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Developing tomorrow's school leaders: The Western Australian Catholic education
Aspiring Principals Program

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Chapter Two: Context of the Research

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research, stated in Chapter One, was to explore aspirant perceptions of Catholic principalship before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program together with the influences provoking discernible perception changes. Specifically, four aspirant perceptions were explored by the research: Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance; factors enhancing interest in principalship; factors diminishing interest in principalship; and self-efficacy to commence principalship. This chapter presents three dimensions of context associated with the research. Context refers to a description of the setting in which the research was conducted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Flick, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Punch, 2014). An overview of this chapter is provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Overview of Chapter Two: Context of the Research

2.2 Context Dimension One: The Western Australian Catholic Education System

2.3 Context Dimension Two: Western Australian Catholic Education Leadership Programs

2.4 Context Dimension Three: The Aspiring Principals Program

2.4.1 History.

2.4.2 Structure and components.

2.4.3 Theoretical underpinnings.

2.4.4 Selection process.

2.4.5 Year one.

2.4.6 Year two.

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

The first dimension of context focuses on the geographical and structural overview of the Western Australian Catholic education system. The second dimension discusses the purpose and structure of Western Australian Catholic education leadership programs and locates the Aspiring Principals Program within

this structure. The third dimension traces the development of the Aspiring Principals Program from its inception in 1999 through to its current version and describes the program's theoretical underpinnings, selection process, structure and components.

A chapter dedicated solely to the context of the research was drafted for two reasons. Firstly, because collective case study was chosen as the research methodology, it was considered important that the boundaries of the case be established for prospective readers (Punch, 2014; Stake, 1995). Secondly, and related to the first reason, it was determined a well-defined context would enable other researchers to make informed decisions regarding the generalisability or transferability potential of study findings and conclusions (Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.2 Context Dimension One: The Western Australian Catholic Education System

Perth is the capital city of Western Australia, the largest state in Australia. The state, illustrated in Figure 2.1, covers an area of more than 2,500,000 square kilometres, has 12,500 kilometres of coastline, stretches 2,400 kilometres from north to south and occupies a third of the continent (Playford, Cockbain, & Low, 1976, p. 12).

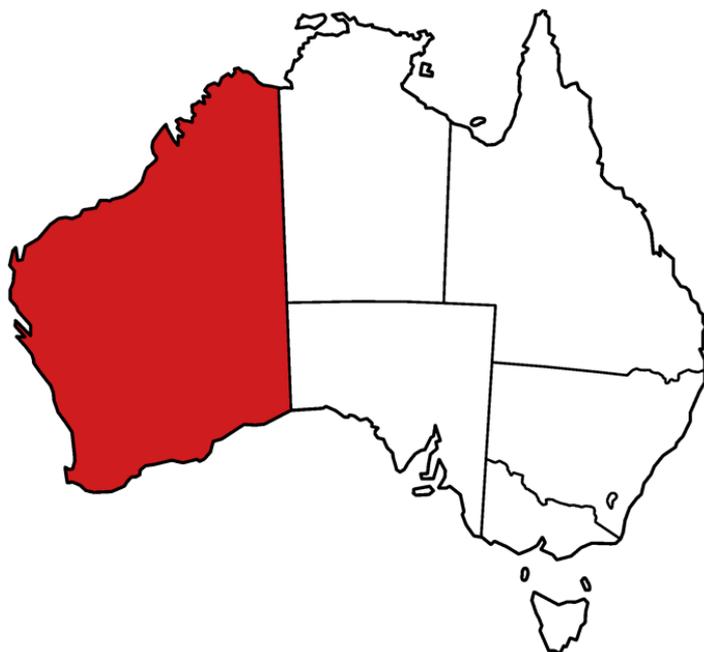


Figure 2.1: The state of Western Australia (Playford et al., 1976, p. 26)

The Western Australian Catholic education system is comprised of 161 Catholic schools (112 primary schools, 28 secondary schools and 21 composite schools) spread across four dioceses (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014a). The four dioceses and respective school numbers are depicted in Figure 2.2.

