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What are the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals during the first four years of their appointment?

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Chapter Two: Context of the Research

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore the professional and personal needs beginning principals to Catholic schools in Western Australia. Underpinning this purpose is the belief that by understanding the professional and personal needs of beginning principals, educational systems and sectors can better recruit, prepare and sustain school principals in their leadership role.

In this chapter, the six dimensions of context contributing to an understanding of the study are reviewed. Dey (1993) suggests that context provides the “lens” that clarifies the conditions in which participants are immersed. That is, Dey argues that one can further understand the meaning presented by participants when the circumstances in which they exist are clarified. Table 2.1 outlines these six dimensions of the research. In particular, these dimensions:

- i. Situate the research in the wider goals of Catholic schooling (Nature and purpose of Catholic schooling);
- ii. Describe the particular governance structure of the Catholic education system in Western Australia (Governance of Catholic education in Western Australia);
- iii. Describe the demographics of Catholic education in Western Australia (Demographic data of Catholic education in Western Australia
- iv. Geographical locations of Catholic schools (Geographical information of Western Australian Catholic schools);

- v. Present the professional requirements of principalship in Catholic schooling in Western Australia (Catholic school principalship in Western Australia); and
- vi. Place the background to the case study of the research (Backgrounds of the Case Study).

Table 2.1

Six dimensions of the context

Dimension	Title
Dimension one	Nature and purpose of Catholic schooling
Dimension two	Governance of Catholic education in Western Australia
Dimension three	Geographical setting of schools in Catholic education in Western Australia
Dimension four	Demographic data of Catholic education in Western Australia
Dimension five	Catholic school principalship in Western Australia
Dimension six	Background of the case study

2.2 Dimension one: Nature and purpose of Catholic schooling

The distinctive religious nature of the Catholic school is its role in the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church. The evangelising mission seeks to “proclaim the good news of salvation to all, and through baptism, form people to live as children of God” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 7). The evangelising mission endeavours to transform the human person from within and sets for the person a path that leads to Christian salvation by always defining the person’s reference point that is

“centred on Jesus Christ” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, paras. 29 and 33).

Catholic schools live out a distinctive educational vision (Hansen, 2001). The Congregation for Catholic Education stated:

What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love... it (the school) tries to relate all human culture to the good news of salvation so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the students will gradually come to learn about the world, about life and the human person (1988).

This statement highlighted the importance of the Catholic schooling experience in the integration of faith and life, and faith and culture. Therefore, the purpose of Catholic schooling is to contribute to the development of the young person through education, particularly in the development of his/ her Christian conscience. The experience of a Catholic education seeks to encourage young people to contribute more broadly to the development of the kind of world envisaged by Jesus Christ (Hickey, Bianchini, Saunders, Holohan & Sproxtton, 2009, para. 6). All thirteen participants in the case study are beginning principals in Catholic schools.

2.3 Dimension two: Governance of Catholic education in Western Australia

Bishops individually lead their dioceses in their episcopal responsibilities. Chief amongst these responsibilities is the oversight of Catholic education (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, cc. 782, 802 and 806). In Western Australia, the four diocesan Bishops, known collectively as the Western Australian Conference of Bishops, have undertaken a joint leadership role for Catholic education. Working in collaboration, each diocesan bishop has articulated his requirements for Catholic education through the *Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2015* (Hickey et al.,

2009). The Western Australian Conference of Bishops had delegated its authority for the running of Catholic education to the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) to “assist them in exercising responsibility for the Catholic schools in their dioceses” (Hickey et al., 2009, para. 105).

The responsibilities underpinning the work of the CECWA are stated in the Terms of Reference of the Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2015 (Hickey et al., 2009). These Terms of Reference are to:

- a) Foster the continuous development and improvement of Catholic schools and act on behalf of the Catholic community for the benefit of all Catholic school aged children.
- b) Generate official statement policies and also assist individual Bishops with schools in their own diocese.
- c) Continue to recognise and make provision for religious institutes that operate Catholic schools in Western Australia and will respect their particular charisms. (Hickey et al., 2009, p. 55)

Uniquely the CECWA has delegated the operation of its function to one Catholic Education Office, which has oversight over all schools in the four dioceses. This governance structure is not common across Australia. Typically every diocese outside of Western Australia has one Catholic Education Office that serves the Catholic schools within the diocese. The Catholic Education Office of Western Australia [CEOWA], regarded as the secretariat of the CECWA, functions to ensure the responsibilities of the CECWA are carried out across the state (Hickey et al., 2009, para.107). To support all dioceses, the CEOWA has one central office in the Archdiocese of Perth and smaller regional offices located in the Broome, Geraldton and Bunbury dioceses. Under the responsibility of the Director of Catholic Education, the CEOWA supports Catholic

schools in their religious and educational endeavours (Hickey et al., 2009). Highlighted within the CEOWA's function is the requirement to ensure that Catholic school leadership is effective. This function includes proposing suitable applicants for principal appointment to the diocesan Bishop, coordinating appropriate performance reviews of principals, and supporting the professional and religious development of school leaders (Hickey et al., 2009).

