had led me to conclude that dealing with underperformance was stressful. This notion of costly discipleship was explored further during the interview phase.

Question 13: Generally when confronted with an issue of underperformance I: (tick all that apply)

The final question of the survey sought to gather data on the behaviours that principals exhibited when dealing with underperformance and how this may have affected them. Principals marked any of the responses that applied to them when confronting an issue of underperformance (Table 13).

Table 13

Behaviours exhibited by principals when dealing with underperformance

Answer choices	%	Total
Avoid dealing with it for as long as I can	15	*6*
Feel comfortable in dealing with it	33	*13*
Am able to deal with it, but it consumes a lot of my physical and emotional energy	93	*37*
Look forward to the opportunity to help a staff member	38	*15*
Find that it adversely effects my personal life	45	*18*
Find that it adversely effects my professional life	45	*18*
Avoid dealing with it altogether	0	*0*

Note. % = percentage of 40 respondents

Amongst the responses, 93% (*n*= 37) of principals indicated that they were able to deal with underperformance but that it consumed much of their physical and emotional energy. However, 45% (*n*=18) identified that dealing with underperformance affected their personal and/or professional lives. It appeared that principals acknowledged that dealing with underperformance is part of their role, as none of the respondents avoided dealing with underperformance altogether.

When analysed in subgroups (Table 13a), there was little variance that could draw comment. It is interesting to note that the level of experience of the principal was not a factor in being comfortable and able to deal with underperformance. One might expect that a principal with less experience may feel less able to deal with underperformance (and exhibit more of the negative emotions) than a more experienced principal. This does not appear to be the case.

Table 13a

Behaviours exhibited by principals when dealing with underperformance

Years of experience	Avoid dealing with it for as long as I can		Feel comfortable in dealing with it		Am able to deal with it, but it consumes a lot of my physical and emotional energy		Look forward to the opportunity to help a staff member		Find that it adversely effects my personal life		Find that it adversely effects my professional life		Avoid dealing with it altogether		Total
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	
0–5	30	*3*	50	*5*	80	*8*	50	*5*	40	*4*	30	*3*	0	*0*	*28*
5–15	19	*3*	25	*4*	100	*16*	25	*4*	50	*8*	50	*8*	0	*0*	*43*
15+	0	*0*	29	*4*	93	*13*	43	*6*	43	*6*	50	*7*	0	*0*	*36*
Total		*6*		*13*		*37*		*15*		*18*		*18*		*0*	*40*

Note. % = number of respondents of the total; *n* = number of respondents; all percentages have been rounded off.

The literature would tell us that principals tend to avoid dealing with underperformance (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Yariv, 2006). This claim is not verified by the data gathered in this survey — although a small number of principals avoided dealing with underperformance for as long as they could. It may be the case with principals of Lutheran schools that the concept of costly discipleship has a large role to play in principals attending to cases of underperformance. This notion was explored further during the interview phase.

Considerations brought forward. While the data gathered is noteworthy, in that it reflected how principals determined and dealt with underperformance, further exploration was needed to identify at what point a principal suspected or knew that there was a case of underperformance to address. Some of the survey questions had assumed that underperformance had already been identified or suspected. Therefore, the interview questions used attempted to clarify processes leading up to the identification of a case of underperformance. Further exploration during the interview phase sought to determine if dealing with underperformance was a proactive or reactive action.

Further analysis needs to be undertaken to explore some of the variations between the less experienced principals and those with more experience. It appeared from the survey data that the construction of underperformance was influenced by the experience a principal had — that less experienced principals relied more on explicit resources than did more experienced principals. Results gained from this exploration may show that the process of constructing underperformance could be influenced by the years of experience of the principal. This finding, however, was not a part of this research.

Finally, further analysis was needed to explore the use of theology in dealing with underperformance. The use of theology within Lutheran schools to inform practice is widely

discussed as a point of difference within the sphere of education, and investigation is needed to verify that what is proclaimed is practised. This investigation occurred during the interview phase.

Summary. The findings from phase 1, from the data collected from the survey, contributed to the development of the questions for phase 2 of the data collection — the semi-structured interviews. The interview phase — which was the major data collection tool for this research — provided deep and rich answers to inform the research question.

Phase 2 (Interviews)

Interview process. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted for the qualitative component of this research. Those considered for interview had five or more years of experience as a principal in a Lutheran school and had dealt with what they identified as two or more issues of underperformance. The interviewees self-nominated by indicating interest via the survey. The process of determining the interviewees was discussed in Chapter 3. The interview questions were developed after consideration of the results of the survey and are included at Appendix B.

Themes. Three major themes and two subthemes emerged from the analysis of the interview data:

- Awareness — a principal's awareness that a teacher is underperforming, and the processes involved in validating this phenomenon;
- Process — in dealing with a case of underperformance, a variety of factors need to be recognised, explored, and addressed. Two subthemes were identified under this theme:

  - Relationships — the importance of a positive relationship between the principal and the underperforming teacher when dealing with a case of underperformance;
  - Motivation — the reasons why a principal will deal with an issue of underperformance and the attitude displayed during the handling of it; and
- Effect — how dealing with underperformance impacts emotionally and psychologically on the principal.

Awareness. When a case of underperformance is suspected, either through observation or by report, there needs to be a process of validation using the structures and processes in the school. Only after underperformance was validated or confirmed was it dealt with by school leadership.

It was evident that all principals interviewed were confident in their ability to identify a case of underperformance. When asked how a potential case of underperformance was identified, the answers centred around the negative impact that the teacher was suspected of having on the teaching and learning program in the school. As Principal C stated, "it was shown by what was not happening for the kids that should have been happening". Principal E said "they were having an effect on the operation of the organisation and on outcomes for the kids". Principal B spoke further on this concept, personalising their thoughts on defining underperformance as "a staff member's impact on individual students, generally more than one, is at such a level that I would feel that I didn't wish that person to teach my own child".

Validating underperformance. The principals expressed that a possible case of underperformance was identified through a variety of means, including complaints from other staff members, parents, or students, and first-hand observation by the principal or

member of the leadership team. “I think you’ve got to be in and around,” said Principal C, so that observation can occur.

Gathering evidence to validate or dismiss a report of underperformance was viewed as an important step in the process. In the words of Principal B, “we actually go out — seek data on people — and find information that way,” and of Principal A, “then the process that we went through was to gather data”. This gathering of data was carried out by the principal or, in larger schools, members of the leadership team.

The use of formal documentation did not feature strongly when validating a case of underperformance. In particular, the “Australian Professional Standards for Teachers” (2015b) were recognised by those interviewed as being more beneficial for establishing classroom expectations and guiding professional learning plans for all teachers, rather as a reference for determining underperformance. Principal A viewed the use of the Standards for determining underperformance as “not that significant”, while Principal D recognised a little more usefulness, saying “[they] give us some guidance, but not necessarily the specifics of underperformance”.

School teaching culture and expectations. There was strong evidence to suggest that the culture of the school and the expectations of principals provided direction and guidance for teachers in establishing and being aware of the expectations required of them; underperformance was judged against these criteria and information about it was collected in the data-gathering process. Principal C emphasised this by stating, “Be really clear about what the expectations are, what the vision is, how we want to operate as a learning community … it is important that they [staff] understand what those expectations are”.

For some, these expectations were articulated in a staff handbook. However, for most principals these expectations were expected to be understood as a result of the continual

discussions and professional learning activities offered to them. The discussions in the interviews here were characterised by the use of such words by all interviewees: "collaboration", "professional learning", "developing all staff", "vision", and "values". Principal A explained the teaching culture in their school as "there is a continual expectation of learning and growth", and Principal E said, "But they [teachers] know what the basics of good teaching are. I think we have defined that".

These expectations were described as being articulated in discussions at induction, in the teacher's role statement, and as an ongoing process as part of schools' culture of developing staff through professional development activities. Principal D reflected on this in these words: "So we've moved from a traditional meeting structure in the school to weekly professional learning".

Summary. Through this theme, the research has shown that principals had a sense of the occurrence of underperformance — this could have been reported to them, or they may have observed it themselves. Once the underperformance was reported, a process of gathering evidence was undertaken to decide what further action, if any, needed to be undertaken. The evidence-gathering was predicated on an assumption that all staff understood what was expected of them as a teacher in that school — whether in written or verbal form. Formal documentary resources (including the Standards) appear to be used minimally in this process.

Process. Principals indicated that, once it has been determined that there is a case of underperformance to be managed, a variety of factors need to be recognised, explored, and addressed in managing the phenomenon.

In addressing this, principals were cognisant of the fact that underperformance could be attributed to a variety of factors and that these needed to be explored further before

support was offered. This understanding was expressed by Principal A when they stated, "often the tip of the ice-berg is indicative of bigger stuff happening underneath", and in Principal C's reflections "there's always something that affects performance".

An interesting observation was made by Principal A when discussing reasons for underperformance. Principal A suggested that the school should examine their own processes as well the perceived shortcomings of the teacher, by asking "is it how we're allocating resources or the expectation that you have within a community that is exacerbating what this person is or isn't able to do?" Principal C articulated this need for self-reflection in these words: "and if they're [the teacher] not operating in that way, then you've got to say, well I either haven't made that clear enough, or our leadership team hasn't made it clear enough, or they failed to hear it".

In addressing a concern of underperformance with the teacher, principals noted the importance of their role and the need for them to be clear about the process which would be undertaken with the teacher. In the words of Principal D, "they know exactly what they've got to do to improve". Principal C asks the question of the teacher in seeking this clarity: "What do we need to do to change things?"

Support structures. All of the principals discussed supporting the teacher who had been viewed as underperforming, during the time that issues were being addressed: "these are support processes we've put in place for you to progress including these clear expectation[s] that you have with the Head of Department," said Principal A. Principal D emphasised this by stating, "So, with underperformance we'll always create support structures … someone they can go to and feel supported through what's happened".

The supporting role was not necessarily viewed as the domain of the principal but was a collective responsibility. Principal B explained this in these words: "what I am trying to do

is empower all kinds of people at all levels to be involved in underperformance". While this involved, especially in the larger schools, the members of the leadership team, the importance of colleagues, mentors, and peers was also highlighted as part of the support process.

Managing underperformance. When describing the process of managing the performance of all staff, the terminology used by principals centred on the terms "appraisal", "performance management", and "performance review". These terms were used inconsistently across all interviews, and this is a matter that is discussed further in Chapter 5. While there was no consistent term given to the practice of managing underperformance, principals could articulate what occurred during this stage.

