

# Being ‘*in*’ principalship: An ontological inquiry of well-being experiences

by

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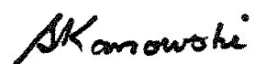
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***Declaration***

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "SKanowski". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with the 'S' and 'K' being particularly prominent.

SHAUN KANOWSKI

18 June 2021



## *Abstract*

A global focus on well-being across many human sectors is on the rise. Of serious concern is the predominant emphasis on contemporary empirical research and well-being policy, which frames the phenomenon of well-being as an individual's problem. Interventions have now become the 'new' norm of neoliberal discourse on well-being, which aims to 'fix' the problem. School principals are not immune. In Australia, quantitative studies into principal's well-being started emerging from 2011 and with a predominant focus on quantitative data. These studies do not capture the contextual nature of principals' well-being and therefore do not capture the nature of being '*in*' principalship nor the phenomenon of well-being.

This inquiry explores the phenomenon of well-being *as experienced* by Queensland principals through a phenomenological lens. I argue that well-being is a phenomenon that matters in our everyday lived experiences. We experience the presence or absence of well-being as integral to our human condition. The essence of being human as a principal is shown to be our everyday way-of-being as thrownness, circumspection and desire for "care-full" relationships as we are drawn along by the festivals of relationships. This understanding of the essence of well-being as about *being* in relation to others, calls for a movement away from current thinking about the phenomenon as something individual - something to 'fix' in the individual, thinking instead as something to address in the way people relate to each other. As a phenomenon, well-being can make an appearance from beneath the surface of lived experiences and can be described and interpreted to discover essential meanings and deepen understandings of what Heidegger (1962) terms, "being together in the world". Well-being is a phenomenon that exists across humanity as the nature of how we exist together.

Principals always work relationally and as such, there is a calling for a focus on cultures of well-being. An understanding of the essence of well-being and not a policy document or new framework, would be beneficial to the everyday care principals. A calling towards a way-of-being built on a foundation of relationships, care and hope.

There is no doubt that there is an ‘urgency’ and a cry for attention to be given to well-being. Rather than just a concern for numbers, measurements and individualising well-being, this phenomenological inquiry has shown well-being to be a collective phenomenon where our interdependence and context always matter. It also challenges the priority and nature of well-being research that dominates and privileges deficit and quantitative studies, which largely minimises the stories and lived experiences of principals. What is lost is principals’ first-hand experiences and a situated understanding of principal well-being, so crucial to ‘being’ in principalship.

## *Acknowledgements*

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I would like to thank my family and friends, whose continual encouragement throughout this journey kept me engaged. Special mention goes to Leanne (spouse) who helped me to find thoughts when my mind had too many tabs open. I would also like to acknowledge Leanne's stunning photography and art work used throughout this thesis for which I have verbal permission to use. A big vote of thanks goes to Matt (son) and Clare (daughter) for their understanding of how significant this work is to me and for their continual kind words of encouragement. Finally, to my dear friends Asha and Charlie Crozier, whose generosity (and lovely beach house at Port Willunga) enabled biennial intensives with my supervisors and a writing retreat to attend to the final stages of this thesis prior to submission.

To my wonderfully supportive and patient supervisors, Professor David Giles and Dr Bev Rogers. I said from the outset, that I wanted supervisors with whom I already had a relationship. I believe that our relationship has grown through your positive supervision, interest and care. Your intellectual generosity and scholarly guidance are appreciated more than you know - thank you.

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To the *Queensland Association of State School Principals* - thank you for your generous bursary *The Travelling Scholars Grant* that funded my trips from Queensland to Adelaide. Thank you also to the *Queensland Association of Combined Sector Leaders Inc* (formally, the *Queensland State P-10/12 School Administrators' Association*), especially President, principal and dear friend, Brian O'Neill, for ongoing interest and support in this inquiry.

To my research participants, fellow school principals who shared their stories, that became the data for this inquiry. Thank you for gifting your rich, lived experiences. I hope my inquiry makes a difference for you and others in the principalship.

No Editor has been used in the preparation of this thesis.

### ***Publications and conference presentations***

Below is a list of publications and conference presentations I have completed during my candidature:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Publication / Conference</b>	<b>Name of article or conference presentation</b>
September 2017	<i>Agility – Creativity - Legacy</i> Conference of the <i>Australian Primary Principals’ Association (APPA)</i> , Royal Brisbane Showgrounds Queensland.	Masterclass: <i>Principal Wellbeing</i>
October 2017	<i>Association Update</i> Journal of the <i>Queensland State P-10/12 School Administrators’ Association</i> (Issue 6)	<i>Researching Wellbeing and the Lived Experiences of School Principals</i> (p.p. 6-9)
December 2017	<i>The Queensland Principal</i> Journal of the <i>Queensland Association of State School Principals</i> (Volume 44 Issue 4)	<i>2017 Travelling Scholar: Researching Wellbeing and the Lived Experiences of School Principals</i> (p. 17)
December 2018	Conference of the <i>Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)</i> University of Sydney New South Wales	Educational Leadership Presentation: <i>Being ‘in’ principalship: an ontological inquiry of well-being experiences</i>

### ***Dedication***

This thesis is dedicated to Queensland state school principals whose well-being is a priority.

## ***Abbreviations***

DoE	Department of Education
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy
QASSP	Queensland Association of State School Principals
QTU	Queensland Teachers' Union

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# 1 Chapter 1: Introduction

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## Context

There is widespread concern, on an international scale, pertaining to the *well-being*<sup>1</sup> associated with the changing role of the school principal (Cooper, Sieverding, & Muth, 1988; Riley, 2020; Savery & Detiuk, 1986; Tung & Koch, 1980). The tensions connected with the changing roles and responsibilities of principals have been implicated in current research as a causative factor in work-related ill-health and disease (Husky et al., 2020; Riley, 2020). In Australia, principal well-being has been a significant national concern in the last decade.

School principals are the nation's most stressed and bullied profession, with as many as one in three physically attacked or a witness to violence in their workplace, a study has found (Michael, 2013, p. 1).

In Queensland<sup>2</sup>, a number of systemic initiatives have been developed to address the effects of work-related well-being for school principals (DoE, 2017, 2019, 2020a). These initiatives, discussed in chapter three, have been judged insufficient by the Department of Education (DoE) and principals themselves, in addressing the issue of well-being for a range of reasons, largely in part to the lack of understanding as to why the issue of principal well-being is a focus in our educational culture in the first place. Riley (2015) reported to *The Educator*:

Structural reform is needed to reverse a serious decline in principal health and well-being. Well-being is a good measure of the success or otherwise of educational policy - it's not a thing that needs to be tackled by itself (Henebery, 2015, p. 1).

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this inquiry, I deliberately hyphenate the word *well-being* to emphasise the ontological nature of *being* 'in' principalship.

<sup>2</sup> I focus this inquiry on Queensland (QLD), as this is the context in which I work as a principal and have lived experience, underpinning knowledge and understanding, through the lens of a former President of a QLD principals' association.

Why is it that principals are struggling across multiple dimensions (personal, school contexts, systemic, national and international) and what are the unspoken truths and taken-for-granted assumptions existing within the lifeworld of principals that create the conditions for potential significant harm? From my own experience, the enormous pressure on principals to be 'perfect' and to meet all needs and demands of their role is immense.

***Positioning the inquiry using a story of being 'in' principalship***

*Once up-on a promotional ladder, lived an upwardly-mobile, fit and healthy, young and high-performing school principal. He aspired to be a most effective school administrator in a large, thriving school or college, and even a senior executive within the organisation. His career pathway was on track, until he approached a major crossroad, which rendered several rungs of the promotional ladder impassable. He was diagnosed with cancer. To compound this illness, he was coping with the death of a close family member, while supporting a young and extended family, as well as leading and managing a challenging school. What unfolded was leave of absence from school for treatment and recovery, a mismanaged transfer to enable access to medical facilities, limited departmental support, workplace bullying and the scrutiny of work performance by an overly officious supervisor. This resulted in a drop in confidence and self-esteem, stress, fear, angst, a felt sense of failure, detachment, isolation, deteriorating health and poor well-being. This young principal was me!*

“Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). Using a personal experience as a starting point positions this inquiry from the outset, I offer a description of a story without “causal explanations or interpretative generalizations” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). My personal and experiential description is a prelude to the many stories that inform this inquiry.

Clearly, I have an investment in this inquiry from a deeply personal perspective. van Manen (1990) advocates using personal experience as a starting point for phenomenological research because “one’s own life experiences are readily accessible” (p. 54). It follows, then, that a focus on well-being in school principals provides an impetus and purpose for my inquiry, originating, as it does, from personal experience, belief persuasions and ongoing interest as an insider.

## **Impetus for the inquiry**

In addition to my own personal experiences, it is also the case that media articles such as the two cited in the introductory paragraphs, appear to be a constant feature in state and national newspapers, magazines, reports and journals (physical and electronic). Disturbing headlines include, *Principal wellbeing: The outlook for 2020: our principals are at breaking point* (Henebery, 2020a), *What have principals learned from COVID-19?* (Henebery, 2020b), *School principals stressed, bullied, bashed and overworked, new findings show* (Michael, 2013) and most concerning, *Death of Melbourne principal highlights lack of support for school leaders, grieving son says* (Corsetti, 2016). Stories such as these form the impetus for my inquiry alongside my own lived experiences and those of others, as well as a passionate interest in the phenomenon of well-being. They highlight the *urgency* to gain contextual understandings of principals' well-being experiences and to imagine possibilities for going forward.

## **The purpose of the inquiry**

The purpose of this inquiry is to uncover ontological meanings within the well-being experiences of principals, to gain deeper understandings of what it is like being 'in' principalship, providing the context for well-being. I explore the lived-experiences of school principals in relation to their roles, contexts and their own well-being. The participants' stories are drawn from a tapestry of personal experiences of formal and visible processes of being 'in' principalship. These include, but are not limited to, accounts of stress, ill health, fear or despair and inclusive of balanced and positive accounts of principals thriving by overcoming barriers and attending to their own well-ness. What emerges within the inquiry are uncovered ontic descriptions of harm due to recruitment and selection processes, illness, government policy, compliance, workload, bullying and



performance reviews. Ontological and not always obvious interpretations of caring relationships, angst, ‘lostness’, and guilt, amongst other ways of being also surface.

In essence, the purpose of this inquiry is to gather stories of the phenomenon relevant to human well-being as experienced in the life world of school principals - so we may learn something meaningful about what it is like being ‘*in*’ principalship. It needs to be noted that I am not interested in the cause and effect nature of well-being, as is the case for so many other researchers in the field. I am interested, however, in the ontological themes of well-being in principals: the collective experiences and how they are interrelated to each other. The collective experiences and the context are important for understanding the nature of well-being for principals.

### **Aims / Objectives**

My aim is to utilise and contribute to contemporary studies into principal well-being, through a wide-ranging literature review (chapters two and three) as a springboard to exploring a gap in the literature and policy, and then to engage in hermeneutic phenomenology. I explore shared understandings of the ontological nature of well-being experiences of principals; including those who experience heightened levels of stress in a system that demands them to “*do more with less*” (Zipin & White, 2002, p. 3, emphasis added). My objective is to seek the ontological meanings of principals’ everyday experiences of well-being which may be possibly expressed as anxiety, stress and wellness, rather than a positivist analysis of a quantifiable set of well-being measures.

My inquiry gives attention to what the lived experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship might mean to school leaders in their daily experiences of the phenomenon of well-being (Giles & Alderson, 2008; van Manen, 1990). Through crafted stories, hermeneutic descriptions and interpretations realised through the philosophical insights of Heidegger and Gadamer, I

unearth taken-for-granted understandings of the phenomenon of well-being as it pertains to school principals.

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences... [it] does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and / or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world (van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

## **Research approach**

Central to this inquiry is a concern that the pressure to balance the scales between systemic and school-based imperatives and a healthy lifestyle, has taken its toll and resulted in a generation of school leaders who are focused on compliance and creating an image of what it means to be an effective principal, at the expense of personal care. From my own lived experiences and awareness of others, it seems that a personal / professional split is not strong for many principals. Principals may be wading in a neoliberal ‘swimming pool’ only to find themselves too busy staying afloat to try to get out of the water. If they stop swimming, they may drown. In the role of President of a Queensland professional principals’ association (2004-2014), I observed at the organisational level, manifestations of neoliberalism within a dominant policy discourse focused solely on increasing external outcomes and results individualised to the school principal regardless of context. And so, the choices are to swim, stay afloat, get out of the pool altogether or worse, drown.

My inquiry is shaped by engaging in conversations with principals. I reserved any expectations of discovering definitive answers or certain truths to research and interview questions as everyone’s experiences are deeply personal and varied. However, in digging deeply through principals’ stories, the exploration of taken-for-granted meanings began bubbling beneath the surface and the collective lived experiences of the nature of well-being started to emerge.

To progress the quest for understandings, I offer a series of crafted stories, hermeneutic descriptions and interpretations of the ontological themes of well-being experiences in principals. The stories are not arbitrary as to be meaningless, but rather aimed at being rigorous and disciplined from the outset by a specific intention to unearth the tension and the relationship that exists between the phenomenon of well-being and school principals. Narratives collected within this inquiry are not offered as sample case studies to be analysed and to which theoretical principles applied. The point is to show that by carefully guided reflection and a strong reading of principals' stories, it is possible to achieve insights and understandings that are essential to interpretative descriptions. This means that as an early researcher, I begin by turning inwards to the meaning structure within the stories rather than outwards to an external (theoretical) source beyond the boundaries of the actual situations and descriptions of well-being itself (van Manen, 1990).

Describing the life world of a school principal, takes seriously Husserl's (1989) admonition to return "to the things themselves" (pp. 59-60) as the point at which we need to begin.

Current inquiries regarding principal well-being consistently turn their back on the nature of the phenomenon of well-being itself, preferring to, as Evans (2016) describes, deal in reified thinking. Such studies seem trapped in a scientific-analytical mindset, reflecting a technical rationality that has come to pervade modern society (Adams & Balfour, 2007). My inquiry is designed to deal with methodological concerns that are "decidedly *unmethodological*" in a purely prescriptive or technocratic sense (van Manen, 1990, p. 3, emphasis added). The phenomenon of well-being drives this inquiry and gathers momentum as each participant's story is contributed. As such, the research design involves recruitment and interviewing of principals to investigate lived experiences, hermeneutic circling (explained in chapter five) involving crafting stories, forming hermeneutic

descriptions, thematic contemplations and exploring philosophical understandings to assist with ontological interpretations.

## **Research question**

This inquiry gives priority to the question (the substance) over the method (the form) and requires that some other way or means of proceeding needs to be found, a way that goes beyond method. In this inquiry, that is the way of hermeneutics (van Manen, 1990).

A hermeneutic approach does not categorise or explain behaviour nor does it generate theory (Finlay, 2011, p. 3).

Meaning questions are researchable questions (van Manen, 1990), as it is possible to speak of such things in a way that goes beyond individual prejudice and personal preference. In this inquiry, I achieve this by deliberately avoiding the word ‘well-being’ within interview questions, yet stories of well-being emerged. Meaning questions possess their own kind of integrity and even their own kind of stability (Evans, 2016). This inquiry therefore explores the taken-for-granted meanings and understandings of the lived experience of the phenomenon of well-being by asking the question:

### **What is the ontological nature of well-being for school principals?**

The research question picks up elements, which van Manen (2014) refers to as existential methods: guided existential inquiry. These elements include:

*Relationality* - lived self - others, which may guide our reflection to ask how self and others are experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied.

*Corporeality* - lived body, which may guide our reflection to ask how the body is experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied.

*Spatiality* - lived space - The existential theme of spatiality may guide our reflection to ask how space is experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied.

*Temporality* - lived time - the existential theme of temporality may guide our reflection to ask how time is experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied.

*Materiality* - lived things - the existential theme of materiality may guide our reflection to ask how things are experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied (pp. 203-207, emphasis added).

As can be seen by van Manen's guided existential inquiry approach, a phenomenon is considered as being essential to human experiences that is felt both in its presence or absence. Therefore, my research question provides the focus for this inquiry and guides the formation of interview questions which are intended purely as conversation starters (Appendix H).

## **Research design**

### ***Recruitment of participants***

I will briefly outline my research design in this next section and elaborate in more detail in chapters four and five. Research participants were sourced from colleagues, namely Queensland principals working (or who have worked) in state schools in the past five years to maintain currency. This was achieved with the assistance of two Queensland principals' associations. One of these associations was asked to forward potential participants, an email from my supervisors containing a *Letter of introduction*, *Letter of support* and *Information sheet* (Appendices B, C and D). In this way, I ensured that any perception of coercion during recruitment was minimised. Initially, research participants included principals who were known to me and from there I encouraged those principals to invite other colleagues known to them to be involved in the research in a process called snowballing<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> **Snowballing:** the researcher is referred to other possible participants by interviewees, who may be able to contribute a different perspective through their own lived experiences. They may even distribute recruitment materials to other[s] (Creswell, 2012, p. 45, brackets added).

Snowball sampling “takes advantage of the networks of identified participants,” which will be used to provide an “ever-increasing set of potential contacts” (Noy, 2008, p. 6). The actual number of research participants was not realised initially, however, as the hermeneutic circling process progressed and as the “shared nature of the phenomena unfolded to a point whereby no new understandings appear to be evident, whereby a sense of saturation was reached” (O’Reilly & Parker, 2013, pp. 191-192). Eleven research participants informed this inquiry. “Phenomenology derives meaning from the experiences without a prescribed viewpoint of power or gender” (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence, 2008, p. 6) as such, the research participants’ personal details were not important to this inquiry; it was their experiences that were essential to the meaning structure.

### ***Hermeneutic phenomenology***

The process of doing hermeneutic phenomenology is represented as a journey of ‘thinking’ in which researchers are caught up in a cycle of reading-writing-dialogue-which spirals onwards. Through such disciplined and committed engagement insights ‘come’ (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1389, emphasis included in original text).

Insights ‘come’ in this methodology when the research question asks for meanings of a phenomenon with the sole purpose of better understanding the human experience (Heidegger, 1962). Furthermore, it is important to understand more clearly, what is a phenomenon, in phenomenology? Moran and Mooney (2002) attempt to address this question by stating that:

The phenomena of phenomenology are to be understood in a deliberately broad sense as including all forms of appearing, showing, manifesting, making evident or 'evidencing', bearing witness, truth-claiming, checking and verifying, including all forms of seeming, dissembling, occluding, obscuring, denying and falsifying (Moran & Mooney, 2002, p. 5, emphasis included in original text).

More so, every phenomenon “demands its hearing in its own way and on its own terms” (Evans, 2016, p. 27). For this hearing to occur, the phenomenologically orientated

researcher needs to allow their research to “evolve as the phenomenon becomes slowly clearer” (p. 27).

This hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is more than describing well-being experiences of principals. It seeks to explore the hidden meanings within principals’ experiences that go beyond words (yet words are used) to articulate and illuminate taken-for-granted meanings and understandings for others to see (van Manen, 1990). The inquiry has enabled me to engage with the experiences of principals and uncover meanings that have otherwise remained silenced. It provided a platform for truth-telling which is necessary for care of self (Besley, 2009). My role as researcher was to make visible what had previously been hidden and / or silenced.

### ***Investigating lived experiences***

van Manen (1990) argues that there is no systematic formula to conducting a phenomenological inquiry because the emphasis is always on the meanings of the lived experiences. Gadamer (2013) concurs and argues that the preoccupation with method or technique is antithetical to the spirit of human science scholarship, “present to thought is that one has not rightly grasped their nature if one measures them by the yardstick of a progressive knowledge of regularity” (p. 4). Furthermore,

The aim is not to confirm and extend these universalized experiences in order to attain knowledge of a law - e.g., how men [sic], peoples, and states evolve - but to understand how this man, this people, or this state is what it has become or, more generally, how it happened that it is so (Gadamer, 2013, p. 4).

Following Gadamer’s example, my inquiry has been informed by a dynamic interplay of the following six elemental research activities as described by van Manen (van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31, emphasis added):

- 1 Turning to *a phenomenon which seriously interests us* and commits us to the world. For my inquiry the phenomenon of well-being as experienced by school principals.

- 2 *Investigating experience as we live it* rather than as we conceptualise it. Within my inquiry, this has been approached through conducting interviews and engaging in dialogue with principals' stories of their lived experiences.
- 3 Reflecting on the *essential themes*, which characterise the phenomenon. In my inquiry, these include notions of care-full relationships, our thrownness, our circumspect fore-sight and our way-of-being in the festival of life.
- 4 Describing the phenomenon through the art of *writing and re-writing*. van Manen describes it as, "writing mediates reflection and action - the very act of phenomenology" (p. 124). I use the hermeneutic circle in this inquiry to approach my writing and re-writing.
- 5 Maintaining a *strong and orientated pedagogical relation to the phenomenon*. In my inquiry, meanings discovered from within each principal's story are illuminated through hermeneutic descriptions and interpretations, using the insights from prominent phenomenologists.
- 6 Balancing the research context by considering *parts and whole* (hermeneutic circling). As a researcher, I sought to engage with each principal's story both intellectually and empathically.

### ***Data generation***

From a phenomenological perspective that characterises this inquiry, it is the *stories themselves that constitute the data*. Munby and Russell (2004) recognise the place for stories of professional practice in the realm of research, a position in which Evans (2016) shares whereby he argues "concern for story is a concern for life" they are "neither abstractions from life nor imitations of life" (p. 27). Stories as data have the effect of "integrating part and whole, the contingent and the universal, the descriptive and the normative" (p. 27).

The focus within the interview was about careful qualitative data generation through dialogue with my research participants about their lived experiences, rather than a more typical question and answer session. I aimed to be actively involved in the exchange with each principal as we fell into conversation, allowing the research participant's story to lead, take its own course and reach its own conclusion (Gadamer, 2013). The power of stories is that they engage us "intellectually and feelingly", the head and the heart (Evans, 2016, p. 27).



### *Thematic contemplations*

Themes played an important role in this inquiry, as the structures of experiences or the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand as a researcher. Analysing themes needs to be contemplative. The meanings discovered regarding the phenomenon of well-being and principals' way-of-being, were explored through reflective "meditations, conversations, day dreaming, journaling and other literary acts" (van Manen, 1990, p. 79).

Understanding the ontological nature, or underestimated value of deeper meanings that exist within principals' experiences of the phenomenon, commenced with a review of academic and non-academic literature. This helped inform descriptions of the narratives of principals' experiences to reveal common themes. Initial themes changed as meanings and understandings of the phenomenon unfolded. This provoked further contemplative writing and re-writing, with the central aim of engaging in carefully guided reflection. By doing so, it was possible to achieve insights and understandings that are essential to principals' well-being and lived experience - their reality. van Manen (1984) argues that things do not exist in reality until they are assigned meaning with words and so my quest for meanings is a process of reflective writing to find the descriptive words.

Within this inquiry, common themes were located within the *black font* of research participants' transcripts. As researcher, I was also interested in understanding the hidden intent within the *white font*; that is, what was not being articulated yet present within the narrative description. Lived experiences uncovered in principals' stories were assigned thematic meanings and understandings of the phenomenon of well-being through a very attentive attunement to thinking and listening to how the text speaks to the "nuances of the phenomenon" (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1389). The transcripts are respectfully contemplated to allow simple phrases and comments that may seem essential to the lived experiences of the phenomena to "come forth through a circling discipline" (p. 1393) in a process called

hermeneutic circling. Circling discipline includes reading, writing, talking, mulling, re-reading, re-writing and keeping new insights in play. From here, deeper understandings started emerging.

A research journal was used throughout this inquiry as an integral part of the circling activity to reflect on literature, capture thoughts, feelings and meditations of the stories of principals. I also used other literary tools such as poetry, images and quotes to help gather further meanings about my phenomenon of interest.

### **Significance of this inquiry**

It is my intention that this inquiry will make a substantive and original contribution to the field of scholarship in educational leadership by exploring the well-being experiences of principals in an ontological way. Narrative descriptions and interpretations of the meaning structures of the phenomenon of well-being as they were experienced by school principals, is an inquiry that *urgently* needed investigating, in contrast to the throng of quantitative studies, which actually tell us little about how it is for principals: *the essence of being 'in' principalship*. Contrary to current quantitative and qualitative research on principal well-being, my inquiry is not about the definition, theoretical constructs or the concept of well-being. This hermeneutic phenomenological approach is unique and significant in that it stands aside from the local discourse, which seeks to rationalise, classify, and label well-being. I have been unable to find another attempt at doing this. Principals' well-being experiences are important to understand due to the vital role in which they play in schools. Principals have a most significant and essential part in student success, both personally and academically (Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2017). As such, principal well-being impacts directly on the quality of their work and relationships with students, parents, staff, the Department of Education (DoE) and wider community.

My inquiry argues that alongside a disciplined understanding of the methodology of phenomenology, both the researcher and reader need to share a commitment to thinking which is willing to question, and be open to trusting the resonance of understandings that comes without expecting answers that are declared truth for all time (Smythe, 2011).

With a level of transformed consciousness, I am optimistic that school principals themselves may be in a position to make sense of their individual personal care requirements through retrospective reflection and within a context of understanding that there is a complicated set of interrelationships, which situate well-being. Furthermore, information contained in this inquiry may stimulate alternative thinking and debate towards future decisions and policy formation, and prompt reflection and support for principals' well-being beyond strategic frameworks. It is my hope that this inquiry compels the DoE to consider alternative worldviews and modify their use of symbols and metaphors, to close the gap between the rhetoric entrenched in neoliberal economic practice and the reality of school principals' work world. Reflecting on the viewpoint that people in organisations are not objects and that relationships and collective well-ness are crucial to an organisation's health and success, my inquiry aims to create a generative space to provoke thoughtful reframing of principals' roles, based on a phenomenological and a relationally grounded view of well-being.

### **Pre-understanding of being '*in*' principalship**

As an early phenomenological researcher, I rejected the need to suspend preconceived ideas about the phenomenon of well-being, but I seek to look beyond them in this inquiry. Crucially, my own pre-understandings *guide* this inquiry and signal my immersion and uncertainty within the context of my own lived experiences. Drawing on Ezzy's (2013) notion of not separating my life experiences from that of the research, I sought a balance in my inquiry between looking for the other, while confirming existing understandings at the

same time. “Qualitative observation, and data analysis, is best done when the observer becomes part of the dance” (Ezzy, 2013, p. xii).

Picking up on Ezzy’s metaphor of the dance, Heidegger (1962) argues that pre-understandings or *presuppositions* are a good starting place for hermeneutic inquiry. To presuppose is to...

Understand something as the ground for the Being of some other entity. Such understanding of an entity in its interconnections of Being, is possible only on the ground of disclosedness - that is, on the ground of Dasein’s Being something which uncovers (Heidegger, 1962, p. 270).

Gadamer (2013) extends this thinking by discussing our subjective *prejudices* or judgements as a being necessary for hermeneutic inquiry, as “pre-reflective involvements with the world stands behind judgements and in fact make them possible” (Lawn, 2006, p. 38).

Our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put to risk. Only by being given full play is it able to experience the other’s claim to truth and make possible for him [sic] to have full play himself (Gadamer, 2013, p. 310).

Explicitly divulging my pre-understandings (presuppositions or prejudices) of being ‘*in*’ principalship from the outset of this inquiry, has helped me to, as van Manen (1990) frames it, “hold them deliberately at bay” (p. 47), whilst at the same time not forgetting them altogether. Pre-understandings give the hermeneutic problem its “real thrust” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 283), therefore they are consciously present and acknowledged throughout this inquiry. I have listed them below and explain each briefly. In chapter ten, I return to the following pre-understandings as part of a transformative hermeneutic circling process - reflecting on them in light of new findings and insights.

### ***Investigating a phenomenon of interest in which I have lived experiences***

In the beginning paragraphs of this chapter, I shared a brief, personal story of my own well-being experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship. Like the research participants

contributing their stories to this inquiry, this is one of many lived experiences contextualising the phenomenon of well-being. I have been in principalship for thirty-two years and in that time, I have experienced the presence and absence of well-being as a phenomenon that is constantly with me, and one in which I have a personal interest. I initially thought of well-being as something individual: a thing that could be defined and managed by a principal, with the right care. However, when I became President of a principals' association in Queensland (2004-2014), this sparked a personal interest in exploring the phenomenon of well-being more deeply, beyond the current discourse of labels and diagnosis.

### ***Health and well-being are one and the same***

Many articles and policies frame well-being as *health and well-being* (Britton, Kindermann, Domegan, & Carlin, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2020; Papa, Mital, Pisano, & Del Giudice, 2020; Riley, See, Marsh, & Dicke, 2021; Tomé, Almeida, Ramiro, & Gaspar, 2021). It is common to view health and well-being as interchangeable and initially, at the commencement of this inquiry, I was thinking and writing about well-being by referring to it as health and well-being. I have come to the realisation that they are two very separate phenomena. Well-being is *not* something that can be contained or controlled through medical interventions, exercise, diet, lifestyle choices, and so forth.

### ***Some principals manage their well-being better than others***

When I attend principals' conferences and business meetings, I am intrigued by the *professionalism* in which many of my colleagues conduct themselves: how they speak, dress, reserve judgement and so forth. My initial perception or pre-understanding of what it means to be 'in' principalship was guided, in part, by the accepted tropes and discourse modelled by these colleagues. My wonderings about their well-being within this practiced

awareness that they were exhibiting, invariably concluded that it was positive. If you look and act the part, then this suggests you must be okay. How wrong was I? Stories within the discussion chapters of this thesis reveal something other: a deeper insight into what is really going on for some of these professionals. Beneath the corporate suits and educational speak, there is humanity and vulnerability.

### ***Well-being is connected to principal's workload***

The majority of studies into principal well-being attribute the causal effect of workload as being the key contributor to poor health and well-being (Collie, Granziera, & Martin, 2020a; Lambert et al., 2020; Swapp, 2020). It is therefore easy to get caught up in the rhetoric and start believing this as truth. So much so, that in many of my ontic descriptions of principals' well-being experiences in the discussion chapters, I resorted to deliberating over workload prior to ontologically interpreting my understandings of what was transpiring in the stories. I have since re-visited those chapters to review, re-think and re-write many of my descriptions.

## **Structure of the thesis**

My inquiry is presented in ten chapters which I describe briefly.

### ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

This initial chapter is a precursor into my inquiry. It outlines my background of being 'in' principalship and what I bring to this inquiry including my own lived experiences, pre-understandings and purpose for pursuing the phenomenon of well-being. I share the impetus for this inquiry, briefly discuss my aims and objectives and highlight the research design, including a word on my chosen methodology - hermeneutic phenomenology.

## ***Chapters 2 and 3: Reviewing the literature - Parts A and B***

The following two chapters concentrate on literature relating to:

- A. The current research on well-being (a review of the literature on well-being).
- B. The current policy environment in Queensland in relation to well-being (a review of the context).

Both literature review chapters situate my inquiry within the field of scholarship by exploring a gap in which I contribute something significant. Although two dedicated chapters have been allocated to explore the phenomenon of well-being and the context of being ‘*in*’ principalship, my literature review is *integrated* throughout this thesis to bring insights from other researchers into the fold to illuminate my findings.

## ***Chapter 4: Philosophical foundations***

This chapter provides a synopsis of the philosophical understandings and contributions of German phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger’s philosophical notions have provided me with deep insights for contemplation within this inquiry, that being, the ontological nature of well-being experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship.

## ***Chapter 5: Methodology***

Chapter five shows how the philosophical notions of Heidegger have shaped this inquiry to enable a research process based on hermeneutic circling (reading, thinking, writing, re-reading, re-thinking, and re-writing). My aim in this chapter is to show how I approached the inquiry by being attuned to the appearances of well-being as experienced by school principals, a turning towards my phenomenon of interest (Gadamer, 1994) as part of a contemplative research process where meanings unfold (Ironsides, 2005). My research approach is explicitly outlined and held open for questioning by others.

Chapters six to nine are my interpretative discussion chapters. They share well-being experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship by eleven research participants, along with my hermeneutic descriptions and interpretations of their stories. These interpretative discussion chapters consider the ontological nature of well-being and point to the essence of being ‘*in*’ principalship.

### ***Chapter 6: Our everyday way-of-being as thrownness***

The first of my interpretative discussion chapters, contemplates how a principal’s thrownness: their everyday way-of-being, impacts on their well-being. Our thrownness into the world is not a physical act ontologically, but rather a way-of-being whereby we are expected to live life under certain cultural and historical traditions with all its associated frustrations, anguishes, and demands that one does not choose, such as social conventions or ties of relationships and duty (Mulhall, 2005; Ness, Hellzen, & Enmarker, 2014).

### ***Chapter 7: Care-full relationships are always mattering***

In this chapter I contemplate that being ‘*in*’ principalship is to be in care-full relationships - it cannot be otherwise as the nature of principals’ work life is always in working relationally. I hyphenated the word careful to read *care-full*. This emphasises the focus on the word ‘care’ and its liaison to the well-being of principals, a relationship that is filled with care. Moreover, in playing with the wording, ‘careful’ relationships imply that principals need to be astute to the kinds of connections they make and with whom they form relationships. Being ‘*in*’ principalship is to be in the world with others and these others are not always filled with care.



### ***Chapter 8: Being in circumspect fore-sight***

In the lifeworld of being ‘*in*’ principalship, circumspection, an awareness in which one looks around before deciding what to do next, plays an important part in the everyday work of school leaders. Heidegger (1962) describes it as a form of awareness in which “one looks around before deciding what one ought to do next” (p. 98). This chapter considers that enacting one’s tacit circumspect fore-sight, along with one’s phronesis<sup>4</sup>, which includes one’s relational sensibilities, there are possibilities and insights into the phenomenon of well-being for those being ‘*in*’ principalship.

### ***Chapter 9: Drawn along by a festival of relationships***

The enduring quality of festivals, those impromptu situations in which principals find themselves; be they a pleasant interpersonal exchange or something more confronting, is explored in this chapter. Principals are immersed in a range of festivals throughout their workday and this impacts on their well-being, especially if the festival experience is unpleasant. I explore the praxis of school principals in this chapter to gain insights into their way-of-being within the festivals of school life. Our existential understandings of how it is for school leaders in these situations provide us with possibilities for being ‘*in*’ principalship beyond the rhetoric of self-help guides and the latest health and well-being fads.

### ***Chapter 10: Conclusion - so what?***

In this final chapter, I discuss the underpinning knowledge and understandings that have emerged from this inquiry and the potential propositions and implications for being ‘*in*’ principalship. I discuss my renewed understanding of well-being, revisit my research

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<sup>4</sup> **Phronesis:** a type of wisdom or intelligence relevant to practical action, implying both good judgement and excellence of character and habits.

question and identify my original contribution to knowledge through recommendations for practice and for further inquiry.

### **Concluding thoughts**

It is my sincere hope and intention that this inquiry contributes something substantial to the field of principal well-being. I have approached this ontological inquiry using a unique methodology, which sets it aside from and complements contemporary research. Specifically, it is “*only as phenomenology, is ontology possible*” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 60, emphasis included in original text). Reflecting on Heidegger’s argument, it can be inferred that the well-being experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship are already a phenomenon, regardless of whether contemporary researchers in the field forget or remember to attend to it. A strong reading of these studies is reviewed and reflected on in the following two chapters.

## **2 Chapter 2: Reviewing the literature - Part A**

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### **Introduction**

Chapter one signalled an impetus for this inquiry, an urgency to understand the complexity of principals' well-being experiences. These understandings are not about quantifying or pathologising well-being through measurements and interventions, but more so about viewing well-being as a phenomenon that exists across humanity, one that matters in our everyday lived experiences. We experience the presence or absence of well-being as integral to our human condition (Heidegger, 1962; Sarvimäki, 2006). Well-being is therefore understood in this inquiry as a phenomenon we all experience as a collective and independent phenomenon and *not just* something individual.

I introduced this inquiry by professing my prior understandings of the phenomenon of well-being in school principals. In human science research, van Manen (1990) argues that there is value in coming to know one's own personal experiences of a given phenomenon, as this allows one to identify the essential qualities of the experience. He refers to this as an "ego-logical starting point for phenomenological research" (p. 54). Husserl (1927 as cited by Smith, et al., 2009) reasoned that if this could be achieved, then these "essential qualities of an experience would transcend the particular circumstances of their appearance and might then illuminate a given experience for others" (p. 12).

To understand the experiences of others more clearly and to position my inquiry, I look at relevant research in the field and reflect on pre-existing scholarship written on the subject of school principals' well-being experiences. I reflect on the empirical data derived through these, mostly quantitative studies, to ascertain their helpfulness in understanding my phenomenon of interest.

My literature review is structured as two chapters (chapters two and three), each addressing specific fields of knowledge production, and then integrated throughout the entire thesis. Part A focuses on literature pertaining to the nature of well-being (a review of the phenomenon of well-being), whereas chapter three (Part B) focuses on the Australian neoliberal policy context of being ‘in’ principalship (a review of the context in which principals work).

### ***Reviewing the literature - Part A***

In this chapter (Part A), I explore well-being descriptions / definitions from organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Bureau of Statistics and consider their relevance to this phenomenological inquiry. From here, I reflect on national research in the field of principal well-being including, *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey* (Riley, 2020; Riley et al., 2021) and *The Flourish Project* (Fraser, 2017) and those from international studies (Cherkowski, Kutsyuruba, & Walker, 2020; Collie, Granziera, & Martin, 2020b; Phillips & Sen, 2011; Wells & Klocko, 2018; Wylie, 2008)

On the surface, these studies appear to be helpful in identifying and measuring the ‘causal’ effects of principals’ well-being and then positing interventions. However, my reflections on the phenomenon point towards a gap in understanding what principals actually experience. The existing research does not include what principal’s actually experience (their stories) - its complexity, but rather interprets the phenomenon of well-being from a psychological viewpoint and discusses the accepted links between the happy / productive worker thesis<sup>5</sup>. I close the chapter by drawing conclusions, pointing to gaps in the literature

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<sup>5</sup> The **happy / productive worker thesis** is an hypothesis that equates happy employees to exhibiting higher levels of job-related performance behaviours (Wright, 2006).

and possibilities, and by showing the conceptual link - a drawing together of the two literature review chapters.

### ***Reviewing the literature - Part B***

Chapter three (Part B) focuses on literature pertaining to the Australian neoliberal policy context for being ‘*in*’ principalship, which is the context for understanding the experiences. I explore neoliberalism and its impact on education, schools and principals. From there, I consider the Queensland Department of Education (DoE) policies and approaches from a professional principals’ association to mitigate well-being issues. I then offer two stories gifted to me by Keith and Casey, who share their well-being experiences in situ. This contextualises my argument in regard to exploring the gap in the literature, a pointing towards current literature not focusing on lived experiences, resulting in a lack of understanding of the conditions in which principals actually work. I conclude chapter three by making connections to my research question and choice of methodology. My inquiry views principals’ experiences through a phenomenological lens. It includes the insights from prominent phenomenologists to assist with the exploration of meanings.

What is not investigated in my literature review, are the throng of possible solutions and ‘self-help guides’ commercially published to address well-being as something individual to be remedied. This would be counter-intuitive to phenomenological research. For the task of phenomenological understandings, there are no definitive answers.

Furthermore, not included in this literature review, are the well-being initiatives from other organisations. Whilst important discoveries may come from looking outside of the education sector, that is a matter for other potential inquiries.

The two chapters serve as a prelude to research, a provocation towards my inquiry explored in later chapters. In addition, my literature review is not limited to two, self-

standing chapters, but rather integrated throughout the entire study. To this end, the literature contained in the following two chapters and throughout the body of this inquiry, has been read for interpretation.

I commence chapter two by reflecting on the phenomenon of wellbeing as it is presented by contemporary opinion such as that of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

## **Contemporary understandings of well-being**

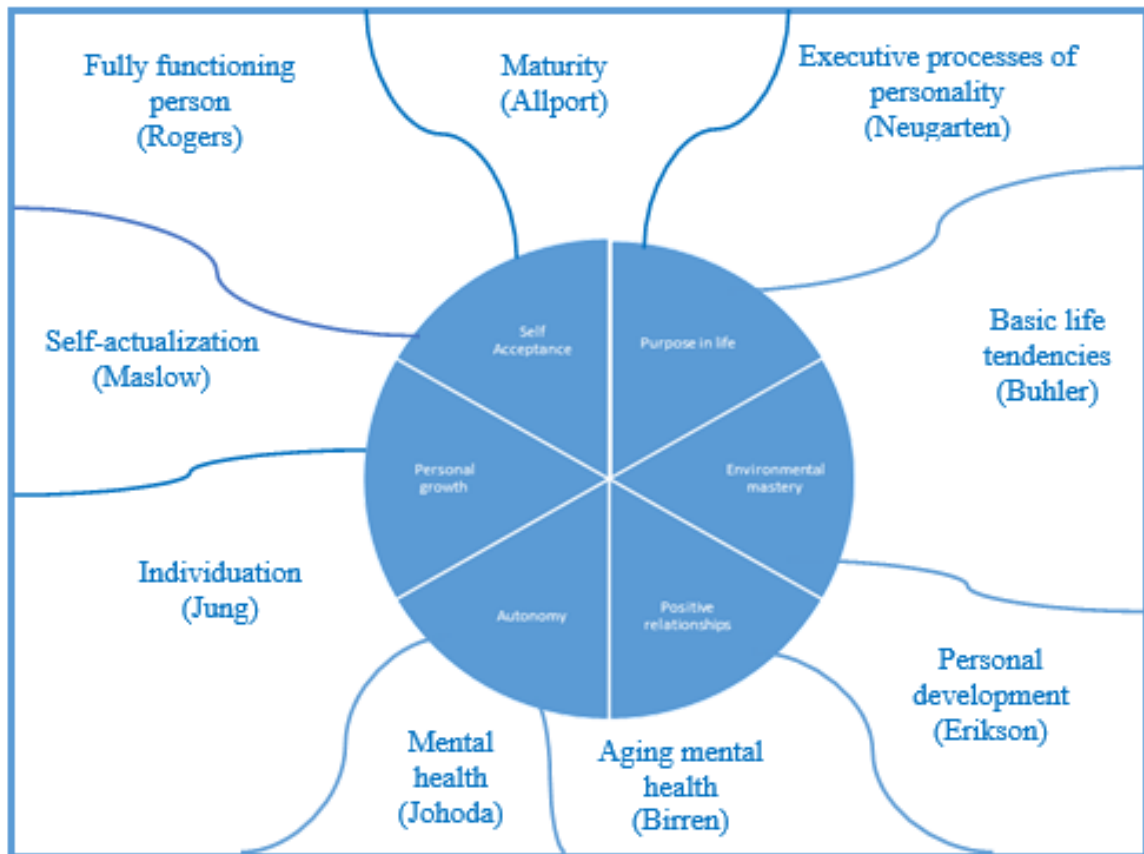
### ***The World Health Organisation (WHO)***

Many organisations have tried to define well-being as something rational and individual. For instance, the WHO (2016) defines well-being as “a state in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (as cited by DoE, 2017, p. 2). This definition, which appears to subscribe to the happy / productive thesis (Wright, 2006), is represented in a school of psychological thought, whereby the study of well-being fits within a specific field of knowledge known as hedonic psychology. It is the study of what makes experiences and life pleasant or unpleasant. It is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow, and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is also concerned with a whole range of circumstances, from the biological to the societal, suffering and enjoyment (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999).

In addition to this perspective, another study by Ryff (1995) defines features of well-being as falling into three literatures which provide theoretical guidance in understanding the meanings of psychological well-being:

1. *Developmental psychology*, particularly life-span developmental psychology which offers numerous representations of wellness, considered as progressions of continued growth across one's life. These viewpoints include Erikson's model of the stages of psychosocial development (as cited by Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981), Buhler's formulation of basic life tendencies that work toward the fulfilment of life (as cited by Ryff, 1995) and Neugarten's descriptions of personality change in adulthood and old age (Neugarten & Neugarten, 1996);
2. *Clinical psychology* also offers multiple formulations of well-being, such as Maslow's conception of self-actualization (as cited by Heylighen, 1992), Rogers' (1963) view of the fully functioning person, Jung's formulation of individuation (as cited by Jacoby, 2016), and Allport's (1955) conception of maturity;
3. The *literature on mental health*, although guided largely by absence-of-illness definitions of well-being, includes significant exceptions, such as Jahoda's formulation of positive criteria of mental health (as cited by Taylor & Brown, 1994) and Birren's conception of positive functioning in later life (Birren & Deutchman, 1991).

**Figure 1. Core dimensions of well-being and its theoretical origins**



(Ryff, 1995, p. 100).

Whilst the WHO definition, the position on hedonic psychology by Kahneman et al., and Ryff's core dimensions of well-being and their theoretical origins have interesting and significant psychological insights, there are also deficiencies in their understandings of the highly complex nature of the phenomenon of well-being. This inquiry is underpinned by an argument that well-being cannot be defined or packaged neatly into theoretical constructs. It can be described and understood, however, *in the context* of people's lived experiences.

### ***Australian Bureau of Statistics***

In 2007, the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing* and released its findings in 2008. The research was quantitative in nature and presented normative data on a series of scales that measured the prevalence of mental



disorders such as anxiety [phobias], affective [depression] and substance [drug use] Australian Government (2008). Such data by itself, is unhelpful in understanding well-being as it prioritises statistical data over understandings of the nature of well-being from the perspective of actual people embedded within contexts and webs of interrelationships that frame the conditions for what is experienced. The nature of a statistical focus decontextualises the experiences by drawing conclusions that are supposed to ‘transfer’ across contexts. They blur the line between mental health and well-being, seducing the reader into thinking they are one in the same. Throughout this thesis, I argue that we experience the presence or absence of well-being as integral to our human condition as a result of webs of human interrelationships which frame conditions and experiences. Well-being is not independent of context or the webs of interrelationships within which any person is enmeshed. Decontextualising well-being does not help us understand the phenomenon.

### ***Australian Unity Well-being Index***

The extant scientific research into well-being, which tries to define well-being quantifiably, is featured in the *Australian Unity Well-being Index*. In this Index, well-being is measured in terms of happiness and life satisfaction, as the reigning empirical indicators. It was designed as a barometer of Australians’ satisfaction with their lives as well as life in Australia, and based on the theoretical model of subjective well-being homeostasis (Cummins, Eckersley, Pallant, Van Vugt, & Misajon, 2003). Data presented within the Index takes the form of a series of graphs and tables as measurements of well-being against a set of criteria. The graphic organiser on the following page was retrieved from the index and is consistent with the type of information presented in the findings.

**Table 1: Personal well-being means and standard deviations (%SM)**

<i>Mean (SD)</i>									
<i>Personal wellbeing</i>									
Life as a whole	75.48	(19.67)	<i>Domain inter-correlations</i>						
<i>Personal life domains</i>									
1. Standard of living	75.78	(19.50)	-						
2. Health	73.97	(21.38)	0.39***	-					
3. Achieve in life	73.48	(18.51)	0.47***	0.36***	-				
4. Personal relationships	78.44	(21.22)	0.34***	0.25***	0.40***	-			
5. How safe you feel	75.40	(20.25)	0.32***	0.29***	0.23***	0.21***	-		
6. Community connectedness	68.98	(20.84)	0.37***	0.26***	0.38***	0.27***	0.32***	-	
7. Future security	69.29	(21.24)	0.51***	0.36***	0.46***	0.30***	0.41***	0.45***	
Personal wellbeing index	73.48	(13.57)							
<i>National wellbeing</i>									
<i>Life in Australia</i>									
<i>National life domains</i>									
1. Economic situation	53.80	(20.36)	-	2					
2. State of the environment	58.17	(19.56)	0.46***	-					
3. Social conditions	59.44	(20.03)	0.53***	0.58***					
National wellbeing index	57.14	(16.52)							
<i>National sub-domains</i>									
<i>Sub-domain inter-correlations</i>									
1. Wealth/income distribution	48.07	(23.00)	-	2					
2. Health services	58.10	(22.23)	0.49***	-					
3. Family support	59.32	(20.38)	0.50***	0.50***					
<i>Social capital</i>									
4. Trust in people	56.84	(20.50)							
<i>Trends</i>									
1. Own life changing for the better	64.00	(19.34)							
2. Australia for the better	53.02	(19.95)							

(as cited by Cummins et al., 2003, p. 171)

Whilst well intentioned and interesting for statisticians competent in locating information within numbers, the conceptual rationales for these criteria are generally lacking and once again decontextualises what they say they are describing. Studies of life satisfaction such as these that are abound in research on personal well-being, present a lack of philosophical understandings, which reflects the historical emphasis on applied initiatives, with intervention and program development being of far greater importance than the task of gaining a deeper understanding of the meanings of well-being (Ryff, 1995).

## **Current research (national and international).**

Research into principal well-being has started to gain traction in Australia in the last decade with the launch of the *Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Well-being Survey 2011-2020* (Riley et al., 2021). The following section describes this and another prominent study occurring in Australia titled *The Flourish Project* (Fraser, 2017) to position my inquiry in the field. I then look offshore at international studies with the view to analysing research approaches into principal well-being.

### ***The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey***

This annual survey focusing on the health and well-being of school leaders has been in place since 2011. The longitudinal nature of the survey concentrates on three risk indicators: self-harm, quality of life and occupational health (Riley, 2020). Participants in the survey complete a comprehensive, electronic questionnaire, and then once submitted, receive by email containing a report that benchmarks them against their peers and the general population. Regular participants also receive a comparison report mapping their benchmarks from year to year.

According to the survey, job demands on average; quantitative demands; work pace; emotional demands; having to hide emotions; average working hours during term; and work-family conflict have remained very high or increased slightly during the last five years (Riley, 2020). Could it be possible that the data is pointing us towards the ontological understandings of angst as a “primordial *state-of-mind* which is concerned with the lack of a sure foundation for your there-being” (Foulds, 2012, pp. 125-126, emphasis included in original text)?

The survey indicates that sources of stress that remained stable during the period were sheer quantity of work, not enough time for teaching and learning, and expectations of the

employer. Causes of stress that increased include resourcing needs, student and parent related issues and government initiatives. The largest increases in stress were reported for mental health issues of both staff and students. Stress diminished for union/industrial disputes, critical incidents, financial management issues, and lack of autonomy (Riley, 2020).

The survey highlighted a negative trend towards offensive behaviour rates and a decrease in social support, which is of concern to principals because of the solitary nature of their roles, particularly those serving in rural and remote locations. This tends to suggest that the stressors within the day-to-day life of a principal are numerous and whilst the health and well-being outcomes within the survey, the self-rated health results, appear to predict a very robust measure of future health, the decline over time is of great concern.

The survey not only provides an executive summary of the findings, it also makes fifteen recommendations framed as strategies and foundations to address concerns raised (Riley, 2020). These are grouped under the following subheadings:

- What the Governments can do.
- What employers can do.
- What the professional associations and unions can do.
- What the community can do.
- What school can do.
- What individual educators can do.
- What the research community can do (pp. 7-9).

Prior to commenting on the abovementioned recommendations, I would like to acknowledge that within the foundations on which these recommendations are based, the following two significant statements position the researcher's intent:

1. No single stakeholder group is responsible for the state of education in Australia, nor do they hold the power to effect much change to the system on their own.
2. Many issues impacting negatively on the education system are entrenched in the wider Australian culture (Riley, 2020, p. 7).

These foundation statements and indeed the fifteen recommendations, suggest that the researcher is arguing that well-being is not just an issue for the individual, but a community matter.

These ontic descriptions focusing on the causal factors leading to stress could potentially be pointing us to the ontological understandings of our thrownness in the world in the midst of others on whom we depend (King, 2001) or as Heidegger (1962) argues, “falling prey or captive to the world” [*verfallen*] (p. 42). Ontologically, this shows a pointing towards our way-of-being in the world, our being in the world with others and the existential care structure associated with being human. In this sense there is some resonance with this part of the survey report to my inquiry. In my inquiry, well-being is described and understood as a matter for community.

What does not resonate with my inquiry, are the normative recommendations about how individuals should live. For instance, under the sub-section, *what individual educators can do*, there are four recommendations [recommendations 9-12] which appear to be prescriptive - a ‘to do’ list towards better well-being. They read:

9. Increase personal capital (social, human and decisional). At the individual level this means increasing possibilities for development and exerting influence over the work based on sound values and moral judgements.
10. Respectfully speak back when faced with ‘moral harassment’, which is an occupational threat.
11. Ensure your passions are harmonious. This means to be in control of them. For example, love your work but do not let it dominate your life (become obsessive about it). A way to determine if passion is harmonious rather than obsessive is to monitor energy levels. Harmonious passion energises, so you feel better after engaging in your passion than when you began. Harmonious passion ... leads to a pervasive level of self-growth, while obsessive passion has corrosive effects.
12. Take responsibility for your personal work-life balance. Only you can know what is reasonable for your long-term health and well-being. It is therefore incumbent on all of us to find and maintain a healthy balance. This cannot be done for you from outside as it is too important to be left in other’s control (Riley, 2020, pp. 8-9).

These were the *same four recommendations* noted in the 2015 survey results (Riley, 2015, p. 25) and despite this being a longitudinal study, principals' well-being experiences continue to be an unfolding matter of some urgency.

### ***The Flourish Project***

Sitting alongside and reflecting renderings of support for the abovementioned survey, is a research project and program titled, *The Flourish Project - Understanding the world of School Principals and helping them Flourish professionally, physically and mentally* (Fraser, 2017). Involving a sample of thirty research participants, it aims to improve the performance and well-being of school principals and focuses on three distinct and complementary sections or parts:

1. What does the job look like today? Diary study, interviews and a survey.
2. What makes a high performing principal?
3. A designed program to help principals to have flourishing well-being - based on the findings of the research.

At the conclusion of the project, findings and suggestions are shared with the research participants to enable them to flourish. These include:

#### Findings:

- Principals are not recovering at work or outside of work.
- The job is so broad, with a huge number of tasks and plenty of interruptions.
- As the day goes on energy and mood drops.