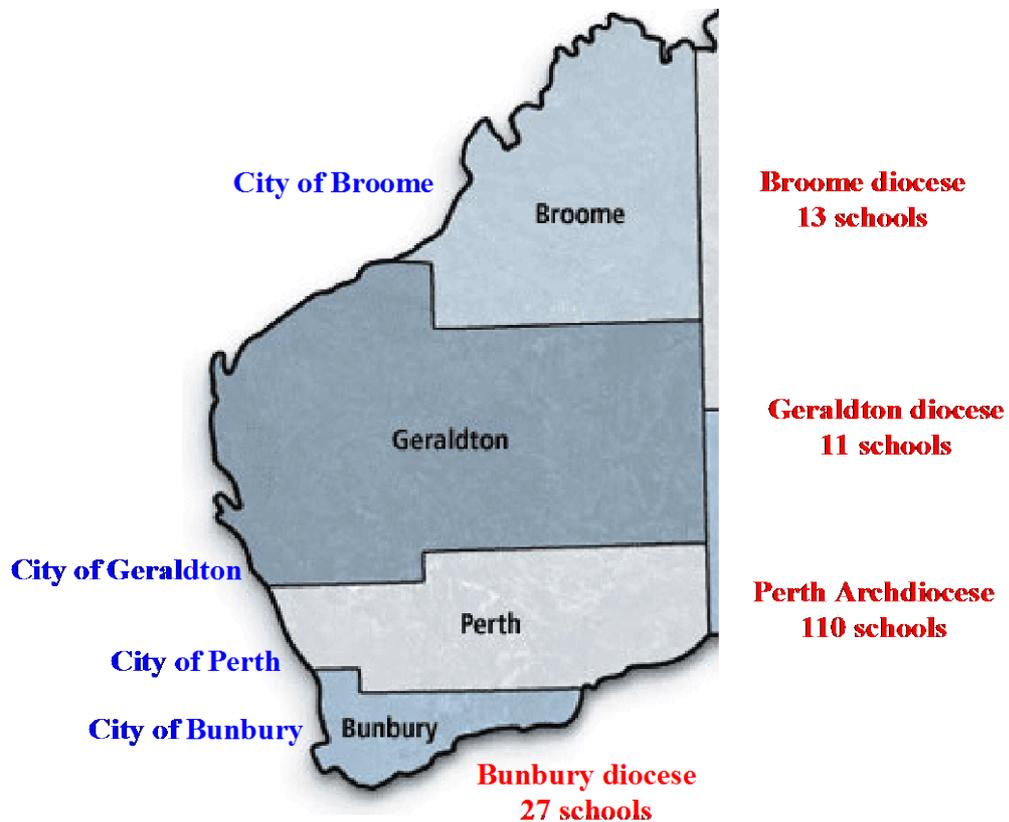


Figure 2.2: Western Australian Catholic dioceses and schools (The National Council of Priests in Australia)

The system educates 73,000 students and is staffed by 5,500 teachers and 3,500 non-teaching staff (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014a, p. 4). The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Western Australia (the Bishops' Conference) leads the system. The Bishops' Conference is comprised of the Archbishop and Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Perth and the Bishops of the Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome dioceses. The Bishops' Conference is responsible for formulation of system vision, the provision of quality Catholic education to achieve this vision and system governance (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014a). The governance structure of the system is illustrated in Figure 2.3.