A wide range of techniques were used in this stage. These included goal-setting, formal and informal feedback, and formal and informal meetings. While it was acknowledged that most of these techniques were used for all staff, it appeared that they were more focused and intentional when an issue of underperformance was being addressed. Conducting the "hard" or courageous conversation, with important follow-up documentation, was an added technique when managing underperformance. As stated by Principal D, "You could have a really difficult conversation, but if you don't document that and follow up with 'what next', that difficult professional conversation is wasted".

What was not explored in the interviews was the length of time that principals allowed for this stage to unfold. While they all indicated that they had dealt with an issue of underperformance, only one principal had had to move to the step of termination in most other cases the teacher under question either changed their behaviour or voluntarily resigned.

Summary. The theme of Process developed around the recognition that underperformance can be attributed to a variety of factors, including teacher capacity, and that these factors need to be explored and addressed. This exploration also included the

school self-reflecting on their processes to ensure they had been clear and fair. It was seen as important to offer support to teachers who were underperforming, during the process of addressing their performance.

While there was inconsistency around the terminology for the management of performance, principals could readily articulate the processes involved in dealing with underperformance, with the aim of changing the teacher's behaviour. An important concept that arose during the discussion around this theme, and especially in support of teachers who were underperforming, was that of relationships — especially the relationship between the principal and the teacher. This has been developed as a separate subtheme due to the focus and intensity it received during the interviews.

Relationships. The development of this subtheme was unexpected. Upon analysis, it appeared that it flowed out of an understanding and practice of Lutheran theology, specifically, grace and creation. As the theme of relationships developed, it became evident that maintaining a positive relationship with the teacher who was underperforming was a high priority for all the principals interviewed. "We walk alongside people," stated Principal A. Principal E supported this: "I have a responsibility to act with care and respect … including those who are underperforming". Such statements were reflective of the grace that was shown towards the staff member.

It was apparent that a positive relationship was a key element in working towards a successful outcome for both the community and the teacher, and that it was premised on the belief that the teacher had the capacity and desire to change.

Teacher capacity. There was collective agreement that each staff member needed to continue to grow professionally. However, as is the case for students, this may evolve in different ways within different time frames, depending on the individual. Principal B

articulated this by saying, “I believe everyone can grow. So even those struggling ones — I actually believe could grow possibly — but something is holding them back”. While there was a belief that each teacher had the capacity to grow, it was noted that the teacher needed to be willing to embrace the opportunities given to them.

When discussing the capacity of the teacher to perform their role effectively, the Lutheran doctrine of creation was explored. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5. There was an understanding by the principals that God had given each individual particular gifts and talents which they used in their career (or vocation).

It was acknowledged that some teachers may not have the capacity to change, irrespective of the support offered to them. It may be that their particular gifts and talents would be better suited to another vocation, not necessarily teaching. However, principals expressed a desire for the individual to realise this themselves after a process of support and encouragement. Principal C was clear about this: “My aim is for people to come to that conclusion themselves”.

Conversations. In maintaining a positive relationship, the importance of conversation between the principal and the teacher was viewed as vitally important. In the words of two principals: Principal E, “it really came down to conversation after conversation”, and Principal C, “you’ve got to stay in conversation with the person and you’ve got to keep the relationship”. When discussing the importance of conversations, the narrative from the principals centred around such terms and phrases as “build trust and rapport”, “honest”, “open”, “transparent”, “to understand them”, and “listening”.

Dignity. When speaking of the relationship between themselves and the teachers, principals were mindful of the way in which they related to and thought of the person. In discussing this, the word or concept “dignity” formed part of the evidence. Principals spoke

of ensuring the teacher with whom they were dealing had their dignity maintained throughout the whole process. As Principal B stated, “it’s also about the appropriate dignity of the person”. Principal D used similar words when discussing the outcome of a courageous conversation: “for people at the end to leave with dignity”.

Principal E clearly expressed this notion of respecting the person: “I have a responsibility as spiritual leader to actually care for them as a person at the same time as I’m doing some of these things [i.e., dealing with underperformance]”. Principal C said, “I still love them”.

Relationship breakdown. The importance of maintaining a positive relationship was noticeable when compared with the effect of a relationship breakdown. Principal C said “those teachers that are underperforming, you can actually stop treating them like people and start treating them like underperforming objects and so you shut out the fact that they’re a person and get out of the conversation with them”. Principal A expressed it thus: “But, I think that if — sometimes if we go through a very regimented process, then you lose sight of the person”.

Summary. An unexpected theme, Relationships is grounded in the principal’s understanding and practice of Lutheran theology: grace and creation. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5. In applying their understanding of these Lutheran theological concepts, it became apparent that maintaining positive and supportive relationships with teachers who were underperforming was of utmost importance to the principals.

Maintaining a positive relationship was achieved through open and honest conversations. During these conversations, respect and love for the person was displayed — ensuring that the dignity of the teacher was preserved. This notion is developed further in the subtheme Motivation.

Motivation. The reasons a principal dealt with an issue of underperformance, and the attitudes which they display in doing so, were clearly expressed during the interviews. While they had a responsibility to the community to address the issue of underperformance, principals also expressed their desire to support the teacher who was underperforming. The Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, where, on the one hand, there are civil accountabilities and, on the other, the work of God is undertaken, underpinned the principals' thinking on this theme.

Addressing underperformance. Principals expressed a strong conviction that they had a responsibility to their school community to address underperformance. Principal D articulated this clearly: "For me, it's about wanting the best for our community and I feel I have responsibilities for them [the community] for that". Thus there is an understanding that there are accountabilities and responsibilities, or God's left hand at work, as expressed in the Lutheran understanding of the two kingdoms.

This strong sense of responsibility to the school, however, was coupled with a desire to care for and support the teacher through the process of addressing underperformance, thus showing the right hand of God at work. Principal A emphasised this by stating, "We have a responsibility to care for people and still have high standards in terms of what we expect". Expressed in the following words, Principal E highlighted the Lutheran understanding of grace (God's right hand at work) by saying "we have to preserve the person because they're God's child at the same time as dealing with the issue".

Recruitment. A concept which arose unexpectedly during the interviews and which has been included under this theme of motivation was that of recruitment. "Recruitment is the number one thing," stated Principal B, and Principal E said, "A lot of it comes back to recruitment". During the interviews, principals recognised that they were the person responsible for the hiring of staff and that, if a staffing decision had not worked out as

expected, they felt an obligation to address the issue. In reflecting on this, Principal A said, "So, I really see that if as a principal you make an appointment, you have some responsibility to that person".

The importance of due diligence and clearly articulating expectations during the recruitment process was strongly expressed and guided the way in which decisions were made. As Principal D explained, "Over the last six years we have absolutely changed the way we recruit". Motivation in this context is twofold: to ensure that staff employed will fulfil school expectations, and knowing that, if a teacher does not meet expectations, the principal will be the person to address the issue, as employing the teacher had been their decision.

Summary. The principal's motivation to deal with underperformance primarily flowed from their understanding of the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms. Dealing with underperformance addresses both hands of God: the civil responsibility to the school community to provide a high standard of education (the left hand) but also the responsibility to treat the teacher with care and support (the right hand). The successful recruitment of staff in the first instance is viewed as important in the hope that issues of underperformance do not arise.

Effect. The third theme explores the emotional and psychological effect that dealing with underperformance has on the principal. Data from the survey distributed as part of this research would suggest that some level of stress is apparent during this time.

"Costly discipleship". Data from the survey showed that principals were more likely to feel concerned, supportive, and pastoral when dealing with a teacher who was underperforming. These findings from the survey were explored during the interview phase.

There was validation during the interviews that principals did exhibit and experience the positive emotions described (feeling concerned, supportive, and pastoral) when dealing

with underperformance, as seen in the words of Principal C: “I’m able to objectively put it now and go this is done in the spirit of love and the spirit of helping, and if I do it with the right motivation, hopefully God will bless it”. There was also recognition, however, that dealing with underperformance came at a cost. Principal B spoke passionately about this: “it’s a huge cost—huge cost! It’s the biggest cost … and it’s a huge cost whenever we deliver justice”.

In exploring this response I coined the term “costly discipleship” to describe the actions and emotions that were evident when a principal is dealing with underperformance. This term is based on Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the use of grace in his book *The Cost of Discipleship* (2015). In this book (first published in 1937) Bonhoeffer speaks about costly grace.

The emotional cost to the principal can be great, as they, as a disciple of Christ, graciously offer support and care for an underperforming teacher. At the same time, the principal operates with an understanding of another key Lutheran teaching — the two kingdoms — that would expect that the principal, while caring for the teacher who is underperforming, must ensure that the underperformance is attended to so that good learning and order continue in the school. Living as a disciple of Jesus becomes costly (costly discipleship) to the principal, as dealing with underperformance and working towards an outcome can be perceived by the community as showing either weakness or harshness in leadership.

However, this emotional cost was also contingent on a number of factors, including the processes used to validate underperformance, the relationship that existed, and the motivation for addressing the issue. If these were taken positively, as was the desire of the

principal, then the emotional cost or impact upon the principals was not as high as when there was negativity around the process.

An unexpected finding from the interviews was that dealing with underperformance seemed to be no more or no less pressured or stressful than dealing with other issues in the school. Principal C supported this by stating "it is costly, but everything in a school is costly".

Role of the principal. There was acceptance of the fact that the role of principal brings with it a certain level of responsibility, and that dealing with underperformance is one of the issues that a principal will need to address at some point. In the words of Principal D, "I think the role of the principal has a lot that goes with it. Not just this aspect of it". Further, Principal E said that "it just goes with the job". Such statements did not diminish the impact that dealing with underperformance may have on a principal, however, they display a recognition of the roles and responsibilities of the office of principal.

Principals spoke of the need to be objective about the processes they undertake to deal with underperformance. There was discussion about the support structures they themselves had around them as they dealt with the issue. These included prayer, strong leadership teams, clear processes, and the ability to be objective.

Summary. It appears that dealing with an issue of underperformance can result in the principal experiencing pressure or stress, and it can come at an emotional and psychological cost. However, the role of the principal has many challenges — addressing underperformance is just one. All these challenges involve some level of pressure or stress and a resultant cost to the principal.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the data collected from the two phases of this research — a survey and one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The data has led to the development of a number of themes and processes which will be discussed further in the following Chapter 5.