#### Suggestions:

- Build in recovery into your work day by making relaxation regular.
- Change the way you work by structuring your day differently.
- Do a time audit.
- Outsource some work.
- Narrow your strategic focus.
- Manage the workflow of your day.
- Take time to think.
- Sprinkle some bright spots.
- Celebrate progress.
- Do not do it on your own - collaborate with your peers (Fraser, 2017).

The enthusiasm and expediency to which this research project, program and testimonials from participants indicate a positive turnaround in their professional practice is hopeful, which, in this study, translates to ‘flourishing’ well-being. My wonderings return me to van Manen’s (1990) work on researching lived experience and concern for what it means to be a school principal, given the “sociocultural and historic traditions which have given meaning to our ways of being in the world” (p. 12). How do you offer suggestions for ways to ‘flourish’ to a principal who has been diagnosed with a potentially life-threatening disease, or one who has been physically disabled in a workplace accident, or assaulted by a student or parent, or is suffering the loss of a close family member (perhaps a child)? My point here is that, in the absence of deep understandings of the essence of well-being pertaining to the principal’s lifeworld, the ‘one size fits all’ model or ‘follow these steps and all will be fixed’ approach to prescribing suggestions for improving well-being can, by the very description of ‘deep understandings’ only scrape the veneer off the problem.

I also reflect on the absolute certainty in which the happy / productive worker thesis and its connections to well-being of principals is playing out in this study. The suggestion that high work performance and well-being are interdependent is speculative at best and ambiguous in understanding the nature of well-being. Notwithstanding that longitudinal research has attempted to prove the connection between performance and well-being, however, support for the happy productive worker thesis remains equivocal (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001).

### ***International studies***

Principal well-being is on the decline both in Australia and overseas (Dicke et al., 2018; Riley, 2018; Wang, Pollock, & Hauseman, 2018; Watson, 2007). Attempts to understand well-being of school principals can be seen through international studies such as the research conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) on *Work-related stress on Head Teachers*

(Phillips & Sen, 2011). The study found that vocational stress was higher in education than across all other industries, with job-related mental ill-health almost double the rate of other industries (Phillips & Sen, 2011).

What is not so evident to the general public is the distressing state of mind in which a large number carry on their work...The absurd anxiety to gain high percentages and outvie the other schools in their neighbourhood is the fruitful parent of many evils under which teachers groan (Phillips & Sen, 2011, p. 177).

The researchers argue that stress in principals is not a modern-day phenomenon. It is something that is made worse by their work in schools, which is an issue that can no longer be ignored. The research findings mainly focused on the causal nature of prevalent work-related stress in principals, namely work over-load, work-life imbalance, gender and school type.

Informed by the UK research, a similar study conducted in Japan titled, *Depression and occupational stress in Japanese School Principals and Vice-Principals* (Nitta, Deguchi, Iwasaki, Kanchika, & Inoue, 2019), concluded with recommendations around clarifying job roles and reducing quantitative workload for principals, thus mitigating depression.

In a similar approach, the New Zealand (NZ) Council for Education Research (2007) conducted a study titled, *Principal well-being and stress in 2007 - are we seeing any changes yet* (Wylie, 2008). It showed high stress levels in NZ principals due to identified Ministry of Education initiatives, paperwork and other systemic demands. Furthermore, a lack of time for principals to focus on teaching and learning, accountability, especially in rural and small schools with low or fluctuating enrolments, and low socioeconomic decile, were identified stressors. The study framed the following two questions, to which it also provided the answers, stating:

1. Should we be worried about principal stress levels and well-being?  
The answer was yes.
2. Are the patterns something we can do something about?  
Again, the answer was yes.



Included in the final report was a model of well-being, which disclosed the importance of workload and role balance, support from outside agencies, internal stressors to school, individual fitness level of principals, and their participation in networks (Wylie, 2008).

In addition, Wells and Klocko (2018) explored the causal nature of well-being and advocated for a remedial approach as a *means* of ‘fixing’ principals, in their USA study titled, *Principal well-being and resilience: Mindfulness as a means to that end*. In this study, the researchers concentrated on the nature of stress in school principals and argued that internal coping methods such as mindfulness and self-care, would build resilience and promote well-being.

And finally, a UK study titled *Good health - Is it worth it*, by the researchers Daley and Parfitt (1996) argue that mood states, physical well-being, job satisfaction and absenteeism are contributing factors impacting on one’s overall well-being. They concluded that from a public health perspective, physical activity is seen as important for disease prevention and psychological well-being. Therefore, the study focused on an exercise program for research participants. Their findings reported improved psychological mood states and physical well-being, with employees more satisfied with their jobs and decreases in absenteeism (Daley & Parfitt, 1996).

Clearly, the international studies cited thus far in this chapter, have made a significant contribution to the field of principal well-being. A theme of *cause and effect* is emerging within these studies. These rely on the quantifiable analysis of causal reasons and recommendations to address health and well-being in school principals. My concern with these types of studies is that they focus on the ontic definitions, labels, categories, theoretical constructs and the concept of well-being, using the language of physical, scientific studies. I argue that rather than relying on abstract generalisations and theories, the alternative is to try to tap into the unique nature of principals’ lived experiences in a

responsive and reflective way: the very activity of doing phenomenology (van Manen, 1990).

As evidenced from these studies cited, contemporary research into principal well-being, has been subjugated by quantitative studies (Collie et al., 2020a; Devos, Bouckenooghe, Engels, Hotton, & Aeltermann, 2007; Dicke et al., 2018). However, amongst the league tables, definitions and rationalisation of data sets outlining causal effects, I have located four inquiries that have harmonised with, and in some instances, informed my inquiry. All are qualitative research projects that use phenomenology as their methodology. Each of the studies innovatively seeks to understand the phenomenon of well-being within their own contexts, rather than trying to provide explanations and rational theories. Their contributions have illuminated essential meanings and taken-for-granted understandings of my phenomenon of interest.

### **Resonance with other research**

My inquiry reflects sections of Cherkowski's, Kutsyuruba's and Walker's (2020) study titled, *Positive leadership: animating purpose, presence, passion and play for flourishing in schools*. In this study, the authors describe some lived experiences of school leaders in kindergarten to year twelve schools in Canada, recounting how they have experienced flourishing in their work. Their findings, situated in context, indicate the possibility that a principal's sense of well-being relates to the notion of balance in their work, recreation and life, which helped them address potential stress and ill-being. The story titled, *A work / leisure now* as experienced by Kath, appears in chapter seven and captures some of these authors' essential meanings.

My relationship with Martin Heidegger and his key philosophical notions as outlined in chapter four, have assisted me in searching for essential meanings from within my research

participants' stories. This relationship led me towards a Finnish study titled, *Well-being as being well - a Heideggerian look at well-being* (Sarvimäki, 2006). This ontological study resonated with my inquiry in that we both viewed the phenomenon of well-being within the everyday unfolding of life as something taken-for-granted and interchanging amid a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity and an authentic and inauthentic way-of-being in the world.

Significantly, this study searched for ontological understandings that orientated the reader towards a hopeful future, realising one's own potentialities. Heideggerian philosophical notions such as being-at-home-in-the-world are used to hermeneutically describe salient arguments within the article. Likewise, I discuss the sense of home-ness when well-being is strong throughout this thesis, which is informed by Heidegger's being-at-home notion.

The next body of research was written for a Doctor of Philosophy titled, *The experience of Well-Being: Uncovering the Mystery*, (Healey-Ogden, 2008). This hermeneutic phenomenological study focused on exploring the mystery of well-being in five nurses in Canada. Healey-Ogden focused on the relational aspect of well-being to bring her essential themes to light. Whilst the research did not focus on being 'in' principalship, I was able to apply many of the key messages uncovered in this research, namely, "phenomenology brings us as close as possible to understanding the experience and, at the same time, allows the mystery to remain" (p. 215).

More specifically, the author concluded by suggesting that the experience of well-being lies in the journey through life events and that to experience well-being is to be open to what is happening around you and to embrace the journey wherever it takes you. This resonated with the findings of my inquiry and was reflected in many of the stories explored whereby principals embrace and make the most of their situations and relationships and thus experience positive well-being.

Healey-Ogden's (2008) take-home message regarding well-being reads as follows, "play, creative expression, dwelling in nature, and embracing our spirituality are significant in fostering well-being in our lives" (p. 216). Like nursing, being 'in' principalship is a journey where well-being experiences can emerge from within relational spaces.

The final research project is contained within an article referred to earlier in this chapter titled *Achieving health or achieving wellbeing?* (Schickler, 2005). Here the author makes the distinction between health and well-being, arguing that well-being has a much wider meaning than health. Phenomenology, including research participants' stories of lived experiences, was used in this study to elicit meanings of well-being. It also focused on the nature of well-being and how it was maintained, lost and recovered. Whilst the study did not focus on principals, it lent itself to possibilities which meshed with my inquiry.

Schickler (2005) argues, "Professionals can affect the wellbeing of those with whom they work: we can cause loss of wellbeing or we can help people to achieve greater wellbeing through positive means" (p. 226).

Prevention of ill-health may be the province of those who work in the health services, but promotion of health and wellbeing is much wider. Those in the health service and those in social services, education and other professionals should be aware of what wellbeing is, and how they affect it, for both themselves and their clients (Schickler, 2005, p. 217).

Each of the four qualitative inquiries sought to gain understandings of the phenomenon of well-being within their own research contexts rather than trying to provide explanations and rational theories. Their contributions have illuminated essential meanings and taken-for-granted understandings of well-being, which are complementary to my inquiry.

According to the strategies I used to review the literature on principal well-being, I was unable to find more than four qualitative references relevant and meaningful to my inquiry. The majority of the findings in this field of inquiry suggest a perceived link between adopting a healthier lifestyle, supported through a caring and supportive workplace and

well-being. Definitive claims within any initiative or corporate policy / framework to decrease the causal nature of well-being for the sole reason of improving work performance are approaching the phenomenon without understanding its complex nature.

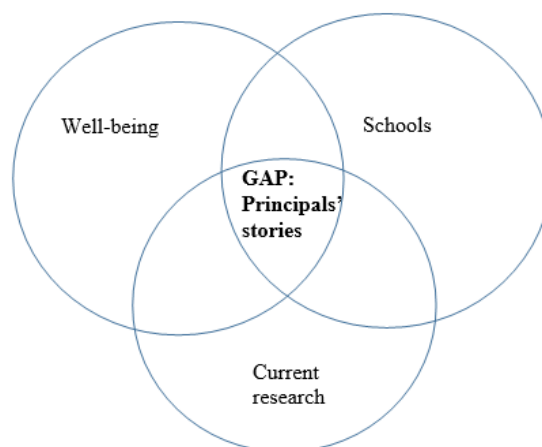
## Exploring a gap in the literature

*Principal's stories are missing from the entire debate on well-being.*

The research discussed in my two literature review chapters, share their own interpretations and taken-for-granted meanings of principals' well-being experiences. Drawing on my professional experiences of being 'in' principalship, I have taken a position regarding the over-reliance of quantitative data used to analysis and pathologise well-being through measurements and interventions. The current research does not say much or provide commentary on what principals experience; the complexity of being 'in' principalship and hence, decontextualises that experience and misses the opportunity to understand the phenomenon of well-being in any depth.

I represent the gap in the literature visually in the follow graph.

**Figure 2: Exploring a gap in the literature - represented as a diagram**



## **Concluding thoughts**

A review of relevant literature in the field of principal well-being reveals a growing body of empirical research, which seeks to rationalise, classify and label. The glaring gap: the absence of principals' lived well-being experiences (their stories) from the entire debate, is one I will attempt to fill within this inquiry and contribute back to the field.

The following chapter, *Reviewing the literature - Part B*, moves the debate forward, by reflecting on the conditions in which principals work. It explores concepts such as neoliberalism and its impact on departmental policy and documents such as the principal's job description and leadership frameworks. I also explore departmental initiatives designed to mitigate the harm on principals and *address* their well-being. I share two rich narratives of principals in context to provoke some re-thinking around how we view well-being.

Understanding the well-being experiences of what it means to be 'in' principalship on an ontological level, may inspire future researchers to seek alternative ways of describing well-being beyond definitions and interventions. An alternative strategy that orientates the researcher towards unearthing deeper understandings of principal well-being as a phenomenon that exists across humanity - one that matters in our everyday lived experiences.

### 3 Chapter 3: Reviewing the literature - Part B

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#### Introduction

##### The Perfect Principal

A principal must be a democrat, an autocrat, a diplomat, a doormat and a cool cat.

They must be able to entertain ministers and secretaries of education, assistant secretaries, deputy-directors of education, superintendents of education, mayors and councillors, teachers, parents and members of the constabulary.

They have to settle arguments and fights. They must be a qualified solicitor, psychologist, clergyman, architect, supervisor, doctor, nurse, gardener, cleaner and on some occasions have some expertise in the role of sanitary contractor, both in the literal and metaphorical sense.

They must always look immaculate when imbibing at end of term celebrations. They must allow their staff to reach maximum capacity but never reach the same happy state themselves.

They must be on the student's side, the parent's side, the teacher's side, the superintendent's side, the teacher's union side, the progressive teacher's side and the ministry of education's side but never on their backside.

To be successful they must be able to handle irate students, insane parents, hysterical overworked teachers, frustrated support staff, the ministry of education, behaviour specialists, social workers, fellow principals and ERO officers.

They can be idolised, patronised, theorised and victimised.

They must accept that they can also be hated and slated, berated and manipulated.

To sum up they will be inside, outside, offside, glorified, sanctified, mystified, pan-fried, crucified, stupefied, cross-eyed and if they are the strong silent type, they can be sanctified and even deified

(ANON, 2009 as cited by the New Zealand Principal).

The poem, *The Perfect Principal*, reflects the complexity of being 'in' principalship and positions the role in context. It also offers insights into principal well-being from an ontic-ontological viewpoint. What is it like being a principal? The purpose of this chapter is to concentrate on literature relating to the problematic and phenomenological nature of being 'in' principalship - the *context for understanding well-being*.

I commence the chapter by considering the historical and cultural forces that have come to dominate departments of education, schools and a principal's way-of-being. I show how

these external and political forces have influenced the educational landscape in which school principals find themselves. The vernacular of neoliberalism has crept into educational policy documents and frameworks (Connell, 2013; Harvey, 2005) as seen in a principal's job description, professional standards and leadership profiles. These documents show the complexity of the role and a pointing towards the struggle of being 'in' principalship.

As my inquiry is limited to Queensland principals, I then explore with concerned interest, initiatives into principal well-being occurring within the Department of Education (DoE) and principals' networks such as professional associations. Finally, and most crucially, I share two rich stories of Queensland principals in context as a provocation of a gap I have explored in the literature, which informs the foundation for this inquiry.

### **Neoliberalism and its impact on the school principal**

Neoliberalism plays out in various ways for individual people and circumstances. It is in the first instance, "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 11). Lazzarato (2009) extends this point by arguing that neoliberalism positions the individual as an "entrepreneur of oneself" maximising themselves as "human capital" in competition with others (p. 111). It has become "*hegemonic* as a mode of discourse and its persuasive effects on thinking - the 'default setting' for common-sense and the way many interpret, live in and understand the world" (Harvey, 2005, p. 12, emphasis added). This plays out in our political, economic and cultural agenda (Connell, 2010, 2013) and impacts on schools and those working in them.



The concept of schools as institutions (or firms) and principals as managers of workplaces is driven by business orientated imperatives of how people (and other resources) can best be influenced to achieve a competitive advantage (Harvey, 2016). The ongoing dialogue of people as assets or property, that is, resources and possessions belonging to an organisation, appears to be firmly entrenched in, and pervades management theory and human resources ‘best practice’ in business (Mercer, Barker, & Bird, 2010). School principals have not escaped this rationalisation of management theory and its impact on their well-being is being realised.

Neoliberalism is captured by contemporary human resource management theory that increasingly de-humanises workplaces (Connell, 2013). Overlooked in the move towards schools as competitive marketplaces, is the principal’s well-being that is fundamental to the development and sustainability of school culture, relationships and importantly, the pedagogy of education (Cherkowski et al., 2020; Keddie et al., 2020).

I argue that a critical inquiry into the meanings of being ‘*in*’ principalship is urgently needed, to include how neoliberalism is playing out in their lived experiences and within the systemic culture of the educational landscape, to help understand the nature of well-being in education.

### ***Rationalisation of Education***

Connell (2013) brings us in more direct contact with the world by rationalising that education has been powerfully affected through the rise of neoliberal political, economic and cultural agendas with the “creation of hierarchies and mechanisms of competition” (p. 2). Hence, there is a redefinition of schools and universities as firms, students and parents as ‘customers’ and the striking revival of competitive testing, as well as the expansion of public funding of private schools. Teachers are placed under performative pressures that

tend to “narrow the curriculum in schools, and make the sector’s workforce more insecure” (p. 2).

Neoliberalist jargon has crept into the principal’s discourse and its impact is realised through their engagement in administrative evil, without even knowing that they are doing so.

### *Administrative evil*

Adams and Balfour (2007) refer to neoliberalism as “*administrative evil*” and the “*ethics of incompetence*” (p. 1, emphasis added). They argue that moral shortfalls of both “professional and public service ethics, fail as safeguards against unethical behaviour, incompetence, and even in the end, administrative evil” (p. 2). Administrative evil can be thought of as a phenomenon where one is acting within the parameters of their role, as others would expect them to from an organisational or policy perspective, but being unaware of the consequences of their actions on others’ well-being. By the very nature of the role of principals, accountable to a larger bureaucratic organisation such as a DoE or to a lesser degree, a school board, the school leader becomes a potential enabler of administrative evil, even if the actions disagree with their moral and sometimes, ethical purpose.

Adams and Balfour (2004) argue that evil may be camouflaged in numerous ways. Moreover, it means that people (particularly those in positions of power) can engage in acts of evil without consciously being aware that they are in fact doing so. Indeed, ordinary people such as educational administrators (principals, Assistant Regional Directors, Regional Directors and so forth), may simply be acting accordingly within their organisational role. Notwithstanding, they are routinely performing what those observing expect and at the same time, actively participating in, for the purpose of this metaphor,

doing evil under the guise of ‘being corporate minded’. Even more disturbing, under circumstances of what Adams and Balfour refer to as “moral inversion” (in which something evil has been redefined convincingly as good), ordinary people can all too easily engage in acts of administrative evil whilst believing that what they are doing, is not only correct, but in fact, virtuous (pp. 205-221).

This provocative concept of administrative evil, speaks clearly as having vast implications for principals and their well-being. Reflecting on point-in-time, high-stakes performance testing, it is apparent that the external (and internal) pressures that principals experience to raise school data, have, and may continue to see them engaging in administrative evil. It is common knowledge in Australia, that a Queensland principal was dismissed for allowing students additional time to complete a high-stakes test (Owens & Lim, 2010). This decision, possibly made under extreme duress and attributed to the need to show progress in his organisational role, has ended an esteemed career, quality of life, relationships and ultimately, has potentially impacted this former principal’s well-being. The article reporting this matter, cites fourteen other reported breaches, seven of which have been referred for disciplinary action. It talks about the DoE (formally Education Queensland as stated in the article) having a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to such matters. The presence of neoliberalism points towards an organisation so focused on results within a toxic culture of competition, that its care for their workers is overlooked, if not absent altogether.

### ***Guerrilla Government***

O’Leary (2014) has a unique and insightful perspective of the impact of neoliberalism on organisations such as the DoE. In her provocative book titled, *The Ethics of Dissent – Managing Guerrilla Government*, the author explores a distinctive aspect of ethics in

government; beyond what are the agreed values and obligations to policy and management principles.

Her research highlights the ethical dilemmas associated with a bureaucracy that make demands of dedicated public servants such as school principals like the one dismissed in Queensland, and how those same leaders balance what is “ethically right with conflicting rules, regulations and administrative expectations” (pp. 135-138). This has serious implications for school principals on multiple levels. Such as, decisions concerning the mandated expectation for students with disabilities (SWD) to undertake standardised testing, due to the relentless pressure imposed by those in power on school leaders to increase participation levels. Ethical decision-making, particularly in the face of adversity and the threat of possible disciplinary action, may be a significant and silent contributor to excessive stress levels and ultimately, the well-being of the school leader. In other words, if the principal chooses not to obey the directive and absents the SWD from a high stakes test that could do the student potential harm, then that principal could expect retribution. The pressure to constantly raise performance in schools has reached breaking point (Broadbent & Laughlin, 1998; Graham, 2020; Tolo, Lillejord, Petour, & Hopfenbeck, 2020; Tucker, 2010).

### ***Leadership in the greedy organisation***

This section paints a dark portrayal of the work / home / leisure balance of a school principal. In the conceptually perplexing concept of *Leadership in the greedy organisation* Gronn (2003a, 2003b) argues that leadership is 'greedy work', building on Coser's (1974) study of 'greedy institutions', which are characterised by "heightened demands and expectations placed on institutional-level leaders" (p. 5). The greedy organisation assumes its workers are available 24/7 and infiltrates the thinking of leaders such as school

principals, to the extent that they believe to be effective they must work long, unrealistic hours, if not physically present then instantly connected electronically (Adler, 2010).

The vulnerability of school principals, who work in a climate of constant pressure to lead a performativity agenda, can challenge the very reason they became educators. My lived experiences have contributed towards a philosophy of education which goes beyond the high stakes testing, narrow curriculum focus and the unhealthy preoccupation with quantitative data defining *high performing* schools.

### ***School Leadership, the OECD and the emergence of the neoliberalism***

Research by Matthews, Moorman, and Nusche (2007) shows that principals in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are facing extreme challenges and pressures, with the rising expectations for schools in relation to rapid and constant technological innovation, massive migration and mobility, and increasing economic globalisation. They argue that the call of the global economy to OECD education systems is to better prepare young people with the knowledge and skills needed to function in a rapidly changing world. As a consequence, the “roles and expectations of school leaders have changed radically” (p. 4). They are no longer expected to be merely good managers, but leaders of schools as world class learning organisations.

Principals are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations and communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives (Van Roekel, 2008).

These changes in roles and expectations have impacted the life, work and well-being of a potentially at-risk and highly stressed profession. In the United Kingdom, where it is

commonplace for schools to be experiencing increased accountability for higher results via the publication of league tables, Phillips and Sen (2011) reported that, “work related stress was higher in education than across all other industries... with work-related mental ill-health... almost double the rate for all industry” (pp. 177-178). This reflects what is occurring in other parts of the world. A significant stressor amongst Australian principals is attributed to the increased emphasis by governments on accountability for uniform curriculum delivery along with the devolution of administrative tasks from central to local control (Riley, 2020).

Substantial changes to the principals’ role and desired professional competencies are announced periodically by federal and state governments (usually, but not always, with a change of government). These policies are interpreted and legitimised through the *Australian Professional Standards for Principals and Leadership Profiles* and includes compliance to the *Australian Curriculum* tied to the national testing program, the *National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)* and public accountability via the *My School* website (AITSL, 2015). The nature of the work itself (role demands) imposed by these changes, further increases work volume and public accountability and decreases principals’ decision-making latitude through externally imposed reporting deadlines. Adverse health outcomes including decreased life expectancy results from high role demand and concurrent low decision-making autonomy. More distressing is that under these conditions younger people appear to be at greater risk of coronary heart disease than their older colleagues (Kuper & Marmot, 2003). Australian schools have not escaped and in truth, it could be stated that neoliberalism has been installed in a remarkably determined fashion (Saul, 2008).

It is evident that the growing body of research, critical of educational reforms from the rise of neoliberalism is emerging (Bernstein, Katznelson, Amezcua, Mohamed, & Alvarado,

2020; Hamilton & Tett, 2021; Hill & Roskam, 2009; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Ross & Gibson, 2007). In addition to these appraisals, alternative ways of thinking to neoliberal conceptions of educational problems and solutions are being explored (Cochran-Smith, 2021; Klees, 2020; Ross & Gibson, 2007). A key issue addressed in these studies, is how forms of critical consciousness can be engendered throughout society via schools. This involves paying attention to the practical aspects of pedagogy for social transformation and organising to achieve a more just society (Hill & Kumar, 2012).

Analysis of neoliberal educational reform evokes thinking in multiple ways to the programs of critical scholars, policy makers, educators, and activists working for education and schools that serve the broad interests of the public and against neoliberalism and its influence on educational practices and a principal's way-of-being. Personal and relational aspects of education within leadership and management practices are integral to the education experience (Giles, Bell, Halsey, & Palmer, 2012). Therefore a calling towards a more humanistic approach that does not view principals as assets or property, would ideally reflect a belief and concern for the ideals of moral obligation and values of mutual respect, care and fairness. These are worth considering as an alternative to neoliberalism (Klees, 2020; Stewart, 2006).

## **Principals' work-world - what they do.**

### *The principal's role description*

The DoE in Queensland, like many organisations, have role descriptions for principals that outline the core components of the position. The syntax changes slightly in principals' role descriptions according to the level of principalship, however for the purpose this argument, I will focus my discussion on the *Principal, Head of School, Head of Campus role description* (DoE, 2020b). In this document, written as a prelude to a recruitment and selection process, it outlines two sections of interest: *your opportunity* and *your role*.

*Your opportunity* focuses on tasks that principals *will* do.

These include:

- Deliver the vision of the department.
- Improve the educational outcomes of students in their schools.
- Develop the quality of teaching and learning.
- Nurture positive relationships between students, teachers, the community and stakeholders (p. 2).

The section concludes by stating that the principal “reports through the Assistant Regional Director to the Regional Director” (p. 2).

*Your role* focuses on the responsibilities of the principal and includes the follow list:

- Lead the school community to develop, articulate and commit to a shared educational vision focused on providing quality learning outcomes for all students.
- Uphold the principalship as a values-based, ethical and moral activity.
- Embed socially just practices in daily school life.
- Set high standards for student and staff performance.
- Active participants in lifelong learning and ongoing professional development.
- Form partnerships with parents, other government agencies, community groups, industry and business.
- Futures oriented and strategic.
- Understand the legislation and policies that impact on schooling.
- Manage resources to achieve goals (p. 2).



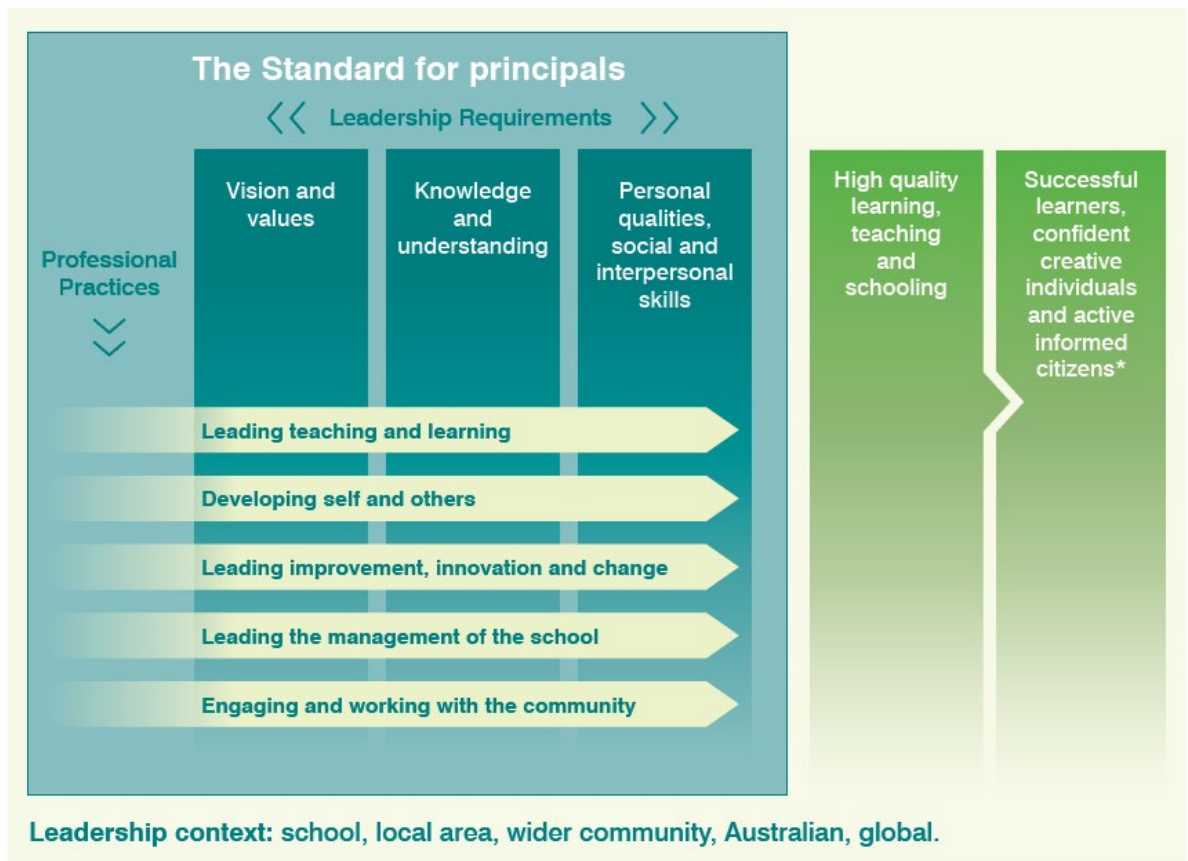
As observed, both sections are extremely prescriptive and compliance-based. One would argue that they need to be given the intended purpose for which they were written. My intention for their inclusion in this inquiry, is to contextualise the complex nature of a principal's role as a possible signpost for investigating their well-being experiences. It is through knowing what principals are expected to do, that we can commence understanding what it means to *be 'in' principalship*.

### ***Australian Professional Standards for Principals and the Leadership Profiles***

There is a clear line of sight between the principal's role description above and the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles* (AITSL, 2015). The standard for principals includes the leadership requirements of developing vision and values, knowledge and understanding and personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills. This is coupled with the professional practices of:

- Leading teaching and learning.
- Developing self and others.
- Leading improvement, innovation and change.
- Leading the management of the school.
- Engaging and working with the community (p. 11).

**Figure 3: The Australian Professional Standard for Principals**

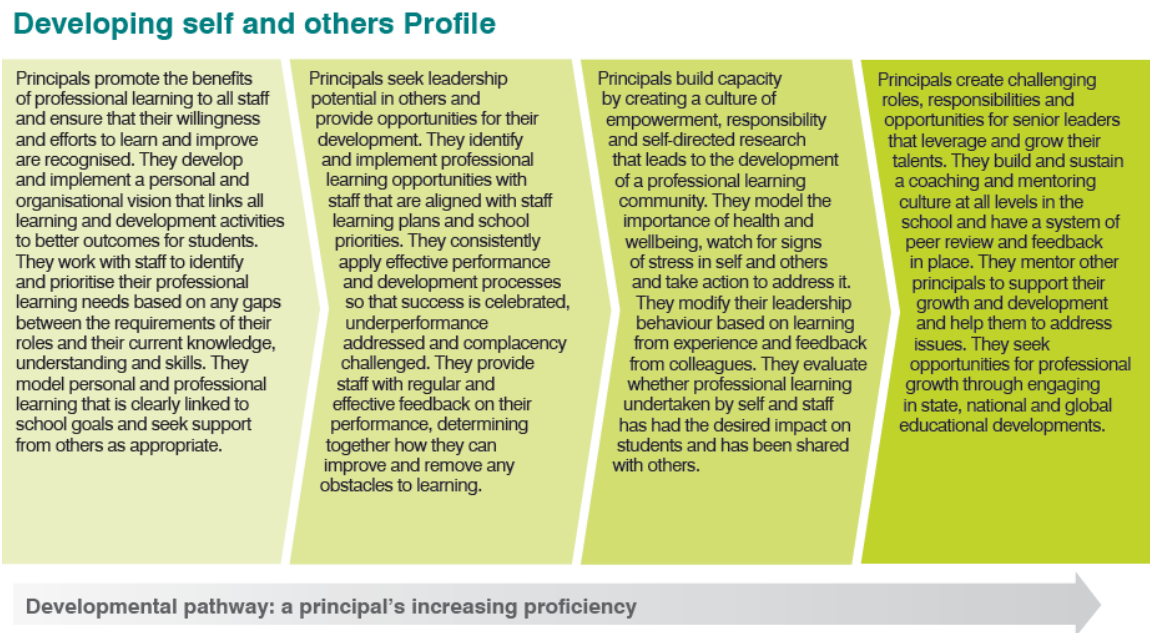


(AITSL, 2015, p. 11).

Both the leadership requirements and professional practices lead to “high quality learning, teaching and schooling” as well as “successful learners, confident creative individuals and active informed citizens” (p. 11). The professional practices are deconstructed into a developmental pathway for principals to increase their proficiency as they move to higher levels within their principalship.

The proficiencies as outlined in the standard, are aspirational and a pathway to engage in leadership leverage which includes the selective and consistent application of the principal’s time, intellect, energy and authority. The following diagram - the professional practice of developing self and others, explicitly illustrates a pathway for developing proficiency and details what principals are to do.

**Figure 4: A principal's increasing proficiency (AITSL, 2015)**



(AITSL, 2015, p. 16).

Within the standard, there are several mentions of the word well-being in the profiles, proficiencies and added explanations, in relation to school leaders, teachers and students.

They model effective leadership and are committed to their own ongoing professional development and personal health and *wellbeing* in order to manage the complexity of the role and the range of learning capabilities and actions required of the role (AITSL, 2015, p. 16, emphasis added).

They model the importance of health and *wellbeing*, watch for signs of stress in self and others and take action to address it (p. 16, emphasis added).

This requirement recognises the importance of emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience and personal *wellbeing* in the leadership and management of the school and its community (p. 23, emphasis added).

Well-being appears to be conceptualised in the standard as a role that underpins principal effectiveness - as an individual skill approach alongside other leadership proficiencies such as developing a vision. On the surface, the standard acknowledges principal well-being as something important, however upon closer analysis, it appears to over-simplify well-being as something rational - the unproblematic nature of it for principals to manage. There is also a lack of any recognition of the system responsibility or connection to societal issues in context.

## **A departmental approach**

### ***Healthier. Happier. Workplaces.***

The *Healthier, Happier Workplaces* initiative, launched by the DoE Queensland in 2017, is packaged as a staff well-being program aimed at improving health and well-being by providing tools and strategies to assist schools to develop their own programs tailored to the needs of staff and workplaces. It claims to support employers to create a work environment that:

- Improves the health and well-being of employees.
- Increases business productivity.
- Enhances workplace culture (DoE, 2017).

### ***DET Staff Wellbeing Framework***

Also launched in 2017 by DoE Queensland alongside the abovementioned initiative, this framework rationalises well-being into five dimensions:

1. Physical wellbeing.
2. Psychological wellbeing.
3. Social and community engagement.
4. Occupational wellbeing.
5. Financial / personal resources (DoE, 2017, p. 5).

The framework encourages schools and workplaces to “employ a planned and systematic approach to developing, implementing and evaluating staff wellbeing programs - based on staff needs” (DoE, 2017, p. 5). The *DET Staff Wellbeing Framework* has been included as it was the incentive for the following consultation and strategy. The framework summarises well-being as a thing to be ‘fixed’. Well-being is individualised in this policy and makes the principal responsible for ‘managing’ the conditions for well-being locally, without acknowledging the importance of the education system and the impacts of the current performativity culture.

I have identified that underpinning such strategic approaches to well-being, neoliberalism, performativity and individualisation influences emerge as a result, which ignores the interrelationships and cultural impacts. The principal cannot ‘manage’ the contradictions. This framework prompted the Department of Education in Queensland to invest in a state-wide consultation into principal well-being, a situation where there was hope to imagine an environment of care as a possibility.

### ***Principal Health and Wellbeing Blueprint for consultation***

This consultation, involving all interested principals from around Queensland via regional business meetings and led by Dr Philip Riley, principal researcher of the *Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey* (2011 - 2021), was launched in 2019 out of concern for Queensland principals’ health and well-being. The findings of the consultation process are grouped into four categories that reflect the most significant challenges and issues raised by principals. The categories are:

1. Managing workload.
2. Support services.
3. Capability.
4. Wellbeing culture (DoE, 2019, p. 5).

I was part of the Stakeholder Reference Group that was consulted at different stages of the blueprint’s formation. There was a sense of hope to see that a well-being ‘culture’<sup>6</sup> was being considered, alongside the other three categories.

Many findings from the blueprint, were then collated and actioned in the following strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> **‘Culture’**: A complex and debated term encompassing the social behaviour and norms of society, as lived through the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities and habits of individuals in certain groups. I use this term unproblematically and acknowledge that I am not examining it within this thesis - but rather considering it as a possibility.

## *Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2022*

Informed by the consultation blueprint and launched by the Queensland Minister for Education in 2020, the strategy highlights an eight-point-plan to deliver a “balanced wellbeing model” within four pillars:

1. Optimise time to lead.
2. Support services.
3. Safe and respectful workplace.
4. Capability (DoE, 2020a, p. 6).

**Figure 5: The Principal health and wellbeing strategy wheel**



(DoE, 2020a, p. 6)

Figure five shows

*the Principal health and wellbeing strategy nested in a continuum, which represents the continually improved and built upon systems and processes that we operate in, and responds to the changing dynamics and nature of the school environment (DoE, 2020a, p. 6, emphasis included in original text).*

The terminology of neoliberalism ‘continuous improvement’ and ‘capability’ provokes wondering about the individual nature of this policy document. Is it aimed solely at

principals attending to their own well-being through performance measures or something more communal?

Absent from the strategy is any mention of a well-being ‘culture’, an environment whereby the workplace is safe and respectful for the entire school community including the principal. Instead, the document that was published concentrated on individual ‘deliverables’ for enabling work effectiveness.

*The Principal health and wellbeing strategy* delivers initiatives that focus on assisting principals with the practicalities and complexities associated with leading and managing schools... It is an incremental strategy over a number of years reflecting the evolving focus on individual wellbeing in workplaces (DoE, 2020a, p. 9, emphasis included in original text).

The happy / productive worker thesis as discussed in chapter two is clearly at play within the DoE frameworks and strategies. It is well argued (Ferguson, 2008; Harvey, 2007, 2016; Legge, 2005) that an organisation’s interest in employee well-being often masks certain truths about their intent of caring. Is the rhetoric reflective of a humanitarian practice, whereby genuine care and concern for employees is authentic, or is it purely an investment in ‘human capital’ and a springboard for increased business productivity as clearly stated within the white font of the strategy?

There appears to be a common theme between this strategy and *Australian Professional Standards for Principals and the Leadership Profiles*. The mention of well-being in these policy documents give the ‘appearance’ of care. They frame strategies around individual improvements, rather than acknowledging the reality of well-being experiences of all principals, as the interrelated events they are and how the context plays out.

In this next section, I discuss initiatives that go beyond business efficiencies that portion blame on the individual. They separate work and the phenomenon of well-being and treat the latter as something everybody experiences all of the time.

### *Principal Connect*

When President of the *Queensland State P-10/12 School Administrators' Association* (2004-2014), I developed a deeper working knowledge and understanding of the nature of well-being experiences for school principals and their lifeworlds. This included unrealistic tasks that they were expected to master; many of which were beyond their experience and capabilities. This situation is a direct result of the impact of the system. Whilst President, I was actively involved in the creation of an initiative titled *Principal Connect*, alongside other professional associations and the *Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU)* in collaboration with the DoE. It attempted to:

- Provide a principal-to-principal state-wide support service.
- Provide practical assistance in a confidential environment.
- Complement existing support systems for principals.

The service did not attempt to provide professional counselling, mediation or legal assistance, nor was it connected to recruitment and selection or performance and review processes. Sixty-three experienced and practising principals from an array of geographical areas across Queensland were trained in mentoring and active listening skills, creating a diverse network committed to supporting principals and their well-being. The service was built on a platform of point-in-time support for principals and was well received. My involvement was not only at the executive level - it included working in the field as one of the sixty-three experienced principals.

Unfortunately, due to politics within state government, budgetary constraints and a lack of quantifiable data to measure its success, those in positions of power viewed *Principal Connect* as a non-frontline service and all support, including financial contributions, ceased. On reflection of this closure, I question how one measures the success of an initiative that essentially attempts to support the affective domain (well-being) of a principal. Furthermore, I now see the initiative as focusing more on the individual and not



on the system or culture. The narrative of ‘cultures’ of well-being is an important consideration and takes the focus away from an individual principal and the complexity of the context in which they work.

In Queensland, there is evidence of established cultures of well-being as seen through the work of various principals’ associations. This network of support set up by principals, for principals, moves the focus away from the individual to the collective needs of those in principalship.

### **Principals supporting principals**

Following the demise of *Principal Connect*, Queensland principals’ associations developed initiatives to focus on principal well-being. These initiatives provide a vital service to principals by prioritising their well-being over other aspects of the role. They provide a platform for principals to talk through concerns with other principals or former principals.

#### ***The Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP)***

QASSP, who were partners in the *Principal Connect* initiative, were the only association with the financial capacity (through corporate sponsorship) to actively address this discrepancy through a funded position. They created a new role titled the *QASSP Service Officer*, whose charter was to provide a high level of professional support to QASSP members in relation to a range of advocacy, leadership and personal needs, independent of the DoE.

Key features of the position include:

- Confidentiality - conversations with members to remain confidential, unless member approves of sharing.
- Role to remain independent of, and seen to be independent of the DoE.
- Accessible to all QASSP members.

Duties of the QASSP Services Officer include:

- Receiving calls from members seeking a collegial conversation.
- Contacting members where a colleague has passed on a concern.
- Contacting members on request of the President.
- Contacting members where an issue / tragedy involving their school community appears in the media.
- Contacting groups of members affected by a natural disaster or event.
- Networking with the Queensland Teachers' Union on behalf of the member and so forth.

Narrating from lived experiences, the gradual development of the *QASSP Service Officer* since the demise of *Principal Connect* has gained traction, with QASSP members accessing the service. QASSP members are fortunate to have their association investing in their well-being.

### ***Queensland Association of Combined Sector Leaders Inc***

Since its inception in 1996, this small but effective principals' association has operated on top of a relational foundation that values and cares for principals in preparatory to year nine / ten / twelve schools. In doing so, executive counsellors (principals) are geographically located around Queensland to serve the small number of colleagues in these areas. Using the catch phrase, 'who you going to call' - taken from the classic film *Ghostbusters* outlines the operating principle of this association. Regular contact with every multi-sector principal throughout the state is made via a network of executive councillors. Furthermore, the President spends a large part of their time on the road visiting multi-sector school principals. In addition, a *Principal's Survival Kit* has been produced by the association and is sent to newly appointed principals to assist them in their transition to a multi-sector school.

Finally, one of the executive councillors has developed a Facebook page titled *Principals Supporting Principals*. This platform provides an online, relational space for principals to converse with other principals from around the state. The facilitator often posts positive

and inspirational messages and well as conversation starters to provoke discussion and the sharing of stories. To illustrate the point, during the period in 2020 when students were learning from home due to COVID-19, numerous posts were circulating on this platform regarding strategies *present-at-hand* and *ready-to-hand*<sup>7</sup> (Heidegger, 1962) offering support for principals and their school communities.

School communities which are the context in which principals' work are an important factor in understanding well-being experiences. The day-to-day engagements of principals with their lifeworld and the people in it provide possibilities for being. "The essence of there-being is existence" (Foulds, 2012, p. 12). Therefore, the sharing of the following two stories in context is important in understanding principals' existence, and how their circumstances impact on their well-being.

### **Principals' stories in context**

In the follow section, I provide two stories of Queensland school principals in context. This differs from the stories contained in the four discussion chapters where I describe and interpret the ontological meanings of well-being '*in*' principalship, rather than focus on individuals. The two stories I present here show the complexity of well-being in situ. They give details of the individual (real person and their background), the physical (what you can see), the emotional (what you feel), and the inter-connections with policy, history and structures, as compared with my interpretative work, which will be across individuals. I hope to engage the reader in the lives of two principals as a provocation for what is missing in the literature. In saying this, I am not suggesting a solution to well-being - just

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<sup>7</sup> **Ready-to-hand:** things, events, persons and situations that are relevant to someone's existence either as a help or as a hindrance (Foulds, 2012, p. 158).

**Present-at-hand:** something that is in the world but of no immediate relevance to what you are doing (p. 156).

showing the complexity and a pointing towards to the significance of what I am trying to do in this inquiry.

### ***Story 1: Keith (Interview 8)***

#### **Context**

Keith is a young principal of a mid-sized school (Algebra P-12 State School) in rural Queensland. He is married to Marie (also an educator) and they have one small child, Rebecca, with another on the way. Keith is a passionate principal who wants to make a difference for students, their parents and staff. He cares so deeply about his school, that he prioritises it over other aspects of his life, including his own well-being.

#### Context:

- Home situated on school property, affording 24-hour access for Keith and others to Keith.
- A lack of facilities and services such as medical care. Keith's town is a three-hour drive from the nearest medical facility.

By his own admission, Keith recognises that he has not been diligent in looking after himself. It was not until he started to feel unwell, that he sought medical intervention.

Keith was diagnosed with bowel cancer.

*In 2016 I had just started as the principal at Algebra. I got to the June/July holidays and I had some medical symptoms that I, being a typical bloke, ignored. I was with my wife on our holidays. My wife was seven months pregnant, and we were heading to Brisbane. I said to my wife, I'd better go to the doctor and get checked out. So, I did. And what we initially thought was nothing, ended up with me having a colonoscopy and finding out that I had bowel cancer. (Story 3).*

Keith's story shows how the system infiltrates a principal's thinking to the point where they cannot prioritise their own health and well-being as they feel (or are involuntarily made to feel) that they have to dedicate their entire 'being' to the organisation in order to be effective.

Following Keith's diagnosis, he went to Brisbane for surgery and six months of intensive treatment, including chemotherapy and radiation to address the presence of metastases. He was granted accommodation at *Ronald McDonald House* for the extent of his treatment. This took Keith away from his family and school community. Keith experienced a felt-sense of helplessness and succumbed to depression, which affected the quality of his recovery.

*This one day I remember so clearly, I was in the hospital ward, sitting on a vinyl recliner connected to my chemotherapy treatment, when a feeling of absolute despair washed over me and I started weeping. It was involuntary and I couldn't do a thing to hide my emotions. It just hit me - what if I die - who would support Marie, Rebecca and James? (Story 3).*

During Keith's treatment, Marie flew to Brisbane to give birth to their son, James. Keith was resolute in his quest to get well for himself and his family, Marie, Rebecca and now, James. By the end of the fifth month of treatment, Keith's prognosis appeared to improve and he entered a phase of remission.

Keith still had several weeks of sick leave leading up to the Christmas school vacation. This time was to ensure rest and promote recovery. However, back at Algebra P-12 State School, an issue had surfaced between three of Keith's staff members, which involved an indiscretion between a male teacher and a female administration assistant. The male teacher's partner was also a teacher on staff, adding another layer of tension. Understanding the dynamics within the small, rural context, Keith returned to his school whilst still on sick leave to manage the situation. When questioned, Keith's rationale for returning early was as follows:

- Only he could address the issue as the acting principal did not know the history or appreciate the context and implications should the situation become public.
- He had his supervisor's (Assistant Regional Director) approval to return to work early.
- The Christmas school vacation would afford him the lost recovery time.

*On reflection, I shouldn't have gone back to school. I should have had those few more days to recover and to see family in Brisbane. I even sacrificed going to see my brother's graduation ceremony - an officer's ceremony in Sydney for the navy - because I felt I needed to get back to the school. (Story 4).*

Principals have this powerful mindset (head and heart) where they feel responsible (high level care) for the school and everything / everyone in it. Nothing can take that away. It is a way-of-being, whereby principals have internalised a paradigm of what is expected of them. The system perpetuates this expectation through audits, school reviews, data sets and performance appraisals, with the outcome seemingly dependent on and felt by the principal, as are the consequences.

Keith did not hesitate to return to work early from sick leave to resolve a school issue and his supervisor, whilst extremely supportive of Keith throughout his medical procedures and recovery, did little to prevent his early return, even though it could have contributed to further medical complications and additional time away from work.

### ***Story 2: Casey (Interview 5)***

#### **Context**

Casey is an experienced principal working in a large, highly complex primary school in regional Queensland. She has a sixty-five-kilometre commute from her home to school each morning and then again in the afternoon; time Casey says, for thinking, planning and unwinding. Casey values positive interpersonal connections with her students, their parents, her staff and colleagues. She is in the later stages of her career and is planning for retirement.

Casey shares a number of stories from her past.

*At the time, I was a year five - seven class teacher, a teaching principal. My health was poor at the time because I'd gotten the flu and kept working through it, instead of taking time off. I was in my office about six o'clock at night, and in those days, I didn't lock myself in and the area was open and people had easy access. Mrs James came in shouting at me and actually cornered me in the*

*office. I had no way of getting out of there. That situation was very threatening to me. Her two children, Tom and his sister Maria, were in the car downstairs and heard every word. I felt absolutely overawed. And honestly, in the six months that followed, I seriously considered leaving the department, because I didn't feel supported. (Story 4).*

Casey describes a time when she had to deal with a 'helicopter' parent whose expectations were excessive and unrealistic, when it came to her son Tom. Mrs James was not only interfering and demanding, she behaved inappropriately towards Casey. She cornered Casey in her office and was clearly intimidating and yelling to the point that her children outside in the car could hear. This situation as it unfolded, impacted on Casey in a most profound way. She contemplated resigning from the profession.

Some parents who principals encounter, can make their work life extremely challenging. Unrealistic expectations regarding their children can play out, with the blame for any shortcomings, clearly and at times, severely directed towards the principal. This has immeasurable effects on a principal's well-being, regardless of how attuned they are to conflict resolution techniques. To be confronted aggressively is stressful, regardless of experience, gender and training. Parents are their most unreasonable and perhaps vulnerable, where their children are concerned. They quite often have a polarised viewpoint of what is true for them and unable to see another perspective.

Casey bore the brunt of Mrs James' rage and it was confronting and intimidating. Casey was unwell at the time, so her well-being was already poor. This relationship between principal and parent appears to be based on power and entitlement - a servant / master mental model from the parent's perspective. This has catastrophic effects on Casey's sense of well-being.

*I had a low point in my career where I really didn't want to see anybody. I actually didn't want to do the job and was prepared to walk away from it all. I'd been harassed by John, an aggressive, helicopter type of parent, who was in a way micromanaging me and it took a toll on my confidence. I just wanted to curl up in a corner somewhere. I felt absolutely gutted. I felt like every single*

*thing that I had believed in that had taken me into the principalship didn't have any meaning anymore. So, it was a pretty dark time.*

*I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression, and I did see some counsellors outside of our department. They were private counsellors, a husband and wife team. So, I worked with them for six months, and I had a very good GP. I refused medication for the depression. I wanted to work through it myself. (Story 16).*

Casey shares a low point in her career whereby she was harassed by another difficult and interfering parent that led to a decline in confidence and a diagnosis of depression. She sought help from her general practitioner (GP) and private counsellors to address her mental health disorder without the aid of medication.

Being professional and being human are not two separate entities, they function interdependently. Most principals are well versed in managing difficult conversations with parents, focusing on the content and not the emotion. There is training and processes that principals can access to help them with these challenging interpersonal dealings. The argument at hand goes deeper to the very essence of what it means to be human. The assumption that a principal is trained and therefore can manage difficult situations in a professional manner and not be affected personally is unrealistic. Feelings of anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty, amongst others, are present for a principal when faced with a challenging interaction, especially when the situation becomes hostile, personal, threatening and dangerous.

*Rachael was a senior secondary principal who I met at a Strategic Leaders Course in 2007. She was an astute lady who talked to me about resilience as a principal. She framed it as 'backs and armour'; put on your backs and armour, and the 'haters' can't get to you. A strong back and a metaphorical, impenetrable armour to protect you from all harm. I think about that almost every day now. I make sure that my back is strong and I have my armour on when I go to work. You know, they can't get through to your heart. You just deflect it. Strong on the inside - strong on the outside. That simple little statement from Rachael helps me deal with the day-to-day pressures and also appeals to my quirky sense of humour. (Story 17).*



The imagery created in this story, one of a principal walking through the school gates dressed in protective armour adorned with the *Bannerment of the King* and ready for combat on the battlefield, is equally humorous and disturbing. It is humorous in terms of the ridiculousness of the image, as if appreciating the comic section of the morning tabloids, and disturbing to be likening a schoolyard, a place of learning, growth and wonder, with a battlefield.

The wisdom gifted to Casey from Rachael, has sustained her in times of need. It has helped to build resilience in Casey, so that when confronted by difficult situations or challenging personalities, she is able to cope and not be affected individually. Principals need an *arsenal* of strategies to deal with the multitude of management issues they confront on a daily basis. They build up these strategies through engagement in professional learning activities, through experience and as is the case with Casey, through networking and forming relationships with other principals.

Playing with this metaphor, a strong back and a coat of armour should possibly be standard issue when one becomes a principal. This, amongst other strategies, may go a long way towards contributing to longevity in the role and show concern for their well-being. Perhaps induction programs for principals that include sessions on building resilience, with a focus on well-being, alongside other leadership and management (skill building activities), would gain traction. Learning to manage human, financial and physical resources, or to develop and implement a strategic plan whilst important, is a futile exercise if the principal's well-being is not up to the task.

### ***Thoughts on the two stories***

Principals have internalised what they perceive is expected of them in terms of responsibility and accountability, anything less would be viewed or feared as

underperformance. It is unique to the principal's role that everything that happens in a school is reliant on them. People look to the principal for decisions, solutions and direction.

In the next section, I consider what is missing from the literature on principal well-being and identify an area of focus for this inquiry.

