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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 Four: Research Plan

4.1   Introduction

The review of the literature in Chapter Three focused attention on four themes, namely,
beginning principals; dimensions of principalship in Australia that include: gender, school
locality and school type; preparation for principalship; and the religious dimension of
Catholic school principalship. Three research areas developed from the literature review
and formed the focus of the study. These research areas were technical and managerial
skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness.

This chapter is concerned with the research plan employed to explore the central question
of the study: What are the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian
Catholic school principals during the first four years of their appointment? Since this
research attempts to explore the professional and personal needs of beginning principals
through their experiences and self-perceptions, a qualitative approach was undertaken. The
reason for such an approach is because qualitative research examines the socially
constructed nature of reality and the situational boundaries that shape the study (Denzin &
Lincoln, 1998). Moreover, the environs of the beginning principals are to be considered as
provide the contexts that suggest particular needs, such as additional support. The research
also involves the researcher as an instrument of data collection. These features suggest an
approach that is qualitative, interpretive and planned around a case study. The outline of the
research plan is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Overview of Chapter Four: Research Plan

Sub-heading		Sub-division	
4.1	Introduction		
4.2	Theoretical framework	4.2.1	Epistemology
		4.2.2	Theoretical perspective
4.3	Methodology	4.3.1	Case Study
		4.3.2	Instrumental case study
4.4	Method	4.4.1	Documentary search
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4.6	Trustworthiness	4.6.1	Credibility
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4.8	Data analysis	4.8.1	Data reduction
		4.8.2	Data display
		4.8.3	Drawing verifications and conclusions
4.9	Ethical considerations		
4.10	Design Summary		
4.11	Conclusions		

4.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of a research inquiry relates to the philosophical basis in which the research takes place. The theoretical framework demonstrates the relationship between the theoretical features and the practical aspects of the research inquiry (Neuman, 2011). In order to undertake an inquiry, Crotty (1998) suggested the researcher needs to consider what methodologies and methods will be used in the inquiry and the justification for these choices. Neuman (2011) posited the view that to strengthen the quality of research, the researcher is required to draw together the practical activity of doing research and the underlying assumptions that guide the inquiry. Crotty (1998) proposed four elements to be considered when undertaking research. These elements are: Epistemology, the theory of knowledge that informs the theoretical perspective; Theoretical perspective, the philosophical position that directs the methodology; Methodology, the design plan for the study; and Methods, the techniques and procedures used to gather and analyse the data (Marsh, Keating, Punch & Harden, 2009; Crotty, 1998). Figure 4.1 presents the theoretical framework in which the research has been undertaken.
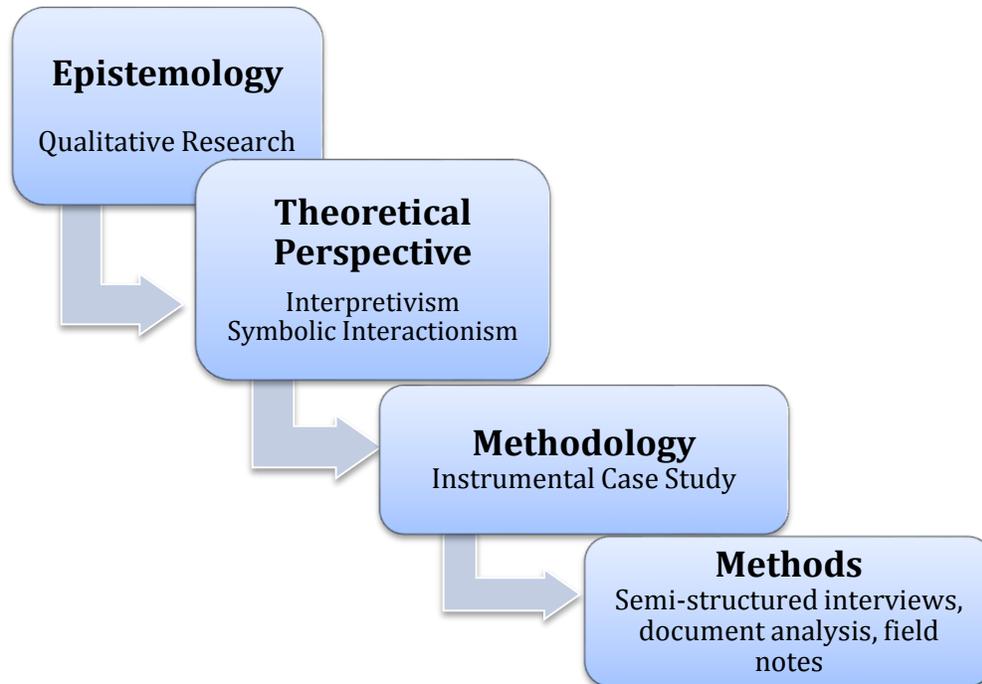
Figure 4.1 *Theoretical framework for the research study*