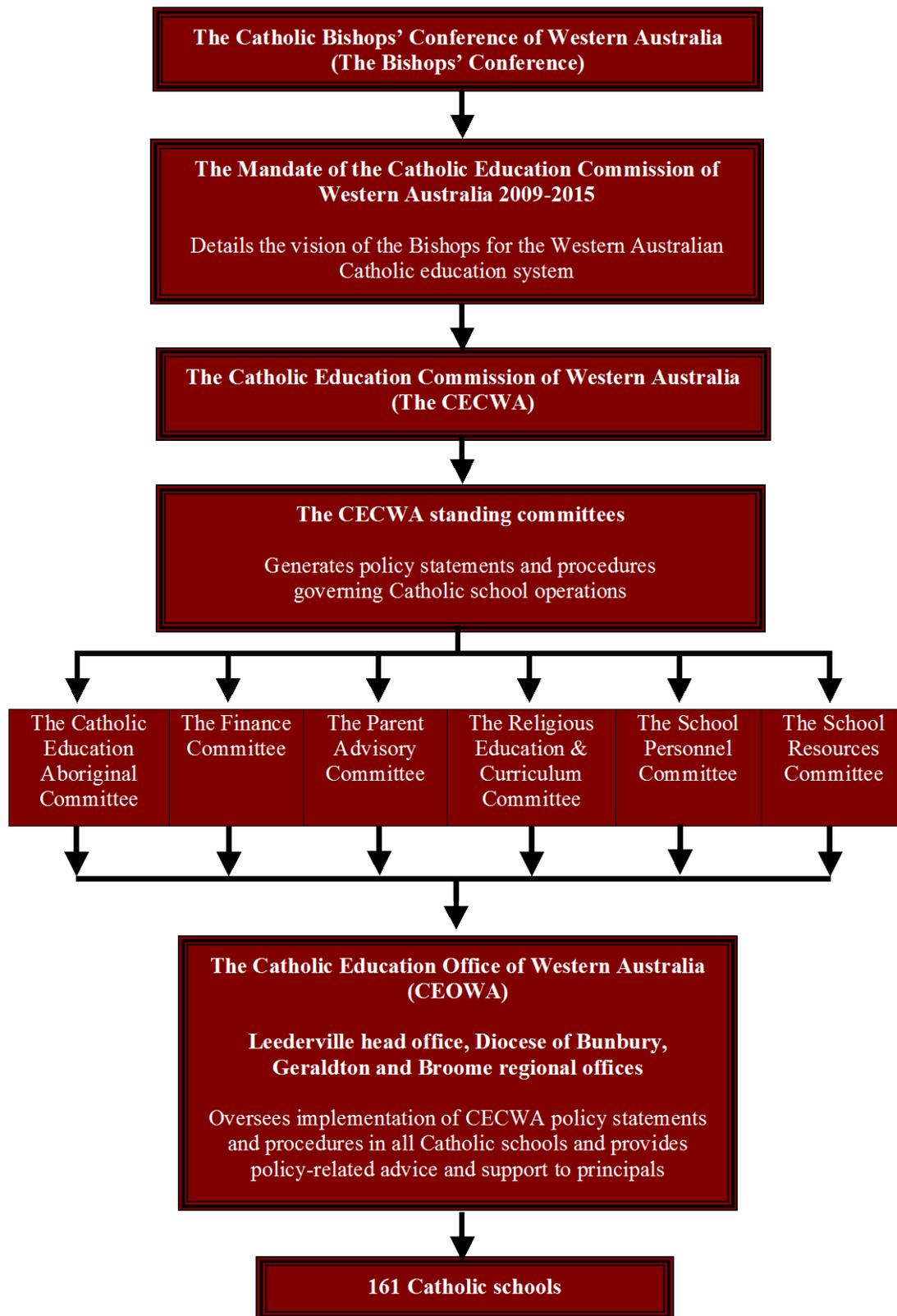


Figure 2.3: The governance structure of the Western Australian Catholic education system (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009)

The Bishops' Conference articulates its vision for the system through the document: *The Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2015*. This vision focuses on the holistic development of students and, in doing so, provision of support for the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009). Holistic development refers to the formation of students as 'whole persons' through the nurturing of the intellectual, spiritual, social, physical and emotional dimensions (The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). Educating students in this way involves the principal and staff modelling the Gospel values of Jesus Christ in word and action, direct instruction through the Religious Education curriculum and the integration of Gospel values, where possible, through other curricula (Convey, 2012). The aim of such modelling and instruction is the development of student values systems based on that of Jesus Christ and the ability to think and act counter-culturally when faced with situations that oppose these ideals (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009).

The Bishops' Conference delegates its authority to the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (the CECWA). The CECWA is the 'board of management' for the system and is comprised of 17 people including one Bishop and the Executive Director, Catholic Education in Western Australia. The CECWA is responsible for the legislative compliance of the system and achieves this through the generation, review and amendment of 38 policy statements and procedures governing school operations. The CECWA generates policy statements and procedures through six standing committees. Standing committee members are selected by the CECWA for their expertise in specific fields and to ensure that the diverse nature of the Western Australian Catholic education community is represented (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014a).

The CECWA uses its Executive arm, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), to implement policy statements and procedures generated by the CECWA standing committees (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014a). The CEOWA employs 245 staff distributed between its head office in Perth and three regional diocesan offices in the cities of Broome, Bunbury and Geraldton (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014a, p. 27). The CEOWA also performs a compliance function by reporting as required to local,

state and federal government authorities on behalf of Western Australian Catholic school principals. The CEOWA, in addition to monitoring compliance, provides policy-related advice and support to Catholic school principals (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014a).

2.3 Context Dimension Two: Western Australian Catholic Education Leadership Programs

Leadership programs are responsible to and funded by the CECWA School Personnel Committee. To facilitate achievement of the vision articulated by the Bishops' Conference, leadership programs aim to develop the leadership capacity of Catholic school and CEOWA personnel at all levels of the system (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014d). Within the suite of leadership programs offered by the CEOWA, illustrated in Figure 2.4, the Aspiring Principals Program is the sixth of nine programs.



Figure 2.4: Western Australian Catholic education leadership programs (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014d)

The structure, content and activities of leadership programs are based on two key documents: the Leadership Framework for Catholic Schools in Western Australia (the Leadership Framework) and the Quality Catholic Schooling (QCS) Framework and school improvement tool (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014d). The Leadership Framework was developed by the CEOWA throughout 2007 and launched in January 2008. The Leadership Framework, illustrated in Figure 2.5, describes Western Australian Catholic school principalship through four, interrelated domains: Catholic identity; education; stewardship; and community. When leading and managing through each domain, principals are required to model the example of Jesus Christ in word and action and consider the future impact of their decisions. The Leadership Framework also articulates four leadership capabilities required of principals when enacting their roles through each domain: personal; professional; relational; and organisational capabilities (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2008b).