The data from the survey contributed strongly to the development and construction of the interview questions which were used for an in-depth exploration of the research question. Analysis of the data from the interview has assisted in answering the research question "How is teacher underperformance constructed by principals of Lutheran schools?" In gathering this data, some unexpected findings emerged. These helped in answering the research question and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter explores in depth three major themes (Awareness, Process, and Effect) and two subthemes (Relationships and Motivation) that have been generated through this research and identified through an open coding process (see Chapter 4). The discussion in this chapter highlights the connection between these themes and the related processes of Perception, Validation, Response, and Outcome which are evident during management of underperformance.

The literature reviewed as part of this research has directed and guided the gathering of the data. It has been established that the present delivery of education is impacted by the current neoliberal ideology or market economy (Hyslop-Margison, 2000; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). Some of the lexicon of operating in such a context have been identified as: competition, quality, excellence and accountability (Angus, 2015; Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005; McGregor, 2009; Patrick, 2013; Zajda, 2013).

Within this ideology, teachers' work has been seen by some to have become more impersonal as teachers feel the pressure to focus solely on the academic standards of students, forgoing such social-democratic principles as equality and citizenship. (Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005; Connell, 2013) Labelled performativity, teachers' work is then managed and observed within the parameters of a pre-determined set of skills, in apparent disregard of the moral dimensions of teaching (Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005; Day et al., 2005).

It is within this context that principals of Lutheran schools are then required to determine and manage cases of underperformance. The strategies and processes in managing cases of underperformance was found to be inconsistent across Lutheran education. The literature around performance management provided important insights into how to deal with

this phenomenon (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Selden & Sowa, 2011).

While Lutheran education operates within the broader context of a predominantly neoliberal ideology and the concepts contained therein, the Christian faith and Lutheran beliefs that are an integral part of these schools creates a dichotomy through which the principal needs to navigate. To understand the tension that was created, it was best viewed through the lens of Lutheran theology, of which three theological teachings were explored — grace, the two kingdoms, and creation (see Chapter 2) and their importance in dealing with underperformance highlighted.

The connection and interplay between the themes and related processes and the Lutheran theological teachings is illustrated in Figure 5.1. Figure 5.1, to be found at the end of this chapter, provides the reader with a visual representation of the findings of this research. The construction of this model is the culmination of the discussion of this chapter.

Identification of Underperformance

Dealing with teacher underperformance is one of the main stressors faced by principals in their work (Riley, 2012a; Riley, 2012b; Worthing & Paterson, 2013). This research explored why dealing with this phenomenon caused principals stress and aimed to discover the reasons for this. One of the main aims of this research was to explore how principals defined the phenomenon of underperformance.

Responses to the survey and interview questions brought to light some valuable data on how principals in Lutheran schools identify and manage this phenomenon. The data suggests that it is the principal who ultimately determines that there is a possible case of underperformance to be addressed. The type of evidence on which the principal makes this

decision was explored through the data collection, using a survey and interviews (Chapter 3). The data gathered is the genesis for the first theme, Awareness.

Awareness

The first theme, Awareness, highlights two related processes, or phases, evident in identifying underperformance: Perception and Validation.

Perception. It is evident from the survey data that principals with five or more years of experience rely more on tacit means (discussion, observation, and feedback) in the identification of underperformance than on explicit resources (documents and guidelines). This finding was verified during the interviews when principals confirmed that they rely on their own observations, listen to feedback, and discuss their perceptions with trusted colleagues or members of the school leadership team. The trust in their tacit knowledge, which was grounded in their experience, was evident when a suspicion of underperformance arose.

The survey and interviews clearly showed that this approach in identifying underperformance is common practice in Lutheran schools. For example, when asked how they identified an underperforming teacher, Principal E answered, “But we go on what we know about teachers and the teaching profession, and those discussions that we have about what we are seeing, what we are hearing. We know what a good teacher is”. The possible inference is that if you are not a good teacher then underperformance is occurring. Principal A answered, “Probably a little bit through observation but clearly from feedback from their peers that they are working with and students”. This comment also highlights the influence of observation in forming a judgement about underperformance.

Once principals perceived that there was a possible case of underperformance to be addressed, they spoke of the need to gather (further) data or find evidence to verify their concerns. This next step has been termed Validation.

Validation. The principals interviewed spoke of the need to gather data or evidence around their suspicion that a teacher was underperforming, before any further action was taken. Principal A clearly stated this, saying that, after acknowledging that there could be a case of underperformance to address, "The process that we went through was to have gathered data". Principal B, also after acknowledging a possible case of underperformance, stated, "Then we actively go out — seek data on people — and find out information that way".

There is some overlap in the themes of Validation and Perception. When principals suspected that there was a case of underperformance (Perception), their suspicions were generated through the use of their tacit knowledge. However, it is clear that the gathering of evidence in this step of Validation is more intentional and focused, resulting in suspicions being confirmed or cast aside.

The gathering of data by principals in this step included formal observation of lessons, evaluation against role statements and school expectations, and analysis of student behaviour and results. The use of the Standards (AITSL, 2012) to determine underperformance was not a key resource in gathering data. The survey data indicated that the Standards were used by principals but not necessarily for identifying underperformance. For example, Principal C stated, "They're [a] nice sort of bedrock thing … they create a nice framework that you can consider".

It was after a case of underperformance was validated that principals used more formal documentation to address the concerns they had. Principal B provided an example of

dealing with underperformance and using the Standards to aid in the reflection of an underperforming staff member: “These are the AITSL Standards that I want you to address and reflect upon”. Principal E indicated that the Standards were one element used to determine the expected level of satisfactory performance: “You still look at the AITSL teacher Standards”.

There was consistency amongst those principals interviewed on how to validate a case of underperformance. The areas of concern were identified through the use of reviewing performance against school expectations (these may be implicitly known, or published), the Standards, or available job descriptions. These descriptors inform principals and teachers of what is expected for satisfactory performance and what that they may need to address for their performance to improve (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Jensen & Reichl, 2011; Selden & Sowe, 2011).

Under the theme of Awareness, it is apparent that the phases of Perception and Validation are used in the construction of underperformance by the principal. However, the process used to construct underperformance varied between principals and there appeared to be no set criteria or set process to follow. It was evident that to varying degrees the use of tacit knowledge, lived (and current) experiences, and to some extent the use of explicit resources (to validate the perception) assisted in the development of principals’ constructions of underperformance.

The process used by the principals to validate a case of underperformance brought to light the use of some of the strategies used in the process of performance management. These strategies, however, did not seem to be used within a well-defined, constructed model of performance management and were used more to validate or disclaim suggestions around

underperformance by a teacher. It became apparent during the interviews that the concept of performance management is used inconsistently.

Performance management. Performance management is a continuous process used to identify, measure, and develop the performance of individuals and teams (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2011). This is contrasted to a process often termed "performance appraisal" or "performance evaluation", which tends to be noncontinuous (likely to be undertaken only once a year) and where the strengths and weaknesses of an individual are identified (Aguinis et al., 2011). In a case of underperformance, appraisal tended to be used as a validation tool.

The importance of having a performance management process is highlighted by Jensen and Reichl (2011). In their report on the importance of the process of teacher appraisal and feedback, Jensen and Reichl (2011) make the claim that studies have shown that these strategies "when linked directly to improved student performance can increase teacher effectiveness by as much as 20 to 30%" (p. 3). While they use the terms "appraisal" and "feedback", Jensen and Reichl (2011) place these strategies in the wider process of performance management.

The features of an effective performance management process include its continuous nature. It has an appraisal or review process which is determined against some form of standards or role statement, from which feedback — informal and formal — is given, so the employees can evaluate their performance and continue to grow in their role. It has a formative function. The process will also assist employees in developing a learning plan to help guide their growth (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Aguinis et al., 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2010; Seldon & Sowa, 2011).

A major element of a performance management process is the need for staff to have standards against which they can review their practice. It is in this review that the

effectiveness of their work can be determined. Through the interview process, I discovered that, in the discussion of staff and school expectations against which staff can be reviewed, there are a wide range of practices in use.

While most of the principals discussed their induction processes for staff, these descriptions varied. They might consist of conversations about expectations (individually or in staff meetings). For example, Principal C said "we make sure it's around the place — the values. And we talk about those sorts of things all the time". Or they might be part of a more formal induction process which makes use of a staff handbook and school policies. For example, as Principal D said, "supporting teachers to understand what is expected of them". Staff members are further exposed to teaching and learning expectations through planned professional learning activities. Principal E gave an example of this: "But, 'what is a good teacher?' I think we do that often … so we are about to go through that all again — the six steps of a highly effective teacher".

There does appear to be a level of osmosis for a staff member to determine the attributes of a good teacher — this knowledge is gleaned from induction processes, professional learning, and the Standards. The principals indicated various degrees of commitment to, and use of the Standards (see Chapter 4), especially when determining a case of underperformance. One of the questions raised early in this research centred on how the Standards were used to construct underperformance. In light of the data gathered from this research the focus of the Standards could shift to their use and applicability as an essential element in a defined performance management process. (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; AITSL, 2015b; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Jensen & Reichl, 2011; Selden & Sowe, 2011).

Other features of the performance management process will be discussed in further sections of this chapter. However, the focus for the moment is that the process of recognising

underperformance begins not through a planned performance management process but through the perception that underperformance could be occurring; it is, therefore, not part of a continuous process but an unstructured one. This is then validated through a range of strategies that encompass some of the performance management elements.

Summary. This research found that there was alignment between its findings and the clusters of behaviour as recorded in the literature, which could indicate underperformance (Marshall, 2005; Wragg, Haynes, Wragg, & Chamberlain, 1999; Yariv & Coleman, 2005) to principals in Lutheran schools. There is, however, little documentation that assists principals to verify their perceptions against shared benchmarks or industry "standards". Through this research, validation appears to occur through the application of tacit knowledge, experiences, and social interaction with colleagues and peers. Elements in the phase of Validation include gathering data, observation, giving feedback, discussion with colleagues/peers, and the possible citing of a role statement (which may be used to highlight inconsistencies between actual and expected performance).

Principals in Lutheran schools, in constructing underperformance, appear to rely on evidence that they gather to validate their suspicions — suspicions which have been aroused primarily through the lens of their experience. This gathered evidence is analysed with members of the leadership team and other colleagues in determining if underperformance is occurring.