2.4 Dimension three: Geographical setting of schools in Catholic education in Western Australia

Western Australia is the largest Australian state. With an area of more than 2,500,000 square kilometres, a 12,500 kilometre coastline and spanning 2,400 kilometre from north to south, it occupies one third of the continent (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2014). There are four Catholic dioceses within Western Australia: Archdiocese of Perth and the dioceses of Broome, Bunbury and Geraldton. Collectively, there are 158 Catholic schools throughout Western Australia. Figure 2.1 illustrates the Catholic diocesan regions and the number of Catholic schools within each diocese (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013).

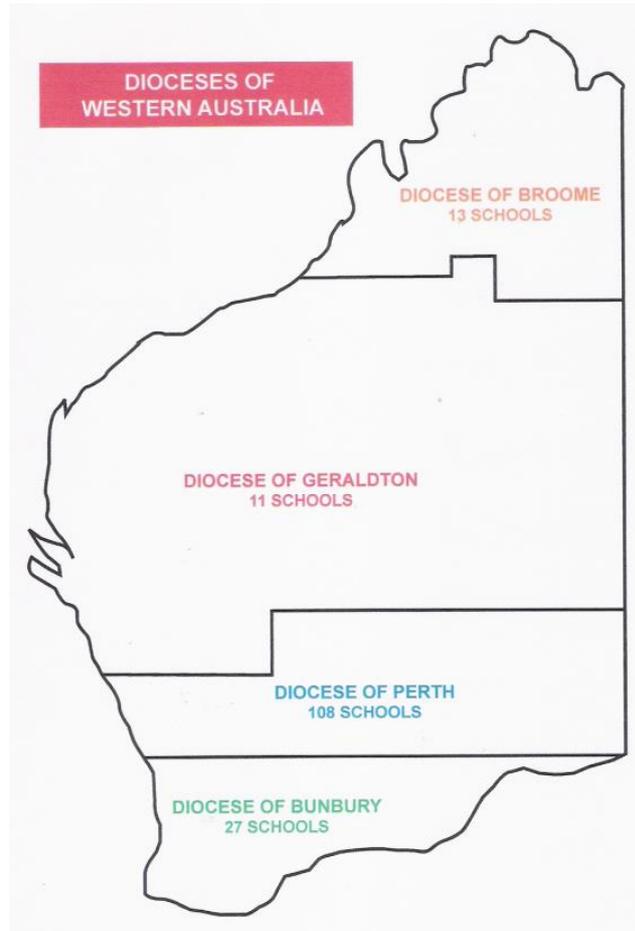


Figure 2.1 *Western Australia Catholic diocesan regions and the number of Catholic schools located with the region.* [Source: Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2009]

When describing the geographical location of a Catholic school in Western Australia, the CEOWA utilises the geo-locations identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS provides four categories of geographic location to describe school location: metropolitan, provincial or rural, remote and very remote (ACARA, 2012). Metropolitan locations are deemed as close to the capital city; provincial or rural is determined as an administration division with a state; remote is considered spatially as distant from the capital city of that state or territory; and very remote is an area considered spatially very distant from the capital city. This research utilises the term rural to include Catholic schools designated as provincial, the term remote, to describe

those Catholic schools designated in remote and very remote locations, and metropolitan to describe those schools located in close proximity to the capital city of Perth. Table 2.2 presents the location and number of Catholic schools according to diocese and geo-location (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013).

Table 2.2

Catholic school location according to dioceses and geo-locations

Diocese	Metropolitan	Rural	Remote	Very remote	Total
Broome	0	0	7	6	13
Bunbury	0	28	0	0	28
Geraldton	0	11	0	0	11
Perth	99	7	0	0	106
Total	99	46	7	6	158

(Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013)

2.5 Dimension four: Demographic data of Catholic education in Western Australia

Catholic education in Western Australia educates over 72 500 students from kindergarten (four year olds) to Year 12 (17 year olds) in 158 schools throughout the State (CECWA, 2013). The type of school includes primary, secondary and composite contexts found throughout all four dioceses. Table 2.3 presents the number of schools according to school type in diocesan regions (CECWA, 2013).