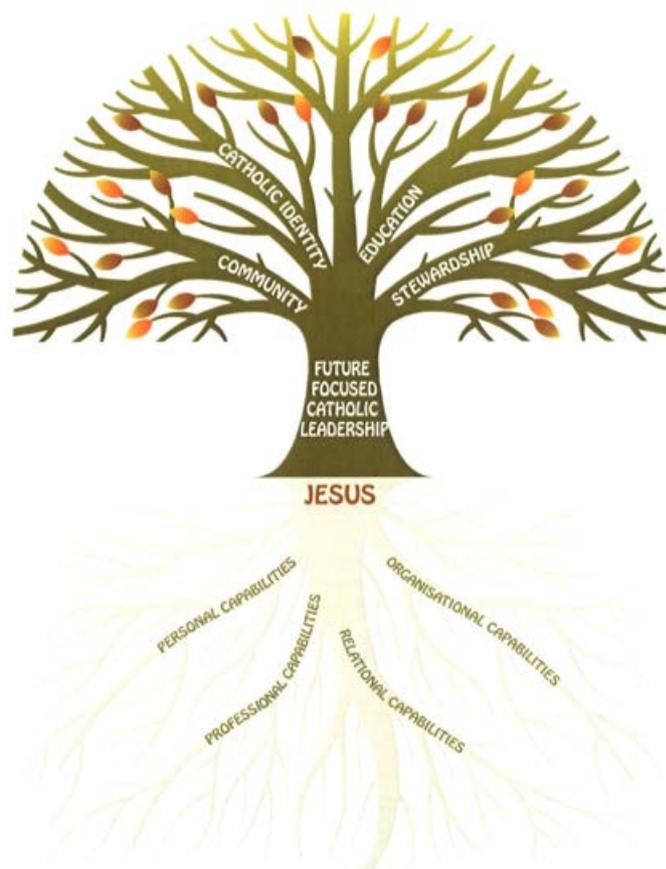


Figure 2.5: The Leadership Framework for Catholic schools in Western Australia (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2008b)

Catholic principals use the Quality Catholic Schooling (QCS) Framework and school improvement tool to review and improve all aspects of school operations. The Framework and tool were developed by the CEOWA throughout 2009 and 2010 and mandated by the CECWA for use in all 161 Western Australian Catholic schools commencing January 2011. The QCS Framework and tool consists of 24 components, listed in Table 2.2, grouped according to the domains of the Leadership Framework. Principals are required to oversee the review of four components per year and complete a full cyclic review every six years (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2009).

Table 2.2
Leadership Framework Domains and the 24 Components of the QCS Framework and School Improvement Tool (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2009)

<p>Catholic identity Vision and mission Evangelisation Catholic life and culture Social justice and action</p> <p>Stewardship Professional learning Staff wellbeing Finance and facilities Accountability and compliance School improvement process</p> <p>Community Engagement with families Engagement with parish and church Wider partnerships</p>	<p>Education</p> <p>Student Learning Vision for learning Curriculum Learning environment Teaching practices Assessment Reporting Evaluation and planning Student achievement</p> <p>Student Support Students with special learning needs Cultural diversity Student wellbeing and pastoral care Student engagement</p>
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Each component contains descriptions for low, moderate and high performance. For each component review process, principals are expected to form and, where practicable, lead a review team. The composition of the team depends upon the component being reviewed and may include teachers, support staff, students, their parents and carers or members from the broader school community

(Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2009). The purpose of the review team is to determine the performance of the school against the component descriptors, source evidence to confirm its rating and, if necessary, formulate and implement a component improvement plan. Moreover, the principal is expected to integrate the component improvement plan with the school strategic plan. In the context of the research, it is important to note that the CECWA School Personnel Committee determined that the Aspiring Principals Program would be used as a medium through which to train future principals in the use of the QCS Framework and school improvement tool (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2009).

Since January 2012, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Standards for Teachers and Principals have also been used to inform the structure, content and activities of Catholic education leadership programs (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014d). AITSL is a public company, founded in 2010 and funded by the Australian Government. AITSL provides national leadership for the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. The AITSL Standards explicitly state what teachers and principals are expected to know, understand and do to achieve in their work. The AITSL Standards were endorsed by all Australian State and Territory Ministers for Education in July 2011 and, commencing January 2012, applied to all Australian teachers and principals (Education Services Australia, 2014).

2.4 Context Dimension Three: The Aspiring Principals Program

The Western Australian Catholic education Aspiring Principals Program is a two year principal preparation offered by the CEOWA to selected primary school assistant principals and secondary school deputy principals aspiring to principalship. The following section traces the development of the program from its inception in 1999 through to its current version and describes the program's theoretical underpinnings, selection process, structure and components. A comprehensive description of the current version of the program is provided in Appendix A.

2.4.1 History.

In 1999, the CEOWA Executive noted a decline in the volume and quality of applications for Western Australian country and remote school principalship vacancies. After considering the situation, the CECWA School Personnel Committee requested the design and implementation of a principal preparation program to attract and form aspirants with interest in country and remote school principalship (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia School Personnel Committee, 1999). This program, the Aspiring Principals Program, was designed in the latter half of 1999 and launched in January 2000 with the caveat that graduating aspirants apply for country or remote school principalship vacancies. The program's original version involved five aspirants completing a theoretical program comprised of 10, day-long, face-to-face classes over a two-week period. Program content and activities were based on the four areas of Catholic school leadership that existed at the time: theological; educational; pastoral; and administrative leadership. After completing the theoretical program, aspirants participated in a five-day internship where they 'shadowed' the principal of a country or remote school. To conclude the program, aspirants summarised their learning in a presentation to the program convenor and their peers (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2000).

