

**Principals' Perception of Quality and Accountability:**

**A Case Study of Lasallian Schools**

**in Hong Kong**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of**

**Doctor of Education**

**at the University of Leicester**

**by**

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**September 2011**

## **Acknowledgement**

This thesis could not have been written without the support of one person: my supervisor, Alan Sutton. I am heartily indebted for his guidance, support and encouragement. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the principals of Hong Kong Lasallian schools for their participation in this study and The Director of The Institute of Lasallian Brothers in Hong Kong for allowing me to undertake this investigation in all the Lasallian schools in Hong Kong. I would also extend my grateful thanks to Dr. Lilian Fang, Sharon Pun and Rita Tai for their kind assistance in cross-checking the translation from Chinese into English scripts.

## **Abstract**

The main aim of the research is to investigate how the principals of Lasallian schools in Hong Kong perceive education quality and accountability and how their conceptions are shaped by the unique Lasallian context and their relationship to different stakeholders to whom they are accountable. Education quality in Lasallian schools is traditionally based on the mission and vision of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers in which 'Education for All', Holistic Education and 'Touching Hearts and Minds' are paramount.

Faced with the prospect of a lessening of the influence of the Lasallian Brothers and having to respond to external educational reform proposals, there have been calls for a renewed partnership between the various stakeholders of Lasallian Schools to achieve a consensus view on quality and accountability. These stakeholders are the Educational Development Bureau, the schools' senior management committee, teachers, parents and students.

The research is based on the interpretive paradigm and the combined use of ethnographic and phenomenological methodologies, a case study approach and purposeful and criterion sampling. Inductive methods are used to analyse data collected through one semi-structured interview with each of the ten principals supported by documentary evidence.

Findings from the investigation suggest that a consensus view of education quality which would appeal to all stakeholders would include : maintaining Lasallian values ; providing a diversity of curriculum provision and holistic education ; enabling all students to achieve a level of academic attainment linked to their ability; achieving a shift from a teacher to a student centred approach, including helping students to 'learn how to learn'.

These outcomes could be achieved by the extended use of a range of strategies in all schools: distributive leadership with increased empowerment of teachers; promoting a culture of continuous improvement through development planning, self evaluation and continuing professional development; parent-school partnerships.

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## **Ch 1 Introduction**

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- 1.2 Personal rationale
- 1.3 Introduction to Lasallian Schools
- 1.4 Aim and Main Research Questions
- 1.5 Significance of the study
- 1.6 The Researcher's Standpoint
- 1.7 Structure of the Thesis

### **1.1. The Research Problem**

School principals in Hong Kong, including those in Lasallian schools, have been exposed to a major educational reform programme which started in the early 1990's with two major policy initiatives intended to improve education quality. These involved major changes in the conception of education quality and in the approaches to achieve that quality (Mok, 2007). The first, which focussed on the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, required principals to provide a more diverse curriculum catering for a variety of student needs and embrace more student centred approaches to learning supported by the increased use of formative assessment. The second, a structural reform of the education system, shifted ultimate responsibility for the implementation of these changes from the government to principals in individual schools through school based management (SBM) and the setting up of a School Development and Accountability framework (SDA). The latter is a mechanism for quality assurance, consisting of annual school-self evaluation (SSE) supported by a process of external review (ER) by the Education Development Bureau (EDB). Judgements of the school's performance were to be based on a set of performance indicators (PI) and key performance measures (KPM) in four

domains: Management and Organisation; Learning and Teaching; Student Support and School Ethos; and Student Performance together with measurements of value added in academic attainment (School Value Added Information System, SVAIS) and affective outcomes (Assessment Programme for Affective and Social Outcome, APASO).

School principals are ultimately accountable to the EDB for the performance of their school but as early as 1991, the EDB had warned that some principals were insufficiently accountable for their actions to their school stakeholders (teachers, parents and students). These new proposals for structural reform, SBM and SDA, required principals to work with their school stakeholders, especially teachers and parents, who were given greater powers in new governance arrangements to implement the new curriculum, teaching and assessment proposals. In the face of these reforms proposals, it would be important for each principal to reach a consensus view with their stakeholders on education quality which took account of the Hong Kong and local context of their individual school. In the wider Hong Kong context, falling rolls promotes competition for students and in the case of Lasallian primary schools, principals face stiff competition for able students from the increasing number of Direct Subsidy schools (DSS). In the local context, principals have to be mindful of both the geographical (local socio-economic conditions) and historical (school status and tradition) situation.

In the case of the Lasallian schools, reaching a consensus view on implementing the new curriculum, pedagogy and assessment proposals was likely to be challenging, given the differing perspectives of the various stakeholders. Principals were ultimately responsible to the EDB for the implementation of the reform proposals which were very broad in their scope and potentially very

demanding for teachers. But principals were also accountable to the Institute of Lasallian Brothers, their sponsors and mentors for maintaining traditional Lasallian values and beliefs about education; these related mainly to the perceived need for education to be inclusive for all students, provide a holistic curriculum experience, focus on students' personal development and foster caring staff-student relations (Handbook of Lasallian Schools, 1998; Tierney and Tam, 2009). How these distinctive Lasallian views on education quality could be accommodated with changes imposed from outside would be very important to the success of the school.

According to Lo (2000), teachers' participation in decision making in Hong Kong schools was weak but teachers, as stakeholders were expected to play a key role in implementing the reform proposals, so their views on what constitutes quality education would be important. In this role, they could find themselves in a difficult situation as they sought to adjust to the new requirements. Traditionally, schools and therefore teachers' own performance have been judged by the extent to which they have prepared students for success in public examinations, a situation which is especially the case in prestigious Lasallian schools, and a status which they are likely to want to retain. But in future, teachers will need to come to terms with a broader set of success criteria which will be used to judge their work. Older teachers, especially those who have been used to 'direct teaching' have been confronted with a fundamentally different learning paradigm and were required to adjust their pedagogy. Teachers are likely to have views on new curriculum requirements, such as the introduction of more extra-curricular activities and the implications of these for their own subject.

In a market driven situation, parents' views on education quality were especially important. But their views on what educational outcomes for their children they were seeking from their school would not necessarily be uniform. Many middle class parents were likely to select a prestigious school with high academic attainment and with English as the medium of instruction (EMI) as student performance in external examinations is still perceived by many parents as a key indicator of the quality of the school. This was particularly the case when students had to compete for places in what was until recently a highly elitist Higher Education system with access possible only for high achieving students. There were likely to be other parents for whom caring for their offspring and having an effective discipline policy could conceivably be more important.

So, in reality Lasallian principals faced a difficult task in reconciling these differing stakeholder views on what constituted quality education and therefore the type of school which they should be attempting to create. They also needed to take into consideration the unique characteristics of the school. These considerations lead on to the main aim of the research which is 'to investigate how the principals of Lasallian schools in Hong Kong perceive education quality, how quality can be achieved, how their perceptions are shaped by the unique context of each school and their relationship to different stakeholder groups to whom they are accountable'.

## **1.2. Personal Rationale**

There are two main reasons for my decision to conduct a research study on principals' perceptions of education quality and accountability in Lasallian schools. First, working in one Lasallian school for over 30 years, I am very committed to the values and beliefs of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers (ILBS).

Second, as an executive member of the Quality Improvement unit of a Lasallian school, I have been assisting the principal with administrative work since 2000 and observed how she worked tirelessly with teachers, parents, the EDB and School Management Council (SMC) on behalf of the students. I concluded that if she were able to acquire a deeper understanding of education quality and how it might be achieved, she would be in a stronger position to negotiate with these stakeholders to reach a consensus view.

### 1.3 Introduction to Lasallian Schools

The ten Lasallian schools are located across the constituent parts of the Hong Kong SAR in Hong Kong island, Kowloon and the New Territories which borders Mainland China. Although two of the secondary schools are much older, one was founded in 1875 and another in 1932, the majority of schools were founded after 1957. Most of the secondary schools have primary schools attached to them and in one case a kindergarten feeds pupils into their primary school. The schools are primarily co-educational with the exception of three large secondary schools which cater exclusively for boys.

**Table 1.1: Lasallian Schools in Hong Kong**

<b>Name of school</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Socio-economic status</b>	<b>Banding (for secondary schools only)</b>
School 1	Secondary	Upper and middle class	Band 1
School 2	Secondary	Upper and middle class	Band 1
School 3	Secondary	Middle and lower class	Band 2/3
School 4	Secondary	Middle class	Band 1/2
School 5	Secondary	Middle and lower class	Band 2
School 6	Primary	Upper class	
School 7	Primary	Upper and middle class	
School 8	Primary	Upper and middle class	
School 9	Primary	Middle and lower class	
School 10	Primary	Upper and middle class	

N.B. The term Band 1 refers to the higher performing schools with academically able students. In contrast, Bands 2 and 3 refer to the lower performing schools with students



who are less academically able. Schools which are entitled to use English as the medium of instruction are Band 1 schools. The EDB does not reveal to the public the banding category of each school.

## **1.4 Aim and Main Research Questions**

As stated in the previous section on the research problem, the main aim of the research is to investigate how the principals of Lasallian schools in Hong Kong perceive education quality and accountability and how their perceptions are shaped by the unique Lasallian context and their relationship to different stakeholders to whom they are accountable.

Four main research questions follow from the research problem and overall aim of the research study:

1. How do principals perceive education quality?
2. How do principals perceive other stakeholders view education quality?
3. How do principals perceive education quality can be achieved?
4. How do principals perceive they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

In a study on the future of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers, Ogilvy et al. (2000) suggested that in order to assist the development of Lasallian schools, it was necessary for the Lasallian principals to reconsider their views on education quality and accountability in partnership with their stakeholders. Some academics have argued that the success of an organisation depends on the committed co-operation of all stakeholders (Fullan, 2003b, 2005; Bounds et al, 1994; Loehr and Schwartz, 2003). According to Robbins and Coulter (2007),

having a successful partnership with stakeholders enables an organisation to achieve a greater degree of trust between stakeholders and a greater flexibility to reduce the impact of change on an organisation caused by educational reform. This need for a partnership with different stakeholders was a reflection of a number of factors: the number of Lasallian principals approaching retirement; the decreasing number and ageing of Lasallian Brothers in service; the growing significance of other stakeholders in school governance; the need to respond to the Hong Kong government's impending curriculum, pedagogic and assessment reform; and finally, the influence of the Lasallian Brothers in their capacity as mentors may be affected by the change in composition of the school governing body which will restrict their membership.

Findings from this investigation could potentially prove to be useful to all members of the Lasallian Community. All Lasallian principals can 'share the good practices, challenges and concerns in their Lasallian world' (Tierney and Tam, 2009, p. 91). The study could provide valuable evidence of how the principals accommodate Lasallian values / beliefs and practices in the face of reform proposals; how the principal's leadership style impacts on the implementation of reform; how the principals negotiate a compromise between stakeholders and maximise stakeholders' individual contributions to the implementation of reform; how the principals manage change necessitated by the reform agenda and the strategies they use to improve education quality; and the extent to which each principal takes into consideration the distinct context of his / her school when faced with the reform agenda.

## **1.6 The Researcher's Standpoint**

An 'insider' researcher possesses 'a priori' intimate knowledge of the community and its members (Hellowell, 2006; Merton, 1972). In contrast, an 'outsider' researcher is not 'a priori' familiar with the setting and the people he / she is researching (Hellowell, 2006). In my investigation, researching colleagues in familiar settings, I had intimate insider 'a priori' knowledge of the values and beliefs of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers, their organisation and working practices which might have affected my objectivity as a researcher. However, I was constantly aware of the possible influence of this 'a priori' knowledge and tried to be as neutral and objective as possible.

I had also experienced long standing collegial relationships with two of the principals involved in the investigation. In one school in which I have worked, the principal has known me for over 30 years; in another, the principal and I had been colleagues for over 10 years before she was promoted to be principal of her school. Consequently, I felt that I could express my views freely, for example, that I supported the Lasallian belief in inclusive education. In the interviews, these two principals asked for clarification of the questions when they considered it necessary and gave me more detailed responses than the other principals. In contrast, I felt that the other eight principals, who I was meeting for the first time, regarded me as an outsider. It seemed to me that they were very careful how they responded to my questions; for instance, when I asked one principal if he had experienced any conflict with his staff concerning curriculum development in his school, he paused for five minutes before he gave me an answer. Further details on the pros and cons of insider research are included in chapter 4.

## **1.7 Structure of the Thesis**

The next chapter, the Hong Kong context, provides essential background information on the Hong Kong government's education reform proposals which are designed to improve education quality in schools. The chapter also identifies some challenges which principals face in implementing the reform agenda. The literature review, Chapter 3, discusses ways of conceptualising education quality and accountability, how education quality can be achieved and the role of the principal in improving education quality and being accountable to different stakeholders. Chapter 4, on research design, provides a justification for the use of the interpretive paradigm, the combined use of a methodology consisting of ethnography and interpretive phenomenology, and case study as a research strategy. A single semi-structured interview with each principal was used to collect data and this was supplemented where possible by relevant school documents. Information is also provided on data analysis and the trustworthiness of the investigation. The chapter concludes with more discussions on the standpoint of the researcher, ethical considerations and some limitations of the investigation. Chapter 5 is concerned with the presentation and discussion of the findings in relation to the contextual information and the literature review. The final chapter concludes with a brief summary of the findings, followed by the implications of the investigation and recommendations for Lasallian principals. An evaluation of the research, suggestions for further work and an end-note concludes the chapter.

## **Chapter 2. The Hong Kong Context**

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Reform Agenda for improving Education Quality
- 2.3 Structural Reform of the Education System
- 2.4 Challenges for Principals implementing the Quality Reform Agenda
- 2.5 Education Quality and Accountability in Lasallian Schools
- 2.6 Conclusion

### **2.1 Introduction**

During the 1990's, educational systems throughout the world were exposed to considerable reform and change which was justified on the grounds of improving the quality of school education (Rowe, 2003). After several decades of education policy focused on quantitative concerns, in 1991 the Hong Kong government turned its attention to improving the quality of education with two main initiatives, structural reform and changes in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. A close examination of the policies informing the backbone of the reform reveals a remarkable similarity to those introduced in the United States, Britain and Australia. In Hong Kong, prior to 1997, educational reforms were criticized as being symbolically promoted but few real changes occurred (Ho, 2005; Mak, 1996; Morris and Scott, 2005); nor were the concerns of school stakeholders taken seriously (Morris and Scott, 2005). After the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the HKSAR introduced an extensive reform programme for improving the quality of education. Within a period of six years after 2000, Hong Kong Schools had experienced seven major reform initiatives , curriculum, assessment, structural , changes in the medium of instruction, mandatory teacher continuous professional development, ICT, and integration of students with special needs into mainstream education (Cheng, 2006). In

addition, there were new demanding requirements for quality assurance and monitoring for accountability purposes (Ngan et al, 2010).

In Hong Kong, this educational reform movement in the 1990s was a response to economic globalisation and perceived long standing local weaknesses in the education system (Lo, 2000). As policy makers examined the educational achievements of key regional competitors, such as Singapore and Japan, the advent of the quality movement was fuelled by specific concerns as to whether Hong Kong's educational achievements would ensure its future economic competitiveness (Tung, 1997, 1998). But there were other local concerns in Hong Kong such as the perceived decline in students' English language competence and dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching (Lo,2000). These reforms were also taking place at a time of low birth rate and population decline in Hong Kong, a trend which particularly affected primary schools which decreased in number from 815 schools in 2001 to 720 in 2005 (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2007), so that school popularity was crucial to the survival of a school (Mok, 2007).

The move to improve the quality of school education was a government top down initiative – the Hong Kong government tends to use managerial accountability to tighten control of government policy including education (Axworthy and Baker, 2005). 'School based management and leadership were considered to be significant to the success of implementing quality education' (Tung, 1997, p. 29). By introducing and endorsing SBM, the government promoted autonomy and self-management in schools (Cheng, 1996; Tse and Lee, 2008). In an important signal of intent, ECR7 shifted responsibility for the delivery of education quality from the EDB to individual schools by promoting internal quality assurance. Strategies for improvement and quality assurance

involved major changes both in the conception and definition of education quality and in the approaches to achieve that quality (Mok, 2007). These strategies included large scale investment in education to improve quality, capacity building of teachers and principals, participation of stakeholders in decision making, and school self-evaluation and external review supported by the development of multiple performance indicators (Lee, 2009; Pang and Lee, 2009; Cheng and Chan, 2000; Tam and Cheng, 2001).

## **2.2 The Reform Agenda for Education Quality**

### ***2.2.1 The reform of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment***

In 1997, a high profile education report (ECR 7) was launched by a newly appointed Education Commission (EC) to promote quality education in schools and help them improve their performance and ensure that the resources were deployed in a most effective and accountable manner (Tse, 2005). ECR 7 outlined broad principles of education quality which were consistent with the above definition of education quality:

- Delivery of educational outcomes which meet the needs and expectations of the community in an efficient, accountable and cost effective way.
- Pursuit of excellence in both academic and other domains of education.
- Participation of front-line educators in choosing the best teaching and learning model that suits the needs of teachers and students of individual schools.
- Provision of educational diversity and choice to parents and students.

(1.6: paragraph1. p.3)

Later, in September 2000, the Education Commission (EC) announced the next major reform proposal in support of lifelong learning. The education reform blue print 'Learning for Life, Learning through life' (ERB 2000) aimed to

provide students with a diversified curriculum, more choice and more opportunities to develop their potential to the full (Chan et al, 2002; Morris and Scott, 2003; Ho, 2005). The blue print identified seven major initiatives in the reform proposal: curriculum reform; assessment mechanisms; language education; support for schools; professional development; student admission systems and an increase in post compulsory education opportunities. Later in 2007, the EDB required that schools cater for the diverse learning needs of different students including those with special educational needs (SEN) who were to be integrated into 'ordinary schools' (EDB Circular, No 13/2007).

Curriculum reform was intended to give students an opportunity for all round development in five learning experiences: Moral and Civic Education; Intellectual development; Community Service; Physical and Aesthetic Development and Career Related experience. Seven learning goals were included in the reform namely healthy lifestyle, breadth of knowledge, learning skills, language skills, habit of reading, the development of a sense of national identity and responsibility. These learning goals were to be achieved by four enabling tasks which were reading to learn, moral and civic education, IT for interactive learning and project learning (Education Commission, 2006). The emphasis of the reform was to move away from an examination oriented curriculum to the achievement of positive attitudes to life long- learning and the development of generic skills (ERB, 2000; EC, 2006).

In many societies, the primary aim of curricular reform has been to promote particular skills for the world market such as global awareness, social skills, problem solving and especially proficiency in ICT and modern languages (Law, 2004). In Hong Kong, in the new proposals to overhaul the curriculum and pedagogy, there was to be a move away from an emphasis on the teaching of



content to learning to learn and the acquisition of generic skills. A major paradigm shift was also envisaged in assessment with a move from summative to formative assessment, from ‘teaching to the test’ to a strategy of encouraging high quality teacher feed-back in support of students’ learning (Black and William, 1998; Shepard, 2000). Formative assessment is strongly supported by the government which is reflected in the use of project learning as a strategy for ‘learning to learn’ (Mok, 2007).

Reform proposals also included a comprehensive reform of arrangements for summative assessment. In Hong Kong, the public examination system has been the recipient of major reforms since 1997. Summative examinations at key exit levels, Primary 5 and 6 for entrance to secondary school (Secondary 1) and at the end of the secondary stage (Secondary 5 and 7) were used as an important quality assurance mechanism. The results of these end of year assessments played a key role in student selection and school accountability from the kindergarten stage through to university entrance. Performance in these examinations at the primary stage decided whether students could enter prestigious Band 1 schools with eventually an enhanced chance of accessing higher education. These examinations represent a form of ‘High Stakes Testing’ which means that teachers, whose performance is judged by their students’ academic attainment, prepare their students by ‘teaching to the test’.

Another significant development was the increased importance of formative assessment at the system level. System level monitoring of standards is achieved through the Territory Wide System Assessment (TSA) based on Chinese language, English language and Mathematics and is conducted in Primary 3 and 5 and Secondary 3 in all schools. This assessment is intended to provide positive feedback on the formative assessment of students, which is

intended to guide the planning of teaching and learning in the schools and the education policies of the EDB (EDB Circular 92/2010). TSA is also designed to help teachers interpret the TSA data and use it to improve the quality of learning and teaching in schools (EDB Circular No 92/2010; TSA Review, 2006).

School based assessment (SBA) was also introduced in phases by curriculum subjects between 2004 and 2007 with the aim of broadening the basis of assessment to include more thinking skills and application of knowledge which are not easily assessed by conventional paper and pencil tests (Mok, 2007).

### ***2.2.2 Government strategies for improving education quality***

#### ***i. Investment in education***

Large sums have been invested in education as reflected in the increase of expenditure from 19.8 % in 1995-1996 to 23% in 2006-7 of total government expenditure which made Hong Kong the second highest investor among eight advanced economies on a student per-capita basis (EC, 2006). A particular example of expenditure on education is the Quality Assurance Fund set up in 1998 with an allocation of 5 billion Hong Kong Dollars (HKD) for continuous improvement, with funds especially available to the secondary sector. Examples of projects include promoting effective teaching and learning, assessment for learning and addressing students' diverse learning needs.

#### ***ii. Capacity building for education reform through teacher development and principal development***

The importance of adopting measures to enhance the quality of the teaching profession was recognised as early as 1992 in the ECR5 report:

‘Since quality in education depends on educators themselves, in particular classroom teachers... the most effective investments are those which help to attract, develop and motivate teachers, and which enable them to give their best in a supportive environment’ (Godwin, 1999, p. 4).

ECR5 outlined four explicit policy goals: aim for steady progress towards an all trained teaching profession; ensure the efforts of teacher education course providers meet the needs of schools as fully as possible; encourage all teachers to enhance their professional competence systematically and progressively throughout their career; increase the importance of professional development as a factor in career progression (Godwin, 1999). These goals were reflected in developments which included the registration of teachers, identification of teacher competences, and the introduction of specialised teaching in English, Mathematics and Chinese at primary level. The professional development of principals is supported by a Principalship certification course and a Principals’ Support Network scheme within the School based Professional Support Programmes set up by the EDB in 2004. In this network, principals support one another in curriculum leadership and human resources management (Mok, 2007).

## **2.3. Structural reform of the education system**

### ***2.3.1 School based management***

In its School Management Initiative (SMI) in 1991, the government set out the background and key proposals for reforming the school system. First, the policy

recommended the Education Department change its role from a controlling to a supportive advisory function. Second, the policy aimed to define more clearly the roles of those responsible for administering schools, particularly sponsors, managers and principals. This meant that every school should produce a constitution setting out the aims and objectives of the school and the procedures and practices by which it should be managed. Third, schools would be given a decentralised block grant to decide their own spending patterns within the ED policy framework. Fourth, the proposals called for greater participation by teachers, the principal, the School Management Committee (SMC) and to an appropriate extent, parents and former students in decision making. SMI specifically singled out teachers and parents as being excluded from the decision making process. Few schools had parent teacher associations and closer contact was encouraged between schools and parents as a means of fostering more effective learning. Fifth, a framework of accountability was to be established involving an appraisal system. Sixth, each school was required to produce an annual plan which would set out its mission, goals and activities for the coming year against which it could be held accountable and would enable the school to set its budget. Finally, each school would be required to produce an annual school profile detailing its activities in the previous year (Dimmock, 1998, p. 364).

Subsequently, Tung (1999) argued that it was necessary to strengthen School Based Management (SBM) and enhance school's accountability for their performance. Schools are responsible for administration, finance, teaching and learning. Participation in school decision making and the input of different stakeholders into the School Management Board was designed to enhance transparency and accountability in schools (EMB Leaflet on SBM, 2002B). These school stakeholders were the principal, teachers, school sponsoring body,

school management committee, parents and the community (ECR 7, 1997; Education Commission, 2000). Later, a participatory governance framework in the form of an Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) was introduced into schools by the government (Education Amendment Ordinance 2004, EAO 2004). The role of the IMC is to define the composition of the SMC and enable more participation from different stakeholders in school management (EDB Circular No 14/2004; EAO, 2004). All schools were required to set up an IMC by 2010 which was to consist of the principal, one teacher manager, one alumni manager, one independent manager and managers from the school sponsoring body.

A contentious aspect of the new arrangement was that the number of sponsoring body managers should not exceed 60% of the maximum number of managers in the IMC. In this way, the controlling power in the school previously exercised by the school sponsoring body would be significantly reduced (Pang, 2007). Not surprisingly, this new arrangement brought the EDB into conflict with key school sponsoring bodies in Hong Kong, such as Sheng Kung Hui (the Anglican Church in Hong Kong) the Catholic Church and the Methodist Church (Apple Daily, 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2008) who were unwilling to accept the government imposed membership of the IMC. The Catholic Church in Hong Kong would make decisions on behalf of all Catholic Faith schools in Hong Kong, including the Institute of Lasallian Brothers. These sponsoring bodies also feared that they could be outvoted in a discussion on what would be the best quality education for their students (Ming Pao Daily, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2008).

### ***2.3.2 Strategies for quality assurance and monitoring***

In 2003, in an attempt to ensure that schools were to be held accountable for their performance, a School Development and Accountability framework (SDA) was introduced into schools by the Education and Management Bureau (EMB), now renamed the EDB, to monitor school performance (ECR7, 1997; Mok, 2007). This framework was based on a process of systematic and rigorous internal self- evaluation (SSE) which was complemented by External School Review (ESR) carried out by a team from the EMB. Its purpose was to support continuous school development and promote a greater public accountability by schools (MacBeath and Clark, 2005). ESR is intended to validate a school's self-evaluation and to arrive at an agreed post-review improvement agenda with the school (EDB Circular23/2003; Law, 2003) and strengthen the school's capacity for self-evaluation ( MacBeath and Clark, 2005).

The SSE was originally based on 14 areas and 29 performance indicators (MacBeath and Clark, 2005; EMB Circular 23/2003) covering four domains which were management and organisation, learning and teaching, student support and school ethos and student performance. Subsequently, this list was restructured in line with changes in educational policy and there are now four domains as before but 8 areas, and 23 performance indicators (see Appendix 1). The use of these indicators is a response to increasing demand for accountability for school performance and improve student learning (EDB Circular 23/2003). In addition to the comprehensive range of indicators identified for the four domains, two indicator systems were developed in 2001 to be used after 2002/3 by all schools for self review and external school review. These are value added performance indicator systems to measure the extent to which schools have added value to the academic attainment and affective outcomes of students

(Mizikaci, 2006; Saunders, 1999). The first, the School Value Added Information System (SVAIS) measures academic value added-ness (Jane et al, 2001); the second Assessing Performance in the Affective and Social Domain (APASO) measures student self-concept, interpersonal relationships , attitudes to school and their own personal values (Moore et al, 2006).

### ***2.3.3 Visions and conceptions of quality in quality assurance and school monitoring***

In putting these quality assurance measures in place, the Hong Kong government adopted ‘an all embracing’ approach to quality assurance. Mok (2007, p.188) has identified several concepts which she claims underpin the government’s policy on quality assurance and school monitoring. These concepts have been identified by other commentators such as Harvey, (1995); Nagel and Kvernbekk (1997), Cheng and Tam, (1997) and Cheng, (2003), and are discussed more fully in the literature review in Chapter 3.

### ***2.3.4 Quality as fitness of educational outputs for use***

This concept requires that the product of the educational process meets the needs and desires of stakeholders. The concept is closely related to a consumer approach to education quality (Nagel and Kvernbekk, 1997) and customer satisfaction model of quality assurance (Tam and Cheng, 2003). Views of key stakeholders such as parents and students are sought to ensure that schools have satisfied their expectations and needs (Cheng and Cheung, 2001; Crosby, 1979; Juran and Gryna, 1988; Mizikaci, 2006). Parental choice is often used by the government as an indicator of the education quality of a school.

### ***2.3.5 Quality as the achievement of mission and goals***

This concept essentially duplicates the goal and specification model of education quality identified by Tam and Cheng (2003) which sees education quality as the achievement of stated institutional goals and conformance to given specifications. The concept implies that the government requires all schools to identify its mission and set long and short term goals and to use these to monitor performance in self and external evaluation (Crosby 1979; Mizikaci, 2006; Mukhopadhyay, 2001).

### ***2.3.6 Quality as adding value to students and institutions***

The School effectiveness research paradigm argues that in order to understand the effectiveness of a school, it is necessary to establish the ‘value’ the school adds to the students as they progress through school (Gibson and Asthana, 1998). In order to measure students’ progress, the government identifies value added performance indicator systems to measure the extent to which schools have added value to the academic attainment and affective outcomes of their students (Mizikaci, 2006; Saunders, 1999).

### ***2.3.7 Quality as continuous improvement***

The concept of continuous improvement also features in the Organisational learning model (Tam and Cheng, 2003) and is also one of five concepts of education quality identified by Nagel and Kvernbeek (1997). This concept implies that schools are challenged by the government to continue to improve their educational practices (Deming, 1986; Mizikaci, 2006). This was



exemplified by the creation of the Quality Education Fund by the government inviting schools to bid for school improvement projects.

### ***2.3.8 Quality as high standards***

This conception of education quality is well established in Hong Kong schools . This concept which is identified as ‘exceptionality’ by Harvey (1995) and as one of Nagel and Kvernekk’s (1997) approaches to quality, refers to the importance of aiming for excellence in student attainment and achievement .To support this, in Hong Kong, the assessment system has moved from a norm referenced to a standard-referenced framework (Gaither, 1998; Mizikaci, 2006).

### ***2.3.9 Quality as transformation***

This concept is closely associated with support from the EDB and some academics (Cheng, 2000a, 2003; Shepard, 2000) for a new learning paradigm with a shift from teacher centred to more student centred approaches to learning and assessment which are discussed earlier in this chapter. This concept of education quality requires the delivery of learner centred education in which students acquire competencies for life-long learning including generic skills and personal qualities (Campell and Rozsnyani, 2002).

## **2.4.Challenges for Principals implementing the Reform Agenda**

### **2.4.1 *The Structural Segregation of schools***

The Hong Kong school system is highly segregated especially in the secondary sector, where schools are separated into 3 bands with each band enrolling about 30% of students that constitute a hierarchy of academic abilities (Lo, 2000). Research suggests that the gap in the academic attainment between the academically stronger and weakest schools has become wider (Lo et al, 1997). Most students are assigned to schools situated close to their place of residence and disparity in educational opportunities is caused by the socio- economic status of parents, the prestige of the school and the perceived educational outcomes for school graduates. In some schools located in socially deprived areas with higher rates of unemployment ,low incomes and reliance on government subsidies , some parents are unable to pay examination fees (Gibson and Asthana, 1998). In contrast , schools in more prosperous catchment areas tend to have good student intakes and higher student attainment (Lo, 2000).

### **2.4.2 *The government student allocation scheme***

The extent to which the EDB controls student allocation to schools is a significant issue for school principals. In primary 1, 50% of places are allocated by the EDB (Report on Primary One Admissions, 2009; POA Pamphlet, 2010). For secondary 1, the ‘Central Allocated Places’ are restricted to the students’ school net which refers to the group of secondary schools covered by the location of the students’ primary school (EDB Circular 3/2006). For those secondary schools which receive students from their feeder primary schools, a

maximum of 85% of places in secondary 1 can be reserved for those students. Thus, secondary schools who wish to maintain their Band 1 status are concerned with the quality of the student intake which is partly out of their control.

The quality of the intake available to secondary schools is also significant for the medium of instruction which schools are allowed to use. Those schools which are allowed to teach through the medium of English (EMI) are regarded more highly by middle class parents (Choi, 2005). As a result of EDB policy, and much to the objection of stakeholders, any secondary school which wishes to use English as the medium of instruction is required to have 85% of its Secondary I intake in the Band 1 Category (EDB Circular No. 6/2009); otherwise, the school is obliged to use Cantonese as the medium of instruction.

### ***2.4.3 Reform overload***

Research evidence from various sources such as Cheng (2006) would seem to suggest that the education sector in Hong Kong is suffering from initiative overload, change related chaos and some cynicism on the part of hard pressed principals and teachers. Arguably, the pace of reform has been relentless and compacted with seven major initiatives within a period of 6 years since 2000. Too many reform initiatives can be counterproductive for principals and their staff (Poon and Wong, 2008). For instance, both Ngan et al, (2010) and Pang (2000) have argued that schools have not had sufficient time to meet the needs created by student diversity proposed in curriculum reform due to the workload created by the excessive number of reform initiatives. It could also be argued that there has been insufficient time for principals to consult with a variety of stakeholder groups to seek their views on education quality.

#### ***2.4.4 Inappropriate leadership style of the principal***

As early as 1991, the EMB and ED had already warned that ‘some principals are insufficiently accountable for their actions’ and see their post as an opportunity to become a little emperor with dictatorial power in school (EMB and ED, 1991,p.14). Certainly, if school based management, as envisaged in ECR 7, is to be implemented successfully, there is a perceived need for change in the principal’s leadership style from authoritarian to one which is more collaborative and participative (Dimmock, 1998). ‘Power and responsibility might be decentralised from the EDB to individual schools, only to be centralised again at the school level in the person of the principal, who captures and monopolises them, aided by staff who are only too willing to display subordination’ (Dimmock, 1998, p. 371). Empowerment is important for achieving quality education. However, in his investigation, Lo (2000) found that principals did little to empower teachers. In addition, some principals are unwilling to arrange meetings with different stakeholders to share their views in order to improve the quality of education (EMB and ED, 1991; Tsang,1998).