(Adapted from Crotty, 1998, p. 4).

4.2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology is an area of philosophy that is concerned with the creation of knowledge that

focuses on how we know what we know or what are the most valid ways to reach the truth

(Neuman, 2011). Crotty (1998), stated that epistemology "deals with the nature of

knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis" (p. 8). Epistemology provides a

philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how one

can ensure that the knowledge is both adequate and legitimate. Research methodology rests

upon a foundation of epistemological assumptions (Neuman, 2011).

The epistemological approach for this study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research

is based on an inductive approach that focuses on specific situations or people with an

emphasis on words rather than numbers (Bryman, 2008; Maxwell, 2005). One of the main features of qualitative research is the emphasis on uncovering meanings by participants in a particular social context (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1992). Maxwell (2005) suggested that the term "meanings" should be understood in its broadest sense and includes "… cognition, affect, intentions and anything else that can be encompassed in what qualitative researchers refer to as the participant's perspective" (p. 22). Through the collection of empirical data that take the form of descriptive rather than numerical information, the researcher unlocks a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) positioned the qualitative researcher into the inquiry. They posited that the researcher "understands that [the] research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity" (p. 3). Schwandt (1998) believed the purpose of the qualitative researcher is to acquire an inside understanding of the participants involved in the research phenomena. Additionally, qualitative research has an "inherent openness and flexibility" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 23) that enables the researcher to uncover new discoveries and relationships through a variety of methods. Qualitative research enables the researcher to better explain the outcomes of actual events (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study concerning beginning principals' perspectives is well placed within a qualitative research because it explicitly addresses their professional and personal needs. In addition to the abovementioned features of qualitative research, the role of the researcher is an important element in investigating phenomena. Bryman (2008) suggested that the qualitative researcher "seeks close involvement with the people being investigated, so that he or she can genuinely understand the world through

their eyes" (p.394). The research draws on the researcher's particular background and understanding in Catholic education, thus enabling a deeper insight into the participants' perspectives and professional needs.

4.2.2 Theoretical perspective

Crotty (1998) viewed the theoretical perspective as the "…philosophical stance behind the methodology" (p. 66). Crotty added that the theoretical perspective the researcher adopts to research the social phenomena pervades the reason, criteria and context for the study. This particular research was designed to gather a richness of descriptive data from newly appointed Catholic school principals about their perspectives on professional and personal needs to undertake the role of school principalship. The theoretical perspective that this inquiry is drawn from is that of interpretivism. The interpretivist view is one of an empathetic understanding of human behaviour centred on the notion that reality is what is internally experienced and socially constructed through interaction (Bryman, 2008; Schwandt, 1998). Of prime importance are the social meanings that people attach to the world around them. The interpretivist view involves searching for those patterns of meaning that people use to make sense of the world (Bryman, 2008; Schwandt, 1998).