The program continued in this form until December 2009. Throughout 2009, the program was redesigned before being launched in its current, two-year format in January 2010 without compulsion to apply for country or remote school principalship vacancies. Five factors triggered the redesign. Firstly, aspirant feedback revealed the poor facilitation skills of program personnel and lack of program rigour, especially with regard to the use of contemporary leadership theory. Secondly, feedback suggested that the caveat of compulsory country or remote school principalship discouraged application from high-calibre aspirants seeking leadership development but, for a variety of reasons including family commitments, were unable to commit to this condition. Thirdly, research involving first-time Western Australian Catholic school principals conducted in 2008 concluded that the program inadequately prepared aspirants for the management of school finances, human resources and systemic accountability requirements (Sayce & Lavery, 2010). Fourthly, the program lacked alignment with the newly launched Leadership Framework. Finally, the development of the QCS Framework and school

improvement tool and the decision by the CECWA School Personnel Committee to use the program as a QCS training opportunity for future principals justified the redesign (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia School Personnel Committee, 1999).

2.4.2 Structure and components.

The CECWA School Personnel Committee funds aspirant participation in the Aspiring Principals Program. Program commitment involves 23 days of face-to-face professional learning: 14 days in year one and nine days in year two, complemented by workplace and at-home activities (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e). The following section provides an abridged version of the program's theoretical underpinnings, selection process, structure and components.

2.4.3 Theoretical underpinnings.

The first year of the Aspiring Principals Program is predominantly based on a constructive transactional model of leadership as it applies to Western Australian Catholic principalship (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e). This form of leadership focuses on the management of an organisation's systems and staff to achieve clearly defined goals (Avolio, 2010; Lowe, Avolio, & Dum Dum, 2013; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Specifically, aspirants are encouraged to apply constructive transactional capabilities when managing staff by setting goals, clarifying desired outcomes, consulting with staff as they execute their roles and suggesting improvement strategies. Aspirants are also encouraged to provide feedback, praise and recognition when warranted and exchange rewards for accomplishments (Avolio, 2010; Lowe et al., 2013; Marzano et al., 2005). Constructive transactional leadership is also used to frame an in-depth study of the managerial aspects of Catholic principalship and the capabilities required for effective performance as expressed through the four domains of the Leadership Framework (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e). Aspects of transformational leadership (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978; Lowe et al., 2013; Walumbwa & Wernsing, 2013) are also introduced in the latter part of the program's first year.

The program's second year aims to enhance aspirant understanding of their leadership style, behaviours and capacity to lead others using two theoretical models: transformational and transcendental leadership. As the term suggests, transformational leaders strive to transform or inspire staff to move from a mindset of egocentricity to one that considers the needs of colleagues and achievement of shared organisation vision (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978; Lowe et al., 2013; Walumbwa & Wernsing, 2013). Although all transformational leaders are different, they generally achieve this shift using a combination of four strategies: individual consideration; intellectual stimulation; inspirational motivation; and idealised influence (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Bass, 1990; Lowe et al., 2013). Transcendental leadership is a relationship-focused model that seeks to nurture contribution-based exchanges between leaders and staff (Beckwith, 2011; Kishore & Nair, 2013; Lavery, 2012). In the context of these exchanges, transcendental leaders not only use their relational capabilities to connect with people, they attempt to develop non-hierarchical unity and a reflective, values-centred culture through the use of genuine, collaborative dialogue (Beckwith, 2011; Cardona, 2000; Gardiner, 2006; Kishore & Nair, 2013; Lavery, 2012; Liu, 2007). These capabilities are not only appropriate for leading school improvement through the domains of the Leadership Framework, they reflect the actions of Jesus, the role model of the Catholic principal (Lavery, 2011).

2.4.4 Selection process.

In any given year, approximately 10 aspirants, eight assistant principals and two deputy principals, are selected by the CEOWA Executive to participate in the program. Cohort size and composition, however, is ultimately determined by the anticipated number of beginning principals required to replace those due to leave the system through retirement or attrition. Program completion does not guarantee aspirants appointment as principals nor is it a prerequisite for the role (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

Program entry is comprised of a three-stage process. The first stage involves submission of a written application. The application requires candidates to provide demographic data and respond to a series of questions. Specifically, candidates are asked to reflect upon and describe their reasons for seeking principalship, their

leadership style and leadership experiences with regard to the four domains of the Leadership Framework (Catholic identity, stewardship, education and community). When addressing this part of the application, candidates are required to state their understanding of each domain, provide examples of initiatives led and subsequent outcomes. The second stage is a written endorsement of responses by candidate principals. The third stage involves a selection panel, comprised of a CEOWA representative, a primary school principal, a secondary school principal and a parish priest, reviewing all applications and shortlisting candidates for an hour-long interview. When preparing for interviews, panellists conduct thorough checks of both listed and non-listed referees including candidate parish priests and current and former principals (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

2.4.5 Year one.

The program's first year is comprised of six components delivered through 14 days of face-to-face professional learning. Aspirants are also required to participate in workplace-based activities and complete tasks at home (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e). An overview of the program's first year is provided in Figure 2.6.