It is, however, evident that the principals are focused on staff development in order to enhance learning outcomes for students. Strategies for staff development as espoused by principals in Lutheran schools appeared to be inconsistently applied when one considers the literature around performance management. (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Aguinis et al., 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2010; Seldon & Sowa, 2011). It became clear

that questions needed to be raised on the consistency of the performance management process and the use of its terminology across Lutheran schools..

As noted earlier, terms such as “appraisal”, “management”, and “evaluation” are used variably to describe a seemingly reactive process to address or manage underperformance. This process tends to be initiated to address an issue, rather than being a proactive one where ongoing goal-setting, feedback, and review are enacted. The consistent and intentional application of performance management processes and terminology (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2011; Kamener, 2012) across Lutheran schools would benefit principals as they seek to develop and sustain staff development processes in addressing the improvement of student learning. This consistent application of performance management processes and terminology is explored further in the following discussion.

The definitive phases and elements discussed under the theme of Awareness shed light on the process that principals in Lutheran schools undertake in the early stages of constructing and managing underperformance. Once underperformance is identified, the process of managing it begins. This is the second theme which has been identified, Process.

Process

This theme deals with the manner in which the principal addresses the phenomenon of underperformance. During the interviews, the principals spoke at length of their desire to assist the teacher who had been identified as underperforming — it was not a fait accompli that the teacher’s contract would be terminated. The next phase (and the third part of the model) undertaken by principals under the theme of Process has been identified as Response.

Response. The overriding message that is apparent in this step is that principals have a desire to support the teacher who is underperforming in addressing their need to change their behaviour. To assist this, support structures (mentors, peer support, counsellors) are

arranged. This support of the teacher, however, is coupled with a desire to ensure that the learning program of the school is not compromised. In effect, this is the higher priority. This comment from Principal A is reflective of those interviewed in focusing on the students: “So it couldn’t continue the way it was for the wellbeing of the kids and the staff”.

There are three elements within the theme of Process and the phase of Response: context and contributing features, support structures, and feedback.

Context and contributing factors. In the interviews, principals discussed the need to be aware of the context in which the teacher who is underperforming is operating and also to be mindful of factors that may be contributing to the underperformance. There was an expressed desire to understand why underperformance may be occurring. Principal A clearly articulated this by stating, “OK let’s look at what’s not happening well and let’s sit with the person and understand why it’s not happening well”.

By understanding these contextual features, principals continue to build their understanding of the phenomenon of underperformance. As Principal C stated, “But it’s about actually putting it in context and knowing there’s an issue going on — they’re sick, or there’s this or there’s that”. These statements and the concepts of context and contributing factors begin to introduce the notion that underperformance may not be able to be thought of in a generic sense but is purely to be considered on a case-by-case basis. This thought will be developed further in discussion of the subtheme Relationships.

Support structures. In consideration of this element, the process of dealing with underperformance moves to a different stage, from Validation to the process of managing or dealing with the phenomenon. After any influences from contributing factors and context have been established, support is offered to the teacher. Principal A’s description of this next step was reflective of those interviewed: “these are support processes we’ve put in place for

you to progress including these clear expectations that you have with [the area of underperformance]".

Feedback. It emerged that by offering support to the teacher who is underperforming, feedback — both formal and informal — on their progress is given, mentoring may be offered, and counselling may be provided, so that the teacher is set up for success. These are practices found within the performance management process. As Principal C stated, it is about "turning them around". By this, the principal means that a noticeable change in the teacher's performance is needed to be seen — the teacher through the processes described needed to address the practices that are under question and change this behaviour for the better.

While some of the elements described above (feedback, support structures) are features of a performance management process, the purpose behind their use in the context of addressing a case of underperformance appears to come from a reactive paradigm rather than a proactive one. In a proactive paradigm the performance management process would be established to ensure that staff members are supported from the moment of employment so that they grow in their pedagogical practices to improve the learning outcomes of students (Jensen & Reichl, 2011). However, in stating that the elements are used reactively (that is, they are not used until a problem arises), it is noted that principals felt a sense of responsibility and a desire to do all they could for a teacher who may be underperforming.

This desire to support the teacher, or to "walk together" during the process, was not something I found recorded in the literature and was an unexpected finding of this research. The data gathered that provided evidence for this finding saw the development of two further subthemes under Process: Relationships and Motivation. These subthemes have a large impact on how a principal responds to underperformance. In the development of these two

subthemes, the theological understandings of the two kingdoms, creation, and grace were clearly evident, and the influence of these understandings impacted on the way cases of underperformance were handled.

Relationships and Motivation

Relationships. The data showed that the principals of Lutheran schools participating in this study have a desire to maintain a positive and supportive relationship with underperforming staff. Principal E, for example, reflected on this succinctly by stating, "I have a responsibility to act with care and respect … including [to] those who are underperforming".

This subtheme began to manifest itself in the survey data when principals indicated they were more likely to feel concerned, supportive, useful, and pastoral than anxious, worried, or physically ill when dealing with a case of underperformance. Through the interviews, this acknowledgement of helping, supporting, and caring for the underperforming teacher became quite clear. As previously discussed (see Chapter 4), it is strongly linked to the application of Lutheran theology, in particular, the understandings around grace and creation (see Lutheran theology in this chapter).

Within this subtheme, the elements of teacher capacity, (for example, "I believe everyone can grow", Principal B), conversations (for example, "you've got to stay in conversation with the person and you've got to keep the relationship", Principal C) and dignity (for example, "it's also about the appropriate dignity of the person", Principal B) were key features in the development and maintenance of a relationship. Through the articulation of these elements, the importance of relationships when managing underperformance became evident. The reasons for principals to address the issue of

underperformance in a caring, supportive, and structured manner were clearly articulated and gave me an insight into their motivation.

Motivation. The motivation principals felt in addressing underperformance was clearly evident in the interviews, with this subtheme being closely linked to the subtheme of Relationships. The desire to maintain a supportive and caring relationship with all staff, irrespective of the teacher's capacity, was a strong motivator for the principals. A further motivator identified was that of recruitment.

This subtheme particularly began to manifest itself in interview discussions on the Relationships subtheme. Principals spoke about their desire to assist, support, and care for the teacher, as they felt they had a responsibility to the teacher to assist them in changing their practice but also to the community to ensure that good teaching was occurring. Principal A articulated this by stating, "We have a responsibility to care for people and still have high standards in terms of what we expect".

The process of recruitment was identified as a motivating influence. Principals felt a sense of responsibility to the staff they employed. Principal A stated, "So, I really see that if as a principal you make an appointment, you have some responsibility to that person". The desire to recruit well was also motivated by the desire to ensure that new staff were able to fulfil the requirements expected of them. As an example of this, Principal D commented, "You employ for what you think the future needs — what skill set that might be needed but also what character you think the school needs".

If one considers a school's operation being influenced by neoliberalism, with its focus on accountability, results and competition (Angus, 2015; Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005; Gerwitz & Ball, 2000; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; McGregor, 2009; Patrick, 2013; Zajda, 2013) the sub-themes of Motivation and Relationships could cause tension for the principal. On the

one hand the principal is striving for a school which was responsive to the marketplace. However, when faced with an issue of underperformance which doesn't support this aim, the principal appeared to feel drawn to support and encourage the staff member concerned (see Chapter 4).

This tension is perhaps further exacerbated when an application of Lutheran theology occurs. An unexpected subtheme, Motivation gives some clarity on why principals in Lutheran schools respond in the manner in which they do on the issue of underperformance. The influence, or application of the theological teachings, as explored in the research also provide motivation for the principal to respond in particular ways.

Lutheran Theology

Three theological teachings of the Lutheran Church were identified in the planning stages of this research as possibly being significant when exploring the phenomenon of underperformance: grace, the two kingdoms, and creation (see Chapter 2). Principals working in a school of the Lutheran Church are expected to be able to "uphold the teachings of the church" (Lutheran Education Australia, 2001, p. 1). Upholding these teachings implies that they understand them and have a working knowledge of them.

An initial investigation of the understanding and use of these teachings was explored in the survey (see Chapter 3). The data from the survey suggested that a number of principals did not hold to the importance of some of these teachings — especially that of creation, with over a third indicating that an understanding of this teaching was either *somewhat important* or *not important*. This response was not mirrored in indicating the importance of grace and the two kingdoms, which received higher scores.

Through the interview process, I discussed the importance of Lutheran theological teachings with all of the interviewees. The interview question which invited dialogue on this

was structured in a way that acknowledged the spiritual leadership of the principal and the implication that an understanding of Lutheran theology is necessary to guide decision-making in the school. The three theological teachings were cited, and the question was "How do you think an understanding of these theological teachings plays out in dealing with staff and in particular underperformance?"

Figure 5.1 (to be found at the end of this chapter) illustrates the significance of the three theological teachings and how they impact on managing underperformance. The theological teachings of the two kingdoms and creation are applied at all stages when managing underperformance, while the third identified that the teaching of grace is evident in the themes of Process and Effect.

Grace. The responses to the interview question reflected the importance that is placed on the teaching of grace and its significance in managing underperformance. The survey results identified that 80% (n=42) of principals regard this teaching, in connection to underperformance, as either *very important* or *important*. The responses to the interview question supported the data from the survey on the importance attached to grace.

When asked the lead-in question (as stated above), immediate responses centred on the way in which the underperforming teacher was treated. For example, Principal E stated, "It is that unconditional love for that person the whole way through the process", and Principal C said, "I still talk to them. I still love them".

Such responses are reflective of the Lutheran understanding of grace; that God loves us unconditionally and we are free from sin through the death and resurrection of Christ. This is a gift which we share with others (Bartsch, 2013). Grace, however, was not offered just to the underperforming teacher — it was also offered to students who were facing disciplinary

action. This indicated a knowledgeable understanding of this theological teaching and the importance principals attached to their role as their school's spiritual leader.

Several of the principals, when describing their application of grace to an issue of underperformance, equated it with the manner in which they also treated students who were under review for behaviour. Principal C, when comparing student misbehaviour and teacher underperformance, said, "We've been really clear about expectations; we've given every opportunity for change". Principal B also spoke of the effect of applying grace to both student misbehaviour and teacher underperformance: "And, even though we are at a stage where the community can no longer allow this person to be here, right now, they're of value — God loves them — and I believe they can change".

Dignity. Dignity was a concept discussed by a number of the principals, and it is indicative of the manner in which they viewed and treated staff. Principal B stated that "at a lower level, yes, face-to-face, not nasty emails sent — all face-to-face, all showing dignity, listening to the person — all of that is where grace abounds". Through the love of that person, a child of God, the principals displayed an understanding of grace.