### **Explicitly identify a gap in the literature - what is missing?**

The rich narratives of principal's experiences, such as Keith and Casey's stories, are absent from the literature. The current literature appears to be largely designed to inform us and 'fix' well-being in school leaders who are not managing well. This chapter of my two-part review of the literature, again saw well-being individualised and internalised to exclude context and interrelationships between measurements and interventions, with little shared understandings of the complex experiences of being 'in' principalship. To understand well-being for principals requires an exploration of experiences *in context*. Excluding a well-being culture from the *Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2022*, the DoE in Queensland has missed an opportunity for growth and understanding, away from the influence of a neoliberalist, performance focuses culture to one of hope and care. This leads me to the importance of my phenomenological inquiry.

### ***My contribution to the field***

My thesis title: *Being 'in' Principalship: An ontological inquiry of well-being experiences*, implies the aim for my inquiry is to understand the phenomenon of well-being, as it is experienced by school principals. The title also provides a strong connection with my research question, *what is the ontological nature of well-being for school principals?* As evidenced, the gap in the literature directly relates to my research question and towards a unique methodology. Phenomenological research has never been attempted in this specific

research space and stands aside from the local discourse. Whilst the four qualitative studies cited in chapter two considered well-being as a phenomenon and not something to be rationalised, they did not make the connection between well-being experiences in principals, which is the gap I intend to explore within the interpretative discussion chapters and contribute back to this field.

My inquiry is connected to current literature in the field, insofar as key findings from both the quantitative and qualitative studies have informed the knowledge base from which to launch my inquiry. In researching the well-being experiences of principals, I use a different scholarly lens and view well-being as a phenomenon to be investigated within the stories of research participants. Carefully constructed hermeneutic descriptions and interpretations, informed by the insights of key phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Gadamer, is the work of my inquiry.

My findings, as expressed in the discussion chapters of this thesis, tell a story that has not been told before and communicates ontological meanings of principals' well-being experiences. For instance, in contrast to collecting statistical data in the hope to developing understandings of the phenomenon of well-being, I focus on gaining deeper understandings of principals' ontological condition through phenomenology. As an example, rather than suggesting interventions such as mindfulness or specific exercise routines, I contemplate the existential notion of homeliness [*heimisch*] (Heidegger, 1962) which describes that there is a sense of home-ness when well-being is strong 'being at home'. This approach to the inquiry transcends our way of thinking about the complex nature of well-being, from something we can control or fix to other possibilities. That is not to say that the contributions I make to the field are less worthy. They afford deep understandings of the phenomenon of well-being. In understanding homeliness, we reflect on the relational aspects of experiences such as being with significant others as well as significant things, places, activities and oneself. Homeliness embodies cognitive, emotional, and conative

dimensions of our lived experiences such as safety, rootedness, harmony, joy, privacy, togetherness, recognition, order, nourishment, initiative, power and freedom (Heidegger, 1954) all of which, have a profound effect on our well-being. This notion of ‘being at home’ is explored in chapter seven within the story titled *a leisure / work now relationship*.

## **Concluding thoughts**

Chapters two and three have sought to identify a gap in both the literature and policy from which to base this inquiry and contribute to the field. My review of relevant literature pertaining to principal well-being reveals a concerning and growing trend towards the rationalising and commodifying of well-being as a noun, a thing to be measured and fixed. Amongst a neoliberalised competitive culture of principal performativity, stories of well-being experiences remain silenced.

What it essentially means to be in principalship is the focus for this inquiry. I attend to the essence of being human: our thrownness, circumspection and desire for care-full relationships within the festivals of life. There is sufficient epistemological literature that identifies the causal, ontic reasons why well-being in principals is of concern. My contribution to the field - my findings, are significant as they tell a story that has not been told enough using a unique methodology based on the philosophical understandings of prominent phenomenologists, which I discuss in the following chapter. In my thesis I employ phenomenological inquiry to argue that well-being is a phenomenon that exists across humanity - one that matters in our everyday lived experiences. We experience the presence or absence of well-being as integral to our human condition. It is not something that can be defined or ‘fixed’. It is a phenomenon that is experienced differently within the lifeworld of principals and also as part of community.

The following chapter contemplates the philosophical underpinnings of prominent phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger. His philosophical insights and focus on 'being', as in being '*in*' principalship, carefully and thoughtfully guide this ontological inquiry, illuminate interpretations of well-being experiences and unearth understandings from beneath principals' stories.

## 4 Chapter 4: Philosophical Foundations

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### Introduction

“Positivism ... decapitates philosophy”

(Husserl, 1970, p.9 as cited by Relph, 2014, p. 99).

Husserl (1858-1938), broadly known as the father or founder of phenomenology (Holt & Sandberg, 2011; Käufer & Chemero, 2021; Moran, 2005; Qorbani & Rezaei, 2016), argued that philosophy was more than a factual science and a set of psychological generalisations, reduced to the reliance on positivism<sup>8</sup>, facts and theories (Husserl, 1970). He advocated for a philosophical approach that exceeded factual scientific inquiry, one that investigated more deeply the higher and broader questions of life such as ethics, knowledge and being. As such, he developed the research approach of phenomenology, which sought to resist making assumptions about what could be studied and how. Instead, it focused on meanings and framing a way of thinking about philosophical questions which could be responsive to all phenomena within human experiences (Finlay, 2009).

What emerged in the previous two chapters from my review of the literature and investigation into contemporary research on the well-being experiences of principals, was a complexity of meanings related to ways of being ‘*in*’ principalship. Whilst much of the previous literature focused on frameworks for leadership, what appears to be absent is an ontological consideration of this complexity and being ‘*in*’ principalship.

In this inquiry, I sought to uncover taken-for-granted meanings of the phenomenon of well-being, as experienced by principals. To enable this, I needed a rigorous approach that went

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<sup>8</sup> **Positivism:** A philosophical doctrine that gave the appearance of “offering a solid epistemological foundation for those sciences willing and capable of adhering to the rigours of the scientific method” (Caldwell, 2015, p. 4).

beyond scientific facts and figures, to explore more deeply the human side of a principal's lifeworld. To use the metaphor of a swimming pool, I wanted to go to the deep end where no one swims for too long, where principals are possibly 'treading water' or 'drowning' and understand more deeply, what is being experienced. I needed an approach that empowered me to look beyond the obvious and consider the ontological meanings, hence my interest in phenomenology as a possible enabler.

## **Doing phenomenology**

"Phenomenology is an umbrella term encompassing both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches" (Kafle, 2011, p. 181). van Manen (2014) refers to phenomenology as "essentially a philosophical discipline" (p. 22). He argues that "doing phenomenology means developing a pathos<sup>9</sup> for the greater texts and simultaneously, reflecting in a phenomenological manner on the living meanings of everyday experiences, phenomena, and events" (p. 23). With this understanding, early researchers like me, who are interested in conducting our research activities to *search* for the chosen phenomenon within everyday experiences, also approach writing using a phenomenological style with insightful and dynamic descriptions and interpretations. "In this sense we are all philosophers" (p. 23).

Whilst there are many philosophers who had adopted and developed a phenomenological approach to their work and writings, Heidegger's explicit acknowledgement of "phenomenology as a hermeneutic enterprise" is significant for this inquiry (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 28). Heidegger (1962) redefined the phenomenological project, moving away from a philosophical discipline that focuses on consciousness and

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<sup>9</sup> **Pathos:** Generally, pathos is translated as a feeling or emotion, and its meaning is commonly associated to Aristotle's philosophic writings. In phenomenology, pathos is viewed as a phenomenon in terms of attunement and disposition (as cited by Oele, 2007).

essences of phenomena, towards elaborating on existential and hermeneutic (interpretive) dimensions (Finlay, 2009). Like Heidegger, I am concerned with exploring how a phenomenon such as well-being appears, then I try to make sense of this appearance through existential descriptions and interpretations.

### **My relationship with Martin Heidegger**

Throughout the interpretative discussion chapters of this thesis, the work and thinking of Heidegger's philosophy has greatly influenced my ontological understandings of principals' well-being experiences. Whilst quite difficult to read at times, his first major literary masterpiece, *Being and Time* (originally written in 1927 and translated in 1962), afforded me the philosophical foundations that resonated with principals' stories and from which I could base my interpretations in the quest towards developing meanings and truth. As such, Heideggerian theories and terminology have a strong presence throughout this inquiry.

I started thinking about phenomenology during the final year of my Master of Education: Leadership and Management at Flinders University. Interested in progressing my scholarship towards a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), I started searching for a research method to explore more deeply, principals' well-being experiences and discovered phenomenology. My relationship with Heidegger developed in an organic way throughout my PhD experience. From the outset, I reviewed the literature on principal well-being, to ascertain possible gaps and to gain insight into phenomenological approaches to research. Following *Confirmation of Candidature*, I conducted my interviews and collated principals' stories (data generation), whilst simultaneously crafting stories, writing descriptions and forming my own interpretations. It was during the interpretative phase that I started having deep conversations with my supervisors and other academics about



Heideggerian philosophy. This ignited my interest in learning more about Heidegger's profound approach to phenomenology.

After several attempts at reading *Being and Time* (1962), I purchased additional books, *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time* (King, 2001), *A simple Guide to Being & Time* (Foulds, 2012) and *Heidegger explained: From phenomenon to thing* (Harman, 2011) to help me understand Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological notions and how they could help guide my doctoral research. It would be an understatement to say that reading the philosophical writings of Heidegger is a measured and reflective process. Understanding and applying his concepts to research is next level and surpasses rational assumptions for a deeper, contemplative way of thinking about everyday human experiences.

The more I read, re-read, contemplated, discussed and wrote about Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, insights into the ontological nature and taken-for-granted meanings of principals' well-being experiences began emerging from within the stories. More importantly, my phenomenon of interest started appearing and with Heidegger's insightful and dynamic philosophical notions as a reference, I commenced making sense of these appearances.

### ***Heidegger's life***

Before explaining some of Heidegger's salient theoretical notions pertaining to this inquiry, I present this brief, but informative account of Heidegger's life, to gain some appreciation and understanding of his context which made his writing and philosophical notions more available to me.

Martin Heidegger was born in Messkirch, Baden Germany on 26 September 1889. He was the oldest child of Friederich and Johanna Heidegger and had two siblings, Maria and

Fritz. He was educated at the Konradihaus in Constance and later at the Gymnasium in Freiburg. Following school, Heidegger began preparations for entering the priesthood, until health issues dictated otherwise.

In 1907, Catholic priest and Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Freiburg, Conrad Grober, presented Heidegger with a copy of the German philosopher, psychologist, and Catholic priest - Franz Brentano's dissertation *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle* (Schalow, 2019). This reading laid the foundation for Heidegger's interest in phenomenology and became the impetus for his work on *Being and Time* (as cited by Spier, 2016).

In 1909, Heidegger studied theology and philosophy at the University of Freiburg. He published his first articles and reviews and commenced studying the work of Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey in 1910 (Schalow, 2019). He later abandoned his theology studies and ambitions to become a priest, and studied Catholic philosophy, natural science, mathematics and history. In 1913, Heidegger obtained his Doctorate in Philosophy and commenced work at the Department of Philosophy in Freiburg. Importantly, it is here in 1916 that he started working under Edmund Husserl, who later advocated on Heidegger's behalf to obtain him a paid teaching position at the university (Denker, 2000).

In 1917, Heidegger married Elfried Petri, who had been a student in his class. They have two sons together, Jorg and Hermann. Elfried arranged for the famous cabin in Todtnauberg, in the Black Forest to be built, which she later gave to Heidegger as a gift. It is here where many of Heidegger's books, including *Being and Time* were written.

**Figure 6: Heidegger's cabin in Todtnauberg where he did a large proportion of his writing**



(Water colour: L. Kanowski, May 2021)

Following Heidegger's example of locating a place and space of seclusion in which to find thoughts and to immerse myself in the writing process, I retreated to a friend's quaint beach home in Port Willunga South Australia throughout my candidature.

**Figure 7: Crozier's beach house at Port Willunga where I did a large proportion of my writing**



(Photo: S. Kanowski, November 2020)

In 1923, Heidegger, with Husserl's advocacy, was appointed Associate Professor at Marburg University. The following year, Hannah Arendt (German-American philosopher and political theorist) enrolled at Marburg and studied under Heidegger's supervision. They

began an extramarital affair (Schalow, 2019). He later had an affair with another one of his students, Elisabeth Blochmann (eminent scholar of education and philosophy). Letters to his wife Elfried suggest possible affairs with others (Schalow & Denker, 2010).

In 1927 Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time* [Sein and Zeit] was published in German, and then in 1962, translated into English by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. *Being and Time* was, and continues to be, recognised as an original and groundbreaking philosophical piece of literature, which had a profound influence on 20th-century philosophy - particularly existentialism, hermeneutics, deconstruction, and the enactivist approach to cognition (Safranski, 1999). Following its publication, Heidegger was promoted to full Professor at Marburg University and in 1928 returned to Freiburg University, receiving Husserl's former chair.

In 1933, Heidegger became a member of the Nazi Party and delivered a number of lectures and statements in support of the National Socialist revolution backing Hitler and his policies. Between 1936-1938, Heidegger wrote his second major piece, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (Schalow, 2019). Shortly after, Heidegger started to deliver several lectures on German philosopher, essayist, and cultural critic, Friederich Nietzsche, in which he provided critical commentaries on the National Socialist doctrine of power and persecution of the Jewish people. This fell under the gaze of the Gestapo and in 1944, Heidegger was drafted into the Volkssturm, a national militia established by Nazi Germany during the last months of World War II (Safranski, 1999). Following the war, Heidegger faced the Commission of De-Nazification and was forced into early retirement without license to teach. He suffered a nervous breakdown.

It was not until 1949 that the French military government lifted the ban against Heidegger in a statement regarding his Nazism, classifying him as "a fellow traveler without reconciliation" (As cited by Schalow & Denker, 2010, p. 15). He returned to teaching in

1951, lecturing, giving seminars, writing and publishing until just prior to his death in 1976.

Through this brief account of Heidegger's life in context, I was able to gain some insight into how events and experiences influenced his philosophical work that led him to write *Being and Time* and other influential works. Its publication transformed him from an enigmatic academic in Germany to a reputed philosopher of international significance. Heidegger's influence and thinking grew and developed amongst scholars and led them on a path to cultivate their own take on phenomenology (for example: Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology and practice, Sartre's existentialism and Derrida's deconstruction, to name a few (Mulhall, 2013)).

In this next section, I discuss Heideggerian philosophical notions stemming from *Being and Time* that have influenced my approach to research and thinking about the phenomenon of well-being as it pertains to principals' experiences.

### ***Being, Time and Dasein***

*Being and Time* was a milestone in Heidegger's philosophical journey of thinking and writing. It was during this time that Heidegger investigated the question of being. He examined his own existence as a Christian by asking the existential question "How can I live as a Christian in the modern world?" (as cited by Schalow & Denker, 2010, p. 24). This is significant, as essentially Heidegger was asking, "Who am I?" a question to which the only possible response is a matter of knowing ontologically what it means to be. Moreover, what it means, "to be", is something we can experience only in terms of our own existence (p. 24).

Within the pages of *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the expression *Dasein* to refer to the existence of being that is peculiar to human beings. "Dasein exists" (Heidegger, 1962, p.

29). In German, Dasein literally means “person”. Heidegger capitalises the word to emphasise the importance of researching our way of “being-in-the-world over time” [the Being of persons is the activity of Dasein: “*there-being*”] as opposed to interpretations focused on what persons are (Foulds, 2012, p. 137, emphasis included in original text). As such, Heidegger uses there-being as a formal indication of the way-of-being human and bases his thinking on themes such as mortality, care, anxiety, temporality, and historicity (Schalow, 2019). For instance, the phenomenon of there-being reveals itself, ever so briefly, in its being through the complex structure of care. I discuss this in the next section.

### ***Being human is caring***

My reading and application of Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology constantly led me on a quest of discovery regarding this great enterprise called *being*. Some salient thoughts emerged and kept returning to me regarding our being, “we care about our being and have to take care of our being” (Schalow & Denker, 2010, p. 24). Heidegger (1962) argues that in the complex phenomenon of care, man’s [sic] [Dasein’s] ‘way to be’, there are three intertwined ways of being. Being human involves:

1. Being-in-the-world.
2. Being-with-others.
3. Being-with-oneself (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 25-26).

My pondering of these three ontological ways-of-being unearthed some taken-for-granted assumptions:

- We always find ourselves as being-in-a-world with which we are familiar.
- We are never alone and always amongst others.
- Factic<sup>10</sup> life-experience is always mine (Schalow, 2019).

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<sup>10</sup> Heidegger terms this **facticity**, which means all facts about you and your circumstances that are actually in the present because of past events and choices. This includes natural, social, psychological and historical facts (skin colour, nationality, beliefs, family background). You carry your facticity with you out of the past and into the future (Foulds, 2012, pp. 142-143).

As such, approaching my inquiry into the well-being experiences of principals, I find myself in a world in which I am familiar, never alone, and existentially describing and interpreting using a foundation of life-experiences and pre-understandings developed during my own time in the principalship. My relationship with Heidegger helped me to grow as an early researcher and to recognise implicit or pre-ontological understandings of the question of being, as the phenomenon of well-being reveals itself from within the concealment of principals' stories.

### *The question of being*

Being can only disclose itself in relation to Dasein (Schalow & Denker, 2010). The comportment<sup>11</sup> of Dasein towards the being of entities<sup>12</sup> is determined by understanding. A computer, for example, is an entity, and the being of a computer is what the device is when it is being a computer. This means that one of the ways of asking what is a computer (what is the being of computers) is to ask what does it mean for something to be a computer. The meaning of an entity is how it fits in with everything else in the world. The meaning of a computer is its character, place and function, within an overall complex of tools, projects and activities of computer users in the world (Foulds, 2012).

In everything we do and say, we have an implicit or pre-ontological understanding of being. Heidegger (1962) argues that this nebulous and implicit understanding is an irrefutable fact, but cautions that there is no straight forward or conclusive answer to the question of being. We can only experience being in the intertwining of structures that constitutes Dasein as the un-concealment of being (Schalow & Denker, 2010). As Dasein

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<sup>11</sup> **Comportment:** Our way-of-being that shows who we are and how we are in the world that is sensed by and communicated to others in a paralinguistic way (Giles, 2008, p. 24).

<sup>12</sup> **Entities:** Objects of attention, both material (computer) or immaterial (time, space, activity). All being is the Being of some activity (Foulds, 2012, p. 140).

[there-being] is determined by mineness<sup>13</sup>, as we discover how being can manifest itself through our own existence. To question being is a distinctive possibility of Dasein - to philosophise is, in this sense, an existential pursuit and demands the reciprocal willingness to question our own being. Like Heidegger questioning his own Christianity, I too have questioned my own being in relation to well-being experiences in the principalship, and have made some important short and long-term decisions as a result of this questioning.

Heidegger's invitation to ask the question of being, empowers us to commence understanding *Being and Time* as his protrepticus<sup>14</sup> is an invitation to philosophise or to start thinking, out of need and desire, because we want to know who we are (Schalow & Denker, 2010). So, who am I? A person, son, brother, husband, father, friend, principal, early researcher and it would seem, a philosopher, to name a few. The list is not conclusive but has a certain mineness about it. Understanding Dasein in the light of mineness helps me to illuminate the meanings uncovered within principals' stories of well-being experiences.

### ***The uncovering of meanings***

Heidegger argued that meanings are "not something primarily expressed as a word or a preposition" (Zhang, 2018, p. 35). Meanings are "that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself" and "structured by fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception, is the 'upon which' of the project in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 142, emphasis included in original text). To explain this quote further, meanings, in their simplest form, are a matter of humans making sense of the world through their relationship with encountered objects that are ready-to-hand or

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<sup>13</sup> **Mineness:** The fact that each and every instance of *there-being* belongs to a specific, concretely realised, individual (Foulds, 2012, p. 151, emphasis included in original text). Dasein is never abstract or shared - it is unique to a person. A person's existence, freedom and death are exclusively their own.

<sup>14</sup> **Protrepticus** is a philosophical work by Aristotle that encouraged the young to study philosophy (Johnson & Hutchinson, 2005).



present-to-hand. Furthermore, it includes articulation that makes the world intelligible (Foulds, 2012). Upon reflection of Heidegger's words, it becomes clearer that meanings are created from lived experiences within context. This paragraph is significant for my inquiry. Searching for the phenomenon of well-being within principals' experiences and then writing descriptions and interpreting meanings as they became available, helped me to be attuned to ontic and ontological understandings with the help of Heideggerian existential analysis<sup>15</sup>.

Within Heidegger's analysis of meanings, birth (natality), marriage (peak events) and death (mortality), are at the forefront of his thinking (Warnes, 2012) with its threefold positions of "self-emergent nature, the memory of the Gods and the Being of truth", revealing the essence of being (p. 4). This *Being and Time* account of Dasein's everyday thrownness of being-in-the-world, from "Being-born [geburtigkeit]" and "habituality [gewohnlichkeit]", to the time-play-spaces of the inhabital, immemorial and gift that is given as essential nature, allows original memory and primordial spirit to develop (p. 4). Moreover, Heidegger's ontological perspective extends beyond the anthropological to include "primordial knowing-fulfilments of temporality and historicity" that are unfolded as the gifts of being (p. 5). Henceforth, this inquiry extends beyond the study of humankind to include our most primary or fundamental foundations of our being (a meaningful past, present and future) which forms the *horizon* for our existence (Foulds, 2012). To understand the phenomenon of well-being within principals' experiences, I must also consider the simultaneous union of being towards the past (as thrown), future (as projective), and present (as fallen) and interpret meanings accordingly (Foulds, 2012).

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<sup>15</sup> **Existential analysis:** The analysis of *existence*. Such analysis is *ontological*, and spells out the meaningful structures [forms] of existence common to persons without specific reference to any one individual's way of life in particular (Foulds, 2012, pp. 141-142, emphasis included in original text).

Being ‘*in*’ principalship is a continuing process of presently exploring possibilities for the future, whilst understanding ourselves from past experiences.

It is possible, then, that phenomenology can penetrate deep into well-being experiences (considering temporality and historicity) to uncover the essence of the phenomenon. In doing so, the researcher hopes to illuminate meanings and reveal the phenomenon in its own original form as experienced by individuals (Kafle, 2011) and in this inquiry, principals. To this end, I embrace hermeneutic phenomenology as a means of describing and interpreting principals’ well-being experiences.

### **Embracing hermeneutic phenomenology / ontology**

Developed from the writings of Martin Heidegger, hermeneutic phenomenology is a deeply reflective research method that focuses on getting beneath the subjective experiences of individuals and groups, in the search for “the genuine objective nature of things as realised by an individual” (Kafle, 2011, p. 186). It is an endeavour on my part as researcher, to reveal the phenomenon of interest within principals’ experiences, as described in their stories, understanding that “description itself is an interpretative process” (Kafle, 2011, p. 187). van Manen (2014) goes as far as to say “hermeneutic or interpretative - descriptive phenomenology” are one in the same (p. 26). Furthermore, Heidegger (1962) equates hermeneutic phenomenology to (existential) ontology stating: “*Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible*” (p. 60, emphasis added).

*Being and Time* in essence, is a fundamental ontology that focuses on our [Dasein’s] way to be and simultaneously, our way to understand our own being, our being-in-the world, and our being-in-the-world-with-others (King, 2001). Heidegger (1962) elaborates on this threefold ontological unity by discussing Dasein’s being as care [sorge], the worldishness of the world and the reality of being with others. As such, research into the “being of other

beings”, is closely associated with the “analysis of Dasein’s own existence (self)” and of the world (King, 2001, p. 26). Heidegger (1962) argues,

Thus, to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity - the inquirer - transparent in his [sic] own Being. The very asking of this question is an entity’s mode of Being; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about - namely, Being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term “Dasein” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 27).

What Heidegger is emphasising in these words is Dasein’s understanding of its own being in the world as precisely what gives it access to other beings affording them the chance to show themselves in what and how they are (King, 2001). My pre-reflective understanding of what it means to be ‘*in*’ principalship has positioned me within this inquiry into the phenomenon of well-being because of my own lived experiences as a principal. It is this understanding of being that opened up a quest of “drawing something forgotten into visibility” (Harman, 2011, p. 92) from within the stories of principals, including my own. Human Dasein is held out amidst beings as they conceal and reveal themselves (p. 92). By way of my relationship with Heideggerian thinking and questioning of being, the phenomenon of well-being came to reveal itself and I was able to recognise my focus of inquiry with some clarity.

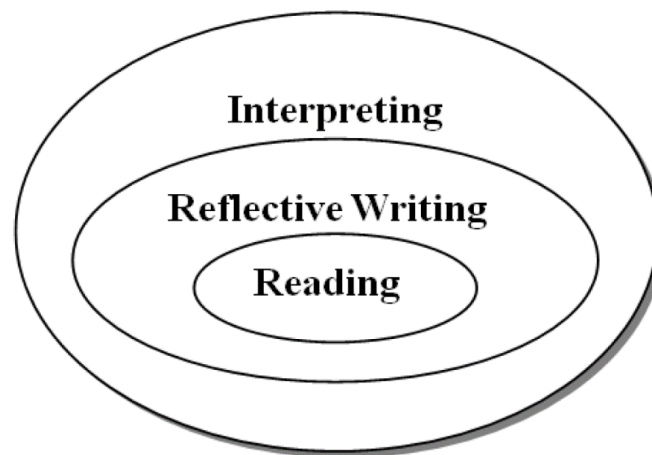
So why embrace hermeneutics over other schools of phenomenology such as transcendental phenomenology? To understand this question, let us take a quick pause to consider this other way of thinking phenomenologically. Conceptualised by Husserl (1982) in the early 1900s, transcendental phenomenology is the original form of phenomenological philosophy. It is “built around the idea of reduction” (Kafle, 2011, p. 186) and refers to suspending personal pre-conceptions [bracketing or *epoche*] whilst endeavouring to reach the core or essence of a phenomenon through a “state of pure consciousness” (Kafle, 2011, p. 186). To search for my phenomenon of interest using a Husserlian approach, would be to deny my lived experiences as a principal, to avoid any

reference to context [my lifeworld] where meanings belong, and to silence personal opinions and pre-understandings. "...the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possess, are *made known* to Dasein's understanding of Being" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 62, emphasis added). Therefore, *reducing* this ontological inquiry to an almost scientific approach, in many ways, would mean to deny my humanity within the inquiry - well-being, after all, is a very human phenomenon. It is for this reason that I did not go searching for the phenomenon of well-being using Husserl's transcendental phenomenological approach. My search relies on acknowledging the lifeworld of principals as a platform to describe and interpret their everyday experiences as they are perceived by the consciousness of each individual principal (Kafle, 2011). To achieve this level of attunement within my own being towards the essence of the phenomenon of well-being, I circle around hermeneutics (ontology) to guide this inquiry.

### ***Hermeneutic circling***

The hermeneutic circle is possibly the most resonating idea in hermeneutic phenomenology and is applied by researchers to search for my phenomenon of interest (Smith et al., 2009). It consists of interpreting data (principals' stories) in a distinctly spiralling and repeated approach of reading, reflective and descriptive writing and interpretation (Kafle, 2011). As the researcher moves back and forth through this process of reading, writing and interpreting, it helps them to think, contemplate and shift their relationship with the findings in the search for meanings.

**Figure 8: The hermeneutic circle – version 1**



(Kafle, 2011, p. 195)

Other approaches to qualitative research are inclined to be described in a linear, systematic method, however with hermeneutic circling, the process is iterative<sup>16</sup> (Smith et al., 2009). As we circle through the process, we assign meanings to our reading, writing and interpretations at various entry points of the research, which lends itself to “different perspectives on the part - whole coherence of the text” (p. 28).

I elaborate on this brief description of hermeneutic circling in the following chapter on methodology. In chapter five, I discuss how I use hermeneutic circling to bring life to my inquiry and develop my understanding of principals’ well-being experiences, by going around the hermeneutic circle repeatedly. In progressing this chapter, I now consider the differences and inter-relatedness of ontic-ontological approaches to research. In doing so, I arrive at the realisation that for this inquiry to be meaningful and relevant towards accessing covered up meanings of well-being experiences, there is only one approach that provides clarity of understanding.

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<sup>16</sup> **Iterative:** Doing something repeatedly with the view to improving it.

### *Ontological verses Ontic*

For my inquiry to progress, it is important to clarify the distinction between ontological [ontologisch] and ontic [ontisch] inquiry (Heidegger, 1962). “Ontological inquiry is concerned primarily with *Being*; ontical inquiry is concerned primarily with *entities* and the facts about them” (p. 31, emphasis added). Heidegger argues that ontological inquiries are “more primordial”<sup>17</sup> than ontical inquiries, by being about the foundations on which ontical inquiries stand (p. 31). All ontical research such as scientific inquiry, presupposes an ontology (Foulds, 2012). For instance, an ontical description of well-being, includes a taken-for-granted ontology that attributes meanings to our being, of what it means to be well or unwell. This ontological understanding of well-being is primordial (prior) to the ontic inquiry (scientific research) because without it, it would render the study incomplete - unable to distinguish between kinds of entities such as a common cold, influenza or coronavirus (Foulds, 2012). Heidegger argues *it* illuminates the research. “Ontological research itself, when properly understood, gives to the question of Being an ontological priority which goes beyond mere resumption of a venerable tradition and advancement with a problem that has hitherto been opaque” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 31).

Taking into consideration this comparison between being (ontological meanings) and beings (ontic meanings), I quickly concluded that this inquiry would focus on the well-being experiences of principals using an ontological lens. My reasoning is twofold. Firstly, no one is playing in this research space, perhaps because it is too challenging. It is an exercise in trusting oneself with the uncertainty of the findings. A “way or attitude of approaching a phenomenon” (van Manen, 2014, p. 26) and not a “method for answering or discovering or drawing determined conclusions” (p. 29). To fully inquire about the well-

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<sup>17</sup> **Primordial:** most primary or fundamental (Foulds, 2012, p. 157). Knowing how to go about the most basic of tasks such as eating (primordial to Dasein - there-being) rather than having theoretical knowledge of nutrition.

being of others, you must first understand your own being, and this can be confronting. Secondly, contemporary research prefers to prioritise ontic knowledge (facts, figures, causal effects) without any real understanding of the meanings associated with principal well-being and as such, the research has not necessarily progressed nor have things changed for principals.

Heideggerian ontological notions helped me to uncover and understand the existence of the phenomenon of well-being within the lifeworld of principals. I was able to explore what being a principal means, rather than explaining this meaning in relation to the causal nature of well-being experiences by dichotomising it and comparing it with something.

### ***The language of phenomenology***

Heidegger gave an address in 1950, simply titled “Language” (Harman, 2011, p. 143). In this speech, he suggested that “humans always speak” even when we say, hear, or read nothing, and even as we sleep (p. 143). What Heidegger is suggesting here is that “humans must always interpret and articulate the world in some specific way, even when no words are used” (p. 143). It is through the *essence of language* that meanings become illuminated within phenomenology (Polt, 2013, emphasis added). By language, Heidegger broadly uses the term to include poetry, art, music, a social or religious institution and so forth, anything that brings meanings to light in an articulated way (Coltman, 1998; Kockelmans, 1980). It is through our articulation of an experience such as art, for example, *this drawing really speaks to me*, that language promotes critical reflection and the uncovering of the complexity and elusiveness of our primary relation to being (Allen, 2007).

Within this hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry, I bring a number of language conventions (poetry, images, drawings, photographs, electronic graphics, extracts from music, religious scripture and other materials) to my descriptions and interpretations, all

the while, writing to understand. van Manen (2006) extends this approach by stating “one does not write primarily for being understood; one writes for having understood being” (p. 721). Therefore, as I was contemplating principals’ stories, I occasionally used an image or some poetry to develop my understanding of well-being experiences, when words were not enough. This creative and interpretative approach to writing shifted my consciousness to one of an internal awareness of essential meanings (Heidegger, 1996; Lahman et al., 2010; Shillingsburg, 1997). Heidegger (1968) reflects on thought and language, claiming that poetry has its own “standing in itself,” and must be seen as “its own truth” in the “beauty” of its very word (p. 19). His words resonated with me throughout this inquiry, as a way of holding open disguised meanings of well-being experiences, long enough for essential understandings to emerge through alternative language conventions and thus, developing an awareness, attunement and a “phenomenological nod”<sup>18</sup> (van Manen, 1990, p. 27) to my phenomenon of interest.

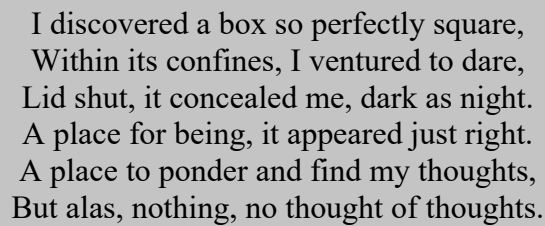
Accordingly, across this inquiry, I have come to recognise the limitations of philosophical and academic language in conveying, ontologically rich descriptions and interpretations of the meaning of being [a principal] (Giles, 2008; Spier, 2016). The application of a range of language conventions helped me find my thoughts and record these as deeper understandings, by means of thinking outside of the box. This is conveyed in the following poem and graphic.

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<sup>18</sup> **Phenomenological nod:** A way of indicating that a good phenomenological description is something that we can nod to, recognising it as an experience that we have had or could have had (van Manen, 1990, p. 27).



## Thinking outside the box



I discovered a box so perfectly square,  
Within its confines, I ventured to dare,  
Lid shut, it concealed me, dark as night.  
A place for being, it appeared just right.  
A place to ponder and find my thoughts,  
But alas, nothing, no thought of thoughts.

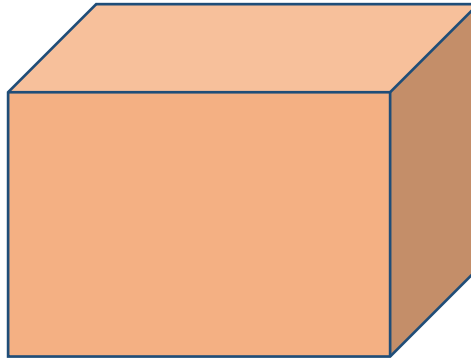
Nothing illuminated inside my head,  
For within the box, my thoughts were dead,  
I could hear no sounds, and saw no sights.  
Dasein's being was alone and devoid of light.  
There were no understandings, no ontological meanings.  
I was limited in capacity, reduced to scientific gleanings.  
I yearned for enlightenment and interpretation of conceptual blocks.  
Then proceeded to do my thinking and writing outside of the box.

(Poem: S. Kanowski, October 2020)

Poetry, as well as music, photographs and art, helped me to think outside the box and as such, essential meanings and wonder began to grow. Analysing principals' stories using hermeneutic circling, in many ways, is like reading or writing a poem. You read or write the poem and then re-read and re-write it repeatedly until it unearths meanings and provides glimpses of a phenomenon of interest. It pointed me towards something beyond taken-for-granted assumptions, to an enlightened hyperbolic dimension, whereby meanings dwell in expressive language. Reading and writing poetry has enabled me to see beyond the words on the page, beyond the finite structure of rhythm and rhyme, to a place where thoughts can germinate by participating in "the hinterland" of language (Williams, 2011, pp. 9-10).

In the following graphic - the box, I illustrate Wittgenstein's (1980) argument as it relates to the Necker Cube (Zwicky, 2014), that of thinking outside of the box.

**Figure 9: Image of a box**



Now that the aspect dawns, can I separate the visual experience from a thought-experience? If you separate them, the drawing of the aspect seems to vanish. I think it could also be put this way: Astonishment is essential to a change aspect. And astonishment is thinking (Wittgenstein, as cited by Zwicky, 2014, p. 1).

Wittgenstein's words resonate with me in that "astonishment is essential to a change of aspect" (as cited by Tyler, 2011, p. xvii). His words prompt us to think outside of the box and understand that essential meanings cannot be contained to the limited thinking from within the box. Using a variety of language conventions transcendentally opens more than one aspect of thinking (Wittgenstein et al., 1980), a viewing of the phenomenon from a range of perspectives which is fundamental for this inquiry. In doing so, I move beyond subjective descriptions and recordings of biographical information of individual experiences [the ontic] towards the "deeper goal" of unearthing the "nature of this phenomenon" (well-being) "as an essentially human experience" [the ontological] (van Manen, 1990, p. 62).

### **Concluding thoughts**

The philosophical foundations discussed in this chapter, form a thread that is woven throughout this inquiry and guides the ontological thinking within the pages of the chapters that follow. From the inception, I set out on an endeavour (using the metaphor of *search*) to uncover taken-for-granted meanings of the phenomenon of well-being, as experienced by principals, a phenomenon of immense personal interest (van Manen, 1990). This

phenomenon has formed a significant part of my everyday lived experiences in educational leadership - one of which I continue to speculate on and theorise about. I would hasten to add that well-being is something I live with every day (Alexandrova, 2017; D'alessandro et al., 2020; Tomlinson & Kelly, 2013).

This quest is guided by an immense passion, whereby my own presuppositions and immediate awareness of the phenomenon of interest is disclosed, developed and attuned through philosophical literature towards ontological understandings and the uncovering of lived experiences. van Manen (1990) argues:

Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence - in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which the reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 36).

The challenge is to “describe what is given to us in immediate experience without being obstructed by pre-conceptions and theoretical notions” (van Manen, 1990, p. 184). The search for the phenomenon of well-being within principal’s stories is fundamental to this inquiry, and not my own prejudices nor other’s philosophical theories. This withdrawing from rational control and certainty is essential to the development of ontological understandings (M. Heidegger, 1996). By approaching the inquiry reflexively, by, “being-lost-in-thought” (Heidegger, 1992 as cited by Smythe et.al. 2008, p.1392) new meanings emerge about the phenomenon of well-being - bringing “something forgotten into visibility” (Harman, 2011, p. 92).

To this end, my inquiry adopts hermeneutic [ontological] phenomenology as a means of providing an analytical structure, supportive of in-depth analysis and the development of primordial understandings into meanings. Like Heidegger, I was drawn to a research approach - a method of description and interpretation that explored our way-of-being in terms of our everyday human life being embedded with meaning (Blattner, 2006).

Heidegger (1962) argues

The phenomenology of Dasein is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting. But to the extent that by uncovering the meaning of Being and the basic structures of Dasein in general we may exhibit the horizon for any further ontological study of those entities which do not have the character of Dasein, this hermeneutic also becomes a ‘hermeneutic’ in the sense of working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends (Heidegger, 1962, p. 62, emphasis included in original text).

Reflecting on Heidegger’s words reinforces that hermeneutic research such as this, is led by the nature of the phenomenon [well-being] under investigation. Heidegger’s approach towards understanding being, does not reduce ontology to scientific terms, methods or explanations, but rather engages the researcher in “playful thinking”, descriptions and interpretations that are more compelling than the rigors of science (Heidegger, 1982, p. 29). It is a more engaging approach where the orientation towards the phenomenon of interest is the matter of central concern and its reporting rhetoric demands for a unique richness of language that extends beyond standard or academic vernacular (Kafle, 2011; Lahman et al., 2010).

In the following chapter, I progress hermeneutic philosophical understandings by showing a practical application of the hermeneutic approach - it is the *how* chapter of this inquiry. The philosophical notions outlined in this chapter are brought to life in the challenge of doing this inquiry (Smythe, 2011). Chapter five *Methodology* illustrates how I applied various phenomenologist’s (particularly Heidegger’s) theories and understandings to this hermeneutic inquiry, with the sole aim of searching for and shedding light on the essential meanings of well-being experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship.

## 5 Chapter 5: Methodology

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### Introduction

van Manen (1990, p. 27) specifies that “methodology is the theory behind the method, including the study of what method one should follow and why.” He adds the Greek *hodos* means “way” and methodology means “logos (study) of the method (way).” Therefore, methodology means “pursuit of knowledge” and a certain mode of inquiry is implied in the notion “method.” (pp. 27-28).

Phenomenology is a quest or search, “a showing that goes beyond the ‘theory’ or ‘method’ (procedure) of how to do research to illuminate the process as it is lived, that is, to uncover the ontology” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1390). This means it is occupied with our everyday way-of-being. Moreover, it studies what it means to be human. To be human, Heidegger (1962) argues, is to be in-the-midst of constant flux. Therefore, approaching this inquiry with a degree of fluidity and not being bound to a procedure that stipulates an order or process, but opens up possibilities and a specific ontological knowing that can only come in the moment of discovery, is the path taken for this inquiry (Harman, 2011; Heidegger, 1968; Smythe et al., 2008; van Manen, 1990).

Within this chapter, I discuss and apply the philosophical understandings outlined in chapter four and reveal how these understandings have shaped my research journey. As an early phenomenological researcher, my aim is to be attuned to the appearances of my phenomenon of interest - a turning towards my phenomenon (Gadamer, 1994) as part of a contemplative research process where meanings unfold and are uncovered (Ironsides, 2005). The essential body of work within this journey is the search for the phenomenon of well-being within principals’ stories, their lived experiences. To aid the search, insights

from phenomenological researchers such as Heidegger and Gadamer are considered, and information derived from philosophical literature is incorporated to shape understandings (van Manen, 1990).

An important note of distinction here is that the literature is not driving this inquiry, the phenomenon unearthed from within the lived experiences (data) is doing the driving. As I read my research participants' narratives, I am seeking to remain attuned to what the stories are pointing me towards in terms of emergent themes. From this launch pad, I form descriptions and then read and apply the philosophical notions to help describe interpretations. It is an opportunity to explore the essential meanings of well-being beyond rational reasoning, to unearth the seriousness, significance and complexity of the phenomenon (that is, what are we not seeing or reading that horrifies us) in an ontological way.

As I progress through the chapter, I share my research process, *what I did* to uncover phenomenological notions and to shed light on the phenomenon of well-being. Each sub-heading is relevant to my process and outlines important thinking along the way from the commencement of this phenomenological inquiry to gathering and working with research participants' stories. This leads to a crescendo whereby I discuss the relevance of phenomenological research as a lived experience for me as early researcher and school principal.

## **Commencing phenomenological research**

### ***Background***

The context for this inquiry focuses attention on Queensland principals and their lived experiences whilst on the job in schools. The schools range from small, one teacher primary campuses, whereby the principal is also the teacher, to large secondary colleges

whereby the school leader is titled an executive principal and performs the role of a chief executive officer (CEO). I have limited the inquiry to eleven Queensland principals and placed myself within the stories because I too have well-being experiences of being ‘in’ principalship. In “using personal experiences as a starting point” van Manen (1990) argues, “the phenomenologist knows that one’s own experiences are also possible experiences of others” (p. 54).

The well-being experiences of principals is something that has intrigued and concerned me for the previous thirty-two years of being ‘in’ principalship. From my early beginnings in a remote, one teacher school, where feelings of isolation emerged, to being principal of a large preparatory to year twelve campus, and feeling overwhelmed at the complexity of leading a primary / secondary school, the phenomenon of well-being made numerous appearances along the way. Whilst pursuing this inquiry, I remained in full-time employment as principal of a preparatory to year ten school, with the exception of taking long service leave to attend to finalising this thesis writing.

During this doctoral study, I addressed two national conferences (*Australian Primary Principals’ Association (APPA)* 2017 and the *Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)* 2018) and wrote two journal articles, one for the *Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP)* and the other for the *Queensland State P-10/12 School Administrators’ Association* in 2017. Both conference presentations and journal articles concentrated on principals’ well-being experiences.

My interest and focus as principal and early researcher, remains fixed on exploring the phenomenon of well-being as a matter of extreme importance with the view to contributing something meaningful to future generations of principals.

### *Engaging with the phenomenological community*

In 2017 when I was framing this study into a research proposal, I made significant connections with members of the phenomenological research community.

I engaged in several email communications back and forth with Professor Max van Manen, whose prominent works include *Phenomenology of Practice* (2014) and *Researching Lived Experience* (1990). We discussed well-being as a phenomenon of interest. His insights led me to connect with Dr Rodney Evans (a former student of Professor van Manen) and author of *The Pedagogic Principal* (2016). Whilst Dr Evan's research primarily concentrated on principals forming pedagogical learnings from their lived experiences, we were able to discuss the possible sighting of the phenomenon of well-being appearing within his research participants' stories.

Finally, as my inquiry progressed, I made contact with Dr Kenton Engel, author of *Recovering the Moment* (2018), a peer reviewed article featured in the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*. Dr Engel and I discussed the temporality of the festival as it instantiates a uniquely hermeneutic conception of the moment. He also directed me towards a reading *Gadamer's Hermeneutic Contributions to a Theory of Time-Consciousness* (Vessey, 2007) that was extremely helpful in shaping my thinking.

These interactions with members of the phenomenological research community contributed to my understanding and application of phenomenology. Each intentional collaboration acted as a signpost for my interpretative writing and influenced the structure of my discussion chapters as I searched for the essential meanings of my phenomenon of interest.



### *The complex nature of phenomenological research*

Approaching this inquiry using a phenomenological lens has been extremely challenging largely in part to the “lack of specificity of the methodology” (Giles, 2008, p. 83) and the deep, interpretative space in which the researcher dwells. There is no predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that “rule-govern” this research project (van Manen, 1990, p. 29). However, as outlined in this chapter, it follows a certain scholarly method: a process of reflection that involves reading, talking, writing, re-reading, re-talking and re-writing, whereby essential meanings are discovered (not fixed) in response to the research question. Heidegger (1962) likens phenomenological reflection to a path through the woods leading towards a clearing, whereby the phenomenon of interest is shown, revealed or clarified in its essential nature. In the words of Smythe et al., (2008):

The process of doing hermeneutic phenomenology is represented as a journey of ‘thinking’ in which researchers are caught up in a cycle of reading-writing-dialogue - which spirals outwards. Through such disciplined and committed engagement insights ‘come’. The researcher is always open to questions, and to following a felt-sense of what needs to happen next. However, it is not a process of ‘do whatever you like’ but rather a very attentive attunement to ‘thinking’ and listening to how the texts speak (Smythe, 2011, p. 1389, emphasis included in original text).

The interpretative space for me became a disciplined commitment to thinking outside-of-the-box and beyond the ontic descriptions of scientific inquiry. Being this way within the inquiry, whilst simultaneously leading a school as principal, was to work paradoxically. My need for certainty, judgement, control and results as principal, needed to be ‘parked’ as researcher, to allow phenomenological analysis to occur in a transformative way, a completely different way-of-working. Naturally, the two worlds (logical verses existential) converged - my default position as a school principal (results orientated) and my emerging position as a phenomenological researcher (ontologically orientated). The growing requirement was to bring these separate worlds together. I found myself re-drafting my writing many times (hermeneutic circling) to capture the essence of well-being in an

ontological way. van Manen (1990) argues that “hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. Research and writing are aspects of the one process” (p. 7). My research process became an obsession, a search for my phenomenon of interest and preparedness to question and remain “open to trusting the resonance of [ontological] understanding that ‘comes’ without expecting answers that are declared ‘truth’ for all time” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1389, emphasis included in original text).

### ***Journaling the process***

I was encouraged to keep a journal of this research journey. I chose to do this both electronically and by using a hand-written jotting pad so that I could capture any thoughts that found me, regardless of my surroundings. My journal contains an array of materials including minutes from meetings with supervisors, notes from professional learning experiences, records of conversations, quotations, drafts of poetry, photographs and images, abstracts from research papers, reflections on my phenomenon of interest and general contemplative ramblings.

My research journal has become extremely important to me when constructing chapters for this thesis. I was able to access information and ideas previously discussed, researched and recorded, to inform my interpretative / scholarly writing. Furthermore, I had a living record that tracked each milestone of the Doctor of Philosophy, which I could readily retrieve when required.

### ***Ethics approval***

This Doctor of Philosophy research titled *Being ‘In’ Principals’hip: An ontological inquiry of well-being experiences* received **Final Ethics Approval** as an interpretative phenomenological project by the Chair of the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University, South Australia. The project was approved on

the basis of information I supplied in the application, which included the research question “What is the ontological nature of well-being for school principals?” Final approval was granted on 2 February 2018 and extends to 30 April 2022 (Project number **7864** Appendix A).

## **Collecting stories**

In January 2018, my two supervisors interviewed me. The interview was more like a conversation than a list of prepared questions. There was an openness to the transaction with no direct mention of well-being and yet upon analysis, this phenomenon was present within most of my stories. This experience provided me with a valuable exemplar in how to conduct a hermeneutic interview, focusing on descriptions of lived experiences and staying attuned to the tendency of research participants to include explanations, opinions and theories, which are unhelpful. van Manen (1990) cautions that when conducting conversational interviews, the researcher needs to remain “disciplined by the fundamental [research] question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place” (p. 66). Therefore, learning and applying interview techniques, was an important first step in keeping my questions open to invite conversation, whilst disciplined to focus attention on personal life stories.

The stories I shared in this initial interview would launch my research process and my own approach to interviewing - my *way-of-being* in the interview. I noted the interview techniques used: the subtle prompts and probing questions that provoked or extended conversation towards the sharing of lived experiences. Moreover, the gentle and respectful redirection of the conversation when I got off-track or commenced theorising in an epistemological way, demonstrated to me that the interview was much more than a conversation, it had purpose, rigor and scholarship. The exercise of being interviewed by my supervisors, prior to me launching into my six interview questions (Appendix H) was

rudimentary to my understanding of this qualitative research method. It encouraged me to think more deeply about my own well-being experiences and recognise presuppositions I held about the phenomenon, ahead of working with my research participants and *their* stories.

Heidegger (1962) acknowledges that presuppositions and assumptions about the phenomenon of interest underlies the existential-ontological research process by stressing

But not only is this Fact one that must not be denied and we are forced to grant; it must be conceived in its positive necessity, in terms of the object which we have taken as the theme of our investigation. Philosophy will never seek to deny its ‘presuppositions’, but neither may it merely admit them. It conceives them, and unfolds with more and more penetration both the presupposition themselves and that for which they are presuppositions. The methodical considerations now demanded of us will have this very function (Heidegger, 1962, p. 358, emphasis included in original text).

Heidegger’s words are a prompt reminder to be attentive to my presuppositions and personal experiences, ensuring that they do not influence my research participants and their stories, but rather provide me with “clues for orientating myself towards the phenomenon [of well-being] and to other stages of this [hermeneutic] phenomenological research” (van Manen, 1990, p. 57, additional information added in brackets). When I commenced this inquiry, I reviewed the literature by recognised “specialists” in the field of principal well-being to discover that it mostly contained a body of scientific knowledge, quantitative data and advice, without necessarily addressing the existential question of the meaning of well-being to school leaders. Whilst practically persuasive, this could have predisposed me to interpreting the nature of the phenomenon of well-being, without any further understandings. Likewise, during these initial stages of the inquiry, I had preconceived ideas of what I would find within participants’ stories, which on reflection could have closed doors to the possibilities of exposing concealed and unique characteristics of the phenomenon.

I declare some of my initial presuppositions in chapter one to illustrate, in experiential terms, the use of “personal experience as a starting point” for this inquiry (van Manen, 1990, p. 54). One example highlighted the issue of a trusting relationship between a principal and their immediate supervisor and my pre-assumptions that this was an impossibility due to my own lived experience. The story described a health issue and the need for time off work to access treatment, being viewed by my supervisor as “poor performance”. I noted within this narrative, that the experience had a profound impact on the guardedness I now hold towards divulging certain information with my supervisor, out of fear of repercussions. As an early phenomenological researcher, I recognise that my own lived “experiences are also the possible experiences of others” (p. 54), however, this said, I needed to exercise due diligence when interviewing others about *their* experiences.

Disclosing my stories in a reflective way is to reveal my way-of-being-in-the-world. Positioning myself within the inquiry reveals my way-of-being-in-the-world-with-others. By others, I mean the intimate engagement with possibilities that manifest in *my* lifeworld, notwithstanding other principals being ready-at-hand to share *their* stories that are relevant to their existence.

### ***Finding storytellers: selection, recruitment and ethics***

The research participants who contributed their stories towards this inquiry, were all sourced from Queensland schools. They are all currently or formerly school principals working in state education. Many were known to me through professional networks and associations and some were approached or referred to me during the research process in a recruitment method known as *snowballing* (McIntyre, 2005; Smith et al., 2009). Principals I had known and approached, referred me to other principals they had identified as having stories of well-being to share. Furthermore, in 2017, following my APPA conference presentation, I was approached by several principals who were most interested in sharing

their stories. And so, I started collating a list of potential research participants to discover that I had an abundance of willing principals yearning to tell their story.

All participants received two initial letters and then additional communication prior to and following the interview process:

1. Letter of introduction (Appendix B).
2. Letter of support from Mr Brian O'Neill, the President of the *Queensland State P-10/12 School Administrators' Association*. This association made initial formal contact with prospective participants, to fulfil commitments I made in my Ethics Approval Application and to avoid the perception of coercion - given my position within the Department of Education (DoE). (Appendix C).
3. Participant information sheet outlining all aspects of the research project (Appendix D).
4. Participant consent form - written informed consent was obtained prior to the interview (Appendix E).
5. Post-interview letter to participants to thank them for their contribution (Appendix G).

From my original list of twenty-five potential participants, I shortlisted fourteen principals to ensure diversity based on the following:

- Female to male ratio.
- Beginning and experienced principals (age range 25-63 years).
- Small school and large school principals.
- Principals working in urban, regional, rural and remote locations.
- Principals working in primary, secondary and multi-sector schools.
- The inclusion of principals from multi-cultural backgrounds.

I stopped interviewing after participant numbered eleven, as no new information was forthcoming and the 148 stories I had collected, I thought were sufficient to inform this inquiry. Each participant took on a pseudonym at the point of transcribing the interview to de-identify them and their school. The names featured throughout this inquiry reflect these fictitious names (Appendix J).