The first component involves aspirants undertaking a 360-degree review of their leadership capabilities using the Human Synergistics, Life Styles Inventory (LSI) psychometric tool (Human Synergistics, 2014). In addition to responding to 240 online, multiple-choice questions regarding their leadership style and behaviours, aspirants are required to select and invite eight data sources from their schools to complete the same questions. Data sources comprise aspirant principals, three assistant or deputy principal colleagues and four subordinates such as teachers or support staff (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e). After debriefing resultant LSI, 360-degree data with a consultant external to the CEOWA, aspirants participate in five, hour-long, confidential coaching sessions throughout the year with a trained and accredited coach. Coaches are practicing Catholic school principals. Aspirants and coaches use LSI data to develop capability improvement goals and strategies. Specifically, goals are designed to amplify aspirant leadership capability strengths and minimise weaknesses identified through the LSI. Aspirants implement, evaluate and refine strategies to achieve stated goals as they enact their

leadership roles in the context of their respective workplaces (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

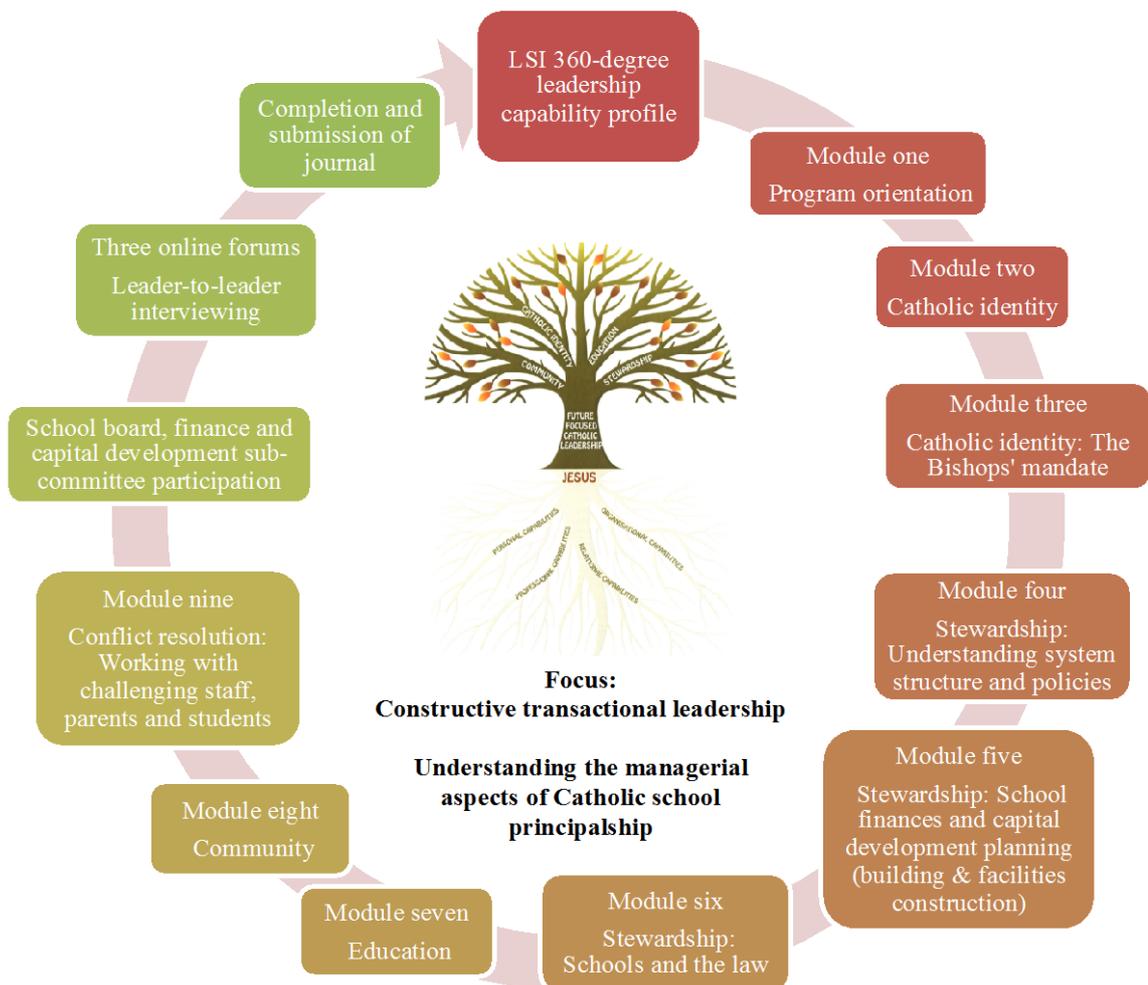


Figure 2.6: The Aspiring Principals Program: Year one (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e, p. 7)