#### ***2.4.5 New responsibilities and challenges for teachers***

Educational reform initiatives in Hong Kong have provided teachers with numerous new responsibilities and challenges. Some measures require them to meet newly established standards and they have also been called upon to transform their role as teachers, notably to make a paradigm shift to embrace a student centred approach to learning supported by increased use of formative assessment. However, some teachers ‘seem reluctant to adjust their pedagogical methods in the classroom’ (Lo, 2000, p. 246 ). Unfortunately, there has been

insufficient support for teachers to cope with new challenges, for instance, to achieve a shift from teacher to more student centred approaches to learning (Chan, 2010; Law, 2003).

In addition, the School Based Management initiative requires teachers to participate more in the decision making process and in school self evaluation. Teachers' participation in school work has a positive effect on improving school effectiveness and student's performance (Anderson, 2002; Cheng and Cheung, 2004; Ho, 2005; Ma, 2003). But in her study, Ho (2005) found that teachers' participation in Hong Kong schools was weak and that SBM was more likely to 'be school driven than teacher driven' (Ho, 2005, p.61). According to Chan (2010), insufficient support is given to teachers in Hong Kong.

In a situation where schools are obliged to adjust development plans according to the advice of the ESR team, the professional accountability of principals and teachers is likely to be weakened and constrained. The influence of a visit by an ESR team from the EDB is strong, and the principal may have to develop and adjust school plans according to the report of the ESR team without due consideration of the professionalism of teachers (Pang, 1998a, 1998b, 2000).

#### ***2.4.6 Problems with the choice of performance Indicators to evaluate education quality***

Ngan et al (2010) and Tsang (2000) claim that the use of performance indicators in SSE and ESR do not provide a fair and effective assessment of school effectiveness and accountability. They argue that the narrow and limited set of criteria are not sufficiently sensitive to the unique characteristics of each school, for example the quality of student intake and the culture of the schools. Ngan et

al 2010 p. 40 commented that the EDB was ‘promoting a one size fits all policy which was unfair to the complexity of school contexts’. Academic attainment continues to be a key indicator for assessing school effectiveness in SSE and ESR with consequences for how teachers respond. In this situation, teachers tend to focus on academic attainment and squeeze out ‘joyful learning’ (Ngan et al, 2010, p. 43). ‘Teaching to the test’ with teachers resorting to drilling methods to meet competitive pressure to enhance students’ academic performance is still common (Ngan et,2010; Pang, 2000).

## **2.5. Education Quality and Accountability in Lasallian Schools**

Faith schools offer a general curriculum but have a particular religious character or formal links with a religious organisation (Donlevy, 2002; Gibbons and Silva, 2006). A faith school is distinct from an institution which is wholly or mainly teaching religion and related subjects. A faith school should provide a general curriculum which includes Mathematics and English, athletic activities and moral education (Donlevy, 2002; Groothuis, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Terry,1993; Walford, 1996). However, some scholars argue that faith schools are indoctrinatory, concerned with passing on religious belief. (Hand ,2003; Short, 2003; Siegel,2004). Faith school education emphasises the truth of a particular religious doctrine which is specific to that faith school (Dagovitz, 2004; Haynes, 1990). For example, ‘education in the faith remains at the heart of Catholic schooling’ (Grace, 2002, p.126 ). Faith schools hold a specific view of education quality; in addition to students achieving academically (Grace, 2003; Nichols, 2004), quality is usually interpreted as students acquiring good moral conduct such as love, harmony, forgiveness and reconciliation (Grace, 2003; Petts and Knoester, 2007) and conforming to the ideology of the particular sponsoring denominations of the faith schools (Sydney, 1975; Wagner, 1997).

Lasallian schools are faith schools which operate under the auspices of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers of the Christian Church (IBCS) and Hong Kong Lasallian Council (HKLC). The former (IBCS) is a society of males, which is approved by the Roman Catholic Church. The Lasallian Brothers do not take Holy Orders; generally, they are involved in pastoral work in the educational or social field, an involvement which distinguishes them from the Catholic priests who are ordained by the Roman Catholic Church. Traditionally, the goal of IBCS was to provide a Christian and Human education to young people and announce the gospel to the poor (Lopez, 2000). The traditional emphasis in Lasallian schools was on evangelization and catechesis (Ogilvy et al, 2000). Nowadays, Lasallian Brothers are chiefly committed to education, in particular for those in greatest need, both the rich and poor (BP, 2007). The vision of IBCS in Hong Kong can be summarised in the words of its founder, St John Baptist de La Salle: ' To touch the hearts of young pupils and inspire them in the Christian spirit'. (BP, 2007; Griekin, 1999). As a community, the IBCS shares common values- a spirit of faith, zeal and community (BP 2007; Tam, 2009). The Lasallian mission is to prepare their students to live a full life in the service of the Church and the world.

These schools are collectively represented by the Hong Kong Lasallian Education Council (HKLEC), which was formed in September 2004 with the approval of Fratelli Delle Christiante in Rome (Echeverria and Franco, 2004). The HKLEC was established in response to a decreasing number of Lasallian Brothers and a need to recruit more laymen to strengthen and promote the Lasallian mission in the context of the ongoing education programme in Hong Kong (Minutes of Preparatory Committee Meeting of HKLEC, 2004). This organisation has the primary task of reviewing education quality in Lasallian

Schools and making recommendations for improvement (Minutes of HKLEC, 2006 and 2007). Significantly, this review was to be completed after consultation with key stakeholders in these schools and was to address issues arising from the education reforms which were considered to be potentially unfair to students in Lasallian Schools (Minutes of HKLEC, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c).

There are already instances where the HKLEC has commented on education reform proposals. For example, in the case of EMB's proposed 3+3+4 new secondary school/ higher education structure (3 years junior high school, 3 years senior high school and 4 years university), the HKLEC has suggested that less academically inclined students could receive insufficient support and poor students might have insufficient money to complete the sixth year in order to achieve a Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (Tierney, 2005a). In another policy decision, when a HKSAR working group consulted schools on the issue of medium of instruction (MOI), HKLEC recommended that the judgement of a school's capacity to operate as an English as an (EMI) or as a Chinese as the medium of instruction school (CMI) be left to parents because as key stakeholders, they know what instructional language is most suitable for their children (Tierney, 2005b).

As the table below illustrates, the Lasallian Brothers adopt a distinctive position in the pursuit of education quality. A key concept is the emphasis on providing a holistic education covering intellectual, physical, social, aesthetic and especially moral development (BP, 2007). This purpose supports the EDB view that all students in Hong Kong must receive a broad education to prepare them for life-long learning (Tsang, 2008). Education in Lasallian schools is also



intended to be inclusive as expressed in the phrase, ‘Education for All’ and caring for poor students (Tierney, 2005a, 2005c).

**Table 2.1: The Lasallian model of education quality**

	<b>Concept</b>	<b>Students’ Learning Outcome</b>
1	Holistic education	Acquisition of moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development
2	Education for all and caring for poor students	Fostering the development of every student Caring for poor students
3	Touching hearts and minds of students	Students being moved to learn and improve by themselves
4	Preparing students to lead a useful life	Students becoming useful citizens
5	Continuous improvement	Students developing a thirst for learning and continuously improving their capabilities

In Hong Kong, all school principals, including those in Lasallian schools, operate in a hierarchy of accountability to different stakeholders (Au, 2002; Wong, 1995b). These stakeholders are the Education Development Bureau (EDB), the School Management Committee (SMC) - later to become the IMC, Institute of Lasallian Brothers (ILBS) - their mentors and sponsors, teachers, parents, students and the wider community including old students. In Lasallian schools, accountability is conceived primarily as responsibility to students supported by co-operation between all stakeholders (Ogilvy et al, 2000; BP, 2007). Being government subsidised, all Lasallian school principals are accountable to the EDB in an upward form of accountability via the quality assurance mechanism (SDA) for the implementation of the curriculum, pedagogic and assessment reform. An upward form of accountability represents the traditional relationship with all teachers, senior teachers, and the deputy principals held accountable to the Principal. In addition, in downward accountability, the principal is held accountable to the teachers, senior teachers and deputy principals in a relationship where the principal’s leadership style determines the extent to which they are involved in decision making (Burke, 2005; Vidovich and Slee, 2000).

## **2.6. Conclusion**

The education reform agenda in Hong Kong is comprehensive, innovative and far reaching with many initiatives introduced in a short period of time.

Responding to this reform agenda is very challenging for all school principals in Hong Kong, not least those in Lasallian schools. There are new conceptions of what should be taught, how students should learn and be assessed, and many of these requirements represent a very significant change from previous practice.

In addition, with school based management and the delegation of responsibilities to schools, there is a requirement that school stakeholders play a much more active role in assisting the principals to implement the new reform proposals (curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) and relate them to existing practice. In Lasallian schools, there is an expectation that the principals will be able to work with school stakeholders to reach a consensus on the direction of change and how it can be best implemented. In the face of reform proposals, it is interesting to speculate to what extent Lasallian values and beliefs about education quality can survive in-tact.

In this situation, as principals contemplate their response to imminent reform, the four research questions for this investigation become particularly relevant. It is arguably essential that principals have clarified their own knowledge and understanding relating to the purpose of education and student outcomes and experiences. So, the first research question is - How do the principals perceive education quality ? Involving stakeholders to reach a consensus view on education quality in the face of new reform proposals will be challenging, not least because some of them will be very interested in maintaining the status quo because it works for them. There is also the likelihood of differences of opinion from stakeholders as to what constitutes education quality So, a second question

is how do the principals perceive other stakeholders view education quality? In the face of reform proposals, principals will need to continue their maintenance function but will also need to make plans to improve education quality. So the third question is how do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved - managed or improved?

Principals are also accountable to their stakeholders for the implementation of these reform proposals. In relation to each stakeholder, it is important for principals to be clear about the particular aspects of education quality for which they are accountable and the way(s) in which accountability for education quality is demonstrated. So, the fourth question is how do the principals perceive their accountability to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality? In order to explore these research questions, the thesis moves on in the next chapter to examine research literature on education quality, accountability and the leadership role of the principal in relation to achieving quality and accountability.

## **Chapter 3 Literature Review**

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Defining and Conceptualising Education Quality
- 3.3 Managing Education Quality and Quality Assurance
- 3.4 Improving Education Quality
- 3.5 Conceptualising and Implementing Accountability
- 3.6 The Leadership Role of the Principal in Improving Education Quality and being Accountable to Stakeholders
- 3.7 Conclusion

### **3.1. Introduction**

The main aim of this research is to investigate how Lasallian principals perceive education quality and accountability in their schools and how their perceptions are shaped by the unique school context and their relationship to different stake-holders. In relation to this aim, the four main research questions are: How do principals perceive education quality? How do principals perceive that other stakeholders view education quality? How do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved - managed or improved ? How do principals perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?

From the early 1990's, twin policy initiatives- structural and educational, were introduced in Hong Kong to improve education quality. Although the implications of these reforms are far reaching, one of the major problems of the education reform agenda was that there was no clear and widely shared understanding of education quality; nor has there been an agreed-upon formula which can enable a school to achieve education quality (Cheng, 2001). These same problems face policy makers, educational researchers and practitioners in schools around the world (Cheng, 1995; Cuttance, 1994). Arguably, because the

purpose of education reform is to improve the quality of students' learning outcomes, conceptions of education quality need to be clear about what education quality means for students. At the heart of school improvement is bringing about change in classroom practice (Hopkins et al, 1994; Stoll and Fink, 1996).

Principals in Lasallian schools were expected to achieve a consensus view on education quality in a situation where responsibility for management and development was devolved to schools. If they were to lead this development / improvement together with other stakeholders, they had to be clear about their own vision and concept(s) of quality student outcomes, and how these might be achieved. They were also required to involve other stakeholders in the process, especially teachers and parents, but also the students themselves who are not only the recipients of the process of improving education quality but also participants. Different stakeholders may have different views on what constitutes education quality from a student perspective and it may be difficult for a school to meet all their needs and expectations at the same time. Moreover, according to Ball (1993), stakeholders with more power can exert greater influence on the principal in the direction of change and development they desire.

Whilst this investigation is focused mainly on the school level, through the 'lens' of the principal, the interface between the school and government level is also important as the principal is required to respond to the education reform agenda with a mixture of 'support' and 'pressure' from the government. A number of authors argue that there is always a need for sustained pressure and support for change from outside the school (Dalin, 1998). To improve education quality, principals are also obliged to work with their senior and middle

managers and teachers and other stakeholders in a ‘community of learning’. Change and school improvement is not a process which can usually be successfully brought about without the consent and positive engagement of the staff (Fullan, 1991; Hopkins, 2001). In this situation, a key consideration for the principal is to strike an appropriate balance between the ‘maintenance and ‘development’ functions of management and leadership in their response to the educational reform agenda.

Another key consideration in this investigation is the significance of ‘context’ which refers to the situation or circumstances which affect the community of Lasallian schools and the individual school which renders each school unique in its response to the education reform proposals. In the former category, the demographic situation in Hong Kong with falling rolls threatens the survival of some schools and requires others to compete for especially able students. In the case of individual schools, socio-economic factors in the school catchment area mean that some schools benefit from strong parental support and funding which is sometimes boosted by money from alumni; while in other more disadvantaged areas, strong parental support in their children’s education is rarer. A second factor affecting individual schools is the role of tradition, with well established prestigious schools achieving high academic and sporting standards and continuing to attracting high quality students.

In order to address the main research questions, the literature review draws on theoretical and empirical research on organisation management, the management of change, school improvement, school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness research.

### **3.2. Defining and Conceptualising Education Quality**

Despite the drive to improve education quality in recent education reform, there is little agreement about the meaning and implications of the term (Becket and Brookes, 2006; Sahney et al, 2004) and there does not appear to be a consensus view (Tam and Cheng, 2001). But agreeing on what constitutes education quality is important because policies designed to implement educational reform to achieve quality education often fail because of the lack of understanding by participants in the change (and development) process of the complex nature of education quality and the absence of a system of educational standards and indicators for directing practice and monitoring performance (Cheng and Tam, 1997).

In the management literature, some concepts relating to quality applicable to industry have been identified, some of which have subsequently been incorporated in different models of education quality. The term quality has been variously defined as: excellence (Peters and Waterman, 1982); value for money (Feigenbaum, 1991); fitness for use - satisfying the needs of clients and stakeholders (Juran and Gryna, 1988); conformance to stakeholders' requirement and specifications (Crosby, 1979; Gilmore, 1974); defect avoidance (Crosby, 1979); and meeting and / or exceeding customers' expectations (Parasuraman, et al 1985). There seems to be no consensus definition, even though most of these definitions are highly related.

Some of these concepts are replicated in a conceptualisation of education quality based on particular visions of the way in which a school can contribute to society's goals (Harvey, 1995 ). Each of these visions has a distinct rationale and represents a plausible justification for educational change (Leu, 2005).

These visions and associated concepts are not mutually exclusive; a school can embrace several or all of these visions of quality, although they implicitly compete with each other for emphasis and funding. Harvey (1995) identified five concepts of education quality based on particular visions of education quality. These are: *exceptionality* in which the pursuit of excellence requires schools to attempt to maximise the potential of all individual students; *equity* which requires schools to provide students with consistent experiences across the school; *'fitness for purpose'* with schools required to prepare students for specific roles in society; *value for money* in which quality is interpreted as the extent to which the school is efficient; *'transformative potential'* where education is seen as a catalyst for positive social change in individuals and society. The majority of these visions and concepts are clearly related to students' learning experiences and outcomes.

One particular school improvement project (of which there are many), the Improving Educational Quality Project (IEQ), identified multiple definitions of education quality (Adams, 1993, pp.12-13). Quality is often multi-dimensional subsuming equity and efficiency goals but sometimes these goals conflict. Quality is also grounded in cultures - values, beliefs and traditions which may be specific to a nation, region, community, school, parent or individual student. Quality is dynamic and changes over time. For instance, one of the key thrusts of many current education reform programmes is to change the way students learn with an expectation that they will be more responsible for their own learning and more effective independent learners. Quality is also affected by context, situations and circumstances with socio-economic, geographical and historical factors playing a part.



### **3.3. Managing Education Quality and Quality Assurance**

In response to the strong emphasis on the pursuit of education quality in on-going educational reforms in Hong Kong, the USA, UK and Australia, a popular approach to conceptualise the management of education quality in school is the input-process- outcome model which draws on the Total Quality Management (TQM) tradition (West-Burnham, 1992) and the Systems approach. In its simplest form, the system consists of the inputs (capital, human resources etc), the outputs (performance of teachers and students etc), the process (pedagogy, management and operation etc), the feedback loop (information collection and evaluation and the environment (physical, social and external environment, school customers etc). A more comprehensive and potentially useful framework which adopted this approach was devised by UNESCO (2004, pp.35-37) which claims to aid understanding, monitoring and improving education quality. The framework identifies five key dimensions and a list of factors associated with each dimension which are learner characteristics, context, enabling resources, teaching and learning approaches and student learning outcomes.

In Hong Kong, Cheng (2002, p.70) incorporated the input, process and outcome stages in a definition of education quality at the school level:

‘Education quality is the character of the set of elements in the input, process and output of the education system that provides services that completely satisfy both internal and external constituencies (stakeholders) by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations.’

This definition is significant because it not only signals the importance of input, process and outcome in achieving education quality but also the significance of consumer (stakeholder) satisfaction. Based on an input, process and outcome system, Tam and Cheng (2001, 2003) developed a framework of multi-models for managing education quality and providing quality assurance at the school level. This framework draws on school effectiveness research literature and organisation learning theory. For each model, they suggest ‘conditions for model usefulness’ (advantages and disadvantages), together with indicators or success criteria which can be used to evaluate education quality. Cheng (2003; 2003b) identified four models as being appropriate for managing and ensuring internal education quality. These were the goal and specification model, the process model, the expert model and the absence of problems model. The remaining five models were designated as interface quality assurance models which were designed to ensure that schools satisfy the needs of stakeholders and are accountable to the public. These models are the resource input model, the satisfaction model, the legitimacy model, the organisation learning model and the total quality management model.

## ***Internal Models***

### ***3.3.1 The goal and specification model***

This model sees education quality as the achievement of stated institutional goals and conformance to given specifications (Gilmore, 1974 ). The model is often used in the assessment of the quality of an individual school or education system in a country. A school is deemed to be of good quality if it has attained the standards specified by performance indicators which include students’ academic attainment in public examinations, attendance rate, drop-out rate,

number of graduates progressing to university, professional qualifications of staff etc. The model is useful when the goals and specifications are clear and well accepted by all stakeholders and where there are appropriate performance indicators which can be used to evaluate whether the prescribed standards have been met. One variation of this model which is widely used in some national systems of education, such as the UK and Hong Kong, is the use of value added measures of student attainment.

### ***3.3.2 The process model***

School effectiveness studies in the 1970s confirmed that the smooth internal process of a school contributes much to the overall effectiveness of an educational programme (Purkey and Smith, 1985). Based on this premise, a quality school is one that has a 'healthy process' which generally includes three process dimensions, management, teaching and learning. Support for this model is a reflection of the emphasis on the importance of leadership and culture to education innovation (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992). The main advantage of this conception of quality is that it focuses attention on the internal operation of the school and emphasises the importance of effective co-ordination between different departments. But the process model also has its limitations, notably the difficulty in monitoring processes, the focus on quality of 'means' rather than 'ends' and a failure to take into consideration the external environment or context in which the school operates. Typical examples of management process indicators / key areas for quality evaluation include leadership, communication channels, co-ordination and decision making. Teaching quality indicators include classroom management, teaching methods and learning strategies; and finally learning quality indicators are student learning experiences and outcomes.

### ***3.3.3 The expert model***

This model is concerned with the values, attitudes and capability of the professional educators, especially teachers who provide the ‘front-line services’ in schools. It assumes that teachers as the professionals in schools who are closest to the students have the most relevant knowledge for making decisions about their learning (Hess, 1991). The model examines the contribution of teachers to achieving quality from the perspective of a professional community of learners, a group who have the capacity and commitment to take control in the professional arena. Evidence from educational reform programmes, such as the three year 1998-2001 school improvement programme in Hong Kong (Lee and Lo, 2007) has shown that changes that do not affect the learning experiences of students and the power relationships between teachers and students in the classroom will end up fruitless (Leithwood and Menzies, 1998). A key concept of this model for the school principal is the need to equip schools with knowledge of best practices and to empower teachers to make site based decisions.

### ***3.3.4 The absence of problems model***

In this model, education quality is equated with an absence of problems in the school. This model is based on the assumption that an absence of problems, difficulties, and weaknesses suggests that the school is of high education quality. It is argued that identifying strategies for the improvement of a school can be more precisely achieved by analysing problems and defects (Crosby, 1979). The principal of a school may set up rigorous quality assurance and monitoring system to ensure a deficiency free environment. This model is particularly

useful when the criteria of quality education are unclear but strategies for improvement are needed. However, if people are more interested in students achieving high attainment, this model is not sufficient.

## **Interface models**

### ***3.3.5 The resource-input model***

This model of education quality focuses mainly on the inputs into the school. It assumes that a school must acquire strategic inputs, such as operating capital, teachers and students in order to survive and perform. A school must compete with other schools for the limited valuable resources; hence, a school is of high quality if it can bring in ample resources, and attract high quality students and teachers. This model has a number of advantages. First, it focuses attention on the relationship between the inputs of the school and its internal operation. Second, to some extent, the model re-addresses the limitation of the goal and specification model by linking education quality to the environmental context and input of resources. On the other hand, by over emphasising the importance of resource inputs, the model may neglect the efforts of the institution to enhance the quality of process and outcomes. Typical examples of performance indicators / key areas for quality evaluation include high quality student intake, recruitment of more qualified staff, better facilities and equipment, an improved staff student-ratio, and more financial support obtained from government, alumni, parents, or the school sponsoring body.

### ***3.3.6 The consumer satisfaction model***

In the absence of a consensus view of education quality in a school, quality is sometimes assessed from the consumers' perspective. In this model, the quality of a school is assessed by whether the school can meet the needs and expectations of powerful stakeholders or clients (Crosby, 1979; Juran and Gryna, 1988; Parasuraman et al, 1985). These stakeholders may include teachers, the school management committee, school sponsors, parents, students, alumni and the education department. There are a number of advantages of adopting this model of quality. In a market driven situation, quality must ultimately be derived from the customers' perspective. Schools that seek to meet the expectations of its stakeholders and clients will tend to be more adaptive to the external environment which is important to its long term survival. The model is a particularly appropriate when the demands of the stakeholders are compatible and cannot be ignored. A survey of stakeholders' satisfaction is often used to assess the quality of a school. The performance indicators / key areas for quality evaluation are the satisfaction of students, teachers, parents, education authority, alumni and management board.

### ***3.3.7 Legitimacy model***

In the current more challenging and competitive education environment, schools face demands to be more accountable to the local community and provide value for money. This model is based on the assumption that a school needs to be accepted and supported by the local community in order to survive and achieve its mission. In this model, education quality is seen as the achievement of a school's legitimate position or reputation in the community. The importance of this model is understandable, given the current emphasis on parental choice and

accountability in education reforms. Performance indicators or key areas for quality evaluation include public relations, marketing activities, public image, reputation or status in the community and school based accountability systems or quality assurance systems.

### ***3.3.8 The organisational learning model***

In this model, education quality refers to the need for the school to be involved in continuous development and improvement. The model assumes that education quality is a dynamic concept requiring the continuous development and improvement of members, processes and outcomes of a school. Several researchers have argued that schools and teachers can be empowered to learn and innovate to achieve education quality (Fullan, 1993; Louis, 1994; Schmuck and Runkel, 1985; Senge, 1990). There are some similarities with the process model, the difference being that this model emphasises the importance of learning behaviour to ensure education quality in organisations. This thinking supports the emphasis on whole school development planning in education (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991; MacGilchrist et al, 1995). The model is especially useful when schools are developing or involved in educational reform, which requires curriculum, pedagogic, management and technology change. The performance indicators or key areas for quality evaluation include an awareness and understanding of external policy implications, community needs, programme evaluation, development planning etc.

### ***3.3.9 Total quality management model***

Total quality management (TQM) is a customer-focussed management philosophy derived from industry (Ishikawa, 1992) which has become important

for enhancing education quality and increasing school effectiveness (Bradley, 1993; Bush and Coleman, 2000; Greenwood and Gaunt, 1994). TQM seeks continuous improvement and meeting or exceeding customers' expectations (Murgatroyd and Morgan, 1993; Sallis, 1996; West-Burnham, 1992); quality starts with the customers and is defined by them (Sahney et al, 2004; Tam and Cheng, 2001) and schools are held accountable to the customers (Sallis, 1996; Quong and Walker, 1996). The commitment of the leadership is central to the creation of a TQM organisation in which everyone participates (Dahlgaard et al, 1998; Kanji and Asher, 1996) and their 'primary responsibility is to create the environment in which continuous improvement can take place' (West-Burnham, 1992, p. 117).

It can be seen that each of these models has advantages and disadvantages, so that principals in Hong Kong are likely to draw on more than one model for managing education quality and accountability in response to government conceptions of quality assurance and their own school context. For instance, the designation of quality as the achievement of mission and goals (Mok, 2007) is closely matched by Cheng's (2003) Goal and Specification model. In a market driven situation with intense competition for students, interface models such as the consumer satisfaction model and the legitimacy model are likely to be especially important in relation to external stakeholders such as parents and alumni. Also in Hong Kong, the quality of the student intake in the resource input model is often seen as an important indicator of the school's success. Attracting high quality students appears to be a necessary pre-condition for some schools to attain high academic performance in public examination. In Hong Kong, the organisational learning model which deals explicitly with the improvement of education quality is also particularly significant because schools are experiencing rapid and turbulent change as a result of far reaching



education reform proposals. It is to the topic of improving education quality now the dissertation now turns in the next section.

### **3.4 Improving Education Quality**

This section discusses the relationship between school improvement and school effectiveness and outlines and discusses Stoll and Fink's (1996) theoretical model of school improvement.

#### **3.4.1. The relationship between school improvement and school effectiveness**

This study of Lasallian schools is located mainly at the school level and from the perspective of the principals who are obliged to respond to external policy directives designed to improve education quality. In order to understand the process of improvement of education quality at the school level, it is necessary to draw on literature from school improvement, school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness research. The purpose of improving education quality is the improvement of students' learning outcomes (achievement and attainment) and experiences (Cheng, 1996b; Elmore, 2004; Wong and Nicotera, 2007). While school effectiveness research has a similar mission, it is more concerned with student attainment, and there are some significant differences between the two paradigms. For instance, school improvement researchers have paid more attention to policy contexts (Creemers and Reezigt, 1997) and studying change (Fullan, 1991; Louis, 1994). The approach to change is seen as a carefully planned and managed process and one in which whole school development planning, monitoring and evaluation play as key role (Hopkins et al, 1994).

Traditionally, the school level was where most improvement actions took place but this has now been broadened to include the classroom level (Reynolds, et al. 1993) where effective teaching and formative assessment are seen to be central to improving student learning (Wong and Nicotera, 2007). The range of participants in school improvement has also widened to include school stakeholders and clients who need to work collaboratively to seek improvement (Mortimore, 1991; Hopkins, et al, 1994). There is also a belief that differences in student outcome are related to school culture and that this culture is amenable to alteration by concerted action by school staff (Hopkins, et al, 1994). School improvement researchers rarely draw on findings from school effectiveness research (Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll, 1993) and research is essentially theoretical; for example, the typologies of school cultures (Hargreaves, D, 1995) have not been studied in practice and their ‘effects’ on the process of school improvement are not known (Creemers and Reezigt, 1997).

In summary, the essence of school improvement is captured in the following definition:

‘a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school’s capacity for managing change. In this sense, school improvement is about raising student achievement through focussing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support it’ (Ainscow et al, 1994 p. 4).

In the research literature, the term school effectiveness acts as a ‘proxy’ for quality education and performance at the school level (Elliott, 1996). School effectiveness research has led to major shifts in education policy in many countries, including Hong Kong, by emphasising the accountability of schools

and the responsibility of educators to provide all children with possibilities for high attainment, thereby enhancing the need for school improvement (Mortimore, 1991). The underlying rationale of this research paradigm is that the accountability for school performance remains with individual schools, their staff, governors, parents and students (Gibson and Asthana, 1998). School effectiveness research points to the need for school improvement, in particular by focussing attention on 'alterable school factors' associated with effective schools; for instance, Sammons, et al (1995) compiled a list of 11 factors which they considered characterised an effective school. These 'factors' can in theory be used to help principals prioritise interventions that help their school improve. In the school effectiveness paradigm, there is a perceived need to determine the value the school 'adds' to the student in their passage through school (Gibson and Asthana, 1998). Whilst school improvement is concerned with change and development, school effectiveness focusses on the schools as static and steady state organisations (Gray et al, 1999). Finally, school effectiveness research is concerned with a study of the more formal organisation of schools, in contrast to school improvement, where researchers are concerned with the more informal processes and cultures (Gray et al, 1999).

There have been many examples of school improvement and effectiveness programmes but many have failed to improve education quality in schools (Harris 2001; Stoll and Fink, 1996). Whereas the criticism of school effectiveness research was that it did not address how schools could become more effective, the criticism of school improvement was that it did not take sufficient account of outcome measures, such as student achievement (Creemers and Reezigt, 1997; Harris, 2001). Therefore, there was a perceived need to build links between the two research paradigms to improve education quality (Harris, 2001; Reynolds et al, 2000). In the UK 'Improving Schools Programme', the

influence of the school effectiveness paradigm was evident in some of the key principles on which school improvement is based.

- All schools have the potential for continuous improvement.
- Schools themselves are the main agents for improvement with support and pressure from local and national partners.
- Raising student performance requires each school to re-examine the processes of teaching and learning.
- Comparing and using performance information is a cornerstone of school improvement.
- School development planning is a means to increase the capacity of schools to manage change.
- Development planning, including target setting related to student achievement, supports continuous improvement.
- Building the involvement and expectations of students and parents for high achievement.
- Spreading development of what works to inform teacher development and practice

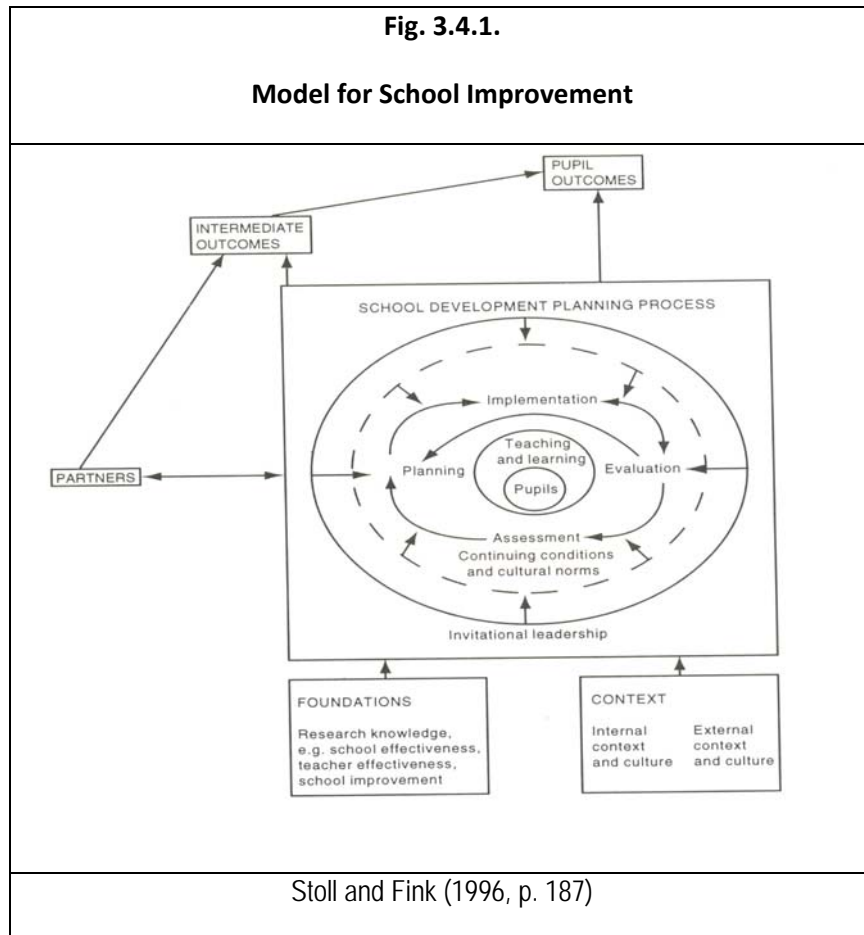
(Hopkins et al, 1994, pp. 2-10, 68-84; Reynolds et al, 2001, pp. 208-217)

A theoretical model of school improvement which links the two research paradigms through the school development planning process was devised by Stoll and Fink (1996, pp. 186-189). This model draws on research findings on school improvement, school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness.

### **3.4.2. A theoretical model of school improvement**

The Stoll and Fink theoretical model of school improvement is based on their involvement in an effective schools project in a district in Canada (Halton, Ontario) and focussed on processes of change in schools, teaching and learning processes in classrooms and teachers' continuing professional development. In the model, school development planning is the vehicle which links the school

effectiveness findings with the school improvement process. The key components of the Stoll and Fink conceptual model (1996, pp. 186-190) are shown in the diagram below.