Crafted stories<sup>19</sup> were then written following a strong reading of the transcripts to reconstruct the interview dialogue into concise descriptions. The crafted stories (testimonies of experiences), were forwarded to the research participant for review. (See Appendix I for an example of a crafted story). Research participants checked the crafted stories for accuracy and then returned a signed copy to me for possible inclusion in this inquiry. Two of my research participants made minor edits. These were in relation to a name change, to de-identify her further due to the nature of her stories and the other was in relation to the chronology of events. All eleven research participants were keen for their stories to be heard and used in this inquiry. “Story tellers anticipate that their story is valued, and in sharing their story (in a way that makes sense to them) give it to the researcher to shed light on their experience and reveal the phenomenon of interest” (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 7).

A list of assigned pseudonyms, individual recordings and transcripts were kept separate from the raw data. Paper copies of interviews, crafted stories, descriptions and interpretations were stored in a separate locked filing cabinet in my locked office. Only my supervisors, transcriber (Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement - Transcription Service) and me, know the identity of my research participants through the signed consent forms and transcripts.

### ***Harvesting the stories in dialogue***

In qualitative research and in particular, hermeneutic phenomenology, the interview is often characterised as a “conversation with a purpose” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). The

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<sup>19</sup> **Crafted stories:** “Deriving narratives from transcripts” (Caelli, 2001, p. 276). Research participants’ stories are *crafted* from interview conversations in such a way that they speak to us directly - they have meaning and uncover nuances about the phenomenon of interest. “They reveal ways of being, thinking and acting in the world that shed light on what is known but covered over, or forgotten” (Crowther, Ironside, Spence, & Smythe, 2017, p. 6). They are stories crafted in such a way that they are a provocative and robust means of evoking shared pathic responses (van Manen, 2014).

original emphasis of the conversation is on description and detail, rather than meanings. The meanings of lived experiences in this inquiry, emerge following the completion of the crafted stories. van Manen (1990) describes the gathering of stories as “borrow[ing] other people’s experiences” in order to “come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience” (p. 62). Essentially, I am *borrowing* principals’ lived experiences that orientated me towards exploring what is the nature of the phenomenon of well-being?

Eight research participants were interviewed once over the phone and three were interviewed face-to-face. The interviews lasted 45-75 minutes and the variation in time was determined by the conversational flow. I did not allow the constraints of time to interrupt the story telling. The nine telephone conversations were necessary due to the geographical locations of participants in relation to me. Interviews were recorded to negate the need for note taking and to promote authentic two-way conversation. My role was primarily to enable conversation through open-ended interview questions (Appendix H: Interview guide questions) and I provided prompts where necessary to engage with the participant and *their* stories. Each participant knew ahead of the interview, my phenomenon of interest - due to prior conversations, conference presentations, journal articles, and by reading the information sheet provided. It is significant to note that during the interview, the word *well-being* was rarely mentioned in the questions, as I was interested in gathering lived experience materials (stories, anecdotes and recollection of experiences) and not theories, explanations or justifications. The main aim of the interview was to “enter into the participant’s lifeworld” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 66) in a relational manner and to avoid a potentially unhelpful conversation about well-being. The “data” of phenomenological research are human experiences (van Manen, 1990, p. 63). Therefore, I was very deliberate in my interview approach to gather descriptions of lived-experiences, stories of actual involvements of being ‘*in*’ principalship.



Open-ended interview questions, enabled participants to fall into conversation about their experiences and to elaborate on the points from their stories that provided rich descriptions. I rarely received a response that was static or a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. To illustrate this point, my first question was, “What is it like being a principal / school leader?” It is near impossible to respond to this question (short of ‘good’ or ‘bad’) without elaborating and providing a description. All eleven principals interviewed, were very appreciative to be given the opportunity to passionately reflect on this question. It established a rapport and set the conversational tone of the interview by providing each participant with the opportunity to interact with me by sharing his or her lived experiences in a comfortable and safe forum.

The second question was deliberately multi-pronged to prompt participants to think about a range of contributing factors which may have contributed both positively and negatively to their experience of being ‘*in*’ principalship. All participants chose to respond to all four sub-sections of the question. My role was to guide participants through these questions through “listening as an active co-participant” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 64). The question reads: can you tell me a time when you:

- A. were on top of your game;
- B. felt overwhelmed;
- C. were playing the game to stay afloat;
- D. sensed a change in administration - ‘thrown’ by a change in policy / expectations from the education department

This question was perhaps the most provocative in terms of drawing out the antecedent nature of being ‘*in*’ principalship as experienced by each individual. My intent here was to understand if the essence of each participant’s experiences involved themes relating to a pattern in the way-of-being-in-the-world-together as principals, a pointing towards something that is truly horrifying and embodied by all. Queensland principals work under similar conditions, as such, it was likely that their shared experiences would be similar and

pointing me towards certain philosophical themes. These were realised as the interviews progressed.

This line of questioning attempted to address the overarching research question: What is the ontological nature of well-being for school principals? The first two questions were helpful in opening up conversations and reflecting on descriptions of genuine lived-experiences. The final four questions were treated as an *unpacking* of specific experiences that explored the nature of well-being (both positively and negatively) and to point towards some overall themes and patterns. Principals interviewed were determined to share numerous stories in response to these questions and from within these stories, the task of uncovering meanings in relation to the phenomenon of well-being, became the focus for this inquiry.

My task as interviewer was to actively listen and immerse myself in the conversation - relationally *being-alongside-others* as they described their stories. “We have a responsibility to listen” (Lawn, 2006, p. 24). Furthermore, this enabled the prompts for additional information to flow organically thus ensuring that the descriptions were rich with detail (van Manen, 2016). Gadamer (2013) comments,

What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors’ subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he [sic] does not know. In dialogue spoken language - in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point - performs the communication of meaning that, with the respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2013, p. 376).

We say that we ‘conduct’ a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partners. Thus, a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it (Gadamer, 2013, p. 401, emphasis included in original text).

Whilst falling into conversation with my research participants, I was forever mindful to suspend all judgement nor embellish *their* stories with my own.

A professional transcriber (Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement Transcription Service) quickly and efficiently typed up each recorded interview and shared this with me using *Dropbox*<sup>20</sup>. I used the transcribed interview to review the conversation and to identify and highlight any salient descriptions that related to my phenomenon of interest. During this strong reading and re-reading of the transcripts, I commenced crafting stories using the research participants' own phrases to honour individualism, capture descriptions and meanings and enhance my understanding. Unnecessary or repeated words (including whole sentences) were omitted from the crafted story to capture the essence of the narrative in a concise way (Appendix I: An example of an extract from an interview transcript, followed by a crafted story derived from this extract). I also inserted [conjunctions, words and phrases] using square brackets to include unspoken meanings, conceptual ties and additional information for reader comprehension.

When crafting the stories, I gave each one a title for easy identification. Story titles were assigned based on thematic contemplations such as *the fragility of leadership* or simply by name, for example *Jake* (Appendix J: Story titles). The crafted stories were sent to my research participants for review and their approval to use within the inquiry.

### ***Gathering sufficient stories***

I initially interviewed seven principals however, upon receiving the interview transcriptions back from my transcriber, crafting stories, forming descriptions interpretations and developing emerging pre-ontological themes, it appeared necessary to interview four other participants for additional information. I repeated the process with these additional four participants, completing interviews, transcripts, crafted stories, descriptions and interpretations. I ended up with 148 crafted stories to inform this inquiry

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<sup>20</sup> **Dropbox**: a file hosting service operated by the American company Dropbox, Inc., which offers cloud storage, file synchronization, personal cloud, and client software.

and decided, along with my supervisors, that I had enough data to proceed. I organised folders, which contained all information pertaining to my research participants: their transcripts and crafted stories and my descriptions, interpretations and emerging themes. These became an important data source [reference tool] for discussions at supervision meetings<sup>21</sup> and follow up teleconference or Zoom meetings, around the next piece of work. At this stage in the research process, I ceased the gathering of further stories to enable me to concentrate on phenomenological interpretation and thematic contemplations that would inform my discussion chapters.

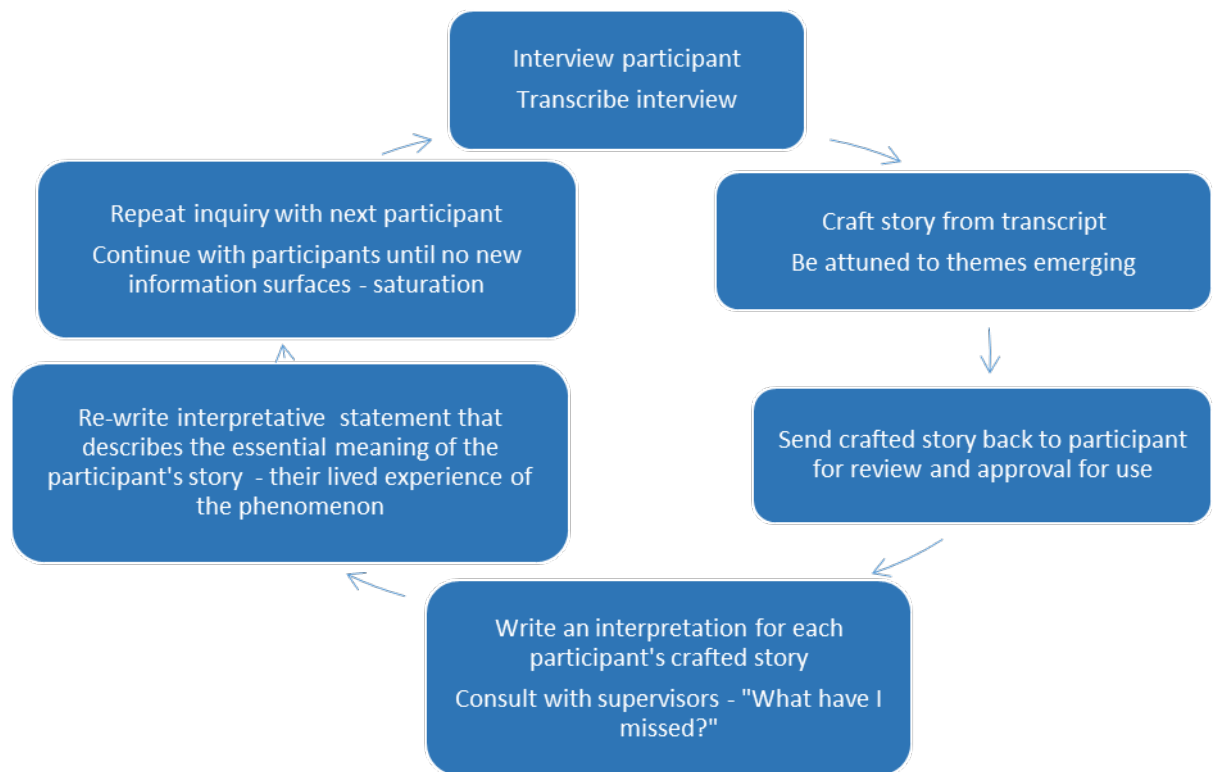
### **Working with the stories**

In working with the stories, I mostly used the transcripts in the crafting process - returning to the interview recording on occasion to clarify certain words or the modality in which they were delivered. I approached the stories as an hermeneutic phenomenological researcher, using the *Hermeneutic Circle* as a method to search for the essential meanings of my phenomenon under inquiry (Caelli, 2001).

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<sup>21</sup> To proactively address the tyranny of distance between Queensland and South Australia, I organised with my supervisors to meet face-to-face at Flinders University each April and September - with 2020 being the exception due to COVID-19 restrictions. This complemented our monthly teleconference or Zoom meetings and enabled me to stay connected with the university throughout my PhD journey.

**Figure 10: The Hermeneutic Circle – version 2**



(Giles, 2008; Giles & Alderson, 2008)

After reflecting on the transcripts, I came up with ideas for each crafted story and mapped these on a concept diagram<sup>22</sup>. From these ideas (story titles), I wrote a description of the crafted story and then an un-researched (my own) interpretation of what the story was showing me about the phenomenon of well-being (Appendix K: Working with the stories).

### ***Working the text: Initial interpretative writing***

A very deliberate strategy used in the initial interpretative writing process was to suspend researching the literature for philosophical understandings. This approach enabled me as researcher to concentrate on the meanings surfacing from within each story and to enable the phenomenon of well-being to lead the way in an attuned and uninhibited way. Harman (2011) comments that phenomenologists such as Heidegger were interested in a “new kind

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<sup>22</sup> A **concept map** or diagram depicts relationships between concepts - for the purpose of this research, between the research participant and their crafted stories.

of theorizing that somehow points to the facticity of life without reducing it to a set of surface qualities” (p. 27). As such, suspending the inclusion of philosophical notions and researched-based methodology was important in this early phase of interpretative writing to make way for personal interpretation. “One must live the experience, drawing from who one is and is becoming. The choice to ‘do it this way’ is known as resonance, attunement, and a sense of ‘goodness of fit’” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1391, emphasis included in original text).

During this early phase of interpretative writing, I soon realised upon reflection that I was highlighting the ontic well-being experiences of principals. I was describing what was there - concrete, specific realities of principals’ experiences as opposed to the nature of being ‘*in*’ principalship. Given this is essentially an ontological study, some re-thinking and re-writing was required. The shift away from ontic descriptions to signifying deeper underlying structures of a principal’s way-of-being, essentially writing in an ontological way, took time and discipline. Feedback loops and regular meetings with my supervisors were crucial to my development and understanding. The sharing of ideas and the interplay of ontological understandings, allowed me to gain momentum with my descriptions and interpretations and slowly and carefully, my writing started to take shape. I was now writing about the meanings emerging from the participants’ stories using my own pre-understandings, phronesis and experiences as a reference point.

To research in a Heideggerian hermeneutical manner is to recognise that phronesis is the predominant mode of being:

All genuine phronesis is absorbed into action - action as ineluctable movement that a person can never step out of ... we can never freeze our assets, nor is there ever a period of respite in which we might prepare ourselves for action as if that were something in which we were not already involved. Or, as Gadamer puts it: we are always already in the situation of having to act (Dunne, 1997, p. 268 as cited by Smythe, et al., 2008, p. 1391).

As a school principal and early researcher studying other principals’ ways-of-being, I was actively invested in this inquiry. For eighteen months, I immersed myself in my

interpretative writing. My mode of being became a metaphoric search for hidden meanings and possible sightings of my phenomenon of interest, which were gradually revealed within participants' stories. This required an attunement to dwell with possibilities and writing and re-writing my interpretations, which led to further lateral thinking about additional possibilities and meanings being unearthed (hermeneutic circling). My interpretations were eventually being written to reflect a hermeneutic writing style.

Once I had completed writing my participants' crafted stories, descriptions and interpretations, I re-read these to understand more fully my participants' well-being experiences and to organised them into both descriptive and interpretative themes. Using a simple numbering code and the story title to reference my participants' narratives, for example, interview five - story fifteen, became *5.15: Good and bad years*, I was able to plot in table form, common emerging themes. Appendices J, K and L show an overview of my crafted stories. From these stories, commonalities of lived experiences were identified (see Appendix L) and I was able to generate my *big themes* which would form the basis for the four discussion chapters.

When considering stories such as *5.15: Good and bad years*, and other stories embodying these sentiments, descriptive themes honed in on the relational complexity of working with school stakeholders (students, parents and staff) and lamenting over who was wielding the stake. Progressing this thinking further towards interpretation, themes such as relational sensibilities, being-in-the-world-with-others, authenticity (authentic there-being) and inauthentic ways-of-being, and concernful-relationships, surfaced to capture ontologically how *being* was to be arranged in a meaningful way. Organising the stories in such a way helped me to maintain vigilance over my own pre-assumptions, to safeguard against positively or negatively manipulating my interpretations, whilst not dispelling them

altogether. In fact, my stories are included alongside other principals' lived experiences.

As a researcher of hermeneutic phenomenology,

We are never outside our research, never planning ahead with full confidence that we know precisely how it will be; rather we are always already in the midst of the research, confronting the possibilities, making choices, wrestling with the restlessness of possibilities (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1391).

Following each participant's crafted stories, descriptions and interpretations, my supervisors and I met to discuss insights, the quality of my writing (both scholarly and interpretative), debate findings and deliberate over the appearance of the phenomenon of well-being and essential meanings. This generally occurred following work on each research participant's set of stories and prior to commencing the process over again with the next participant's stories (typically one to two months apart).

To progress this inquiry, I stopped investigating well-being as an individual matter and instead, considered it to be something plural, a matter for community. This changed the course of my inquiry and I came to understand how easily a 'blame culture' can develop, when we approach well-being from an individual perspective - let us 'fix' the individual principal, even though the systemic culture may be causing the damage.

I continually returned to my writing and embedded this shared contemplative thinking and conversation throughout forming descriptions and interpretations. At times, I deferred my writing to concentrate on the possible meanings generated from participants' stories and to just sit with the data in a reflective way. Early mornings, school holidays and weekends away from the day-to-day happenings of my work as principal, afforded a quiet, uninterrupted space to contemplate essential meanings. Heidegger's (1996) suggestion that *thoughts find you*, resonated with me during these times away from school. In addition, like Heidegger, I actively looked for an immersion experience away from all distractions where thoughts could germinate, and so retreated to the seclusion of a friend's beach house at Port Willunga South Australia to think and write (see figure 7). In essence, ceasing my



writing to make room for contemplative thinking decreased my propensity for rash and naïve conclusions. It also allowed me to “let go of all the clutter and focus on ... one clear insight. Thinking [became] energised, eager to be set free in writing” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1394).

### ***Engaging with philosophical understandings***

Using the hermeneutic circle as a research method, took me eighteen months to engage with and write up my participants’ stories (data collection and analysis). My pre-philosophical understandings were mapped out in table form (Appendix L) to show how common themes such as trust, concerns with relationships, playing the game and so forth were generated from my participants’ stories and clustered together.

I was now in a position to engage with the philosophical understandings of prominent phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Gadamer. Once I had established the themes in which to group my participants’ stories, I read to investigate specific philosophical notions such as thrownness, care [sorge], circumspection and the festival, to ascertain if these ontological understandings resonated with the stories I had collected. This part of the research process was a deeply contemplative time. I carefully reflected on a range of philosophical notions that would enlighten my participants’ stories and describe emerging themes - many of which were unhelpful in my interpretations. I used a hermeneutic spiralling process of reading, thinking, re-reading, re-thinking and eventually applying these new learnings to my interpretations of my participant’ stories. I eventually located numerous philosophical notions that were helpful in ontologically describing and interpreting my participants’ stories and the essential themes that would form the basis of my discussion chapters.

It is important to note that my interpretations of the stories led the way forward to finding philosophical notions that would illuminate this initial analysis, and not the other way around. My aim was to highlight principals' lived experiences illuminated by interpretative writing, which in turn are ontologically described further by philosophical text and written in such a compelling way as to assert that this is how we should be thinking about principal well-being. I never attempted to validate the philosophical concepts, but moreover, tried to say what is it in the philosophical readings that are relevant and useful to show hidden meanings within the experiences noted in the stories. Importantly, phenomena cannot be captured, we cannot control them. In this thesis, I am taking a stance to it: a thrownness stance, a care stance, a stance that considers circumspection and the impromptu happenings within a festival in which principals find themselves as a way-of-being. This is what I believe is showing between the lines of the script on being 'in' principalship.

***Working the text: Interpretative writing towards essential meanings of the well-being experiences of principals.***

Researching the philosophical notions of Heidegger and Gadamer to help ontologically explain the essential meanings associated with my phenomenon of interest was like reading Shakespeare or studying Latin. I found myself sitting with a philosophical notion or concept such as *Dasein* for several days before it started making sense. I re-read my crafted stories, descriptions and interpretations, with the purpose of finding the most appropriate phenomenological themes to help explain the collective experiences of my research participants in an ontological way. As I was reading philosophical literature, I hung onto the ontological perspective that well-being is not a noun, not a thing, not an object, and is not a steady state phenomenologically. Well-being cannot be defined; however, it can be ontologically described.

Identifying patterns in participants' stories and emergent themes through a process Smith et al., (2009) refer to as *abstraction*, led me towards developing a sense of what they call a "super-ordinate theme" (p. 96). I arrived at my four super-ordinate themes, by grouping like-with-like and developing a new name for the cluster that would capture the essence of the emerging themes. For example, there were a series of emergent themes within the participants' stories which were pointing me towards descriptions of authentic and inauthentic behaviour, relational sensibilities, feeling trapped, risk aversion, the question of trust, playing the game and so on. I grouped my crafted stories according to these relating themes and assigned the super-ordinate theme of 'thrownness'. The super-ordinate, phenomenologically orientated theme, emerges at a higher level as a result of clustering crafted stories containing similar ontic themes.

Using the insights of Heidegger and Gadamer, I was able to *marry* my crafted stories, descriptions and interpretations in shaping four phenomenologically orientated themes: being thrown, care, circumspection and festival. Each of these concepts suitably captured the essence of the phenomenon of well-being in an ontological way and thus became the themes for the discussion chapters of this inquiry. In Appendix K: Working with the stories, I analysed Kath's story titled *Married to the job* using Heidegger's notion of care [sorge]. As the title suggests, Kath found herself in a position whereby she prioritised her job as school leader over her relationship with her husband. My interpretation, what the story was showing me about the phenomenon of well-being, focused on a way-of-being whereby work intensification consumes principals to the point that other entities in their life such as relationships and their own health and well-being are not mattering. Self-care and the care of others and relationships did not seem to be mattering. (As an aside, this was a common theme within the majority of my research participants' stories). Kath's experience resulted in a marriage breakup, which was a particularly devastating experience that impacted heavily on her well-being. However, I pick up the story during a time of

hope and care, when Kath has commenced a relationship with a new partner. It would appear that previous relational experiences have influenced her current way-of-being towards care. Using this philosophical notion to illuminate Kath's story, I submit the following ontological explanation:

**Kath' story: Married to the job**

Being-in-the-world could be interpreted as being-at-home-in-the-world and knowing one's way around while going about one's practical affairs, day after day. The expression 'being-at-home' - a sense of home-ness when well-being is strong (a Heideggerian notion) has entered Kath's lifeworld. She has found hope and a pattern for a healthy and doable work / home / life balance whereby she cares about and attends to her relationship with her new partner (Interview 2: Story 5).

When thinking and writing about this lived experience, I deliberately tried to include Kath's narrative, alongside my own thoughts, which in turn were captured by Heidegger's notion of care. I repeated this process for all of my research participants' stories prior to uncovering similar thematic aspects. Not surprisingly, all of my research participants had stories to share in relation to the theme of care. "Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through" (van Manen, 1990, p. 90).

The task-at-hand was to decide on which of the 148 stories I had collated best captured and illuminated the phenomenon of well-being within the thematic contemplation of care. "Themes have phenomenological power when they allow us to proceed with phenomenological descriptions" (van Manen, 1990, p. 90). Furthermore "A good theme formation somehow seems to touch the core of the notion we are trying to understand" (p. 88). As such, I concentrated on stories whereby the thematic phrase of 'care-full relationships are always mattering' which incidentally became the title of chapter seven, served "to point at, to allude to or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon" of well-being (p. 92). I settled for six stories which embodied the essence of care-full (and careful)

relationships and which seemed to be saying something about and pointing to my phenomenon of interest.

These stories were titled:

1. A leisure / work now relationship.
2. Home-full Brendan.
3. Collegial support - or lack thereof.
4. Being alongside a mentor.
5. Aspiring leaders.
6. Ken: an inspiring leader.

This approach was used in the formation of all four discussion chapters - with the crafted stories, descriptions and initial interpretations (the data) pointing me towards an Heideggerian or Gadamerian philosophical notion and essential theme. The theme was never “stripped out of the data” but rather, the theme is a way forward to “show what we see or hear in a text” (Symthe et al., 2008, p. 11 as cited by Giles, 2008, p. 94).

Having determined further potential ontological themes emanating from participants’ stories through the process of abstraction, I returned to the stories to explore additional disclosed experiences that possibly reflected one of these themes. I discovered that I had an abundance of stories that embodied each theme, which was not unexpected, as the stories determined the themes in the first instance.

Within the inclusion of the theme of thrownness, I describe a principal’s way-of-being-in-the-world as being thrown and how the thrownness of being ‘*in*’ principalship contributes to the experiential nature of ‘being’ an educational leader. Essential meanings of thrownness and its connection with the phenomenon of well-being are explored through the nine stories that make up chapter six. Likewise, in contemplating the theme of circumspection, as featured in chapter eight, I played with the possibility that being in circumspect fore-sight - our looking around and observing important objects in our everyday living, may have significant connections to principal well-being in that they can

choose to pay attention (or not) to entities around them. I pondered over seven stories that revealed possibilities for hidden ontological understandings such as “everyday taking-care of things is guided by a circumspect fore-sight” (King, 2001, p. 86). In the final theme of being drawn along by a festival of relationships, I explore the impromptu ‘happenings’ in which we find ourselves and that which open up to unexpected experiences. This theme was represented strongly within my participants’ stories. The festival, in relation to principal’s well-being experiences - especially those triggered by an unforeseen situation in which principals find themselves; be it a pleasant interpersonal exchange or something more confronting, is contemplated through six stories in chapter nine.

## **Meeting the challenge of interpretative writing**

### ***Writing to understand***

To *do* research in a phenomenological sense is already and immediately and always a *bringing to speech* of something. And this thoughtfully bringing to speech is commonly a writing activity (van Manen, 1990, p. 32 emphasis included in original text).

Using this logic, van Manen is arguing that research is writing. Writing towards understanding is the prime task of phenomenological research with one significant distinction, in phenomenology we do not write to be understood, we write our understandings. “One does not write primarily for being understood, one writes for having understood being” (van Manen, 2006, p. 721). Phenomenologists tend to avoid epistemological (to know) concerns and focus on ontological (to be) concerns regarding phenomena such as well-being and the ways in which we find ourselves being-in-the-world (Vagle, 2016).

“Qualitative writing that addresses itself to the phenomenality of phenomena of everyday life is surprisingly difficult. The more reflective the process becomes, the more it seems to falter and fail” (van Manen, 2014, p. 19). This quote resonated with me as an early

researcher. As I quickly discovered, working in the interpretative thinking and writing space was personally challenging and required a contemplative, open and patient temperament as well as self-discipline (honest yet gentle and serious yet playful disposition) whereby the rulebook was being written alongside the research. In his book *Writing Phenomenology* (2002) van Manen acknowledges that interpretative writing is painful, difficult and disorientating and associates it to writing in the dark. Yet from within this darkness, essential ontological meanings start to emerge, alongside the brief appearance of the phenomenon of interest, making the wait worthwhile and the writing of our understandings much more insightful.

### ***The limitations of language***

van Manen (1990) discusses the silences that occur when conducting phenomenological research. He refers to two types of silences, “literal and epistemological silence” (pp. 112-113). In relation to the phenomenological writing process, the literal silences - the unsaid, are used to effect and are as important as words on the page. The epistemological silences however, occur when we cannot quite communicate in words what we are thinking. During my interpretative writing sessions, the constraints of language at times did not afford me the words to capture the essence of my phenomenon of interest, I was silenced. Polanyi (1969) explains that we possess a tacit form of knowing whereby we sense “that we know more than we can tell” (pp. 159-207). This paradoxical way of working with the limitations of language invites us as researchers to explore innovative and creative ways to write our understandings. van Manen (1990) reinforces this understanding by stating, “beyond the range of our ordinary speaking and writing there is a rich domain of the unspeakable that constantly beckons us” (p. 113).

Finding a literary construct beyond the range of ordinary speaking and writing, came to me in the form of poetry, photography, quotations, lyrics from songs, art, comic strips and

digital images. Poetry is a way of holding open essential meanings for ongoing hermeneutic circling and explanation (Crotty, 1998; Kafle, 2011). In this way, through the language of poetry, I was able to reflect upon the phenomenon of well-being both ontologically and creatively. It then became “imported” into my “phenomenological writing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 115).

## **Living the experience of phenomenological research**

### ***Research as a lived experience***

Placing myself within the inquiry from the outset became a natural movement. I was researching principals’ well-being experiences whilst working as a principal. “In drawing up personal descriptions of lived experiences, the phenomenologist knows that one’s own experiences are also possible experiences of others” (van Manen, 1990, p. 54). Heidegger, in a letter to former student and lover, Elisabeth Blockmann in May 1919, talks of “graced moments” as experiences in which “we feel ourselves belonging immediately to the direction in which we live” (As cited by Crowe, 2006, p. 30). Whilst working with my research participants’ stories, I soon realised that many of their lived experiences, their *graced moments*, meshed with my own. In many ways, this phenomenological research project became a lived experience for me as researcher (Giles, 2007) as I became embroiled in the data from both a personal and professional perspective. Gadamer (2013) argues that our own pre-understandings are “properly brought into play” within phenomenological research and it is “only by given full play is it able to experience the other’s claim to truth and make possible for him [sic] to have full play himself” (p. 310).

My research question, *what is the ontological nature of well-being for school principals?* is something I have pondered over and been deeply interested in; “inter-esse, to be or stand in the midst of something” (van Manen, 1990, p. 43), for the duration of my career in the



principalship. Leading the way, my research question opened up and kept open possibilities (Gadamer, 2013) for ongoing analysis and interpretation via hermeneutic circling. van Manen (1990) notes that “even minor phenomenological research projects require that we not simply raise a question and possibly soon drop it again, but rather that we “live” this question, that we “become” this question (p. 43). He extends this thinking by stating, “is this not the meaning of research: to question something by going back again and again to the things themselves until that which is put to question begins to reveal something of its essential nature?” (p. 43). When developing descriptions and interpretations of participants’ stories, I found myself returning to, living and becoming my research question - it flowed through my every being as an unconscious phenomenological researcher’s quality assurance signpost.

My research question directed all interpretative writing and I found myself treating both as a lived experience. I embraced a “*phenomenological attitude*” towards my inquiry and daily work as a principal (van Manen, 1990, p. 45, emphasis added).

My daily work as a principal included being part of a stakeholder reference group (discussed in chapter 3) that focused on the development of a blueprint where four categories for approaching principal health and well-being were conceptualised. I was hopeful when I saw that one of the categories considered a well-being culture. This category was later omitted from the final, published strategy, in favour of more measurable actions - framed as pillars. I was writing my discussion chapter on care-full relationships are always mattering at the time, attuned to my participants’ and my own lived experiences pointing to the philosophical notion of care [*sorge*]. I struggled with the psychologising of the strategy and its focus on professionally developing the principal and their performance. I became aware that I was living my research and it was influencing how I thought about principal well-being in a transformative and informed way. The embodiment of care was

absent from the strategy, something that concerned me greatly regarding our organisation's modus operandi. Furthermore, I began to reflect on the establishment of a well-being culture proactively negating the need for other measurable strategies. A principal's lived experiences, whereby they live and work in a school environment where the culture is positive and conducive to growth, provokes wondering about the phenomenon of well-being and the potential for change.

My experience with the development of the *Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy* reinforced to me that my inquiry had become a manifestation of my very being, a captivating and passionate pursuit. My own experiences of well-being and its relationship to the thematic contemplations selected for this inquiry, helped me as researcher to orientate myself to the appearance of the phenomenon emerging from within the participants' lived experiences. "Experience is really a form of understanding ... it is primarily self-understanding, an understanding of the self and for the self" (Lawn, 2006, p. 64). Furthermore, describing the lived experiences of my research participants and of my own, primarily became the 'raw' data on which to base my interpretations. It was not until I started immersing myself in the stories, and those stories pointing me towards philosophical notions, that taken-for-granted meanings and understandings started surfacing. I stayed *open to new possibilities* within the inquiry as a lived experience (Gadamer, 2013). This way-of-being reflects Heidegger's (1962) existential-ontological notion "fore-structure of understanding" (p. 192) whereby a truth surfaces from concealment, and with this comes essential meanings and a sense of understanding. "That is the quest, simply to be who we are and to let thinking come, as it comes; to trust that ideas will call, to lose ourselves in the play, to listen to our moods, to respond to the resonance of insights" (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1396).

*Chancing upon the unexpected: illuminating core essences as experienced by principals*

My connection to the lifeworld of the research participants and their rich stories of well-being experiences, orientated me towards greater understanding of the essential meanings of my phenomenon of interest. All eleven participants shared stories pertaining to deteriorating health and well-being. Some were stories about managing diseases such as cancer or diabetes, while others were about surviving a heart or severe anxiety attacks. Many were horrific experiences and for some principals, difficult to share. One such experience that was shared quite unexpectedly, came from a senior principal who portrayed the image of a high-performing, infallible school leader. This principal was hospitalised following an extremely stressful day at school. She passed out and was rushed by ambulance to hospital, whereby she underwent numerous tests, including those for a heart attack. Whilst this story portrays an extreme incident, I was prompted to re-evaluate shared understandings and taken-for-granted meanings of well-being experiences for *all* principals - even those perceived as highly capable. A “no taken-for-granted attitude is permitted during the hermeneutic analysis” (Kafle, 2011, p. 196). The phenomenon of well-being can unexpectedly be encountered by anyone, anytime and without warning. It does not choose a type. I was reminded of this when writing my data chapters, particularly those regarding being thrown, circumspection and the impromptu nature of the festival. Being ‘*in*’ principalship is to be constantly in a relationship with these ontological notions. It is a relentless characteristic of our everyday being-in-the-world and a “shared sense of belonging to the insight that seems to go beyond what is said, yet is felt and understood as ‘being true’. This is different from proffering answers. It is rather a calling-to-consideration” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1396, emphasis included in original text).

## **Trustworthiness and rigour**

Qualitative researchers rely implicitly or explicitly on a variety of understandings and corresponding types of validity in the process of describing, interpreting, and explaining phenomena of interest (Maxwell, 1992, p. 279).

Maxwell's *Framework for Trustworthiness* is of significance because this inquiry is conducted in such a rigorous way that future readers of the published work can assume that the research design is sound and the cited conclusions are trustworthy (O'Toole, 2003). In contemplation of the criteria for trustworthiness for phenomenological research, my inquiry includes transparency of the reflexive processes of interpretation and accountability. Documented research materials (transcripts, drafts of crafted stories, descriptions, interpretations, and my research journal) have been meticulously organised for easy reference and to demonstrate transparency of practice. These documents have been safely secured as part of rigorous and accountable approach.

As an early researcher using the methodology of phenomenology and method of hermeneutic phenomenology, I fully understand that my research commitment requires rigour and trustworthiness, to honour the high standards set by Phenomenologists. Phenomenology requires the researcher to be self-aware and to explicitly and reflexively engage in their own subjectivity (Patton, 2002). In phenomenological research, the researcher brings his or her own understandings and experiences to the research project.

Interpretation requires an object - something else - something other. The existence of something else and other, makes interpretation a necessary, inevitable and inescapable activity and in addition, to speak meaningfully of the possibility of misinterpretation (Evans, 2016, pp. 28-30).

Within the study, I recognise and hold open my prejudices to begin the process of separating out "what belongs to the researcher rather than the researched" (Finlay, 2011, p. 25). This is not to imply that I suspend all personal opinion, but rather get beneath my subjective experiences and immerse myself in the stories (the data) to find the nature of my phenomenon of interest as realised by my research participants (Kafle, 2011). Smythe et al.

(2008) argue that, “the trustworthiness of a study is known first by researchers themselves, who test out their thinking by engaging in everyday conversations with those who share the interest or who are living the phenomenon” (p. 1396).

Given this study is primarily a conversational form of inquiry, that is, engaging with principals in dialogue on the day-to-day problems and situations they encounter in their work lives, it sets out to reveal important insights into the phenomenon of well-being. When principals begin to reflect on their everyday lives as school leaders, the reflections often take the form of stories. Principals “become storytellers” (Evans, 2016, p. 27). As a researcher, I occasionally interrupted the stories with probing and clarifying questions and comments inserted into the text, which is an important element in the total scheme of research, as it builds a conceptual bridge between raw stories and strong, hermeneutic readings. Moreover, my role as researcher is to actively listen to my research participants’ experiences “in a manner that seeks to understand the meaning of what is said, and to respond with thinking that provokes and engages” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1396).

To ensure transparency, an interpretative crafted story of the principal’s transcript, as well as an accurate (word for word) transcript has been included within this published dissertation (Appendix I). Principals’ narrative descriptions, crafted stories and interpretations were discussed reflectively with my supervisors, to determine their appropriateness for inclusion and to review the thoroughness of the interpretations and insights. When I am immersed in the data, I like to share my findings, descriptions and interpretations with trusted others, to validate, clarify or re-direct my thinking and to gain their learned input. This important part of the hermeneutic circling process, reaffirms that my inquiry is trustworthy when, as Smythe et al. (2008) phrases it, people say, “I’ve never thought about it like that before” or “you’ve put into words what I’ve always known but couldn’t say” (p. 1396).

Crucially, shared understandings of the phenomenon in the finished text or the resonance of others in what van Manen (1990, p. 27) refers to as the “phenomenological nod”, will provide a “hallmark of trustworthiness” (Smythe, et al, 2008, p. 1396). Resonating with “our sense of lived life ... [as] *a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience - is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience*” (van Manen, 1990, p. 27, emphasis included in original text).

### **Concluding thoughts**

This chapter summarises the ‘how’ of this inquiry, by outlining the hermeneutic phenomenological method (hermeneutic circling) used to investigate and hold open my research question of *what is the ontological nature of well-being for school principals*. My research question arose from a deep interest and “passion that calls, holds and takes one on a journey” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1398). It directed my attention away from ontic descriptions of what was there in relation to principals’ well-being experiences such as workload, confrontation and performance, towards ontological understandings of the nature of being ‘*in*’ principalship. This research path provoked thinking about notions such as angst, resoluteness, relational sensibilities, solicitude, being-in-the-world-together, circumspect fore-sight and so forth. All of these notions, alongside many others, feature in the interpretative discussion chapters that follow.

Whilst actively listening to my research participants’ stories, which were shared with me by principals from around Queensland, I began to realise that I was immersed in the inquiry as a lived experience. In dwelling with the stories (data), it became apparent that my own well-being experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship in Queensland were mirrored in many of the personal life stories of other principals. This awakening to the phenomenological nature of well-being as something plural and not individual, prompted a quest to uncover shared understandings and taken-for-granted meanings of well-being

experiences. In placing myself within the inquiry, I was forever mindful of my own presuppositions. Whilst not bracketing<sup>23</sup> them completely, I was careful to honour my participants' stories, ever hopeful that they would point me towards new understandings.

New understandings did emerge when I turned towards illuminating the ontological meanings from within the shadows of *our* stories that were "pointing to and pointing out" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 68) my phenomenon of interest. Working hermeneutically, the crafted stories, descriptions and interpretations, enhanced by the philosophical understandings of Heidegger and Gadamer, started to provide a trail of breadcrumbs that led to greater understandings and new possibilities for being-in-the-world. The phenomenon of well-being appeared from within my thinking and writing. "Writing hermeneutically is thinking. Research is thinking" (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1397). As van Manen (1990) puts it, I was starting to develop a "phenomenological nod" (p. 27) towards my descriptions and hermeneutic interpretations. Ongoing conversations with my supervisors and other phenomenological researchers about what was appearing from within the inquiry has been fundamentally important to further maintaining the 'nod'.

Descriptions and hermeneutic interpretations sometimes required other literary conventions such as poetry and images to capture the essence of the phenomenon and to hold it open for further interpretation. Crafting phenomenological research by writing poetically "strikes a wondering, contemplative tone that resists finality and rigidity" (Vagle, 2016, p. 57). Likewise, art-based methodological tools such as photographs and drawings can convey meanings of a lived experience, when language-centered methods lack capacity. Photographs, poetry and drawings are used throughout this phenomenological study to convey salient meanings through observation and interpretation. For example, the

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<sup>23</sup> **Bracketing:** A term developed by Husserl (1982) used in some phenomenological investigations, whereby the researcher's lived experiences and judgements are suspended to focus on the analysis of experiences in an objective way.

photograph and poem below communicates visually and interpretatively how I approached this inquiry which included early mornings before work (4am-6am); no one in my home awake other than my Cornish Rex and me; a quiet place to find my thoughts. Gadamer (2013) argues that “the picture contains an indissoluble connection with its world” (p. 144), my world being that of an early researcher who embraced early mornings for study.

**Figure 11: Finding thoughts with my study companion**



(Photo: Kanowski, October 2020)

### **Ode to hermeneutic descriptions and interpretations**

I sat at my desk in silent contemplation  
My mind pondering thoughts in reflective agitation  
When all at once from within a crafted story  
My phenomenon of interest appeared in all its glory  
A description of a lived experience validated my thinking  
Followed by vibrational interpretation that was in essence - interlinking  
From there a splash of Heidegger and a pinch of Gadamer  
The ontological nature of being ‘in’ principalship began to appear.

(Poem: S. Kanowski, January 2020)



The ontological nature of well-being is expressed in four phenomenological themes that emerged from my participants' stories and informed the interpretative discussion chapters that follow. Thematic contemplations were realised and worked within the hermeneutic circle process of reading, writing, thinking, re-reading, re-writing and re-thinking until ontological interpretations surfaced. Collectively, participants' stories fell into four themes that communicate our:

- lifeworld in relation to our everyday way-of-being as thrownness in the world - the basis of chapter six;
- world inhabited by everyday care that is mattering - the basis of chapter seven;
- going about our practical business and looking at the world around us circumspectively - the basis of chapter eight;
- impromptu and temporal nature of being drawn along by a festival of relationships - the basis of chapter nine

In the following chapter, I explore the philosophical notion of thrownness - our way of existing in the world in which Dasein is already thrown (King, 2001). When we think about thrownness, Heidegger (1962) argues, we are not implying an action such as a ball being thrown or a person physically thrown. Thrownness is an existential<sup>24</sup> notion which is part of our very existence, in other words, our way-of-being. "Dasein exists as a thrown entity" (p. 376). "A factically (facticity, thrownness) existing and falling away from himself [sic]to the things he meets within his world" (King, 2001, p. 37). Existence and thrownness are therefore interpreted as our way of being-in-the-world.

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<sup>24</sup> **Existential**: common structures or logic of existence [living the life of a person in the world and over time] (Foulds, 2012, p. 13).

## 6 Chapter 6: Our everyday way-of-being as thrownness

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### Introductory thoughts

Being ‘*in*’ principalship in the landscape of a contemporary school environment is to be always, already, in a relationship with *thrownness*. It is a constant essence of our everyday being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962). Currently a principal’s narrative is consumed with performance measures, goal setting, the establishment and maintenance of school culture and the day-to-day interpersonal interactions with a diverse range of students, parents, staff, and the wider community. Principals, by the nature of their role description (as discussed in chapter three) are drawn into supportive and harmful encounters, which can see them vulnerable to being thrown<sup>25</sup> which impacts their well-being. Whilst this ontic description might seem like episodes of thrownness, our being in the world is ontologically thrown all the time (Heidegger, 1962).

Principals live out of their thrownness in the same way a musician experiences jazz - there is good jazz and there is bad jazz, there is jazz that improvises and jazz that is more scripted. The metaphor of jazz relates to the quality and sensitivity of authentic improvisation. When a principal is *thrown-into* a situation during their workday, their lived-experiences can be drawn upon (the scripted) whereby they instinctively enact their phronesis - practical wisdom and tacit knowing, which in context involves “relational sensibilities of attunement, tact, nous, resoluteness, improvisation, moral judgement, amongst others” (Giles, 2018, p. 56). For some principals such as those newly appointed to the position, they may lack the lived experiences in which to draw on and thus their thrownness, may result in potential harm.

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<sup>25</sup> **Being thrown** is not about any external being, beings, or force, placed on you. It is an existential concept that captures finding yourself landed with the task of existing as someone you did not choose to be in a world you did not choose or control (Foulds, 2012).

In this chapter, I reflect on stories that disclose how the *thrownness* towards being ‘in’ principalship contributes to the experiential nature of ‘being’ in educational leadership. I then analyse these stories through hermeneutic descriptions and by discussing the philosophical understandings of thrownness that I interpreted from the story. In conclusion, I contemplate that even though our state of ‘being’ may be predetermined and that we are thrown into an existence that is already rich in history and culture, there are possibilities for a future way-of-being.

I front-end this chapter with a personal story that embodies how our everyday being as thrownness can evolve. In doing so, I capture the uncertain nature of the phenomenon of well-being and its presence within the thrownness of lived experiences.

### ***A very COVID experience***

*I had flown from Brisbane to Adelaide in November of 2020 for research and to gain access to my university. Both Queensland and South Australia at the time of my departure were considered safe locations and had no active COVID-19 cases - their borders were open to each other. Two weeks into my time in Adelaide, traces of COVID-19 were detected on the north side in what was termed the ‘Parafield Cluster’. This occurred on Monday, 16 November 2020. I heard about it on the morning news that day and an hour later, was watching the Queensland Premier’s media statement broadcasting that the Queensland border would be closing to South Australia at 11:59pm that evening.*

*In a panic, I contacted my travel agent and together we tried to secure a flight back to Queensland prior to the border closing. We had a ten-hour window. Not surprisingly, all flights from Adelaide to Queensland were solidly booked out. My travel agent attempted to problem-solve by checking flights to other destinations such as Canberra, with a possible connecting flight into Queensland. All efforts proved fruitless. The earliest flight I could secure was on Wednesday, 18 November 2020. I felt trapped, isolated and helpless. I couldn’t concentrate on anything and was deeply upset at the unrealistic timeline set by our Premier.*

*Between that day and my departure two days later, I was in constant communication with the Department of Health in Queensland. They advised me to complete a Queensland Border Declaration Pass and together, using the list on the Department’s website, we determined that I was not staying in a COVID Hotspot and should be okay to enter Queensland on the Wednesday. How wrong we were! When I arrived in Brisbane Airport, the*

*Police Officer who processed my paperwork had a different list of COVID hotspots in South Australia, which included my place of residence. She informed me that I would be required to enter mandated government quarantine for 14 days at my own expense - \$2,800. My initial shock must have shown, because she invited me to sit down.*

*I was directed to a cordoned off area within the airport which was guarded by military personnel. There were 17 of us who were considered COVID risks. We were 'herded' through the airport, escorted by a dozen military personnel and police officers. After collecting our bags, we were then directed to a bus waiting outside the terminal. People were watching us from afar, ensuring that they didn't catch what we were supposedly carrying. I felt like a leper with some terribly disease, totally embarrassed and beyond upset. Thank God I was able to hide behind my mask. The bus left the airport under police escort - one car at the front and the other at the rear of the bus.*

*At the government-approved quarantine motel, a guard of 'dis-honour' lined the footpath between the bus and accommodation entrance. The expediency to which we were processed and escorted to our locked rooms was rapid. Once in my room, I collapsed on my bed and wept. The sense of thrownness and loneliness was overwhelming.*

*In the next 14 days, I tried to remain positive by keeping myself busy with a daily routine of study, exercise, good nutrition, reading, listening to music, playing games, watching television and drinking the occasional glass of wine. My family and friends, concerned for my welfare, sent care packages and made regular contact. This certainly helped. I looked forward to my daily 'fresh air breaks' which consisted of walking the perimeter of a sectioned off area of the motel carpark alongside others with whom I have struck a 'quarantine relationship'. A Police Officer would come to my room and escort me down and back up again for these breaks. My meals were delivered each day at 8:00am, 1:00pm and 7:00pm. They consisted of a set menu that arrived in a brown paper bag outside your door. The attendant would knock three times and we were instructed to count to ten prior to collecting our meal. The lock on the door enabled us to open it to collect our meal - we were not permitted in the hallway. In many ways I felt like a prisoner retrieving my rations. My choices had been taken away from me (even what I was to be eating each day) and because of our Premier's unwavering doggedness, I found myself compliantly adhering to the routines of this new reality, silenced and isolated.*

*I have written to the Premier's Department outlining my experience, informing her that I did everything possible to return to Queensland before the unrealistic 11:59pm deadline of Monday, 16 November 2020 and through no fault of my own, I was placed in quarantine. I have also contested the \$2,800 payment. One thing about quarantine is that you have plenty of time to think and to build a resolute stance.*

Recounting such an upsetting experience reminds me that life is unscripted. As organised as I believed I was, that is, carefully and thoroughly planning my trip to South Australia,

my own thrown projection towards uncertainty, something beyond my own control, affected my well-being in a most profound way.

Ness et al. (2014) argue that consciousness and acknowledgment of the unpredictability of Dasein is characterised as a state of *thrownness* in the present with all its associated frustrations, anguishes, and demands that one does not choose, such as social conventions, events or ties of relationships and duty. Feelings of angst surfaced throughout the abovementioned experience impacting on my ability to concentrate on anything other than my own thrownness.

My ability to think rationally was temporarily disconnected from reality. However, within this thrown experience, moments of resoluteness and nous surfaced. I exercised determination to return to Queensland, understanding the possible implications of remaining in South Australia for a further three weeks as originally planned. Once in quarantine, I was determined to treat the experience as an opportunity to grow and to remain optimistic.

*I met a Dutch lady named Gerri on my return flight from Adelaide to Brisbane. Gerri was flying to Adelaide at the time the Queensland Premier made the border closure announcement. She tried to remain in the Adelaide Airport, hoping for a return flight back to Queensland before the 11:59pm border closure. Like me, Gerri was unable to secure a flight on the Monday and had to wait until Wednesday. Gerri was placed into quarantine at the same government assigned motel as me. I saw her each day for our fresh air break and we supported each other throughout our 14 days of confinement.*

This resolute and solution-focused way-of-being, is a possible by-product of my upbringing and a condition of being 'in' principalship. Heidegger (1962) argues that thrownness symbolises the subjective or enigmatic nature of being-in-the-world [our there-being - Dasein] that connects the past with the present. It is conceivable then, that one's own existence is a manifestation of thrownness. This awareness of the past as one's blueprint not chosen, but at the same time, not entirely binding or determined, results in the

notion of thrownness - a kind of alienation that humans struggle against, and that leaves a contradictory opening for freedom. “The thrower of the project is thrown in their own throw” (Globus, 2019, p. 70). Rather than dwelling in the circumstances of my quarantine, I viewed it as an opening for uninterrupted engagement in reading, writing and thinking about this thesis, as well as connecting with people such as Gerri, who was sharing this experience.

This personal experience highlights the very essence of thrownness as it is lived. The rapid and unpredictable nature of coronavirus and its thrownness on our way-of-being is now a lived experience and one to which I can relate to when viewing news reports regarding the pandemic in Australia and across other parts of the world.

My lived experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship and being in the world with others, has aided my understandings and relationship with the idea of thrownness. This relationship helps to describe and interpret the experiences of the principal which I explore in the next section.

### **Stories, descriptions, interpretations**

The stories in the first section of this chapter illustrate the notion of thrownness as ‘how one is being’ in the lifeworld of a principal and its relationship to the phenomenon of well-being. In the second section, the stories point to the possibility that, whilst there is something very individual about our experience of thrownness and its impact on well-being, there are also experiences in common with others. The stories point to the possibility that for principals, the philosophical notion of *thrownness* and its relationship to the phenomenon of well-being are experienced by all as a community - something plural as in ‘how we are’. The final section contributes some further thinking around the notion of thrownness and explores the concept of attunement and its impact on our relationship with

others and ourselves. I explore personal and inter-personal attunement and the possibility of finding the phenomenon of well-being located within the fabric of our lived experiences.

### *Thrownness as ‘how one is’*

The principal in this first story shows us ‘how one is’ in the situated-ness of ‘being-thrown’ within the school context.

*Over the weekend, Jack, a special education student, had been kicked and quite severely bashed in a local park by Damien, another enrolled student. I had a conversation with region office as to where our duty of care started and ended, given the assault occurred on the weekend. This was played out very publicly in the papers. The decision I made in accordance to the rules and guidelines of our school’s responsible behaviour plan, was that Damien’s behaviour was serious enough to consider an exclusion, because of its violence and the fact that they were both known students at the school. The possibility of continuing threats to Jack if Damien returned to school were real. My decision was repealed and overturned by the region. I sought a lot of feedback and got wrapped up in policy nuances and counter advice which were quite awful at the time.*

*I felt totally unsupported, stressed and annoyed. My team and I had consulted around all of these things prior to making a considered decision to exclude Damien. It seemed to me that the region’s duty of care to liaise with central office had changed. There were really no policy changes that I could see to support this action; I read policies to the ‘enth’ degree. It was more a change in the direction that the department was travelling - more by osmosis floating down and it was all about keeping youth in schools etc. It was a data game! (Interview 7: Story 2).*

Elizabeth’s story shows us some of the characteristics of thrownness as it is played out in the situated-ness of a school context. Principals experience thrownness within their day-to-day work and at times this way-of-being can impact on their well-being in a harmful way. A felt sense of burnout, stress, angst, anger and an imposed sense of failure may emerge, if principals are not meeting imposed corporate expectations and deadlines, nor being the ‘superhumans’ that they need to be in order to survive in an essentially neoliberalist, demanding world.

Elizabeth had found herself caught up in the thrownness of the situation and this influenced her well-being. *I felt totally unsupported, stressed and annoyed.* Negative feelings emerged as a result of the perceived lack of support from the department. For Elizabeth, the how-it-is of the situated-ness occurred when her supervisor, clearly responding to pressure from a parent and media attention, failed to support her decision and questioned (rather publicly) her professionalism. *My decision was repealed and overturned by the region. I sought a lot of feedback and got wrapped up in policy nuances and counter advice which were quite awful at the time.* Elizabeth was thrown, not by the causal nature of her situation, but by the lifeworld in which she is expected to exist under certain cultural and historical traditions (Ness et al., 2014). There is an element of thrownness in the everyday unfolding of life - an alternating between a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity in the world, between *being-authentic* and *being-inauthentic*. *How it is* and *how one is*, situates well-being towards the future and the realisation of one's potentialities (Sarvimäki, 2006).

An ontic explanation is fundamentally that as principal, Elizabeth had made a considered decision to exclude a student for physical aggression towards another student, based on evidence and supported by policy. Her concern centred on student protection and welfare. Elizabeth was the accountable officer in the field managing the situation and from her account, made the decision in good faith after considering all available information. Autonomy over decision-making by principals is encouraged and promoted by our Director General and Minister for Education, especially in matters of discipline of students. This principal exercised her aligned autonomy and was invalidated by her immediate supervisor. Her self-confidence in making decisions and her trust and optimism of support from the department changed and was damaging.