The second component is a 14-day, face-to-face theoretical program. The purpose of this program component is aspirant familiarisation with Catholic principalship role components, expressed through the four domains of the Leadership Framework, and constructive transactional capabilities required for effective performance. Conflict resolution theory and tools also form part of the theoretical program. Facilitators of the theoretical program are trained in the use of adult learning principles and include CEOWA support staff with specialist knowledge pertinent to principalship. CEOWA support staff include finance, capital development, human resource, industrial relations and legal consultants. A practicing

principal is also invited to host an 'Inside Leadership' session at the conclusion of each day associated with the theoretical program. During 'Inside Leadership' sessions, principals interact with aspirants through a semi-structured question and answer session and share stories of leadership success, challenge and resultant learning (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

The third component, development of a leadership vision statement, begins early in the program's first year and continues until the end of the program. The vision statement development process has two broad aims. Firstly, the process is designed to assist aspirants to clarify their leadership values, important for the effective leadership of Catholic school communities. Secondly, the process enables aspirants to identify the attractive aspects of Catholic school principalship (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

The fourth component requires aspirants to participate as observers on their school boards for the duration of the program. Aspirants are also required to participate as members of their school board's finance and capital development (building and facilities construction) sub-committees. These experiences are designed to expose aspirants to three managerial aspects of the role with the potential to cause consternation for beginning principals: school board leadership; school financial management; and overseeing the planning and construction of new or refurbishment of existing school facilities (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

The fifth component, leader-to-leader interviewing, invites aspirants to reflect upon three aspects of Catholic principalship before engaging in professional conversations with their current and a guest principal and sharing learning online with program colleagues. The first activity examines aspirant understanding of Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance. The second activity explores the factors enhancing aspirant interest in principalship. The third activity assesses the factors diminishing aspirant interest principalship (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

The final component requires aspirants to progressively construct and submit a 2,500-word journal. Journaling is designed to assist aspirants to reflect upon their experience of program modules, activities and perspectives regarding Catholic

principalship. Aspirants are encouraged by the program convenor to portray their perceptions using a combination of narrative text, images, photographs or other forms of expression (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

2.4.6 Year two.

The program's second year is comprised of six, integrated components delivered through nine days of face-to-face professional learning. Aspirants are also required to participate in workplace-based activities and complete tasks at home (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e). An overview of the program's second year is provided in Figure 2.7.