The first component in the model is the school context, both internal in the form of inputs such as the nature of the student population and external such as government policy and societal trends. The second component is the foundations, the research findings on school and teacher effectiveness and school improvement. The third component, the school development planning process, consists of two outer layers, an inner circle and a two layer central core. The two outer layers in the school development planning process (Fig. 3.4.1) are made up of ‘invitational’ leadership, ‘continuing conditions’ and ‘cultural norms’. Invitational leaders are those leaders who invite other potential stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and students in schools to contribute to

school development ‘with the ultimate aim of developing shared leadership and .... professional opportunities and challenges’ (Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.115). They are said to have an understanding and feel for the change process. Leadership is a driving force for change and in the first instance, the principal with support and pressure from partners, is perceived to be key to school improvement. The term continuing conditions (or factors), refers especially to the need for teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD), amending management structures and the use of funding to improve teaching and learning. School cultural norms include a sense of common purpose, collaboration / collegiality, and continuous improvement. These ‘conditions’ and ‘cultural norms’ may or may not precede the process of school development planning but they pervade the process and require constant attention. The inner circle layer of the school development planning process (Fig 3.4.1) is formed by the on-going four stage school development planning cycle of assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation. This process is influenced by the context of the school and in its turn influences intermediate teacher outcomes, as well as student learning experiences and outcomes. In the core, there is an essential focus on the teaching and learning processes and the curriculum and the student who is not only the product of improvement but a participant in the process.

The fourth component is the ‘partners’ of the school which is both influenced by and reaches out to partners. Stakeholders and clients (parents, alumni, higher education, employers etc) can provide critical friendship, materials, funding and information to enhance students’ learning experiences. The fifth component is the intermediate outcomes which include the identification of the competences required of an effective ‘teacher as learner’. The final component, student learning outcomes are key success criteria indicating school improvement (Reynolds, 2001). They are:

- a range of outcomes, both academic and social that measure the goals of the school
- an emphasis on student progress to demonstrate the value ‘added’ by the school
- attainment of the highest standards possible
- a focus on equity so that success is experienced by all students
- standards ( school ) improve over time

(Stoll and Fink, 1996, p. 190)

In the following section, each of these components of the Stoll and Fink (1996) model will be discussed with reference to relevant research. The role of the principal in leading improvement and demonstrating accountability will be examined in the final section of this chapter.

### **3.4.3. A discussion of key components of the Stoll and Fink model**

#### **i. School Context**

The school’s internal and external contexts are perceived to be important initial influences on the development process in school and should be considered before planning and development start. They may also continue to influence the improvement process, once the implementation is underway. Internal context or circumstances includes inputs or intake measures such as: learner characteristics which include students’ aptitude for learning, motivation and perseverance; the socio-economic conditions of the school catchment area which affect the level of parental support; the school’s culture including traditions, visions and mission; enabling resource inputs, especially high quality teachers but also the physical infrastructure and teaching and learning resources (UNESCO, 2004, pp. 35-37). The external context consists of the external policy environment and important trends such as falling rolls, both of which impact on a school’s development. Both internal and external circumstances will be different for

primary and secondary schools and will make the school improvement process unique to each school. The school is seen as being distinctive, so that external reforms need to be sensitive to the context in individual schools, rather than assuming that all schools are the same. Stoll and Mortimore (1997, p. 12 ) warn that ‘what works in one context may lack relevance in others’.

## **ii. Continuing conditions and cultural norms**

### ***Continuing conditions: amending management structures and resource allocation in support of teaching***

School principals may feel it necessary to reconfigure their organisations in response to the external reform agenda, especially in view of the renewed emphasis on improving teaching and formative assessment to meet the needs of the emerging learning paradigm as well as changes to the curriculum. The term structure refers to organisational arrangements, roles and formal policies that support collaboration and continuous improvement (Zywine et al, 1995). These school level structural changes include making new senior management appointments, recruiting highly qualified and committed staff, deploying staff to maximise their teaching expertise, appointing mentors, creating time for joint planning, developing joint teaching arrangements, producing continuing development policies and making arrangements to disseminate good practice. New sources of funding from government may also be accessed to help to improve the quality of teaching materials and equipment such as ICT and these sources may be supplemented by parents and alumni. Principals may play an important role in succession planning to ensure the continuation of the school’s values, beliefs and practices (Rothwell, 2010).



## *School Culture*

The importance of school culture or 'climate' is widely recognised in both the school effectiveness and school improvement research literature (Hargreaves, D., 1993, 1995; McMahon, 2001). In education, most researchers employ the anthropological definition of culture - the knowledge, traditions, values, beliefs, customs, rituals, symbols, artifacts and language of a particular group (Daft, 1998; Hargreaves, D., 1995). The literature on effective schools suggests that high performing schools are those with an effective culture and that participative decision making is a key requisite for these cultures to develop (Purkey and Smith, 1985). In their framework for school improvement, Zywine et al. (1995) identify specific cultural norms as being essential for school improvement; they are shared purpose, collegiality (collaboration), continuous improvement and the 'teacher as learner'.

Shared purpose includes the school's vision, mission, goals, objectives and unity of purpose. It refers to the shared sense of purposeful direction of the school relative to major educational goals. Norms of collaboration (which may or may not be collegial) refer to the ways in which mutual sharing, assistance and joint effort by teachers is valued in the school. Collaboration (collegiality) must be linked to norms of continuous improvement and experimentation in which teachers are constantly seeking and assessing potentially better practices inside and outside their own school and contributing to other teachers' practice through dissemination. The 'teacher as learner' concept, which includes anyone at school level who is a professional educator, is of critical importance and links classroom and school improvement. The key point is that teachers can develop in four key aspects to improve their practice - mastering a range of teaching and learning strategies, becoming a reflective practitioner, collaborating with other

professionals to receive and provide ideas and assistance and drawing on research evidence of effective teaching and formative assessment. Other cultural norms associated with school improvement include teacher professionalism (Johnson, 1990) and a willingness to be accountable for their performance (Robertson and Briggs, 1998).

A culture of caring relationships in the school is also considered to be important for school improvement (Sernak, 1998). A study by Shann (1999) confirmed the positive impact of a caring culture on students' academic attainment and pro-social behaviours. Stoll and Fink (1996) identified a culture of caring as the ingredient that underlies a variety of concepts in their school improvement models - 'context, planning, leadership, teaching and learning, partnerships, learning organisation, among many others' (p. 191). Caring teachers expect all students to do well and do what it takes to help every student achieve (Hargreaves, D., 1995; Stoll and Fink, 1996). A culture of caring that engages students in their learning applies equally for teachers and parents and other stakeholders.

School culture may be a cause, an object or an effect of school improvement. It is said that school culture should be a target for change because it will be a causal influence on other 'conditions' for school improvement and on student learning outcomes which in turn reinforce the culture (Hargreaves, D, 1995). In the late 1980s, it was argued that collaborative cultures are better able to support school improvement (Rosenholtz, 1991), so teachers were encouraged to become more collaborative and leaders to promote teacher collaboration to implement external reforms (Hargreaves, A, 1991). Later, it was argued that collaboration had been given too much importance as a means of increasing school and teacher effectiveness (Hargreaves, D. 1993). To assist in the

investigation of school culture and the process of change linked to education reform and strategies for school improvement, Hargreaves, D. (1995) proposed a typology of school culture for two types of school, traditional and collegial, based on six underlying social structures - political, micro-political, maintenance, development, service and moral. The relative advantage of each type of culture is relative to the context or circumstance of the school. For instance, the traditional type with its strong maintenance structure prospers well in stable circumstances. In contrast, the collegial type with its stronger development structure and collaborative relationships may be able to handle change better but only under specific conditions; for example, when there is collective agreement to the externally imposed change, it may be filtered through the school's vision or mission and so implemented. In reality, under the impact of the unprecedented scope and pace of educational reform, many school cultures are in transition and most schools perhaps are in some aspects traditional and in others collegial.

### **iii. School development planning**

School development planning is considered to be essential for school improvement (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991; Mortimore, 1998). School Development planning is associated with Cheng's (2003) organisational learning model in which the key concept is continuous development and improvement. Whilst the ultimate aim is to improve the quality of student learning and enhance their outcomes (MacGilchrist, 1994; Stoll and Fink, 1996), development planning has increasingly become associated with external accountability, a means by which control can be exerted over schools. According to MacGilchrist (1994), the purposes of development planning have been variously identified as improving teaching and learning, incorporating

external policy requirements, empowering schools to take control of their own development, meeting government legislation requirements to parents, acting as a monitoring and accountability device and finally providing a management tool for principals to control their budgets.

For development planning to be effective, research evidence suggests that there are a number of key issues which principals should consider (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1990; Hopkins et al, 1994; MacBeath, 1994; MacGilchrist 1994; MacGilchrist et al, 1995). First, in times of external government mandates for education reform designed to improve education quality, there is a need to integrate internally and externally generated priorities into a coherent development plan. Second, target setting should focus on the improvement of teaching, formative assessment and learning and should be linked with arrangements for teachers' continuing professional development. Third, teachers are more likely to be committed to the achievement of a few key school targets which include priorities for the short and medium term. Fourth, the importance of involving the views of stakeholders, (parents, students as well as teachers), is increasingly recognised. Finally, the school may invite external experts in school improvement to carry out an audit and advise on strategic direction.

#### **iv. Teachers' continuing professional development**

From the late 1990s, researchers have asserted that successful education reform and teachers' professional development are integrally linked (Bolam, 2002; Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998). A major cause of failure of some past school reforms has been attributed to a lack of high quality professional development (Sparks and Hirsch, 2000). Without sufficient support and training, teachers

may revert to the teaching methods they remember as a student or the ones they consider workable for them, which may not necessarily be appropriate when faced with new reform proposals (Ho et al, 2001). According to Leu (2005), the view that teachers have a key role in improving the quality of students' learning has not received the attention it deserves until recently. As Cheng's (2003) 'expert model' reveals, teachers are the first line professional staff helping students to learn. This key role is succinctly outlined in a recent report on education quality:

'What goes on in the classroom, and the impact of the teacher and teaching has been identified in numerous studies as the crucial variable for improving learning outcomes. The way teachers teach is of critical concern in any reform designed to improve quality' (UNESCO, 2004, p.152).

Improving the quality of teachers' professional learning is essential to raise standards of attainment and implement new ideas about teaching and learning (Darling- Hammond, 2005; Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001; Stoll and Fink, 1996 and Wood and Bennett, 2000). The research literature suggests that a positive policy environment and adequate support for growth are essential for creating and sustaining teacher quality (Fredriksson, 2004). The idea that the 'teacher as learner' extends to all other professional educators in a 'learning community' is advocated by Barth (1990), Stoll and Fink (1996) and Zywine et al (1995). Teachers now play a much more active role in their own professional development which takes place more frequently among groups of teachers at the school level. Support materials are used by teacher groups to introduce new ideas and stimulate experimentation with new approaches (Leu, 2005). There is considerable international evidence of an emerging professional model or paradigm of teacher learning. Attempts are being made to bring teachers' and

school development needs together and there is an increased orientation towards seeing professional development as a continuum rather than a one off event. In line with the move towards adopting constructivist principles for student learning in the classroom, many education systems are starting to advocate matching active learning approaches to teachers' professional development (Leu, 2005).

#### **v. Student involvement in school improvement**

Students are not only the product but a participant in school improvement but improving their learning experiences and outcomes is usually considered to be more important than their role in the process of improvement. In the emergent learning paradigm based on a social-constructivist theory of learning, students have an opportunity to 'learn how to learn', so that they become more effective independent learners who are responsible for their own learning (Cheng, 2003). Some academic commentators advocate that students should experience a holistic education, with intellectual, emotional, social, moral, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual dimensions (Nagel and Kvernbeek, 1997). In many reform proposals, for instance in the UK, students are expected to acquire a range of desirable skills and competences in both the cognitive and affective domain, which are often linked to perceptions of what employers need. Cognitive skills typically include critical thinking, problem solving, technological literacy and may include meta-cognitive thinking. Personal qualities include responsibility, adaptability and interpersonal skills (Stoll and Fink, 1996).

## **vi. School and community partnerships**

School partnerships involving different stakeholder and client groups are an important vehicle for school improvement (Fullan, 1993; Lee et al, 2004; Mortimore, 1998). External reforms make it desirable for groups to work together to reach a consensus (Dalin, 1998). Any school is in a unique position to create a partnership with all individuals, groups, and institutions which share responsibility for growth and development of students. These partnerships can include parents, previous students, external advisers from higher education, employers etc. Partnerships enable schools to maintain a firm grip on current reality by employing partners as critical friends. They can also provide practical support and additional funds to support students' learning. Virtually every major reform effort has placed a heavy emphasis on parental involvement in schools (Christenson, 2004; Fingon, 1990) which is vital in building an effective school and helping students to learn (Chubb and Moe, 1992; Eccles and Harold, 1993; Lee et al, 2004; MacBeath and Stoll, 2001). Epstein (1995) provides a useful list of ways in which schools can promote parental involvement in their children's education. This includes providing information on school programmes, practices and student progress, encouraging and recruiting parent volunteers, helping parents to support their children's school work at home, and involving parents in school decision making and accessing resources.

## **vii. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Stoll and Fink (1996) model is a comprehensive theoretical model which has practical applications for this research, providing a useful conceptual framework to evaluate practice in Lasallian schools in the face of the reform proposals. By including key components which are acknowledged in the

school improvement literature and identifying the improvement of student learning outcomes as the goal, the model has a number of distinct advantages. First, it places students firmly at centre of the school improvement process which is the intention of the reform proposals. Second, it acknowledges the key role teachers play in improving students' learning and the importance of their continuing professional development. Third, although student success is normally dependent on teachers, the improvement in teachers' performance in the classroom is recognised as an intermediate outcome and is not in itself the goal of school improvement. Fourth, by including school context, the model alerts the researcher to the fact that school responses to the reform proposals will not be uniform. Fifth, the model acknowledges the cultural norms which are associated with school improvement and which are particularly relevant in this study; nor are 'structural' considerations, in the form of organisational changes, policy statements and funding neglected. Sixth, by recognising the contribution of the school's partners to school improvement, the model allows for an examination of the role of stakeholders and clients which is an important aspect of this study. Finally, and last but not least, the model identifies the key role of the principal, the focus of this study, in facilitating school improvement.

### **3.5 Conceptualising and Implementing Accountability**

#### **3.5.1. Introduction**

The concept of accountability is complex from both a theoretical and practical standpoint (Glatter, 2002; Kogan, 1986; Simkins, 1997). Accountability refers to a 'relationship between an individual who dispenses a service and the recipients of that service' (Seyfarth, 1999, p. 103). Broadly speaking, accountability is the process by which a person or group of persons is held to



account to those who are entitled to the information (Earl, 1998; Glynn and Murphy, 1996). The notion of authority in an organisation infers a right to call people to account; for accountability to be meaningful, this right must be accompanied by the ability to exercise control over their performance (Day and Klein, 1987; Mulgan, 2000; Schwartz, 2000). Earl (1998) conceives of two opposing views of accountability. On the one hand, accountability is seen as answering to a higher power that has the authority to 'judge quality, exercise control and order compliance' (Earl, 1998, p. 187). On the other hand, accountability is seen as emancipatory and change in an organisation that cannot be imposed. In schools, principals are accountable to multiple stakeholders that include the government, sponsors, teachers, parents and students. But with multiple stakeholders, there are multiple accountabilities; thus accountability can be multi-directional. With more power in their hands, stakeholders may demand accountability from the school in the direction they desire. Accountability is a multi-faceted concept which may have several interpretations (Burgess, 1992; Bush, 1994) as the following sections illustrate.

### **3.5.2. Relational and identity accountability**

Accountability can be broadly conceived as a relational issue, being answerable to and held responsible to others, or as an identity issue, being answerable to ideals or missions and one's own sense of responsibility (Ebrahim, 2003a, 2003b; Najam, 1996; Unerman and O' Dwyer, 2006). With relational accountability, people are required to explain and take responsibility for their actions through the giving and demanding of reasons for their conduct. This assumes that the recipients or stakeholders have certain rights to hold others accountable for their actions (Buhr, 2001). The identity form of accountability focuses on issues of integrity and mission that are internal to individuals or

organisations. Identity accountability therefore represents a means by which principals as school leaders take responsibility for shaping their organisation and realising the school mission and ‘open themselves to public or external scrutiny for assessing their performance in relation to their goals’ (Ebrahim, 2003a. p. 815).

### **3.5.3. Weak and strong accountability relationships**

Fenstermacher (1979) classifies an accountability relationship into weak and strong forms. In a weak accountability relationship there is a relationship between people, for example the school stakeholders hold the principal to account. People are also accountable for some standard of performance. For example, the principal is held to account by the stakeholders for the performance of students in school. People are also obliged to provide or receive information. For example, the principal is obliged to provide information about school performance to stakeholders who have the right to request or command the school principal to explain or justify his / her conduct or performance. In order to have a strong accountability relationship, Fenstermacher (1979) argues that in addition to the above three features, trust, discretionary authority and responsibility must also be present so that a good collaborative relationship can be developed for the benefit of the stakeholders and the organisation.

### **3.5.4. Approaches to defining and conceptualising accountability**

Scholars have identified different approaches to conceptualise accountability. Burke (2005) and Vidovich and Slee (2000, 2001) suggested four approaches - upward, downward, inward and outward. *Upward accountability* represents the traditional relationship of a subordinate to a superior in which the subordinates

are required to act according to the wishes or decisions of their superiors. Subordinates are called to account for their actions and, if necessary, penalised as a means of bringing them under control (Becher et al, 1981). *Downward accountability* focuses on a manager, for example a school principal, being responsible to subordinates, such as teachers, in participatory decision making or collegial accountability (Burke, 2005). This form of accountability benefits from a good collaborative partnership in an organisation (Brushwood, 2001). *Inward accountability* centres on adherence to professional norms, values or ethical standards which means it has the same focus as identity accountability. This form of accountability often appears in organisations such as universities and schools in the form of professional accountability (Burke, 2005). *Outward accountability* relates to external clients, stakeholders and supporters of the school. This form of accountability includes market and political accountability (Burke, 2005). In the school context, market accountability emphasises the role of customers, whether they be students or parents, a situation which encourages schools to compete for students (Bush, 1994). Political accountability refers to schools and colleges being held accountable to government for the optimum use of funds (Bush, 1994; Scott, 1989).

Leithwood et al (1999 ) also developed a four-fold classification of approaches for conceptualising accountability. They are market, decentralisation, professional and managerial approaches in which there is some overlap with Burke's market and professional approaches. In the *market approach*, competition between schools for students fosters the exercise of parental choice by parents (Feintuck, 1994; Halstead, 1994). In this situation, schools must compete for students and resources in order to survive (Carlson, 1965; Leithwood et al, 1999). These schools aim to service the needs and wants of target markets (Kotler and Andreasen 1987). The principal is held accountable

to the students and parents, who are conceived as customers of schools (West, 1994). In this approach, school leaders are sometimes labelled as salespersons (Chubb and Moe, 1992; Kerchner, 1988). These leaders strive to market their schools effectively in order to enrol more students, develop good customer / client relations and monitor students' and parents' satisfaction. To prosper in such a context, school leaders may choose to redesign their organisations in response to fast changing conditions. They may collect data about competitors' services and prices and find niches for their schools. They need to have exceptional clarity about their school missions which are viewed as a central criterion in parent and student choices for schools.

In the *decentralisation approach*, the responsibility for providing an 'account' is shared between professionals within the school, representatives of the parents and community including alumni and / or the Education Office. What is to be accounted for such as budgetary and personnel decisions depends on the range of decisions allocated to the School Management Council (SMC). The main aim of this approach is to increase the voices of those who are not heard or at least not sufficiently listened to, in the context of a typical school governance structure. The basic assumption in this approach is that the school seeks to directly reflect the values and preferences of parents and the local community (Ornstein, 1983; Leithwood et al, 1999).

The *professional approach* specifies for what the teachers, principal and school governance structure should be held accountable. According to Urbanski (1998), teachers should be accountable for identifying and meeting the needs of individual students responsibly and knowledgeably, based on the standards of professional practice. The assumption is that teachers, who are closest to the

students, have the most relevant experience and knowledge to satisfy student needs (Hess, 1991). The principal should be accountable for a whole host of strategies which include: equity in the internal distribution of resources; the adoption of policies which reflect professional knowledge; the establishment of organisational configurations which support teaching and learning; the creation of problem identification and problem solving processes that continually assess, modify and improve school practices; and the initiation of a response to the concerns of parents, students and school staff (Urbanski,1998).

In the *managerial approach*, the school as a whole is held accountable but with more responsibility for the principal. The school and its senior administrator are directly accountable to the next level in the organisational hierarchy, such as the School Management Council or Area Education Officer to whom the principal reports in an *upward form* of accountability (Burke, 2005). This approach is different from new managerialism (Peters, 1992) as it includes systematic attempts to create more goal oriented, effective and efficient schools. A managerial approach assumes that effective leadership conforms to what is sometimes called strategic management. School development planning is an example of the managerial approach to accountability (Giles, 1997; Hatton, 2001). In this process, school leaders need to be skilled in collecting and interpreting systematically collected data, developing with their teaching staff priorities and realistic manageable goals, monitoring progress and modifying plans accordingly.

### 3.5.5. Implementing accountability: some key issues for school principals

#### *i. Accountability to different stakeholders*

A principal may face the problematic issue of how to manage his / her accountability to different stakeholder groups (McConnell, 1971; Gibton, 2003). The management of accountability involving different stakeholders can be considered from several perspectives (Talmange and Munro, 1972) as stated in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Perspectives on accountability relationships

● Accountability involves a reciprocal relationship between stakeholders.
● Each party has differing responsibilities for accountability to the other stakeholders.
● Relationships exist between the various stakeholder groups and the school.
● Relationships exist between the various stakeholder groups.
● These interactive relationships carry differing perspectives of the others' role.
● Through the process of negotiation, stakeholders' differing perspectives can be brought into closer congruence.

In the school context, effective accountability is derived from negotiating a consensus with stakeholders when there are conflicting expectations, for instance of education quality, and how it can be achieved (Talmange and Monroe, 1972; Kogan, 1986).

## ***ii. Accountability and autonomy***

Accountability is also related to school autonomy, a term which refers to a school's self regulating capacity (West, 1992; Levacic, 2002). Autonomy implies a self-governing institution which is not controlled by social elements which include market forces and cultural and political institutions such as churches and the government. Edwards (1991) points to the difficulty leaders face in reconciling the closely entwined concepts of accountability and autonomy; the former leads to control while the latter fosters the release of human potential. This tension may become evident in the relationship between the principal and teachers in school. On the one hand, the principal may recognise that a measure of autonomy is desirable to enable teachers to teach in the way they prefer; but on the other hand, the principal is responsible for ensuring that new approaches to teaching and learning required by educational reform are implemented.

## ***iii. Tensions between differing approaches to accountability***

A plurality of approaches to accountability is in evidence in schools (Epstein, 1993; Fenstermacher, 1979; Schwartz, 2000). They may operate at the same time and interact with one another and cause problems in the exercising of accountability (Farrell and Law, 1999). Historically, the dominant models have been professional accountability which focuses on professional standards of integrity and practice, and upward accountability which involves the principal in a hierarchical relationship with an obligation to account to senior colleagues or the government. Recently, other approaches have come to the fore such as market accountability with greater power accorded to parents through the market mechanism. According to some commentators, this situation can be

damaging to professional accountability. With a reduction of ‘ the producer (teachers’) domination of the education system’, by implication, the significance of professional accountability is reduced (Bush, 1994). Thus, the principal’s role in striking a balance between these two approaches becomes an important challenge.

Some commentators have also argued that there is a potential tension between professional and managerial approaches to accountability which could affect the relationship between the principal and teachers. They conceive of a polarisation between the values of professional responsibility and those of efficient management. According to this perspective, principals are primarily concerned with the budget, the market, entrepreneurial activities and a drive to efficiency; in contrast, teachers are more concerned with the curriculum, teaching / learning and assessment, student needs and the drive for effectiveness (Ball, 1993; Ball and Bowe, 1991). Positioned between the demands of the government and the market, principals may also be under pressure to ignore the demands of teachers (professional accountability) and become increasingly isolated from colleagues and classrooms, leading to a divergence between the managers and the managed (Power et al, 1997).

#### ***iv. The relationship between accountability and education quality***

Accountability and education quality have a close relationship in which accountability affects quality either positively or negatively. From a positive perspective, accountability can be a catalyst to improve education quality. A key role of accountability is to stimulate an organisation to improve itself; if schools are made accountable, they tend to perform better (Gillmore, 1997). The requirement for schools to be accountable to different stakeholder in an



organisation drives the improvement of quality (Roberts, 1991). As the leader of the school, the principal is held responsible for the performance of the school and for the improvement of educational quality. In development planning, long term participation in implementing accountability can also enable the school and stakeholders to close the performance gap between the planned and achieved targets. Accountability also has a role in monitoring the improvement of education quality in response to external reform proposals (Wong, 1995b; Lind and Peter, 1988). The following section discusses the principal's leadership role in relation to education quality and accountability.

### **3.6. The Leadership Role of the Principal in Improving Education Quality and being Accountable to Stakeholders**

#### **3.6.1. Introduction**

International research evidence has consistently reinforced the importance of leadership in securing and sustaining improvement (Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001; West et al, 2000). Effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; DiPaola and Walther-Thomas, 2003) which are 'small but educationally significant' (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003. p 3). Current education reforms require principals to draw on different conceptions of leadership to help them improve their schools (Danielson, 2007). Over recent years there have been many attempts to identify models and types of leadership (Busher and Saran, 1994), which include instructional (Mortimore, 1988), transactional (Leithwood, 1992; Lambert, 2003), transformational (Mitchell and Tucker, 1992), invitational (Stoll and Fink, 1996), and more recently distributed (Gronn, 2008; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2005). However, as Harris (2004, p.12) points out, the key question is 'what types or forms or models of

leadership in schools maximise student learning and contribute to school improvement?

### **3.6.2. Effective leadership practices for the improvement of school and student outcomes**

In their report for the UK Department for Education and Skills, Leithwood et al. (2006) identified a series of basic effective practices for the improvement of school and student learning outcomes. These were setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and improving the instructional programme.

Setting directions for colleagues is considered necessary to motivate colleagues to achieve goals for school improvement (Hallinger and Heck, 1998). Three specific practices are included - building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and communicating high expectations of performance to staff. The primary aim of developing people is 'capacity building', not only the knowledge and skills staff need to accomplish organisational goals, but also the personal qualities that support the application of knowledge and skill (Harris and Chapman, 2002). Common practices in capacity building include the provision of support to stakeholders, intellectual stimulation to encourage colleagues to examine their work from different perspectives and rethink how it can be performed better (Avolio, 1994) and setting an example for colleagues to follow that is consistent with the values the leader espouses (Avolio and Gardner, 2005).

Redesigning the organisation includes the practices of building collaborative cultures, temporary restructuring with the formation of teams for problem

solving (Hadfield, 2003), distributing leadership for selected tasks and increasing teacher involvement in decision making (Reeves, 2000) and building productive relationships with school stakeholders. Other important practices relate to establishing links with the external environment, such as local government agencies, local employers and universities to seek information and advice, stay in tune with policy changes and help to anticipate new trends which are likely to impact on the school. Bringing in external support can play an important role in school improvement (Reynolds et al, 2001).

Improving the instructional programme (curriculum, pedagogy and formative assessment) is a pre-condition for improvement to take place in student learning in the classroom. Strategies include identifying staff with appropriate skills, providing support to improve teaching, learning and assessment, designing and co-ordinating the curriculum, providing resources (Waters et al, 2003) and monitoring student progress.

Some of these basic effective leadership practices for school improvement were confirmed by teachers involved in the ‘Teacher Quality or Work Life study’ (TQWL) study (Louis and Smith, 1991; Louis, 1994; Rosenblum et al, 1994) in the USA. The study investigated how teachers’ work was altered in eight high schools where significant change efforts had been underway for some time. The participant teachers argued that effective change leadership consisted of six practices:

- 1 Providing consistent policies to delegate and empower staff.
- 2 Spending time on the details of life in school - principals “hung around”, so they “know what’s going on in the school”. They had an open door policy and encouraged drop in visits.
- 3 Willingness to confront bad teaching together with supportive programmes to help less effective teachers improve.

- 4 Providing leadership about values; making clear what is valued through vision and mission statements
- 5 Emphasising the importance of caring for students; student-teacher and student-principal relationships were regarded as more important in new elementary schools than in traditional secondary schools.
- 6 Actively and persistently using educational knowledge and ideas, not just research reports but good ideas emerging from practice. Principals were themselves linked into local and national networks for exchanging ideas and also placed a high emphasis on encouraging their teachers to join such networks for school improvement.

Some of these practices 1, 2, 4 and 5 fall into the category of developing people in the basic effective leadership practices identified by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and 2, 3 and 6 are related to improving the instructional programme.

### **3.6.3. Distributed leadership and school improvement**

As previously noted, there is increasing evidence in school improvement research of the importance of capacity building as a means of sustaining improvement (Fullan, 2001; Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). It has been argued that at the core of capacity building is 'distributed leadership along with social cohesion and trust' (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002 p.92). Until recently, much of the research literature has focussed on the formal leadership of head-teachers and has overlooked leadership that can be distributed across many roles and functions in the school. The idea of distributed leadership overlaps with shared (Pearce and Conger, 2003), collaborative (Wallace, 2002), democratic (Gastil, 1997) and participative (Vroom and Yago, 1998) leadership styles. Until recently, empirical research on distributed leadership has been lacking but three studies provide valuable insights into the nature of distributed leadership, its potential contribution to school improvement and the inherent barriers implicit in fostering distributive leadership in schools. These research studies are the

Distributed Leadership study in the USA (Spillane et al, 2004), the National Association of Headteachers' (NAHT) project (Day et al, 2002) and the National College of School leadership (NCSL) study in schools facing challenging circumstances (Harris and Chapman, 2002).

Spillane (2005) emphasises that distributed leadership is first and foremost about the practice of leadership - the daily performance of leadership routines, functions and structures. Distributed leadership refers to the sharing and spreading of leadership across individuals throughout the organisation (Spillane, 2006). The distributed perspective focuses on how leadership practice is distributed among formal and informal leaders (Harris, 2004). Leadership includes not only principals and other senior managers but also teachers, either as informal leaders or in formal leadership roles such as subject co-ordinator or mentor (Muijs and Harris, 2003). In this way, distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organisation. As Elmore (2004, p.14 ) points out 'in a knowledge-intensive enterprise like teaching and learning, there is no way to perform these complex tasks without widely distributing the responsibility for leadership among roles in the organisation'. Leadership practice can be spread across two or more leaders but is typically distributed across three to seven people, including administrators (Camburn et al, 2003). The number involved typically depends on the routine and subject area; for instance, in the Distributed Leadership study (Spillane et al, 2004), monitoring and evaluating teaching involved fewer leaders, typically the principal and assistant principal, compared with teacher development in literacy which involved the principal, curricular specialists and lead teachers.

According to Spillane (2005), leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions (an inter-dependent relationship), between school leaders and their

followers in a particular work situation. Structures, routines and tools are the means through which leaders act; the term structure refers to organisational configurations, roles and policy statement (Stoll and Fink, 1996). Taking the improvement of teaching and learning as an example, structures could consist of a school policy statement and a development plan, both of which are designed to improve teaching and learning; structures could include the widening of a leadership group to include teacher leaders other than the senior management team and the convening of a teaching and learning group to assist in the dissemination of good practice. Routines could include schedules for observing teachers and providing formative feedback. Finally, tools could include student assessment data, protocols for evaluating teaching and lesson observation checklists.

The example demonstrates the contribution that distributed leadership can make to school effectiveness and improvement (Gronn, 2008; Robinson, 2008). The arguments for distributed leadership for change and improvement are powerful. Research by Silns and Mulford (2002) showed that student outcomes are more likely to improve where leadership is distributed throughout the school community and where teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them. A variety of research studies have found clear evidence of the positive effect of distributed leadership on teachers' self efficacy and levels of morale (MacBeath, 1998; Mitchell and Sackney, 2000). Leaders have a key role in teacher empowerment which is a crucial factor in school effectiveness and for organisation growth and development (Erickson et al, 2003). Employees who are empowered are more committed to the organisation, more accountable for their work and better able to fulfil job demands in an effective manner (Bogler and Somech, 2004). However, there are also inherent difficulties in adopting distributed leadership. There is the major challenge of how and more

importantly who is responsible for the distribution of development responsibility and authority. The traditional hierarchy of leadership in schools means that the power resides with the leadership team and might impede responses to distribute leadership responsibilities. The separate divisions of subjects and pastoral and academic structures can present ‘significant barriers’ to teachers working together (Harris, 2004, p. 20). Finally, research has shown that colleagues can sometimes be hostile to distributed leadership because of inertia, over-cautiousness and insecurity (Barth, 1990).

#### **3.6.4. Personal qualities and skills associated with effective leadership**

A range of personal qualities and skills are closely associated with effective leadership (Davis, 2006). In their study on effective leadership for change, Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) identify a set of personal qualities and skills for effective leadership in which the quality of their relationships with stakeholders are especially important (see table below). When change in school culture is required, leadership for school improvement is promoted when leaders possess personal qualities which help in their relationships with school stakeholders (Parrett and Wilison ,2004).