The ontological interpretation points to concerns about what it means to be human - our way-of-being-*in-the-world* with others. Thoughts surface around the very nature of how



humans each express, confront and repair themselves in the thrownness of life, amidst a felt-sense of being abandoned, as it were, in an existence predominantly characterised by demands, frustrations, conventions, duties and suffering, not of one's choice. This is relevant to understanding Elizabeth's way-of-being as her choices were taken away and her authentic being. She was essentially thrown. Questions, therefore surface regarding the very ways we each confront what Szasz (1961) concisely labelled "the problems of living" and how humans "learn about themselves, others, and life" (p. xvi).

In the following section, I consider our individual existence of being thrown into the world as *being-toward-death* - an existential part of Dasein (Mulhall, 2005).

### ***Thrownness as 'Being-towards-death'***

Thrownness is linked into the existential world of how we are *being-in-the-world* comporting our human condition (Giles, 2011). There is an essential essence in comportment about being-thrown, which includes care, fear, anxiety, stress and burnout, amongst other human conditions. The principal in the story above was 'thrown' into a situation, which ignited a union of authentic and improvised responses. What happened next illustrates the seriousness of 'being-thrown'.

*On this particular day, Valerie our Regional Director, wanted me to respond in writing to a list of questions. I hadn't eaten or drunk anything and I hadn't been home. On the way home, I got really light-headed; I thought I was going to crash; I thought I was going to die. I ended up thinking I was having a heart-attack. I called Kate, my sister on the phone. She said, pull over! Pull over! I said, I don't know what's happening. The chest pain is unbelievable.*

*I was just hyperventilating to the point I thought I was going to black out and lose the wheel. I managed to get to Frank, my neighbour's place. I drove in. I tried to get to his door but collapsed on the floor. Kate had called an ambulance and said to meet me there. I was just holding my chest and absolutely shaking.*

*The ambulance arrived, as did Kate. The ambos were really worried that I was having a heart-attack. They gave me those drugs that they give you to try and settle the pain and treat it like a heart attack victim. They couldn't get the pain down. I spent the night in the hospital. They did all the x-rays. There was no immediate damage, but they were so concerned about the pain. It was confronting. I remember being in the ward when everyone had gone home. I was wired to machinery, still in pain and totally distressed. I thought I was done for! (Interview 7: Story 6).*

The story above shows rather seriously, the essential characteristics of thrownness and integration with the phenomenon of well-being. Whilst extreme, it highlights thrownness as experienced by a principal. The experience of thrownness has become quite literally, the experience of death [that is the experience of death as it is lived].

Elizabeth was alone in her car when she experienced an overwhelming sensation that something was dreadfully wrong. She had recently been placed under pressure and felt unsupported by Valerie regarding a decision she had made as principal and this consumed her with feelings of angst. As she was driving, Elizabeth knew her body was reacting and so she pulled into a neighbour's home, where she collapsed and gave in to her thrownness.

The interpretative pathway from thrownness to dying is illuminated by the description of Dasein's being in terms of possibility, and of freedom for assuming its being as possible. Heidegger (1996) has not simply identified the experience as finding oneself thrown and the experience of death, even though the former becomes finding oneself thrown into death. (Fynsk, 1982).

Heidegger (as cited by Fynsk, 1982) discusses anxiety [angst] as a mode of primordial *existentialia* [befindlichkeit] "state of mind" (p. 192, emphasis included in original text). He links this to the affective domain in which one finds themselves, as we observed in Elizabeth's account: *It was confronting. I remember being in a ward - everyone had gone home. I was wired to machinery - still in pain and totally distressed. I thought I was done*

*for!* Elizabeth's thrownness was beyond her control. It was part of her thrown being, as Fynsk (1982) argues in the following passage.

It is in its *Befindlichkeit* that Dasein discovers its thrown being, and discovers itself as the thrown being that it is and in existing has to be. Delivered to the world, abandoned to it, Dasein finds itself powerless as regards the conditions determining the fact that it is and has to be as it can be. Dasein's sole power, as we will see [in the following story], inheres in the possibility of resolutely assuming its thrown Being, and assuming it by giving itself up to - affirming and receiving - the possibility of its own annihilation (Fynsk, 1982, p. 192, emphasis included in original text - text in brackets added).

In the following story, Elizabeth proceeds to share her lived experiences of thrownness and the possibility of resolutely assuming her thrown being as a way of being 'in' principalship.

### ***Thrownness as a 'mode of being'***

In the following story, I examine the relationship between a principal's angst and Dasein's authentic comportment to existence.

*While I was at the doctor's clinic, Phil from the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) rang me to say that in response to my teachers' refusal to teach Damien, a highly volatile student, the department was hovering around. Valerie, the Regional Director, was on her way to my school (in my absence) to collect evidence and to strong-arm my staff. Well, here I am in the doctor's clinic being assessed for a stress-related condition and a woman whom I do not trust and partly blame for my condition, is plotting something in my absence. I said to Phil that she is not setting foot in my school without you and me present. Phil was trying to calm me by stating that Valerie needed evidence to provide to the department as to why the school had taken such drastic action. I said to Phil that if Valerie goes into that school without me, no one would talk to her. Phil picked me up from the doctor's surgery (the doctor had written me a doctor's certificate) and he drove me out to my school, so that I could talk to pivotal staff. Just talking about it makes my heart go weird! (Interview 7: Story 7).*

The lived experience of the principal in this story is one of angst and *being-continually-thrown* by her circumstances. She is seeking medical assistance for a health condition

resulting from *being-thrown* in the first instance, and now she finds herself in a situation involving a possible conflict with her Regional Director.

*Well, here I am in the doctor's clinic being assessed for a stress-related condition and a woman whom I do not trust and partly blame for my condition, is plotting something in my absence.*

*Thrownness* is an experience of nothingness, or nullity which Heidegger (1996) refers to as an experience of guilt - a fundamental impotence regarding the conditions of the 'there' in which one finds oneself thrown, and a powerlessness to become anything other than what one is in life.

According to Heidegger, "angst exposes Dasein to the fundamental nature of its being-in-the-world by bringing it before the great void of existence" and is therefore crucial to Dasein's authentic existential understanding of concepts such as thrownness (as cited by Magrini, 2006, p. 78).

In thrownness, the lived experience of *being-possible* is an experience of total powerlessness, fascination or vertigo. As such, in anxiety [angst] "Dasein is taken all the way back to its naked uncanniness, and becomes fascinated by it [benommen]" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 394). This fascination gives Dasein its thrownness as something possible and as something that can be repeated. It gives Dasein repeatability as something that can be taken up in a resolution in *being-towards-death* (Fynsk, 1982). The principal in all three stories experienced angst at *being-thrown* by the situated-ness of her circumstances. In the third story however, we witnessed a transformation, whereby her thrownness saw her *being* resolute: *I said to Phil that she's not setting foot in my school without you and me present.*

Within the angst of *being-thrown*, we are compelled to be cognisant of this thrownness into the paradox of Dasein as *being-in-the-world* and *being-with-others* - the meaning and

ground of the particular *self* and *world* into which we find ourselves thrown. Our lived experiences show that we can often perceive a circumstance, a relationship, or even our locus of control to be under threat, for us to take notice at all and to give it our attention. As we saw in Elizabeth's story, she grew in resoluteness as a principal, when she felt that Valerie was attempting to marginalise her leadership position by speaking to school staff without Elizabeth's knowledge. Once Elizabeth knew of this action, her way-of-being changed.

*I said to Phil that if Valerie goes into that school without me, no one would talk to her. Phil picked me up from the doctor's surgery (the doctor had written me a doctor's certificate) and he drove me out to my school, so that I could talk to pivotal staff. Just talking about it makes my heart go weird!*

An existential threat as to who we are and our understanding of what it means to be human, makes us pay attention [temporarily] to the question of what it means to be human, and importantly, to the response that we are providing to this question. It compels us to be aware of the manner in which we hold onto what is meaningful, true, good, and the way that the world and others are mattering to us. While the being of Dasein may manifest in other notions, anxiety brings human existence face-to-face with itself against our tendency to fall away from this being (Heidegger, 1962). Elizabeth came face-to-face with angst in her own thrownness and this had implications for her well-being.

In the following story, thrownness as our way-of-being in the world together with others is described, with the outcome being more positive than the previous experiences.

### ***Thrownness as 'how we are'***

Elizabeth's stories illustrate the seriousness of thrownness and its impact on the individual. We witnessed that for this principal, her experience of *being thrown* was an experience of being-thrown-towards-death (quite literally, a near-death experience). The relationship between one's own way-of-being, one's own thrownness-towards-death and one's well-

being, is starting to reveal itself in all manner of manifestations. Heidegger (1962) says that the only certainty we have in life is our death - towards our own mortality.

Death is the possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 294).

There is something very individual about our experience of thrownness and its impact on our well-being, but then, there is also something we have in common with others. Rational reasoning suggests an individual problem and therefore an individual solution. I would argue, the solution is not individual - the solution is in community and in relationships, as principals' work relationally. Individualism is psychological based - 'fix' the individual. The notion of coexisting as *being-with-others* is critical in this inquiry. The following stories, each from different participants (Simon, Ken and Casey), illustrate the notion of thrownness through the lens of 'how we are' in the world.

Simon has just been appointed to a one-teacher school where he is also the principal. The school is located in an isolated region of south-west Queensland. He lives at the school with his wife Linda. The school is located on an old Cobb and Co postal route - a dirt road. Simon's isolation has the potential to affect his well-being, however, he finds support and professional companionship in a colleague facing similar challenges.

### ***Finding and being found***

*In my third year of teaching, I was moved to a one-teacher school in the sticks of South West Queensland and in the middle of a sheep paddock. It had fourteen children enrolled from years one through to year seven. I was to be the only teacher in the school. I was posted there for four years.*

*My first taste of being a school leader was being thrown in the deep end. We did go to 'Principal School' where they gave us a week's induction on everything you needed to know to be an effective principal. The induction went through things like setting up relationships within your school community,*

*budgeting, looking after facilities, and there was a little bit about teaching and learning.*

*There were a lot of great take-aways from that week.*

*I met other people who were in the same boat. I met a lady named Jill - she was posted to a school a hundred kilometres away from my school, so she was one of my closest neighbours. We made a pact that we would support each other in our time in our very remote little schools. There were instances where Jill would phone Linda and me. We would jump in the car and fly over to her school and stay the night, have dinner with her, talk through issues and then be up at 4:30 the following morning ready to drive the hundred kilometres back to my school, ready for a day's work.*

*We would talk about curriculum, we would be talking about teaching practices, how to enhance relationships with parents - particularly those tricky ones that in a one teacher school, you can't get away from because you're living amongst it. The collegiality was reciprocal and valued. Jill, Linda and I became really close friends - a relationship that continues today (Interview 1: Story 1).*

This story begins at a 'principals' school' which was a week-long induction program for school leaders taking up the position for the first time. In amongst the information shared, Simon had time to find and meet a colleague who was appointed to a neighbouring school in the same remote, rural area to his school. The importance of the initial 'pact' to talk through issues in new principalships and the close friendship was opened.

Travelling great distances (200km round trip) to and from each other's homes / schools demonstrated a commitment personified. The finding of an-other, unexpectedly, is very important to this story.

Simon could have been left to himself with no support in his remote school and this would have left him isolated. Expectantly, and without scanning, Simon found, and was found, by an unexpected person who would become his fellow traveller. Neither of them was aware of the other, nor did they intentionally go looking for such a traveller. Who would have known that in the midst of the administrative skills and requirements, the long-term

view of the role was the matter of a relationship with an as-yet-unknown? The relationship was essential to the professional journey that would commence.

Finding a colleague who shared a similar way of being was an outcome that was not rehearsed, rather the relationship and connection ‘found them’. Focused on some good and certain advice from his overseers, Simon’s uncertainties about his ability to be a good principal took on the change that he was not alone anymore.

Jill, whom he met at the initial induction days was as prepared as he was to share the ‘blow by blow’ events of the first years of a beginning principal in ways that supported each of them. They shared their stories and problem-solved school matters together. Each time they did this, gave another perspective which was a fresh look or at times a confirmation of a good job. They supported each other both professionally and personally at a time where the work of being a principal had personal impacts because it was so new. It seemed to be a way of validating and valuing each other as people and as professionals when the role as a new principal is testing and challenging the way each person thinks about themselves and the confidence they have to do the job. Simon and Jill’s lived experiences of balancing their own and each other’s well-being concerns with the needs and demands of school administration, saw them both endure and prosper.

Essential to any adequate ontological analysis or understanding of Dasein [being-in-the-world] the ‘Being’ of Dasein, essentially can be interpreted as “Being-with-Others as Dasein and world” (Mulhall, 2005, p. 64). What Dasein works upon is typically provided by others and what it produces is typically destined for others; in other words, “the ‘whereof’ and the ‘towards-which’ of equipmental totalities relate the work-world to other people” (p. 65, emphasis included in original text).



Simon's story is one of being-with-others. It highlights Dasein's ability to lose or find itself as an individual, which always determines, and is determined by the way in which Dasein understands and conducts its relations with others. Furthermore, our everyday lived experiences of that understanding, focuses upon one's differences (in appearances, behaviour, lifestyle and opinion) from those with whom one shares the world, regarding them as "the main determinant of one's own sense of self" (pp. 66-67).

Dasein, as everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in subjection to Others. It itself is not; its Being has been taken away by the Others. Dasein's everyday possibilities of Being are for the Others to dispose of as they please. These Others, moreover, are not definite Others. On the contrary, any Other can represent them . . . One belongs to the Others oneself and enhances their power. The Others whom one thus designates in order to cover up the fact of one's belonging to them essentially oneself, are those who proximally and for the most part 'are there' in everyday Being-with-one-another. The 'who' is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, the 'they' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 146).

As we observed within Simon's story of being-with-others, at the most fundamental level, we are thrown into human existence alongside others and our way-of-being is relational - it cannot be any other way. We also witnessed an integral part of Heidegger's philosophical notion of thrownness, which unearthed the realisation that as humans, we are essentially *thrown-towards* that which is beyond the bounds of the *I*. It is not to be assumed that Dasein comes first as a kind of essence of being, from which then comes an external world. Rather, ontologically speaking, we are essentially being-in-the-world and being-with-others.

The links between Simon's story and the phenomenon of well-being suggest that a possible way forward may be found in relationships and community.

The following story, as told by Ken, reflects on a time when he and his staff endured a corporate-mandated school survey. Ken's way-of-being was thrown and he had to re-

orientate himself to resolutely overcome the potential for harm to his own and his staff's well-being.

### ***Damaging staff survey***

*I remember, reasonably early on, I'd been teaching probably for six-seven years and our head office decided that things weren't going as well as they should have at the school where I was working. They sent one of their consultants out to conduct a staff, student and a parent survey. The staff survey came back horrifically scathing.*

*The leadership team, of which I was at the lower echelon in those days, was called in and basically hauled over the coals. I sat there and listened to them berate what was happening at our school. When they finished the chair-person said is there anything that anyone would like to say? I said, yeah, I think I have a few pertinent points that are worth sharing. I said, one of them is that you have taken the staff survey in week 9 of the school term which was a reporting and assessing week. You have hit people when they are at their absolute lowest. I said, I am not saying you should have taken it in week 1 when everyone has come back fresh from the holidays, but if you have any understanding of the make-up of schools, you would know that generally speaking, most teaching staff crawl towards the finish line at the end of a school term. They have put their heart and soul into everything that they have done. I invite you to come back in a summer term where we might be in about week four or five and just do a bit of a check as to the difference in responses that you get.*

*It was a pretty shattering experience from the point of view from having something which, could have potentially been a really positive experience for the school - in getting some quality feedback because obviously there were some things that weren't working well, but also in being able to action some of that. But it ended up basically being a stone-throwing experience that was poorly handled (Interview 4: Story 3).*

Ken recalls a time when those in positions of power conducted a school survey in response to perceived concerns. The survey was done to them as opposed to being conducted with them and by Ken's own admission; it was scathing in its assessment of his school. The data from the survey was used to admonish Ken and his staff and to substantiate their initial concerns. Ken could have passively accepted the findings, however his experience and nous as an educational leader within a school setting, provoked him to challenge the

process and its timing. The leadership team's collective thrownness triggered a reaction in Ken to *leap in* and be resolute in his response. His understanding of the school context and the welfare of his colleagues motivated a caring attitude of working relationally. Ken's awareness of the dynamics became circumspective<sup>26</sup> (Heidegger, 1962). This *being on the lookout* for potential harm in his staff caused by the damaging survey results and being attentive to and available for them, embodies a circumspective mode of care (Foulds, 2012). Ken's story demonstrates the complexity of well-being in context. The context of a school environment is not an individual experience, but rather an experience of being-in-the-world-with-others.

Regular quality assurance processes and other compliance measures such as audits and surveys, are thrust upon schools as a way conducting *health checks* to the performativity of the organisation. If the data returns favourably, then the school is considered functioning or even high performing. However, if the data shows a downward trend, there are red flags and consequences. For Ken and his team, a negative survey response, conducted in the final weeks of a school term when his staff were physically and mentally exhausted, reflected badly on their school. Ken's superiors interpreted this 'unclean' data to suggest that the school was not performing and that staff morale was low. They proceeded to be critical of the leadership team. The potential for real damage from this performativity regime was realised by Ken, who questioned the timing of the survey. Nevertheless, this was a stressful episode for Ken and his team as evidenced by the emotive language used in his story - *pretty shattering experience*, and its impact on their collective well-being was apparent.

Ken's experience shows the distinction between ontic and ontological matters within well-being. This underpins Heidegger's claim that, "just as Dasein's basic orientation

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<sup>26</sup> **Circumspection** – notion of dealing with the now, with an eye on the future. See chapter seven.

towards ready-to-hand objects is one of concern, so its orientation towards others is one of solicitude”<sup>27</sup> (Heidegger, 1962, p. 237). *Concernful* dealings with objects [people and situations] can also take the form of indifference, carelessness and neglect. This way-of-being-with-others captures an aspect of Dasein’s ontological state, highlighting the fact that Dasein finds itself amongst objects with which it must deal. Moreover, our way-of-being may not only be compatible with, but ultimately makes possible, specific ontic states of unconcern [since it is only being capable of concern that one can attribute lack of concern]. Being-with-others does not deny that Dasein can be and often is indifferent or hostile to the well-being of others, but rather brings out the ontological underpinning of all specific ontic relationship to others, whether they be caring or damaging (Mulhall, 2005).

At times, the way we discuss our experiences of thrownness is to objectify and rationalise them for example: *It is the department’s unrealistic expectations causing unattainable workload! My leadership position and circumstances are causing me burnout. The new technology system is frustrating and causing me stress.*

Heidegger (1962) argues such ways of talking, reveal how a phenomenon (such as well-being) is really experienced. This type of reaction is what surfaces when we apply rational, ill-fitting conceptual models and look to the things themselves. Psychology is the ‘default’ lens in which people want to see things, understand and control them. Psychology identifies deficits, labels them and attempts to ‘fix’ them. This conceptual model is being applied to principals and their well-being as a means of understanding and ‘fixing’ them in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness, which is an entirely different agenda. This approach denies relationships and departments refuse to see their role in it as to what gives life.

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<sup>27</sup>**Solicitude:** care or concern for someone or something.

Our lived experiences and relational spaces, show that our thrownness arises from objects, people, situations, words and events, all emanating from our life experiences of being-in-the-world-with-others. For Heidegger, all feelings, moods, and emotions contain this connection with the world and others, and this reveals our thrownness into Dasein as being-in-the-world and being-with-others.

The phenomenon of well-being does not remain static - ontologically, life is about well-being. Well-being exists throughout the day. It is fluid and not necessarily attributed to one particular episode, but a combination and, as we as humans are realising, very much dependent on relationships.

My well-being is not necessarily something that is consciously in my head that I project into a world and to others. Rather, it arises in relation to, and feeds off, the world and others. Associated to this, is a principled foregrounding of 'we-relationships' or *mitsein*, which shows close links to being in the world. The key message is that we are absolutely in a relational context, it cannot be otherwise for any adequate articulation of well-being. From this perspective, it is assumed that ontologically, "well-being is simultaneously both singular and plural" (Webb, 2010, p. 3).

The final story in this section, illustrates Heidegger's (1962) metaphor of finding yourself thrown into a world with others. It captures ontologically, how we are being in situ - in other words, how we experience our thrownness to then find ourselves already *landed* with being a particular person in a particular environment. Casey's particular persons were Beth, Jenny, Andy and Pat, and her environment was her school.

### ***Managing others***

*In my former school, I worked beside a teacher called Beth who was very difficult to manage. She was lazy, took too many days off and a poor teacher. There was also a teacher aide, Jenny, working with Beth and me. Jenny and*

*Beth did not get on and there was a lot of nasty conflict, which had been present for many years before I came to the school. I was trying to resolve the situation, but soon realised it was pointless. I felt like both women were just looking for opportunities to find fault in the other and using me as the go-between. I just felt that I could not possibly go on. It was such a dark time in my career and absolutely knocked my confidence. I did not feel I had any answers any more. I did not really know who I could trust in the school community.*

*Probably one of my saving graces were Andy and Pat, two neighbouring principals who I had known for a long time. I felt that I could absolutely trust both of them. So, I guess that was my starting point to get my resolve back (Interview 5: Story 5).*

Casey landed in a new school and situation whereby her thrownness became part of her new and unfolding reality. Staff dynamics can be challenging and stressful for a principal, especially when they find themselves thrown in the middle of a conflict situation and expected to manage or solve the problem. This is not necessarily the principal's problem to solve, nevertheless, their involvement is inevitable as unprofessional behaviour aligns with a code of conduct citing *respect for others* and managing professional conduct is part of a principal's discourse.

Principals cannot mandate *niceness* however, they can insist on respect. The line is often blurred and each combatant, in this story Beth and Jenny will perhaps expect Casey to side with them, as is so often the case with staff conflict. The inability to see the other person's perspective, especially where there is a history of ill will, unpleasantness and disdain, is present and strains relationships.

Casey, by default, was thrown into this 'damaged' relationship when she was appointed to the school. It had been festering long before she arrived. Casey was placed in a difficult situation through no fault of her own. Not only did she feel a need to invest in resolving the conflict between Beth and Jenny, she also was expected to manage Beth's underperformance in a discrete and professional manner, and I surmise, under the

scrutineering gaze of Jenny's eyes. Casey's sense of well-being was low, as suggested by her statement *this was a dark time*.

Relationships are tenuous and the slightest infraction can tip the scales towards the negative, creating perceived irreparable damage (Hoff, 2021; Jonas & Hulseberg, 2017; Paglen, 2019). Trying to mend a damaged relationship as an outsider [an *in-between others*], is like trying to repair a dyke with one's finger. As soon one leaking hole is plugged, another one forms. There are just not enough fingers!

Heidegger (1962) argues that we can consider Dasein as being-in-the-world, a fundamental interrelation of I with a world and others. Casey was thrown into a world with others (Jenny and Beth) and somehow had to work through this relationship.

Referring to this notion, combined with the way that the world and others are seen to be necessary to our lived experiences as a kind of object pole, leads Heidegger (1995) to proclaim that "ultimately every attunement - is a hybrid, partly objective, partly subjective" (p. 88). Attunement discloses that "Dasein is the being of this between" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 132) of subject and object. In comprehending this *between*, we start to understand why the term *attunement* is relevant in characterising our lived experience, given that an attunement corresponds to a relation, a "*between multiple poles: in attunement, the world, Dasein-with, and existence are equiprimordially*<sup>28</sup> disclosed" (p. 137, emphasis included in original text). For Casey, her way-of-being was somewhere between objective and subjective. Her experience of thrownness *between* the opposing *poles* of Jenny and Beth, had the potential to impact negatively on her well-being.

*I was trying to resolve the situation, but soon realised it was pointless. I felt like both women were just looking for opportunities to find fault in the other*

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<sup>28</sup> **Equiprimordial:** (not comparable) - existing together as equally fundamental.

*and using me as the go-between. I just felt that I could not possibly go on. It was such a dark time in my career and absolutely knocked my confidence.*

However, working through this issue alongside trusted colleagues Andy and Pat, Casey reached a resolute level of attunement.

*Probably one of my saving graces were Andy and Pat, two neighbouring principals who I had known for a long time. I felt that I could absolutely trust both of them. So, I guess that was my starting point to get my resolve back.*

### ***Thrownness, 'there-being' in attunement [befindlichkeit]***

In the final section of this chapter, I open the concept of attunement further through the lens of our *mood*, an enduring and fundamental emotional attunement to having been thrown into the world as who we are (Foulds, 2012).

In the following story, Simon's thrownness unearths a fearful mood, the face of which we fear, fearing itself and that about which we fear. Simon is undergoing an operation to remove a level three melanoma. His uncertainty and fear regarding the procedure and the spread of the cancer is an overwhelming experience, notwithstanding the thought of dying and leaving his spouse and young children behind.

### ***I could die here - an emotional attunement to fear***

*I was lying on the theatre operating table floating in and out of consciousness. I was aware of the procedure to remove the melanoma located on my lower right leg and of the skin graft that was to be extracted from my left hip. Even though the local anaesthetic had rendered both areas numb, I could feel the pressure of the scalpel cutting out the cancer and a wide margin of flesh surrounding the area. I could also feel the doctor removing skin from my hip and the drawing effect of the sutures as the medical thread was tightened and the surgical knots were tied.*

*I counted forty-four stitches on my leg and twenty on my hip. I remember being upset at my first sight of both areas and feeling overcome with fear regarding*



*the very real possibility of metastases of malignant growths to other areas of my body. I could actually die here!*

*Shortly following my release from hospital, I contacted our family's solicitor to ensure that my Will was in order and our insurance broker to ascertain the amount of my life insurance. It was important to me that Linda, Matteo and Carmen were cared for should my health decline. (Interview 1: Story 12).*

Simon's story highlights the fragility of life and is a timely reminder of the truly important matters that are at the core of our humanity, namely relationships. Facing an uncertain future due to the seriousness of cancer and its possible spread to vital organs, Simon fears leaving his family behind and takes steps to protect their financial security.

In Simon's story, the three main articulations of Heidegger's (1962) analysis of fear as a specific mode of attunement are at play. Simon's *fear of* not being around to support his family; the *fear itself* (fearing, being afraid) of his own mortality; and, *fear for* his children never really getting to know him and for his partner Linda, who, may potentially will have to forge ahead as a sole parent.

The relationship between Dasein's attunement (mood / fear) and well-being is being realised, as illustrated in Simon's story. Surprisingly, research in this space is limited to the causal effects - a *fear of* something (crime, childbirth, missing out, death, spiders and so forth) and its impact on well-being. It is rationalised in a predominantly psychological way, thus satisfying one's need for a diagnosis and solution, albeit in the absence of deeper, ontological understandings.

Looking through a Heideggerian lens, this suggests a form of existential attunement, a condition of the possibility of what he refers to as *anganglichkeit* (King, 2001), the English interpretation meaning approachable and adept of letting something come near.

On the ground of attunement, Dasein is approachable, concernible, touchable, strikable, and capable of being affective and moved by whatever may approach him [sic] from the world. Dasein could never be affected through the senses, if attunement did not in advance throw him open to be affected in various ways (King, 2001, p. 57).

In this following story, Stan reflects on a time when his thrownness affected him in various ways after he *leaped in* and gave a statement to the local media about his school's homework policy. What transpired by this seemingly harmless action, was a felt sense of restraint, terror, fear and awe.

### ***Venturesome leap***

*A few principals (including me) were used to conversing with the local media about what our schools were doing. It was standard practice to promote our schools. The media had rung and asked about our homework policy. Unknown to me, the department was releasing a statement in the Courier Mail that day around the department's position on the homework (HW) policy. I wasn't aware of that - no one had told me.*

*I received a personal phone call from Pamela (from the department). She explained that I was not allowed to make a public comment on any policy of the department. And of course, I challenged her. I said, (at that stage the department did not have a HW policy) if I knew there was an official HW policy well I'd be able to comment on it.*

*I stated to Pamela that this is what the paper asked and responded with an explanation of our school's HW policy. Pamela responded quite emphatically "Well your school's policy is not in line with the department's policy." I said, "Well if I had the department's policy I'd make sure our school's policy reflected it..."*

*It really threw me that here we were in a system where we could have that open conversation with the media, and then the department says, "NO; we're going to deliver all of our policy statements to the Courier Mail first and then to principals!" Where's the sense? That was probably what really shook me. To think okay, aren't we the people who need to know the policy and get our heads around it before the Courier Mail? I understand NOW, why. I understand that all they were doing was pushing information to the Courier Mail so that at least they get positive information rather than misinformation. But getting caught up in that - I was absolutely flabbergasted. I worried about my position and my reputation with the department.*

*It's interesting that when Pamela came to our principals' business meeting the following week, she pulled several of us aside, to make clear, YOU know now that you are NOT to comment on any department policy. Yes - we know. Yeah, that really did throw me (Interview 6: Story 11).*

Part of a principal's role currently is to market their school. It is commonplace to see school-based activities, achievements and celebrations plastered across the front pages of local newspapers. Unbeknownst to Stan, the department was releasing a homework policy statement on the same day to the *Courier Mail*. What followed was a 'cool' conversation and a reprimand from Pamela - a senior official.

Principals learn through experience, the types of information that can be shared with the media. If they are unsure, the Department of Education (DoE) provides a twenty-four-hour media relations service to schools and regions to help respond to media inquiries and opportunities. Being misquoted in the media or to have one's name attached to something controversial can be extremely overwhelming. However, to see their school promoted in a positive light can be awe-inspiring, hence the value of the media relations service.

Perhaps Stan did not know of this service or simply did not realise that his public comment would cause potential damage to his employer. Regardless, to receive a call from Pamela for the sole purpose of being professionally admonished, is both terrifying and stressful. His thrownness as a way-of-being in the world, emerged through the unravelling of his relation to the face of the other, as he was summoned by Pamela at a meeting the following week which created even more tension. Sabry and Mansour (2019) explain this form of thrownness,

A relation through which we enter an ethical event - an event that reorientates our take on ontology - because ontology here is founded on our possible and impossible responsibility towards the other - the other as uniqueness (Sabry & Mansour, 2019, p. 54).

Stan's experience opened possible and impossible responsibility towards the other. He remained resolute and was able to discuss with Pamela the need for principals to be kept informed of major policy decisions and to not hear about them for the first time from a leading Queensland newspaper. Stan states that he now understands why the DoE works so

closely with the media and I expect this new learning will see him exercise restrained praxis in future dealings with local media.

Stan's story highlights a fundamental flaw in the DoE's communication strategy. Principals and schools (the officers charged with actioning policy guidelines at a school level) need to be informed of policy decisions prior to the public. How stressful and embarrassing (for the principal, school and department) to be approached by a parent for clarification on a policy that they have just read in the paper, and for that principal to have no knowledge of the policy in question. There appears to be a glaring need for clarity in the field of school policy dissemination.

Stan's story can be ontologically interpreted through an understanding of what Heidegger (1999) refers to as a 'venturesome leap'. The leap itself is not a physical act in which we have control - in the same way that the philosophical notion of being-thrown is something that occurs in our everyday being and not something we physically action. The leap is a shift that transforms our relationships into what Heidegger refers to as 'entities'.<sup>29</sup>

In leaping, we discover that we can find ourselves existentially thrown. To elaborate, we ourselves are shaped by Dasein (being), and as a result of this, entities will never be completely accessible to us. When we experience our thrownness, we no longer stand apart from entities in the sphere of security created by our perceived domination of them. Instead, "we ourselves are 'set out into' or 'exposed to' entities - by way of interpretation, we are ventured" (Jennings, 2005, p. 18, emphasis added).

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<sup>29</sup> **Entity** - Any object of attention that can be distinguished from another object of attention. All material things are entities, but so are immaterial objects of attention such as time, space or the activity of being a person; so, the word 'entity' means more than just a material thing. All *being* is the being of some entity (Foulds, 2012, p. 140, emphasis included in original text).

In this next story, we return to Simon, an experienced senior principal who embodies a phronesis, practical wisdom and tacit knowing in his personal account of well-being experiences. It is a story of hope.

***The essence of things in our ordinary, everyday world [umwelt]***

*I have been teaching for over thirty-two years and a school principal for just on thirty years. To keep myself engaged and interested in school leadership, I continually try to nourish my appetite for learning by:*

- *Engaging in tertiary coursework and research.*
- *Visiting schools (local, state, inter-state and international) - speaking to and working alongside other principals.*
- *Investing in my own professional learning (conferences, field studies, cluster and professional association engagement, DoE initiatives such as school reviews, consultation forums, recruitment and selection panels).*

*My supervisors do not always embrace this approach. The unwritten expectation is that every three to five years, successful principals will seek promotion. I have been appointed to my current school now for twenty years, so I clearly do not fit the 'accepted' definition of a successful principal. This thinking was reinforced to me recently, when Denise, my supervisor asked the question, so when will you be moving to a larger school? My response was, a promotion is not on my radar at the moment, due to other life choices and goals such as family circumstances, tertiary study and the fact that I am content living and working in this lovely community. Naturally, I received a look of masked, corporate disapproval.*

*In my early days in the principalship, this would have thrown me and caused self-doubt. These days, I look at people like Denise and see an over-weight, cheerless divorcee, who has dedicated her life to her career at such a high personal cost. And this reinforces to me that success in life is not necessarily measured by using one set of criteria to the detriment of others (Interview 1: Story 11).*

Successfully being 'in' principalship for Simon, equates to getting the balance right between home, work and leisure. In addition, it is about being comfortable and confident to defend his position, recognising and embracing the relationship between his own thrownness and attunement. His story illustrates a form of ontological clarity in school development processes and demonstrates that through attuned understandings, alternative career pathways are possible.

Simon embodies a quiet confidence in his thrownness into things and life situations. He does not subscribe to the expected promotional pathway of being ‘in’ principalship and has worked things out for himself through concern and care (Sabry & Mansour, 2019) for his own well-being. His feelings towards what constitutes a successful career are clearly articulated and he appears comfortable with his choices. His observation of Denise’s example of perceived success is telling when he states *this reinforces to me that success in life is not necessarily measured by using one set of criteria to the detriment of others.*

The affective mode of disclosure and being attuned, as argued by Heidegger (1962), brings Dasein face-to-face with its thrownness. This means that as we encounter things and others within our world of lived experiences, things such as joy, suffering, objects, feelings, understandings, and so forth, we figure things out for ourselves. “Thrownness comes to the fore as an existential condition” (Sabry & Mansour, 2019, p. 63). Existentially, being thrown can be interpreted as finding oneself in one way or other. This is reinforced in Simon’s story when he substantiates his position by stating, *a promotion is not on my radar at the moment, due to other life choices and goals such as family circumstances, tertiary study and the fact that I am content living and working in this lovely community.*

Whilst in the midst of thrownness and Dasein being captive to the world into which one has been thrown, Heidegger argues that freedom can be achieved and one can transcend to the possibilities of being.

In Heidegger’s interpretation, understanding is not a cognitive faculty, like comprehending or explaining, but a basic way of existing. It is, in fact, nothing other than the fore-structure of care, whereby Dasein is constantly before himself, ahead of himself. Since understanding is a structure of the original whole of care, it must necessarily be “tuned” by attunement. All the possibilities of Dasein’s being that understanding can disclose must hence be possibilities of a thrown and dependent being as disclosed by attunement (King, 2001, p. 59, emphasis included in original text).

Simon could have surrendered his beliefs, lifestyle and possible well-being, by succumbing to the persistent pressure from his supervisors to relocate or promote to new schools every three to five years. However, he remains attuned to all the possibilities<sup>30</sup> of Dasein's being. Heidegger (1962) contends that we not only primordially exist as possibility, but as "thrown possibility" (p. 183). We are thrown into a particular historical-cultural situation, and this *ensnares* our possibilities, always limiting and opening new possible ways in which we are free to be in a given context.

This thinking is reflected in the following extract from the timeless poem "The Road Not Taken" (Frost, 2002, p. 214).

Two roads diverged in a wood, and  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Much like the traveller in Frost's timeless verse, Simon considered all possibilities of his thrownness and freed himself of corporate expectations to take the road less travelled. Whilst this freedom to choose was possible for Simon given his lived experiences and attuned phronesis, it may not be so for others, especially younger principals trying to establish themselves within the DoE. Gadamer (2013) captures this argument by arguing that how we choose to respond in a given situation is always constrained by some antecedent conditions that are not of our own making. Furthermore, "Dasein that projects itself on its own potentiality-for-being has always already been. This is the meaning of the existential of thrownness" (p. 264).

Gadamer's words resonate powerfully with me as both principal and early researcher. My observation of principal recruitment and selection practices during the last decade has seen

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<sup>30</sup> Heidegger's ontological notion of **possibility** refers to what we sense we 'can be': the ways of being human that we understand ourselves as being 'able to be' in the world, rather than a role or skill we can do (Blattner, 2006; Dreyfus, 1991; Martin Heidegger, 1996).

younger, less experienced school leaders appointed to large, challenging campuses, the result of which is starting to be realised. Burnout, angst, stress, thrownness, under-performance, relinquishing positions and poor well-being are just some of the ontic-ontological themes being experienced. Some principals have become casualties of their own thrownness thus contributing to the relatively contemporary focus on principal health and well-being research.

Our understanding of thrownness is an “entangled existential condition that is at once traversal and processual” (Sabry & Mansour, 2019, p. 63). This understanding connects with my research question because it is through thrownness that we are able to encounter our human condition.

For school principals, their way-of-being in their own thrownness is temporarily traversal and processual in that they ontologically pass through and over conditions that impact their well-being, which then opens possibilities towards an embodied contemplative and resolute form that remains beyond the experience. They understand something about themselves from their own thrownness. Stan’s experience with Pamela or Elizabeth’s encounter with Valerie, are examples of how one’s thrownness can have lasting effects and contribute to one’s understanding of who they are.

## **Concluding thoughts**

This chapter has focused on thrownness as an essential, taken-for-granted aspect of being in principalship. This ‘throw’ is not something that we have physically done, or have had done to us, but something that is ontologically part of our everyday being in the world. We are not the agents but the recipients, those affected by it. It is something that has ‘already’ happened in some sense, something we did not choose and could not choose. Being thrown



suggests a “momentum to our lives that we did not engender and perhaps are unable to stop” (Cowles, 2018, p. 6).

The phenomenon of well-being has clearly revealed itself in the stories within this chapter and I suggest that there is a profound relationship between our thrownness and our well-being. At the start of this chapter, I made the assertion that being-in-principalship was to be always, already in a relationship with thrownness due to the unpredictable nature of the role. The take-home message here is that life is unscripted and a principal’s thrownness is something that is unable to be controlled, which is a different way-of-being for those in school leadership.

The unpredictability of thrownness and its links to the multifaceted nature of well-being is experienced differently by principals as described in the stories. How various aspects of principals’ well-being are tied together and how these ties differ between individuals at one point in time and within individuals over time, lead me to conclude that well-being is a phenomenon that is experienced through our thrownness both positively or negatively in its presence and absence. As such, well-being cannot be defined or labelled, but can be described within lived experiences utilising notions such as thrownness.

How we interact with the thrownness of our experiences largely depends on the context and the relationship with who is present. Being attuned to our own thrownness helps us to gain leverage to safeguard our own well-being in a way that is positive, real and meaningful. By the nature of their roles, school principals are generally successful problem-solvers (Gold, 2021; Holm, 2018; Robinson, Meyer, Le Fevre, & Sinnema, 2020; Service & Thornton, 2021). As such, the condition of thrownness, while temporarily finite, presents possibilities for principals beyond the experience to problem-solve and learn.

The following chapter, *Care-full relationships are always mattering*, considers the impact of the philosophical notion of care [sorge] a human's way-of-being [there being] in relationship with others. It builds on our understanding of thrownness and includes two aspects of care:

1. Concern [when states of affairs matter to you].
2. Solitude [when persons matter to you] (Foulds, 2012, p. 20).

## 7 Chapter 7: Care-full relationships are always mattering

### **Introductory thoughts**

The Being of Dasein is care (Heidegger, 1962, p. 465).

Being *'in'* principalship is a relational way-of-being (Eacott, 2020). As such, much of the work of school principals is about building relational trust between themselves and the school community in which they serve. This includes connecting with students, parents and staff, amongst others, in a positive way, honouring differences and keeping lines of communication open. Within the care-full relationships that principals form, well-being emerges when they create a relational space for connections in their lives (Siegel, 2010).

Heidegger (1962) makes the connection between our being as care and our potentiality for being in the world alongside others. Within this potentiality, as we saw in the previous chapter, care “exists fallingly as something that has been thrown” (p. 465). Within the festivals of life (see chapter nine), our thrown projection shows us possible ways for being - our human nature. Moreover, in moments of thrownness, we realise that our being with others draws on the authentic possibility of a care-full relationship emerging, especially from those who are mattering to us. Heidegger argues, “we must assure ourselves that we have a full conception of thrownness as a basic attribute of care” (p. 435).

Being *'in'* principalship is to be in care-full relationships, it cannot be otherwise because principals always work alongside others and therefore, their work is always relational. Heidegger's (1962) account of Dasein-with<sup>31</sup> others and everyday being-with [mitsein] others, whereby the basis of human sociability, even our individualism, show close links to

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<sup>31</sup> **Dasein-with** (there-being): The way-of-being-in-the-world that is peculiar to persons. The German word literally means 'person' but is capitalised by Heidegger to stress that what he is investigating is not what persons are but how they go about the task of being a person in the world over time (the Being of persons is the activity of there-being) (Foulds, 2012, p. 137).

being in the world. Ontologically, *mitsein* would take the position that they are linked. In other words,

being-in-the-world as a person always and *essentially* entails the input of other persons. The fact of being-with others is both inescapable and hugely influential on the project of being-a self (Foulds, 2012, p. 133 emphasis included in original text).

The key message here is that we are always in a relational context. Our there-being [Dasein-with] is about being-in-the-world-with-others (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 118-119). This is not a new radical concept or way of working, but rather something that is at the ontological core of what it means to be a school principal.

The word ‘care-full’ in this chapter title is deliberately hyphenated to emphasize the focus on the word ‘care’ and its connection to the well-being of principals, a relationship that is filled with care. Furthermore, in playing with the wording, ‘careful’ relationships imply that principals need to be astute to the kinds of connections they make and with whom they form relationships. There are strong links to their *phronesis* and practical wisdom. For instance, the rapport principals build with a student, parent, staff member, colleague or immediate supervisor, is profoundly different, even though similar ontologically, from the relationship he or she has with a spouse, family member or friend. Sometimes the line can be blurred, whereby a professional relationship can be thought of as a personal one, and this is where principals need to be ‘careful’.

A relational and caring nature is essential to a principal’s way-of-being-in-the-world and this has become magnified as a necessary capability within today’s schooling systems and market economy, whereby parents can ‘shop’ around and have choice over educational settings for their children (Debs, 2021; Glazerman, 2017; Rowe & Lubienski, 2017).

Traditionally in Queensland (and throughout the nation), school principals or head teachers served as disciplinarians of students and supervisors to teachers. Currently principals are responsible and accountable for leading, working positively and productively alongside

staff, students, parents and the wider community, in addition to managing substantial budgets, and strategic planning cycles. A significant part of a principal's discourse is associated with being the schools' instructional leader (Lynch, 2012) as we will see in Sam's story about being-alongside a mentor. As such, principals maintain concern for the learning of all students, including those with disabilities. Ontologically, the way-of-being-in-the-world that is peculiar to a school principal given the complexity of the role, is to be in the world with care-full relationships.

In a world inhabited by everyday care "the paths on which Dasein carefully goes about his business are different every day, but it is precisely in this way that the *real world* is originally discovered and is truly at hand" (King, 2001, p. 105, emphasis added). A principal's way-of-being is different every day - because every day *is* different. Through the different relational encounters with school stakeholders, principals understand that it is through their everyday care for others, that they discover and build on their own praxis for developing care-full relationships.

A principal's way-of-being is exceedingly challenging both culturally and ideologically. With the intensification of neo-liberal politics, public services such as education have become progressively redefined as market commodities (Angus, 2004; Bonal, 2003; Connell, 2013; Hamilton & Tett, 2021; Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019; Stevenson, 1999). As such, the focus on establishing care-full relationships, whilst more important than ever, is undermined by a more pressing agenda resulting in decidedly care-less relationships being commonplace.

In this chapter, I contemplate essential judgements of principals (especially by the school community) that are not necessarily those which can be measured and posted on league tables. They lie in the care-full relationships established (our interpersonal interactions with others) which form a school's culture.

Acknowledging the primacy of relationships as fundamental to human flourishing leads us to advocate an ethic based on a clear-eyed estimate of the consequences of behaviour on human well-being ... (Totterdell, 2000, p. 133).

Care-full and careful relationships matter to the well-being of a principal. The stories that follow reveal how ontologically significant care-full relationships are as a way-of-being in the principalship. I meditate over the possibility that ontologically, care is already around us, and its influence on a principal's well-being and quality of life can be positively influenced and nurtured by the care-full relationships that they establish. Furthermore, I unveil some thinking around the philosophical notion of care and its association with relationships, as the essence of care and its implications for well-being is uncovered from each story.

### **Stories, descriptions, interpretations**

In this first story, we meet Kath, an assistant principal in a newly developed school on the outskirts of Brisbane. Kath shares her experiences of positive modes of care in relation to her partner, work colleagues, students and thinking about the future.

#### ***A leisure / work now relationship***

*I have a new partner Tom. He runs a farm and I run a school, which works very well for us as a couple. It's such a great feeling when you both are mutually invested and care about each other's lives, even though they are so different. We were doing a happy dance this morning because it's raining - it was just such great joy. At school the kids were saying, it's raining, it's raining and Miss Kath is so excited. We've got crops in the ground that need rain, hence our exhilaration.*

*I know deeply, that when I leave my school to have children, I essentially can't return to the same place in my career, it's going to be a very difficult decision to do that. But then I know I can raise my own children rather than other people's children, which will bring me great joy.*

*It does help to have people surrounding you that can pick up the pieces or make dinner and can provide that retreat on the weekend. In this particular role, I have made a boundary for myself not to work on the weekends. When you go to*

*a place where you don't have internet or phone reception, it's very easy. However, it's difficult at times as I have to be contactable.*

*At the moment we're knee-deep in reporting, so it definitely requires work on the weekend; but for me, it means I work longer hours during the week; and that's how I balance my own time. It has taken a very long time to get there - it helps not having any internet reception. We're not 'emergency surgeons' and we don't need to be on call over the weekend. When families realise that, our well-being will probably improve. I tell that to my staff all the time, you know, why do you have your email on your phone? You're not an emergency doctor, you're not on call 24/7. You don't need that parent email that comes to you at 8pm to ruin your night. They're just emailing you then because you're free. You're also meant to be free with your family and not checking your emails. (Interview 2: Story 6).*

Kath's story reminds us that we are always in care-full relationships and that being-with others in the world matters. Kath has reached a place and time in her personal and professional journey where she has sought to make a generative space within her busy world of school leadership for a relationship with a new partner. Whilst continuing to attend to the day-to-day school tasks such as reporting, she now honours and embraces her new relationship through deliberate decision making such as not working on weekends and by using this precious time to nurture and nourish her personal time at home with her partner.

Being in the world could therefore be interpreted as "being-at-home-in-the-world and knowing one's way around while going about one's everyday practical affairs, day after day" (Sarvimäki, 2006, p. 6). The expression 'being at home' engenders a sense of home-ness when wellbeing is strong (Heidegger as cited by Dreyfus & Hubert, 1991) has entered Kath's lifeworld. She has found a pattern for a healthy and doable work / home / leisure balance that suits her relationship with her new partner. If schoolwork builds up, Kath stays back in the afternoons to safeguard her valuable weekends with her partner. English musician Noel Gallagher is quoted as saying "I don't live to work; I work to live" (Andrews, 2016; Gallagher, 2019) which resonates within Kath's story of self-realisation.

Kath has developed a healthy perspective on work, home and on life. She even projects into the future to a time where she perhaps may have children of her own and compares this to the fragility and uncertainty of her current position within the school.

As an aside, the tenure of school leadership positions quite often has a finite, contractual and conditional period. A successful tenure is based on work performance, results and the subjective anecdotes of those in governing power such as a school council or principal's supervisor perhaps. No pressure! How this plays out for the school leader is nothing more than an uncertain and insecure future: job one day - gone the next! The stress and effect on one's own wellbeing is relentless. Kath acknowledges that she is playing in this space and is now taking positive steps to build something concrete, something stable in her life.

Heidegger (1962) argues that being-in-the-world encompasses confronting things, tools and equipment that are there ready-to-hand, and nature, which is present-at-hand. Moreover, being-in-the-world incorporates the presence of other human beings and the being of oneself [selbstsein]. Heidegger's explanation unearths thinking around who exists in the world and who is mattering to us.

Heidegger (1962) interprets the world ontologically by characterising existence with others as "Being-with and Dasein-with [mitsein]" (p. 114). The other persons that "the 'Self' encounters in the world, unlike equipment and nature, are Dasein in its everydayness" (pp. 114-115, emphasis included in original text). The phenomenological interpretation of Dasein is thus very profound, meaning a "with-world [mitwelt]" (p. 118). This with-world of Dasein surpasses simply existing side by side or 'Being-alongside' as separate beings. In the "with-world of Dasein, Being-alongside is defined as care, which encompasses both concern and solicitude" (p. 120). Kath's story is therefore interpreted ontologically as a story of being-alongside (her partner, students and staff) in a caring relationship that comprises of concern and solicitude.



Heidegger's notion of care [sorge] can be interpreted as having two characteristics:

1. Concern - when *states of affairs* matter to you.
2. Solitude - when *persons* matter to you (Foulds, 2012, p. 20, emphasis added).

Both of these characteristics can be inferred as your "relationship with objects" (things and people) according to their relevance for your existence (p. 20).

Glimpsing at the term 'concern' through an ontological lens, does not necessarily assume that humans will always take care of objects that are ready at hand, but rather they are mattering in a way that reflects their relevance to our way-of-being-in-the-world (Foulds, 2012).

Being concerned with various objects of attention - even if you are not concerned about their welfare - is an essential character of being-in-the-world as a person. Like all existentialia, including solitude, concern covers a range of possibilities - in this case, having to do with being variously concerned about or indifferent to objects. So Care-related ways of dealing with objects in the world include not only concern-for but also indifference, carelessness and neglect (Foulds, 2012, p. 21).

Additionally, Heidegger (1962) argues that Dasein can be with others in an "owned" (authentic) or "disowned" (inauthentic) way<sup>32</sup> (p. 157). As humans we have the ability to "care for [fursorge] and show concern for [solitude] others," as a way-of-being (King, 2001, p. 77). What is becoming clearer is that there are possibilities for developing care-full relationships, that contain both positive modes of caring for and non-caring or indifferent ways in which Dasein is revealed in our everyday being together. Kath's story of a care-full relationship between her home and school life, reveals essences of both care and concern as a way-of-being.

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<sup>32</sup> **Authentic:** A possible way-of-being-in-the-world that is not covered over with being *fallen* into the world and being-with 'they'. This way of life would be a matter of turning away from *idle talk*, *sighting* your being-in-the-world as *thrown projection*, and acting in an understanding of there-being as *potentiality-for-being*. Heidegger (1962) describes such an existence as entailing *reticence*, *anticipatory resoluteness* and a *willingness to accept anxiety* (Foulds, 2012, p. 127, emphasis included in original text).

**Inauthentic:** The normal human way-of-being-in-the-world in which we are caught up [fallen into] the everyday world and various communally-established ways of existing. The word is not pejorative but is a strictly technical term for describing the ordinary everyday kind of existence that obscures [closes off] the existential Being of being-in-the world that Heidegger (1962) wants to interrogate (Foulds, 2012, p. 149).

In the following story, I explore another example of a care-full relationship through a slightly different lens. We hear from Simon (the narrator), an experienced principal from rural Queensland and one of his students, Brendan, an adolescent who exhibits challenging behaviours. Despite this, their relationship encompasses essences of concern and solicitude and unearths Brendan's potentialities.

### ***Hope-full Brendan***

*We had a lad named Brendan enrolled in our school for year eight, nine and ten. He came to us from another regional area. His family could be described as dysfunctional and lower socio-economic. His circumstances could have led him down the same path. We recognised that he was a decent kid and we could actually have some influence in the five hours that he was with us each day. We organised a school-based apprenticeship to keep him engaged in school. He struggled with mainstream schooling but we got him off onto a pathway that he did like and was good at.*

*He is now gainfully employed as a motor mechanic. He's probably in his thirties and married with a young child. He has his own home.*

*We played some part in Brendan's success and I'm very proud of that fact. We're doing that for other students nowadays with mixed results. (Interview 1: Story 7).*

The story of Brendan highlights the positive impact that schools and people within schools can have on their students. The mental model one could have formed regarding Brendan and his academic success, based on his family circumstances, could have influenced perceptions regarding his education in a negative way. Getting to know Brendan, his likes / dislikes, his strengths / weaknesses, led Simon to re-evaluate his educational pathway - a school-based apprenticeship. The match was a success. Brendan flourished and at the end of his school-based apprenticeship, the employer, impressed by his work ethic and resolve, offered him gainful employment.

Educational success can be measured in a number of ways. Traditionally, academic proficiency which enabled entry into tertiary education - the benchmark of success, was the end game. Brendan's story of hope demonstrates an alternative. Education is the great

social equaliser and has everything to do with hope and care. A student's life chances cannot be determined by their postcode (where they live), their family circumstances or choice of school they attended - yet there are many examples where this is indeed the case (Coleman, 2019; Johnson Jr, 2014; Wise & Gendler, 1989). Schools have an opportunity to influence a student's pathway, to break the cycle of socio-economic disadvantage and to steer them in a positive direction. Brendan was one such student. Traditional schooling was not working for him and if left in 'the system' he would have quite possibly floundered. However, some 'creative thinking outside the box' by Simon saw Brendan engage positively in his educational program beyond the walls of the classroom and embrace this opportunity. Whilst he did not achieve a university education, he has earned a qualification and is now gainfully employed.