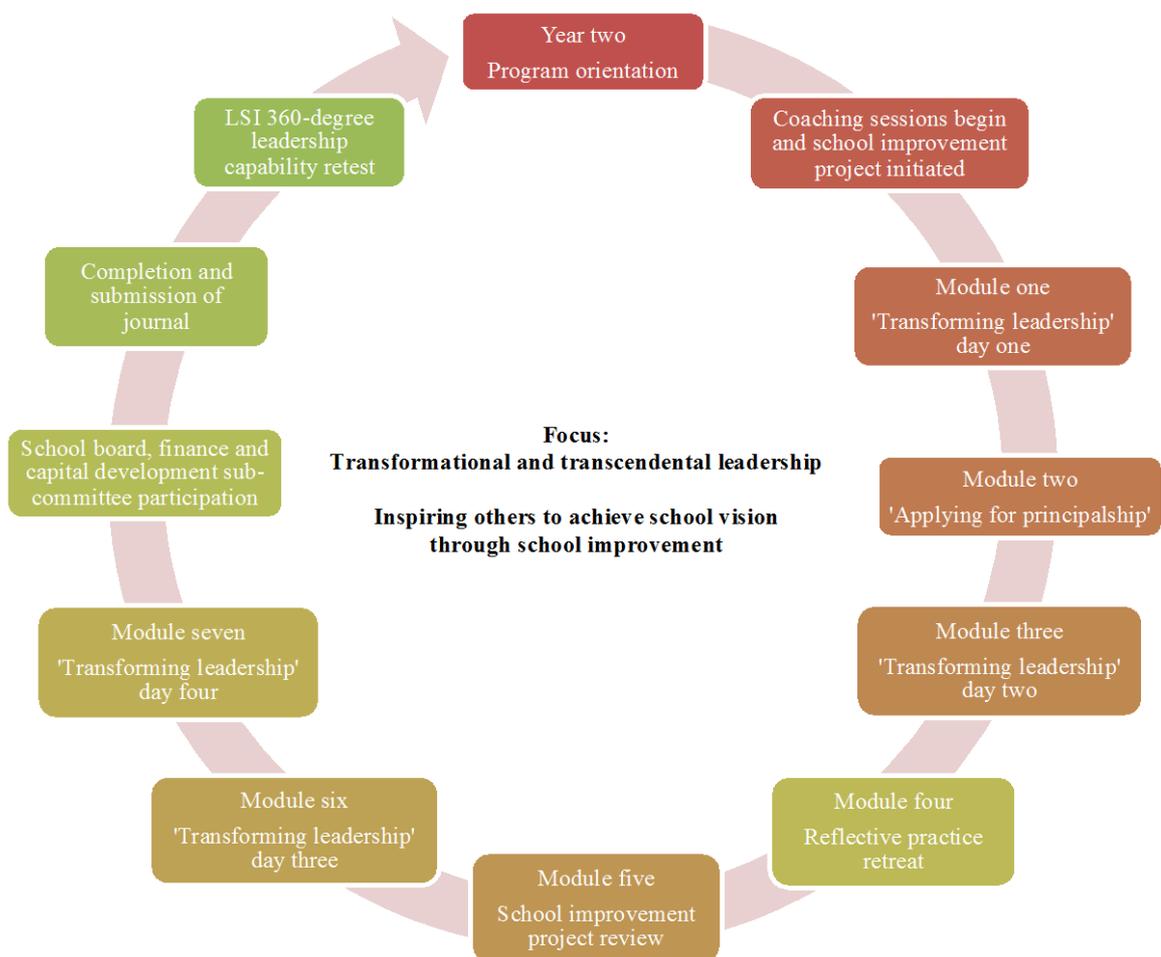


Figure 2.7: The Aspiring Principals Program: Year two (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e, p. 13)

The first component involves continuation of the coach-aspirant relationship established during the program's first year for an additional six, hour-long sessions.

As occurred throughout the program's first year, the coaching relationship involves generation of capability improvement goals based on aspirant LSI data and achievement strategies. During this year, coaches also assume the role of 'critical friend' to aspirants as they complete the second component, a year-long school improvement project. Aspirants are encouraged by their coaches to implement, evaluate and refine strategies apposite for goal achievement in two ways: through their leadership of the project and the day-to-day execution of their respective leadership roles (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

The school improvement project requires aspirants to lead the review of one QCS component at their schools. The project begins with aspirants, their coaches and principals collaborating to identify a QCS component for review. Aspirants then form a component review team and work with team members to rate school effectiveness against QCS component descriptors before sourcing evidence to confirm team conclusions. Aspirants then lead the formulation, implementation, evaluation and refinement of a component improvement plan. As the improvement process is enacted, aspirants are expected to work with their principals and school board members to integrate the goals, actions and success measures from the component-improvement plan with the school strategic plan. Mid-way through the program's second year, aspirants work with the program convenor and their coaches for a full day to collectively review project successes and challenges and recalibrate as required (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

The third component is a seven-day, face-to-face theoretical program. Four days associated with this program, entitled 'Transforming leadership', involve aspirant exploration of transformational and transcendental leadership theory and tools. Aspirants are expected to use theory and tools presented during these days when working with their coaches to develop, implement, evaluate and refine strategies to achieve capability improvement goals. As occurred during the program's first year, aspirants interact with practicing Catholic principals through 'Inside Leadership' sessions convened at the conclusion of each day associated with the theoretical program (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

As most aspirants consider applying for principalship at this point in the program, they also participate in a full-day theoretical module entitled 'Applying for

principalship.’ This module is dedicated to the exploration of the Western Australian Catholic education principal appointment process. On this day, aspirants receive guidance with regard to the use of transformational and transcendental leadership language within both the application and interview processes (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

The final component of the theoretical program is a two-day, overnight, reflective practice retreat. During the retreat, aspirants explore their inner and outer leadership journeys. As part of the exploration process, reference is made to constructive transactional, transformational and transcendental leadership capabilities and experiences (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

To continue development of constructive transactional leadership capability, component four requires aspirants to continue serving as school board observers and participants on their board’s finance and capital development sub-committees (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e). Prior to the conclusion of the program’s second year (November), aspirants participate in component five, a second 360-degree review of their leadership known as an LSI retest. Where possible, aspirants invite the data sources that contributed to the formulation of their original profiles to participate in the retest. Once data is processed, aspirants meet with a consultant, external to the CEOWA, to debrief results. During the debrief, the consultant compares and contrasts the final LSI with that completed prior to program commencement, the purpose of which is assessment of the leadership capability change process (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

The final program component is aspirant submission of a 2,500-word journal. As was the case with the program’s first year, journals are designed to encourage aspirant reflection with regard to their experience of program modules, activities and perspectives regarding Catholic principalship. Aspirants are encouraged by the program convenor to portray their perceptions using a combination of narrative text, images, photographs or other forms of expression (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

To familiarise the reader with the setting in which the research was conducted, this chapter presented three dimensions of context. The first contextual dimension focused on the geographical and structural overview of the Western Australian Catholic education system. The second dimension discussed the purpose and structure of Western Australian Catholic education leadership programs and located the Aspiring Principals Program within this structure. The third dimension traced the development of the Aspiring Principals Program from its inception in 1999 through to its current version and described the program's theoretical underpinnings, selection process, structure and components. The upcoming chapter, Literature Review, is comprised of four sections. Each section presents literature relevant to one set of aspirant perceptions explored by the research: Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance; factors enhancing interest in principalship; factors diminishing interest in principalship; and self-efficacy to commence principalship. The literature presented in this chapter culminates in the formulation of the four specific research questions that, collectively, were used to guide the study.