**Table 3.2. Personal qualities and skills for effective leadership**

1	Acting as a role model to others.
2	Being diligent, working longer hours than other staff.
3	Valuing the relationships with stakeholders and trusting them.
4	Being respected and trusted by stakeholders.
5	Being empathetic to stakeholders e.g. committing to assisting stakeholders and showing concern for school welfare.
6	Having an open door policy, allowing stakeholders with problems to approach the principal at any time.

7	Valuing all stakeholders by giving them timely information regarding impending changes.
8	Exerting a lot of effort in supporting, understanding and caring for staff.
9	Being a good listener.
10	Using effective two way communications.
11	Having financial trustworthiness and acumen, leaders being trusted with the money raised from fees and other sources and being used wisely.
12	Being protective in terms of issues connected with school development and school security.
Source: Ngcobo and Tikly, 2010, pp. 220-222	

Creating an environment of trust by school leaders is a pre-requisite for achieving education quality (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Wong, 2001). Another desirable personal quality is transparency and openness to stakeholders to encourage their participation in and commitment to school improvement (Sanders, 2003). Empathy is the ability to share another person's emotions and feelings which helps in resolving difficulties (Covey, 2004). The principal's role in creating a caring culture was also confirmed in studies by Sernak (1998) and Shann (1999).

### **3.6.5. Leadership role of the principal in achieving education quality and accountability**

The leadership role of the principal is clearly important to achieving education quality and school improvement (Elmore, 2004; Fry, 2002). The roles played by principals in achieving education quality are constantly evolving (DiPaola and Walther-Thomas, 2003). Principals need to play more than one role to make their 'contribution to education quality' (Cheng, 2002, p.80). A number of scholars have identified a variety of roles commonly adopted by principals in schools. In his study of principal leadership Cheng (2002) identified several



roles which are linked to his models for managing quality and quality assurance. These were school goal developer, resource developer, social leader and satisfier, organizational developer and problem solver. Other roles adopted by principals include coaching leader (Bradley, 2004), creator of a community of leaders (Mednick, 2003), affiliative leader (Bradley, 2004), facilitative leader (Blase and Blase, 2003), consultative leader (Hiebert and Klatt, 2001) and re-engineering leader of an organisation (Hammer and Champy, 2003). The function of each of these roles is described in Table 3.3 below.

**Table 3.3: Contribution of different roles of principals to the achievement of education quality and accountability**

	Role of Principal	Contribution to the Achievement of Education Quality
1	School goal developer	Develop appropriate strategies to achieve planned school goals e.g. public examination results; Lead members to achieve goals, implement plans and programmes and meet standards.
2	Resource developer	Procure necessary resources and inputs; Allocate resources to support effective teaching, learning and school functioning.
3	Social leader and satisfier	Create opportunities to satisfy the diverse expectations of all powerful constituencies; Lead members satisfy the needs of key stakeholders in teaching and all other school activities.
4	Organizational developer	Lead members to have a full awareness and analysis of environmental changes and environmental barriers; Promote organizational learning.
5	Problem solver	Lead members to avoid and solve conflicts and problems.
6	Coaching leader	Provide direction to stakeholders by sharing vision and policy
7	Creator of a community of leaders	Identify potential leaders from staff, distribute leadership and empower them.
8	Affiliative leader	Care for the emotional needs of school stakeholders.
9	Facilitative leader	Teach, coach and promote capacity building of stakeholders, especially teachers.
10	Consultative leader	Consult with stakeholders before making a decision.
11	Re-engineering leader	Focus on organizational and job re-structuring.

The principal is ultimately responsible to stakeholders for school performance. Structural reform with the decentralisation of responsibility for leadership and

management to individual schools together with education reforms requires the principal to interact with a broad spectrum of stakeholders (Caldwell, 2009; Gamage and Zaida, 2009). But these stakeholders may have different requirements for education quality. Earlier discussions in this chapter on education quality and how it might be achieved and on accountability to their main stakeholders have been used to produce a summary of the leadership role. This dual role, leading stakeholders in the improvement of education quality and ways of demonstrating accountability to different stakeholders, is illustrated in the Table 3.4. below.

**Table 3.4: Leadership role of the principal in relation to main stakeholders**

<b><i>Accountability to stakeholder</i></b>	<b><i>Types of accountability</i></b>	<b><i>Accountability for what aspect of education quality</i></b>	<b><i>Ways in which accountability for education quality is demonstrated</i></b>
Government	Identity, relational, upward, outward, political. professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement of goals and specifications relating to external reform demands e.g. value added</li> <li>• Delivering Value for money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of school development plan in response to external reform demands</li> <li>• Annual report</li> <li>• School self-evaluation</li> <li>• External school review</li> </ul>
School sponsor	Identity, relational, decentralization, upward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of vision, values and beliefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School's vision and mission statement</li> </ul>
School Management Council	Identity, relational, decentralization, inward, upward, professional. managerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocation of funds</li> <li>• Staffing and allocation of roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Achievement of goals and specifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School development planning</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation of school's performance</li> <li>• Annual report</li> </ul>
Teachers	Identity, relational, inward downward, decentralisation, professional, managerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equitable allocation of resources</li> <li>• Facilitating continuing professional development</li> <li>• Allocation of staffing to support student learning</li> <li>• Encouraging shared decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of learning partnerships</li> <li>• Staff involved in construction of development plan</li> <li>• Staff involved in governance</li> <li>• Annual report</li> </ul>
Parents	Identity, relational, market,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent satisfaction</li> <li>• Maintaining or improving school's image.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission statement</li> <li>• Publicity campaigns</li> <li>• Parental opinion</li> </ul>

	decentralisation, managerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining school tradition</li> </ul>	surveys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents involved in governance</li> <li>• Parents involved in evaluation</li> </ul>
Pupils/students	Downward, market, professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a broad curriculum meeting needs of individual students</li> <li>• Responding to students' concerns</li> <li>• Providing effective teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff – student council</li> <li>• Evaluation of teachers</li> </ul>

Matching types of accountability practices to school improvement needs is critical in educational-accountability reform to bring improvement in education quality and student learning (Wong and Nocotera, 2007). Such a view is reflected in the table above. In this process, the school principal appears to be ‘the key’ to success (Grogan and Andrews, 2002).

### 3.7. Conclusion

The main research question in this investigation is “How do the principals in Lasallian schools in Hong Kong perceive quality and accountability and how is this perception shaped by the unique context and their relationship to different stakeholders to whom they are accountable?” Four main research questions were identified in chapters 1 and 2. They are: 1. How do principals perceive education quality? 2. How do principals perceive other stakeholders view education quality? 3. How do principals perceive education quality can be achieved - managed or improved? 4. How do principals perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality? The contextual information discussed in Chapter 2 and the review of relevant literature in this chapter have provided the basis for the development of sub-questions for each of the four main research questions.

### **3.7.1. How do principals perceive education quality?**

Given the important role of the principal in achieving education quality (Fry, 2002; Goodlad, 1984), a significant factor in managing and improving quality is that the principal has an adequate conceptualisation of education quality that guides how he /she addresses the different views and demands of stakeholder groups such as parents, staff, school sponsoring body and the EDB. Therefore, the principal's view on the purpose of education can reflect his / her conceptualisation of education quality. Thus, the first sub-question is: What do the Lasallian principals think is the purpose of education?

Associated with educational reform to improve education quality, there seems to be a consensus that student learning experiences and outcomes based on cognitive and creative / emotional development are associated with education quality (Stoll and Fink, 1996; UNESCO, 2004). This leads to the second sub-question: What student learning experiences and outcomes do the principals think are important?

The tradition of a school is significantly linked to the quality of education in a school (Jenkins, 1995). As school leaders, principals need to have a clear understanding of the link between tradition and quality in their schools. This gives them the values needed to achieve 'its (quality) objectives and goals' (Vause 1997, p. 222). Tradition provides a distinctive element to quality in any school context and therefore from a principal's perspective 'To what extent do they think the Lasallian view of education quality is different from other schools?' is the third sub-question.

The context of a school is important to school improvement (Wimpelberg et al, 1989; Teddlie et al, 2000) and may influence a principal's view of education quality (Stoll and Mortimore, 1997). Lasallian schools in Hong Kong are located in catchment areas with differing socio-economic conditions and with differing intakes of students. It is possible that the Lasallian principals may have differing views on education quality because of their different school contexts. Thus the fourth sub-question is: 'How are the Lasallian principals' views on education quality influenced by their school context?'

### **3.7.2. How do principals perceive other stakeholders view education quality?**

In order to manage and improve education quality in school, it is important that principals understand the views of other stakeholders (government, teachers, parents and students) on education quality (Ainscow et al, 1994; Maoos, Mahony and Reeves, 1998). Arguably, to understand how principals perceive education quality, it is essential to know how they perceive other stakeholders' views as their views may be influenced by those of the stakeholders (Belchetz and Leithwood, 2007). Therefore, the logical fifth and sixth sub-questions are: How do their views of education quality compare with those of the government? How do their views on education quality compare with the views of other stakeholders?

### **3.7.3. How do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved - managed and / or improved?**

The discussion in Chapter 2 showed that both the government (EDB) and the Institute of Lasallian Brothers (ILBS) in Hong Kong play significant roles in

Lasallian schools as the former is the source of school funding and the latter is the school sponsoring body. The success of school development is dependent on the roles the government and the school sponsoring body play in helping the school to improve (Mahony, MacBeath and Maoos, 1998). To manage and / or improve education quality, the Lasallian principals need to seek assistance from them and they need to know the roles these two important stakeholders play to help their school improve. So, the seventh and eighth sub-questions are: How do the principals perceive the role of government in helping them to improve education quality ('pressure' and / or 'support')? How do they perceive the role of the Lasallian Brothers in helping to achieve quality?

The review of literature has shown that to successfully manage and improve education quality, principals as senior school leaders need to understand their own roles and the factors and strategies which are important in managing and improving education quality. Thus the necessary sub-questions are: How do they perceive their own role on managing and/ or improving education quality? What factors and strategies do they think are important for managing and improving education quality?

#### **3.7.4. How do principals perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?**

Accountability is important to achieving education quality (Cheng and Chan, 2000). A principal needs to find out what different stakeholders expect of him to execute his / her accountability effectively (Behn, 2001). It is important that the principal understands his / her accountability to different stakeholder groups (Burke, 2005; Maoos, Mahoney and Reeves, 1998). Thus a further sub-question is: To whom do the principals perceive they are accountable, for what aspects of

education quality and how is this achieved? With differing demands for education quality by different stakeholder groups, conflict is bound to occur. Being accountable to different stakeholders, principals have therefore to resolve potential conflicts between stakeholders (Wong and Nicotera, 2007). Thus, the twelfth and final sub-question is: How do principals perceive their own role in reconciling stakeholders' views on education quality?

## **Chapter 4 Research Design and Method**

- 4.1 Aim and Research Questions
- 4.2 Research Methods
- 4.3 Research Strategy: Case Study
- 4.4 Sampling Method
- 4.5 Data collection: semi-structured interview
- 4.6 Documentary Analysis
- 4.7 Administration of Data Collection Instrument
- 4.8 Data Analysis
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- 4.10 Pros and Cons of Insider Research
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- 4.12 Limitations of the Research
- 4.13 Conclusion

### **4.1 Aim and Research Questions**

The main research question in this investigation is ‘How do principals of the Lasallian schools in Hong Kong perceive education quality and accountability and how is this perception shaped by the unique context (of each school) and their relationship to different stakeholders to whom they are accountable? In the introduction, four specific research questions (RQ) were identified: How do principals perceive education quality? How do principals perceive other stakeholders view quality? How do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved - managed or improved? How do principals perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?

Following on from research on the context for the investigation in Hong Kong and the literature review, a series of sub-questions (SRQ) were identified which related to each of the main research questions.



(1) How do principals perceive education quality?

1. What do they think is the purpose of education?
2. What student learning experiences and outcomes do they think are important?
3. How do they think the Lasallian view of education quality is different from other schools?
4. How are their views on education quality influenced by the particular context of their school?

(2) How do principals perceive other stakeholders view education quality?

5. How do their views of education quality compare with those of the government?
6. How do their views on education quality compare with those of other stakeholders (teachers, parents and students)?

(3). How do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved – managed and/or improved?

7. How do they perceive the role of the government in helping them to achieve education quality ('pressure' and 'support') ?
8. How do they perceive the role of Lasallian Brothers in achieving education quality?
9. How do they perceive their own role in achieving education quality?
10. What factors and strategies do they think are important for achieving education quality?

(4). How do principals perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?

11. To whom do they perceive they are accountable, for what aspect of education and how is this achieved?
12. How do they perceive their own role in reconciling stakeholders' views on education quality?

## **4.2 Research Methods**

The choice of an appropriate research paradigm for an investigation depends on aims and research questions (Landsheere, 1988). That is the notion of 'fitness for purpose' which guides the choice of research design (Punch, 1998). The main aim of the research was to explore the Lasallian principals' perceptions of education quality and accountability in the face of structural and educational reform in Hong Kong. Hence the researcher chose to locate the study within the interpretive paradigm and to carry out an ethnographic study directly involving the principals with the intention of achieving an in-depth understanding of the phenomena, their perceptions of education quality and accountability with a view to achieving a consensus view of education quality with stakeholders. McMillan (2002, p. 6) summarises the research approach: 'Ethnographies collect observational and /or interview data and then summarise and analyse the data. Conclusions are based on a synthesis of the data that were collected.'

### **4.2.1. Research Paradigms: epistemology and ontology**

According to Creswell (1994), a paradigm is a set of ideas and beliefs which provide a consensual framework within which researchers and practitioners operate. Paradigms are essentially clusters of epistemological assumptions of knowledge about the social world and represent 'competing views about the ways in which social reality ought to be studied' (Bryman, 1988, p. 5). There are two basic research paradigms, positivist and interpretive (naturalistic or phenomenological) which are fundamentally different in their beliefs about the way in which knowledge is constructed and the methods which are typically used to collect data (Au, 2000; Husen, 1988; Leung, 1990). Since the aim was to capture the in-depth perceptions of the principals and those perceptions are subjective, the researcher worked within the interpretive, as opposed to the

positivist paradigm. A description of the essential features of the two paradigms based essentially on Easterby-Smith et al, (1994) is shown in the table below.

**Table 4.1: Key Features of the Positivist and Interpretive Paradigms**

	<b>Positivist paradigm</b>	<b>Interpretive paradigm</b>
<b>Basic beliefs</b>	<p>The world is external and objective</p> <p>The researcher is independent</p> <p>Knowledge is concerned with generalization, prediction and control</p>	<p>The world is socially constructed and subjective</p> <p>The researcher is part of what is being investigated</p> <p>Knowledge is concerned with interpretation, meaning and illumination</p>
<b>Role of the researcher</b>	<p>Focus on facts</p> <p>Search for causality and fundamental laws</p> <p>Reduce phenomena to simple elements</p> <p>Use a hypothetical- deductive method to formulate hypotheses and then test them</p>	<p>Focus on meanings</p> <p>Focus on describing, understanding and explaining people's behaviour</p> <p>Focus on the totality of each situation</p> <p>Develop ideas through analytical induction from data</p>
<b>Preferred methods</b>	<p>Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured</p> <p>Using large samples</p>	<p>Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena</p> <p>Small samples investigated in depth or over time</p>
<b>Source: Easterby-Smith et al, 1994, p.80</b>		

Epistemologically, researchers working in the positivist tradition regard the social world as being hard, real and external to the individual (Cohen and Manion, 1989). Ontologically, the social phenomena investigated are external to the researcher who is independent of the investigation and maintains a detached and objective view in order to understand the facts (Duffy, 1986; Vrasidas, 2001). The research participants' interpretation of situations are ignored (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Positivists exhibit a pre-occupation with objectivity,

replicability and causality (Bryman, 1988). The strength of such detachment guards against bias and ensures objectivity (Carr, 1994; Duffy, 1986). The aim of research is to discover the patterns and regularities of the social world (Cassell and Seymon, 1995; Denscombe, 2003) and the analysis of investigations ‘must be expressed in laws or law generalisations’ (Cohen, 2000, p. 8 ).

Epistemologically, an interpretive approach views the social world as ‘ ... more subjective.. based on experience and insight’ (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 7).

Ontologically, social reality is the product of the subjective experience of an individual (Vrasidas, 2001). Aspects of social reality have no existence apart from the meanings that individuals construct for them (Kumar, 1996).

Interpretivists emphasise the different constructions and meanings people place on their experiences (Erickson, 1986; Holloway and Wheeler, 1997; Easterby-Smith et al, 1994), the subjective reality for individuals (Middlewood et al, 1999) and the importance of empathy and understanding with research participants (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Easterby-Smith et al, 1994).

#### **4.2.2. Quantitative and qualitative methods**

The appropriate choice of research methods for an investigation depends on the research aims and questions (Robson, 1993; Cooper and Schindler, 2001; Zikmund, 1997). Two research methods, quantitative and qualitative related respectively to the positivist and interpretive research paradigms, were considered for use in this investigation. Quantitative research refers to ‘empirical research where the data are in the form of numbers’ (Punch, 1998, p. 4). Quantitative research focuses on the measurement of objective facts and variables and the relationship between them and is independent of context (Neuman, 2000 ). Statistical analysis is important (Cooper and Schindler, 2001;

Rubin and Babbie,1993). However, Cormack (1991) and LaPorte (1997) comment that it is difficult to use statistical analysis and quantification to find out and understand the true perspectives and authentic experience of research participants. Using such an approach would have made it difficult to gain a holistic view of the Lasallian principals and their environment.

Qualitative techniques are associated with the interpretive paradigm (Cassell and Seymon, 1995; Fryer, 1991). The term qualitative research refers to ‘research where the data are not in the form of numbers’ (Punch, 1998, p. 4) and the findings are not usually arrived at by statistical procedures (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Qualitative methods are often associated with the collection and analysis of written or spoken texts or the direct observation of behaviour (Cassell and Seymon, 1995). Researchers who use this approach are primarily interested in the ways different people make sense of their lives; in other words, they are concerned with participants’ perspectives (Vrasidas, 2001). The strength of this approach is that it allows a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the research participants, the Lasallian principals, than could be achieved through a more rigid quantitative approach (Duffy,1986). The researcher can obtain insight through discovering meanings in the verbal data and subjective analysis from the perspectives of research participants (Gall et al, 1999).

As the core task in this investigation is to describe, understand and explain Lasallian principals’ views on education quality and accountability and how these might be achieved in the face of reform proposals and influenced by the unique situation in each school, the interpretive paradigm rather than the positivist paradigm was chosen. A qualitative approach was chosen as it enabled the researcher to obtain relevant and in-depth information from each of the principals of all the Lasallian schools in Hong Kong using semi-structured

interviews supported by documentary evidence (Best and Kahn, 1989; Hoddinott and Pill, 1997; Rubin and Babbie, 1995). Obtaining intricate details about their thought processes are difficult to obtain using quantitative methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

#### **4.2.3. Methodological approaches: ethnography and interpretive phenomenology**

Two methodological approaches frequently used in qualitative research are ethnography and interpretive phenomenology. Both are exploratory, both use interviews to collect data and both look for meaning in the narratives but there are also significant differences (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Ethnography concentrates on the individual or shared views of a particular culture and aims to describe the cultural knowledge of the research participants (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007). The ethnographer can build up an overall picture of the language, rituals and relationships within a given community (Hammersley, 1992). Interpretive phenomenology tries to uncover concealed meaning in the words of the narrative and the research participants' subjective experiences (Sorrell and Redmond, 1995). See table below.

**Table 4.2: Distinguishing features of ethnography and interpretive phenomenology**

<b>Research methodology</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Distinguishing features</b>
<b>Ethnography</b>	Concentrates on the descriptions people give to their daily lives, enabling the ethnographer to explore a number of views at the same time.	The ethnographer is seen as an observer.  Meaning is cultural.
<b>Interpretive phenomenology</b>	Concentrates on the phenomenon under review through the discovery and interpretation by the researcher of concealed meaning embedded in the words of participant narrative.	The phenomenologist is seen as the data interpreter empowered by their understanding of participant experience. Meaning is what the researcher understands it to be

In this investigation, if ethnography and interpretive phenomenology were successfully combined, the phenomenological perspective would enable the researcher to concentrate on the phenomenon under review, the principals' perception of education quality and accountability in the face of proposals for structural and educational reform, whilst the ethnographic perspective would allow the phenomenon to be considered in terms of the cultural background - language, rituals and relationships of the Lasallian Community which includes stakeholders as well as Lasallian Brothers. The ethnographic researcher concentrates on how principals in the Lasallian Community share similar views but also differ in their views on education quality and accountability. The extent to which the individuality of the principal's experience is influenced by the unique school context (socio-economic and historical) is a key aspect of this investigation.

#### **4.3 Research Strategy: Case Study**

A case study is 'an intensive study of a specific individual or specific context' (Trochim, 2001 p. 161), 'a focus study' (Simons, 1989, p. 116) and also a 'form of enquiry, an explanation of the unknown' (Basse, 2002, p. 108). According to Yin (2003), a case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident and where multiple sources of evidence are used. A case can be a programme, an event, an activity or individuals (Creswell, 1998) but a case study must be bounded by time and place (Stake, 1995). The main aim of a case study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the emerging situation with an interest in process and outcomes. A case study aims for a high degree of detail and thick description is

one of its features (Hammersley, 1992). The focus of this case study is the Lasallian principals' perceptions of quality in their school contexts. It examines the impact of an education reform programme on a community of schools seeking to achieve a consensual view on education quality which satisfies the needs of different stakeholders. The task for the researcher is to unravel the complexities of the principal's perceptions (Denscombe, 1998).

Case study is more a strategy than a research method. It has a distinct advantage over other research strategies when a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control (Yin, 2003). The strategy is particularly suitable for research which is interested in process, especially of a longitudinal nature (Morrison, 2002). Case study has the advantage of allowing a deeper understanding of complex issues and can explain them through the perspectives of research participants (Tellis, 1997). The direct involvement of research participant and researcher in a case study can make the researcher into an active participant in the event(s) being studied (Yin, 1993). Only by achieving this can the complexities of the processes being studied be portrayed and judgements made in the context of a particular case (Bassey, 2002).

Case study suffers from several disadvantages. A frequent criticism is that it is not suitable for generalisation because 'it is bounded in time and place'. (Hammersley, 1992 p.184). This implies that any case study is 'local' and 'immediate' in 'character' and 'meanings' and it will not be constant across time and space (Gall and Borg, 1996, p. 22). Findings from case or case studies are also difficult to generalise beyond the immediate case (external validity) because of inherent subjectivity on the part of the researcher; in addition, the researcher may not see other important factors (social, economic and political) which are operating externally. However, Yin (1989, 2005) contends that there



is scope for generalisation from case studies. Analytical generalisation can be used to generalise the results of a case study to theory and not to population; if two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication ( i.e. transferability) may be claimed. Construct validity is also problematic because of the subjectivity of the researcher, but this can be counteracted by using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence and having a draft case study report reviewed by key participants (Yin, 2003). A further disadvantage is that case study often contains a substantial amount of narratives which are difficult or even impossible to summarise into neat, general propositions and theories (Mitchell and Charmaz, 1996; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Bassey (2002) has identified three possible types of case study for a research investigation: story-telling and picture drawing case studies which are analytical accounts of educational events, projects, programmes or systems; theory seeking and theory testing case studies leading to fuzzy general predictions; and evaluative case studies which set out to explore some educational programme, system, project or event in order to focus on its 'worthwhileness'. This study was neither theory seeking nor theory testing. Thus, a storytelling and picture drawing case study form of enquiry (Bassey, 2002) was employed as this approach provided narrative accounts from all the Lasallian principals that are crucial for this investigation.

#### **4.4. Sampling Method**

Sampling considerations pervade all aspects of research. The idea of a sample is linked to that of a population which refers to all the cases or participants under investigation. Robson (1993, p. 136 ) describes a sample as 'a selection from the population'. Given the requirements of this study, purposeful and criterion sampling were adopted. In qualitative research, research sites and participants

are selected using purposeful sampling (Patton,1990); this involves ‘selecting information rich cases for study in depth’ (p.169) when the researcher wants to understand something about those cases without needing or desiring to generalise to all such cases. Purposeful samples are selected according to the needs of the study and include participants ‘with atypical experiences so that the entire range of experiences and the breadth of the concept or phenomena may be understood’ (Morse,1991,p. 129). In this investigation, by selecting all ten principals of Lasallian schools would hopefully ensure that a full range of experiences and views were available to the researcher. Principals varied in their leadership experience and their views were likely to vary depending on their particular school context.

Of the 15 different types of purposeful sampling strategies available for selecting information rich cases (Patton, 1990), criterion sampling was selected for this investigation. This involved the selection of research participants according to certain pre-determined criteria. In this study, the selection criteria were the principals of all ten Lasallian schools. Given their positions, it was anticipated that each of the principals would be able to provide the researcher with rich data on their perceptions of education quality and accountability in their particular school context. They were the key informants who had ‘special knowledge or perceptions that would not otherwise be available to the researcher’ (Gall and Borg, 1996, p.306). It was the intention of the researcher to clarify how principals perceived their stakeholders viewed education quality and accountability but not to seek the stakeholders’ views directly. Besides, owing to the constraints of time and resources, a detailed investigation of the views of different stakeholder groups on education quality and accountability to confirm the views of the Lasallian principals will be left to another study.

## **4.5 Data Collection**

### **4.5.1. Introduction**

Data for this study was collected through one semi-structured interview with each principal and documentary analysis. Wherever possible, a documentary search was carried out to verify or supplement the information provided by the principals. A quantitative approach, such as the use of questionnaires, would not have yielded the type of data required. Other quantitative research methods, such as large scale survey, were not considered because generalisability of findings was not the main concern of this study. Ontologically, the researcher was interested in the perceptions of the principals and qualitative semi-structured interviews provided the appropriate epistemological tool for this type of data gathering. An interview is a widely used tool for collecting qualitative data (DiCicco et al, 2006; Kvale, 1996; Wragg, 2002) and is the basic research instrument in case study (Bush, 2002; Nisbet and Watt, 1984). Given that the focus of this investigation was to uncover the ‘meanings’ of Hong Kong Lasallian school principals’ perception on education quality and accountability, an interview was considered to be appropriate. It was felt that in an interview situation, principals would be more likely to reveal their values, thoughts and feelings (Kitwood, 1997). However, interviewing is a time consuming business that requires thorough preparation and follow up. Interviews are also prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer (Cohen and Manion, 1989).

### **4.5.2. Semi-structured interview**

Interviews are normally classified using a three part taxonomy - structured or fixed response, semi-structured and unstructured or open ended (Freebody, 1991; Wragg, 2002). In this study, a semi-structured interview was selected as it provided the researcher with more flexibility to explore emerging issues

(Freebody, 2003; Gall, Borg and Gall, 1999). Without the scope to probe responses, as in the interview setting, the data would have been ‘thin’ and underdeveloped. Robson (1993, p. 229) contends that ‘face to face interviews offer the possibility of modifying ones’ line of enquiry, following interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that postal and other self-administered questionnaires cannot’. An open ended interview allows interviewees to say as little or as much as they like but comparability across respondents is sacrificed for personally relevant information (Breakwell, 1990; Gunter, 2000). It is difficult to make reasonable and valid comparisons across informants (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). This investigation attempted to compare the views of Lasallian principals on education quality and accountability taking into consideration each school’s unique context but time constraints meant that open ended interviews were not considered to be realistic.

#### **4.5.3. Interview schedule**

The main research questions and sub-questions, derived from the context chapter and literature review, formed the foundation for the development of interview questions (Appendix 2: Interview schedule, p. 6-7). These questions were designed to elicit information from the Lasallian principals about their perceptions of education quality and accountability and their inter-relationship. An interview schedule which is designed to guide the interview lists the issues and topics that should be covered (Rubin and Babbie, 1993). The interviews with all the principals followed the same semi-structured format, with the main research questions (and sub-questions) used as the basis of the interview schedule which consisted of an opening phase, main theme (main body of the interview) phase and concluding phase (Appendix 2: Interview schedule, p. 4-8). By using this consistent approach, the researcher aimed to make comparisons of the interview data more valid. In this investigation, one semi-

structured interview was conducted with each principal in the period between October 2007 and July 2010. The Lasallian principals were extremely busy and it was difficult to make an appointment to interview them.

The potential drawbacks of an interview are researcher bias, difficulty in understanding the interview questions, inequality between interviewer and interviewee and the difficulty of maintaining a neutral stance by the interviewer. (Cohen et al, 2000; Schaeffer and Maynard, 2002; Wragg, 2002). To overcome these potential disadvantages, the interview schedule was piloted with a principal of a non-Lasallian school and one senior teacher in a Lasallian school. This was intended to check the language level of the questions, the research participants' understanding of the questions and their reactions to the interview. The research participants were treated as equals. If sensitive questions were asked, they were reminded that their responses would be held in strict confidence. The interviewer maintained a neutral stance to avoid influencing the responses of the research participants.

Both prompts and probes were used in the main phase of the interview 'to help participants say what they want to say' (Drever, 1995, p. 23). Prompts are concerned with what participants know but have not yet mentioned; probes are directed at what they have already said, 'asking them to clarify and explain but not as a rule to justify or defend their position (Drever, 1995, p 23- 24). The researcher used either prompts or probes whenever the situation necessitated. A list of prompts and probes was employed for the researcher's reference (Appendix 2: Interview schedule, pp. 1-4).

#### **4.6. Documentary analysis**

In this investigation, documentary analysis was used with semi-structured interviews to provide data triangulation to achieve trustworthiness (Bush, 2002; Jack and Raturi, 2006; Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Documents such as government policy statements and school documents can be a useful source of information in qualitative research (Cortazzi, 2002). In this investigation, government policy statements, guidelines, circulars and external evaluation reports provided essential contextual information on government intentions for education reform and on the implementation of reform. ESR reports where available were used to cross-check evidence gained from interviews with each principal; for instance, in the case of principal 7, both data sources confirmed that the principal had caring relationships with teachers and students. This convergence of data was achieved through method and data triangulation which is an ‘inter-method’ approach to triangulation (Maggs- Rapport, 2000). Documentary analysis of school vision and mission statements, prospectuses, magazines and external school review (ESR) reports by the EDB were collected where possible from individual Lasallian schools. Vision and mission statements reflected the principal’s views on education quality and accountability held in different Lasallian schools. The school prospectus, school magazine and ESR report reflected how school principals had responded to accommodate stakeholders’ views on quality and accountability in different school contexts. These documents provided valuable information on school cultures and were also used to verify data from the interviews.

Documentary analysis focused on the analysis and classification of themes and meanings (Cortazzi, 2002). An inductive category development approach was used for the qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000c). This is a reductive

process to formulate categories of data from the selected documents. The emerging coding technique was used (Stemler, 2001). First, following preliminary examination of selected documents, the data was reviewed to establish category definition with reference to the research questions which determined the boundary aspects of the text taken into account; the categories thus formed were tentative. Then, within a feedback loop, the categories were reviewed and eventually reduced to main categories which were then used. The findings from quantitative content analysis were compared with findings from semi-structured interviews with the Lasallian principals to confirm their perceptions and to check if any views had been missed in the interviews. Taking school 1 as an example, the principal reported that his students had achieved an excellent academic attainment record which was confirmed by the 2007 school magazine. 100% of students taking the Hong Kong University Entrance Examination were successful and admitted to university; 30% of them gained a grade A pass in all subjects.

#### **4.7 Administration of data collection instrument**

Two Lasallian Brothers were approached to seek approval for the investigation. One was the supervisor of two Lasallian schools and the other Director of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers and supervisor of the remaining Lasallian schools. Following their approval, the researcher telephoned all principals of Lasallian schools in Hong Kong for their approval and appointments were made for interviews. As Cantonese was the principals' first language and the interview questions were written in English, principals were sent the interview schedule in advance to enable them to prepare for the interview. Although they were allowed to respond in either Cantonese or English, all chose Cantonese as they could express themselves without any language impairment. Interviews with all the principals followed the same semi-structured format and prompts and probes

were used where necessary. The sequence of questions was the same for all the principals and there was no difference of emphasis in the questions. Principals were able to articulate their views and some chose to respond in more detail on some questions. All the interviews were voice recorded with the principals' permission and were first transcribed into Chinese and subsequently translated into English. Following the completion of the transcription, both language versions of the text were returned to the participants for checking in a second meeting and some questions were asked to clarify issues arising from the first interview. This member checking was intended to reinforce the trustworthiness of the research.

#### **4. 8 Data analysis**

In order to combine ethnography and phenomenology, data analysis must be sympathetic to considerations which overlap both methodologies. For instance, both look for commonalities and shared themes with the principals' narratives and both reduce data to uncover the essence of participant meaning or to clarify cultural meaning. The researcher can reduce the data to search for typologies or understand the interview themes in accordance with ethnographic data analysis techniques whilst reinforcing the process by using a process of cognitive reasoning to understand the phenomena (Maggs-Rapport, 2000, pp. 219-229). In this investigation, the researcher used the technique of analytic induction to process the data provided by principals. Analytic induction is where 'concepts are developed inductively from the data and raised to a higher level of abstraction and their inter-relationships are then traced out' (Punch, 1998, p.201). It is also an approach where 'theory comes last and is developed from or through data generation and analysis' (Mason, 2002, p. 180).