The story of Brendan reveals a caring concern and solicitude for another, which involved attuning - listening - projecting. It presented an example of Simon 'leaping in' to provide immediate intervention and taking hold of a circumstance in which, he deemed necessary for Brendan's future. It also saw Simon 'leaping forward' with this initiative, which relates to those actions of care that had an impact on the future becoming of Brendan.

To elaborate on this argument, I would like to explore in more detail the positive modes of care [*sorge*]. Heidegger (1962) refers to the first positive mode of caring-for as "leaping in" [*einspringt*] for the other person (p. 158). When a person leaps in for another, they take care of matters - essentially taking the *care* off the other person. Whilst well intended, there is a risk of the other becoming dependent or even dominated (however subtly) by the person caring for them. We see extensive examples of *einspringt* in our everyday being together in the world, from nursing homes to parenting. Education is no different. A principal's way-of-being can, at times, see them jumping in to care for another person, such as a teacher being troubled by a student with challenging behaviours; a student at risk

of neglect or abuse by a carer; or a colleague with a health scare. The current approach to addressing principal well-being could be likened to *einspringt*, whereby the department is jumping in to ‘fix’ principals without any real understanding of the phenomenon of well-being or the antecedents that have contributed to their way-of-being.

In contrast, the second positive mode of caring-for another is what Heidegger (1962) refers to as “leaping ahead” [*vorausspringt*] (p. 159). This mode of caring for another does not take the *care* for oneself off the other person, but rather assists the other person come to the realisation of his or her own being as care.

This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care - that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a what with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it (Heidegger, 1962, p. 159).

As with *einspringt*, we see evidence of *vorausspringt* as a mode of caring for others in education whereby the teacher facilitates the learner to discover new findings, the principal empowers the teacher to discover new career aspirations and the university supervisor supports the doctoral student to realise possibilities. There appears to be ontological implications for Dasein’s being in accordance to *leaping ahead* for principal well-being. This mode of caring for others offers authentic possibilities, which I will explore within the stories that follow, along with the mode of *leaping in*. Heidegger argues,

Everyday Being-with-one-another maintains itself between the two extremes of positive solicitude - that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates [*vorspringend - befreienden*] (Heidegger, 1962, p. 159).

Heidegger’s (1962) philosophical notion of care [*sorge*] should not be confused with a feeling or an attitude one has towards others. “Care has an existential-ontological meaning” (p. 120), which includes a union of the ways in which being-with can be characterised. Using this ontological premise, care is viewed as a presupposition for different kinds of involvement, such as concern and solicitude being unpacked within the stories.

To elaborate on the explanation, concern encompasses having to do with, produce or attend to something or someone. It includes looking after, making use of, or giving something up and letting it go and incorporates consideration and discussion. Additionally, this explanation includes deficient or indifferent modes of concern such as leaving something undone, neglecting and taking a rest, all of which constitute an “inauthentic way-of-being” (pp. 121-122).

Solicitude refers to different modes of being with one another in an authentic caring way because we encounter others in the world. In contrast to concern, solicitude can take the form of doing things for other people by helping them realise their “own potentiality-for-Being” (p. 122). In common with concern, solicitude also includes deficient and indifferent modes of being-with. These include “Being-alone, passing one another by or not ‘mattering’ to one another” (p. 121, emphasis included in original text). Heidegger asserts,

Just as circumspection belongs to concern as a way of discovering what is ready-to-hand, solicitude is guided by considerateness and forbearance. Like solicitude, these can range through their respective deficient and indifferent modes up to the point of inconsiderateness or the perfunctoriness for which indifference leads the way (Heidegger, 1962, p. 123).

Ontologically, this interpretation highlights the essential distinction between indifferent modes and the manner in which being-with-one-another does not ‘matter’. Moreover, in reflecting on the Heideggian notion of care and its relationship with the phenomenon of well-being pertaining to this hermeneutic research, there are deep understandings starting to emerge. A principal cannot physically, socially or mentally carry the burden of care by ‘leaping in’ to solve every student’s, parent’s or staff member’s issue - even though some try as it is in their deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). There just are not enough hours in the school day! Simple practices such as disconnecting with technology after hours (as seen in Kath’s story) and making yourself unavailable 24/7, appear to be significant steps forward to greater principal well-being.

'Leaping forward' in an authentic way appears to be a preferred mode in terms of its value-addedness to others and to the well-being of the principal. The *dance* between the positive and deficient or indifferent modes of solicitude of being-alongside-others is one an experienced principal with learned phronesis, practical wisdom and tacit knowing, has reconciled and practised in their daily way-of-being. For a principal to focus on their own well-being, their being-alongside-others in a large department such as education, is as much about inconsiderateness or the *perfunctoriness* for which indifference leads the way, as it is about *considerateness* and *forbearance* (King, 2001). The ability to *not* invest in a situation - to pass another by, or to be alone, could be argued, is a mode of self-caring for a principal.

In the following two stories, as told by Elizabeth and Sam, I ponder the notion of leaping forward in both a deficient and positive way-of-being-alongside-others. Both stories contain essences of solicitude that are viewed in contrasting ways. In addition, I explore the possibility that our understanding and trust of care-full relationships has a life and an identity that is mattering and essential to well-being.

### ***Collegial support - or a lack thereof***

*I needed the support from Andrew, a fellow principal and it just wasn't there. He was taking a very corporate line with me thinking that this was his idea of support. That's what he was thinking and not what I was thinking, and I called him on that behaviour. I'm not saying he didn't genuinely care about me, because he does, and we are mates. However, I wouldn't know that if I was in a sinking ship, Andrew, that friend who I valued highly, would be there saving me. I think he might be sailing off in the latest strategic boat that was going to advance him somehow. And, I don't even know that he would see it that way, because I think it's my expectations of other people, rather than how he sees the world. He'd just say, that's nothing to do with me. You know?*

*I did address it with him, later. I said, you know, I felt pretty let down by you mate; Shane (another principal) rang me that night. Simon had no clue what was happening, but he called me to see if I was okay. Andrew goes, oh well, I don't do emotions very well, I'm sorry you felt like that. And so, it's a trust thing isn't it? You know, who's got your back when you're at your lowest ebb? (Interview 7: Story 9).*

Elizabeth's idea of support vastly differs from Andrew's viewpoint. Elizabeth was at a low point and in need of a friend and colleague to just listen and be supportive. Andrew, on the other hand, possibly thought that he was being supportive by rationalising with Elizabeth, by taking a corporate line with her. By his own admission, he did not attend to Elizabeth's emotional state, providing the much-needed pastoral care she was so undoubtedly craving. In contrast, Shane recognised Elizabeth's low mental state and poor well-being by acknowledging her emotional reactions and feelings, unaware of the precursory behaviours that rendered her upset.

Elizabeth's story is rich ontologically and unearths the wholeness and uniqueness of being human. Human existence is grounded in relationships (Buber as cited by Fife, 2015). Buber (2012) argues that within relationships humans take on a certain way-of-being which he refers to as I and Thou / I and It (an objectified or subjectified way-of-being). Buber compiled *I and Thou [Ich und Du]* between 1919 and 1922, and published it in 1923. His philosophical-theological contribution to original knowledge deals with the most profound issues of human relations - human relations with reality, and human relations with God (Buber, 1970; Kramer & Gawlick, 2003). He introduced the notion of an ontologically prior relation of *presence*, binding subject and object together in an identity-in-difference which he termed the 'I-Thou relationship', which creates the space which he refers to as the *between* [das zwischen]. Buber argues that the "I-Thou relationship connects spirit-and-life through the introduction of this new element of the *Between*" (Wood, 1969, p. xi, emphasis included in original text). Furthermore, he saw certain problems themselves to be "entrenched in the supposition of the primacy of the subject-object relationship, with subjects 'over here' and objects 'over there' and their relationship a matter of subjects 'taking in' objects or alternatively, constructing them" (Wood, 1969, pp. xi-xiii, emphasis included in original text).

Returning to Elizabeth's story and viewing it through Buber's lens, it is conceivable that an 'I-Thou relationship' existed between her and Andrew. The relationship reflected that of subject-object, with Andrew attending to Elizabeth 'over here' through possibly actively listening to her grievances. However, he avoided involvement (emotionally, nor offering solutions) by distancing himself 'over there' from the problem; and perhaps unintentionally, from Elizabeth.

Collegial support is paramount when principals are experiencing overwhelming mental and emotional reactions (Beatty, 2000; Beausaert, Froehlich, Devos, & Riley, 2016; Beausaert, Froehlich, Riley, & Gallant, 2021; Elomaa, Eskelä-Haapanen, Pakarinen, Halttunen, & Lerkkanen, 2021; Goldring, Preston, & Huff, 2012). Their overall well-being is enhanced or diminished, depending on the quality and presence of support. This raises the question of expectations we have of our colleagues and the care-full relationship we have with them.

Is a trusted colleague somehow morphed into a professional friend with whom we come to rely on for emotional support and not just work-related advice? As I ponder this question, I reflect on Elizabeth's story whereby she was possibly not looking for work-related advice from Andrew, but conceivably, looking to emotionally download. Rightly or wrongly (for the sake of this argument, it does not matter) principals need trusted colleagues in their lifeworld (Robbins & Alvy, 2003). This is someone to just "Be-alongside" (entities encountered within-the-world) (Heidegger, 1962, p. 317), walking the walk as opposed to talking the talk - someone with a deep understanding of their plight and with whom they can share lived experiences and seek assistance to carry the prodigious emotional baggage associated with the role of being '*in*' principalship.



In the following story, we meet Sam, a beginning school leader who has intentionally engineered a care-full relationship with David to support him with various aspects of the role and to grow professionally.

***Being-alongside a mentor:***

*It would be around about August 2015. I was doing some work with David, my lead principal at the time. David was wonderful for me that year because it was my third year as a small school principal and I'd got the school through a very turbulent time - floods (pardon the pun). I was still teaching very well and my data was going in the right direction.*

*David said to me Sam, you can show me that you are a very good teacher, but you need to show me that you're a really good leader to make that transition to a larger school. So, we talked a lot about how I needed to start producing artefacts on paper - this is what we do - these are the non-negotiables in our school - trying to lead through coaching. David said there's a time when we've just got to instruct and tell staff what to do. So, it was shifting my mindset a little bit. David organised a group of working parties, where there were four to five other small school principals who came to my school. David said, "I want you to show us what you've done." I presented the artefacts that underpinned the work we did in my school, discussing the shift that we were making.*

*As a small school principal, the second teacher and I were very forward thinking around using technology. We used technology with the students with disabilities. My school had fifty children at the time and of these, ten were verified with a disability. Even so, we weren't receiving any specialist services to support these children. We used technology as a way to support and lift them. So that day we were able to present how our inclusive practices went beyond just a multi-aged school. The kids were immersed in how we used technology and the feedback we got from those principals that visited that day was, Sam, you actually made the impossible sound possible. It was a huge affirmation for the hard work we did.*

*But what I realised was those conversations that David and I had for the three months leading up to it, was that I finally started to instruct and lead. I wasn't just another peer doing some good work and I had a good team around me. I actually started to lead a change in the direction for the school and the students.*

*That's one of the times where I felt on top of my game, because it then changed the things I do now. I actually reflect on those times and conversations and go, right - how do I change our brain processes to think about making a change in this direction in a bigger setting? It was probably the moment that I realised I was a principal of a school. (Interview 3: Story 3).*

Sam reflects positively on a time when he worked alongside David, his mentor. David supported and encouraged Sam to prepare for a career as principal of a larger school by

leaping ahead and engaging him in tasks that would give him the necessary skills and confidence to lead others. Sam embraced this opportunity by sharing a project with other small school principals. The project involved the use of technology to help educate the twenty percent of students with disabilities based in his school. The project and the sharing of the project with others was successful, leaving Sam with a felt sense of achievement.

Being-alongside a mentor in an authentic way, can afford the mentee valuable professional learning (Cole, 2015; McKinley, 2004). The mentor provides the mentee with the gift of time - a generative and dedicated space in which to learn and grow. From my experience, for this professional relationship to work, it must be built on a foundation of trust. Fortunately for Sam, the formula he and David used worked, with positive outcomes being achieved.

Principals supporting principals is clearly a model that works for a range of reasons - notwithstanding the sharing and deep understandings of common lived experiences (Drago-Severson, 2012). In Sam's world, David had the credentials from which to learn. When this arrangement is harmonious, well-ness prevails.

Sam's story offers a way forward - a heightened awareness of the dialectical nature of the relationship between two people holding different perspectives and similar lived experiences, but wishing to establish a truth through reasoned dialogue. Moustakas (1995) discusses three processes for facilitating growth of individuality and relationships namely:

1. Being In.
2. Being For.
3. Being With (p. 81).

The process of 'Being In' is imaginatively articulated through his prose titled "In-Being".

### **In-Being**

Being-in transports me to the world of the other.

A sojourn, a dwelling,

In this, I listen to understand, to say what is

Just the way it is, wide open, a beginning.

Emptied and purified of private thought

I enter, inside the being of time and space and essence,

Fully present, abiding with, in a sustaining way.

I hear new words, strong, clear words

That point to possibilities of world,

That open paths to creation of Being.

Being-in touches the pain, goes through the

Suffering, realizes the joy of living, the essence of relationship.

In-Being is in the world, connecting what is with how it came to be,

In-Being is presence, and caring in its presence, and in its sayings.

(Moustakas, 1995, p. 100).

Moustakas (1995) argues that 'Being in', positions one totally in the lifeworld of the other and requires a certain attunement to hear what is being communicated without "personal thoughts, feelings, theories or pre-suppositions" (p. 101). Similarly, Covey (2013) frames this way-of-being within habit five of the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* as "seek first to understand, then to be understood" (Covey, 2013, pp. 247-272). It is a form of active listening (Friston et al., 2021; Jones, Bodie, & Hughes, 2019; Rogers & Farson, 1957; Rost & Wilson, 2013) that goes beyond paraphrasing what the other has said - it involves a certain attunement. David certainly assumed a position of 'being in' for Sam, as he mentored him and supported his professional growth and well-being.

'Being for' others, takes on a slightly different way-of-being. As Moustakas (1995) explains, in this process, the "mentor takes a stand and offers a position" (p. 101). That position has an element of being on the other's side, defending him or her against those who would minimise, criticise, or block this person's right to be or to grow - a sense of alliance. It also involves being in the other person's lifeworld to the degree of experiencing their feelings both positive and negative. One lives with the other's tribulations, but also shares in their joy - the joy of a breakthrough; the feeling of an enhanced identity and the wonder of emerging self-esteem and well-being. Furthermore, 'being for' is about directly and actively promoting activities and events that benefit the other, by "providing opportunities, resources and plans aimed at positive resolution of problems, in the direction of the other's own interests, preferences and predispositions" (p. 101).

This notion is supported by Bauman (1995) who argues that,

Being-for is entered for the sake of safeguarding and defending the uniqueness of the Other. It is the guardianship undertaken by the self ... makes the self truly unique, in the sense of being irreplaceable; no matter how numerous the defenders of the Other's unique otherness may be, the self is not absolved of responsibility (Bauman, 1995, pp. 51-52).

For David, this way of 'being for' in his mentoring of Sam, allowed him to experience a feeling of 'being-together' in both the planning, implementation and celebratory stages of his work with their cluster of principals.

The third process, 'being with' includes aspects of 'being in' and 'being for'. The point of difference is that when "I am with others, I am always present as an individual self, with my own unique lived experiences and underpinning knowledge and understanding" (Moustakas, 1995, p. 102). 'Being with' others, engages my entire being. I process information and objectively interpret my own understandings, beliefs and judgements. Moustakas argues that 'indwelling' is the key cognitive process in 'being with' others and

focuses attention towards meaning beyond the *appearance* of things - beyond the presented thoughts and feelings.

Through indwelling, phenomena are centered, not as external objects or events, but as pointers to meaning that exists inside the phenomenon or event (Moustakas, 1995, p. 102).

This quote highlights the essence of this hermeneutic phenomenological research, by emphasising the organic nature in which meaning and deeper understandings may emerge. In 'being with', Moustakas (1995) asserts, "I become the searcher for glimmerings of meaning which start to become unearthed within the stories of others" (pp. 102-103). Through a process of indwelling, which includes contemplation and sensing beyond raw facts and data, clarity and ontological meanings start to surface, which lead to enlightenment, resolving problems and well-being. Naturally, indwelling cannot be fully achieved without a care-full relationship being established between mentor and mentee.

Bauman (1995) contends that from being-with to being-for, from convention to commitment, is an unspoken "demand to take care of the Other" (p. 62). Care, along with a sense of relationship (personality and friendship), collegiality and connection, shrouded in an atmosphere of safety, trust, honesty, willingness and mutual respect, are essential to nurturing growth (Bakioglu, Hacifazlioglu, & Ozcan, 2010; Brandl, 2021) and enables the three processes of being in, being for and being with to occur in an authentic way.

Returning to Sam's story, his final statement regarding feeling on top of his game, changing the way he approaches his work, reflecting on conversations with his mentor, and realising his potential as a principal, are pointing to an enlightened perspective resulting from an intuitive mentor 'being with' him in his principalship journey. This is particularly evidenced in Sam's next story, whereby he discusses the positive impact his mentors have had on him.

### *Aspiring Leaders:*

*In my principal journey, I participated in 'Aspiring Leaders' in 2010 and that's where it all got started for me. At that time, I needed a mentor. I'd just moved to Ipswich, so I didn't really know anybody at the time. Previously I was in the Logan area in South East Queensland. I was advised to see two or three different people and by accident, I met Martin. I saw Martin at a professional development session and the way he was working with his two or three teachers, and I thought - yep - that's similar to me and the person I am. So, I contacted Martin. We didn't know each other at all. I just saw how he operated and heard of his reputation. We've worked together ever since. So, he's officially my mentor. He's now on the Gold Coast, and I will still call him. I get kind of embarrassed when he says he learns off me [laugh]. But, that's been a really good professional and personal relationship (now I suppose). Networking with other principals is really important to me.*

*I contact Peter who is also serving in a rural area. Peter's been good at helping me think systematically. I have gone and sought people out. But, I've always been conscious of working with people who have the same sort of moral purpose around their job.*

*With David, Martin and Peter, they are very personable and deeply reflective. ... the learnings from them are tremendous and takes you all kinds of places. There's a lot of conversation. I'd have to say, Martin has been the person who has had the biggest impact on my career and principal work. (Interview 3: Story 6).*

Sam has surrounded himself with a strong support base and can call upon a range of colleagues in times of need. The path a principal walks can be a solitary journey (Howard & Mallory, 2008). In a school setting, they are the ones who provide support to students, parents and staff, but who supports them? Who can principals talk to about concerns? They cannot divulge certain information to stakeholders within the school community, because there is uncertainty as to who is holding or wielding the stake and wonderings around for what purpose will the stake be used (Walker, Kutsyuruba, & Noonan, 2011). Therefore, for many principals, they remain silent and risk *internally combusting* often leading to cognitive overload, burnout, stress and poor well-being (Bauer & Silver, 2018; Riley, 2020; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010; K. S. Whitaker, 1996). For other principals such as Sam, they seek out a network of like-minded colleagues with whom they can de-combust through the power of conversation.

A mentor who embodies a phronesis is rehearsed in active listening and can help the mentee problem solve situations without providing any answers. They lead others to their own solutions (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; A. A. Smith, 2007). For Sam, he identified three such mentors: Martin, Peter and David. Each mentor clearly has their own unique skill set and experiences and is a phone call away. Sam can, with confidence, treat each of these colleagues as a metaphoric ‘lightning rod’ in times of stress and need. He knows that they each have the necessary underpinning knowledge, experience and understanding to support him. What a rare and precious gift!

In reviewing the mentor phenomenon, Little (1990) compares the legend in which Odysseus entrusted Telemachus to mentor’s care (based on a profoundly personal and mutually respectful relationship) to modern-day mentoring in educational settings. Little argues that for a mentor / mentee relationship to be successful, it “requires of the mentor wisdom, integrity and personal investment” (p. 297). Sam’s mentors certainly possessed these qualities and focused on his personal well-being and professional developmental needs and interests. Tickle (1993) attests that this approach to mentoring among principals is not necessarily the focus for most Departments of Education (DoE). Moreover, it is often and predominantly conceived in terms of “utilitarian purposes that may be summarized as providing orientation to school settings, curriculum information, organizational arrangements, technical assistance, support with resources, or the assessment of performance” (p. 191).

The majority of the principals whom I have interviewed advocated positively for mentoring as a successful personal and professional practice. It offered them substantial practical assistance with school-based issues, supported their well-being and brought benefits that were separate from other forms of principal professional development and training. Research (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1995; Borovets, 2019;

Swaminathan & Reed, 2019) supports the position that mentoring be offered as an integral part of a national strategy for the professional and personal development of principals.

Informal mentoring of principals is in fact occurring in many circumstances throughout Queensland and the nation (Gurr & Drysdale, 2016; Nemanick Jr, 2000). These care-full relationships are individually established between principal and principal and in some circumstances, between principal and supervisor. In the following story, we meet Keith, a rural principal who has established a care-full relationship with Andrea, his supervisor. You will note in Keith's story that the relationship between himself and Andrea, whilst professional and work related, extends further to show elements of personal care surfacing when required.

### ***An Aspiring Leader***

*My previous principal, Andrea, had a massive impact on developing me as a school leader. It was funny because when I started at Eaten State High, she interviewed me for the deputy position. At the time she was principal of the school. Shortly after I was appointed, she was promoted to an Assistant Regional Director (ARD) position and I thought I wouldn't have much to do with her. Not the case! She was assigned to Eaten in her ARD position and would be in the school a lot because we had a priority school review. Back then Andrea would very rarely say anything to me.*

*However, when I became a principal and was appointed to Alma State School, I had much more to do with her as she became my ARD and immediate supervisor. As a beginning principal, Andrea took me under her wing. She walked alongside me, nurtured me and gave sound advice when I requested it. She was very loyal but very tough - something I really respected.*

*Then when I had the challenges later on with my health, with personal matters and with tricky school situations, she was almost like a big cuddly bear - very tough but at the same time very caring. I try to do similar to that with my own staff. She'd do anything for you, and she'd find out anything I requested of her, particularly how she could support your school to be better. (Interview 8: Story 8).*

Andrea's relationship with Keith could reasonably be described as care-full. She embodied the notion of care in nurturing Keith and whilst not explicitly stated in the story, she mentored him as a beginning principal. Andrea created a relationship with Keith whereby



an uplifting, attentive solicitude was present for him, thus enabling him to develop as a principal - it mirrored a mentor / mentee relationship. The relationship emphasises how care is central to what it means to be human. “Humankind as a social totality is brought into the world and sustained by care. Since it binds humans together, care is the glue of society” (Reich, 1995, p. 319).

As a beginning principal, Keith’s quest for enlightenment, hope and aspiration for his future career, and life for that matter, ran very high. Andrea was able to provide the appropriate level of pastoral care [sorge] to sustain his thirst for practical knowledge and understanding. Heidegger (1962) would contend that Andrea was exhibiting a solicitous style of care that ‘jumps ahead’ of Keith, anticipating his potentiality - not in order to take away his care, but to give it back. This kind of solicitude as previously discussed, is authentic care, for it helps Keith to know himself in care, and to become free for care.

Hayes (2019) argues that a strong mentoring relationship can support a beginning principal in developing skills to be a leader of learning by clarifying the mentor’s role, focusing mentoring sessions to build the mentee’s capacity as a leader of learning, and a commitment to mentoring sessions that support teaching and learning. In light of what has been unearthed within the stories, the foundation of a strong mentoring relationship appears to extend beyond operational functionality and is dependent on authentic care.

In the article *Well-being as being well - a Heideggerian look at well-being*, Sarvimäki (2006) argues that Heidegger’s philosophy of *Being and Time* (1962) has formerly and extensively been utilised as a foundation for qualitative research into health and care.

The landscape of well-being sketched out from this viewpoint included being well as the everyday unfolding of life, as alternating between a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity in the world, between authentic and unauthentic. The landscape also included being well as orientating towards the future and realizing one’s potentialities as well as confronting anxiety and death” (Sarvimäki, 2006, p. 4).

Sarvimaki argues that from this enlightened perspective, a deeper ontological understanding of care and well-being can be achieved. This paves the way towards developing a strategy for further understanding and conceptualisation of human care and well-being.

***Care-full relationships = well-being***

It is becoming apparent that there are ontological links between developing care-full relationships and the positive impact this has on one's well-being. For a school principal, with the multitude of interpersonal relationships available to them that they must establish within and beyond their school communities, developing care-full relationships sustain and improve their personal and professional well-being. Wells and Klocke (2018) argue that internal coping methods such as "mindfulness and self-care" may potentially be the way forward to developing care-full relationships and resilience in principals, in an era of high-stakes accountability and unparalleled expectations (p. 161). Furthermore Parker and Martin (2009) assert that well-being and satisfaction in workplaces such as schools, are absolutely dependent on personal engagement or care-full relationships. This position is supported by van Dierendonck, Haynes, Borrill, and Stride (2004) who claim that "the social context of a workplace such as a school, is directly aligned with individual well-being" (p. 173) - with leaders such as principals and workers such as teachers, teacher aides, ancillary staff and so forth, influencing one another in a relational way. In addition, they argue that it is imperative that organisations develop and implement programs and procedures that are aimed at "diminishing stress and enhancing the well-being of its employees" (p. 173, bracketed words added).

The capacity to grow a sense of well-being is plausibly the most significant issue in principal longevity in the role (K. Spiller, Ford, & Eckermann, 2018). Whilst I argue, that principal well-being (self-care) is primarily the responsibility of the individual, a view

supported by Hausman, Crow and Sperry (2000); Departments of Education (DoE) can and must contribute by focusing on organisational culture (Powell & Graham, 2017). Care-full relationships are at the centre of principal well-being, as such, the DoE has an ethical responsibility to re-evaluate leadership programs to include a curriculum where “principals learn to thrive, deal with stress, and challenge with optimism and resilience” (Wells & Klocko, 2018, p. 169).

We could learn much from our Māori cousins from across the Tasman.

Care is at the heart of the Māori values system, which calls for humans to be Kaitiaki, caretakers of the mauri, the life force, in each other and in nature. The Relational Five Well-beings’ approach, based on four case studies of Māori businesses, demonstrates how business can create spiritual, cultural, social, environmental and economic well-being. A Well-beings’ approach entails praxis, which brings values and practice together with the purpose of consciously creating well-being and, in so doing, creates multi-dimensional wealth. Underlying the Well-beings’ approach is an ethic of care and an intrinsic stakeholder view of business (C. Spiller, Erakovic, Henare, & Pio, 2011, p. 153).

The relationship between the Māori values system of overall care and well-being and its correlation to outcomes, suggests that implementing a well-being improvement solution could have a significant bottom and top-line impact on business performance. This is supported by contemporary research where findings unearth a direct relationship between an organisation’s focus on a positive culture, workers’ health and well-being and high performance and productivity (Ciobanu, Androniceanu, & Lazaroiu, 2019; Cooke, Cooper, Bartram, Wang, & Mei, 2019; McCarthy, Almeida, & Ahrens, 2011; Miao & Cao, 2019; Ogbonnaya, Daniels, Connolly, & van Veldhoven, 2017; S. Wood & De Menezes, 2011). These uncovered understandings point to the interconnected relationship between a positive organisational culture and implications for principal well-being. As part of an all-encompassing, state and national strategy, there is a solid argument that well-being strategies must be a consideration for all school principals (Wicher, 2017).

## Concluding thoughts

In this chapter, I have explored the notion of care-full relationships as a way of being '*in*' principalship, which reflects a certain 'being-alongside' others in the world. The key take-away from this chapter is that school leadership is relational. The taken-for-granted position is that we are always in a relationship with others and that care-full relationships are always mattering - ontologically it cannot be otherwise.

The primordial nature of being human is one of being-with-others in a relational co-existence that is essential to the world we share with others. Other people are always being-there-with us in their presence and absence (Giles, 2008, p. 119).

The stories within this chapter reveal that school principals engage in constant interpersonal interactions with key stakeholders (students, parents, staff and others). Whether these interactions embody the positive mode of caring-for-others as described in the chapter as 'leaping in' for the other person or 'leaping ahead', "our everyday being-with-one-another maintains itself between the two extremes" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 159) - a care-full relationship.

Maintaining care-full relationships has implications for principal well-being. When the relationship is positive as we witnessed in Sam's story of being mentored by David, positive well-being is present. However, when the experience leans towards a negative relationship, such as Elizabeth's story of being alongside Andrew, the 'care' in care-full relationships is absent, rendering well-being also absent, with potential for harmful consequences.

Our way-of-being-with-others requires an attuned commitment to take care of the other (Bauman, 1995). These relationships are crucial and are mattering to the well-being of principals. Contemplative notions of care reveal how ontologically significant care-full relationships are as a way of being '*in*' principalship. Principals' well-being and quality of

life can be positively influenced and nurtured through the establishment of cultures of well-being around them.

The impact the principal has on care-full relationships established in a school community is immeasurable and does not end at the school gate. They lead the school community's contributions towards a positive culture. It is imperative for those who take responsibility for principal development to recognise and address the impact their well-being has on the quality and longevity of care-full relationships.

The following chapter: *Being in circumspect fore-sight*, which deals with the now, with an eye on the future, considers a way-of-being that enables one to see beyond the immediate moment to understand what else is unfolding. There appears to be a strong connection between one's thrownness, the being of Dasein as care where care-full relationships are mattering and our everyday circumspective being in the world with others.

## 8 Chapter 8: Being in circumspect fore-sight

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### Introductory thoughts

“Learning to fasten the seat of my union suit without looking around.” (Lee, 1960, p. 18)

In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) Scout compares learning to read to “learning to fasten the seat of his union suit without looking around” (As cited by Bear, 1991, p. 149). In both instances, the new learnings are developed over a period of time until they became instinctive. The practical qualities of routinely performing tasks [automaticity] start to emerge, usually without “conscious reflection or planning” (p. 149). It is this fore-sight and the ontological implications for being ‘*in*’ principalship that will be explored in more detail within this chapter.

Heidegger (1962) refers to a special kind of sight [sicht] which he terms ‘*umsicht*’ - translated as circumspection (p. 98). Circumspection is described as an awareness in which one looks around [ontologically] before deciding what to do next. It’s an awareness in which Heidegger seems to generalise in a narrower sense as “occurring in our everyday living” (pp. 98-99, bracketed word added). Whilst Scout has now mastered the tasks of reading and fastening the seat of his union suit without looking around, “entities that are relevant to your existence” (Foulds, 2012, p. 27), it is his very being in the world, that is, ‘being on the lookout’ circumspectively, that enabled him to acquire these skills.

The lived experiences of principals could be likened to Scout’s way-of-being in the world. Being ‘*in*’ principalship encompasses “looking around” or “looking around for something” or “looking around for a way to get something done” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 98). It is a form of ontological, rather than an ontic awareness in which “one looks around before deciding what one ought to do next” (p. 98). A principal’s awareness of important entities, whereby

they look around for a way to get something done, also encompasses, by contrast, “not paying attention to entities that are merely present-at-hand (i.e., not relevant as possibilities for their existence)” (Foulds, 2012, p. 27). Just as Scout no longer has to look around to fasten the seat of his union suit, a principal with lived experiences and phronesis, practical wisdom and tacit knowing, does not necessarily need to pay attention to all entities in their lifeworld. School leadership involves “delegating responsibility” and “nurturing participatory leadership” (Neuschel, 2005, p. 151) that involves offering opportunities to aspiring school leaders whereby they take ownership and accountability for various tasks (Fairholm, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Sanders (2017) argues “the degree to which a leader is able to delegate work is a measure of his [sic] success” (p. 138).

This opens a window to the possibility that circumspection, our looking around and observing important objects in our everyday living, may have significant connections to principal well-being in that they can choose to pay attention (or not) to entities around them. From an ontological perspective, this philosophical notion posits that the practice of tacit noticing described as circumspection, may provide an opportunity for those in the principalship to “reorient Dasein toward clearer awareness of the spatial context” (Shepperd, 2016, pp. 752-763).

In this chapter, I explore the notion of circumspection and the possible connections it may have to the phenomenon of well-being. I ponder over participants’ stories that reveal potentially hidden ontological understandings that “everyday taking-care of things is guided by a circumspect fore-sight [*umsicht*]” (King, 2001, p. 86).

### **Stories, descriptions, interpretations**

In the stories that follow, I explore the notion of circumspection and its presence in the every-day experiences of school principals. What unfolds within each story is a certain

circumspect fore-sight that goes beyond just looking around. It involves practical behaviour and dealings with entities in-order-to develop an existential understanding of the possibilities of things and their relevance to or bearing upon a given situation. Furthermore, I unearth and explore the phenomenon of well-being and its possible connection to circumspection, as a way forward to challenge taken-for-granted meanings and quick, rational explanations.

### ***On common sense***

Bob is an experienced senior principal and President of a Queensland principals' association. He has lived experiences and attuned school administrative praxis, which guide his every-day dealings with people and objects.

*I remember a former school audit whereby the auditor, an officious fellow, with no practical experience in schools, had highlighted a most absurd recommendation in his final report. He put in this statement that we didn't have a current Beginning Teacher Induction Program in the school. As I tried to explain to him, the reason we didn't was because we hadn't had any beginning teachers for the last few years.*

*I pulled out the Beginning Teacher Induction Program I had written when we last had a beginning teacher, and said, look, this guy is now a head of department; this one here is now a primary principal, so we must have done something right. And this guy, the chief auditor, said no, you've got to have a new program every year, which made absolutely no sense to me. I said, look, trust me, if we got a new beginning teacher, we would update this program and insert their name into it, because it's on the computer ready to go.*

*But, obviously that wasn't good enough. And I just thought, what the bloody hell are we doing here? (Interview 10: Story 3).*

A principal's awareness of important entities, whereby they look around for a way to get something done within their uncertainty, also encompasses, by contrast, not paying attention to entities that are merely present-at-hand, that is, not relevant as possibilities for their existence. Bob's story highlighted the absurdity of a mandated requirement, to which he chose not to pay attention because it was not relevant to him or his school. To Bob, updating his school's beginning teacher program annually, when he was not inducting any



beginning teachers, seemed a redundant and unnecessary activity. For Bob, it did not make common sense to be investing in the production of an artefact that would sit on his shelf and not be used in the coming years. As Bob attests, it was a waste of his time which could better be directed elsewhere. An experienced principal understands that information changes over time and that any form of induction needs to ensure it contains the latest information on policy and procedures.

With the concept of circumspect fore-sight, Heidegger (1962) gives an existential-ontological explanation of what is familiar to us as “common sense [verständigkeit]” (p. 187). The Dasein of common sense sees things in advance in the light of their possible usefulness, harmfulness, significance, or insignificance to circumstances. Furthermore, Heidegger argues that the common sense view of the world can only be possible when an existential understanding, which “fore-throws the possibilities of Dasein’s existence in its world”, in the “light of which alone the possibilities of things in their relevance to ..., their bearing upon... this or that situation becomes understandable” (Heidegger, as cited by King, 2001, p. 70).

The relationship between temporality of the beginning teacher program and being-present-at-hand, reveals, to some extent, an ontological knowing in Bob’s praxis. The updating of the beginning teacher program was clearly something that was in the work-related tasks of a principal; however, it had no immediate relevance to what Bob was presently doing, because he had no beginning teachers at his school. *I’ll update the program when a beginning teacher is appointed to our school*, were Bob’s final words following his story. Bob is clearly, even steadfastly, enacting his phronesis. Bob’s ontological way-of-being is seen as a common-sense approach to being ‘in’ principalship. Is our looking around at things almost, always, subjective and a truer representation of how we are as humans, because they are possibly not as objective as we claim?

In aligning this question to the topic of well-being experiences in principals, we are now awakening to our taken-for-granted pre-assumptions and realising that the phenomenon of well-being is something that is experienced by everybody, all of the time (Healey-Ogden & Austin, 2011; Michalos, 2017; Oades, 2019). Therefore, is well-being something that is subjective or objective or rather, a constant presence of our being in the world? Can our circumspection, our awareness of things, have implications for our underpinning knowledge and understandings of what it means to be well?

In contemplating these questions, I explore another side to circumspection which involves concern and care-for-others in our everyday being together. Circumspection is the “perceptual framework you get when you have a need or project in mind; it is not disinterested nor contemplative” (Foulds, 2012, p. 27). This is because circumspection goes with care and concern as a way of discovering objects that are “ready-to-hand as a possible resource or asset” (p. 28). The significance of entities in one’s lifeworld depends on your existence; the behaviour of students, for instance, is relevant to principals and teachers in a way it is not to a childcare worker, due to the formal nature of schooling and expectations of behaviours for learning. Essentially, we tend to be in the world on the lookout for entities that are relevant to our existence; in other words, we are being in the world on the lookout for possible equipment<sup>33</sup>. This “being on the lookout for equipment” is circumspection (p. 27). If, for example, you are a principal, teacher or a childcare worker, then your awareness of child protection is circumspective - you are sensitive to changes in conditions that serve or threaten [have meaning for] theirs’ or your chosen existence.

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<sup>33</sup> **Equipment:** *Ready-to-hand* objects that are used or useful towards some end (eating, shelter, good works, sewing, writing, measuring, transport, crime, making music, building and so on) which ultimately has to do with a way of *existing*. A bed, for example, is equipment for rest, comfort, and / or intimacy; a holiday is equipment for rest and / or recreation (Foulds, 2012, p. 140, emphasis included in original text).

As previously revealed, Heidegger (1962) refers to our own way of seeing and understanding as *umsicht*, which literally means, “looking around or circumspection” (p. 98). To explore Heidegger’s notion more deeply, the *um* in *umsicht* is interpreted in its spatial sense with three key vantage points coming into view:

1. The world round-about us (the first and nearest world).
2. Going about the world and about our practical business with things.
3. Looking around - circumspection (King, 2001, pp. 69-70).

These three key vantage points could be thought about as a perspective on and a perspective in. If we think about the former world number one tennis player, John McEnroe, he would have a number of perspectives of his play depending on which vantage point or world he was viewing from - as a spectator watching his match from the stand or as a player in the moment of play on the court. He is able to view his game circumspectively beyond the immediate moment to see what else is unfolding, depending on his vantage point. Even nowadays as a tennis commentator, his vantage point is likened to that of a helicopter view displaying care for the immediate and care for the future.

The “*um* in *umsicht* has heightened meaning when we turn to the *um* in its primary sense of *for*” (King, 2001, p. 70 emphasis included in original text) as in the word fore-sight. Heidegger (1962) discusses Dasein’s first and nearest world as the for-world in the sense that the form, the “how” of its coherence is given by the *for-the-sake-of* its own existence (p. 120, emphasis included in original text).

This prescribes the character of significance, the specific “for-worldishness of the everyday world”, by the relational complex “by means of ... in order to ... for...” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 120). The ontological implications for principals tacitly extend beyond the theoretical “only-looking-at things” and include the “practical taking care of things [umgang]”, which includes its own way of seeing and understanding circumspectively (King, 2001, p. 69).

In this next story, I explore the notion of circumspect fore-sight through a slightly different lens of curiosity. “Curiosity originates from everyday circumspection” (King, 2001, p. 244). And whilst we associate curiosity with scientific inquiry or a sense of inquisitiveness, Heidegger (1962) restricts its meaning to a “greed for seeing something new” (p. 397).

The author of this story is Simon, who is situated in a different time and place in his principalship. Here Simon describes a period in his career where he performed the role of President of a Queensland principals’ association. It was a particularly positive, even though challenging period and the important work he performed, as the representative of the eighty-three preparatory to year 10 / 12 (P-10/12) Queensland State Schools, was valued. He learned as an insider, how those in power (senior executive positions within a government department) went about their business and saw how hard they worked. He formed an appreciation for what departmental executives do for schools. He also experienced the fragility of initiatives that came and went with a change of government – which was key to this experience.

### ***The fragility of leadership***

*A satisfying moment in my career was being voted in as President of a Queensland principals’ association. I had substantial competition for the job. Being appointed to the role meant a slight wage increase. It was a dual role - 0.5 principal of Allen P-10 State School and 0.5 President of the Queensland P-10/12 State Administrators’ Association. I held that role for ten years - the longest serving President in Queensland at the time. To be constantly re-voted into the position re-assured me that I was doing the right work and that colleagues had an enduring confidence in me.*

*Being part of consultation groups and forums, which made decisions that would impact on Queensland schools, gave me a different perspective regarding our Central Office and the work that they do. I got to work alongside our Minister for Education, the President of our Queensland Teachers’ Union, our Director General, other association presidents and executives. It was a privilege and an honour. I attended state, national and international conferences, representing the eighty-three P-10/12 State Schools in Queensland.*

*However, a change of government stopped all support for principals' associations. I felt de-valued and decided not to run again for President after ten years of dedicated service to principals, P-10/12 state schools and to our department.*

*Another change of government reinstated support for the principals' associations, which was met with applause from every Queensland principal. Our then Minister for Education made the announcement at a state principals' conference.*

*Bob, my replacement, is doing a great job. (Interview 1: Story 4).*

Simon appears to have developed an inquisitive, but healthy balance of appreciation and scepticism towards his department and government during his period in the presidency, having worked alongside senior executives witnessing and contributing to major decisions which in time, impacted on Queensland schools. He is clearly grateful for this former opportunity and now views the association and department with curiosity.

Heidegger (1962) contends that curiosity arises when everyday circumspection “sees nothing more at hand that needs to be done” (p. 216). The care of making, improving or finishing something comes to a rest.

Circumspection, whose proper function is to “bring things near [ent-fernen]” so that they can be taken care of, becomes liberated from the workday world to which it has been bound (Heidegger, 1962, p. 216). We see suggestions of this in Simon’s story when he *decided not to run again for President after ten years of dedication to principals, P-10/12 state schools and to our department.* This unoccupied care or “taking a rest” from the work however, does not thereby disappear, but “gathers itself in the liberated circumspection” (p. 216). By his own admission, Simon continues to demonstrate concern for the association, albeit from a distance stating that, *Bob, my replacement, is doing a great job.* Since its very essence is to bring something near, yet there is nothing at hand that has to be done, “circumspection creates new possibilities for seeing itself” (p. 216).

Heidegger explains:

It tends to leave the things nearest at hand for a distant and strange world. Care turns into taking-care of possibilities, resting and staying to see the “world” only in its *outward appearance* [aussehen]. Dasein seeks distance solely to bring it near in its outward appearance. Dasein lets itself be intrigued just by the outward appearance of the world, a kind of being in which makes sure that it gets rid of itself as being-in-the-world, gets rid of being with the nearest everyday things at hand (Heidegger as cited by King, 2001, p. 244, emphasis included in original text).

For Simon, distancing himself from the role of association President at a time of great uncertainty and making modifications to his everyday circumspection, liberated him from the boundedness to his workday world and opened up new possibilities for taking care of other things such as his own well-being. While the certainty of ongoing leadership can be anticipated, the uncertainty of the politics surrounding education can torment the valuing of those in leadership and the nature of their contribution. Initiatives that evoked passion, coupled with extremely hard work and financial commitment, can be gone with a change in government. This has the potential to play out in a number of ways: eroding trust, commitment, relationships, enthusiasm, security, attitude, and belief in and support for the system. Moreover, the prospect of unearthing the phenomenon of well-being with new possibilities for seeing itself circumspectively, arises with possible consequences for harm.

In the following story, we return to Bob, whom we met earlier in this chapter. Bob is both a school principal and current President of a Queensland principals’ association.

### ***The replacement President***

Simon and Bob have been friends for the past twenty years. They both are long serving principals of Queensland P-10/12 state schools, and have supported each other for the greater part of their principalship. When Simon stepped down from being President of a principals’ association, Bob stepped up to ensure the good work continued.

In the story that follows, Bob experiences a serious health scare whilst performing the dual role of President and principal. Bob's spouse Leticia is a medical practitioner and cautions him to slow down with his work commitments and to gain perspective.

*I arrived at the Mater Hospital in Macksville where the doctors put me through a range of tests. They said, you've had a heart-attack! I must have gone white with shock and sat down to process this news. Following this, I ended up having angiograms and other diagnostic procedures.*

*I took all of the fourth term off from school to recover. It was a kind of awakening call, because when I eventually went back to school the following year - you know what - it had gone along quite nicely and coped without me! I wasn't the infallible super-principal I thought I was. Yeah! The school didn't crumple in a heap due to my absence.*

*It was at this time that I re-evaluated my roles and I thought that being President of a principals' association is a big tough gig, especially when you're trying to run a school as a full-time principal. What got me thinking was that my predecessor also had a heart-attack and had to relinquish his job as a result. So, I went to visit senior executive officers in our department and put in a submission for additional support, first with Benjamin (Assistant Director General) asking if I could be released from my principal's workload for 50% of the time. I found if you tried to work some days here at school, I would be inundated with conflicting tasks. People would say, "Oh this will only take 5 minutes", and suddenly your day is gone. And then, I was having to do everything for the association at night. Of course, when I had to go to Brisbane for a meeting as a representative of the association, you'd go through this guilt trip about not being at school. It was a real conflict of roles.*

*So as part of the deal I struck with Benjamin, 50% I got paid as a band eleven association President and 50% of the time as a band eight principal. I also was given a deputy principal for half the week. I amended the submission to change the offer of a deputy principal and create a principal's position to job-share my workload back at school. This was achieved by amending the band eleven salary and keeping my pay scale at band eight level to enable the appointment of another principal to help run my school. It was a cost neutral agreement.*

*The other association Presidents told me I was silly, because that was the first thing the department would take off me. I said, I don't care, because I think my health and well-being are more important than an increased salary. I felt I was able to comfortably manage a 50/50 split in the roles of President/principal where a clear line of sight had been established between the roles. Because of my heart attack, I realised the school wouldn't suffer if I wasn't there. The big decision to share the principal's role has been a lifesaver!*

*Yes. Really, the only people you are indispensable to are your family. (Interview 10: Story 7a).*

This story reveals a moment of clarity, when the practical circumspection of everyday care is quite literally mattering to the health and well-being of someone in principalship. Rather than solely being a consequence of our ability to access things in a circumspect *fore-sight* manner and discover things at hand as utensils and what they are for, “practical circumspection of everyday care” can modify itself in various ways (Heidegger as cited by King, 2001, p. 243).

In this story, Bob recounted an experience that awakened him to the possibility, a circumspect *fore-sight*, that led him to explore another way-of-being in general. His serious health scare and the events that followed, prompted Bob to re-evaluate his priorities and to find a new way-of-being-in-the-world. Heidegger (1962) terms this circumspect *fore-sight* “transparency” [durchsichtigkeit] which is related primarily and on the whole to our existence (p. 186). Included in this philosophical notion is an awareness - a knowledge of oneself in a sense, which is well understood. Furthermore, it is not a matter of perceptual tracking down and inspecting a point called the “Self”, but rather one of seizing upon the full disclosedness of being in the world throughout all the constitutive items which are essential to it, and doing so with understanding (p. 187). In Bob’s words,

*... my health and well-being are more important than an increased salary. I felt I was able to comfortably manage a 50/50 split in the roles of President/principal where a clear line of sight had been established between the roles. Because of my heart attack, I realised the school wouldn’t suffer if I wasn’t there. The big decision to share the principal’s role has been a lifesaver!*

Bob shares additional information in this story, which affords some insight into his new way-of-being.

*Leticia’s parents were both teachers. Her father was a principal who went up the promotional ladder and became a Regional Director. She was familiar with the demands and the community aspects of a rural community in New South Wales (NSW), so, she was aware of that and very supportive. But of course, always hounding me, and it was her line for years the only people you are*



*indispensable to is your family. To which, I thought yeah, yeah, right. But it wasn't 'til it happened that I realised how true it was. (Interview 10: Story 7b).*

Leticia's insight as a medical practitioner and lived experiences as the daughter and now the spouse of a school principal, has given her a level of understandings that provides informed commentary. Bob, on the other hand, initially dismisses Leticia's warnings, but only comes to understand her practical wisdom, following his health scare. Heidegger (1962) refers to this practical understanding in the ontic sense, using the expression "understanding something [meaning] being able to manage something, being a match for it [or] being competent to do something" (p. 183, bracketed words added). To help illuminate this point, Heidegger explains,

The Being-possible which is essential for Dasein, pertains to ways of its solicitude for Others and of its concern with the 'world', as we have characterised them; and in all these, and always, it pertains to Dasein's potentiality-for-Being towards itself, for the sake of itself (Heidegger, 1962, p. 183).

Interpreting this explanation when contemplating over what had transpired in Bob's story, we gain some insight that he experienced his own being as a set of possibilities - some as free-floating, some with mistakes and some seized upon and having a state-of-mind for its "ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 183). Furthermore, "understanding is the Being of such potentiality and the essence of our existence" (p. 184). Bob's way-of-being, discloses in itself what its being is capable of - in other words, an existential understanding of possibilities following his health scare experience.

Given Bob's enlightened way-of-being in the world, it is conceivable that things such as prioritising your own health and well-being over work commitments are initially discovered and understood by the circumspect fore-sight of everyday care. This notion is contemplated further in the following story about Heidi, whereby everyday care understands the being of things from their relevance "[bewandtnis]" to a world, and this is the way in which they can be "discovered as they are in themselves" (Heidegger, as cited by King, 2001, p. 72).

### *Acting principal*

The German term *bewandtnis* is used by Heidegger (1962) to describe an entity's involvement in doing something or some activity. Its root meaning has to do with the way something is "already turning" when one lets it run its course (p. 115). Our circumspection can "take account of it and be free from encounters within-the-world" (p. 114).

What emerges within Heidi's story is a concerned circumspection that involves taking account of her current situation as acting principal - something that was *already turning*, letting it run its course and eventually becoming free from it.

*I think my worst experience in the principalship - a time when I considered relinquishing my job, would have to be the end of the school year at Mari Mari State School. I was acting principal at the school and it was an extremely stressful experience, due to the challenging relationships within the school community and a lack of support for me as principal.*

*What ended up happening at the start of term four for my own self-preservation, I took five weeks long service leave (LSL). In hindsight, it should have been stress leave, but I wasn't game to talk to the department about it for fear of repercussions. So, I took five weeks of LSL just to get out of that hell hole. I was at the point where I needed to take a break or quit my job, and I didn't want to end my career.*

*In the last five weeks of the school year, when I returned from LSL, I was basically just doing the necessities - working on auto-pilot to get to the end of term. I kept telling myself, I've got five weeks left in this school, then I'm returning to Ozzie State School where I belong and am appreciated. I knew that I could go back which helped me through this difficult experience.*

*So, yeah, that was definitely a time when I went, you know what, I'm just going to do what I need to do. And I got through it because I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, to understand that I can leave this place soon. Which is sad, in hindsight, because that's not the way I work. I hated working like that, it made me feel very defeated, but it was the only way that I could stay sane. (Interview 11: Story 4).*

Heidi's acting principal experience unfolded into a harmful way-of-being that could have potentially ended her career in school leadership. However, she circumspectively prioritised her own health and well-being over her everyday having to deal with things

and took time out in the form of long service leave, for respite and self-care. When she returned to Mari Mari School, there was only five weeks remaining of her acting appointment. Given this short timeframe and the thought of returning to Ozzie State School, Heidi made a decision that her endgame at Mari Mari was simply to maintain things in her thrown-ness of care. The story offers a glimpse into Heidi's basic way of existing when she states:

*...that was definitely a time when I went, you know what, I'm just going to do what I need to do. And I got through it because I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, to understand that I can leave this place soon.*

Heidegger (1962) suggests this basic way of existing is *disowned* or *inauthentic* - a "potentiality-for-Being in which this Being is *mine*" (p. 275, emphasis included in original text). Whilst the word *disowned* suggests a measured course of action or attitude, Heidegger's meaning is ontological and points to the basic possibilities of Dasein's being is *self* in existing, and "Dasein is *in each case mine*" (pp. 235, 323, emphasis included in original text) "grounded in existential understanding" (p. 187). For Heidi, her thrown-ness manifested into something negative, and saw her turn away from herself and disown the possibility of which her way-of-being is capable. This basic way of existing saw Heidi descend into a *disguise* - characterised by "being lost to the world" (King, 2001, p. 41). It was not necessarily conscious or deliberate, but more so, a disowned existence that Heidi fell into in her thrown-ness towards care. Heidegger (1962) explains, "Dasein is already ahead of itself in each case; this is implied in its state-of-Being as care" (p. 270). Heidi's potentiality-for-being during this most challenging time saw her concerning herself with "unexpected entities within-the-world and uncovering them circumspectively" (p. 271). She understood that her state of being as care - her giving up and letting go, was atypical of how she would normally exist, but nevertheless, necessary for her own well-being, as evidenced in her statement, ... *that's not the way I work. I hated working like that, it made me feel very defeated, but it was the only way that I could stay sane.* In uncovering

meanings of the phenomenon of well-being within Heidi's story, it is possible that the practical circumspection of everyday care can modify itself in numerous ways as a form of self-preservation to be liberated from that which it has been bound.

This notion of modifying our practical circumspection is explored further in this next story. Within the white font of Doug's narrative, his potentiality-for-being as being-in-the-world of thrown-ness, assumes a state of disclosedness in his understanding of entities within the world circumspectively. Rather than existing in a disowned state of being, Doug understands the circumstances surrounding him and asserts himself in a way whereby the truth has been presupposed and uncovered, and important relationships are preserved.