While this understanding of grace is reflected though the way relationships are established and maintained, principals also expressed that offering grace is not an infinite action. Although they express compassion and love, it is also necessary for the teacher to change. Principal A articulated this well by stating, "We have a responsibility to care for people and still have high standards in terms of what we expect".

The understanding shown by the principals around this theological teaching would not raise any concerns. There was clear articulation of its meaning and practice. The responses from the principals interviewed supported the data gained from the survey which placed a high level of significance on the use of grace, and it was strongly evident in the themes of

Process and Effect. This level of confidence is also found in the understanding of the second of the three theological teachings, the two kingdoms.

The two kingdoms. Analysis of both the survey and the interview data showed that there was a high level of confidence in the understanding and application of this theological teaching, with 76% (*n*=42) of the respondents indicating that this teaching was either *very important* or *important*. The teaching of the two kingdoms speaks of the two hands of God and how he works in the world. The left hand ensures good order is maintained while the right hand works in the realm of mercy and forgiveness (Christenson, 2004; Bartsch, 2013).

The application of an understanding of the two kingdoms, in particular the left hand, is seen in this research to begin under the theme of Awareness. Through the steps of Perception and Validation, the principal ensures that good teaching is occurring for the sake of the students and the community (the left hand). As Principal C clearly articulated, "I believe as soon as you see an issue, that you go this really isn't good enough".

The two hands of God can be seen working together, ensuring good order and offering mercy and forgiveness, in this theme of Process and the subthemes Relationships and Motivation. Through the interviews, it was evident that principals expressed the need to maintain good order and good teaching (the left hand), while offering care and support to the teacher who was underperforming (right hand). As Principal E stated, "We have to preserve the person because they're God's child at the same time as dealing with this issue".

As with grace, there are no concerns to be raised through this research about the level of understanding and application of this theological teaching. The third theological teaching, creation, was identified in the survey responses as being the least understood or valued teaching when dealing with underperformance.

Creation. The theological teaching of creation views each individual as being created in the image of God and having a unique set of gifts and abilities. It is through our vocation, or the work which we undertake in the service of others, that we use these capabilities (Bartsch, 2013; Christenson, 2004). The survey data suggested that this teaching was the least valued of the three, with 64% (*n*=42) of the responses indicating this teaching was either *very important* or *important* (when compared to grace and the two kingdoms), and the remainder of the principals viewing it is as *somewhat important* or *not important*.

The application of this theological teaching was noted when principals discussed the capacity of individual teachers; specifically, it was a recognition of the particular set of gifts and talents that each individual had been given. An understanding of creation is applied at the stage when a principal is validating whether a teacher is underperforming, as it is the capacity of the teacher to perform the required tasks which is being evaluated.

Principal A expressed this concept of creation when discussing with a teacher their capacity to perform the role, by stating, "For me, it really is discussing with the person whether they have the right vocation". Principal D emphasised the need for principals to be able to recognise the capacity, or gifts and talents, of the individual and be prepared to have an honest discussion with them, if the "fit isn't right": "Whilst we realise people's gifts and talents and their ability to contribute, there are a number of employees in this Lutheran school that wouldn't have a sense of what their vocation is".

All of the interview participants could clearly discuss the concepts of gifts and talents and vocation, which are central features in the theological teaching of creation — although they appeared not to place them under the teaching of creation. When asked about their understanding of creation theology during the interview, Principal C responded "that's not a term I've used". When this teaching was explained, the principal immediately understood

what it involved; such clarification of this teaching was needed at other times during the interviews. With the evidence of some lack of understanding around this term, the survey's lower response rate to this teaching is perhaps more reflective of principals being unaware of the term than its use in practice.

Essentially, there appear to be no grounds to be concerned about the application of this theological teaching, although clarity needs to be given on the terminology used. Principals could discuss the key features of this teaching with confidence.

Summary of the theological teachings. As the spiritual leaders of their schools (Bartsch, 2013), the principals could discuss their roles in this area with confidence and passion, clearly describing the importance of the three theological teachings identified for this research. The application of these teachings was consistent across all interviews.

While the interviews were limited to principals with five or more years' experience, the survey results were consistent across all three identified respondent groups when they were asked about the importance of the theological teachings in dealing with underperformance. Therefore, the data gathered and the findings discussed in this chapter could be generally applied to all principals of Lutheran schools.

The three theological teachings are clearly evident in the various stages of the performance management process, as illustrated in Figure 5.1. The findings of this part of the research are evidence that principals are carrying out their role as the spiritual leader of their school.

Effect

The third (and final) major theme that was identified in the process of managing underperformance is that of Effect, which deals with the outcomes that are generated from

working through a process of dealing with underperformance. The end result in managing underperformance is observed in the impact it has on the health and wellbeing of the principal, and in whether or not there is a change in the teacher's practice. This fourth phase has been termed Outcome.

Teacher change/no teacher change. After a process of identifying and validating a case of underperformance, responding to this in a variety of ways, acknowledging the importance of relationships, and applying Lutheran theological teachings, either there will be no change in the teacher's performance (which may lead to a termination of contract) or changes addressing the concerns will be evident. Interestingly, of the principals interviewed, only one had had to dismiss a staff member due to underperformance that could not be rectified. In the other instances of underperformance (principals who were interviewed had to have dealt with at least two significant cases of underperformance), the underperforming staff under discussion either changed their behaviour or left the school or the teaching profession of their own volition.

The main purpose of this research was to explore how principals of Lutheran schools constructed underperformance. A procedural subquestion from this explored how dealing with underperformance may have affected their health and wellbeing. Further research is recommended to explore what is an acceptable period of time for managing a process of underperformance and under what conditions teachers who are being managed for underperformance leave the school.

Health and wellbeing. One of the primary reasons for this research was to explore the finding of Riley (2012a; 2012b) and Worthing and Paterson (2013) that dealing with underperformance of staff was a major source of stress for principals. Data was collected from the survey (n=42) and interviews (n=5) in this research, to further explore these

findings. In analysing the data gathered for this research, it became evident that principals in Lutheran schools experienced more positive than negative emotions in dealing with underperformance (Table 12, Chapter 4).

There appeared to be a contradiction between the findings of this research and those of Riley (2012a; 2012b) and Worthing and Paterson (2013). Further investigation was undertaken during the interview stage to explore this apparent contradiction. The data gathered from the interviews tended to support the findings of the survey undertaken for this research more than the findings of Riley (2012a; 2012b) and Worthing and Paterson (2013). This led to questions about why principals had previously indicated that dealing with underperformance was a major cause of stress.

Stress. Both Riley (2012a; 2012b) and Worthing and Paterson (2013) in their surveys used the concept of stress as an indicator for an emotional response experienced by principals when dealing with various issues in the school setting. However, definitions of the concept of stress are contested (Beheshtifar, Hoseinifar, & Moghadam, 2011; Blaug, Kenyon, & Lekhi, 2007; Pates, 2012), and the word tends to be used to describe any negative feelings one experiences when dealing with any difficult situation (Blaug et al., 2007).

Pressure. The concept of pressure (Blaug et al., 2007; Health and Safety Executive, 2015) could be one which describes more fully the emotional response experienced by principals when dealing with underperformance. Pressure can be a motivating and positive factor (Blaug et al., 2007; Health and Safety Executive, 2015) and can help in achieving goals. With more positive than negative emotions being experienced by principals in Lutheran schools, the findings of this research lead to questions around whether principals were feeling stress or pressure when dealing with underperformance.

It is clear that principals feel pressure (which may lead to stress if prolonged and acute) when they deal with teacher underperformance. However, in completing the surveys of Riley (2012a) and Worthing and Paterson (2013), the concept of stress was the only option available to indicate how they felt with this (and other) issues in the workplace, and this may have impacted on the results of those surveys.

Costly discipleship. There was a level of acceptance amongst the principals interviewed that many aspects of the position attracted pressure or stress. Although principals did stay in relationships with underperforming staff members, feel positive emotions such as being pastoral and supportive, and support underperforming teachers in their endeavours to change their behaviour, principals also felt that this came at a cost. For example, Principal B stated "it's a huge cost — huge cost! It's the biggest cost … and it's a huge cost whenever we deliver justice". I believe that some of these feelings of pressure or stress were a result of the principals endeavouring to uphold the teachings of the Church.

However, analysis of the interviews revealed that principals are relatively accepting of the fact that they are required to deal with cases of underperformance, and that it is only one part of their role which can cause pressure or stress. Principal D's statement is representative here: "I think the role of the principal has a lot that goes with it. Not just this aspect of it".

Support. When asked about the level of support they would like to receive to lessen this pressure, all felt comfortable in being able to identify and validate a case of underperformance. Comment was made, though, that they would like to able to network more and discuss these issues with peers. Principal E commented, "We don't share this collectively — that collective wisdom that we've got. And I would love to hear how other principals go through the process". Principal B stated in response to the question about support that could

be offered, “Well, just unpacking it today — talking to you today. That’s a wonderful thing to be able to do — completely openly with somebody”.

Summary. The final theme of Effect completes the cycle of the management of underperformance. The outcomes observed under this theme related to both the teacher who was underperforming and the health and wellbeing of the principal.

Either a teacher will improve their practice and fulfil the expectations the principal has of them, and any issue of underperformance will dissipate, or, if there is no change in performance, termination of employment will occur. However, this research showed that any staff member who did not change their performance was more likely to voluntarily resign.

It was evident through the analysis of the data collected that managing underperformance has an impact on the health and wellbeing of a principal. Dealing with underperformance can cause feelings of pressure and, when the pressure is prolonged, stress. The principals, however, recognised this as being part of their role. While they are accepting of that, they suggest that peer networks would assist in being able to discuss issues they may have.

The theme of Effect is the last in understanding underperformance in Lutheran schools. Throughout this chapter, a number of themes, phases, and elements have been discussed along with three theological teachings of the Lutheran Church. Figure 5.1 illustrates the connectivity and interplay between these.