The term Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) refers to the range of processes and procedures whereby the researcher moves from the qualitative data that has been collected to some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the participants and phenomena under investigation (Holbrook and Atkinson, 1996; Gibbs, 2002 ). Five stages of analysis were employed for analysing the interview data: formation of categories; assembly of analytical and sub-categories into a guide for coding; coding of the data; quantifying surveys of materials; and interpretation of quantified results from interviews (Schmidt, 2004).

#### **4.8.1. Formation of analytical categories**

The first stage involved grouping data into different categories for analysis and comparison (Dey, 1993). To keep the data analysis focussed, categories were created according to the four main research questions:

- 1 Principals' perception of education quality
- 2 Principals' perception of other stakeholders' view of education quality
- 3 Principals' perception of how education quality could be achieved
- 4 Principals' perception of their accountability to different stakeholders

#### **4.8.2. Assembly of analytical and sub-categories as guide to coding**

The second stage involved the identification of sub-categories as a guide for coding. The four main research questions were broken down into sub-questions to form sub-categories to aid the organisation and coding of data from the interviews.

## **1. Perception of education quality categories**

SRQ1 Purpose of education

SQR2 Important students' learning experiences and outcomes

SQR3 Distinctiveness of Lasallian schools

SQR4 Influence of the individual school context on education quality

## **2. Perceptions of other stakeholders on education quality categories**

SRQ5 Comparison between principals' and government's views on education quality

SQR6 Comparison between principals' and other stakeholders' (teachers, parents and students) views of stakeholders on education quality

## **3. Achievement of education quality categories**

SQR 7 Role of government in helping to improve education quality

SQR 8 Role of Lasallian Brothers in achieving quality

SQR 9 Principal's own role in managing and /or improving education quality

SQR 10 Factors and strategies important for managing and improving education quality

## **4. Accountability to different stakeholders categories**

SQR 11 Principal's accountability to whom, for what and in what form

SQR 12 Principal's role in reconciling stakeholders' views on education quality

### **4.8.3. Coding of the data**

A third stage, coding of the data involved breaking the data into units for analysis and categorising the units. This begged the question, 'Which words, ideas or events should be looked for in the data and into which categories should they be put?' (Denscombe, 2003, p. 271). The data coding entailed identification of the emerging themes contained in the transcribed text passages

of segments from the interviews (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Text passages containing identical themes were coded in the same way; passages containing different themes received different codes. In order to compare relevant cases in the interviews with regard to dominant tendencies, irrelevant materials were removed (Schmidt, 2004). Relevant material was allotted to an analytical category. Coding was based on both the literature review and research questions and new labels were added as derived from new insights gained from the interview scripts. For instance, in the case of SQR 1 (Purpose of education) the codes were AC for Active Citizenship and HE for Human Education, in the case of SRQ2 (Important students' learning experiences and outcomes) VAM for Value Added Measures and GSD for Generic Skill Development and in the case of SRQ12 (Principals' role in reconciling stakeholders' views on education quality) CF for Communication Facilitator and PS for Problem-Solver.

### **Categorical indexing**

During coding, categorical indexing was used to identify themes which are grounded in data from interviews but do not appear in an orderly and sequential manner. This indexing involved linking labels to words, sentences or paragraphs in the interview text to gain a "sense of the scope and coverage of the data" (Mason, 2002, p. 153). The researcher had no pre-conceived idea of what data, labels or themes would emerge in the process. In this investigation, several significant themes emerged and are presented below in relation to each of the main research questions:

**Table 4.3. Emergence of significant themes**

<b>Main research questions</b>	<b>Emergent themes</b>
<b>1. How do principals perceive education quality?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominance of academic attainment as a key indicator of education quality</li> <li>• Distinctive Lasallian values and beliefs about purpose of education and relationships between staff and students</li> <li>• Importance of school's unique local context in providing a steer for school's development</li> <li>• Impact of market forces and competition for students on management of education quality and quality assurance</li> </ul>
<b>2. How do principals perceive other stakeholders view quality ?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic education is an ideal</li> </ul>
<b>3. How do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved-managed or improved?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School development planning as a vehicle for school improvement and /or accountability</li> <li>• Role of school culture in improving education quality and achieving accountability to stakeholders</li> <li>• Importance of quality of teachers and teaching</li> <li>• Multiple roles of principal in maintenance (management) and / or development (leadership)</li> <li>• Role of distributed leadership in the improvement of education quality</li> <li>• Potential of school-parent partnerships</li> </ul>
<b>4. How do principals perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tension between different concepts of education quality</li> <li>• Balance between pressure (accountability) and support (development) from different stakeholders</li> <li>• Scope for reconciliation of stakeholder views based on accountability to students</li> </ul>

#### **4.8.4 Quantifying surveys of material and interpretation of quantified results**

In the fourth stage of the analytical strategy, quantifiable material was presented in table form revealing indications of frequencies in categories. This provided a preliminary overview of distributions in materials from the interviews and pointed to possible relationships that could be pursued in the qualitative analysis (Schmidt, 2004). For example, eight Lasallian principals indicated the

importance of academic attainment in their narratives which pointed to the possible relationship between academic attainment and education quality in the school of these principals. As asserted by Vrasidas (2001, p. 3 ), ‘interpretive approaches to educational research do not necessarily exclude the use of quantitative or statistical techniques’. The key issue is the decision about what makes sense to count and how it can strengthen the plausibility of the researcher’s focus on the meaning of phenomena (Vrasidas, 2001). In the final stage, the quantified results from the interviews were examined and interpreted.

#### **4.9 Trustworthiness of the Research**

In this study, the researcher used an interpretivist stance and attempted to achieve trustworthiness in the way in which the data was collected and analysed. For the interpretivist, trustworthiness ‘pertains to how much the researcher has adhered to procedures specific to the chosen method, has exercised rigour in inquiry, and is open about describing the procedures’ (Berg and Latin, 2004, p, 221). The conventional criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research are internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, in this investigation, the interpretation of trustworthiness is based on alternative criteria (Bassey, 2002; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Kincheloe and McLaren, 1998; Leininger, 1994; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). These were credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity). Credibility examines the fit between research participants’ views and those of the researcher (Janesick, 2000). Transferability refers to the generalizability of findings; in a qualitative enquiry, this concerns only the case to case transfer of information (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Dependability refers the assessment (i.e. correctness and suitability) of the data collection, data analysis and theory generation.

Confirmability is concerned with establishing that interpretations of findings are clearly derived from the data.

In order to achieve trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it is possible to use six techniques for establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis and member checking. In this investigation, in view of the time and resource constraints as a consequence of being the sole researcher, some limitations were placed on the use of these techniques. Prolonged engagement was limited to one semi-structured interview for each principal which lasted between two hours to three and a half hours. Persistent observation was not considered because the principals were very busy and unwilling to be followed around in school to be observed. Member checking consisted of the researcher providing each of the principals with a summary of the interview transcript which ensured that findings were dependable and confirmable. Triangulation can take place at a number of stages in any research process - during the research design, data collection, data analysis or throughout the whole investigation. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) identify four basic types of triangulation which are ideally used in conjunction with each other in all qualitative research:

- Data triangulation - various data sources are used
- Investigator triangulation - various researchers work together to counteract the potential bias of a single researcher
- Theory triangulation- a variety of perspectives are used to explore single data sets
- Methodological triangulation - more than one methodology is used to study a single research problem

This investigation made use of three types of triangulation - data, theory and methodological to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. As previously

noted data was collected from interview transcripts which were subsequently cross - checked with information from school documents. Two theoretical frameworks were used to interpret the findings, the models for managing quality and quality assurance (Tam and Cheng, 2003) and the Stoll and Fink (1996) model of school improvement. As previously noted, the combined use of ethnography and interpretive phenomenology provided benefits from both methodological approaches. For member checking, a summary of the interview transcripts was returned to the Lasallian principals for comment and validation.

#### **4.10 The Pros and Cons of Insider Research**

In view of the pros and cons of being an insider researcher, Mercer (2007) considers that ‘conducting insider research is like wielding a double edged sword (p.12). Researchers investigating the organisations in which they work face advantages and disadvantages in their role as insider researchers. Access to the sample population is a major advantage and is easily granted to insiders. Given that this researcher had been a senior school teacher in one Lasallian school for a long time and he and the other research participants were working for the same school sponsoring body, access to all Lasallian principals was granted by the Director of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers in Hong Kong without any difficulty. This study was subsequently supported by all principals in Lasallian schools.

Drawing on the work of Hockey (1993, p. 199), Hellowell (2006) identifies the strengths of the insider viewpoint working in familiar settings: ‘....the relative lack of culture shock or disorientation, the possibility of enhanced rapport and communication, the ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses, and

the likelihood that respondents reveal more intimate details of their lives to someone considered empathetic...'. Therefore, an insider researcher enjoys the advantages of 'freer access, stronger rapport and a deeper, more readily available frame or shared reference with which to interpret the data they collect' (Mercer, 2007, p. 13). As an insider researcher with a principal under whom I was working, I could easily understand what she was recounting during the interview. I did not have any sense of confusion, disorientation and uncertainty which might be felt by someone who had not been exposed to the cultural environment of a Lasallian school. When she talked about the Lasallian community, I could easily understand that the term referred to the wider fraternal community formed by all Lasallian schools in Hong Kong.

On the negative side, as the researcher was the sole instrument for data collection and analysis which depended on the researcher's interpretation, there was clearly room for researcher bias at all stages. The researcher had his own views about the case school in which he was working, and there was a danger that he might have brought his preconceptions into the analysis (Mercer, 2007). It might also have been difficult to maintain objectivity given the researcher's previous and close contact with the institution (Robson, 1993). Insider research is also affected by informant bias, that is the effect of 'people's willingness to talk to you, what people say to you, is influenced by who they think you are' (Drever, 1995, p. 31). If they think you can / cannot be trusted, they will tell you the truth or vice versa (Mercer, 2007; Robson, 1993).

My relationship with other participants in the study as a staff member belonging to the same school sponsoring body placed a constraint on them to reveal their true opinions and feelings as they might think that my findings would be made available to the school sponsoring body to evaluate their own performance in school. To enhance trustworthiness, two actions were taken to counteract the



negative effects of being an insider researcher. First, in the researcher's opinion the absolute guarantee of anonymity and a promise that the findings would not be given to the school sponsoring body or any other people without their permission served to limit any possible negative effects. Second, as an insider researcher, I tried my best not to publicise my own opinions about research topics to influence the views of the research participants.

#### **4. 11 Ethical Considerations**

The term research ethics refers to a set of guiding principles for researchers to inform their moral judgement in carrying out their work. To ensure trustworthiness for the investigation, a consideration of ethical principles was required (Busher, 2002; Dockrell, 1988). These principles were respect for and responsibility to research participants who agreed to take part without coercion. As previously noted, the Director of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers in Hong Kong, the supervisors of the Hong Kong Lasallian schools and the principals of each of the Lasallian schools were approached to seek their consent to be involved in the investigation. In addition to the two actions suggested in 4.10 for achieving trust from the principals, I also assured them of their rights to withdraw from the research.

In order to seek initial approval for the investigation, two Lasallian Brothers were approached, one the supervisor of two Lasallian schools and the other Director of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers in Hong Kong and also supervisor of the remaining Lasallian schools. Subsequently, the researcher telephoned principals of all Lasallian schools for their approval and appointments were made to conduct the interviews. Respondents were treated as equals. If sensitive questions were asked, participants were reminded that answers were held in strict confidence. The interviewer maintained a neutral response in all questions

to avoid biasing the responses. The participants took part in a voluntary way without coercion.

#### **4.12 Limitations of the Research**

There are several limitations in this research study. The first relates to the scope of the study in that the findings are only valid from the perspective of the Lasallian principals, and do not represent the direct views of different stakeholder groups. Second, there was a danger of bias on the part of the researcher who was committed to Lasallian values and beliefs relating to the purpose of education and desirable learning experiences for students. Third, in terms of trustworthiness and in particular, using the technique of prolonged engagement, it could be argued that a second interview with each principal would have been useful to explore the topic more fully and at a later stage in the phasing in of both structural and education reform proposals. Fourth, the sample population was not large enough to generalise the findings as it was limited to one particular group, the school principals. Fifth, it is possible that during the interviews the principals might not fully reveal their perceptions of quality and accountability fearing that making clear their views might be used to assess their performance. A sixth concern was that access to more documentary sources would have been valuable; in particular external evaluation reports were generally not available.

#### **4.13 Conclusion**

This chapter has explained and justified the methodology adopted in this investigation. It has sought to demonstrate how the researcher has attempted to achieve ‘fitness for purpose’ in the selection of an interpretive approach so that the ‘meanings’ principals attach to education quality and accountability in their

schools would emerge. The chapter has also explained and justified the processes adopted for data collection and analysis and the steps undertaken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. In the next chapter, findings from interviews with Lasallian principals are presented, analysed and discussed.

## **Chapter 5 Findings and analysis**

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Purpose of Education
- 5.3 Student Learning Outcomes and Experiences
- 5.4 Distinctiveness of Lasallian Schools
- 5.5 Influence of School's Context on Lasallian Principals' views of Education Quality
- 5.6 Comparison between Principals' and Government's views on Education Quality
- 5.7 Comparison between Principals' and other Stakeholders' (parents', teachers' and students') views on Education Quality
- 5.8 Role of Government in helping to achieve Education Quality
- 5.9 Role of Lasallian Brothers in helping to achieve Education Quality
- 5.10 Role of Principals in achieving Education Quality
- 5.11 Factors and Strategies for achieving Education Quality
- 5.12 Principals' conceptualisation of accountability
- 5.13 To whom the principals are held Accountable, For What aspect of Quality and How this is Achieved
- 5.14 Role of Principals in reconciling Stakeholders' views on Education Quality

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and analyses the interview data from the principals of the ten Lasallian schools in Hong Kong relating to the four main research questions. These relate to the main aim of the research which is to investigate the Lasallian principals' perception of education quality and accountability and how this perception is shaped by their unique school context and their relationship with different stakeholders to whom they are accountable. The questions are:

1. How do principals perceive education quality ?
2. How do principals perceive other stakeholders view education quality?

3. How do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved – managed or improved?
4. How do principals perceive they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?

The findings and analysis are presented in relation to the twelve sub-questions which relate to the main research questions and include emerging themes identified in the analysis section of Chapter 4. These sub-questions are: 1. What do Lasallian principals think is the purpose of education? 2. What learning outcomes and experiences do they think are important? 3. To what extent do they think the Lasallian view of education is different from other schools? 4. How are their views on education quality influenced by the particular context of their school? 5. How do their views on education quality compare with the government? 6. How do their views on education quality compare with those of other stakeholders (teachers, parents and students)? 7. How do they perceive the role of the government in helping to achieve education quality ('pressure' and / or 'support')? 8. How do they perceive the role of the Lasallian Brothers in helping to achieve education quality? 9. How do they perceive their own role in managing and / or improving education quality? 10. What factors and strategies do they think are important for managing and improving education quality? 11. To whom do they perceive they are accountable, for what aspect of education quality and how is this achieved? 12. How do they perceive their own role in reconciling stakeholders' views on education quality?

## **5.2 Purpose of Education**

Education systems are often structured around what is believed to be a shared vision and related concepts of education. Each of these visions has a distinct rationale and represents a plausible justification for education change (Leu, 2005). A school can embrace several or all of these visions but they implicitly

compete with each other. The interview data indicated that the Lasallian principals perceived a range of purposes of education. They were holistic education (all principals), Education for all (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9), preparing students for active citizenship (Principals 2, 5, 7 and 9), the provision of human education to enable students to respect human rights (Principals 1, 3 and 4), fostering students' personal development (Principal 7) and helping students to achieve a smooth transition to adult life (Principal 8). Three principals (Principals 2, 8 and 10) explicitly referred to the need to foster a positive attitude to lifelong learning.

Holistic education is an important concept in Nagel and Kvernbekk's (1997) model of education quality and forms part of the education rationale of both the ILBS (BP, 2007) and the EDB (EC, 1999). Holistic education is an important aspect of curriculum reform in Hong Kong, which is concerned with developing students' all round potential (Forbes, 2003; Martin, 2002; Miller, 2001). The Education Commission in Hong Kong defines Holistic Education as: 'all areas covering ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics' (EC, 1999, p. 15). Holistic education is also one of the key components of the Lasallian model of education quality (Table 2.1) and the fact that all Lasallian school principals were strongly supportive of the concept implied that the Institute of Lasallian Brothers had a strong influence on the educational philosophy in the Lasallian school community. For Principal 9, the intention was clear: 'We want to train our students to become a whole person, that is holistic education which includes religious education'. The intended learning outcomes of holistic education were identified by Principal 5: 'The focus of education in our school is on the five good education virtues - ethical behaviour, good wisdom, good sportsmanship, good team participation and aesthetics'.

Secondary school principal 3 explained his rationale for supporting holistic education: 'Holistic education fits the working of education for all principals, for which the Lasallian Brothers are working in their mission - all people, whether they be rich or poor, are entitled to receive education. Besides, holistic education allows students to receive training in different areas and have a chance to develop their special talents.' Enthusiastic support for holistic education was provided by primary principal 8: 'We are Lasallians. We are committed to execute the work of the Lasallian Brothers, in particular for those in greatest need, both rich and poor. This is education for all. Holistic education is the best definition for education quality and an ideal instrument for executing education for all in Lasallian schools'.

In Lasallian schools, Education for All (EFA), the idea of education being available to all students irrespective of their background is promoted by the Lasallian Brothers and supported by Colclough et al (2005). This view was shared by a majority of principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9).

According to Principal 3 Education for all aims to give a chance of education to all people disregarding wealth, poverty, age and race. Principal 1 has a wider coverage for EFA: 'Education for all signifies that schools never reject people who want to receive education', an idea which was strongly supported by the Director of ILBS who further asserted that EFA should serve to meet the different needs of students and develop their different abilities through different teaching and learning strategies without racial discrimination (BP, 2007).

Active citizenship can be seen as having a transformative function (Harvey, 1995) which was considered necessary to change societal values by placing less emphasis on wealth accumulation and more on creating a more caring society. The importance of active citizenship was endorsed by Principals 2, 5, 7 and 9.

Principal 2 emphasised that active citizenship was achievable by all: 'In the current society, young people lack a perception of correct values for society. When they come out to work in society, even though they are not very good academically, they can still be good citizens. That is the rationale of our school'. Another principal (Principal 8) was of the opinion that Lasallian values were somewhat of an antidote to undesirable societal values: 'When our students enter society, they do not focus mainly on money making. They also focus on working for society. This is because the Lasallian spirit has been implanted in them'. For another principal (Principal 4), active citizenship could be helped by the emphasis on holistic education: 'Education must enable students to receive holistic education to cope with the requirements of society. Eventually it is hoped that our students can serve society'.

Human education was considered by some principals (Principals 1, 3 and 4) as a goal of education which was recognised in the Handbook of La Salle Brothers in Hong Kong (1998, p. 6) and the 2004-5 school magazine (p. 10) of school 4. Human education refers to: 'a movement in education which is committed to develop people fully as human beings, to learn to live as brothers and sisters in a world of peace and justice' (Principal 3). For Principal 1, a fundamental aim of human education was 'to make students understand and respect human rights', which according to Principal 3 refers to the basic rights of human beings, including life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression and equality before the law. Ethical behaviour was one of the 5 virtues promoted by the Lasallian vision which was also associated with a Christian education which Principals 1 and 9 identified as being important.



### **5.3 Student Learning outcomes and Experiences**

In their model for School Improvement, Stoll and Fink (1996) argued that the improvement of student learning outcomes is the ultimate goal of school improvement. Cheng (1996) and Sammons (1999) opine that the students' learning outcomes and experiences are good indicators of education quality in schools. Different schools may have different focuses on students' learning experiences and outcomes and a range of student learning outcomes have been identified from the interview data. These include students' academic attainment (all principals with the exception of primary principals 5 and 10), a range of generic skills including leadership (Principal 1 and 2) and the ability to be an independent learner (Principals 8 and 10).

#### **5.3.1. Learning Outcomes**

A focus on helping students' to achieve a high level of academic attainment in public examinations is one way of defining education quality (MacBeath, 2000; Nagel and Kvernbekk, 1997). In Hong Kong, academic attainment is a key indicator of education quality and the vast majority of principals, including all secondary principals, perceived that achieving high standards of academic attainment was a high priority. This view was in line with Harvey's (1995) concept of exceptionality and the Goal and Specification model of Cheng (2003). The concept of exceptionality requires schools to maximize the potential of students to pursue academic excellence whilst in the Goal and Specification model a school is considered to be of good quality if its students achieve a high level of attainment. In Hong Kong, schools are primarily judged by their success in preparing students to succeed academically. As secondary principal 4 pointed out: 'The number of A's (grades) is used to determine

education quality.’ This situation is a reflection of the way in which schools are judged by their success in preparing students for public examinations, the Secondary 5 Certificate examination and the Hong Kong University Advanced Level Matriculation entrance examinations (Tan, 2005). This pressure to maximise academic performance was perceived to affect all schools across the entire Hong Kong region. As Principal 1 noted on new school provision: ‘New schools in the New Territories are trying to build a reputation in academic performance in order to attract more students to prevent school closure’.

In recent years, the related concept of value added has been included as a measure of school effectiveness in arrangements for quality assurance (Mok, 2007) for which government guidelines are available on students’ academic attainment, valued added measures (VAM) and affective outcomes (APASO). Both Mizikaci (2006 ) and Saunders (1999) support the need for value added measures. In Hong Kong, the government requires that all secondary schools conduct value added as part of its arrangements for self-evaluation (ECR 7, 2.12; LC Paper ,2002). The term value-added refers to the extent to which a school contributes to student learning over a given period of time and relative to other schools, taking into account student intake characteristics and other characteristics such as prior academic ability and gender. In the interviews, only Principals 3 and 4 explicitly mentioned value added; the others made no mention of VAM, possibly because they did not conduct VAM or because they lacked a reliable standardised assessment to measure the prior attainment of students before entering school (Thomas, 1998).

The dominance of academic attainment was apparent in both primary and secondary sectors and applied to both schools which had a tradition of high academic attainment and those schools which were under pressure to improve

their performance to attract students. The latter perspective was typically reflected in the observation of secondary Principal 4: ‘We have to think about how to raise all students to reach the standard of Band 1 students and we hope our students achieve value-added in the education process.’ A recognition that all schools, irrespective of the quality of their student intake, needed to focus on academic attainment was clearly recognised by Principal 3: ‘Practically, you cannot afford to have weak academic performance. Everyone understands; you need to have value added-ness and acceptable form 5 public examination results’. Neither was this view confined to the secondary sector as primary schools were also under pressure from the schools into which they fed students to improve academic attainment. As primary principal 7 explained: ‘There is nothing upper primary can do about ethical behaviour. They have to produce good academic results at the request of the secondary school’. Whilst recognising this reality, the principal of another primary school (Principal 9) cautioned about a potential knock on effect of an over-reliance on academic attainment: ‘The academic performance of students has to be of first priority but too much (emphasis) will waste the talents of students in other areas because not all students can have good academic performance. Good quality education includes good academic performance, development of talents in other areas and good ethical behaviour’.

The importance of generic skill development, an important intended outcome of the reform proposals, was mentioned only rarely by the principals. The principal of secondary school 1 referred to the importance of developing students’ communication, leadership and collaboration skills. Principals 1 and 2 specifically emphasised the acquirement of leadership skills which they felt was possible in schools with an intake of good students. As Principal 2 explained: ‘We have many good and able students and we try in every possible way to give

them the opportunity to learn leadership skills. Students' own management of the Student Union in our school is a good example of their leadership skills.' Primary school principals, such as Principal 6, were clear about the importance of developing their students' literacy skills: 'Every child needs to have a good reading habit in English and Chinese; there is a requirement for students to read English and Chinese books from September to May of every school year before the Final Examination June'.

### **5.3.2. Learning Experiences**

The 'knock on' effects of the importance placed on academic attainment on students' learning experiences were considerable and included setting of students by ability, their eligibility to study different subjects in secondary school and the persistent pressure to succeed academically. Principal 1 explained his reasoning for setting which included ease of monitoring student progress, apparently less need for differentiation and being able to retain direct teaching with the teacher maintaining tight control over the pace of learning: 'We allocate students to different classes according to their academic performance ... with students roughly of the same abilities, we can teach with the same strategy and monitor their progress easily. We do not have the difficulty of waiting for the weaker students in class while teaching'. A similar strategy was adopted by Principal 2: 'If we have students of different abilities, we will have a difficulty waiting for the less able students. Tackling the issue of students having learning differences, we allocate students with the same ability into the same class.' The same principal pointed out: 'We have to classify students into Arts and Science classes according to their academic results and abilities.'

In addition, students' academic attainment was carefully monitored through the regular testing / examination and parental reporting system which starts in primary school. Pressure on students to succeed was demonstrated in secondary school 1 with four assessments per year in every subject from secondary 1 to 3 accompanied by report cards to parents with form positions and half and final year examinations. The implementation of holistic education was proving to be difficult in practice with teachers feeling under pressure from the emphasis placed on boosting academic attainment. As Principal 4 explained: 'Although we have an agreement on the direction of holistic education development, we do not have an agreement on what are the prioritised and secondary contents. The teachers have different priorities. Every teacher says his / her subject is the most important. They even have the same mentality towards extra-curricular activities. They do not know how to balance with one another'.

In response to reform proposals, some secondary school principals (Principals 1, 2 and 3) reported that their schools had made significant strides to produce a more broad and balanced curriculum in addition to the traditional Lasallian school emphasis on academic and sporting excellence. This broadening included the provision of cultural learning experiences, notably music, arts and drama. School 1 had only recently introduced arts into the formal curriculum and students were able to attend voluntary arts workshops and an increasing number had been sent to attend training courses in Art and Technology. Despite these additions to the curriculum, the status of subjects remained the same with Chinese language, English and Mathematics being perceived as the most important.

Extra-curricular activities (ECA) after school and at week-ends are an important component for broadening the curriculum and are intended to provide

some relief from the pressure of academic study. Principals in both primary schools and secondary schools supported the use of a wide range of extra-curricular activities; for instance School 1 had 40 such activities and the principal of School 2 required all students to join at least 3 extra-curricular activities. The importance of these learning experiences was explained by Principal 3: 'To help the students achieve the outcomes intended by school, we need to give them various kinds of activities to enable them to experience. Project learning and extra-curricular activities such as scouting, the Catholic Society and the football club assist them to achieve the final learning outcomes, such as active citizenship and leadership skills'. One primary school principal (Principal 6) made the case for the wider benefits of ECA: 'These (extra-curricular activities) indirectly help students improve their academic performance; I like my students participating in these activities to improve their collaboration and tolerance with one another as they are team based'. Even then, some of the good intentions were sometimes thwarted by the relentless pursuit of academic success. As Principal 2 pointed out, parents often send their children to tutorial classes which had an adverse impact on the take up of ECA.

In all secondary schools, further broadening of the students' learning experiences for some more fortunate students was provided by student exchange programmes which were intended to extend their cultural awareness. As the principal of School 2 explained: 'We have a student exchange programme with a high school in Shanghai with 20 students involved. There are also plans to extend this exchange programme to Singapore and the UK.' As a preparation for active citizenship, secondary school 2 required their students to take part in community service: 'We have a community service dimension for our students paying visits to old people's homes and hospitals'. Some schools sought other out of school learning experiences: 'The formation of Lasallian Youth by all

Lasallian secondary schools in 1997 are intended to train our students to become leaders in the community’ (Principal 2). Another school was involved in an environmental education project ‘to give students learning experiences to become leaders in environmental protection (Principal 3)’.

An important aspect of the reform proposals (ECR7) was the intended change in classroom practice with an attempt to encourage students to become more independent learners. The intention was that this approach to learning would not only be used in project learning but would also be introduced across the curriculum. However, only a few principals identified ‘learning to learn’ as an important aspect of education quality and those that did included one secondary principal (Principal 1) and two primary school principals (Principals 8 and 10). As Principal 8 asserted: ‘Quality in education ... is enabling students to have self learning. The students know what strategy can be employed to learn better. The important thing is to teach students to learn how to learn’. Principal 10 was equally supportive of the government proposals for independent learning, identifying a link with life-long learning and the need to develop students’ thinking skills: ‘Our vision is to inspire a life-long love of learning, to be able to learn independently, ask questions and think critically, so teachers must know how to guide students to learn how to learn and learn independently.’

#### **5.4. Distinctiveness of Lasallian Schools**

The distinctiveness of Lasallian schools was largely due to the persistence of cultural values and beliefs about the purpose of education and the nature of relationships in the wider Lasallian Community involving principals and teachers and students. According to the interview data, Lasallian schools are distinctive in the following ways: the tolerance of other religious beliefs; the

autonomy of the principals in their relationship with their sponsors; the focus on education rather than evangelisation; education for all; touching the hearts and minds of people; promotion of core values of Faith, Zeal and Community. These values and beliefs collectively differentiate Lasallian schools from other schools in Hong Kong.

#### ***5.4.1. Tolerance of different religious beliefs and an absence of restrictions on principals***

Eight principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9) indicated that a tolerance of different religious beliefs and an absence of excessive guidance made Lasallian schools different from other faith schools. The Institute of Lasallian Brothers was prepared to recruit principals and teachers from different religious beliefs. According to Principal 4, none of the principals of Lasallian secondary schools were Catholics. The same principal also claimed that the lack of restrictions placed on them by the school supervisor also made Lasallian schools different. Principals were able to operate with some degree of autonomy from the Institute of Lasallian Brothers and were not given specific guidelines on how schools should be run, so that they were able to respond to the local situation. As principal 10 explained: ‘Without too many fixed guidelines, principals can develop differently to suit the needs of their school.’ For one school, this relative freedom of action of principals in the relationship with the Lasallian Brothers was confirmed by an external evaluation report prepared by X university in 2003 on the school of Principal 3: ‘The ILBS does not give too many rigid instructions, thus giving the school more freedom in leadership and policy development’.



#### ***5.4.2. A focus on education rather than evangelization***

The basic historical rationale behind the establishment of faith schools is to provide religious instructions to their students (Dagovitz, 2004; Rossi and Greely, 1964). Lasallian schools are Catholic faith schools but according to Tierney (2005a, 2005c), the schools adopt a unique position in their pursuit of education which was confirmed by the Director of the Institute of Hong Kong Lasallian Brothers (ILBS): ‘Perhaps, unlike most faith schools, Lasallian schools concentrate 100% on education. I think this is rather distinctive.’ Of the principals interviewed, a majority (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) agreed with this emphasis on education rather than evangelization. As Principal 7 explained: ‘We do not purposely evangelise, preach and try to convert our pupils into the Catholic religion. We do not deliberately employ Catholic teachers. We only employ capable teachers’. Being members of the Lasallian Community, all principals are supposedly obliged to agree with the views held by ILBS and it is not clear why the others did not make their own position clear, apart from the principal who supported evangelization because she was a devout Catholic.

#### ***5.4.3. Education for all***

According to Tierney, (2005a, 2005c), there is an emphasis in Lasallian schools, on ‘education being available for all students irrespective of their background’, a position which was confirmed by the Director of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers in Hong Kong: ‘we do not care whether the students are rich or poor’ (BP, 2007). A majority of principals, seven in total (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9) agreed that EFA was a distinctive element of Lasallian schools to which they subscribed. In one instance, the principal of school 3 had deliberately set out to recruit the poor and needy Non-educated youth (NEY) and Special

Education Needs (SEN) students and had taken in students with criminal offences in an economically and socially deprived part of Hong Kong. In another instance, the principal of School 8 had accepted students of other different races, such as Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese and Malaysians as well as new immigrants from mainland China into her school.

#### ***5.4.4. Touching hearts and minds***

Guidance from the ILBS on the kind of staff-student relationships expected in Lasallian schools clearly identified the notion of touching hearts and minds (Armin, 2008). This implies a relationship based on care and even love for all students by the principal and teachers. The Director of ILBS asserted the need for such a focus in all Lasallian schools: ‘The school principals and teachers of Lasallian schools must touch the hearts and minds of the students confided to your care’ (BP, 2007). Five principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7) claimed that ‘touching hearts and minds’ made Lasallian school distinctive but five did not which suggests there may be an underlying disagreement between them and the ILBS which deserves further investigation.

Several principals (Principals 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10) referred to the fact that their views on education quality reflected those of the Lasallian Brothers. The mission of the ILB refers to learning, service and caring which were reflected in school mission and vision statements. As Principal 2 pointed out: ‘Our school mission refers to caring about less gifted children. In our school, the senior students have to learn how to look after and care for students of junior classes’. Principal 4 claimed that the school’s vision could be simplified to ‘Touching hearts with student centred-ness’. Principal 3 pointed out that the school identified with three traditions of Lasallian schools - a focus on students, having

trust in teachers and providing education for all those people who need education, especially the poor and needy. According to several principals (Principals 2, 4 and 7), teachers were held in high regard and caring relationships were encouraged. There was a high degree of loyalty to their old school by former students who provided funding and other forms of support. As Principal 5 revealed: ‘The students of Lasallian schools are very sentimentally attached to their mother schools. we have many old students coming back to support’.