Heidegger states that in Dasein's state-of-being as care - in being-ahead-of-itself, lies the most primordial "presupposing" (p. 271). Tacitly assuming this precondition of possibilities, we presuppose ourselves as having the attribute of disclosedness. More so, the notion of presupposing, Dasein being-ahead-of-itself, involves "uncovering the truth both assertively and circumspectively" (p. 271).

### ***The principal's children***

*Having your own children attend the same school in which you are principal can be challenging. Others invariably target the principal's kids at some point during their schooling. For my kids, it happened at high school. There were kids that decided to take up the mantle and have a go at them - the principal's son or the principal's daughter. And, unfortunately, there were teachers that also picked on my three kids. I personally led professional development (PD) sessions with some of these teachers. It wasn't easy when you've got someone who is not willing to listen or change, and you've got to be fairly direct and call their behaviour. Some of these teachers would then take it out on my kids - and oh, that was really heart breaking.*

*My daughter was dux and she clearly deserved the award as her grades were the highest. You're the first person I've ever told this story to. My deputy principal went through her data to ensure it was accurate. He said, well, there are two other students that were close to her grades when I go back over the year's achievements - but she is still on top. I said, we'll go back from the year*

*before and we'll look at that planned data and that sort of thing. I just wanted this decision to be watertight and, in the end, it was, but I still felt uncomfortable. It was the only time in my career as principal that I gave out three dux awards! And I did that even though my daughter was in front. I knew the families of the two other dux recipients extremely well. To compound this difficult decision, one of the families were close friends!*

*Anyway, the results were close enough for me, as principal, to justify the decision and avoid any unpleasant dialogue to suggest nepotism. (Interview 9: Story 4).*

Doug's way-of-being could have placed him 'between a rock and a hard place' in this story. This adage adequately captures the difficult situation in which Doug potentially found himself, where he had to choose between two equally unpleasant courses of action. Should he award his daughter dux and expose himself to possible negative commentary or consider an alternative? He approached the situation circumspectively, *fore-seeing* the potential outcome of decisions made in advance. Doug's lived experience as a principal and tacit understanding of the dynamics and perceptions within his school community - especially in regard to his own children's achievements and the potential for interrogation, guided him.

This circumspect fore-sightedness, Heidegger (1962) argues, is something we grasp in advance, in a "*fore-conception*" (p. 191, emphasis included in original text). Furthermore, whenever something is to be understood, the reading will always be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception, and this interpretation is never a "presuppositionless apprehending" of something presented to us (pp. 191-192). Doug's eventual decision to award three students, including his daughter, with dux, revealed a circumspect fore-conception (his anticipation) of the possibilities. Whilst his daughter finished the school year with the highest grades, he accepted that two other students (one being the child of a close family friend) had grades close enough to be considered and eventually share the honour of dux. Doug understood that any perception of partiality on his part would diminish his daughter's achievement and possibly place him in a

precarious situation with his integrity potentially scrutinised. This situation could have potentially turned what should be a positive experience into a hypothetically negative one.

The following poem communicates an essence beyond being in the world of thrown-ness. It captures a disclosed state of circumspection towards care, as experienced by one who understands its meaning.

### **Beyond the lion's pride**

Step right up ladies and gentlemen!  
See the ferocious king of the jungle  
In all his magnificent wonder and glory,  
Going head to head with his lion tamer!  
Who will win this prodigious battle?

With one crack of the leather whip  
The great beast surrenders his natural instincts  
And performs unspeakable acts just to please.  
The magnanimous lion tamer wielding his momentary power  
For the invested crowd's macabre pleasure

Back in his putrid and confined quarters,  
The king's melancholy posture  
Attacks the glance of a small but curious passer-by.  
She sees beyond potential danger and strokes his wounded pride.  
He, in return, lowers his head and purrs.

(S. Kanowski, September 2018)

### **Concluding thoughts**

This chapter highlighted the philosophical notion of circumspection as an essential way-of-being for principals. The ability to see the world from various perspectives and have the fore-sight to predict possible outcomes, is one in which principals may develop over time when they enact their phronesis as relational sensibilities (Giles, 2018).

The everyday being in the role of principal requires an attuned kind of awareness whereby one looks around and beyond that which is in plain sight, before deciding what course of action should come next. This foresight can proactively determine positive outcomes and

well-being for the principal and for those around them as we witnessed in Bob's story of self-realisation. However, a lack of circumspection also experienced within Bob's story, can have devastating effects on well-being.

The heart of the chapter and key take-away is understanding that the life-world and well-being of a school principal involves a certain circumspect fore-sight that goes beyond just a look at the outward appearance of things. It requires "readiness-to-hand dealings with equipment in-order-to gain greater understanding" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 98). This has implications for each principal's well-being. For example, Bob's letting go of leadership responsibilities and prioritising his own well-being, Doug's understanding of the importance of maintaining relationships when making school decisions and Heidi's way-of-being towards self-care in a changing work environment, all represent a circumspect fore-sight, an ontological interpretation that is grounded in familiarity with the world of being '*in*' principalship. This familiarity extends beyond one's own physical, mental and social well-being to include an *awareness* of *how one is* being '*in*' principalship.

In the chapter that follows, the philosophical notion of the festival has a tacit connection to thrownness, care and circumspection, in that it is a 'happening' that is opening as you enter into it. Life is unscripted - there is an openness to the transaction. When you are in a festival you do not rationally say I will do this or that - you lose yourself. This notion has implications for being '*in*' principalship and well-being experiences, as we will discover.

## 9 Chapter 9: Drawn along by a festival of relationships

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### Introductory thoughts

#### I wandered lonely as a cloud

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze...

(Wordsworth & Creeley, 2004, p. 1)

The excerpt above taken from Wordsworth's (2004) lyric poem: *I wandered lonely as a cloud* - commonly known as *Daffodils* was originally published in 1807. It is a sonnet about solitude and the unscripted festivals that influence our way-of-being. The philosophical notion of festival is not about balloons and parades, but more so about the unexpected 'happenings' that open up in which you find yourself occupied (Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006). Wordsworth happened upon and lost himself in a field of golden daffodils which for him, was a temporal and unscripted, immersion experience, that lasted long after an encounter (Malpas & Zabala, 2010). This is reflected in the final verse.

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

(Wordsworth & Creeley, 2004, p. 1)

Through the stories provided in this chapter, I explore the philosophical concept of the festival in relation to principals' well-being experiences, especially those triggered by unexpected situations in which principals find themselves; be it a pleasant interpersonal



exchange or something more confronting. I offer stories, which lead the way in describing particular festivals, and contemplate what meanings and existential understandings these stories unearth about the different ways in which principals experience the phenomenon of well-being amidst the everydayness of their principalship. We live in a world of immersed experiences such as a festival - we do not come in and out of a festival - the experience has an enduring quality.

A person becomes an active participant in the festival, it cannot be otherwise. As such, meanings appear to develop for the participant (Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006). In other words, it is characteristic of a festive experience that is meaningful for those taking part, even if they do not realise they are in a festival. The development of meanings is not linear, but rather experiential (Gendlin, 1978). When we find ourselves in a festival, we also sense a new time-relation developing, not the linear one-thing-after-another, but a going back that is also a going forward, and the only authentic way of going forward (Gendlin, 1978). For Wordsworth, had he not stopped to appraise the field of daffodils in their golden wonder, he would not have an experience from which to base his thoughts, moods and words for his poem.

Gadamer (as cited by Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006) uses the metaphor of festival to argue for a synthesis of social and aesthetic experiences into a kind of hermeneutic meaning theory<sup>34</sup>. We seek to understand ourselves in artistic experiences "drawing us into its world" (Lawn, 2006, p. 93). Everyday human interactivity and our connection with an artistic medium such as poetry, is one of several ways of constructing meaning in the world. Gadamer (2013) argues that the social arena is an essential quality of the festival. It is this social arena for being '*in*' principalship that I will focus on within this chapter.

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<sup>34</sup> Gadamer regards theory as fundamentally a mode of comportment that exceeds scientific and utilitarian instrumentality. "Theory is not in the first instance a behaviour whereby we control an object or put it at our disposal by explaining it" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 32), but it is in the first place concerned with goods that are held in common.

As human beings, principals, by nature of their roles, regularly find themselves improvising in a festival of social connections. Life is unscripted, there is an openness to transactions (Neyer, Mund, Zimmermann, & Wrzus, 2014; Ringstrom, 2019). When you are in a festival you do not necessarily say, I'll do this or that, instead you lose yourself in the experience. These 'happenings' have a range of possible outcomes (both positive and negative) for being '*in*' principalship.

The festival image as commonly understood, is associated with some kind of celebration - something festive involving a gathering. Gadamer (2013) reminds us that a festival is an "experience of community ..." (as cited by Wright, 1990, p. 1). This experience of community draws one into the festival, sometimes without control or choice. At times we might be unprepared for the festival experience and because of our unpreparedness, we become vulnerable and 'opened up', rendering the experience pleasurable and safe or unpleasant and potentially dangerous.

### **Stories, descriptions, interpretations**

The school principal is generally the person with the authority and responsibility to lead and manage the school. The constant pressure on principals requires them to be in control of situations. It is a balance that is rewarding, frustrating, isolating and at times, overwhelming. Within this chapter, I share stories where principals are not in control and we are reminded of what life really is like. "Life is indeed unscripted - we don't know what blessings and complexities are going to land in our laps" (Lindenfeld, as cited by Katzman & O'Connor, 2018, p. 2). As recognised in the stories, principals can get swept up by an experience and this in essence, is the phenomenon of well-being briefly showing itself. It is not necessarily the festival experience causing harm, as indicated in the stories, but the need to do something with it, interrupt it or not wanting to experience it at all, for fear of losing control.

In this first story, we meet Ken, a Queensland principal who is presently deployed to an international school overseas. His position as head of school requires him to perform the duties of a principal even though he is accountable to an executive principal and school board. We pick up the story following the dismissal of one of Ken's colleagues. Ken had been working alongside this colleague on a new, innovative, middle schooling strategy. Ken's association with this colleague, caused a chain of events that would ultimately impact on his well-being.

### ***The masks we wear***

*Following the middle schooling experience, the ensuing six to twelve months imploded within our school. Outwardly, I was trying to appear that I was in control of every situation, physically, mentally and emotionally, whereas at different stages I was a bit of a 'train-wreck' internally. I'm very fortunate that Beth, my wife, works at the school as a teacher so I've had someone that I could bounce off. That whole being able to give people the understanding that life is normal and that everything that you've been doing and continuing to do is being done to the best of your ability. So, playing the game would be smiling, killing people with kindness, being the ultra-professional and just doing everything to the 'nth degree' of making sure that you're not giving anyone a reason to potentially turn you over.*

*I would say that more than 50% of those relationships damaged, were broken by miscommunication. People were hearing things that weren't correct; or inappropriate actions in relation to the people that had the damaged relationships. I'm sure there were members of staff that did not want to change, who sent formal complaints to the Board. And yet, in the staffroom there was very much a two-faced sense of them appearing as though everything was rosy. I knew there was staff going behind my back saying, I think what he's doing is wrong and I don't think potentially he should continue at the school or I don't think this is the right path for the school. From my point of view, it was challenging having normal conversations with these people that you knew had 'stabbed you in the back'.*

*Probably the greatest challenge is, some of the staff members where there was a breakdown of trust, I would have considered to be very good friends of mine before this all happened. And some of those relationships, even with the staff members that have left, are only now being restored. (Interview 4: Story 10).*

Ken discusses the human side of school leadership in this story and highlights the fragility of relationships amongst staff whilst being in an impromptu situation. Colleagues that he considered friends betrayed his trust and 'stabbed him in the back' whilst continuing the

charade or perception of a positive relationship. This affected Ken in a profound way for a period of six to twelve months. Outwardly, he had put on his metaphoric mask of professional composure, whereas inwardly he was in turmoil. Ken contributes some of his coping strategies to his relationship with Beth, his spouse. Beth works at the same school and has field knowledge of the staff dynamics. Ken states that some of those damaged relationships are starting to repair, through casual communication using social media. My wonderings about the authenticity of the conversation or the guardedness of what is discussed continually surface when I describe and try to interpret this situation.

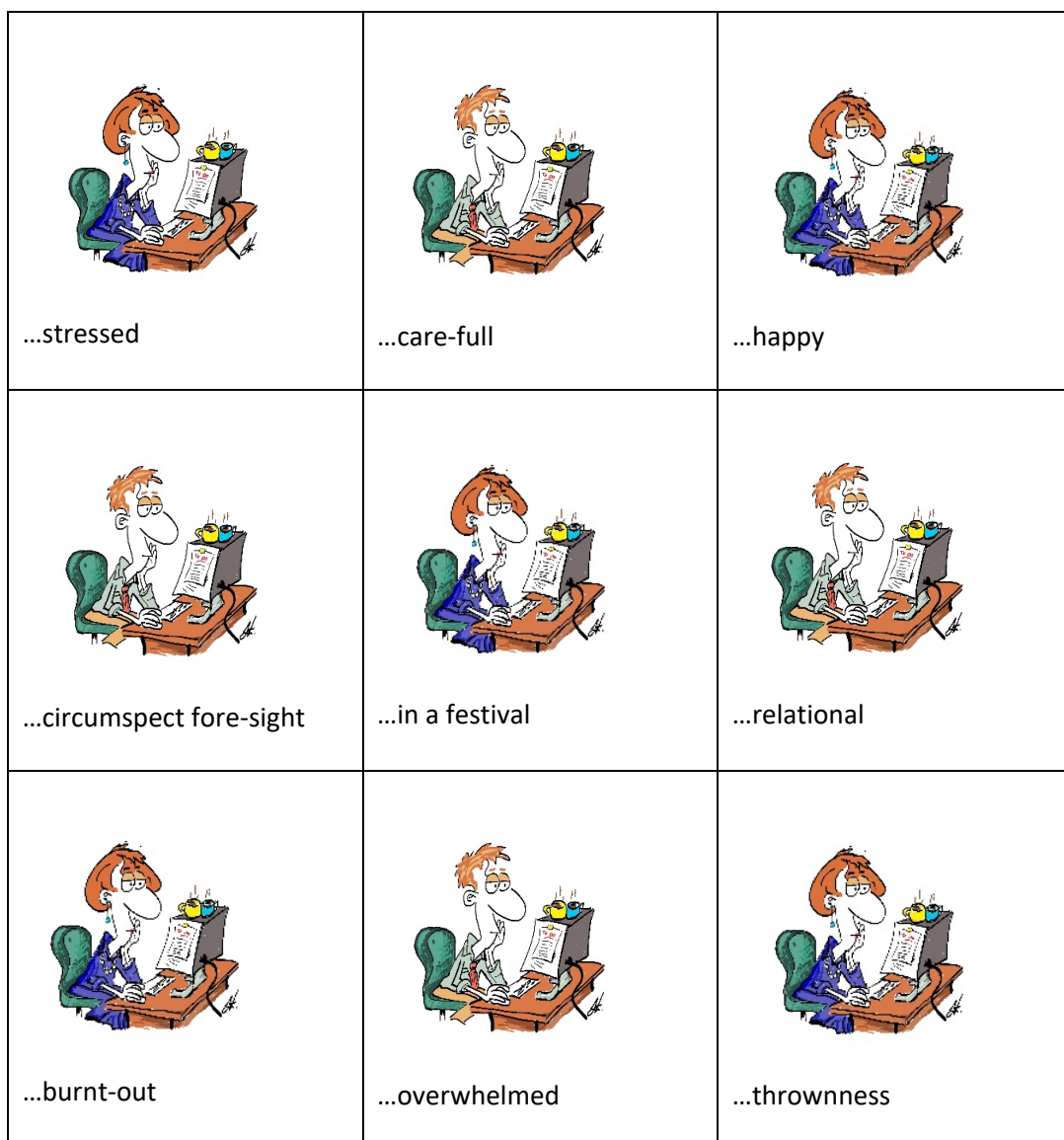
In glimpsing beneath Ken's mask, it is possible to surmise that his way-of-being ontologically, leans towards an inauthentic state. Ken's avoidance of thrown-ness is the mask of avoidance - an inauthentic mode of existence, in which he neglects his own self-care and well-being by failing to be himself (Mulhall, 2005). His way-of-being-in-the-world around others who have betrayed his friendship, resembles what Heidegger (1962) refers to as a disowned state - whereby he turns away from himself, not letting his being fully disclose itself as his own. For Ken, existing in this way, sees Dasein disowning the possibility of the "utmost illumination of which his being is capable [and falls into the disguise - wearing of a mask] that characterises his lost-ness to the world" (King, 2001, p. 41, bracketed words added).

Haugeland (1982) argues that nobody is entirely disowned or self-owned, but conceivably, somewhere between the two modes. This is essential in understanding Ken's way-of-being. There is a distinct possibility of multiple ways of being in relation to community festivals and Dasein, which in a sense, could be dependent on a measure of routine self-constancy - awareness of one's own thoughts and behaviours. Heidegger (1962) extends this thinking

further by affirming that to be “extant”<sup>35</sup> - present-at-hand, is to acknowledge cases<sup>36</sup> and in doing so, we try to understand ourselves ( as cited by Haugeland, 1982, pp. 21-22).

It would seem that part of the experience of being a school leader is to develop self-awareness, whilst learning to ‘park’ personal emotions and thoughts in the name of professionalism. Principals wear a mask to hide feelings about certain issues and people and remain voiceless. This is pictorially represented in the following comic strip.

**Figure 12: The masks school principals wear**



(Drawing: L. Kanowski, October 2020)

<sup>35</sup> **Extant:** Heidegger (1962) says that something is extant if what or who it is, in each case, is its own efforts to understand what or who it is.

<sup>36</sup> **Cases:** Everyday activities such as opening a door or hammering.

This comic strip sits on the pin board above my desk at school. Whilst intended to be humorous, its ontological insight is a constant reminder to me to remain human and relational within my role of school principal. Many school leaders *buy into* the ‘good worker’ rhetoric (Baxter-Reid, 2016) and believe that they must act, dress and speak in a certain way and embody an almost dehumanised way-of-being when performing the role, so they wear a mask.

The consequences of wearing a mask to cover our sense of humanity impact heavily on our well-being and is two-fold argues Jung (1989). In the first instance, the practice of mask wearing makes it next to impossible to discover, live with, and honour the real self. In phenomenological terms, Heidegger (1962) refers to this state as authentically being in change (as cited by Su, 2011; Zickmund, 2007). Secondly, mask wearing becomes habitual, and people believe they are the face they put on (Jung 1989 as cited by Craig 1994). In Ken’s words, one *becomes a train wreck internally, while giving the perception of being in control externally*. The energy that principals lose when hiding inside their masks must be exhausting and may possibly have connections to stress, poor mental health and well-being.

In the following story about Elizabeth - a senior principal of a large secondary school, we gain some insight into her understanding of mask wearing within a festival in relation to the accepted image that one must uphold when being ‘*in*’ principalship. Elizabeth talks about the importance of dressing a certain way to portray the ‘correct’ appearance of a successful principal. This is evident as she finds herself in a group of principals gathered for a conference. Her metaphor, *sea of grey and beige*, expresses an insight into her understanding of the expected way-of-being with others [principals] in the world.

## ***Dressed for success***

*I was at a principals' conference recently and it was a sea of grey and beige. I thought to myself, do I have to dress like that to be taken seriously? It looked a bit like an Amway convention.*

*Everyone has a mask on! I think that's the cost of leadership. I'm so much more guarded now than I used to be. I feel that I can't laugh uproariously at things out of fear of being judged. I second-guess myself about stuff that shouldn't matter.*

*Neville discussed this persona thing we play at his conference on Tuesday. He used the Darth-Vader character from Star Wars to illustrate the hardened masks we wear as principals to show the world that we are strong. I find people who do this inauthentic. However, without realising it, we principals get all 'beiged-up'. It's not who I am, I don't want to be beiged up just to create some corporate image of someone else's idea of what it means to be a principal. But I play the game just the same.*

*I have a dream about when I finally retire, that I will get every piece of corporate clothing I own and have a giant bonfire while running around in hippy garb chanting something. It is a good dream! (Interview 7: Story 13).*

Elizabeth adds some humour in telling this story. Unwritten expectations around a principal's appearance, whilst never overtly articulated other than a loose statement in the *Code of Conduct* (DoE, 2006) around dressing professionally, are an unwritten expectation. If you are to be taken seriously, you must look and behave a certain way. This includes suiting up and dressing for success! By her own admission, Elizabeth's internal narrative does not embrace the traditional notions that a principal must aspire to a certain type and wear the accepted attire. Outwardly, she conforms to some level of mask wearing and discusses burning her corporate outfits upon retirement. Perhaps Elizabeth acknowledges the importance of public perception, whilst holding onto her sense of who she is and her individuality. Elizabeth, not wanting to draw attention to herself or risk possible condemnation or exclusion from the group, partakes in an inauthentic way-of-being.

Participation [teilhaben] is significant in Gadamer's (1975) hermeneutics in regard to his interpretations of traditions, language, the festival and solidarity (Malpas & Zabala, 2010).

Given that being ‘*in*’ principalship is fundamentally a participatory and relational activity, Elizabeth is thrown into this way-of-being within life’s festivals.

Principals wear masks to protect themselves and to create a professional guise, which they project to the public (Leary, 2019). Dressing in business wear such a grey or beige suit, communicates a corporate identity or an air of confidence to which the majority of the public relate and even expect. Whilst wearing their ‘power suits’, principals also behave in a certain way (Aaker, 1997; Fennis & Pruyn, 2007; Goldberg, 1992; Japutra & Molinillo, 2019) especially when they find themselves in the temporality of the festival experience.

This is not to imply a personality metamorphosis, but rather it is more about the suit being part of the discourse of being ‘*in*’ principalship. However, as Elizabeth highlights, this can at times come across as superficial (Sweetapple, 2007).

The key message from the professional development session Elizabeth attended with Neville was profound. Neville illustrated his point regarding the masks principals wear by likening it to *Darth-Vader*, the fictional, villainous character from *Star Wars*. Star Wars enthusiasts would understand that Darth-Vader literally requires his mask and suit in order to survive. Underneath he is severely disabled and weak. Looking through an ontological lens, my ponderings return to the significance of the mask as a way-of-being ‘*in*’ principalship. Like Darth-Vader, would principals survive if they took off their masks? What would occur if principals removed their suits and found themselves in a festival at school, business meeting or conference without their mask? Would their experience be different and would they be afforded the same level of respect or be taken seriously? Are we socially conditioned to such an extent that we prejudge the worth of books based firmly by their covers and disregard the important contents within? Is etiquette, personal charisma, business attire and surface language, all part of a schema principals must learn to be successful? If a principal does not conform to such inherent tropes, would their well-



being be jeopardised as a result of social and professional vulnerability? (Klare, 1991; Muncer, Taylor, & Craigie, 2002).

As I contemplate these questions, I return to the extremely bewildering temporal structure of festivals, specifically what Gadamer (2013) refers to as the “return of the festival” (p. 126). Periodic festivals such as annual principals’ conferences are repeated events in which we find ourselves *celebrating*. However, as Gadamer argues, the festival experience of time and dimension changes in nature from one *celebration* to the next. It is not linear, but rather, each festival contains its “own original essence” as something different (p. 126), which suggests that the actual experience, such as the next principals’ conference, will be different for the participants. Perhaps Elizabeth’s experience at future principals’ conferences may see her and others wearing brighter colours.

The next story sees Sam, a beginning principal, contacted unexpectedly by the department, to inform him that he is being made a permanent employee. The chain of festival encounters that follow this announcement, led Sam towards a lifesaving diagnosis, an experience that has a positive outcome.

***To celebrate or commiserate - that is the question.***

*I do remember when I got the phone call to tell me that I was going to be made permanent at a school that I was acting at for two years. I was in the car driving and my wife Sue overheard the call. I thanked the person, hung up the phone and Sue said, do you realise you just got your first permanent job there? I replied, yeah, but there was no excitement or celebration. I was completely overwhelmed with the job at the time, the demands, everything! I was exhausted and at that point, I was also feeling flat.*

*Over the next couple of weeks, Sue encouraged me to go and see our general practitioner (GP), because she thought I was maybe heading towards depression. I was completely and utterly fatigued and just getting through each day. I was silly enough to work Saturdays and Sundays, because I thought that was the only way I could keep myself afloat. I would turn it on for the kids that were in my class and I feel that they were never affected by my mental state. I was worried about this and actually checked in with a teacher that I trusted greatly. I asked her, did I ever appear unhinged in front of my students? She*

*replied, no you didn't, however we were worried about you because you look exhausted every day.*

*So, I did go to our GP in the end and funnily enough, it wasn't depression, it was type two diabetes. It had obviously impacted on my health - because my levels were out of whack - and it was starting to affect how I was thinking and feeling. Even the doctor said at the time, Sam obviously you're overweight, but you've always been overweight; so, looking at what you say you eat, you shouldn't have the diabetes, and I'm more worried about the stress you are carrying. (Interview 3: Story 12).*

Sam's unexpected promotion to permanency in the principalship was bittersweet. In one way there was a sense of solace in that he no longer needed to exist in acting situations as echoed by Sue's considerateness, *do you realise you just got your first permanent job?* However, this positive news was overshadowed by a deep sense that something was wrong with Sam's health. He was constantly exhausted and fears surfaced around possible depression. It was not until he visited his general practitioner (GP) that a diagnosis of type two diabetes was revealed. In addition to the medical test results, Sam's GP expressed concerns around stress levels. Sam found himself enveloped in numerous and unforeseen festivals that had potentially positive and negative outcomes: his promotion to permanency and an early diagnosis of a life-threatening disease.

Sam's poor health and well-being denied him the opportunity to celebrate the positive news that he had been assigned permanency as a principal. "A festival exists only in being celebrated" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 126). He had been, for an extended period, routinely attending to his workload (including working on the weekends), *I was just completely and utterly flat and just getting through each day.* A diagnosis of Type 2 Diabetes surfaced and subsequent health management plan developed and implemented.

My wonderings turn to the number of undiagnosed illnesses that principals carry around with them, which have the potential to impact significantly on their well-being. Sam, for the purpose of the argument, was lucky that he received an early diagnosis and follow up treatment. The business and nature of the role, impacts in some way on a principal's level

of care-for-self. School leaders, generally speaking, are preoccupied with caring for the welfare of others (students, parents and staff) that they neglect themselves, their own health and well-being. Heidegger (1962) refers to this way-of-being as solicitude and comprises considerateness and forbearance<sup>37</sup>. Investigating the phenomenon of well-being using this existential analysis, unearths questions around who is to blame for principals not looking after their own well-being? Is it actually a blame game or part of the facticity [facts and circumstances] of being ‘*in*’ principalship? Is it the unintended consequence of the role itself? Is it the price a principal must pay to sustain their position in their unabridged experiences of the festival and return of the festival?

Gadamer (2013) offers some insights into these questions. He adopts the concept of the festival to express not only the essential meaning for aesthetics, but for our complete and uncondensed experiences of the world in which we live. Moreover, a festival experience is characterised by a certain temporality into which we find ourselves. It occurs at any given time and is transformative for all those participating. For Sam, his festival experiences were transformative, namely, his promotion and diagnosis. The essence of the festival is attributed to a time and place that is festive and this essence is unearthed in the return of the festival (Grondin, 2001). Sam was able to recall with clarity that he was with Sue in his car when he received the call regarding his promotion and he was with a colleague at school when he made the decision to consult his GP.

In the story that follows, the return of the festival notion is explored further through the experiences of Heidi, a small school principal, who, like other Queensland school leaders, tries to develop a positive working relationship with her supervisor. An Assistant Regional

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<sup>37</sup> **Solicitude** – the range of *care* attitudes that persons have towards each other.

**Considerateness** - the set of care attitudes towards other people that ranges from caring deeply about their interests to being totally indifferent.

**Forbearance** – the set of care attitudes towards other people that ranges from tolerance to intolerance. (Foulds, 2012, p. 161, emphasis included in original text).

Director (ARD), or in Heidi's case, a Lead Principal (LP), is assigned to schools to support the principal and monitor performance. Heidi's situation is unique in that her supervisors change regularly, making a meaningful and sustainable relationship challenging.

### ***Shifting goal posts***

*Oh gosh! Changing supervisors happens all the time. Because I am principal of a small, band five school, I don't tend to be assigned a longstanding ARD. In fact, I actually don't get an official ARD, but a LP instead. Furthermore, I constantly am getting new bosses, because the people who are going into the LP role are generally using that position as a stepping-stone to promote into an ARD role.*

*I counted the other day that I've been a band five principal for seven years and have had eleven different supervisors. What's more, there was a period of six months where I didn't even have a boss, there was nobody supporting me in an official capacity. What is so frustrating is that with every new supervisor assigned to me, the goal-post shifts. It's something different.*

*My current supervisor, Sue, is interesting. She was appointed last term and came to my school sprouting oh, we want the same thing, we're all on the same page. You are doing a great job, keep doing what you are doing! And yet, this term it has changed. It always changes! Sue is now saying; our regional focus is firmly on reading and that I needed to adjust my strategic priorities. Notwithstanding the fact that my school's reading data is amongst the highest in the region!*

*I've got a little bit savvier and just say, okay yep, what bit of paper do you need from me? If you need a piece of paper, I'll make you a piece of paper. I just keep doing my job! (Interview 11: Story 8).*

Heidi's story illustrates the temporality and return of festivals because it applies to the happening between principals and their supervisors. ARD or LP school visits are generally planned on a term-by-term basis, sometimes more, depending on individual circumstances. Even so, each festival is distinct in nature and whilst principals become familiar with the format, the experience is always something different. To compound Heidi's supervisory experience and uncertainty, her LP is regularly someone different due to the transient nature of the role.

Gadamer (1975) discusses the highly puzzling temporal structure from festivals and the periodic nature to be repeated, which, as previously noted, he refers to as the "return of the

festival” (p. 126). He argues that even though the usual experience of time and its dimensions appear as historical temporality. Each festival is unique in its own right, and its “own original essence” is always to be something different even when ‘celebrated’ in the same way (p. 126). I return to this explanation, as it helps us to understand Heidi’s experiences with her multiple supervisors. Her supervisor / principal experience changes with each festival, as it must, regardless of changing personnel. The festival cannot be repeated in exactly the same way to which Gadamer argues,

An entity that exists only by always being something different is *temporal* in a more radical sense than everything that belongs to history. It has its *being* only in becoming and return (Gadamer, 1975, p. 126, emphasis added).

There is ontic-ontological meaning to unearth within Gadamer’s words as they apply to Heidi’s experiences. Educational agendas, priorities, federal, state and regional foci, along with school-based strategic plans, are in constant flux and influenced by socio-demographic, technological and twenty-first century cultural change (Acton, 2021; Cranston, Kimber, Mulford, Reid, & Keating, 2010; Papadopoulos, 1995; Savage & O’Connor, 2015; Wong & Sunderman, 2007). As such, the festival between principal and supervisor must therefore evolve to remain relevant.

Heidi’s narrative provokes insight into festivals - the important relational spaces that exist between supervisors and principals. When respectful, trusting and collaborative relationships exist, positive outcomes are experienced (Thessin, 2019). However, when a supervisor or principal exhibits specific antecedent characteristics within their partnership, as perceived in this next story, something entirely different is experienced within the festival of relationships.

### ***You made us look bad***

*I was working alongside my Assistant Regional Director (ARD) on an issue around cluster meetings. We’d been trying to organise early detection and intervention for kids for hearing and sight, because the health nurses were no longer doing that service. The parents of these kids will not take them to the city*

*to have them tested. So, no matter what you do - you end up with a child who is unable to see or hear properly and they go through the schooling system with this untreated impairment.*

*I went to our regional office and discussed the situation with Bev who was working in the student services section. Bev put me onto Mike - Director of Special Education. I said to Mike that I knew there was a program happening down in the metro areas where they were performing vision and hearing screening in early childhood settings. I needed to see what was happening in our area because I wanted to prioritise that for the students in our school. Mike couldn't give me any further information.*

*Lance (our State Member) was in my school the next week and I mentioned it to him as he was the former Health Minister. I thought he might have some more information. He shared what he knew and said, yes there's definitely a program happening - I don't know how you get onto it. So, I contacted Mike and discussed this with him and the possibility of getting something similar happening in our region as there was a real need. My concerns seem to have fallen on deaf ears.*

*I got back onto Lance and he said, you're well within your right to ask the Premier what the heck is going on. I thought okay, so I wrote a letter to the Premier. That was not a very good idea as it turned out. The letter was very well written and had all of the newspaper articles of what was happening in the metro areas. It also contained all of the research I'd done about the importance of screening kids and also information regarding a trial in the Capricornia region.*

*The letter didn't disparage our Department of Education (DoE) in any way shape or form. However, I got a phone call from Daniel who was my supervisor at the time. I had kept him informed of my actions all along. Daniel said, oh Stan, I'm sorry I have to officially reprimand you. You are not to write letters to the Premier. I said, Daniel, you knew I was writing one. He said, yes, but I'm telling you, it was not a good idea. The Premier has now gone to the Education Minister and said, what the heck is someone in the DoE questioning me about something to do with health? The only way that should be done is through education questioning health at the ministerial level, not at a principal level. So, Leonie, Regional Director (RD) then sent me a nice letter explaining how our region prides itself on supporting kids. She also forwarded me an unpleasant letter stating how dare you go down that line!*

*Anyway, long story short, she said, yes, you're going to be prioritised! We will investigate screening students in early childhood in this region. That was three years ago and NOTHING has happened to this date with the exception of our regional newsletter advertising that screening will be coming. That's it! So, sometimes questioning higher powers is NOT a good idea!*

*Daniel now attends most cluster meetings and I feel that he is monitoring the conversation to the point where I can't even seek support from my colleagues or ask questions that could potentially make the department look bad. (Interview 6: Story 13).*

Stan's story is multi-layered both ontically and ontologically.

Ontically, Stan recognised an issue within the allied-health services which impacts on the quality of education he can provide his students. Stan seeks the advice and support from regional personnel in the first instance, but they cannot or will not assist. Stan is aware of early intervention programs (screening for sight and hearing) occurring in other educational jurisdictions and desires the same level of health service for the students in his geographical area.

Stan has an audience with Lance, his state member, who encourages him to write to the Premier. Stan follows this advice; however, the letters make their way back to the DoE from a disgruntled health department. The outcome is an admonishment for breaching protocol from Leonie (RD). The outcome for the students is consideration at a regional level of screening students in early childhood.

Stan, without thought for his own wellbeing, forged ahead with his quest to gain additional health screening for early childhood students. Whether Stan understood that he was acting in a manner that would reflect poorly on the DoE or not is unclear. As principals, we are informed explicitly, and reminded frequently, of protocols around official communication. This includes an expectation that we converse through our Regional Director - when communicating with senior executives and politicians. It is masked as a courtesy, however in reality, it is an expectation.

Nevertheless, Stan found himself in a precarious position and on the receiving end of a difficult conversation with Leonie. Such an unpleasant conversation would have possibly created a felt sense of concern and anxiety within Stan and potentially impacted heavily on his well-being - the gravity of which has clearly been realised long after the festival encounter.

My ponderings turn to the severity of the reprimand from Leonie. Was she ‘pulling rank’ to silence Stan and remind him of his position? What was her tone when she rebuked Stan? Was she angry in her delivery or did she act in a perfunctory manner and take the corporate line - possibly reciting scripture from the code of conduct?

Usually an ARD would conduct these conversations with their assigned principals. Was the matter viewed with such seriousness that it was elevated to the RD? I wonder if Leonie would have been contacted by a discontented or humiliated superior (perhaps the Director General or Minister for Education) and instructed to handle it - enacting ‘damage control’.

I also ponder over Stan’s thinking and intent in circumnavigating the RD and communicating directly with the Premier. Stan, a senior principal, would be aware and have possible lived experiences regarding DoE communication protocols. Was he acting in a deliberate and provocative manner to incite action, guided by his moral imperative to make a difference for early childhood students in his care? Was he unclear or naive about DoE communication protocols or did he not realise the implications of his actions? Did he care? Clearly, what was mattering for Stan went beyond the red tape of DoE expectations.

Ontologically, the festivals Stan found himself in, represent a way-of-being ‘*in*’ principalship in which Heidegger (1962) refers to as authentic there-being. Moreover, Heidegger describes such an existence as involving “*reticence, anticipatory resoluteness and a willingness to accept anxiety*” (as cited by Foulds, 2012, p. 127, emphasis included in original text). Heidegger’s interpretation affords profound insight into Stan’s thinking and way-of-being. Stan’s authentic self was disclosed through each festival and not buried by tradition, being fallen into the world and being-with ‘they’ (p. 127). He embraced a mode of ‘owned’ resolve, regardless of the audience or the consequence in the temporality of care towards his students. Heidegger (1962) characterises this mode as the authentic present - the “moment of vision” in which a forward-running future of a resolutely



disclosed existence brings itself face to face with its own ready-to-hand or present-at-hand “now” (p. 387). Dasein “brings [itself] again *forth* [into its ownmost potentiality-for-Being in an authentic] repetition” (p. 388, emphasis included in original text, bracketed words added). Stan remained in all festival instances attentive to the authentic present, whilst holding onto the authentic future guided by a past of care. This temporal interpretation surfaces within one of his final statements,

*Anyway, long story short, she said, yes, you’re going to be prioritised! We will investigate screening students in early childhood in this region. That was three years ago and NOTHING has happened to this date with the exception of our regional newsletter advertising that screening will be coming.*

Stan’s story of falling into the world of his own concern and its existential meaning towards an authentic presence within the temporality of the festival, whilst unique to his situation, is a possible a way-of-being for educational leaders. I am talking about those principals who have the courage of their convictions and resoluteness to take risks and authentically pursue their own potentiality. Furthermore, they embody the determination to stay the course and remain true to themselves - their authentic selves.

In the following story, we are thrown into a situation with Elizabeth, a senior principal who questions the actions of her Regional Director. Elizabeth’s potentiality-for-being projects an authentic understanding of things with which she is concerned and temporalises itself in terms of making her own-self present in each throw festival.

### ***Taking on the system***

*I requested a meeting with Valerie, the Regional Director, to discuss regional office (RO) interference in school-based decisions. My first email was not responded to for over a week. I felt she was avoiding the conversation. Eventually, I was granted fifteen minutes of her time at a regional principals’ business meeting. Valerie was late for the meeting and I only got about eight minutes of her time to tell my story.*

*I lost my faith and trust in the region.*

*I requested a follow-up meeting, which Valerie agreed to. I thought it was an Elizabeth and Valerie chat. However, when I walked into the meeting with my piece of paper, six officers from RO greeted me. Valerie had sabotaged me with a formal proceeding, which included meeting minutes of the discussion and a scripted conversation from Valerie. I felt ambushed!*

*However, never being one to back down from a fight, my inner steel went - game on! I thought, I won't be a shrinking Violet, I'll say exactly what I need to say. If I'd been smarter, and not been so taken back, I would have said, who's taking notes? For what purpose are those notes being used and can I have a copy?*

*Throughout this meeting and the meetings to follow, I felt that Valerie and her possie were taking the corporate line over common sense and using policy documents to support decisions. I call it policy appeasement. Valerie said - she supports me to make better decisions by only making decisions according to policy. I challenged her - so what you're saying is that I get none of the courtesies that you afford the complainant. They are provided with a scribe and endless hours to dialogue. My decisions are overturned and you don't even communicate them to me yourself; you have someone else do it and you don't even have the courtesy to call me and ask me for any further input into the situation.*

*I felt it was total power play. It just wasn't washing with me! (Interview 7: Story 5).*

Elizabeth attempted several times to have a conversation with Valerie regarding regional interference in a school-based decision. It appears that Valerie not only avoided the conversation, but played corporate power games with Elizabeth to silence her (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 2011). Elizabeth's determination to be heard and to put forward her position was strong. However, it appeared to provoke avoidance in Valerie, who was possibly waterlogged with the inertia of her decision - which she masked as adherence to policy.

Expressing leadership resoluteness and challenging the establishment takes courage and an entrepreneurial attitude (Hörnqvist & Leffler, 2014). Elizabeth was not tolerating Valerie's inauthentic behaviour nor accepting the judgement to overturn a school-based decision without plausible explanation and justification. Confronting another in normal circumstances is stressful - confronting someone in a position of power would potentially intensify one's stress barometer beyond comprehension (Ellen, Kiewitz, Garcia, &

Hochwarter, 2019; Knoll, Neves, Schyns, & Meyer, 2021; Leck & Galperin, 2006; Mannix-McNamara, 2021). Elizabeth's angst, well-being and sense of identity were exposed. Furthermore, she found herself confronted suddenly and unexpectedly within a festival of departmental hierarchy. According to Elizabeth, Valerie had *ambushed* the meeting by inviting several regional office personnel who were present-at-hand and ready to defend complex bureaucratic rules and procedures to be followed, without informing Elizabeth beforehand. They were, in effect, possibly present to silence Elizabeth. How intimidating! Retrospectively, by her own admission, Elizabeth felt that she could have gained some of the *power* back by respectfully calling the group on their behaviour and questioning the purpose of the minute taking and requesting a copy for her own records (DeVito, 2019).

Elizabeth's way-of-being in a festival that is both threatening and unforeseeable, for simply performing the role of a principal would have been potentially overwhelming. One could deduce that a principal's way-of-being as experienced within Elizabeth's story, reinforces the unwritten professional expectation of never challenging those in authority (Anderson, Banks, & Owens, 2019; DeVito, 2019). Inviting professional debate has become little more than a literary trope and rhetoric device designed to present a public image of consultation (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995; Höpfl, 1995). The reality however, is quite the opposite. Challenging those in authority is viewed by some as insubordination and this potentially incites unintended consequences, including angst and demands on one's own well-being.

Being '*in*' principalship involves finding oneself in numerous and unexpected festivals - it is the nature of the role. Ontologically, this way-of-being cannot be any other way. Principals unremittingly engage in festivals with students, staff, colleagues, parents, supervisors and members of the local and greater community. Some of these interactions

are fuelled with angst and displays of exceptionally high levels of passionate provocation. This emotionally demanding interpersonal interaction can take its toll on the principal's well-being and possibly lead to a plethora of responses such as fear, stress, burnout, loss of motivation and job performance (Beusaert et al., 2016; Boyland, 2011; De Nobile & McCormick, 2010; Phillips & Sen, 2011). To compact the experience for principals, they must be sensitive to the needs of these others and be able to switch seamlessly between stakeholder<sup>38</sup> interactions, whilst attending to competing agendas and maintaining the expected professional composure (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015). And this can manifest in the form of "emotional labour" for the principal, where feelings are induced or suppressed (pp. 133-134) leading to states of stress, isolation, vulnerability, negativity and burnout (p. 140).

Life, as we can now appreciate more fully, is unscripted - there is indeed an openness to the transaction (Neyer et al., 2014; Ringstrom, 2019). When you are in a festival, you essentially lose yourself (Gadamer, 2013) with rational thoughts, words and deeds, momentarily frozen within this unscripted encounter. This is true for school stakeholders, especially if the happenstance is emotionally charged. In these instances, the implications for principal well-being is serious, as quite often they are on the receiving end of those wielding the stake. Feelings of being lost to the world emerge due to being-with others. The principal may lose sight of being-one's-self by letting "they" dictate "the tasks, rules, and standards, the urgency and extent, of concerned and solicitous Being-in-the-world" (Foulds, 2012, p. 143).

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<sup>38</sup> The accepted definition for **stakeholder** is someone with a vested interest or concern in something - in this example - the school. However, for the purpose of the argument, I am using stakeholder as a metaphor for one who is wielding a stake.

## **Concluding thoughts**

In this chapter, I focused on the inevitable and unexpected festivals in which principals find themselves throughout their workday. These festivals illustrate spontaneous happenings and improvisation transpiring within relational spaces between principals and school stakeholders. Significantly for principals, the festival experience is unscripted and not predetermined, as is the outcome. Moreover, the influence of the festival extends to the principal's way-of-being and well-being experiences. Sometimes the festival involvement has a positive outcome, however, the result for the principal may be negative, revealing feelings linked to the phenomenon of well-being such as angst, as we sensed in Ken's story of mask wearing.

The key message emerging from this chapter, focuses on taken-for-granted meanings for principals who participate in festival experiences which are rooted in a happening that extends beyond their subjective choice, activity or intending (Grondin, 2001). Within this paradigm of uncertainty, the outcome on their well-being can be positive or otherwise. Furthermore, the lifeworld of a principal is characteristically filled with managing unexpected and unpleasant temporal festivals which places them, in many instances, under extreme pressure that can and does cause significant harm, as we understood from Sam's experience.

This connection between the festival experience and the phenomenon of well-being has explicit implications for a principal's way-of-being. The daily chance meetings between principals and stakeholders can be complex and something that the principal must learn how to manage on the job. Being-in-principalship is like an immersionary experience. To use the metaphor - principals are swimming in a communal pool and it can have a drowning effect. This metaphor is tentatively pointing to areas of concern in that not all experiences in which principals are immersed are positive, helpful or useful and there is

little choice but to endure or drown. As we saw in Sam's experience, it is significant for a principal to come back from a drowning experience and show resoluteness.

A noteworthy insight emerging from the stories within this chapter, highlights how principals find themselves and become aware of their own being-in-the-world, as leading an authentic existence through "*understanding and interpreting your Being as a person existentially ... as it really is*" (Foulds, 2012, p. 143, emphasis included in original text). Elizabeth and Stan's stories provided awareness as to how principals 'push back' against the potential *trappings* of the festival. In both situations, these principals enacted their phronesis, practical wisdom and tacit knowing, which enabled them to recognise the appearance of inauthentic happenings within the festival. They exercised nous and an attuned resoluteness that took courage, but they remained authentic to themselves.

I acknowledge that for many, the festival experience is indeed positive. However, for the purpose of this research, *being 'in' principalship, an ontological inquiry of well-being experiences*, I wonder about the re-imagining of the word 'festival' as possibly those 'uncertain, impromptu encounters', to reflect more accurately what is experienced.

In the following chapter, I revisit my research question, discuss how I have addressed and transcended it to align all the filaments of this inquiry towards an original contribution to knowledge.

## 10 Chapter 10: Conclusion – so what?

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### Introduction

Figure 13: An early morning stroll



(Photo: L. Kanowski, October 2020)

#### A new path to discovery

Venturing down a path alongside principals gifting their stories  
Of life experiences pertaining to well-being  
The soul becomes progressively enlightened and free  
With the uncovering of hidden meanings

Like a quiet walk before dawn - limited light to guide the way  
Pondering hermeneutic descriptions and interpretations lurching  
Overstaying and under-paying with each tentative step  
Until the rising sun sheds rays of light on my philharmonic ponderings

However, the business of hermeneutics is a searching business  
One that is combined and mixed like sifting cake ingredients, fully refined  
Until, ideas, like the rising cake, emerge from the mix  
And others, like an under baked recipe, must be declined

Searching, researching, whilst back on my path  
'Tis a temporal journey leading to ongoing reflection  
The silences appearing when there weren't any more words  
Alongside the faintly illuminated phenomena and their imperfection

Now standing amongst the sun's morning light and warmth  
Where moments ago, thoughts were not to be found or heard  
Essential meanings of well-being shone in pure consciousness  
And points me in a hopeful direction on my return path homeward

(Poem: S. Kanowski, November 2020)

In my research space, I discovered a new path to discovery by contemplating the lived-experiences of eleven Queensland school principals in relation to the phenomenon of *well-being*. Engaging with the research participants' stories since Easter 2018, has created an opportunity to explore the essential nature of well-being beyond rationality, towards understanding the seriousness, significance and complexity of the phenomenon in an ontological way. What is not necessarily showing, or reading, is what horrifies us. The principals' stories of well-being experiences signalled something deeper than merely workload, burnout and stress. It was bigger than theoretical reasoning and labelling and required careful attunement to the development of meanings that reflected what was being said (and not said) to reach a level of understanding.

Principals are swept along by the multitude of persistent happenings in their roles beyond any job description. It is their *way-of-being* in relationship and this, in essence, is the phenomenon of well-being showing itself, a withdrawing from the lucid grasp for control and certainty. The phenomenon of well-being cannot be captured, but can make an "appearance" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 51).

This inquiry has provided a generative space for my phenomenon of interest to make an appearance within principals' shared experiences. Whilst these experiences were all quite different from one another, as were the effects of the involvements on individual principals, there was a strong reading pointing to the communal nature of well-being. As such, I argue that ***well-being is something everyone is experiencing all of the time.*** Furthermore, I call for a move away from dealing with individuals when it comes to principal well-being, the psychologising of the issue and the administering of metaphoric pills (capability and performance development) by means of a *quick fix*. This neoliberal approach is a measure of the toxicity of our culture that is in essence, a blame game.



I argue that *principal well-being is plural* and the approach for acknowledging it is *a matter for community and relationship* because principals, by the very nature of their being, work relationally. This understanding makes my research approach to well-being different from other studies, in that it situates the lived experiences of being ‘in’ principalship within the possibilities of what it means to be human.

In this chapter I revisit my pre-understandings and acknowledge changes in perspective, discuss my renewed ontological understandings of well-being and state my original contribution to knowledge.

### **Circling back to my pre-understandings**

In chapter one, I made explicit some of my pre-understandings and common taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the well-being experiences of being ‘in’ principalship, “to hold them deliberately at bay and even turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing nature” (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). Revisiting those presuppositions in the concluding stages of my inquiry, has led me to question both my initial thinking and the literature relating to well-being, as experienced by principals.

Much of the literature, as highlighted in chapters two and three, does not address the question of meanings within principal’s well-being experiences. Instead, the authors are preoccupied with pointing out the causal effects (workload, conflict, compliance) and then administering advice, without any real ontological understanding. Furthermore, being ‘in’ principalship is characteristically considered a “how to skill” which can be taught (van Manen, 1990, p. 47) as shown through contemporary readings such as, *I'm the Principal - Principal Learning, Action, Influence and Identity* (Dinham, Elliott, Rennie, & Stokes, 2018), *Qualities of Effective Principals* (Stronge & Xu, 2021), *Leading learning - principles for principals* (Halford, 2009) and *What Great Principals Do Differently:*

*Twenty Things That Matter Most* (T. Whitaker, 2020). Whilst practical and grounded in compelling leadership and management theory, they do not necessarily bring us any closer to understanding the nature of ‘being’ a principal, or their well-being experiences.

The literature reinforces the pre-assumption that the matter of well-being is the business of the individual principal and not the system in which they work. Currently the system supports the principal’s health and well-being through initiatives such as sick leave, compensation, managing under performance, annual principal performance development (APPD) planning, and access to an employee advisor. However, my discoveries through reading, writing, thinking, re-reading, re-writing and re-thinking (hermeneutic circling) call for something other than this to be considered.

## **Hermeneutic circling**

Hermeneutic circling (as noted in chapters four and five) is an all-encompassing research method that positions the researcher within the process in a deeply meditative way. The search for possibilities and the constant reconciling of presuppositions with what the stories (data) are pointing to, requires a disciplined attunement.

All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies, and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought. And it must direct its gaze on the things themselves (which, in the case of the philologist, are meaningful texts, which themselves deal with things). For the interpreter to let himself [sic] be guided by the things themselves is obviously not a matter of a single, conscientious decision, but is the first, last, and constant task (Gadamer & Derrida, 1989, p. 53).

Gadamer and Derrida’ statement that preconceptions can obstruct understanding; especially when they are not corroborated by the things themselves, holds true for me as an early researcher and principal. I found myself (on several readings) making assumptions about the data based on my own experiences, rather than letting the stories themselves do the pointing - an objectivity of interpretation. I was not making any claims to absolute knowledge during this meta-level of consciousness, because I was immersed in the

indeterminacy and conditioning nature of the hermeneutic circle (reading, writing, thinking, and reviewing) which was transformative. My approach towards the latter research participants' stories, embodied the hermeneutic descriptions and interpretations of reconstructed objectivity, having developed this insight with and returning to the earlier stories. Like sunrays breaking through the concealment of storm clouds (God's fingers touching the Earth) the transformative nature of hermeneutic phenomenology lit the way towards discovering new possibilities for viewing well-being experiences and being 'in' principalship.

**Figure 14: God's fingers touching the Earth**



(Photo: L. Kanowski, October 2020)

## Lighting the way

In this section, I share insights (sunrays) that appear to be illuminating from within the interpretative discussion chapters and readings. Being ‘*in*’ principalship is fundamentally a relational activity. A principal’s everyday way-of-being is a constant flux of interpersonal happenings with students, parents, staff and others. A principal finds themselves positioned somewhere along a continuum of positive solicitude, “that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 159). Furthermore, “solicitude is guided by *considerateness* and *forbearance*” (p. 159 emphasis included in original text) and an attunement to the relationship which shows a principal’s phronesis, tacit knowing and practical wisdom as a way of determining what is ready-to-hand.

During my interview conversations, several principals discussed matters relating to trust, or the lack thereof, in reference to their everyday way-of-being around others in the context of the school environment. They felt that they needed to act in a certain inauthentic way, conduct themselves professionally and suspend aspects of their being such as emotions, opinions and health concerns, out of fear of reprisals from supervisors and those in positions of power. This brings into question the very essence of what it means to be ‘*in*’ principalship.

To illustrate this point, consider Ken’s story in chapter nine titled *the masks we wear*. Ken, through his association with another colleague, became collateral damage to a school initiative gone wrong. Within the aftermath, Ken learned that several other colleagues, those he considered friends, had been acting divisively to infiltrate the initiative to the point that it was doomed to fail. In Ken’s words,

*From my point of view, it was challenging having normal conversations with these people that you knew had stabbed you in the back. Probably the greatest challenge is, some of the staff members where there was a*

*breakdown of trust, I would have considered to be very good friends of mine before this all happened. (Interview 4: Story 10).*

This impacted on Ken's way-of-being with others in a profound way, prompting him to wear a mask to hide certain truths.