Table 2.3

School type in their diocesan region

Diocese	Primary	Secondary	Composite	Total	%
Broome	6	0	7	13	8
Bunbury	22	2	3	27	18
Geraldton	7	3	1	11	7
Perth	75	23	9	107	67
Total	110	28	20	158	100

(Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013)

Catholic education in Western Australia employs over 9000 staff of whom 4 270 are full time equivalent teachers and school principals. With regard to teaching staff, there are 2080 primary school teachers and 2190 secondary teachers (CECWA, 2013). The remaining 4 800 are support staff. With regards to gender of the Catholic school principals and the type of school they lead, data presented indicate that there are twice as many male as female principals. Table 2.4 presents the data on gender and school type with regard to principalship (CECWA, 2013).

Table 2.4

Catholic school principals with regard to gender and type of school

	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total	% of total
Primary	38 (34%)	74(66%)	112	71
Secondary	8(32%)	17(68%)	25	16
Composite	6(29%)	15(71)	21	13
Total	52(33%)	106(67%)	158	100

(Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013)

2.6 Dimension five: Catholic school principalship in Western Australia

The CECWA policy statement on the Appointment of Principals in Diocesan Accountable Schools clearly outlines the requirements for principalship in Catholic schools (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014). Beginning principals are appointed and reviewed under the leadership framework, which outlines the four domains for leadership. This framework, which is drawn from the Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2015 (Hickey et al., 2009), highlights the professional requirements for leading a Catholic school (CEOWA, 2008). The four domains are: theological leadership; pastoral leadership; curriculum leadership, and administrative leadership (CEOWA, 2008). Each domain has distinct leadership requirements. These are now briefly explained.

Theological leadership incorporates the preservation and growth of the Catholic identity of the school by ensuring the Catholic Church's mission and vision is embedded with the educational goals. The Catholic school principal needs to ensure that Christian values permeate all aspects of school life. In addition, this domain of leadership requires the principal to be an active witness of faith to the school community.

Pastoral leadership demands that the dignity of the person be preserved at all times and that the principal needs to ensure that all school community members are cared for (CECWA, 1999). The Catholic school principal is required to provide a safe and supportive school environment, and a curriculum, policies and practices based on the Gospels. The pastoral leadership provided by the principal seeks to promote care, respect, value diversity and is centred on the teachings of Jesus Christ (CECWA, 1999).

Curriculum leadership requires the principal to promote the religious, intellectual, social, cultural and physical development of students in all facets of their educational experiences. The curriculum domain of leadership outlines the educational goals as defined by the Church's mission: integration of faith and life and faith and culture (Hickey et al., 2009, par. 21- 24). The integration of faith and life and faith and culture seeks to inculcate a Gospel vision within young people thus enabling them to be disciples of Christ and which requires "making a total commitment to Christ" (Hickey et al, 2009, par.23). The domain also stipulates the maintenance of standards of educational instruction that is in accordance with the System Agreement of the School Education Act 1999 (Western Australian Government, 1999).

The final domain for Catholic school principalship deals with the procedural aspects of school operations. The Administrative leadership domain requires understanding of policies, legislative requirements, staffing, management issues and financial sustainability. In collaboration with the school board, the principal must ensure the financial viability of the school and meet the accountability requirements established by the CECWA, state and federal governments (CEOWA, 2008).

2.7 Dimension six: Background of the case study

The research sought to identify the professional and personal needs of newly appointed principals and utilised a case study approach that focused on the perspectives of gender, school location and type of school. The first perspective, gender, focused on the distinctive needs of male and female beginning principals with a particular focus on identifying their professional and personal needs. The second perspective, school location, examined the influence of locale on the beginning principal. The three school

locations that the participants were appointed to included rural Catholic schools located in the Bunbury and Geraldton dioceses, remote Catholic schools located in the Broome diocese and metropolitan Catholic schools in the Perth Archdiocese. The third perspective, type of school, attended to the particularities of schooling type. The three types of schooling that prevail in Catholic education in Western Australia are shown in Table 2.3 above. Whilst leadership of Catholic schools *per se* highlights generic skills and understandings required of the principal, the nuance of school type highlights particular emphasises in leading schools. This perspective sought to determine whether school type influenced the needs of beginning principals.

2.8 Summary

Chapter Two provided the six contextual dimensions that contribute to understanding the study. These six dimensions include: nature and purpose of Catholic schooling; governance structures surrounding Catholic education in Western Australia; the demographic data of Catholic education in Western Australia; the geographical setting of schools in Catholic education in Western Australia; requirements of Catholic school principalship in Western Australia; and the background of the three perspectives in which the inquiry investigated.