#### ***5.4.5. Core values of faith, zeal and community***

Faith, Zeal and Community are the three core values which are deeply rooted in the tradition of the Institute of Lasallian Brothers and are widely held in Lasallian schools (Grieken, 1999; Lavin, 2007; Tam, 2009). According to Tam (2009), ‘ .... the force of faith and zeal in education work, backed up by a big community consisting of all stakeholders from all Lasallian schools makes the Lasallian schools distinct from other school’. In a seminar in the schools of Principals 2 and 8 (7<sup>th</sup> November, 2009), Tam, a layman Lasallian provided an interpretation of the three core values. Faith refers to the call from god. Zeal refers to a commitment to work in education for the benefit of all, especially the poor and needy. Community refers to the building up of a fraternal community in which the SMC, principals, teachers and other stakeholders share a common vision of working for children in association with different stakeholders and even stakeholders of other Lasallian schools. This encourages all stakeholders of different Lasallian schools to merge into a large family to work in education collectively. However, in the interviews, only two principals (Principals 6 and 9) referred to these core values. Strong support for these values was demonstrated by principal 9: ‘With the introduction of faith, zeal and community, both

principal and teachers will be strongly held together as a team and dedicated to their work and public service .... if teachers have zeal in their work, they will influence their students to have zeal in their studying.'

### **5.5 Influence of the school's Context on Lasallian Principals' views of Education Quality**

Market forces and competition for students are an important contextual factor that influences decisions for managing and improving education quality in Hong Kong. In implementing the government reform proposals, all Lasallian principals were having to respond to the Hong Kong demographic context. As a consequence of falling rolls, market forces create competition for primary school and secondary age students to the extent that survival is a key issue for some schools in Hong Kong. This trend particularly affected primary schools which decreased in number from 815 in 2001 to 720 in 2005 (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2007). In view of the competition for students, satisfying school stakeholders' needs and requirements, especially parents and students, who are consumers of education, cannot be ignored (Cuttance; 1994; Tam and Cheng, 2001) so that Cheng's (2003) model of consumer satisfaction is very relevant in Hong Kong. In this situation, there is a pressure on principals to retain and improve the quality of student intake. With the pressure of market forces from Direct Subsidised Schools (DSS), schools have to re-position themselves to prevent the loss of students (Mortimore, 1998). Principals 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 expressed their concern over the competition for students with other schools. Some, such as Principals 4 and 8, were afraid of losing students. As Principal 4 pointed out: 'Outside, the competition for students is keen; ABC college, a famous school in our neighbourhood also competes for good students with us...We are afraid of losing students...We need to retain EMI status and

have good student academic attainment.’ The market driven situation was also confirmed by the principal of primary school 7: ‘All the principals of the primary schools under the sponsorship of the ILBS face the same problem, competition with an increasing number of DSS schools for the most able students to raise overall attainment in primary 1’. The principal of primary school 7 emphasised the key importance of student recruitment for school survival. Even schools which perform well are potentially vulnerable: ‘Some schools which have received excellent ESR marks from the EDB may be closed down if they fail to recruit enough students’ (Principal 7). The principal of School 3 had also faced the threat of closure in the recent past and was forced to accept students who were not popular in other schools.

On an individual school level, Legewie and DiPrete (2011) argued that local school context influences the development of school and student learning outcomes. A similar view was echoed in Stoll and Fink’s model for school improvement (1996): ‘Context is one initial influence on the school development process. It acknowledges key differences, for example between primary and secondary schools, and it is what makes the process unique in each school (p.187).’ The interview data revealed that all Lasallian principals acknowledged the important role of the local context in providing a steer for the development direction of their schools. As Stoll and Mortimore (1997) point out: ‘What works in one context may lack relevance in others’ (p. 12).

The quality of student-intake is the first contextual factor impacting on Lasallian principals and their schools, a factor which was recognised by a majority of principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 10). The point was well made by the principal of secondary school 1: ‘Every Lasallian school has it’s own unique view of quality, for example a focus on academic attainment.’

Their views may be different depending on the intake of students. This view complies with the Resource-Input model of Cheng (2003) which argues that the student input (i.e. student intake) affects the performance and development of the school. Different Lasallian schools have differing student intakes and this influences both the focus and direction of development in their schools. This situation can be demonstrated by referring to two extreme cases, drawing respectively on examples of good student intakes (Schools 1 and 2 ) and poor student intakes (Schools 3 and 5). Principals 1 and 2 reported that because their schools benefited from very good student intakes, they were obliged to focus on developing students' academic attainment. However, they were also able to strike a balance between students' academic attainment and their cultural development. Principal 1 explained the situation succinctly: 'Our school is located in a good catchment area. The students entering our school are able and are all from good and rich families. We have to focus on development of their academic attainment. Of course, as our students are competent in various areas, with a strong support from their families, we can strike a balance between their academic attainment and cultural development'.

In contrast, Principals 3 and 5 had a very different context in which they operated. School 3 was located in a socio-economically deprived area with not only academically weaker but also some students with challenging behaviour. The problems experienced by schools in these more deprived catchment areas was outlined by Principal 3: 'Our school is situated in a socially and economically deprived catchment area with many new immigrants from Mainland China. With a high unemployment rate, many families are dependent on government support. Some students are from single parent families and some have a drugs problem'. The principal explained: 'The students sent to our schools by the EDB are all Band 3. These students have a low self-image and

their motivation is weak. The students of this banding usually have a low language ability. They have many experiences of failure, especially in primary 6.' Adapting to this situation, the principal had clearly identified a niche for the school: 'Among all the Lasallian schools, I am taking care of the most number of weak and neglected families, including some Non-Educated Youth (NEY), SEN students and problematic girls. Other schools did not take these students'. In responding to the situation, the principal initially tackled the problem of indiscipline and poor attitude to learning to ensure the survival of his school as a first step to school improvement, before embarking on the improvement of teaching and learning.

The significance of the quality of the student intake and parental support on the direction of school development was explained by the principal of a secondary school (School 5) in a deprived area, although the school context was not as bad as that of Principal 3: 'Most of our students are Band 2 and 3 students and their academic results are in the lower middle level. Many students are from single parent families'. Principal 5 appeared to be resigned to the difficulty of the school achieving high academic standards and wanted to make parents aware of the situation: 'We want to make parents understand that the college is not a prestigious school. Good academic attainment is too difficult for us'. His response to the situation was to focus school improvement on cultural dimensions: 'Because of the student intake, with academically weak students without strong parental support for academic attainment ... we focus on cultural dimensions in our school improvement'. The decision to inform parents about the focus for school improvement reflects Cheng's (2003) legitimacy model for managing education quality and quality assurance.

A second contextual influence on development was school tradition. As Principal 1 asserted: 'There is a tradition for every school which has a lot of influence in school'. Three principals (Principals 1, 2 and 5) explicitly stated the influence of tradition on their school's development. High performing schools, such as Schools 1 and 2 which had a tradition of high academic attainment and taking an active part in sporting and cultural activities, were seeking to recruit the most able (Band 1) students to retain their prestigious position. As Principal 1 explained: 'Our school is traditionally famous for producing students with high academic attainment. Our students are also traditionally good at sports and even cultural activities, like music. The students, parents, teachers and even the School Management Council are used to and feel proud of this tradition. This tradition makes us focus on academic attainment and sports activities in our school improvement planning'. The school also had some famous alumni: 'Many senior government officials graduated from our school. We have a tradition of producing high academically attaining students who are also good at cultural and sporting activities'. As previously noted, the situation in School 5 was different in that there was a tradition of students achieving high standards in cultural and sporting activities: 'Our focus in school improvement is on cultural dimensions, like drama and sports like basketball and track running' (Principal 5).

A third contextual factor was the influence of other important stakeholders on the school development and direction. These groups included the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), SMC (including the school sponsoring body), teachers and alumni who would become a stakeholder group when the IMC was established in school. Principals 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 indicated that the majority of stakeholders were able to impose pressure on their schools to influence the focus of school improvement. Drawing on the issue of EMI and CMI status,



Principal 4 provided an example of stakeholder influence: ‘Personally, I don’t mind my school becoming a CMI (Chinese as the medium of instruction) school. The teachers will mind because a CMI school affects school reputation and perception of good quality. A good school is an EMI school and a bad school is a CMI school...The PTA will mind.. the Old Boys’ Association will mind too... thus we cannot change into a CMI school’.

In the primary sector, the influence of the school stakeholders tended to be weaker and the principal could often refuse their requests. The primary principal of School 6 elaborated on how she prevailed in the face of parental demands to place more emphasis on academic attainment: ‘We found that not all our students are academically good. We tried to switch to provide a focus more on cultural and sports activities so that more students will find their abilities and talents in other areas. Some parents and alumni approached us to request not to give up the traditional focus on students’ academic attainment. But we had a strong hold and convinced them that the students in primary school really do need development in cultural and sporting activities’.

On the other hand, in the secondary schools of Principals 1, 2 and 4, the pressure of stakeholders such as teachers and parents was stronger and the principals were obliged to focus on students’ academic attainment in their school improvement planning. Principal 1 presented a graphic account of the strength of both of these stakeholder groups and the tension between implementing holistic education and maintaining academic excellence: ‘I understand that holistic education is good for all students and is the rationale in the education work of Lasallian Brothers. Two years ago, I tried to enforce a greater focus on holistic education with less emphasis on academic attainment. But, I encountered opposition from both teachers and parents, some of whom

are alumni. I had to switch back to academic attainment as the main focus of school improvement’.

These examples confirm once again that the key focus in secondary education is on academic attainment. In contrast in primary schools, the focus is on students’ personal development, especially character formation, but even then they are under an obligation to provide 85% of Band 1 students into the secondary school into which they feed students. The nature of the student intake determined the principal’s positioning of the school and direction of development both of which related to students’ academic attainment. As the principal of secondary school 4 reflected: ‘About (our) mission, every Lasallian school has to make an adjustment to cope with its own situation. The adjustment depends on the quality of the students and the defined positioning of the school’.

## **5.6 Comparison between the Principals’ and Government’s views on Education Quality**

The emphasis of curriculum reform in Hong Kong is to move away from an examination oriented curriculum and an emphasis on academic attainment to promoting students’ all round balanced development through holistic education (Education Commission, 2006; Mok 2007). This is an orientation towards introducing holistic education in all schools in Hong Kong (Tsang, 2008), a move which is also intended to promote positive attitudes to life-long learning and develop generic skills (Mok and Chan, 2002; Education Commission, 2006). The interview data showed that while in principle all Lasallian principals agreed with the concept of holistic education, in reality Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 9 considered that holistic education was either unrealistic in view of the dominance of the tradition of academic attainment, or not suitable for their

school or there was insufficient government funding to support implementation. Secondary school Principal 3 spoke for others when he reasserted the difficulty of striking an appropriate balance between students' academic attainment and all round development and argued that the performance of a school should be based on more than academic performance: 'If it (the school) is only accountable for academic performance, I feel it is a big problem.' The problem in Hong Kong is that students' academic attainment at the end of the primary and secondary phases continues to determine whether students can enter a prestigious secondary school or university which gives students and their parents little choice but to focus on academic performance (Johnson, 1997). Another secondary school (School 2) was concerned about insufficient support from the EDB to introduce holistic education: 'The real difficulty is that we do not have sufficient support from the EDB to implement holistic education' (Principal 2).

There were also some reservations in the primary sector about the 'reality' of implementing holistic education. One primary principal (Principal 8) pointed out that holistic education was good in principle but unrealisable in practice: 'Holistic education is good for students but it is an unreachable dream ... Our teachers are indifferent to the new education concept of holistic education. The reason is our school is famous'. Whilst supporting a greater emphasis on holistic education, another primary principal (Principal 9) was concerned about the time required for implementation and more urgent priorities for teachers preparing their students for examinations: 'Holistic education is the dream of the EDB. We cannot achieve this in a short time. Teacher workload is excessive and has already caused a deterioration of relationships. They have to concentrate on preparing their students for PRESONE (Pre-Secondary One Examination) and TSA (Territory-wide System Assessment) because the

academic performance of students affects the survival of the school'. Despite the government's stated intentions regarding the broadening of education, one primary school principal, (Principal 7) thought that the EDB still placed more emphasis on academic attainment: 'I think the EDB places a focus on academic performance rather than holistic education'.

Integrated education was introduced in Hong Kong to complement holistic education (Sharma and Chow, 2002) but several principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9) expressed serious reservations about implementing the policy of integrating SEN students into classrooms. A lack of teacher expertise in coping with SEN children was cited as a major source of concern by Principal 1: 'I have to teach SEN students when they are assigned to the school. If parents do not speak out, we do not know who the SEN students are. We also do not know how to teach them and have to send teachers to attend the (government) courses'. In secondary school 5, the principal voiced the opposition of his stakeholders to SEN inclusion: 'Sometimes, there are policies that schools are required to execute that may conflict with the views of stakeholders; for example the parents, teachers, school management and SMC do not agree with the introduction of integrated education.' Another difficulty for implementing integrated education raised by Principal 9 was the typically large size of classes in Hong Kong schools.

A major concern in the recent history of educational reform is the need to engage teachers in a reform process which involves a broadening of the range of subjects on offer and a change in pedagogy. One primary school principal (Principal 8) was concerned that teachers were becoming disillusioned by the overall pace of reform: 'Teachers feel what they have done is good enough'. Some principals (Principals 4 and 10) were able to identify with their teachers'

reluctance to introduce more student centred approaches to learning on the grounds that the amount of content in the subject syllabus and the need for students to reach high standards made it difficult for teachers to move away from ‘direct teaching’. As Principal 4 explained: ‘It is necessary to use the teacher centred approach to complete the syllabus. If the students do not complete the syllabus, the results in public examinations will not be good’. It is sometimes the case that older teachers may be more set in their ways and reluctant to change the way they teach, whereas recent graduates and those who have attended central CPD programmes may be more receptive to change. As the primary principal of School 10 noted: ‘Teachers do not want to change too much. They do not want to change the way of teaching they are used to. Senior teachers are used to direct teaching. They have not received training in project learning and feel incompetent to use this to guide students to learn. The younger teachers may have attended the (centralised) training course on project learning and are easily adapted to the new curriculum’.

### **5.7 Comparison between Principals’ and other Stakeholders’ views on Education Quality**

Parents and teachers are important school stakeholders and sharing similar views on education quality is important for students’ learning and development. Principals, parents and teachers need to be ‘reading from the same page’ (Stoll and Fink, 1996, p. 135). The interview data revealed that eight principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9) and the teachers in their school shared the same focus on academic attainment. This may explain why academic attainment has become a key indicator of academic quality as indicated in Section 5.3. Middle and upper class parents in Hong Kong continue to have high expectations for their children’s education and place great emphasis on

academic attainment because of pressure from the secondary school placement examination and the university entrance examination. As secondary Principal 3 explained: 'We (i.e. all Lasallian schools, teachers and parents) all understand that under the pressure of the current examinations and assessments, like TSA ... and even in the long run in view of the new secondary school curriculum, we have to produce some good academic results as indicated by student academic attainment. Academic performance is the main directing force in education quality'.

In the primary sector, Principals 6 and 9 asserted parents' concern with their children's academic attainment. 'Every parent wants his / her child to have good academic performance' (Principal 6). Principal 9 held the student allocation system and the publication of summative assessment results (TSA for primary 6 and secondary 3 students) responsible for parents' focus on academic attainment: 'Without the distribution of places into secondary 1 and without the publication of TSA results, parents' views on education quality would not be focussed on academic performance.' This parental obsession with their children's academic attainment can distort other aspects of their education, such as students' involvement in extra-curricular activities (ECA). As secondary principal 1 observed: 'Whilst parents consider the interests and abilities of their children more than in the past, if they see the academic performance of their children dropping, they will suggest they reduce their extra-curricular activities'. A similar situation was cited by primary principal 9, a feeder school for a high achieving secondary school: 'Parents focus on academic performance. They do not allow their children to take part in extra-curricular activities'. One primary school principal (Principal 8) cited pressure from parents for the school to provide additional support for the high academic attaining and gifted students: 'Some parents want the school to run programmes for the gifted and talented.

They do not care about those students who perform weakly but some teachers do not agree with this view’.

This parental focus on academic attainment also impacted on the likelihood of holistic education being successfully implemented. As the same principal explained: ‘Holistic education is only an ideal for the EDB and the Lasallian Brothers. Hong Kong is a pragmatic and realistic society. People will still assess and employ people according to their academic attainment. All parents still use academic attainment as the key indicator of quality rather than holistic education’. Principal 4 was concerned about the persistence of societal views on the centrality of academic attainment where ‘people outside in society are more concerned about academic attainment more than how to be a good person.’ According to the principal of School 2: ‘May be all Chinese parents are like this. Studying is always prioritised. When their children cannot perform well academically, they will develop their children in other areas’.

For some principals and their parents and teachers (Schools 3, 5, 6 and 7), school discipline was also an essential indicator of education quality. The decline in standards of discipline in Hong Kong secondary schools has been noted and is of some concern (Lo, 2000 ). For one secondary school principal (Principal 5), the issue was linked to parental expectations and student recruitment: ‘Discipline is important in education quality. Many parents expect good discipline in school. It can affect the reputation of the school and student recruitment.’ For another primary principal (Principal 6), the issue was more about the impact on students’ learning: ‘Without good discipline, students can hardly concentrate on their study’.

Given the importance attached to academic attainment as an indicator of school quality, it was perhaps not altogether surprising that Principals 1, 2, 4 and 9 reported that teachers ranked academic attainment as being the most important aspect of education quality. Several principals (Principals 1, 2 and 5) noted that teachers were accountable in a form of professional accountability to stakeholders such as parents and students. As Principal 1 pointed out: 'Teachers are accountable for their performance through publication of results in internal examinations and the public examination system. I feel that accountability gives teachers a great deal of pressure'. According to Principal 2, teachers are under pressure to perform well and 'all subject teachers, especially the panel chairperson will try their best to excel in their subject.'

### **5.8 Role of Government in helping to achieve Education Quality ('pressure' and / or 'support')**

Education reform in Hong Kong was intended to improve education quality (Mok, 2007). In recent reform movements throughout the world, governments exert pressure on schools to improve education quality through a combination of 'pressure' and 'support' mechanisms (Dalin, 1998). These mechanisms operate in a situation where schools are given more responsibility to manage their own affairs within a framework of accountability in which they are expected to set targets for improvement and evaluate progress. A key role of accountability is to stimulate an organisation to improve itself; if schools are made accountable, they tend to perform better (Gillmore, 1997). In Hong Kong, School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and External School Review (ESR) were introduced with the intention of promoting greater public accountability and supporting continuous school development and improvement (MacBeath and Clark, 2005). The distribution of power to schools through decentralisation may imply more autonomy but this autonomy only exists within the framework of



government policy objectives (Glatter, 2002). In Hong Kong, centralised control is exercised over the curriculum through the range of subjects required, subject guidelines and through requirements to move to a more student centred pedagogy including greater use of formative assessment. This means that the school's autonomy is only conditional (Bell and Bush, 2002).

In Hong Kong, one of the ways in which government exerts power over schools is through a high degree of control of the student allocation process which affects both primary and secondary schools. The government requirement that 85% of students in secondary one must be Band 1 students, in order for the school to qualify as an EMI (English as the medium of Instruction) school, was especially problematic and affected six schools (Schools 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 and 9) where there was a link between a secondary and their feeder primary school. For instance, School 8 is the feeder primary school for secondary school 1; the schools of primary principals 6 and 9 are the feeders for secondary schools 2 and 4 respectively. Thus, the pressure is felt by both the corresponding feeding and receiving schools. This situation puts pressure on principals of feeder primary schools to raise the standards of academic attainment of their students because secondary schools strive to maintain their reputation for academic success and to retain their EMI status. Concern about whether they would be able to retain their EMI status was a key issue for two secondary schools (Schools 1 and 2). As the principal of School 1 pointed out: 'If we do not have 85% and above Band 1 students for our secondary 1, we will become a CMI (Chinese as a Medium of Instruction) school.' Concern about the issue was reflected in calls for the government to abandon the policy, a view expressed by Principal 4: 'I hope the government will re-consider the criteria that 85% of secondary 1 students have to be Band 1 in order to be eligible for EMI status.'

Not many schools can become an EMI. When the government introduces this policy, around 30 schools like ours will be affected.'

In Hong Kong (as in the UK), summative assessment is used as a form of pressure on schools to raise their standard of performance. Government pressure on schools to raise standards of student attainment is exerted by the use of assessment for accountability purposes in public examinations. Territorial-wide System Assessment (TSA) is used to assess students' performance in Chinese, English and Mathematics in primary 3 and 6 and secondary 3 at the basic level of competence (TSA Reports 2009 and 2010). In addition, public examinations at critical stages are also accountability devices because of their selection function; for instance those at the end of the secondary phase are 'high stakes tests' because of their role in admitting students into higher education. In Hong Kong, the typical school response to this situation is the frequent use of 'teaching to the test', a process which starts in the primary phase and the attendance of students from more wealthy backgrounds at extra-tutorial classes for revision purposes. The EDB forces schools to train students to achieve a targeted performance. Principal 7 explained how the TSA testing demands had increased pressure in the primary sector: 'Because there is TSA, we have pressure. From Primary 1-3, we have to allow some time to train students to do some exercises to prepare them for TSA ..... We do not even have enough time to complete the curriculum syllabus. Before, only the Primary 4 students were required to take the competency test.'

The introduction of ESR and annual SSE were also perceived as a form of pressure on Lasallian principals. As secondary Principal 1 explained: 'We feel burdened with ESR ... because of ESR, we have to spend a lot of time on writing the annual plan and report .... we have insufficient time for school

improvement in the interests of our students'. Another primary principal (Principal 8) was puzzled whether she should focus her time and energy on ESR and SSE which are compulsory requirements or student recruitment which ultimately determines the fate of the school, irrespective of EDB judgments on the quality of a school. As the principal explained: 'Some schools which have received excellent remarks by the ESR team may be closed down if they fail to recruit enough students, e.g. the Primary School of the Fishery Wholesalers Association'.

However, some principals (Principals 2, 3 and 8) acknowledged that ESR and SSE were a stimulus for accountability and in turn school improvement. As Principal 2 remarked: 'ESR and SSE imply accountability to us .. accountability is a good thing. It can make everyone complete work to the best of one's ability .... without accountability the development of education quality will be difficult'. Another secondary principal (Principal 3) noted a close link between the introduction of self-management, especially evaluation in schools and improved accountability but queried the extent to which his own school had developed an accountability culture: 'Accountability was clearly started after education reform was begun in Hong Kong. External review and self-evaluation gave accountability to the school. ESR and SSE ... improving accountability in school ... but I dare not say if my school possesses the accountability culture.' As an interesting example of Cheng's (2003) absence of problems model for managing education quality and quality assurance, primary principal 8 noted the importance of internal and external evaluation in identifying school weaknesses which could be targeted for improvement: 'SSE and ESR have been a catalyst for addressing the weaknesses in the school...(which is) good for school improvement'. Some principals were ambivalent about the impact of the government on improving education quality.

As the principal of primary school 9 noted: ‘ESR can be a motivating force, for example the development of the curriculum but can also be a hindrance because of the need to write too many reports’.

An important mechanism in SBM is the requirement for development planning which includes target setting and self-evaluation. While the ultimate aim of development planning is to improve the quality of students’ learning, the process has increasingly become associated with external accountability (MacGilchrist, 1994). Development planning was perceived by Principal 1 to be an accountability device rather than a vehicle for school improvement. The principal was frustrated by the bureaucratic demands of the EDB which he perceived to be unrelated to teaching and learning. His views echoed those of several other principals who were concerned by what they perceived to be an increase in EDB bureaucracy. The same principal was disturbed by the EDB policy directive ‘to give more training to the most able and best performing students, whilst helping the weakest to improve’. On the other hand, Principal 3 used development planning in a systematic and phased programme of school improvement which progressed from implementing effective behavioural management to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Data from the principals confirmed that the EDB did provide some support in the form of additional funding and centralised continuing professional development (CPD) to implement the reform proposals. This funding for school improvement was available through the government Quality Education Fund (QEF) and other special enhancement grants, such as the Curriculum (Capacity) Enhancement Grant (CEG) and Activity Enhancement Grant (AEG). However, this was a form of ‘categorical’ or conditional funding which was available for specific initiatives, such as project learning and formative assessment, which

were designated as part of the education reform agenda. For instance, the principal of secondary school 1 was able to access QEF funds to set up an orchestra to improve the status of music and a new art room; the same principal was also able to tap into CEG and AEG grants for curriculum and activity enhancement. Principal 4 referred to a sum of 0.3 million Hong Kong dollars (HKD) made available to every school to develop extra-curricular activities but with a 'claw back' facility. Another important source of support for school improvement was the provision of centrally organised CPD again linked to government priorities in the reform proposals but there was a pressure for schools to participate. For instance, Principal 4 explained the government's combined use of support and pressure in the contentious area of SEN provision: 'EDB has a 5 year plan to train sufficient numbers of teachers to teach SEN students. At least 10% of teachers must have attended the course. However, the teachers are under pressure as they lack the knowledge to handle the SEN students'.

According to Cheng (2006), the education sector in Hong Kong is suffering from initiative overload which has resulted in some cynicism from hard pressed principals and teachers. In the face of what appears to be relentless and far reaching government reform proposals, one exasperated primary school principal (Principal 7) spoke for many expressing displeasure at the incessant demands made on schools, ostensibly to improve education quality: 'The EDB needs to do something new for people to see. After a period of time, the EDB will have something new for schools to do'. The same principal doubted whether the government had sufficient funds to support schools: 'The EDB is not able and effective in helping schools improve ... does not have any resources to support schools ... it is better not to bother them'. Another primary school principal (Principal 9) was equally scathing about the level of support from the

EDB to implement the reform proposals, thus confirming doubts expressed about the level of support for teachers (Chan 2010): ‘The EDB does not care if the support for school reform is not sufficient’.

An important decision which principals have to make when confronted with external reform proposals is prioritising and sequencing developments. Too many reform initiatives can be counterproductive for principals and their staff (Poon and Wong, 2008). One principal (Principal 9) suggested that it was important for a school to be selective about what aspects of the government reforms could be implemented: ‘Sometimes, a principal cannot totally abide by what the EDB has said.’ On a positive note, there was a suggestion by one principal (Principal 7) that imminent government reforms had been a catalyst to help schools clarify their beliefs and values: ‘In these last few years we had to hurry to find out what was the Lasallian spirit before the introduction of ESR.’

### **5. 9 Role of Lasallian Brothers in helping to Improve Education Quality**

As a key stakeholder, a school’s sponsoring body plays an important role in helping schools to improve their education quality (ECR7; Pang, 2000). In the case of the Lasallian schools, the Institute of Lasallian Brothers (ILBS) functions as the sponsoring body for all schools and the Lasallian Brothers, in their capacity as school supervisor (mentor) play a significant role in helping principals to achieve education quality. A majority of the principals indicated ways or areas in which the Lasallian Brothers helped them to improve education quality in school. The evidence from these principals suggested that the Lasallian Brothers were more a source of support than pressure. This support often took the form of personal encouragement. For example, secondary school Principal 5, a secondary school principal, revealed that: ‘When we are stressed

with our school's troubles and difficulties, our supervisor, a senior Lasallian Brother, comforts us and speaks supportive words and encouragement to us'. In another example, the principal of primary school 9 reported : 'They (the Lasallian Brothers) are empathetic with us and give us a feeling that they are like parents. We see support from their eyes'.

In an earlier section, Section 5.3, it was noted that the majority of Lasallian principals (Principals 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10) welcomed the fact that the Brothers allowed the school to respond to their own needs, a situation which contrasted markedly with other school sponsors in Hong Kong. The principals specifically stated that this autonomy assisted them to improve education quality in their schools. This autonomy gave the principals 'a lot of room and freedom' (Principal 10). The situation was explained by Principal 6: 'Our school does not have many regulations, unlike the large school sponsoring bodies ... Lasallian Brothers give us a lot of autonomy... without too many fixed guidelines, schools can develop differently to suit the needs of the school'. As Principal 5 pointed out: 'The Lasallian Brothers do not question what we do and allow us to act according to the situation'. This conferment of autonomy by the Lasallian Brothers is based on the trust which they have for the principals. As the principal of School 8 pointed out: 'Lasallian Brothers fully trust all Lasallian principals. They give full authority and autonomy to all Lasallian Schools to run his / her school'. In turn, Lasallian brothers were held in high regard by Lasallian principals. As the principal of School 8 pointed out, there is a high degree of loyalty to and respect for the Lasallian Brothers by stakeholders: 'All stakeholders deeply respect all Lasallian Brothers and the Institute. If they have made a request, we will try our best. The old students will do the same'. The degree of support for the Brotherhood was such that the principal of secondary school 1 even suggested that: '..the principal of a Lasallian school should be a

Lasallian Brother. That is a very important symbol ... but we do not have enough Lasallian Brothers working in schools’.

As the main regular point of contact between the ILBS and each school principal, each Lasallian Brother appeared to be playing a key role in preserving Lasallian values and beliefs about education quality. In one case, the supervisor of secondary school 4 had rewritten the school’s vision and mission statements. As the principal explained: ‘Brother X changed the whole draft on vision and mission. We stick this on the notice board on the ground floor together with the three year development plan and success criteria. All teachers, parents and students can see them’. One primary principal (Principal 8) was adamant that this Lasallian vision and mission conferred superiority over other schools in Hong Kong: ‘We are better than other schools because we have the mission and vision of the ILB to guide the development of schools’.

Creating a caring culture for staff and students has been identified as an important factor in school improvement (Sernak, 1998) and a caring culture is important to the vision of the ILBS and Lasallian schools (BP, 2007). Two principals outlined the importance of a caring culture in school improvement and the positive effect on teachers and students. Principal 1 outlined how the school supervisor had been actively involved in caring for students: ‘The school supervisor is very caring to students ... he interviews all primary 6 students himself ... just to reflect his caring for them and understand their problems and help them to resolve them .... this caring affects our students and they try to do better in their schooling ... helping our school improve without conferring any force on students.’ Relationships between the Lasallian brothers, principals and teachers are based on mutual trust. As Principal 8 pointed out: ‘They give full authority and autonomy to all Lasallian principals to run his / her school. They



also respect the professional spirit of teachers'. The brothers were seen as role models for the way in which they emphasised trusting and caring relations in the Lasallian community. As Principal 8 explained: 'Every day, I have to learn the spirit of trust from the Lasallian Brothers. I have taken 2 years to win the trust from the teachers.'

Contact between the principal and school supervisor tended to be regular but informal. As Principal 7 revealed: 'We have a meeting with Brother X every week informing him about the school situation and the policies we plan to implement'. It appeared that the Brothers called for a selective and cautious response to reform proposals which put the interests of students first. Principal 8 reported on Brother X's words: 'Think before you leap. Don't listen to everything that EDB says. Do what is right in the interest of students'. A good example of support for the direction of school development was provided by principal 4 who explained how the Brothers helped in the construction of the school development plan: 'In 2006, we were puzzled what should be the specific goals as a direction for our 3 year development plan. Noting this, we let the school supervisor know. He immediately arranged to meet us over 3 Saturdays. He also encouraged us to approach the Director of ILBS who gave us much useful advice. We came to arrive at three specific goals in our development plan: becoming a learning community, serving people and acquiring knowledge. Since then, our school improves much along these directions.'

Another principal provided another example of Lasallian support, this time helping to resolve the problem of appointing a new principal. In anticipation of the principal's retirement and having failed to recruit internally, the school supervisor and Director of ILBS helped the school make an appointment from

outside: ‘we did not find an appropriate candidate from our staff, including the two present Deputy Principals ... Eventually we found a deputy principal from another prestigious school, and he has a proven leadership record to improve the quality of the school’.

Hitherto, there had been little contact between individual Lasallian schools but there was some evidence of schools being less autonomous with the emergence of a Lasallian ‘community’, which was one of the 3 guiding values of the ILBS. A good example was provided by Principal 3 who shared his experience with other principals on the way he had used continuing professional development on behavioural management to tackle the problem of student indiscipline.

### **5.10 Role of the Principals in achieving Quality**

As chapter 2 revealed, government policy statements suggest that effective leadership is ‘considered to be significant to the success of implementing education quality’ (Tung 1997, p. 29). The role of the school principal is generally acknowledged to be a key one in securing and sustaining school improvement (Hopkins, 2001; West et al, 2000). The impact of the principal on school culture is recognised as being especially important in school improvement (Hargreaves, D, 1995). Current education reforms require principals to draw on different conceptions of leadership to help them improve their schools (Danielson, 2007). The key question is ‘What types or forms or models of leadership in schools contribute to school improvement?’ (Harris, 2004, p. 12). The interview data showed that the principals adopted six different leadership roles in their attempts to improve their schools. These roles were coaching leader (Bradley, 2004), creator of a community of leaders (Mednick, 2003), affiliative leader (Bradley, 2004), facilitative leader (Blase

and Blasé, 1991), consultative leader (Hiebert and Klatt, 2001) and re-engineering leader of the organisation (Hammer and Champy, 2003). As the table below illustrates, the principals adopted more than one leadership role.