*Outwardly, I was trying to appear that I was in control of every situation, physically, mentally and emotionally, whereas at different stages I was a bit of a 'train-wreck' internally. (Interview 4: Story 10).*

As I continue to reflect on Ken's story, I am wonderstruck at the inauthentic way-of-being in the world with others as something normal. Are we so caught up or thrown into the everyday happenings of the world and the accepted communally established ways of existing, that we have forgotten what it means to be human?

Heidegger (1962) makes the connection between our existential inauthentic way of being-in-the-world with others as a manifestation of thrownness. He states

Thrownness is neither a 'fact that is finished' nor a fact that is settled. Dasein's facticity is such that as long as it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, and is sucked into a turbulence of the "they's"<sup>39</sup> inauthenticity (Heidegger, 1962, p. 223, emphasis included in original text).

Perhaps it is the uncertain nature of our thrownness and its connection to others and our own inauthenticity that has the potential for harm. This connection could be interpreted ontologically as a principal's potentiality for being in the world, their everyday being-present-at-hand to others as a mode of inauthenticity within their own thrownness.

The everyday thrownness of a principal, whereby they find themselves landed (without control or choice) with the task of *existing* in the lifeworld of a school, is brought to life within the stories of chapter six. Recall how Elizabeth was caught off-guard multiple times by the circumstances surrounding a disciplinary decision she had made as principal. Her thrown projection was not of her making and involved being in the world alongside

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<sup>39</sup> **They** - communal values to which one conforms - sometimes without even knowing you're doing so (Foulds, 2012).

inauthentic others, especially Valerie, her immediate supervisor. Elizabeth's story titled *Thrownness as 'Being-towards-death'* showed how extreme the conditions in which principals find themselves quite unexpectedly, can impact greatly on their well-being. Let us relive this story to see how a principal's thrownness has a potential link to harm.

*I hadn't eaten or drunk anything and I hadn't been home. On the way home, I got really light-headed; I thought I was going to crash; I thought I was going to die. I ended up thinking I was having a heart-attack...The chest pain is unbelievable.*

*I was just hyperventilating to the point I thought I was going to black out and lose the wheel. (Interview 7: Story 6).*

Sadly, and alarmingly, Elizabeth's story of a major health scare is also the experience of others being 'in' principalship.

Keith (chapter three) had neglected his own health and well-being, prioritising school matters over warning signs. It was not until his body signalled something was seriously wrong that he sought medical advice. Keith's words of angst and 'absolute despair' are reflected by Heidegger's (1962) reading "the falling into lostness - has its source in that primordial authentic temporality itself which makes possible thrown Being-towards-death" (p. 399).

*This one day I remember so clearly, I was in the hospital ward, sitting on a vinyl recliner connected to my chemotherapy treatment, when a feeling of absolute despair washed over me and I started weeping. It was involuntary and I couldn't do a thing to hide my emotions. It just hit me - what if I die - who would support Marie, Rebecca and James? (Interview 8: Story 3).*

Keith's story shows us the human side of being 'in' principalship. It is about relationships - not only with the school stakeholders, but also with family and friends. In chapter seven, I explored the notion of care-full relationships with a strong focus on everyday being-with others, which Heidegger terms *mitsein*.

Furthermore, the philosophical notion of care [sorge] surfaced from within the stories such as Kath's narrative of a *leisure / work now relationship*, attuned to her interdependence with her partner Tom,

*It's such a great feeling when you both are mutually invested and care about each other's lives, even though they are so different (Interview 2: Story 6).*

Or Sam's story of working alongside *aspiring leaders*, where he surrounds himself with a support network of colleagues,

*Networking with other principals is really important to me. David, Martin and Peter, are very personable and deeply reflective. ... the learnings from them are tremendous and takes you all kinds of places (Interview 3: Story 6).*

The learnings that emerged from the stories within chapter six regarding care-full relationships point us towards possibilities for positive well-being to be realised in the everyday lives of principals. Relationships, care-for [fursorge], concern and solicitude, are all philosophical notions explored within this chapter and all shed light on a way-of-being that humanises the role. Even when making the distinction between care-full (meaning full of care) and careful (meaning cautious) I deliberately structured the chapter to read positively, using notions such as 'leaping in' and 'leaping forward' to show how being-alongside-others for principals, can be a result of their phronesis - practical wisdom and tacit knowing. Take for example Elizabeth's story, where she just knows which of her colleagues she can depend on for support and those with whom she cannot,

*Simon rang me that night - he had no clue what was happening, but he called me to see if I was okay. You know, who's got your back when you're at your lowest ebb? (Interview 7: Story 9).*

On a similar note, I have spent thirty-two years in principalship, aligning myself with a network (cluster, association, like-minded mentors) of supportive, relational school leaders. This temporal care structure enables me to exist as a principal and as a person

concernful of my own well-being and that of others. This looking around for potential support from, and for others, is explored in chapter eight titled *Being in circumspect fore-sight*.

Foulds (2012) describes circumspection as an “interested *sight*; the kind of perceptual framework when you have a need or project in mind” (p. 134, emphasis included in original text).

A principal’s circumspect fore-sight aligns with care and concern as we saw in Simon’s story regarding his lived experience of leading a small school in a remote part of Queensland. In his story, Simon talked about forming a supportive relationship with Jill - a school leader he sought out during a principals’ professional learning day. Jill was to become Simon’s closest colleague, living 100 kilometres away. In the story, *Finding and being found*, Simon, Linda [Simon’s spouse] and Jill, show that relationships matter and being ready-to-hand is the essence of well-being.

*There were instances where Jill would phone Linda (spouse) and me if she had a challenging day. We would jump in the car and fly over to her school and stay the night, have dinner with her, talk through issues and then be up at 4:30am the next morning to drive the hundred kilometres back to my school, ready for a day’s work...The collegiality was reciprocal and valued. (Interview 1: Story 1).*

This story shared an experience of ‘how matters stand’ for principals working and living in isolated school communities. Furthermore, it shows how two principals proactively supported the well-being of each other under challenging circumstances. As I re-read this story, I made connections between the commonality of experiences for many principals, including my own, to the phenomenon of well-being. As van Manen (1990) states, one develops a “*phenomenological nod*” (p. 27, emphasis added). Being-with others, regardless of the circumstances as shown through Simon’s story, is about care. Heidegger



(1962) argues “Dasein, when understood *ontologically*, is care” (p. 84, emphasis included in original text).

## **A thesis of ontological understandings**

As stated in chapter one, I have approached this inquiry into the well-being experiences of being ‘*in*’ principalship, using a unique scholarly lens - ontology. The phenomenon of well-being is an uncontrollable and uncontainable happening experienced by those of us immersed in the lifeworld of school leadership. It cannot be defined, labelled or categorised, but can be described and interpreted to gain, as van Manen (1990) argues, “a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 9).

Principals’ everyday experiences are ‘laced’ with numerous and complex interactions involving stakeholders. This is commonplace in every school and for every principal. Everyday happenings ‘take over’ and the principal’s well-being is surpassed for the business of the workday. Principals find themselves thrown into festivals, those impromptu happenings that can have positive or negative outcomes. Those in principalship with attuned circumspect fore-sight, relational sensibilities and phronesis, may move through the unexpected situations relatively unscathed and even enlightened or transformed. Whilst others, may dwell in the temporality and turbulence of the situation, disclosing feelings of uncanniness, stripped of possibilities in moments of angst that Foulds (2012) equates to “feelings of not being ‘at home’ in the world which is normally hidden by being *fallen* into the world and *being-with* ‘they’” (p. 166 emphasis included in original text). The varied gravity on well-being from these experiences, continues to shape our way-of-being in the world far beyond quantifiable time and space.

This raises further possibilities regarding being ‘*in*’ principalship in relation to Dasein’s time-ness. The temporality of one’s “state-of-mind” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 389), of

understanding and attunement, of existentially being-thrown and of everyday taking care of things, could therefore authentically reveal or inauthentically cover up the phenomenon of well-being. Regardless of our fleeting experiences, our being-with-others is unavoidable and significant “which springs from one’s own self” (King, 2001, p. 125). Our own and other’s experiences of well-being continue to surprise and shock, irrespective of how long we have been in the principalship. Moreover, our taken-for-granted assumptions regarding our way-of-being in the role and its direct impact on well-being, continue to be silenced, closed off, covered up with misinterpretations and baseless half-truths, blocking the way for meaningful understandings to surface.

Uncovered in this inquiry, via a thorough review of the literature, is the quantitative methodological approach used by researchers and organisations alike in an attempt to define principals’ well-being (see chapters two and three for a list of references). Using constructs such as impersonal surveys, fixed procedures and techniques to collect and collate data, and then reducing well-being to psychological concepts, graphs and tables, tells us little about the essential nature of the phenomenon. Absent are principals’ narratives - an inquiry into principal well-being minus principals’ lived experiences. An omission this significant continues to form the impetus for this and possible further research into well-being.

### **So, what is well-being?**

This inquiry showed that whilst well-being cannot be defined, even though many have tried, including the World Health Organisation (see chapter two), it can be characterised as a phenomenological concept referring to a feeling or experience (Eriksson, 1984). It can be described as tranquillity, emotional strength and a rhythmic flow which is experienced differently by people, whereby harmony and balance lie at its foundation (Healey-Ogden, 2008).

Heidegger's writings have been used to develop deeper, ontological understandings of the meanings emanating from principals' well-being experiences. His ideas have assisted to inform new ways of thinking about principals' well-being within this inquiry in addition to the health sciences, so that future empirical research can endeavour to reimagine alternative ways to describe well-being as a phenomenon, something that goes beyond the causal effects of concepts such as workload to something that is part of our way-of-being.

The phenomenon of well-being requires a personal drive to exist; it is not experienced through purposeful means (Healey-Ogden, 2008). It is experienced in a self-forgetful way, in the free space where life unfolds and where people come to see their worlds differently. The lived experience of well-being is interwoven with perceiving one's identity which evokes feelings of orientation and of knowing oneself more fully. It presents with fluctuating qualities and is expressed in a newfound quietude of voice (Healey-Ogden, 2008)

The following is an excerpt from a well-being statement used in a peer-reviewed article titled *Achieving health or achieving wellbeing?* (Schickler, 2005). It attempts to describe well-being, without labelling or defining it.

Well-being means that I have hopes and goals.  
I have self-esteem, authenticity and confidence.  
I can be creative or spiritual.  
I have energy and vitality which flows freely.  
I am relaxed and at ease.  
There is a feeling of peace and a knowledge that all is well in my world.  
It is about being content with life, accepting myself, knowing my limitations  
and the reality and the risks of life.  
Only I know how I feel when I feel a sense of well-being  
and it is hard for me to tell if someone else feels that way.  
Often, I don't notice my well-being.  
I take it for granted - until I don't have it.  
(Schickler, 2005, p. 222)

## **So, what about the research question?**

What is the ontological nature of well-being for school principals?

The ontological nature of well-being, as seen in the stories throughout this inquiry, cannot be defined, because the phenomenon is experienced and described differently by each principal. That said, there is something communal in the way principals articulate the ontological nature of well-being, which was experienced as *thrownness*, through *care-full relationships* and their *circumspect fore-sight* within the numerous *festivals of life*. The ebbs and flows of life experiences (joy, disappointment, expected and unexpected) are part of our human condition and these impact principals and their well-being within their day-to-day roles. Principals' stories gave meanings and understanding to the lived experience of well-being which in turn, gave it life.

I have come to understand in this inquiry - through the collective descriptions and interpretations of principals' stories and through exploring the literature, that I have transcended the phenomenon of well-being as separate from descriptions of health or wellness - to a phenomenon unique in essence and one that we all experience all of the time in its presence and absence. As seen in the principals' stories, well-being shows within our lived experiences of being human. It is through understanding and accepting that well-being is part of the human condition, that possibilities for growth may emerge.

Principals can learn from their own and others' lived experiences of well-being to position themselves better towards understandings of care. This extends beyond the growing number of self-help literature which aims to 'fix' perceived well-being 'problems', towards a community of principals who understand and care about their and others' well-being experiences within the context of a demanding school environment, to the degree that they take notice of ways in which they could make a difference in the well-being experiences of the community - communities of care.

Emerging from the filaments of the research question comes an understanding that seeking to uncover the mystery of the phenomenon of well-being in principals' lived experiences is complex and may never be completely explicated with any certainty (van Manen, 1990). Even though this research space afforded new understandings of how eleven principals experience well-being, the phenomenological / ontological understandings surrounding the phenomenon of well-being continue to elude us. Hermeneutic phenomenology as a research approach enabled me to explore the taken-for-granted nature of well-being experiences and glimpse at how school principals experience this phenomenon in their everyday lives, without the pressure of arriving at a set of answers which would become my original contribution to knowledge.

### **So, what is my original contribution to knowledge?**

This inquiry affords an original contribution to knowledge on educational leadership which ontologically explores the wellbeing experiences of principals. In doing so, the inquiry acknowledges a shared ontological humanity as seen in our being-together-in-the-world.

Reflecting on the stories gifted to me by Queensland school principals, instils an understanding of dwelling in locales (places and spaces) and 'being' in principalship as a relational activity in becoming one within the experience of well-being as our way-of-being. Well-being is a phenomenon that exists across humanity, in our thrownness, in our circumspect foresight in care-full relationships and within the festivals of life. In contrast with contemporary understandings of wellbeing, this inquiry has found wellbeing to be a living relational entity, not a *thing* existing in a transactional and ontic world of cause and effect.

A particularly significant original finding emerging from this inquiry is that well-being is understood as a collective phenomenon we all experience and one that matters in our everyday lived experiences. We experience the presence or absence of well-being as

integral to our human condition. As a phenomenon, well-being can make an appearance from beneath the surface of lived experiences and can be described and interpreted to discover essential meanings and deepen understandings of what Heidegger terms, being together in the world. Well-being is a phenomenon that exists across humanity. I attend to the essence of being human within this inquiry.

With these illuminated understandings, I offer the following recommendations for practice which have been realised from the stories within this inquiry.

### **Recommendations for practice**

In this inquiry, an attempt has been made to uncover taken-for-granted meanings of the phenomenon of well-being emerging from within principals' lived experiences. Throughout the chapters, I have signalled some provocations based on research findings and asked questions for ongoing consideration. I now pose four provocations, framed as implicit or explicit callings for consideration in practice.

#### ***A calling for principals: listen and learn from your life stories***

**Well-being is first and foremost a priority for principals.**

Principals have numerous day-to-day responsibilities in their work and prioritising that work at the expense of one's own well-being, can lead to devastating consequences. Listening and working with your life stories is the first step towards proactively looking after our own well-being.

My position here is one of incitement and encouragement - to listen and work with your life stories and use these insights to create the best life possible.

*A calling for clusters of principals: listen to one another's stories*

**Well-being is something everyone is experiencing all of the time.**

The plural nature of well-being lends itself to alternative thinking away from individualising the phenomenon to one of shared experiences. This thesis has shared multiple stories of principals' well-being experiences, which have been hermeneutically described and interpreted to uncover essential meanings. We all experience well-being, all of the time, in its presence and absence. As such, there is not a cure for well-being, it is part of our human condition.

**Principals work relationally.**

The majority of principals attend regular cluster meetings and belong to a professional association. They can be a meaningful source of support and a forum for developing professional relationships. Unfortunately, the agendas for these interpersonal gatherings, all too often reflect a neoliberalist approach of raising performance, attending to systematic priorities and skill acquisition. The discussion is guarded and the principal's way-of-being is often inauthentic, 'masking' their own-self for communally-established ways of existing. Exploring another way-of-being when principals come together, may lay the foundations towards a relational approach to well-being.

**Networking is vital.**

An important insight rising from within this inquiry is that principals who network with and who are supported by other school leaders (local and further afield), experience continued positive well-being. This scenario has possibilities conducive to an authentic way-of-being, a relationship built on the premise of mutual support. However, as this inquiry discovered, professional relationships and friendships develop organically, they are not something to be forced or strategically orchestrated.

### **Mentoring - the key to a professional friendship.**

In the study, *Mentoring: towards an improved professional friendship* Gardiner (2008) argues that a professional friendship is possible and an essential component of an effective mentoring relationship. Gardiner lists personal traits for a professional friendship and mentoring relationship such as honesty, openness, respectful, trust and so forth. Amongst these traits are the words “caring, shared experiences, support and understanding” (pp. 213-219). Ontologically, a professional friendship, nurtured by an authentic mentoring relationship reflects what Heidegger (1962) argues as our way-of-being-in-the-world with others. This being “belongs essentially to Dasein and Dasein, when understood *ontologically*, is care” (p. 84 emphasis included in original text). Mentoring, could thus be described as a caring relationship - like the one Sam experienced in chapter six in the story titled, *Being-alongside a mentor*.

### ***A calling for principals’ supervisors: listen to principals’ stories***

#### **Experienced principals are to be valued.**

Principals’ supervisors, known in Queensland as Assistant Regional Directors (ARDs) are generally recruited because of their performativity as principals of large schools. Many ARDs who reach this level are relatively young and supervise principals who are senior to them in age and experience. These principals have developed and enacted their phronesis - practical wisdom, tacit knowing which Giles (2018) argues “is context specific and involves relational sensibilities such as attunement, tact, nous, resoluteness, improvisation, moral judgement amongst other sensibilities” (p. 56). As such, they need to be valued through a differentiated supervision model (Reyes, 2021), whereby their stories and phronesis are valued, acknowledged and shared and not silenced.



## *A calling for departments of education and policy makers*

### **Create recognition of ‘cultures’ of care.**

The current performativity culture, whereby the central focus is fixed on results - is toxic. It has the potential of doing significant harm to those in leadership. It creates competition amongst principals and erodes trust and support. Mette (2020) talks about a toxic culture contributing towards wounded leaders and calls for the organisation’s culture to be one of support, growth and personal development. These wounds, Goldman (2017) argues, are often the result of criticisms and attacks on the principal, based on personal beliefs and differing ideologies, which have lasting effects that may span a professional lifetime.

In Queensland, there is hope for principals with the introduction of the *Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2022* (DoE, 2020a). Whilst under development and throughout the consultation process, a *Principal Health and Wellbeing Blueprint* (2019) was constructed and deconstructed to highlight salient messaging for consideration. One of the categories identified as a significant challenge, was the institutionalising of a well-being culture. Whilst it is a start, my wonderings about the nature of a well-being culture, as something that gets conceptualised into a strategic document or framework, rather than realised as a way-of-being, raise concerns.

In the quest to uncover the phenomenon of well-being within principals’ stories - revealing matters that shock us and give us hope, the abovementioned recommendations for practice and provocations point towards greater ontological understandings of well-being, as it is experienced by principals.

## **Limitations of my research**

There are limitations (matters and occurrences) that have arisen within this ontological inquiry beyond my control as researcher. I 'limit' the discussion below to three:

1. The limits of phenomenology as a methodology.
2. The limits of the research design.
3. The limits of the range of the research participants.

### ***The limits of phenomenology as a methodology***

My quest to understand principals' well-being experiences is fundamentally an interpretative endeavour and focuses on attempts to make meanings from research participants' stories. Given the nature of this inquiry, I am limited to my own interpretations, which are illuminated by the philosophical writing of Heidegger and Gadamer. My interpretations are not hard truths, theories or facts for all who read this thesis, but rather my own attempt to uncover essential meanings emerging from within principals' stories. This is different from the 'hard sciences' where the end game is to generate a theory of defensible absolutes and truths. As van Manen (2014) argues, "Phenomenology is primarily a philosophic *method for questioning*, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determined conclusions" (p. 29). In phenomenology, the aim is to keep the research open for future contemplation, understandings and insights.

Communicating existential meanings of the phenomenon of well-being in principals can be quite limiting and difficult, especially to those who dogmatically maintain preconceived, rational ideas and hasty solutions for 'fixing' the issue. This group includes principals themselves, as well as those in positions of power within the Department of Education, amongst others. This same thinking treats and labels well-being as a thing. "Her well-being is poor because she is always stressed" or "His massive workload is affecting his well-being." Perpetuated by current quantitative research, well-being is packaged as an

individual's affliction, much like diabetes or arthritis. And like medical afflictions, well-being is treatable by eating healthier, exercising more and practising mindfulness.

Remaining in the interpretative space and suspending judgements, especially given that I am currently working as a principal, as well as a researcher, requires discipline and attunement. The propensity to include accepted pre-understandings and popular explanations of well-being, including those stemming from quantitative inquiries, into the research, was tempting. This distracted me from thinking, interpreting and writing about a specific feature of the phenomenon, as described from within my participants' stories.

### ***The limits of the research design***

This inquiry is limited by way of its research design. It involved eleven principals who shared an average of thirteen stories each, totally 148 stories. I ended up using 30 of the 148 stories I had collected, which could be viewed as a limitation. A large proportion of the stories that I did not use, were unhelpful in my search for the phenomenon of well-being. Given the current traction that well-being has been given in the research community, this is quite a small sample of principals. Whilst I interviewed to the point that no new information was forthcoming, many other principals were available and interested to share their stories of well-being experiences. Had I continued interviewing, it is uncertain what new insights and meanings would have emerged. The temporal nature of my inquiry (interviews, crafted stories, descriptions and interpretations) was limited to a period between 2017-2020. Extending the research period may have influenced my findings, for example, I received limited stories concerning the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of principals.

### ***The limits of the range of the research participants***

I deliberately limited this inquiry to participants who are or have been principals working for the Queensland Department of Education (DoE) in the last five years. My thinking around this decision was to hone in on one jurisdiction that was known to me personally, for the purpose of insightful commentary. I discuss the recruitment of my research participants in chapter five in a section titled, *finding storytellers: selection, recruitment and ethics*. Noteworthy, was the inclusive nature of the selection process. Principals were selected on the following criteria:

- Female to male ratio.
- Beginning and experienced principals (age range 25-63 years).
- Small school and large school principals.
- Principals working in urban, regional and rural and remote locations.
- Principals working in primary, secondary and multi-sector schools.
- The inclusion of principals from multi-cultural backgrounds.

### **Possibilities for further research**

In this section of the conclusion, I recommend several possibilities for further research into principal well-being. Framed as statements, these have emerged from within the threads of this inquiry to be considered and studied in potential future inquiries.

***Exploring well-being experiences of principals from multiple jurisdictions, states, territories and countries, reveals a certain way-of-being in the world.***

During my time in principalship, I have been afforded the opportunity to work alongside school leaders from other States of Australia, from India, Canada and the United States. There are clear differences in our way-of-working, however, there are commonalities pertaining to our way-of-being. A phenomenological inquiry based on the lived experiences of principals beyond the borders of Queensland, may reveal some interesting insights as to principals' way-of-being in the world.

### *The ontological nature of well-being, as experienced by aspiring school leaders.*

This statement came to me when interviewing Kath, a newly appointment school leader. Like Simon and Jill, Kath had limited preparation prior to her appointment and learned on the job what it means to be ‘*in*’ principalship. Research questions to explore this statement could possibly include:

- What does it mean for a teacher to be promoted into the principalship?
- What is it like being ‘*in*’ principalship?
- What does praxis mean for a newly appointed principal?
- How do newly appointed principals use their intuition in making decisions?

### *The everyday lived experiences of principals’ practice*

There are multiple sources of literature (professional reading) pertaining to school leadership and management; the majority of which, comprise of metaphoric ‘recipes’ to follow, or a ‘to do list’ to work through, in the journey to becoming a principal. Yet, absent are phenomenological studies that seek to understand the experiential nature of being ‘*in*’ principalship. One noteworthy exception is a phenomenological inquiry by Parylo, Zepeda, and Bengtson (2012) that sought to understand principals’ lived experiences of being evaluated by their supervisors. It also investigated the notion of adult learning, as it pertains to principals’ professional development. This prompts possibilities for further research by asking the question:

What is the significant nature of professional learning for those in principalship?

### **The Impact of this phenomenological research**

I emphasised my long-standing interest in principal well-being from the outset of this inquiry, as noted in chapter one. Being ‘*in*’ principalship since the late 1980s has afforded me a smorgasbord of lived experiences that have pre-reflectively shaped my understandings of well-being and what it means to ‘be’ a principal. As van Manen (1990) argues, our lived experiences are the “starting point and end point of phenomenological

research” (p. 36). As such, I have used my own personal experiences as a starting point for this inquiry by placing my stories amongst those of other principals.

Revisiting my initial presuppositions and taken-for-granted assumptions, as noted in chapter one, has been an enlightening exercise. Many of those pre-understandings have harmonised with this inquiry, whilst others have been re-imagined in line with newly realised ontological insights. My unwavering concern for the well-being of principals, as stated in the introduction, hasn’t changed, but sustained me throughout this inquiry. What has changed in a most transformative way, is my deeper understandings of the meaning of being ‘*in*’ principalship and the ontological nature of well-being. Being present for and with principals as they shared their lived experiences has had a profound impact on my way-of-being as both researcher and principal back at the coalface of the school environment.

Engaging with this inquiry has confirmed for me that the current approach used to describe and manage well-being in principals, has missed the point. Well-being is a collective phenomenon (not individual) that everyone experiences, and like all phenomena, it cannot be caught, described and psychologised. It can however make an “appearance” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 51) long enough to be described in an ontological way, clearing the path for greater understandings and existential meanings to gather. And it is the gathering of those deep understandings and essential meanings that makes this inquiry so significant to principals in moving forward.

### **Concluding thoughts**

*Being ‘in’ Principalship: an ontological inquiry of well-being experiences*, has unearthed critical findings of the contextual and relational nature of well-being amongst principals and their communities. This inquiry found that a principal’s well-being is continuously in

play and can be seen in everyday relating, as it is for other members of the community. Well-being then is a collective phenomenon. Indeed, it is an error for well-being to be advanced as an isolated construct with individual numeric measures that reduces everyday relating to transactions occurring between objects. In addition, such measures do not take account of the power and presence of our ontological and existential inter-connectedness as human beings. For the reasons above, the research findings challenge the dominant discourse of an individualistic and quantifiable well-being culture devoid of the complexities, thrownness and influence of context and relationship.

The focus for professional development and engagement conceivably needs to be re-imagined as relational leadership, with opportunities for principals to share their well-being experiences. In this way, we cultivate a generation of principals who embody care and support. A generation of principals who compliment, not compete with each other and a generation where their own and each other's well-being is mattering.

Well-being is a matter for schools and their community - we all experience well-being all of the time. This phenomenon makes *appearances* within our everyday lived experiences. Building a culture of well-being is essential to our understanding of the phenomenon and our everyday being-with-others. This may sound utopian in nature and impossible in practice, and in stark contrast with today's neoliberal ideology, which commands our way-of-being (especially *in* principalship). However, I hold onto the hope that our lived, well-being experiences, compel us (and those in positions of power) to take a stand and provoke change towards a more positive and brighter future.

For that reason, I challenge principals, school communities, regions, central office and the Department of Education policy makers, to re-think their practices that are causing potential harm. I challenge them to re-imagine a culture that does not focus just on performativity and competition, because such a focus breeds isolation, unhealthy rivalry

and stress. This inquiry advocates for a well-being culture that is humane and care-full - one that attends to and values the people who are on the ground producing positive and effective outcomes. As Gammon (2001) advocates, “Look after your people - and they will look after your business” (p. 12).

For society to produce learners who are able to grow into productive and contributing citizens, our schools need leadership by principals, who are themselves, resilient to the thrownness of rapid changes and impromptu happenings occurring within the educational landscape. The landscape of change needs to reflect principal’s well-being as fundamental to the development and sustainability of school culture, relationships and significantly, the pedagogy of education. Departments of education have a responsibility to grow and support cultures of care whereby principals can focus on the important work of ‘being’ relational leaders in their day-to-day dealings with others and embody a care-full and circumspect approach to well-being in their everyday practice. As Douglas (Unknown date) argues, “If you want to change the culture you will have to start by changing the organisation”. In this way, being ‘*in*’ principalship would be a transactional and transformational activity whereby school leaders and their well-being becomes an integral part of an organisation’s way of working.





## Appendix A: Ethics Approval

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### 7864 SBREC Final approval notice (2 February 2018)

HE Human Research Ethics  
Fri 2/02/2018, 12:18 PM  
Shaun Kanowski; David Giles; Bev Rogers

Reply all |

Ethics Approval

This message was sent with high importance.

You forwarded this message on 2/05/2018 5:31 AM

Dear Shaun,

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.

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## FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:

Project Title:

Principal Researcher:


Email:

Approval Date:  Ethics Approval Expiry Date:

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently provided.

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## Appendix B: Letter of introduction to participants

 <p><b>Flinders</b> UNIVERSITY ADELAIDE • AUSTRALIA</p>	<p>Shaun Kanowski Doctoral student: College of Education, Psychology and Social Work</p> <p>Education Building Flinders University Bedford Park GPO Box 2100 Adelaide SA 5001</p> <p>Tel: 0407 119 971 Fax: +61 4666 7299 <a href="mailto:kano0012@flinders.edu.au">kano0012@flinders.edu.au</a> <a href="http://www.flinders.edu.au">www.flinders.edu.au</a> CRICOS Provider No. 00114A</p>
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### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Colleague,

Allow me to introduce myself.

I am undertaking research to explore how school leaders balance their own well-being with the demands of administration in their context. The aim of this narrative hermeneutic inquiry is to explore the *lived* experiences, shared understandings and taken for granted meanings of principals' experience of the phenomenon of well-being and of *being* in an increasingly 'hope-less' context. Moreover, I wish to explore the impact of the dominate ideology and how this influences principals' 'ways-of-being in leadership'.

In Australia, some quantitative research is occurring, which measures and scores principal's surveyed responses against a set of criteria. My research looks at well-being through a different lens - this uncharted approach is a phenomenological study utilising narrative descriptions to form the data for this research. My research attempts to gain a deeper understanding that if ... feelings of lack of control ... unappreciated ... never being complemented ... being seen as incompetent ... always more to do ... the nightmare metaphor of always running without time to rest ... and yet being told the good leader can manage these things... contribute to work intensification, what does this mean for school principals who are mortgaging their own well-being for the organisation?

Are you interested in this research and in sharing your story? If so, I would like to make contact with you by email and provide you with an Information sheet and a Consent Form for you to sign. As a participant, you would be interviewed by phone. Since I intend to make recordings of the interview, your consent would be sought to record each interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing my thesis or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed. It may be necessary to make the recording available to secretarial assistants (or a transcription service) for transcription, in which case you can be assured that such persons will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement which outlines the requirement that your name or identity not be revealed and that the confidentiality of the material is respected and maintained.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in any published documents. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to Shaun Kanowski at the address given above or by telephone or email.

Thank you for your attention and possible participation.

Yours sincerely|



SHAUN KANOWSKI  
Researcher  
Flinders University

## Appendix C: Letter of support

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13/06/18

To whom it may concern

Our roles as leaders in dual sector schools place many demands on us which is why I believe that the doctoral research current being undertaken by Shaun Kanowski is vitally important.

In addition to being a doctoral candidate at Flinders University and the Principal of Allora P-10 State School, Shaun is a vice president and a past president of the Queensland State P-10/12 School Administrators' Association.

I endorse Shaun's invitation to you to be involved in this research and encourage you to share your experiences so that as a system and an association, Shaun's recommendations can better equip and support our school leaders to balance their own well-being with the demands of their administrative roles.

I can be contacted on my mobile – 0428540236 if you would like to ask me questions regarding either my endorsement of Shaun's invitation or if you wish to discuss a matter in which our association can assist you.

Regards

Brian O'Neill  
State President – Queensland State P-10/P-12 School Administrators' Association.

## Appendix D : Participant information sheet

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Shaun Kanowski  
Doctoral student:  
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

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Flinders University  
Bedford Park  
GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001

Tel: 0407 119 971  
Fax: +61 4666 7299  
[kano0012@flinders.edu.au](mailto:kano0012@flinders.edu.au)  
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CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

*This research has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 7864). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on +61 8201 3116, by fax on +61 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*

### INFORMATION SHEET

**Title: Being 'in' principalship; experiences of the phenomenon of well-being – an ontological study**

**Researcher:**

Shaun Kanowski  
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work  
Flinders University  
Tel: 0407 119 971  
[kano0012@flinders.edu.au](mailto:kano0012@flinders.edu.au)

**Supervisors:**

Professor David Giles  
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University  
Tel: 0403 774 222

Dr Bev Rogers  
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University  
Tel: 0417 251 218

Dear Colleagues,

I am embarking on an exciting doctoral research project that endeavours to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of well-being and the *lived* experiences of school principals and welcome your insights. I am looking for participants (school principals – past and present) to share their stories of a time when they had to balance their own well-being with the duties of school leadership. You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Information Sheet in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact me via the phone number or email address listed above.

**Description of research project**

This study forms part of the data collection phase of the research project titled above. Being a phenomenological inquiry, I am keen to understand more about what it means for a principal to be juggling school leadership commitments with their own well-being, especially when the latter is suffering. Flinders University - College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, support this research project.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the inquiry is to document descriptive narratives associated with the *lived* experiences of school principals. Your experiences of school leadership and well-being will be sought for analysis to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying meaning of what it was / is like for you.

**What will you be asked to do?**

I extend an invitation to you to attend a telephone interview where I will ask you to recount experiences relating to the phenomenon of well-being as it played out in your lifeworld of being in the principalship. As you share your stories, a digital

recorder will capture your contribution. I will also be taking notes throughout the interview and ask probing questions to maintain a conversational flow. Following the interview, I will transcribe and edit your contribution and then return it to you for review and seek approval to use it for further analysis. You retain the right to amend, add or subtract information so it more accurately reflects what was said or intended.

### **Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research**

The consent process involves:

- \* Reading this information sheet
- \* Clarifying any questions you may have
- \* Signing and returning the Consent for Participation in Research form

You retain the right to withdraw from participation at any stage.

### **Snowball approach to this research project**

I will also seek your direction and referral to other colleagues who may be interested in participating in this research project; principals of whom you are aware have struggled with their own well-being while maintaining the rigors of school administration. Naturally, you are under no obligation to disclose any names and this will not affect your participation in this research project in any way, shape or form.

### **How long will the interview take?**

Depending on the depth and flow of conversation, the interview will take between 45-60 minutes. In addition, reading through the edited crafted stories, may take another 15-30 minutes.

### **What are the benefits of participation?**

Stories from participants will be recorded and analysed in a process known as hermeneutics. Hermeneutic phenomenological research endeavours to uncover the meanings within the text to gain a deeper understanding. In attempting to uncover the phenomenon of well-being as it is experienced in the subject of school principals, it may reveal underpinning ways of being in the world. Or to put it in more clearly, our narrative descriptions may help us to understand with a level of depth, what it means for a school principal (you) to balance issues of well-being with work commitments and how this plays out in school land.

### **Confidentiality and Storage of data**

You will remain anonymous throughout this research project, with any identifying information removed. Confidentiality of your personal details (e.g. name, school, significant others) is assured and in fact, won't be used. The transcription of your interview and your edited narrative descriptions will be stored in a secure file and back-up file. My supervisors will view the transcripts in their capacity of overseeing the analysis of the data, however these transcripts will be de-identified using codes in place of names. On completion of the research, the data will be stored securely for a period of five years, after which they will be destroyed.

### **Risk or discomfort**

I do not anticipate any risks through your involvement in this research project. Understandably, at times during the interview, you may disclose raw emotional and confidential information in our conversations and this may present discomfort. I reiterate here that your narrative descriptions (highly personal) will be treated with the upmost respect and confidentiality.

Some participants may find the digital recording device used in the interview confronting and stifle conversation. I foreground an apology for this intrusion from the outset, as I need to capture your narrative description in all its honesty and be present for you throughout the interview.

### **Services on offer if adversely affected**

All participants will be provided with the number for the helpline of Beyondblue: 1300 22 4636 or Headspace Principal Coaching and Support Service (PCSS): 0476 839 363.

No financial payment will be given for participation in this study. Participants will receive a small token gift upon completion of the interview process to thank them for their participation.

### **Results**

The results will be published as part of a Flinders University PhD. In addition, participants will be provided with a short summary of the results upon request.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I hope that you will accept this invitation to be involved.

Yours sincerely

SHAUN KANOWSKI  
Researcher  
Date: 13 June 2018

## Appendix E: Participant consent form

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### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (by interview)

Being in principalship; experiences of the phenomenon of well-being  
– an ontological study

I .....

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the Information Sheet for the research project on principal well-being.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio/video recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
  - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
  - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
  - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to me.
  - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on my progress in my course of study, or results gained.
  - I may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
6. I agree/do not agree\* to the tape/transcript\* being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed.      \* delete as appropriate
7. I have had the opportunity to discuss taking part in this research with a family member or friend.

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher's name: Shaun Kanowski**

**Researcher's signature.....Date.....**

*NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.*

8. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a crafted story of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

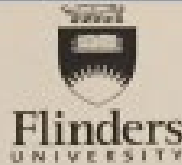
**Participant's signature.....Date.....**

9. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the researcher's report and agree to the publication of my information as reported.

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**

---

## Appendix F: Confidentiality agreement - transcription services



### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT Transcription Services

Being 'in' principalship; an ontological inquiry of well-being experiences

I, Pauline Giles, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Shaun Kanowski (Student Number: 2143132) related to his doctoral study on "Being 'in' principalship; an ontological inquiry of well-being experiences" (Ethics Approval Project Number 7864). Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Shaun Kanowski;
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Shaun Kanowski in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) Pauline Giles

Transcriber's signature Pauline Giles

Date 27 June 2018

Scanned with CamScanner



## Appendix G: Post-interview letter to participants

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[Date]

Dear [participant]

I want to express my deep appreciation for the opportunity you gave me to interview you for my doctoral study. The transcripts have provided me with substantial material relevant to my study. The methodology that I am using requires me to work with each transcript before moving on to the next person's transcript. You can imagine - this is a lengthy process.

I have attached (below) the stories that I have drawn from our interview for your review. Please note that, for anonymity purposes, I have changed the names of all those mentioned in the interview, including your own. Would you please read these stories with the view to (a) confirming the information, and (b) allowing me permission to formally work with these stories in an interpretive way.

- If you are in agreement, would you mind responding via email giving your permission.
- Alternatively, if you wish to edit any story, please make your notes on the particular story (via 'Track Changes' in the word document below), and email to me. I would ask that you return the edited stories via a reply email.
- If you have grave concerns over a story, can you note this on the particular story so that I can contact you and discuss this?

Again, thank you for your consideration of these materials. Please feel free to contact me over any matter listed above.

Alternatively, should my communication with you or expectations cause you concern, please don't hesitate to call my supervisor, Professor David Giles by telephone on 0417 101 014, or email ([david.giles@flinders.edu.au](mailto:david.giles@flinders.edu.au)).

Thank you for your attention and possible participation.

Yours sincerely

SHAUN KANOWSKI  
Researcher  
Flinders University

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 6012). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Secretary of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 5962, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*

## **Appendix H: Interview guide questions**

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Researcher: Shaun Kanowski, PhD Candidate Flinders University

### **Being 'in' principalship; an ontological inquiry of well-being experiences**

#### **Interview questions:**

1. What is it like being a principal / school leader?
2. Can you tell me a time when you:
  - A. were on top of your game;
  - B. felt overwhelmed;
  - C. were playing the game to stay afloat;
  - D. sensed a change in administration – 'thrown' by a change in policy / expectations from the education department
3. What people in your leadership journey stand out for you?
4. How does your leadership role impact on significant others in your life?
5. Have you ever had a time when you were uncertain as a leader? What feelings were generated by the experience?
6. What's the hardest part of being in leadership?

## **Appendix I: Example extract from interview transcript with crafted story**

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The following excerpt comes from the transcript from an interview with Simon (Interview 1):

\* Comments within the square brackets [ ] have been inserted.

\*\* Strikethrough are comments and details omitted from the crafted story.

### **Simon: finding and being found**

*In my third year of teaching, I was ~~moved~~ [promoted] to a one[-]teacher school in the sticks of South West Queensland and in the middle of a sheep paddock. It had fourteen children from years one through to year seven. I was to be the only ~~teacher~~ [Teaching Principal in the school] and I was there for four years.*

*My first taste of being a school leader was [quite literally,] being thrown in the deep end [, without any floatation devices.]*

*We [I] did go to ‘Principal[’s] School’ [where] ~~they gave~~ [the Department provided] us [with] a week’s induction on everything you need[ed] to know to be an effective Principal. [The induction] ~~went through~~ [covered] things like ~~setting up~~ [tips for establishing productive] relationships within your school community, budgeting, looking after facilities, and there was a little bit about teaching and learning ~~in there~~ [multi-age classes. I taught Years 1-7 in the one classroom.]*

*~~So that was my first taste of school leadership. As a classroom teacher, I led various projects like the instrumental music band. We had a celebration in the town and, and I led the parade.~~*

*There were a lot of great take-aways from that week?*

*I met other people who were in the same boat. I met a ~~young~~ lady [named] ~~Julia~~ Jill - she was posted to a school ~~a~~ [one] hundred kilometres away from my school, so [as it turned out,] she was one of my closest neighbours. We made a pact that we would support each other in our time in these very remote little schools. There were instances where ~~Julia~~ Jill would phone ~~Leanne~~ Linda [spouse] and me [if she had a challenging day]. We would jump in the car and fly over to her school and stay the night, have dinner with her, talk through issues and then be up at 4:30 in the morning ready to drive the hundred [kilometres] back to my school, ready for a day’s work.*

*We [Jill, Linda and I] would [talk] about curriculum, we would be talking about teaching practices, how to enhance relationships with parents – particularly those tricky ones that in a one teacher school, you can’t get away from because you’re living amongst ~~it~~ [them.] The collegiality [was reciprocal and valued]. [The three of us] became really close friends. [Linda was Jill’s Made-of-Honour at her wedding.]*

*~~It was reciprocal.~~ That week [at the principals’ school] set up the platform for relationships to start budding. I am very grateful to have ~~had~~ [experienced] that week, because there were some learnings in there in which I still hold ~~dear,~~ dear now.*

### ***The crafted story as it appears in chapter 7***

*In my third year of teaching, I was promoted to a one-teacher school in the sticks of South West Queensland and in the middle of a sheep paddock. It had fourteen children from years one through to year seven. I was to be the only Teaching Principal in the school and I was there for four years.*

*My first taste of being a school leader was quite literally, being thrown in the deep end, without any floatation devices.*

*I did go to 'Principal's School' where the Department provided us with a week's induction on everything you needed to know to be an effective Principal. The induction covered things like tips for establishing productive relationships within your school community, budgeting, looking after facilities, and there was a little bit about teaching and learning multi-age classes. I taught Years 1-7 in the one classroom.*

*There were a lot of great take-aways from that week.*

*I met other people who were in the same boat. I met a lady named Jill. She was posted to a school one hundred kilometres away from my school, so, as it turned out, she was one of my closest neighbours. We made a pact that we would support each other in our time in our very remote little schools. There were instances where Jill would phone Linda (spouse) and me if she had a challenging day. We would jump in the car and fly over to her school and stay the night, have dinner with her, talk through issues and then be up at 4:30am the next morning to drive the hundred kilometres back to my school, ready for a day's work.*

*Jill, Linda and I would talk about curriculum, we would be talking about teaching practices, how to enhance relationships with parents – particularly those tricky ones that in a one teacher school, you can't get away from because you're living amongst them. The collegiality was reciprocal and valued. The three of us became really close friends. Linda was Jill's Made-of-Honour at her wedding.*

*That week at the Principals' School set up the platform for relationships to start budding. I am very grateful to have experienced that week, because there were some learnings in there in which I still hold dear now. (Interview 1: Story 1).*

## **Appendix J: Research participants and their stories (148)**

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### **Interview One: Simon**

- Story 1: Finding and being found
- Story 2: Attempting clustering with designated others
- Story 3: Longitudinal official relationships and well-being
- Story 4: The fragility of leadership
- Story 5: Influencing the DNA of emergent leadership
- Story 6: Influencing the DNA of emergent leadership part 2 – from the beginning
- Story 7: Hope-full Brendan
- Story 8: Relationships and dialogue exist ‘between’ others
- Story 9: Relationships that leave a profound and positive impact
- Story 10: The essence of things in our ordinary, everyday world [umwelt]
- Story 11: I could die here – an emotional attunement to fear

### **Interview Two: Kath**

- Story 1: Uncertainty of the role
- Story 2: Opening a new school
- Story 3: Care – for self and others
- Story 4: Parent expectations
- Story 5: Married to the job
- Story 6: A leisure / work now relationship
- Story 7: Yearly registration – playing the game
- Story 8: A change in administration
- Story 9: Relational leaders
- Story 10: Being micromanaged
- Story 11: The power of conversation
- Story 12: Balancing priorities

### **Interview Three: Sam**

- Story 1: Growing those around you
- Story 2: Curriculum leader
- Story 3: Being-alongside a mentor
- Story 4: A shift in Perception
- Story 5: David
- Story 6: Aspiring Leaders
- Story 7: Feeling overwhelmed
- Story 8: Time to decompress
- Story 9: A felt sense of guilt
- Story 10: Carrying the load
- Story 11: An uncertain time
- Story 12: To celebrate or commiserate – that is the question
- Story 13: School culture and reputation
- Story 14: Legislative requirement
- Story 15: Principal support
- Story 16: Finding your third space

Story 17: The Hatfield's and the McCoy's

#### **Interview Four: Ken**

Story 1: Highs and lows of school leadership  
Story 2: Jake  
Story 3: Damaging staff survey  
Story 4: Four years to action a plan  
Story 5: Curriculum leader  
Story 6: Project – middle school  
Story 7: Collateral damage  
Story 8: School Board's directive  
Story 9: Insecurity of the role  
Story 10: The masks we wear  
Story 11: Holding up a mirror  
Story 12: Conflicting registration recommendation  
Story 13: Taking one for the team  
Story 14: Leonie  
Story 15: Impact on significant others  
Story 16: Unsuccessful applicant  
Story 17: Unpopular decisions

#### **Interview Five: Casey**

Story 1: The best and worst parts of being 'in' principalship  
Story 2: A felt sense of achievement  
Story 3: The tides of change  
Story 4: Threatening parent  
Story 5: Managing others  
Story 6: Damaging words  
Story 7: Priorities  
Story 8: An Australian curriculum  
Story 9: The presence and present of trust  
Story 10: Supportive colleagues  
Story 11: Time for significant others  
Story 12: Time management  
Story 13: A resilient school leader  
Story 14: A conflicted school leader  
Story 15: Good and bad years  
Story 16: The depths of despair  
Story 17: Backs and armour  
Story 18: The busyness of being 'in' principalship

#### **Interview Six: Stan**

Story 1: The allusive 'to do list'  
Story 2: An understanding family  
Story 3: National partnerships  
Story 4: Autonomous leadership

- Story 5: The whims of a Department
- Story 6: Cleaning up someone else's mess
- Story 7: A career-limiting move
- Story 8: Once bitten – twice shy
- Story 9: Compliance plan for Principals
- Story 10: The silencing protocol
- Story 11: Venturesome leap
- Story 12: It is pointless to challenge authority
- Story 13: You made us look bad
- Story 14: Inspirational leaders
- Story 15: School is part of our family
- Story 16: An unsupported leader
- Story 17: A pushy parent
- Story 18: Gluing staff relationships together

### **Interview Seven: Elizabeth**

- Story 1: Solid advice
- Story 2: Thrownness as 'how one is'
- Story 3: An upset parent
- Story 4: The powerless Principal
- Story 5: Taking on the system
- Story 6: Thrownness as 'Being-towards-death'
- Story 7: Thrownness as a 'mode of being'
- Story 8: The weight of accountability
- Story 9: Collegial support – or a lack thereof
- Story 10: A flying start
- Story 11: A compliant Principal
- Story 12: Inspirational colleagues
- Story 13: Dressed for success
- Story 14: Too tired to function
- Story 15: Coping strategies
- Story 16: An active brain that won't switch off

### **Interview Eight: Keith**

- Story 1: Two sides of the one coin
- Story 2: Being alongside others – their success is our success
- Story 3: An aspiring leader
- Story 4: Playing the game to stay afloat
- Story 5: Being thrown by a bureaucratic system
- Story 6: An unethical teacher
- Story 7: Inspirational leaders
- Story 8: An uninspiring leader
- Story 9: I do not work for a Department – I work for people
- Story 10: Managing an underperforming teacher

### **Interview Nine: Doug**

- Story 1: New government - changing educational landscape
- Story 2: Being “Uncle” in an Indigenous community
- Story 3: Being alongside valuable others in leadership
- Story 4: The principal’s children
- Story 5: The nullity of thrownness
- Story 6: Throw projection
- Story 7: Being-with-others who inspire
- Story 8: Being-alongside-others who are mattering
- Story 9: Time management in leadership – potentiality-for-being-guilty
- Story 10: Thrownness towards death whilst in the Principalship

### **Interview Ten: Bob**

- Story 1: Being ‘in’ principalship in the rural sector
- Story 2: Being-there for someone else
- Story 3: On common sense
- Story 4: NAPLAN – a six-letter word
- Story 5: A narrow and sharp focus
- Story 6: The statue of David
- Story 7: The replacement President
- Story 8: When care is present
- Story 9: Being-alongside-others in an authentic way

### **Interview Eleven: Heidi**

- Story 1: Being ‘in’ Principalship – both sides of the coin
- Story 2: The average everydayness of being ‘in’ principalship
- Story 3: Trial by media
- Story 4: Acting principal
- Story 5: Relational spaces in school communities
- Story 6: Being a first-time Principal – a venturesome leap
- Story 7: Being silent regarding the angst associated with school leadership
- Story 8: Shifting goal posts
- Story 9: The considerateness of significant others
- Story 10: Meaningful relationships



## Appendix K: Working with the stories



### Story #5: Married to the job:

I was SO caught up in the job that I didn't have time for a relationship - to the detriment to myself, for a long time, I essentially have been married to the job.....

#### Description:

Kath's story of being married to the job is a commonly themed script for those of us in school leadership positions. The very essence of the role is multi-faceted and makes demands on one's time to the extent that the line between home and work is quite often blurred - if it exists at all....

#### Interpretation (what is the story showing me about the phenomenon?):



forever present as a school leader at the expense of her personal life and well-being?

The danger is that the partner one comes home to, can seem like yet another person in the queue of those who want a piece of you. What transpired for Kath is that she prioritise her job over her relationship? Were the demands (work intensification) so relentless that she had no other choice but to work outrageous hours – being

### Philosophical Notion: Care (sorge):

Being-in-the-world could therefore be interpreted as being-at-home-in-the-world and knowing one's way around while going about one's everyday practical affairs, day after day (Sarvimäki, 2006, p. 6). The expression 'being at home' – a sense of home-ness when wellbeing is strong (Heidegger as cited by Dreyfus & Hubert, 1991) has entered Kath's lifeworld. She has found a pattern for a healthy and doable work / home / life balance that suits her relationship with her new partner. If schoolwork builds up, Kath stays back in the afternoons to safeguard her valuable weekends with her partner. English musician Noel Gallagher is quoted as saying "I don't live to work; I work to live" (Andrews, 2016; Gallagher, 2019) which resonates within Kath's story of self-realisation.

## Appendix L: Participants' stories, descriptions and interpretative themes overview

### Participants' Stories, Descriptive and Interpretative Themes Overview

Key:

Participant Number	Name	Number of Stories
1	Simon	10
2	Kath	12
3	Sam	17
4	Ken	17
5	Casey	18
6	Stan	18
7	Elizabeth	16
8	Keith	10
9	Doug	10
10	Bob	10
11	Heidi	10
		148 stories in total

Last updated: 20 March 2020

Participants' Stories	Descriptive Themes	Possible Interpretative Themes (Ontic)	Philosophical Notions (Ontology) Hermeneutic phenomenological study
2.4: Parent expectations; 3:17: The Hatfields and the McCoys; 4.2: Jake; 4.14: Leonie; 5.4: Threatening parent; 5.5: Managing others; 5.15: Good and bad years; 6.17: A pushy parent;	Difficult parents / students / staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns with relationships;</li> <li>Power relationships;</li> <li><b>The essence of Relationships - chapter 6</b></li> <li>Parents as stakeholders – what stake are they holding and what is the intent of using the stake?</li> <li>Relationships and well-being are the two sides to a coin and happening in unison all of the time;</li> <li>Lack of respect – blurring of boundaries;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Heideggerian philosophical notions of Dasein and Mitsein (being-with - co-being) and meaningful interpersonal relationship in being and time.</li> <li>Humans relate and indeed, to be human is to relate. Moreover, humans are always in relationship. There is a relational connection between people that is essential to our shared humanity (Heidegger, 1996).</li> </ul>

Participants' Stories	Descriptive Themes	Possible Interpretative Themes (Ontic)	Philosophical Notions (Ontology) Hermeneutic phenomenological study
1.3: Longitudinal official relationships and well-being; 1.4: The fragility of leadership; 2.7: Yearly registration – playing the game; 2.8: A change in administration; 2.11: The power of conversation; 3.14: Legislative requirement; 4.3: Damaging staff survey; 4.7: Collateral damage; 4.8: The School Board's directive; 4.9: The insecurity of the role; 4.10: The masks we wear; 4.12: Conflicting registration recommendation;	Compliance with department policies and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thrown-ness;</li> <li>Inauthentic behaviour;</li> <li>Feeling trapped;</li> <li>Risk aversion;</li> <li>Trust;</li> <li>Playing the game;</li> <li><b>The essence of phronesis (practical wisdom, tacit knowing) - chapter 7;</b></li> <li>Quality, effectiveness, ability – nous in reading bigger picture. Compartment – how Principals conduct themselves – their demeanour;</li> <li>A practical wisdom from a deeper place. Intuitive actions / nature of Principals – improvising and thinking on their feet, without rehearsal or a script;</li> <li>When should Principals be resolute? What are the risks of action / inaction? How far or high can they play the stakes?</li> </ul>	The notion of <b>Compartment</b> shows how we are being-in-the-world. Our way-of-being is shown in who we are and how we are. Importantly, our compartment is communication through the body in its whole sense, felt by others. In this way, the nature of our compartment is accessible to others. Everyday experiences of relating are communication that is primordial to how we are.

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