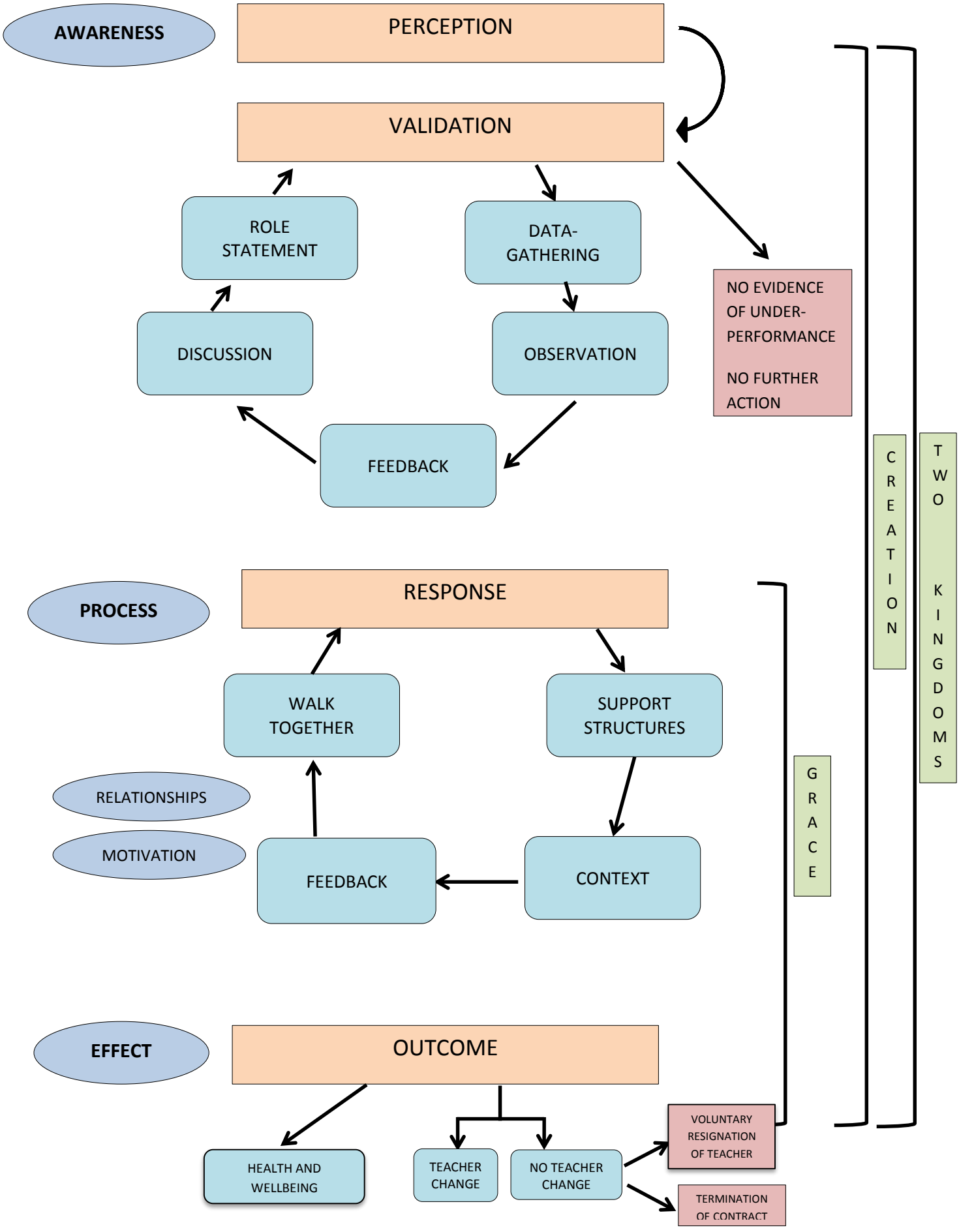

Figure 5.1. Teacher underperformance in Lutheran schools.

Figure 5.1 presents a model to assist the reader in understanding the phenomenon of underperformance in Lutheran schools. This visual representation is built on the themes, phases, and elements discussed throughout this chapter. This model is explicit in identifying the process that is undertaken in the construction of underperformance, how it is managed or dealt with, and any effect that managing it has on the principal. The point of application of the identified teachings of Lutheran theology are also illustrated.

This model (Figure 5.1) has been developed from the findings of the research, to assist in an understanding of the connection and interplay between the themes, phases, elements, and theological teachings involved in underperformance in Lutheran schools. When dealing with a case of underperformance, principals of Lutheran schools may refer to this model to understand the processes involved. This may assist in helping them to determine an appropriate manner in which to handle this issue.

Conclusion

The focus of this research was to explore how principals of Lutheran schools constructed underperformance. Procedural subquestions focused on the processes involved in dealing with underperformance (and the adequacy of these), the influence of Lutheran theology in the construction of underperformance, and any implications that dealing with underperformance may have on the health and wellbeing of principals. Through the findings of this research, answers to these questions became evident.

The findings of this research have uncovered how principals in Lutheran schools construct underperformance. Evidence has been gathered on the processes used to manage a case of underperformance, the impact the application of Lutheran theology has on this, and

how it affects the health and wellbeing of the principal. Chapter 6 will discuss how the questions on which this research was based have been answered. It is expected that this will present strategies and actions the Lutheran education system can use to support principals of their schools as they manage a case of underperformance.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Chapter 1 explained how the genesis of this research was grounded in the findings of Riley (2012a; 2012b) and Worthing and Paterson (2013), which identified that dealing with teacher underperformance was a major source of stress for principals. This research recognised that the phenomenon of underperformance, and how principals dealt with it, needed to be explored to begin to understand why principals identified it as a high stress factor.

Chapter 2 discussed the framing of the research as within the context of contemporary education and the recognised ideologies of neo-liberalism (Codd, 2005; Ellison, 2012; Hyslop-Margison, 2000; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; McGregor, 2009) and performativity (Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005; Connell, 2013; Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005). With the publication of AITSL's "Australian Professional Standards for Teachers" (2012), it became possible for principals to have guidance on dealing with underperformance. So the question arose as to why dealing with underperformance is identified by principals as a major factor of stress (Riley, 2012a; Riley, 2012b; Worthing & Paterson, 2013).

This research set out to explore the phenomenon of teacher underperformance and how principals of Australian Lutheran schools constructed it. It has identified the processes that are used to determine teacher underperformance, and also the impact of the use of Lutheran theology within these processes. This research also sought to show the implications for, or the impact on, the health and wellbeing of principals dealing with cases of teacher underperformance.

Through the research, several themes emerged which highlighted the motivations and attitudes of principals as they dealt with cases of underperformance. The literature around

teacher underperformance, particularly in relation to Lutheran schools, was minimal. This final chapter will discuss the conclusions and understandings reached in this research through the evidence gathered.

Research Findings

This section highlights the findings of this research. The question for this research was, "How is underperformance constructed by principals in Lutheran schools?", which had three subprocedural questions:

- What processes are involved in dealing with underperformance and how adequate are these?
- What is the influence of Lutheran theology in addressing teacher underperformance?
- What are the implications for the health and wellbeing of principals in addressing underperformance?

The answers to these procedural subquestions are evident through the data gathered and discussed in Chapter 4, Research Findings and Chapter 5, Discussion. After analysis of the data, the key themes of Awareness, Process, and Effect, and the two subthemes of Relationships and Motivation, emerged. Connected with these themes were the processes of Perception, Validation, Response, and Outcome. The findings of this research are grounded in these themes and related processes, and are detailed below.

1. **Dealing with underperformance.** The findings of this research would suggest that dealing with underperformance tends to be a reactive response by principals rather than a proactive action where teachers are continually supported in their professional growth. Strategies in the process of performance management (e.g. goal-setting, feedback, and appraisal) are used, but there is inconsistency in their terminology and application. One of the

unforeseen findings of this research was the principals' desire to maintain a positive relationship with teachers who were underperforming.

Performance management. Principals could articulate the processes that they used in dealing with underperformance and state how they used performance management strategies such as feedback, goal-setting, and appraisal. Many of these strategies were more likely to have been brought into practice when a case of underperformance was validated (reactive), rather than being used as a strategy for professional development for all staff (proactive).

It was evident that there was inconsistency in the application of the concepts associated with performance management. The process tended to be referred to as "appraisal"; appraisal was not understood as one of the strategies of performance management. The need for a clear and concise performance management process will be discussed in this chapter.

Relationships. There was an indication that principals had a strong desire to maintain a caring and supportive relationship with an underperforming staff member, as they felt a sense of responsibility (motivation) to the staff member (recruitment), the students, and the community. The principals' references, in the research interviews, to maintaining positive relationships and supporting teachers identified as underperforming led to this unexpected finding.

2. The influence of Lutheran theology. The findings from this research would indicate that principals in Lutheran schools have a good understanding of the three identified theological teachings of the Lutheran Church (grace, the two kingdoms, and creation), and could apply these appropriately when dealing with underperformance. While the three teachings were understood conceptually, the terminology for creation was not easily recognised by the principals.

As spiritual leaders in their schools, the findings reflected that principals were exercising this aspect of their role extremely well. Through the application of this theology, principals in Lutheran schools could be seen to be motivated to care for and support the teacher who was underperforming. There is strong alignment with this finding and those discussed above, under the heading of Relationships. It appears that, when a relationship breaks down, pressure or stress can become evident.

3. Implications for principals' health and wellbeing. There is evidence that dealing with underperformance has an impact on the health and wellbeing of a principal (Riley, 2012a; 2012b; Worthing and Paterson, 2013). However, this is difficult to fully ascertain, as the findings of this research would indicate that principals dealing with underperformance experience more positive emotions than negative (Chapter 4).

Principals identified that there was an emotional cost to dealing with underperformance and applying the theological teachings of the Lutheran Church. This has been labelled in this research as "costly discipleship".

Understanding of stress. Data from Riley (2012a; 2012b) and Worthing and Paterson (2013), would suggest that dealing with underperformance is a major source of stress for principals. Questions have arisen through this research, however, about the use of the word "stress" and whether the concept of pressure is more appropriate to describe the emotional response experienced by principals when dealing with underperformance.

Relationship with previous research. As discussed in Chapter 2, the general theoretical literature on this subject, specifically in the context of Australian Lutheran schools, is non-existent on several vital questions which would give an understanding of teacher underperformance. Furthermore, the literature is inconclusive in discussing the motivations of principals, particularly those of Lutheran schools, dealing with

underperformance. The findings of this research, while supporting a number of aspects of this field as written in the literature, have addressed some of the shortcomings that are apparent in this field.