**Table 5.1: Leadership roles of principals for achieving education quality**

<b>P1</b>	<b>affiliative leader and facilitative leader</b>
<b>P2</b>	<b>coaching leader, creator of a community of leaders, affiliative leader, facilitative leader, consultative leader</b>
<b>P3</b>	<b>coaching leader, creator of a community of leaders, affiliative leader, facilitative leader and re-engineering leader</b>
<b>P4</b>	<b>coaching leader, creator of a community of leaders, facilitative leader</b>
<b>P5</b>	<b>coaching leader and facilitative leader</b>
<b>P6</b>	<b>coaching leader, creator of a community of leaders, affiliative leader</b>
<b>P7</b>	<b>coaching leader, creator of a community of leaders, affiliative leader</b>
<b>P8</b>	<b>coaching leader, creator of a community of leaders, affiliative leader, consultative leader</b>
<b>P9</b>	<b>affiliative leader and facilitative leader</b>
<b>P10</b>	<b>coaching leader and affiliative leader</b>
<b>P=Principal</b>	

A coaching leader provides a sense of direction by sharing school vision and policy with teachers, parents and students to achieve a unity of purpose, sets high expectations for teachers and students and helps teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses, set long term goals and achieve them (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2000; Avolio, 1994; Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Evidence from the interviews suggested that eight leaders adopted the role of coaching leader (Principals 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10). Principal 2 believed in the importance of a shared vision and unity of purpose and ‘communicating high expectations to teachers’. In order to share the school vision with students, teachers and parents, Principal 5 provided a coaching session at the beginning of every school term: ‘On the first day of every school year, I will tell the stories about the founders of our school ... our vision ... to the students and parents ... and even to all teachers in the general staff meeting’.

Creating a community of leaders is an important and new role for principals (Mednick, 2003). Distributed leadership (Gronn, 2008; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2005) and invitational leadership (Stoll and Fink, 1996) are significant in this new role of principal (Mednick, 2003) and are important to school improvement (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). Distributed leadership was a role which was being promoted by the EDB to implement the reform proposals. Research by Silns and Mulford (2002) showed that student outcomes are more likely to improve where leadership was distributed throughout the school community and where teachers were empowered in areas of importance to them. Evidence from the interviews suggest that Principals 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 adopted the role of creator of a community of leaders. Delegation of responsibilities was identified by several principals as a key strategy for effective leadership to ease the burden on the principal and build on subordinates' expertise. Principal 3 explained his rationale for adopting distributed leadership: 'I cannot fight a lonely war when my school is facing many problems, e.g. discipline problems and loss of students ... I have to empower staff and make potential ones become middle management to help me ... You have to exercise distributed leadership. Among the two deputy principals, at least one has to be very good at teaching work administration'. Adopting a form of invitational leadership (Stoll and Fink, 1996), another principal (Principal 7) emphasised the importance for effective leadership of empowerment, identifying teachers with ability who could become leaders in their specialism and replace incompetent middle managers: 'I need to make use of the different specialisms of teachers and appoint them to lead the development of their specialised areas. Placing teachers into appropriate leadership positions is my principle .... I invite potential staff to replace the incompetent leaders and replace their teams. However, if the principal does not exercise empowerment, no teacher dares to help the principal and the teachers

who have a problem'. Principal 8 summarized the importance of creating a community of leaders and empowering colleagues to work together in teams: 'A principal cannot do all the work ... I believe in synergy ... I create teams with leaders selected according to their abilities and specialized knowledge and skills to help a school do its business. I often use empowerment and delegation ... this is important to the success of the leaders. I need to assemble all the strengths and weaknesses of different staff and match them to roles.' The same principal distinguished between the role of management and leadership: 'I need to take the role of leadership. I do not need to do the execution work as I have a very strong upper and middle management team'.

Affiliative leaders focus on the emotional needs of the school stakeholders, especially teachers and students, caring about the whole person and not only the tasks for completion (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2000; Louis 1994). The interview data showed that nine principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) were adopting the role of affiliative leader and considered caring relationships with stakeholders important for school improvement and particularly improving the quality of student learning (Ngcobo and Tikly, 2010). Principal 6 explained how caring relationships could help to improve the quality of the students' learning experience: 'A caring relationship with stakeholders is important for school improvement and cohesion of different stakeholders ... the caring relationship can create a family in school working for one goal, the betterment of students'. Some principals (Principals 2, 7 and 8) saw themselves as role models for demonstrating caring relationships to their staff and students (Rosenblum et al, 1994). In the case of Principal 8, it was a question of replicating the quality of the relationship which they experienced with the Lasallian Brothers: 'Every day, I have to learn the spirit of trust from the Lasallian Brothers. I have taken 2 years to win the trust of the teachers.'

Another principal (Principal 7) talked about being a role model for demonstrating caring relationships to teachers and students using the technique of ‘touching hearts: ‘ I feel I have to be a role model for teachers and students. I am caring for teachers and parents. This can touch their hearts to improve by themselves .... very important to school improvement.’ The same principal was also a keen advocate of empathising with parents: ‘Before I do anything, I will change into the position of parents and see things from their perspective. This (empathising with parents) is important in handling parents’ problems easily’. Another principal (Principal 2) extended the responsibility of being a role model to other senior and middle managers: ‘I feel I have to serve as a role model. If we want to develop successfully, the senior and middle management, like the panel chairpersons, need to have the same views and serve as role models’.

A facilitative leader resembles an instructional leader (Mortimore et al, 1988), who teaches, coaches, but also promotes the capacity building of teachers (Harris and Chapman, 2002), is pro-active in fundraising, uses development planning and facilitates a sharing of good practice (Blase and Blase, 1998). Evidence from the interview data suggests that four principals (Principals 1, 2, 3 and 9) adopted the role of facilitative leader. For example, Principal 1 provided guidance to assist his staff draw up a development plan: ‘Last year, the teachers did not know how to draw up the development plan for the coming years .... I held meetings with different subject panels and lead them to review their needs and performance by subject in public examinations and identify strategies for improving the weaker subjects. In this way, they were helped to draw up the development plans’. Sharing good practice of ‘what works’ among Lasallian principals was not only important for school improvement but also an indication of a strengthening of the association of Lasallian schools as a developing learning community. A good example was provided by Principal 3 who

disseminated the way he had used CPD on behavioural management to tackle indiscipline to turn his school round when it was threatened by closure as a result of difficulties in recruiting students. As he explained: ‘I invite teachers from another Lasallian schools to share and disseminate good practice with staff of our school. Just to help them to learn how to improve the teaching strategies and behavioural management in class. ’

Involving teachers and parents in decision making is not something which has been common in Hong Kong schools (Dimmock, 1998) and was a development which the reform proposals for SBM encouraged. Consulting with teachers and parents was identified as being an important aspect of leadership in Schools 2 and 8. In school 2, the principal claimed he used a consultative leadership style working with his two deputy principals in order to make a decision. He explained how he used a combination of bottom up and top down management techniques depending on the circumstances but admitted that bottom up techniques would be rarely used. The principal explained how he preferred to consult with teachers and parents before introducing new policy measures: ‘The big principle is respecting the ideas of front line workers. I hope they can give me valuable ideas, for example how many periods to allocate to liberal studies in the new 3-3-4 system’. The same principal emphasised the importance of shared accountability: ‘I want them to be accountable collectively.’

A re-engineering leader focuses on organizational re-structuring and job re-structuring (Hammer and Champy, 2003). It seems that only Principal 3 adopted the role of re-engineering in his school. In his case, it would seem that the education reform proposals were an external stimulus to adopting the concept of continuous improvement and the concept of a learning organisation (Senge 1990; Sergiovanni 1996): ‘I agree that education reform has its own merits. It

drives all of us, from principal to school workers to learn continuously'. In a process of organisational re-configuration the principal re-allocated the responsibilities of the two deputies and replaced incompetent middle managers. Another example of re-configuration came from the re-classification of the responsibilities of senior teacher responsible for the School Computer Administration and Management System (SAMS) into hardware and software divisions. The original senior teacher continued to manage the hardware division and a newly recruited teacher with skills in computer programming administered the software division.

## **5.11 Factors and Strategies for achieving Education Quality**

### ***5.11.1. School Culture***

School culture is 'the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members' of a school (Schein, 1985 p. 6). Most educational researchers employ the anthropological definition of culture: the knowledge, traditions, values, beliefs, customs, rituals, symbols, artifacts and symbols of a particular group (Hargreaves, D, 1995). Culture can play a powerful role in changing a school (Stoll and Fink, 1996) but as Deal and Kennedy (1983) claim: 'When culture works against you, it's nearly impossible to get anything done' (p. 140). In this investigation several principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4 5, 8, 9 and 10) identified school culture as an important factor in improving education quality. As previously noted, sharing a common vision to achieve a unity of purpose was considered to be important by these principals (Zywine et al, 1995). In schools which enjoyed a high reputation for academic success, this meant preserving enduring cultural values, a point made by Principal 1: 'The important thing is that our school has a rationale which never changes. Our



school motto is 'Labour and Virtue'. We always try to strike a balance between academic achievement and extra-curricular activities'. A few school principals, (Principals 2, 3 and 4) were promoting a culture of continuous improvement (Zywine et al, 1995). As Principal 2 pointed out: 'Education quality is actually (about) continuous improvement which was supported by a culture of creating a learning community. I feel that quality education is a whole school approach ... in which all teaching staff, non teaching staff and parents support education quality.' Closely allied with this was the view that because concepts of education quality are dynamic (Adams, 1993) schools must embrace a culture of continuous improvement and become 'learning organisations' (Principal 3). Principals 4 and 8 alluded to the importance of promoting the 'teachers as learners culture' to improve the quality of teaching (Zywine et al, 1995): 'If teachers learn continuously to improve their teaching and learning, and are professionally equipped for their teaching in the classroom, students will be motivated to learn easily and willingly. Teachers as learners culture is important for improving the whole school'. The principal of School 10 alluded to the importance of promoting a collaborative culture (Zywine et al, 1995) to improve teaching with young and older teachers combining knowledge and experience: 'For improving teaching quality, collaboratively we, the old and young teachers, exchange knowledge and experience with one another and discuss how teachers in other schools are working.'

### ***5.11.2. Organisational conditions***

In some schools, organisational changes were made to support the improvement of teaching and learning. These changes included reducing the staff student ratio, deploying their best teachers for maximum effect and re-configuring their schools by making senior appointments to support the improvement of teaching

and learning. For example, in Schools 2 and 10, organisational changes were made to enhance the staff-student ratio. In School 2, two teachers were allocated per class in secondary 1 with each teacher responsible for 20 students and each student was allowed three tutorials per year. The same school had introduced small class teaching (using government funding) in Chinese, English and Mathematics in secondary schools 4 and 5. In secondary school 3, staff were deployed strategically to support teaching and learning: ‘the best teachers were allocated to the class of secondary one and with a doubling up of staff in secondary one and two’. Also the principal of the same school assigned the student guidance officer to be the class teacher of the worst (behaving) class. The way in which senior management teams were sometimes reconfigured was illustrated by Principal 4: ‘One deputy principal is important for student work. The other is responsible for school administration. Without these two, I cannot complete my work.’

The importance of providing a good learning environment and high quality school resources to improve students’ learning experiences was mentioned by several principals (Principals 1, 2, 4, 8, 9 and 10). Speaking for others, Principal 2 stressed: ‘Without good resources, how can teachers handle the rapidly changing environment?’ Principal 4 was one of several principals who noted the importance of improving the learning environment: ‘In the last two years, we installed computers and projectors in all classrooms at a cost of 0.6 million HKD’. Whilst placing a similar emphasis on the quality of the learning environment, primary school principals felt that funding was inadequate. As principal 10 explained: ‘We have invested a lot of resources to improve the school environment. I feel that the biggest problem in the realm of education quality is the shortage of resources and funding.’

### ***5.11.3. School Development planning***

As previously noted, school development planning (SDP) was a key component of Stoll and Fink's (1996) model of school improvement. For them, it was 'the vehicle that blends the school effectiveness research findings with the school improvement process' (Stoll and Fink, 1996 p. 188). The drawing up of a school development plan is connected with 'school self-evaluation, curriculum development and the push for greater accountability' (Stoll and Fink, 1996, p. 63). In the interviews, a few principals (Principals 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10) specifically described the role of development planning for school improvement. As Principal 2 explained: 'We use SWOT analysis to define our school goals to assist our future development ... if we want to improve'. Principal 3 outlined in some detail the way in which the school development plan contributed to both improving education quality and providing accountability to stakeholders: 'The school development plan is important to us as it is related to SSE and curriculum development in our school ... indirectly (it) is a push for accountability from principals and teachers to students.' The same principal explained how he had made use of external expertise to audit provision and identify priority areas for improvement, firstly improving classroom discipline, followed by improvements in teaching and learning, with the former supported by carefully targeted CPD: 'When I became principal, I often referred to the X university external evaluation report (2003-2004) which provided a strategy for school direction ... We sent 5 teachers to receive training to learn techniques in behaviour management'.

From an alternative perspective, the principal of School 1 expressed concern that development planning was essentially a device for accountability to the EDB, a trend which was noted by MacGilchrist (1994) and challenged what he

considered to be unnecessary bureaucratic demands made by the EDB to write plans and reports, using the time which he thought could have been spent more profitably on improving student learning outcomes. This may explain why he did not identify SDP as a strategy for school improvement: ‘I think ... principals did not see the link between the school development plan and the improvement of teaching and learning ... the school development plan is written just to satisfy the External School Review ... We have to spend a lot of time on writing the school development plan and reports ..... The time on writing these can be devoted to improving teaching and learning to improve student learning outcomes’.

#### ***5.11.4. The quality of teaching***

Teachers are also an important component in the School Improvement model of Stoll and Fink (1996). According to Leu (2005), the view that teachers have a key role in improving the quality of students’ learning has not received the attention it deserves .The recruitment and retention of high quality teachers is an important factor in school improvement which was identified by Principals 2, 3, 4 ,5, 6 and 7. These principals were looking to recruit high quality teachers who could contribute effectively to the success of the school beyond their subject specialisms.The point was well made by Principal 2: ‘Good teachers are important to our school improvement ... We need teachers who know how to teach and help in various disciplines, like sports and cultural development ... Retaining and recruiting good teachers is an important strategy for improving our school’. Successful education reform and teachers’ professional development are integrally linked (Bolam, 2002). Improving the quality of teacher’s professional learning is essential to raise standards of attainment and implement new ideas about teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

So faced with the prospect of imminent pedagogical reform, the provision of opportunities for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD), both in-house and external, was especially important.

The provision of CPD was regarded by some principals (Principals 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8) as a key factor in the improvement of teaching and learning and peer lesson observation emerged as the most commonly cited in-house strategy. As Principal 1 observed: 'Continuous professional development and peer lesson observation are good methods for improving education quality.' As Principal 2 pointed out: 'Teachers are the greatest asset of the school. We have to give teachers staff development to improve their skills and knowledge'. Some of the most effective CPD was provided in-house and involved coaching and the sharing of good practice. In School 3, a form of distributed leadership was used with experienced teachers taking part in a phased approach to lesson observation, starting with subject specific observations and culminating in observations by non-subject specialists to improve teaching. In the opinion of the principal, these lesson observations had helped to develop a culture of continuous improvement: 'Now all the teachers are used to having lesson observation by teachers of different disciplines and do not resist such activity'. Principal 3 recognised it was imperative that teachers were fully prepared for impending reform: 'In secondary school, the possible problem concerns the upcoming new secondary school system .... Teachers do not know how to cope with the new reforms. The difficulty for teachers is that they do not possess the knowledge and experience ...to face this new system'. The principal of School 8 provided experienced teachers to help teachers experiencing difficulties.

### ***5.11.5. Parent-School Partnerships***

In their model for school improvement, Stoll and Fink (1996) clearly stated the importance of parent-school partnerships contributing ‘significantly to a pupil’s success in school’ (Stoll and Fink, 1996, pp. 134-5). The work of the International School Improvement Project (ISIP) asserted the important role that parents can play in school improvement (Hopkins, 1990; Hopkins et al, 1994), a view which is shared by Denessen et al. (2001), Fullan (1993), and Mortimore (1998). The interview data indicated that several principals (Principals 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10), including all primary schools with one exception identified parent-school partnerships as an important factor / strategy in school improvement. In a rare example of the contribution made by parents in a secondary school, Principal 2 explained how parent-school partnerships can be used to support reading to learn (one of the reform proposals): ‘We hope that students can read more books ... parents are very helpful in the library, book binding and covering as well as bar code entry.’ In some schools (Schools 2 and 6) parents made important contributions to improving students’ learning experiences especially in organising extra-curricular activities. In the primary school of Principal 6, parents helped students develop their interest in reading books at the ‘English corner’ and took charge of the school’s extra-curricular activities under the supervision of the PTA. In the primary school of Principal 9, parents helped teachers look after students at lunch time, thus releasing them to have more time for lesson preparation. Encouraging parent-school partnerships in more deprived areas require considerable effort on the part of the principal. As the principal of a school (Principal 3) in a more deprived area observed: ‘In prestigious schools, there is no need to encourage parents to become engaged in school work. Parents in my school did not receive much education and dare not help, so it was rare and precious for parents and students to stand beside me’.

## 5.12 Principals' Conceptualisation of Accountability

Broadly speaking, accountability is the process by which a person or a group of people is held to account for their conduct to those (stakeholders) who are entitled to the information (Earl, 1998; Glynn and Murphy, 1996). The evidence from the interviews suggests that all principals defined accountability as a responsibility to all stakeholders. Their response was typified by Principal 6: 'Accountability means a responsibility held to the stakeholders of an organisation for answering their questions, and being obliged to inform them what has been done and what the results are'. It was important that stakeholders understood that they were involved in both an identity and relational form of accountability (Unerman and O'Dwyer, 2006). This was important in this research where the goal was to achieve a consensus view on education quality by stakeholders in the Lasallian Community. Unfortunately, Principal 6 was of the opinion that the stakeholders did not understand that they held a relational accountability to one another: 'The current difficulty is how to make all stakeholders understand that all stakeholders are inter-related together ... they perceive that they are held accountable to those group of people to whom they belong, sharing the same interests. Without holding relational accountability to other stakeholders in school, the co-ordination of work will be affected.'

Accountability can be a catalyst to improve education quality. The requirement for schools to be accountable to different stakeholders in an organisation drives the improvement of quality (Roberts, 1991). Several principals (Principals 2, 4, 7, 8, and 10) confirmed this view referring to the positive link between the pressure of accountability and the improvement of education quality. As secondary Principal 2 asserted, accountability encourages teachers to perform to

high standards: ‘Without accountability, the development of education quality will be difficult. Accountability is a good thing. It can make everyone work to the best of their ability.’ A similar view was articulated by primary principal 7: ‘Accountability is the driving force of education quality. I have to be accountable to the SMB, parents, students, EDB, teachers and so on’. The same principal recognised her own accountability for improving education quality: ‘Principals have the responsibility to turn schools into good ones’. But some principals cautioned that accountability can have negative consequences; for instance, when goals and specifications are not met, accountability may become a threat to be avoided. Principal 4 made it clear that he ‘did not use accountability to threaten and impose pressure on my (his) colleagues. I (he) accept opposing voices’. Principal 8 also issued a word of caution pointing out the possibly negative effects of accountability on morale and producing a culture of complaint.

### **5.13 To whom the Principals were Accountable, for What Aspect of Quality and How is this achieved (form of accountability)**

When responding to the need for accountability, principals may face differing demands for education quality from different stakeholders (Gibton, 2003). All Lasallian principals, with the exception of Principal 10, perceived they were accountable in an upward (Burke, 2005; Vidovich and Slee, 2000), relational and identity (Ebrahim, 2003a; Unerman and O’Dwyer, 2006) form of accountability to the EDB for the effective management of the school and for implementing the reform proposals. This accountability was achieved by the production of an annual plan and arrangements for evaluation. However, one primary school principal (Principal 7) cautioned that principals should not automatically accept all education reforms proposed by the EDB without first



evaluating their feasibility and needed to ‘reflect on the possible difficulties ... (and achieve a) ... compromise with the EDB to work out a win-win solution for both sides’. Only one principal (Principal 10) claimed that she was not accountable to the EDB for the introduction of school reform as the income of her school was derived from the students’ school fees and a subsidy from the school supervisor.

All Lasallian principals held themselves accountable to the ILBS via the SMC for the effective management of the school (but not all schools had fully functioning SMCs) in an upward form of accountability. As Principal 7 observed: ‘The SMC, representing the Institute of Lasallian Brothers, employs a person to be the principal. Thus, all principals are held accountable to the SMC for the effective management of the school’. Effective management referred to development planning, self evaluation, the effective deployment of staff and equitable allocation of resources across departments. According to Principal 3, effective management referred to: ‘the presence of an appropriate use of school monetary resources, a state of harmony in school, continual progress in student learning, all stakeholders co-operating for the benefit of students and good maintenance of school premises’. The principal of secondary school 2 considered that he was accountable to the SMC for maintaining school tradition: ‘Our College has many customs that have existed for a long time. These cannot be changed at once. We will sustain and keep the good traditions e.g. sports.’ Another secondary principal (Principal 3) held himself accountable to the ILBS and SMC for preventing the closure of his school caused by a shortage of students in his school. As he explained: ‘The school was suffering from a serious shortage of students and could have been closed down by the EDB at any time because of this. I was appointed by the SMC and the ILBS to resolve the school’s survival problem’. According to Principal 10,

accountability to the school supervisor was important ‘to help the school improve and help children to learn happily’.

Teachers are key stakeholders in school and their participation has a positive effect on improving school effectiveness and students’ performance (Anderson, 2002). Principals have a responsibility for maximising their contribution to school improvement (Cheng, 2003c; Sernak, 1998). A majority of principals (Principals 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10), reported that they held themselves responsible in a downward and upward form of accountability (Burke, 2005) to their teachers for helping to improve the quality of their teaching. Principal 4 asserted the importance of high quality teaching: ‘(With good teaching quality), they (the teachers) can teach their students effectively... students can benefit from their lessons’. One way in which some principals (Principals 7 and 8) demonstrated their accountability was by improving the performance of newly qualified teachers in a professional form of accountability (Burke, 2005). As Principal 7 explained: ‘the principal has the responsibility to lead the new teacher to become a good teacher.... the important thing is that when new teachers are employed, their mentors give them confidence and help them’. Another important aspect of accountability was the way in which principals held themselves responsible for helping their staff with difficulties and problems relating to reform. In this way, they were responding to concerns that insufficient support was provided for teachers to cope with new challenges (Chan 2010; Law 2003). Principal 7 was one of five principals (Principals 2, 3, 5, 7 and 8) who were mindful of possible problems: ‘If I have prepared them through continuous professional development and attending appropriate courses run by higher education institutions, when they face any difficulties and problems not encountered before, they will know how to handle the situation’. Another principal (Principal 8), felt that it was important to provide staff with a

pleasant learning environment and they could also feel that they could approach their leader for support.

Another important aspect of the accountability relationship between the principals and their teachers was the use of performance appraisal to make decisions on promotion. Principal 2 valued the new arrangements which he felt were preferable to the former situation when promotion was based on length of experience and personal relations: 'We can know which teachers have better performance and which weakest. Before, promotion was made according to seniority, the number of years working in the school and the relationship factor'.

All principals identified their accountability to parents in a market driven recruitment situation in which customer satisfaction (Parasuraman et al, 1985; Cheng, 2003), legitimacy models of quality assurance (Cheng, 2003 ) and market accountability (Halstead, 1994; West 1994) were important. As primary principal 8 explained: 'Schools will define their education responsibility in response to parents' requirements'. One principal (Principal 3) placed great emphasis on co-operation between school and home and appreciated the importance of that relationship: 'I place my focus on cooperation between school and home. The parents choose your school because they trust that the teachers are willing to help their students'. Mindful of the importance of monitoring students' progress, eight principals (Principals 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 , 7 and 8) indicated that they used regular reports to parents on students' progress in different subjects as one form of accountability. An important aspect of their role was creating effective channels of communication with parents. As Principal 2 explained: 'We have meetings with parents' gatherings (monthly PTA meetings) and with parents of secondary 1- 5.' In those secondary schools (Schools 1, 2 and 3), with a school tradition of achieving high academic

standards, principals went to great lengths to demonstrate to the parents their commitment to achieving high standards of academic attainment. In school 8, accountability to parents took the form of providing a safe learning environment for young children.

Students are important stakeholders in school (Osborne et al, 1998; O'Neil et al 1999) and as in the case of parents, principals are accountable to their students in a market form of accountability (Kotler and Andreasen, 1987).

Accountability to students featured very prominently in all Lasallian schools where a majority of principals (Principals 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 9) held themselves accountable to their students for their academic attainment. Other forms of accountability to their students included providing equal learning opportunities (Principals 3, 5, 6 and 9), helping them to become good citizens (Principals 2, 4, 7 and 8), assisting their personal development (Principal 7), and providing an enjoyable learning environment (Principal 10). Developing their students' active citizenship was exemplified by the principal of School 2: 'My accountability to students is that I have the responsibility to give them chances to develop themselves within their capabilities and become a useful citizen with good ethical behaviour'.

In Hong Kong, Old Boys Associations are a significant stakeholder group, especially in prestigious schools and exerted some influence, especially on communicating the need to maintain school status and traditions as well as providing significant financial support. As the principal of School 2 commented: 'The Old Boys Association of X college has a lot of power. They have given a lot of money to help their schools to provide a better education'. Old boys of successful schools expect students to continue to perform well academically.

### **5.14 The Role of Principals in reconciling Stakeholders' views on Education Quality**

In the current age of many education reforms, different stakeholders have different views of education quality (Cheng, 1995) and a principal may face the problem of how to manage his / her accountability to different stakeholder groups (McConnell, 1971). Effective accountability is derived from negotiating a consensus with stakeholders when there are conflicting expectations of education quality and how quality can be achieved (Kogan, 1986; Talmange and Munroe, 1972). In this investigation, an important aspect of the principal's role in the face of impending reform was to secure an agreement on education quality which would satisfy all main stakeholders, the EDB, SMC, parents, teachers and students. An important task for the principals was to avoid conflict in the form of 'perceived incompatible differences that result in interference or opposition' (Robbins and Coulter, 2007, p.465). Their challenge was neatly summarised by Principal 2: 'It is difficult to balance the different accountabilities to different stakeholders. We hope that all can have a common and agreed understanding of education quality.' To reconcile stakeholders' views, the interview data revealed that principals were required to play different roles, mediator (Blase and Blase, 1991) communication facilitator (Blase and Blase, 1991), coaching leader (Bradley, 2004) and problem solver (Cheng, 2003).

In the role of mediator, a number of principals (Principals 1, 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10) acted as a peace maker between opposing sides. As Principal 8 explained: 'Mediation is important for reaching a compromise on different views. I play the role of mediator to resolve issues ... to influence stakeholders to reconcile their differing views on education quality'. Much of the principals' work in

relation to education quality and accountability appeared to take place as part of the principals' 'maintenance' rather than 'development function' (Cheng 2003; Leithwood et al, 2006). On a practical daily basis, the principals generally saw an important aspect of their role as mediating between different stakeholder groups, especially between teachers and parents concerning students. According to the principal of School 1, parents are now more articulate and demanding than before with much more communication between parents and the school. One primary school principal (Principal 8) felt that there was sometimes a tension between teachers and parents which the principal had to resolve: 'I play the role of mediator to resolve issues ... even though teachers have made mistakes, I have to support them over teaching methods and conflicts with parents.' In their role as communication facilitator, Principals 1, 2, 3 and 4 acted as a channel of communication between the stakeholder groups. In their role as coaching leader, Principals 3, 5 and 9 helped and guided their stakeholders to see possible solutions to reconcile their differing views. Finally, in the face of having to deal with a critical problem such as the threat of closure, the principal (Principal 3) was obliged to play the role of a problem solver.

In reality, some situations required the principal to adopt more than one accountability role at any one time to reconcile stakeholders' views (Cheng, 2003c; Bradley, 2004). This was graphically illustrated in way in which Principal 3 recounted how he had worked with stakeholders to avoid the threat of school closure: 'Our school was running short of students. We faced a problem of school closure; I had to facilitate communication with different stakeholders and make them understand this critical problem. I had to guide and coach them on how to resolve this problem ... Eventually, after three years of different stakeholders' hard work, our critical problem of school closure was removed'.

When taking on these roles to reconcile stakeholders' differing views, principals adopted a number of principles and strategies. As Principal 3 explained: 'If I have good principles, like (making a) decision for the benefit of students and using strategies like transparency, there will be no difficulty in the reconciliation of different views on education quality.' The interview data revealed that principals adopted four principles for resolving conflicts in their accountability to stakeholders. A majority of principals (Principals 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10) agreed on the importance of making a decision for the benefit of students, a view which concurs with the ILBS and Education Commission of Hong Kong (EC). As the EC asserted: 'We wish to foster the development of every student; school education should develop all students' (EC, 1999,p. 17). The need for a student centred focus was agreed by all stakeholders as pointed out by Principal 10: 'The development and academic outcomes of students ... (is) the concern of stakeholders.' Other principles were the importance of stakeholder demands being reasonable (Principals 2, 4, 7 and 10), decisions based on factual evidence (Principals 6, 7 and 9) and understanding the background of the conflict before making a decision (Principals 1, 2 and 8) as illustrated by the following examples. Principal 6 considered that the parents' attempt to intrude on the teachers' methods was unreasonable as the teachers were trained specialists. Before making a decision on whether to make direct teaching or project learning as the focus of development for students in the coming school year, Principal 7 insisted on collecting factual evidence from other schools and advice from scholars in Higher Education before making her decision. In a conflict over parents' demands for more training to raise students' academic attainment and teachers' request for more extra-curricular activities to develop students' differing abilities in the coming year (which was debated in the annual PTA meeting), Principal 8 requested more time to understand the background to the conflict before making her decision.

Evidence from the interviews suggested that four strategies were adopted by Lasallian principals to reconcile stakeholders' views. The first was a strategy of non-intervention (Principals 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9) which is in agreement with the management rationale of the ILBS. As the Director of Lasallian Brothers explained: 'We want stakeholders to resolve their problems and conflicts by themselves' (BP, 2007). Being fair and transparent were potentially complementary strategies for reconciling stakeholders' views. Transparency was regarded as being important by Principals 2, 4, 6, 7 and 10 and fairness by Principals 3 and 9. As Principal 4 explained: 'We need to have high transparency; otherwise, we cannot get support for the policy we are implementing'. The interview data revealed that the majority of principals used meetings with teachers (nine principals), parents (six principals) and PTA (five principals) in an attempt to reconcile stakeholders' views.

This chapter has presented and analysed the findings from the interviews on how the Hong Kong Lasallian principals perceived education quality and accountability and how their perceptions were shaped by their unique context and their relationship to different stakeholders to whom they were accountable. The final chapter will provide a summary of the findings, implications and recommendations, evaluation of the research, some suggestions for further research and an end-note.



## **Chapter 6 Conclusions**

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Summary of findings
- 6.3 Implications and recommendations
- 6.4 Evaluation of the research
- 6.5 Suggestions for further research work
- 6.6 End note: Current developments in the Lasallian schools in Hong Kong

### **6.1 Introduction**

This study aims to investigate how the ten principals of Lasallian schools in Hong Kong perceive education quality and accountability and how this perception is shaped by the unique context in Hong Kong and their relationship to different stakeholders to whom they are accountable. The unique context refers to the demographic situation, the nature of the catchment area for each school, the influence of EDB policy, SMC, teachers, parents and students. Findings from this investigation could potentially prove useful to all members of the Lasallian Community. All principals can ‘share the good practices, challenges and concerns in their Lasallian world’ (Tierney and Tam, 2009, p. 91). The investigation provides evidence of: how the principals accommodate Lasallian values / beliefs and practices in the face of reform proposals; the leadership roles which principals adopt to achieve education quality and accountability to stakeholders; the factors / strategies which principals use to achieve education quality and quality assurance; how they set out to reconcile the views of different stakeholders on education quality; and how the principals take into consideration the distinct context of their school when faced with the reform agenda. In this concluding chapter, the main findings will be summarised in relation to each main research question. This will be followed by implications and recommendations, an evaluation of the investigation, suggestions for further research and an end-note.

## **6.2 Summary of findings**

Education systems are often structured around what is believed to be a shared vision and related concepts of education quality (Leu, 2005). At the government level in Hong Kong, concepts of education quality are outlined in major education reform proposals such as ECR 7 and ERB 2000. These concepts are the pursuit of excellence, value for money, consumer (parent and student) satisfaction, holistic education, continuous improvement and value added-ness. In their roles as supervisor / mentor, the Lasallian Brothers continue to promote their own distinctive visions and beliefs of education quality through cultural ‘artifacts’ such as vision and mission statements. These visions and beliefs are ‘Education for All’, ‘Touching Hearts and Minds’ (caring relationships between staff and students, principals and staff), and a belief in the value of holistic education for preparation for adult life. Lasallian school principals appear wanting to continue to preserve these visions and beliefs, notably education for all and holistic education which is endorsed by the government but these aspirations appear to be thwarted by the relentless pursuit of academic attainment.

Education quality is a time bound concept and interpretations of what constitutes education quality continue to evolve (Adams, 1993). Many current reform proposals appear to be related to the need to make learning relevant to the future lives of young people and endorse life-long learning (Cheng, 2003). This appears to be the case in Hong Kong, where policy statements are intended to change the way in which students learn, with teachers helping students to ‘learn how to learn’ with more project work and formative assessment, and develop a range of thinking skills. These proposals are intended to place less emphasis on the teaching of subject content but in reality there is still pressure

for teachers to cover the syllabus with subject programmes tightly prescribed. Very few principals interviewed appeared to associate education quality with assisting students ‘to learn how to learn’.

