The Leadership Careers of Selected Primary School Principals in Ireland: a qualitative investigation of the formation of the principal and what inspires and sustains the principal in his/her leadership role

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Doctor in Education

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____ (Gerard McHugh)

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Mary and Thomas McHugh, born into a farming community in Ballintubber Co. Mayo a century ago. Their significant sacrifices in challenging times enabled me to acquire the roots to grow and the wings to fly - to a fulfilling career as an educator.

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List of Acronyms

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPSMA	Catholic Primary Schools Management Association
DEIS	Delivering Equality in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science (1997-2010)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (2010-present)
DfES	Department of Education (UK)
ETB	Education and Training Board
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Services Executive
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
LDS	Leadership Development for Schools
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NPC	National Parents' Council
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCSP	Primary Curriculum Support Programme
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

ABSTRACT

TITLE: The Leadership Careers of Selected Primary School Principals in Ireland: a qualitative investigation of the formation of the principal and what inspires and sustains the principal in his/her leadership role

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This thesis explored the leadership role of the Primary School Principal in Ireland. It examined the making of a principal (formation), becoming a principal (accession) and being a principal (incumbency). It painted a portrait of accession to principalship and investigated how participating principals perceive the role of principal early in the second decade of 21st century and moreover what inspires and sustains them in their work

A review of literature included works on leadership, leadership in education, career history approaches and the history of the Primary School Principal in Ireland. Twelve principals were interviewed for a period of between one and half and two and a half hours each.

The study was located within a phenomenological paradigm using a qualitative methodology. The research tool used was the face to face semi- structured interview combined with a life story and career history approach to studying school leaders.

The thesis found that Irish Primary Principals are very highly motivated, they believe they have high levels of autonomy in many areas of their work and that they are accountable to many stakeholders. Further findings are described under five themes; Values/Moral Purpose/Interests of Children; Empowerment; Frustrations; Passion and Pride and Emerging Landscapes. While principals are extremely positive about their role they acknowledge many significant frustrations accompanying the role in a time of uncertainty. A number of recommendations were made which may be of interest to principals, policy makers and researchers.