The construction of underperformance. Returning to the research question — "How is underperformance constructed by principals in Lutheran schools?" — the findings of this research are seen as being consistent with those of Wragg, Haynes, Wragg, and Chamberlin (1999), Marshall (2005), and Yariv and Coleman (2005), who speak of underperformance as a cluster of identified behaviours. In the data collection phase of this research (see Chapter 4), principals in their responses were consistent in identifying the nominated behaviours, as stated in the literature, as indicators of underperformance.

The NSW Department of Education and Training (2006), SA's DECD (2015), and the Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman (2015) generally defined "underperformance" as an inability to carry out or perform duties expected of the employee. Such an understanding, if applied, leaves a lot of scope for interpretation by individuals. However, through this research such a general definition did not appear to concern the principals interviewed, as they had confidence in their own ability to identify a case of underperformance.

The findings of this research suggest that principals tend to rely on their experience to identify a teacher who is underperforming. Once this perception has been recognised, a process of validation occurs to confirm that their perception is correct. During this process of validation, evidence is collected by the principal, and their perception is either confirmed or dismissed.

The literature was scant when exploring this process of Perception and Validation in the construction of underperformance and tended to focus more on how to manage a case of

underperformance without first clearly exploring the process needed to identify it. However, principals did not appear to be too concerned about this lack of clarity in the process, being self-assured in their ability to identify underperformance.

Dealing with underperformance. Broadly speaking, principals in Lutheran schools tended to use strategies from the performance management field (Aguinis & Pierce, 2011; Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Koo, 2011; Kuvaas, 2011; Palaiologos, Papazekos, & Panayotopoulou, 2011; Thurston Jr & McNall, 2010) when dealing with underperformance. However, the use of these strategies and the terminology was inconsistent.

Of particular note was the confusion by the principals around the terminology of performance appraisal and performance management. Appraisal is understood to be a singular, quite often annual, evaluation of performance, whereas performance management is a continuous process of development and support for the improvement of the individual (Aguinis et al., 2011). This understanding as found in the literature was not reflected during interviews with principals.

As discussed, one of the unexpected findings of this research is reflected in the themes which have been identified as Relationships and Motivation. The literature speaks of managing underperformance so that student outcomes are not affected (Jensen & Reichl, 2011). The data from this research would suggest that, while this is a primary concern, other motivational factors are apparent when principals of Lutheran schools manage a case of underperformance.

Principals of Lutheran schools, while being concerned about the students and their learning, were also cognisant of the importance of the relationship they have with the teacher being managed for underperformance. A number of principals felt responsible for the teacher, especially if they had recruited them (Chapter 5). This attitude was reflected in the manner in

which they spoke of their belief that an individual has the capacity to grow. The use of words such as "care", "support", and "concern" in connection to the relationship highlighted the importance of the themes Relationships and Motivation (Chapter 5).

A correlation between the application of Lutheran theology and the principals' practice of their Christian faith could impact on these two subthemes. This suspected correlation, however, was not explored as part of this research. The subthemes of Relationships and Motivation as discussed in this research are not written about in any length in the literature, and the findings of this research have added to the knowledge in this area.

Impact on the principal's health and wellbeing. With a lack of clarity around the use of the term "stress" — as opposed to "pressure" (Chapter 5) — based on this study it is difficult to conclude that dealing with underperformance is stressful or a major source of stress for principals in Lutheran schools. It was identified through the survey phase (Chapter 4) that principals felt concerned, supportive, useful, and pastoral more than anxious or worried when dealing with underperformance. This finding runs counter to those published by Riley (2012a) and Worthing and Paterson (2013) which identified dealing with underperformance as one of the major causes of stress for principals.

However, it is evident that there is some impact on the health and wellbeing of the principal in that the principal does have a responsibility to address the performance of the teacher. This research has termed this "costly discipleship" (Chapter 4). It is debatable, however, whether this action is stressful or more a feeling of pressure for a period of time.

Implications of the Research and Recommendations

This research offers suggestive evidence of a number of implications for Lutheran education. These implications and recommendations are set out below.

Performance management. The research appears to support the argument for a consistent approach to performance management processes and strategies. It is evident that there is inconsistency in the use of performance management language which has confused the concepts of appraisal (a noncontinuous approach) and management (a continuous approach). It is therefore recommended that:

- a consistent approach to performance management, in both process and terminology, be adopted by LEA to assist principals and leadership teams as they support all teachers in their professional growth;
- principals receive training in the various strategies which comprise a performance management process;
- a performance management process be viewed as a formative exercise which involves all staff, not solely a summative one; and
- such a process be grounded in the soon to be released LEA leadership and formation framework, *Growing Deep*, which describes a number of personal and professional capabilities which are expected of staff in Lutheran schools. Complementary to the AITSL Standards, *Growing Deep* will provide a complementary set of standards for staff in Lutheran schools.

Lutheran theological understandings. It was evident that there was a good understanding and application by principals of the three theological understandings identified for this research. While the theological understanding of creation was not immediately recognised by principals, it was clear that they understood and applied this theological understanding. As principals are the recognised spiritual leaders of their schools, it is my view that LEA must ensure that its principals have been trained in the understanding and application of the Lutheran Church's theological teachings.

It is important to note that this research focused on principals with five or more years of experience (see Limitations of the research and implications for future research, in this chapter) and that the research did not explore how and when these principals gained their knowledge and understanding. It is therefore recommended that:

- a well-defined professional learning process in regard to theological understandings is articulated, so that all principals receive the training required of them to understand this and be able to apply these theological understandings in a practical setting; and
- principals be given opportunities to continue to grow in their understanding and application of these theological understandings through ongoing formation activities.

Professional learning and support for principals. This research has established that principals with five or more years of experience are confident in their ability to recognise an issue of underperformance. They validate this perception mainly through the use of tacit means (discussion, observation, feedback). With 52% [*n*=22] of principals indicating in the survey phase they had received some training in the area of underperformance (Chapter 4), and with principals' reliance on tacit means to validate underperformance, LEA would be well served to support their principals in this area. It is therefore recommended that:

- consideration be given to allow time for discussions on underperformance at principal meetings. This may include, but is not limited to, how underperformance is first perceived and then validated by a principal, the processes involved in dealing with a case of underperformance, and the sharing of best practice in this area. Figure 5.1 would provide direction and guidance for this discussion to occur.
- data is gathered on the needs of principals in this area, in terms of what further support they require to deal with an issue of underperformance. From this data, professional learning activities could be developed.

Maintaining a well-functioning relationship was viewed by the principals as an important element in dealing with staff members who were underperforming (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). This notion of a well-functioning relationship, however, should not be discussed exclusively within the context of underperformance but should be evident for all staff. It is therefore recommended that:

- consideration to be given to allow time for discussions on leadership theory and practice at principal meetings. During these discussions, the importance of the leader developing and maintaining relationships with staff should be emphasised.

One of the strong motivating factors shared by principals (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) in dealing with a case of underperformance was the responsibility they felt as a result of employing the teacher being managed. The importance of thorough recruitment processes was discussed. It is therefore recommended that:

- consideration be given to allow time for discussions on recruitment practices at principal meetings.

Principal health and wellbeing. Principals recognised that dealing with underperformance was a part of their duties and on the whole experienced more positive feelings than negative when dealing with it (Chapter 4). It was apparent, however, that dealing with underperformance did have an effect on the health and wellbeing of the principal, and this was defined for the purposes of this research as "costly discipleship". To support principals in addressing any emotional effects they encounter due to dealing with underperformance, it is recommended that:

- principals be assigned a professional supervisor so they are able to debrief their experiences and receive support. It is recognised that a provision has been included

for professional supervision in principals' contracts; however, it is essential that LEA ensures that all principals are taking advantage of this benefit.

Limitations of the Research and Implications for Future Research.

The research has offered an interpretive perspective on how principals in Lutheran schools construct teacher underperformance, the processes they use to manage it, and the impacts that dealing with it had on their health and wellbeing. It was conducted across all Australian Lutheran schools and used sampling to interview principals with five or more years of experience. As a direct consequence of this methodology, the study encountered a number of limitations which need to be considered. Where appropriate, comment will be made on possible future research to address the limitations.

Australian Lutheran schools. It is acknowledged that data was collected only from Australian Lutheran schools and not from schools of other sectors — independent, Catholic, or public. As one of the procedural subquestions involved an understanding and application of Lutheran theological understandings, it was not deemed appropriate to extend this research to other educational sectors which would have little, if any, knowledge of these understandings.

Further research. The data that was gathered resulted in the development of Figure 5.1, Teacher underperformance in Lutheran schools, with the resultant themes and subthemes as indicated. A number of themes appeared to be inextricably linked to an understanding and application of Lutheran theological understandings.

Further research could be undertaken to investigate if this model is applicable to other educational sectors. The theology of other denominations, or the moral imperative held by principals, could be explored to determine if it translates into the model.

Principal experience. To impose limits to make the research manageable, the decision was made to use sampling to interview only principals with five or more years of experience. The principals interviewed were chosen through maximal variation sampling. The rationale for this was discussed in Chapter 3. The data gathered and the findings discussed were therefore essentially reflective of this particular cohort of principals.

Further research. To gain a broader understanding of how principals in Lutheran schools construct teacher underperformance, future research could investigate this question across all levels of experience, and not focus on the one identified cohort.

Further research could also change the parameters of the sampling and interview cohorts based on school structure or size. School location could also be used as a sample.

Teaching staff. This research concentrated on the underperformance of teaching staff and did not include other school staff. Further, the issue was addressed only from the perspective of the principal. Perspectives of teaching staff who may have been managed for underperformance were not gathered.

Further research. The recognition of the role that staff play in underperformance allows for a number of areas for further research. This research could involve both teaching and nonteaching staff. Investigations could include:

- gathering data on underperformance from a staff member's (teaching and/or nonteaching) perspective, to broaden the understanding of underperformance; and
- determining whether the process of dealing with underperformance that was clearly articulated by principals is reflective of the way underperformance is used for nonteaching staff.

Recommendations for Further Research

This section will discuss a number of recommendations for further research which are not tied to the limitations of the study. From the findings of the study, it is recommended that further research is undertaken to explore:

- at what point a principal determines that the process described in Figure 5.1 has been exhausted, and termination occurs. The timing of the process was not explored during this research.
- whether there is a relationship between a principal's understanding and application of Lutheran theological understandings and their Christian faith when dealing with a case of underperformance. This would explore the impact these two elements have on the subthemes of Relationships and Motivation; and
- clarification around the terms "stress" and "pressure". It is a contention of this research that the use of the concept of stress may not have been a true indicator of a principal's emotions.