Academic attainment continues to be the prime indicator of the quality of education in Hong Kong. This dominance is promoted by the use of summative assessment for both accountability and selection of students and by the government’s use of student allocation and its policy on EMI and CMI status. These policies compel all secondary schools to improve / maintain high standards of academic attainment which in turn puts pressure on their feeder primary schools to ‘add value’ to students’ attainment. Parents, teachers and alumni continue to regard academic attainment as of prime importance. Despite the call from government for more formative assessment to help students learn, teachers continue to ‘teach to the test’ to enable students to perform well in the TSA (Johnson, 1997). Teachers resorting to ‘drilling methods’ in a bid to boost students’ performance is still common (Ngan et al, 2010). Other ‘knock-on’ effects of the focus on academic attainment on the curriculum include the difficulty of introducing holistic education to broaden the curriculum and the reluctance of some parents to allow their children to take part in extra-curricular activities.

In Lasallian schools, education quality is context bound and has to take into consideration both the wider Hong Kong demographic context and the local unique historical and geographical conditions of each school. Values and beliefs about the desired outcomes of education quality are influenced by both school tradition and local socio-economic conditions. In a highly segregated school system (Lo, 2000 ), the quality of the student intake is perceived to determine the academic potential of the school. Tradition also plays a key role in providing

a steer for the direction of the school; for instance, principals of secondary schools with a strong academic and sporting tradition continue to hold on to an 'exceptionality' vision of quality (Harvey,1995) because these schools continue to have a high status in the community and are strongly supported by school alumni in the form of monetary and other contributions; whereas in those schools with less academically able student intakes, less emphasis is placed on academic attainment and more on cultural and sporting achievement.

In dealing with external reform proposals, principals have to operate at the interface between government and the school level (Bell and Stevenson, 2006) to interpret and implement changes in education policy which are not necessarily popular with other stakeholders. The policy on the inclusion of SEN students was considered by principals to be difficult to implement because of a lack of teacher expertise and large class sizes; that on holistic education was unrealistic, especially in primary schools, because of the pressure to succeed academically and a lack of funding. The reform proposals were comprehensive, challenging and introduced in a rapid succession prompting suggestions from some principals that these proposals were too demanding for their teachers who were already under pressure from the demands of the public examination system. The proposed shift from direct teaching to one in which the teacher was more a facilitator of learning was generally regarded by some principals with some scepticism who saw the pressure that teachers were under to deliver subject content.

School based management and arrangements for quality assurance devolve power to the school level but autonomy is constrained by government policy guidelines (Glatter, 2002). Governments seek to improve education quality and provide quality assurance through mechanisms for 'pressure' and 'support'. In

Hong Kong, the new requirements for quality assurance and monitoring in SDA were new and demanding (Ngan et al, 2010). In the case of Lasallian schools, government ‘pressure’ appeared to be exerting a dominant influence on the improvement of education quality. For instance, pressure was primarily exerted by the requirement for schools to produce an annual development plan, self-evaluation report, access ‘categorical funding’ for CPD and improve school infra-structure. Primary school principals considered that the level of funding available to support centrally organised CPD was inadequate.

In their capacity as school supervisor, the Lasallian Brothers appeared to be essentially a conservative influence and a source of stability in the face of education reform proposals. They provided support for the maintenance of traditional values and beliefs about the purpose of education and the importance of caring relationships between principals and their staff and teachers and students. They generally appeared to stop short of providing detailed guidance on how education quality could be improved in each school. The Lasallian Brothers appeared to be well respected and there was a high degree of mutual trust in their relations with their principals. There was some evidence that the Institute of Lasallian Brothers was promoting more co-operation between Lasallian schools in the form of meetings and sharing good practice at the level of the principal in the Principal’s Conference.

In terms of models for managing education quality and providing quality assurance (Cheng and Tam, 1997; Cheng, 2003), a few specific models appeared to dominate but each school principal also appeared to use some models dependent on their own school context. In response to the government’s approach to quality assurance, all principals were obliged to adopt strategies associated with the goal and specification approach. The majority of principals

recognised the importance of the resource-input model attempting to recruit able students, appointing high quality staff, reducing the staff-student ratio, improving the school's physical infra-structure, and extending IT facilities. In a market driven situation with competition for students in both the primary and secondary sectors, all schools were obliged to pay attention to the consumer satisfaction model of education quality and this was reflected in principals' arrangements for accountability which included regular contact with parents and surveys of stakeholder satisfaction. One school faced with the threat of closure as a result of falling rolls was obliged to implement strategies associated with a legitimacy model of managing quality. The majority of principals appeared to support the expert model for managing (and improving) education quality with attempts to develop the capacity of teachers and encourage a sharing of good practice within the school and increasingly in the wider community of Lasallian schools. A majority of principals tend to adopt the organizational learning model for improving education quality in school mainly by using lesson observation, sending staff to attend courses run by HEIs and encouraging experience and knowledge sharing among staff.

To improve education quality, the majority of Lasallian principals adopted several roles. These were coaching leader, creator of a community of leaders, affiliative leader, facilitative leader, consultative leader, and re-engineering leader. The most common of these roles were affiliative leader (nine principals), coaching leader (eight principals), and creator of a community of leaders (seven principals). The creator of a community of leaders role implied the use of a form of distributive leadership which was supported by the EDB and ILBS and represented a significant shift from a traditional to a more collegial form of leadership (Hargreaves, D, 1995). Student outcomes are more likely to improve when teachers are empowered in areas which are important to them (Silns and

Mulford, 2002). Invitational leadership and delegation of responsibilities are significant in the principal's new role as a creator of a community of leaders. The Lasallian principals used more than one role to manage and improve education quality in their schools (Table 5.1). For instance, Principal 7 adopted the roles of coaching leader, creator of a community of leaders and affiliative leader for managing and improving education quality in her school.

A majority of principals recognised the importance of promoting a shared vision to create a unity of purpose (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Rosenblum et al, 1994) and this was often included in school vision and mission statements which reflected Lasallian values and beliefs. Linked with this cultural norm was the perceived need to communicate high expectations to staff to raise standards of student attainment (Mortimore et al, 1998). A number of principals identified the importance of promoting a culture of continuous improvement (Cheng, 2003; Mok, 2007) and this was linked with the idea of promoting the 'teacher as learner' (Stoll and Fink, 1996; Zywine et al, 1995). Creating a culture of collaboration between teachers was intended to share good practice of effective teaching and in one school was achieved by the systematic use of lesson observation. All schools were promoting a caring culture for teachers and students (BP, 2007; Louis, 1994; Rosenblum et al, 1994) based on the Lasallian belief in 'touching hearts and minds' (Hargreaves, D, 1995). Some principals noted a willingness of teachers to be accountable for their performance (Johnson, 1990; Robertson and Briggs, 1998). There was some evidence that schools were in transition and in some respects traditional and some collegial (Hargreaves, D, 1995). For instance, in one school, faced with the threat of school closure, the principal asserted his authority by requiring all teachers to stamp out indiscipline and took control of the development planning process himself. Later, when student enrolment increased, he devolved more

responsibility to teachers to construct their subject development plans and to ‘foster collegiality among all staff’.

Improving the school infrastructure to enhance students’ learning experiences and reconfiguring the structure of their organisation to support collaboration and continuous improvement are considered to be important factors in school improvement (Stoll and Fink, 1996; Zywine et al. 1995). Most principals recognised the importance of providing adequate resources in the form of buildings and equipment, including IT facilities for the achievement of education quality. There were also significant examples of principals reconfiguring school structures to place more emphasis on teaching; this included the appointment of a deputy at senior management level responsible for teaching and learning and principals were also prepared to replace underperforming staff members.

In some research literature (Hopkins et al, 1994), the school improvement process was conceived as a carefully planned and managed process in which whole school planning, monitoring and evaluation play a key role. Despite the fact that all principals were required by the government to produce a development plan and evaluation report, relatively few commented on the value of the process for either improving quality or demonstrating accountability. Only one principal referred to the effectiveness of using systematic and phased plan for school improvement. Another principal perceived the process of development planning to be primarily concerned with demonstrating accountability to the government and parents. Most Lasallian principals seemed to be as concerned with the continuity and maintenance function of their roles as they were with the improvement of educational quality. Routine maintainance tasks such as the equitable allocation of resources across



departments, securing adequate funding, convening meetings with senior managers, mediating in disputes between teachers, students and their parents, and meeting with parents were frequently mentioned in the interviews.

Echoing a UNESCO (2004) report, the quality of teachers and teaching was seen by most principals as a key factor in the achievement of education quality.

A major cause of failure of some past school reforms has been attributed to a lack of high quality professional development (Sparks and Hirsch, 2000).

Concern about teacher quality was reflected in the care taken by some principals in making initial appointments. Principals were keen where possible to recruit highly qualified teachers and recently trained graduates who were prepared to offer an additional sporting or cultural contribution to the life of the school beyond their individual subject specialism and who had already been introduced to new teaching approaches. The effective deployment of teachers in the classroom was also a concern, with significant attempts to improve the staff student ratio and to deploy staff for maximum effect by strategic use of the best teachers. Enhancing the quality of English teachers was a priority for EMI schools and, when available, principals drew on additional funding to recruit native speakers. Extending the capacity of teachers was regarded as a priority by most principals to improve teaching in response to the calls for pedagogical change (Darling-Hammond, 2005). When funding was available, selected teachers in each school were encouraged to attend centrally devised CPD with an expectation that they would be able to apply their newly acquired expertise and share with colleagues. Primary school principals felt disadvantaged by a shortage of funds to support CPD. In the best practice, schools used mentors and coaches to assist colleagues experiencing difficulties. In one school, lesson observation was widely used to improve the quality of teaching and learning, a practice which had reportedly changed the school culture.

School partners external to the school are an important component of the Stoll and Fink (1996) model of school improvement which includes alumni, parents, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and employers. Only one example was provided of the use of HEI consultancy for school improvement suggesting that this was an under-used strategy. Parent-school partnerships are potentially important for improving students' learning experiences and enhancing accountability, for instance through stakeholder surveys. Some primary schools had an excellent reputation for involving parents to provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities and supporting students' reading. Parent-school partnerships were being encouraged in schools in catchment areas with good socio-economic conditions.

External accountability to the government was generally perceived to be a catalyst for the improvement of education quality and was achieved by development planning and evaluation, both internal and external. All principals agreed that they had a key role in promoting an accountability culture but admitted that in one case there was some way to go before he / she could claim an accountability culture was in place in his / her school. With one exception, all principals considered they were accountable to the government, for effective and efficient management of the school and the implementation of reform proposals. But principals perceived they were also accountable to the Lasallian Brothers for maintaining traditional Lasallian values and beliefs in the purpose of education and caring relationships with their students. The Principals considered that they were primarily accountable to their teachers for providing opportunities for their continuing professional development and offering on-going support through caring relationships; in turn they expected increased accountability on the part of the teachers. Principals rated their own personal accountability to students very highly and believed that their role was to

maximise their academic attainment, nurture individual talent and give opportunities for all students to achieve some success and help them to become good citizens.

Principals considered they played a key role helping stakeholders reconcile differing views to reach a consensus view on education quality. They perceived that all stakeholders were in agreement that they were primarily accountable to students so that any consensus had to be based on satisfying students' needs and expectations. But there were problems in catering for the needs of SEN students and tensions involving achieving 'education for all' and 'holistic education' when at the same time they were under intense pressure to focus on academic attainment. Principals adopted more than one role in managing accountability. These roles were mediator, communication facilitator, coaching leader and problem solver and they used more than one role to reconcile stakeholders' views (Cheng 2003c; Bradley, 2004). In discharging these roles and implementing these strategies, personal qualities which they perceived helped them succeed were trust (Bryk and Schneider, 2002), fairness, transparency and openness (Sanders, 2003).

### **6.3 Implications and recommendations**

Confronted by numerous educational reforms, schools need to adopt the organisational learning model to cope with different challenges (Cheng, 2009; Louis, 1994; Silns et al, 2000b). Principals' support for the expert model and organizational model are closely intertwined and complement each other. According to Senge (1990): 'Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning (such as developing the capacity of teachers and sharing good practice in Lasallian schools) does not guarantee individual

learning. But without it, no organizational learning occurs' (p.139). This implies that development planning becomes very important (MacGilchrist et al, 1995) as does the promotion of a 'teachers as learners' culture (Stoll and Fink, 1996; Zywine et al, 1995) and a students' 'learning how to learn' culture (ECR7; ERB, 2000) to improve education quality. The work of the Hong Kong Lasallian Council, joint staff development for all Lasallian schools and the Lasallian Principals Conference appear to endorse this direction to improve education quality.

Development planning is potentially a powerful tool both to improve education quality and demonstrate accountability in response to the reform proposals. In recent years, in government guidance documents, the focus of development planning has moved from managing change to improving the quality of teaching and learning but this shift was not evident in the interviews. If reform proposals which relate to a change in pedagogy are to be successful, development planning needs to be linked to the provision of a planned programme of CPD involving all staff (MacGilchrist et al, 1995). To achieve this, principals need to work with their staff to set targets to help students 'learn how to learn' and improve those aspects of formative assessment which research suggests are most likely to help students learn more effectively and raise standards of attainment; these are teacher feedback, student self and peer assessment and task design (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Distributed leadership is one way of managing and improving education quality and also a way of spreading accountability across other middle managers and teacher leaders (Harris, 2004). This form of leadership ensures that teacher leaders' expertise can be used to improve teaching and learning and they become empowered in the process (Erickson et al, 2003). Distributed leadership

is being promoted by the EDB and the ILBS. Several principals advocated the use of distributed leadership but of those who claimed to practice this form of leadership, they did not appear to link distributed leadership to the improvement of teaching and learning. Principals need to be made aware of or reminded of the arguments in favour of distributed leadership for improving teachers' self efficacy and boosting morale (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000). Principals would also benefit from being made aware of how the quality of teaching can be enhanced by the combined use of policy statements, work routines and assembling teams of senior managers and 'expert teachers' to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Spillane, 2006).

Without sufficient training and support, teachers may revert to the teaching methods which work for them, which may not necessarily be appropriate when faced with new reform proposals (Ho et al, 2001). Improving the quality of CPD within the Lasallian community of schools is crucial if teachers are to be able to respond effectively to the reform proposals. Priority areas appear to be CPD activities to assist teachers to work with SEN students and activities which help teachers broaden their repertoire of teaching and learning strategies to help students 'learn how to learn' and become more reflective practitioners (Zywine et al, 1995). Improvement in teaching could be achieved by subject teachers sharing examples of good practice within Lasallian schools and across the Lasallian community; for instance, lesson observation could be used to improve the quality of teaching based on a common agreed generic framework which complied with EDB guidelines on effective teaching. Nor should principals be excluded from CPD, so that the sharing of successful management experience (Louis and Smith, 1991; Louis 1994) such as that provided by one principal's handling of classroom indiscipline could be extended to other areas such as the use of distributed leadership.

Bringing in external support can play an important role in school improvement (Reynolds et al, 2001). For one school, external consultancy support provided by an HEI helped the principal in his strategic planning at a time when the school was under threat of closure. In future, other principals could consider how HEIs could be deployed to help them improve selected aspects of teaching and learning. A parent-school partnership has the potential to help students learn effectively (Christenson, 2004; Eccles and Harold, 1993). The use of parent-school partnerships to improve the quality of students' learning experiences is present in some schools but is more effective in some schools than others and should be extended to more schools. In primary schools, parents made a significant contribution to extending the range of students' learning experiences through organising extra-curricular activities in school and in one case a reading corner. Principals need to be made aware of the potential advantages of these partnerships. A home school co-ordinator role could also be created to provide information and support to parents. Parents can also assist schools to improve education quality by completing stakeholder surveys, a practice which should be extended.

Parent-teacher partnerships have the potential to help students' learning, either by helping students experiencing difficulties or by identifying ways of helping student learn more effectively (Zapata et al, 2006). But, there was no evidence of a parent-teacher partnership in any of the Lasallian schools. To make this possible a number of strategies are recommended: All staff should be coached to understand the necessity of parent-teacher partnerships; teachers should be trained to work with parents; the school culture must be made more welcoming as significant cultural barriers to progress exist when parents are denied easy access to teachers and when parents are required to complete multiple forms to meet with a teacher. Finally, more effective communication should be provided

between teachers and parents such as regular meetings and possibly a telephone hot-line.

Schools are required to cater for the diverse learning needs of different students including those with special educational needs ( EDB circulars No13/2007, No 19/2010). The intention is that with the introduction of Integrated Education into all Hong Kong schools, students with special education needs will benefit from being educated with ‘normal’ students, both of whom have differing needs. Unfortunately, it would appear that the Lasallian principals did not fully understand the concept of integrated education and were not able to fully discharge their responsibilities to these students. It is recommended that surveys are conducted with parents, teachers and students to assist the principals identify the actual needs of different students.

It is apparent that there is a tension between achieving the concepts of ‘education for all’ and holistic education and academic attainment. The Institute of Lasallian Brothers advocates the concept of ‘education for all’ and this belief is strongly supported by the school principals. However, with a focus on academic attainment, some academically weaker students could be prevented from entering a Lasallian school. Secondly, although the Institute of Lasallian Brothers is in agreement with the EDB policy of promoting holistic education which is also supported by school principals, holistic education is unpopular with teachers and parents who are more focussed on academic attainment. In order to achieve education for all and provide holistic education, Lasallian principals are required to provide opportunities to all kinds of students, including the academically weaker students and those with SEN, to develop their different talents and interests. Thus, the principals face a dilemma and a need to clarify with the Institute of Lasallian Brothers the focus of their school’s

development, either education for all and holistic education or academic attainment. In view of the above, the principals need to understand the teachers' and parents' expectations of the focus of the school's development. Crucially, there is a need to establish how the decision will affect the school's student intake and hence survival.

By introducing school based management, the Hong Kong government endorsed self management and a degree of autonomy in schools (Cheng, 1996; Tse and Lee, 2008). Nevertheless, schools are still accountable to government through arrangements for quality assurance, such as evaluation and monitoring school's performance. In this investigation, all principals held themselves accountable to their sponsor, the ILBS, and nine principals considered they were accountable to the EDB for managing their schools and implementing reform proposals. But the EDB and ILBS were in disagreement on two issues which created a dilemma for the principals. The first issue was the planned change in the composition of the IMC at the instigation of the EDB which would have the effect of reducing the control of the ILBS in school governance. This raised the prospect of the ILBS and Lasallian principals voting against the proposed change. The second issue, the integration of SEN students into normal schools by the EDB, prompted the question as to whether the ILBS and school principals would refuse to accept SEN students into their schools on the grounds of insufficient financial support from the EDB and insufficient training of teachers. Whilst it is apparent that the principals need to support the reform initiatives, they have to evaluate the suitability of these measures in their schools and act accordingly.

In summary, some key challenges for principals are: How can they use development planning to improve the quality of teaching and learning? How



can they enhance the effectiveness of teachers' continuing professional development both within schools and across the Lasallian learning community? How can they use distributed leadership to improve the quality of teaching and learning? How can they develop parent-school and parent- teacher partnerships to improve the quality of the students' learning experience? How can they devise a curriculum which meets the needs of all students but which is acceptable to all stakeholders? How can they strike an appropriate balance between accountability to the EDB and their own sponsoring body?

These implications and recommendations suggest significant changes are required to the culture, personnel and organization structure of the Lasallian Schools and the Institute of Lasallian Brothers. A community wide consultation is necessary to agree on the way forward but this suggestion needs to be endorsed by the Institute of Lasallian Brothers and by the Lasallian principals. An 'ad hoc' feasibility team could be established to re-evaluate the current situation and consider the recommendations from this investigation. This group could consist of representatives from the Institute of Lasallian Brothers, the Lasallian principals, alumni from different Lasallian schools and other stakeholder groups.

#### **6.4 Evaluation of the research**

By selecting all ten principals in both secondary and primary schools and schools with different school contexts, it was possible to draw on a wide range of insights and experiences relating to education quality and accountability. But because the research was conducted through the lens of the principal, there was no opportunity to triangulate their views with other key stakeholders, which would have been possible, had the sample been restricted to a much smaller

number of schools. As previously noted, a second interview with each principal would have enabled the researcher to rectify imbalances in the interview data provided by each principal and where appropriate probe their opinions further, but time and resource constraints made this impossible. As it was, interviews took place over an extended time periods, from 2007 to 2010, which would have made the phasing in of a second interview difficult. The investigation also suffered from a time constraint and insufficient resources to employ another person to conduct member checking on the interpretation of findings, implications and conclusions. However, two lecturers, one from a university in China and another from a university in Taiwan, kindly consented to conduct member checking on the translation of scripts from Chinese into English. Another major problem was the reluctance of principals to supply documentary evidence from their schools to assist triangulation. In particular, reports from the EDB External Reviews and minutes of school meetings could have provided useful additional evidence. However, only two school principals, Principals 3 and 7, were willing to allow the researcher access to their school's external evaluation reports. Nor were school magazines sufficiently reflective to provide valuable information.

## **6.5 Suggestions for further research work**

This research on Lasallian schools was conducted essentially at the school level and at the interface with the government and focussed on the way in which principals were managing change and development in response to a major reform programme designed to improve education quality in which there were both major structural changes and changes to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. The literature base for the study was essentially that of management theory, school effectiveness and school improvement, with some reference to

research on teacher effectiveness. Whilst the findings are likely to be of interest to principals, policy makers and the Institute of Lasallian Brothers who are interested in ‘managerial’ perspectives, they are less likely to be of interest to teachers who are more concerned with changes in classroom level practices which require some of them to modify the way they teach and assess students.

A future study could be carried out in Lasallian schools at the classroom level to investigate the impact of the reform proposals on pedagogy and formative assessment. This would reflect the recognition that teaching processes in the classroom are key to student achievement and attainment and could draw on the growing teacher effectiveness research base. Questions which could be considered include: How do teachers change their practice to become more reflective practitioners? To what extent have they extended their range of teaching and learning strategies? What has been the impact of government support for formative assessment on their practice? How do they encourage students to become more responsible for their own learning?

Existing research on schools tends to be either on the school level or on the teacher or classroom level (with the exception for instance of Mortimore et al (1988). Yet students are moulded in their outcomes by both levels and interactions between these levels simultaneously. For instance, at the interface between the school level, teacher and classroom levels, an interesting research question would be: How is CPD being used to transform pedagogy and the way students learn?

## **6.6 End-note: Current developments at the Lasallian schools in Hong Kong**

By September 2010, eight Lasallian principals, four primary and four secondary, had retired from their principalship. All the four new primary principals and two new secondary principals were originally deputy principals in their schools. Two other new secondary principals were recruited from outside, one (a deputy principal) from a prestigious non-Catholic school and another (a Lasallian Brother) principal in another Lasallian school in New Zealand. Three of the new secondary principals are non-Catholics. Two of the retired primary school principals have been appointed supervisors of their schools. One primary school principal and one secondary school principal have been appointed members of SMC in their schools. Three laymen have been appointed to become school supervisors of secondary schools. Among them, two are former students and another a layman principal who retired from office ten years ago. It is hoped that this research study will provide a useful form of information on education quality and accountability for the new principals and supervisors to help them develop their schools in future.

The appointment of laymen to the posts of school supervisors and members of SMC indicates the recognition of the importance of laymen partnerships by the ILBS in its education mission. This also reflects their belief in the importance of distributed leadership which is deemed necessary in view of the shortage and ageing of the Lasallian Brothers. As the Director of the ILBS pointed out in his memorandum to all Hong Kong Lasallian Schools: ‘You may be aware, we have already begun the process of inviting lay partners to be Supervisors of some of our schools, and distribute our leadership to them to lead those schools. This process has become urgent in the light of the shortage and ageing of the Brothers. We trust our Hong Kong Lasallian family will continue to support us

as we move the Supervisor process forward' (ILBS Director's Memorandum Circular, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008).

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Framework of Performance Indicators (Quality Assurance Division Education Bureau: Performance Indicators for Hong Kong, 2008 – For Secondary, Primary and Special Schools). It is an important tool for evaluating school performance. The framework consists of 4 domains, which are subdivided into 8 areas and 23 performance indicators (PI). The following table illustrates the Domain, Area and PI structure:

Domain		Area		Performance Indicator	
I	Management and Organization	1	School Management	1.1	Planning
				1.2	Implementation
				1.3	Evaluation
		2	Professional leadership	2.1	Leadership and Monitoring
				2.2	Collaboration and Support.
				2.3	Professional Development
II	Learning and Teaching	3	Curriculum and Assessment	3.1	Curriculum Organization
				3.2	Curriculum Implementation
				3.3	Performance Assessment
				3.4	Curriculum Evaluation
		4	Student Learning and Teaching	4.1	Learning Process
				4.2	Learning Performance
				4.3	Teaching Organization
				4.4	Teaching Process
				4.5	Feedback and Follow-up
III	Student Support and School Ethos	5	Student Support	5.1	Support for Student Development
				5.2	School Climate
		6	Partnership	6.1	Home-school Cooperation
				6.2	Link with External Organizations
IV	Student Performance	7	Attitude and Behaviour	7.1	Affective Development and Attitude
				7.2	Social Development
		8	Participation and Achievement	8.1	Academic Performance
				8.2	Non – academic Performance

## **Interview Schedule**

This interview survey is designed in a semi - structured format. There are three parts in the interview schedule: (1). the opening phase, (2). the development of main theme phase (main body of interview) and (3). the concluding phase.

### **Prompts and probes for interview survey:**

Both prompts and probes are used in the main theme phase of this interview survey. The purpose of prompts and probes is “to help people say what they want to say” (Drever, 1995, p. 23). Prompts are directed towards” what the respondents know but have not yet mentioned” (p. 23). Probes are directed at what people have already said, “asking them to clarify and explain, but not as a rule to justify or defend their position” (p. 24). Either prompt or probe will be used whenever the situation necessitates. The following list of prompts and probes will be used for reference.

### **Prompts**

The interviewer will employ the following “commonsense rules” (Drever, 1995, p24) about the kinds of prompts to be used in different situations as encountered in this interview survey.

(1)	If the respondent seems not to understand the question, offer a specific prompt for that question: repeating the question in other words and possibly more fully, but do not suggest answers.
(2)	If the respondent gives some answers and seems ready to continue, offer a general prompt: “any other (reasons / factors / advantages)?” as appropriate. Do this until the answers have been finished.
(3)	If they appear to have been finished, the interviewer needs to check whether they have completed all interview questions / question at hand, and move the transition from one area to another.

**Probes:**

Probing is used to “get the respondent motivated and steered towards giving relevant, complete and clear responses to meet the objectives of the interview” (Gordon, 1987, p. 419). The interviewer does not know in advance whether a probe will be needed or what form of probe will be most appropriate. Seven categories of probes (Table 1) will be referenced for use according to the needs arising in different situations in this interview survey (Gordon, 1987).

Table 1

Categories of probes for employment	
(1)	Silent probe:
	This technique of silence allows the respondent to proceed towards whatever direction most interesting and meaningful to him or her. The silent probe uses non – verbal means to convey that the interviewer is asking for more information (Gillham, 2000; Marguerite et al, 2010). It may be a nod of the head to offer encouragement or a raised eyebrow to indicate that a further query is required. One caution has to be taken: if the respondent is not eager to say anything, does not know exactly what the interviewer expects and asks, and feels a need for some support and direction from the interviewer, then a pregnant pause may become an embarrassing silence (Gordon, 1987).
(2)	Encouragement:
	This category includes all remarks, nonverbal noises and gestures which indicate that the interviewer accepts what has been said and wishes the respondent to continue speaking without in any way specifying what the respondent should talk about. This includes such things as: “uh hub”, “really”, “I see”, “hmmm”, “Is that so!”, a nod of head or an expectant facial expression (Gordon, 1987).
(3)	Immediate elaboration:
	The interviewer goes beyond encouraging the respondent to continue speaking by indicating that the respondent should elaborate upon the

## Appendix 2: Interview schedule

	<p>topic at hand, whatever that topic may be (Gordon, 1987). The request for elaboration takes two forms for this interview survey. First, elaboration may imply a need for continuing a story or finishing the trend of thought. This includes such probes as, "...and then?", "Then what happened" and "What happened next?". The interviewer is not asking for anything specific. Second, the elaboration may request the respondent to say more about the topic at hand. For example: "Tell me more", "Tell me more about that", "What else could you say about that?", "Is there anything you would like to add?", "Could you spell that out a little more?" and "Would you please elaborate on that?".</p>
(4)	Immediate clarification:
	<p>This clarification probe specifies the kind of additional information that is needed. The immediate clarification takes two forms for this interview survey. First, the interviewer may request the respondent to give a more detailed sequence of events, beginning at a certain point in the action described in the immediately preceding response. Secondly, the interviewer may probe for more detailed information on some specific aspect. For example, "Why do you suppose you did that?"</p>
(5)	Retrospective elaboration:
	<p>The interviewer refers to a topic that has been mentioned by the respondent. The forms of these probes are in essence the same as those for the immediate elaboration. The difference is that the topic referred to is not contained in the "immediately preceding response but was further back in the interview" (Gordon, 1987, p. 424).</p>
(6)	Retrospective clarification:
	<p>This type of probe specifies what additional information is needed like that for an immediate clarification. The difference is that the area to be clarified was not contained in the immediately preceding response. Here the topic is changed to one which has been mentioned by the respondent before the immediately preceding response, and the interviewer specifies what he or she wants to know about this topic. For example: "You told me that you used some quality methods. Can you tell me more about the kinds of quality methods you used?"</p>

(7)	Mutation:
	This type of probe introduces a new topic that cannot be construed to be an elaboration or clarification of any preceding response. The interviewer takes the initiative in introducing the new topic, rather than waiting for the respondent to lead into it naturally. The interviewer may soften the abruptness of the transition by bridging it with a specific topic which has already been discussed or by showing how the new topic fits into the overall purpose of the interview. For example: “So far, you have given me a good picture about the pupil – focused curriculum development in your school, but I need to know something about how the professional training of teachers can cope with the needs entailed by curriculum development.”

## Interview Protocol

Research focus	:	How do principals perceive issues of quality definition and accountability in Lasallian schools in Hong Kong?
Date of interview	:	
Time of interview	:	
Place of interview	:	
Interviewer	:	Peter Kwok
Interviewee	:	
Position of interviewee	:	Principal

### (1). Opening phase

- (1) Establishment of rapport:  
[ Interviewer shakes hands with the respondent. ] My name is Peter Kwok. I am a doctoral student of Leicester University.
  
- (2) Purpose of interview:  
I am conducting a research in Lasallian schools in Hong Kong. I am investigating how the Hong Kong Lasallian principals perceive quality definition and accountability in their schools.

(3) Purpose of the research:

Through this research study, I wish to provide more information for Hong Kong Lasallian school principals to have a better understanding on quality and accountability in education in their school context.

(4) Time line:

The interview will take about 1 hour 15 min to 1 hour and 30 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions within this time?

## (2). Development of main theme phase

**Main Research Question:** How do principals in Lasallian schools in Hong Kong perceive quality and accountability and how is this perception shaped by the unique context and their relationship to different stakeholders to whom they are accountable?

Areas covered for interview survey	
(1)	How do the principals perceive education quality?
(2)	How do principals perceive other stakeholders view education quality?
(3)	How do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved – managed and / or improved?
(4)	How do principals perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?

Transition: Let me begin by asking you some questions about your perspective on conceptualization of quality in your school.

## Questions for interview survey

### (1). How do principals education quality?

(1)	There is much talk of ‘quality’ in education these days. Please can you tell me what is the purpose of education?
(2)	What student learning experiences and outcomes do you think are important?

## Appendix 2: Interview schedule

(3)	To what extent do you think the Lasallian view of education quality is different from other schools?
(4)	How are your views on education quality influenced by the particular context of your school? (i.e Do the particular school contexts influence your view on education quality? These school contexts are: demographic situation, the nature of the catchment of your school, the influence of EDB policy, SMC, teachers, parents and students.

### **(2). How do principals perceive other stakeholders view education quality?**

(4)	To what extent do you see the different views of quality between stakeholder groups to be in alignment or in tension? Where / how are they similar / different.? (These stakeholder groups are EMB, Institute of Lasallian Brothers of Hong Kong, School Management Board, teachers, non – teaching staffs, students and parents.)
(5)	How do you engage (i.e. making arrangement) with stakeholders in order for them to articulate (i.e. to speak clearly and distinctly) their aspirations of quality (i.e. the desire and wish of what are to be done in terms of quality in education in school)?
(6)	How do you develop a shared understanding and view of quality across different stakeholder groups? And to what extent do you feel it is possible to achieve this?

### **(3). How do principals perceive that education quality can be achieved – managed and / or improved?**

(7)	How do you perceive the role of the government in helping you to improve education quality (‘pressure’ and ‘support’)?
(8)	How do you perceive the role of Lasallian Brothers in achieving education quality?
(9)	How do you perceive your own role in achieving education quality?
(10)	What factors and strategies do you think are important for achieving education quality?



**(4) How do principals perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of education quality?**

(11)	To whom do you perceive you are accountable? For what aspect of education? How is this achieved?
(12)	How do you perceive your own role in reconciling stakeholders' views on education quality?

Transition from the Development of Main Theme Phase to the concluding phase: Well, it has been a pleasure finding out more about you.

**(3). Concluding phase:**

- (1) **【Maintain rapport】** I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know so that I can have a better understanding of the research focus in this interview?
- (2) A summary report of this interview will be sent to you for cross – checking and validating with your consent – approval of the views you have reflected.
- (3) Is there anything else that you want to ask me?
- (4) (Action to be taken) I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to call you again if I have any more questions? Thanks again for your help in this interview.