Conclusion

The findings of this research show that principals in Lutheran schools construct underperformance with little reliance on any explicit resources (e.g., "Australian Professional Standards for Teachers", AITSL, 2012), mainly through a process of checking (validating) issues of suspected underperformance which they may be alerted to by various means (perception). Evidence gathered during the research (Chapter 4) would indicate that experienced principals have confidence in their ability to determine if underperformance is occurring.

Principals face a number of challenges and stressors in their work as they endeavour to create and maintain an environment where excellence in teaching and learning occurs. Dealing with underperforming staff could be viewed as one of these challenges or stressors.

The findings of this research will assist principals in Lutheran schools in understanding the process that occurs when underperformance needs to be addressed and the importance that their role as spiritual leader in the school plays in this. A thorough understanding of performance management strategies will support and guide their actions in dealing with not only underperforming staff but the entire staff of the school in a proactive system of professional learning.

In reading this research, principals in Lutheran schools can feel a level of comfort and assurance in the manner in which they can view and deal with underperformance. This research has addressed and unpacked the phenomenon of underperformance for the principal's benefit so that they can work towards making the teaching and learning program of the school the best it can be.

Appendix A
Survey Questions

1. Region

- ◯ LEQ
- ◯ LEVNT
- ◯ LSA

2. School type

- ◯ Primary only
- ◯ Secondary only
- ◯ Composite (primary and secondary)

3. Years of experience as a principal

- ◯ 0-5
- ◯ 5-15
- ◯ 15+

4. In regard to defining teacher underperformance, how significant are the following areas?

	Very significant	Significant	Somewhat significant	Not significant
Working with colleagues	◯	◯	◯	◯
Behaviour management	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lesson/unit preparation	◯	◯	◯	◯
Working to agreed tasks	◯	◯	◯	◯
Parent, student, peer complaints	◯	◯	◯	◯
Student progress	◯	◯	◯	◯
Expectations of students	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please explain)

5. What resources do you draw upon to gain your criteria in determining underperformance?

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Documents and guidelines provided by my regional Lutheran education office	○	○	○	○
Documents and guidelines provided by other organisations	○	○	○	○
AITSL Standards	○	○	○	○
My own experience	○	○	○	○
Advice/discussions with HR consultants	○	○	○	○
A 'gut' feeling	○	○	○	○
Feedback from community members (student, staff, parents)	○	○	○	○
Advice/discussions with colleagues/leadership team	○	○	○	○
Other	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

6. How useful/adequate have you found the following in determining teacher underperformance?

	Very useful	Useful	Somewhat useful	Not useful
Documents and guidelines provided by my regional Lutheran education office	○	○	○	○
Documents and guidelines provided by other organisations	○	○	○	○
AITSL standards	○	○	○	○
My own experience	○	○	○	○
Advice/discussions with HR consultants	○	○	○	○
A 'gut' feeling	○	○	○	○
Feedback from community members (students, staff, parents)	○	○	○	○
Advice/discussions with colleagues/leadership team	○	○	○	○
Other	○	○	○	○

Other (please comment))

7. Please respond to the following questions.

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
A Lutheran understanding of grace emphasises that all people have received forgiveness freely through Christ. How important is this understanding of grace in dealing with teacher underperformance?	◯	◯	◯	◯
A Lutheran understanding of creation affirms that we are all unique, created in the image of God and have gifts and talents which can be used in our service to others. How important is this understanding of creation in dealing with teacher underperformance?	◯	◯	◯	◯
A Lutheran understanding of the two kingdoms encourages us to see that God works through both the realms of civil order and the church. How important is this understanding of the two kingdoms in dealing with teacher underperformance?	◯	◯	◯	◯

8. To what extent do the following factors influence the way (or impact) how you deal with teacher underperformance?

	No influence	Some influence	More influence than not	Quite influential
Union involvement	◯	◯	◯	◯
Workplace agreements	◯	◯	◯	◯
Industrial/legal requirements	◯	◯	◯	◯
Wider staff expectations	◯	◯	◯	◯
Community expectations	◯	◯	◯	◯
Leadership team	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

9. In your professional development as an educational leader have you received any specific training to deal with teacher underperformance?

◯ Yes ◯ No

10. Please comment on the training you received. (eg courageous conversations)

11. Please comment on any support that could be offered to enable or assist you to deal more effectively with teacher underperformance.

12. When I am dealing with an issue of underperformance I feel ...

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Anxious	○	○	○	○
Worried	○	○	○	○
Energised	○	○	○	○
Physically ill	○	○	○	○
Concerned	○	○	○	○
Supportive	○	○	○	○
Useful	○	○	○	○
Pastoral	○	○	○	○

13. Generally when confronted with an issue of underperformance I: (tick all that apply)

- ☐ Avoid dealing with it for as long as I can
- ☐ Feel comfortable in dealing with it
- ☐ Am able to deal with it, but it consumes a lot of my physical and emotional energy
- ☐ Look forward to the opportunity to help a staff member
- ☐ Find that it adversely effects my personal life
- ☐ Find that it adversely effects my professional life
- ☐ Avoid dealing with it altogether

The next stage of this research process is to interview 5 or 6 principals on the management of underperformance (45-60 minutes at your location). This is entirely voluntary and principals who are willing to be interviewed must:

- have five or more years of experience as a principal
- have dealt with at least two cases of significant underperformance

14. If you are willing to be considered for interview, please type your name in the box. Otherwise no further action is required.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
Shane Paterson

Appendix B
Interview Protocol

Project: The Challenge of addressing teacher underperformance in Lutheran schools: an exploration of principals' experiences

Key research question: How is teacher underperformance socially constructed by principals in Lutheran schools?'

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

A description of the study:

a) **Purpose**: Through the research of Philip Riley and LPA it is evident that dealing with underperformance is one of top stressors experienced by principals. I am aiming in this research to investigate how principals construct or decide if a teacher is underperforming; what resources you use, how you refine this understanding. Considering some of the resources that are available (eg Australian Professional Standards for Teachers) for principals I am interested in exploring why, with such documentation, that dealing with underperformance is one of the top stressors for principals. Along with this I want to explore any implications that the principal as the spiritual leader of the school has on this. There will also be some exploration on the effect that dealing with underperformance has on principals. It is hoped that this research will give a clearer picture on the processes we use to construct underperformance, how it affects our health and wellbeing and what support we may need to be able to address this issue in our schools.

b) **Process:** 50 % (43) of principals responded to the survey which was distributed as the first part of this exercise. Thankyou for participating in that survey and also for a being a part of this interview process. Across all regions there will be 5 / 6 principals interviewed in total with no identification used in the publication of data - except by principal A, principal B etc. A transcription of this interview will be provided to you so that you can confirm that it was an accurate recording. All transcriptions will be stored at the university.

c) **Interview:** It is expected that this interview will take approximately one hour and you have given signed consent for your involvement in this next stage (show / collect form). As is written in the Introduction letter you are able to remove yourself or the information you have shared at any point in the research process.

Interview (pre-interview questions)

How many year's experience do you have as a principal in a Lutheran school?

Can you share with me the highlights you experience in being a principal?

How many cases of underperformance, which you would consider significant, have you dealt with during this time? (how would you define significant?)

1. a) **You indicated on the survey that you have dealt with two (or more) significant cases of underperformance. Could you talk to me about the cases that you were reflecting upon in answering this question.**

   (*prompts* – I would not use these verbatim but have included them in this format to assist me in phrasing a prompt)

   - It was apparent that principals of 5 years or more experience relied more on tacit evidence than explicit. Principals of five years or more experience tended to rely more on:
     - Advice or discussions with colleagues and leadership teams,
     - Feedback from community members
     - Your own experience

     Could you comment on the reliance of this form of evidence rather than the use of documentation?
   - How do you use the Standards to determine if a teacher is underperforming?
   - Explore whether the process being described is a reactive or proactive one

   b) **As a principal in a Lutheran school you are expected to be the spiritual leader. This would imply that it is necessary to have a good knowledge and understanding of Lutheran theology and how to apply this in a school setting. This understanding then guides our decision making and the way in which we deal with all situations. How do you think this understanding plays out in dealing with staff and in particular underperformance?**

   - Could you describe to me how our theological understandings of:

Grace….. *A Lutheran understanding of grace emphasises that all people have received forgiveness freely through Christ. How important is this understanding of grace in dealing with teacher underperformance?*

Creation theology….. *A Lutheran understanding of creation affirms that we are all unique, created in the image of God and have gifts and talents which can be used in our service to others. How important is this understanding of creation in dealing with teacher underperformance?* An acknowledgement of our vocation, or the service we undertake for others is part of the understanding of God's continuing creation, we use our gifts and talents to serve the needs of others (Bartsch, 2013). Such a belief emphasises the way members of a school community are viewed and treated.

The two kingdoms….. *A Lutheran understanding of the two kingdoms encourages us to see that God works through both the realms of civil order and the church. How important is this understanding of the two kingdoms in dealing with teacher underperformance?* The right hand is often depicted as the realm of mercy where God operates through the church, the community of Christians, with the gospel of forgiveness. It is within this context that Christian practices (eg. worship, confession, absolution) occur within Lutheran school settings.

- Are there any other theological understandings that may impact on the way we construct and deal with underperformance?

c) When faced with issues of underperformance it is apparent that principals, feel such emotions as anxiety and worry which can affect their personal and professional lives. However, there was also a strong sense of duty and obligation to pastorally care for the individual. This highlights the concept of 'costly discipleship' where helping, supporting and caring for the individual is at cost to me and my emotions but it is done for the benefit of the individual, the students and the community. What is your response to the concept of costly discipleship' when dealing with a case of underperformance

- *Stress - motivator or feelings of (dis) stress*
- *How they feel about it - how they deal with that*

d) What further professional training would be beneficial for you, if any, in being able to identify a case of underperformance

Appendix C
Ethics Approval

Dear Shane,

The Chair of the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University considered your response to conditional approval out of session and your project has now been granted final ethics approval. This means that you now have approval to commence your research. Your ethics final approval notice can be found below.

FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:	**6661**
Project Title:	The challenge of addressing teacher under performance in Lutheran schools: an exploration of principals' experiences
Principal Researcher:	Mr Shane Paterson
Email:	pate0344@flinders.edu.au

Approval Date:	30 September 2014	Ethics Approval Expiry Date:	**31 December 2018**

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