The process of understanding or interpreting is differentially represented and projected through the different philosophies of interpretivism (Schwandt, 1998). The term *Verstehen* or "interpretive understanding" is often used as a central view in describing interpretivism and stemmed from the ideas of the German sociological philosopher, Max Weber. *Verstehen* gives those observing social activity a method of investigating social phenomena

without distorting his or her social world. According to Marsh et al. (2009), what people do needs to be interpreted "in the light of the meanings, motives and intentions behind their action" (p.118). *Verstehen* sociology, according to Weber (Crotty, 1998), positions the study of society in the context of the actions and interactions of people, or as O'Donoghue (2007) stated, "the researcher is to use research skills to attempt to understand how others understand their world" (p. 10). The interpretivist approach seeks interpretations of the socially based world that are culturally connected and historically situated.

Within the interpretivist perspective there are different approaches to human action (Bryman, 2008). One such approach is symbolic interactionism, which underlines the theoretical perspective to this inquiry. A symbolic interactionist approach assumes that "people transmit and receive symbolic communication when they socially interact" (Neuman, 2011, p. 86). At the core of symbolic interactionism lie three sociological premises that have been developed by Blumer (1969). The first premise is that human beings act towards phenomena on the basis of the meaning they have for those phenomena. The interaction between the abstract and concrete phenomena and humans is shaped by culture and the situation in which the interaction occurs with a particular emphasis placed on the construction of meaning. The second premise is that meaning constructed by the individual arises out of social interaction with other people. Meanings are social products that arise during interaction and are personal to the individual. The attribution of meaning to objects through symbols is a continuous process with the symbols being gestures, signs, language and anything else that conveys meanings. The final premise is that meanings are dealt with and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with

the research phenomena (Blumer, 1969). Individuals construct meaning to situations, others, things and themselves through a dynamic process of interpretation. How something is interpreted depends on the meanings available and the particular sense the interpreter chooses to make of these meanings at that time. Neuman (2011) suggested that people construct perceptions of their social settings and each other and then act on these perceptions.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated that whilst "people may act within the framework of an organization, culture or group; it is their interpretations and definitions of the situation that determine action and not norms, values, roles or goals" (p. 10). Thus, the perceptions and interpretations of people in their world have significant meaning. Crotty (1998) suggested that it is important for the researcher to explore the manner in which participants arrive at an understanding about the phenomena of interest. Crotty suggested the researcher then needs to investigate the participant's response to the phenomena utilising his or hers interpretation and experiences. If the aim of the interpretive approach is to "get inside the actors' heads and see how they define the situation" (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985, p. 236), then the researcher needs to be aware of personal biases and assumptions, interpretations and preconceived ideas that may lead to misinterpretation of the participants' meanings.

In adopting a symbolic interactionist perspective, Clarke (2000) suggested that researchers are fundamentally concerned with how individuals "cope with, deal with, handle or manage particular phenomena" within the course of their inquiry (p. 4). Much of the research in symbolic interactionism involves the collection and analysis of naturally

occurring talk between people, as well as textual analysis of written material. Consistent with a symbolic interactional perspective, this study concerning beginning Catholic school principals sought to explore the perspectives of participants as they navigated their first principalship. The data that was collected drew from the personal context of each participant. In keeping with the theoretical perspective of interpretivism and the lens of symbolic interactionism, the methodology chosen for this inquiry is a case study design. The methodology underpinning this inquiry is now discussed.

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Case Study

Case study design is concerned with the "complexity and particular nature of the case in question" (Bryman, 2008, p. 52). Bryman (2008) suggested that case study design "favours qualitative methods such as participant observation and interviewing … because these methods are viewed as particularly helpful in the generation of an intensive, detailed examination of a case" (p. 52). A case study research design was chosen for this inquiry because it is consistent with a symbolic interactionist approach. Yin (2009) argued that the case study approach as a methodology should be considered when the researcher is seeking to "explain some present circumstance such as the 'how' and 'why' of a social phenomenon … and when the questions require an extensive in-depth description (of the phenomena)" (p. 4). In addition, Baxter and Jack (2008) suggested that the case study approach be considered "when you want to uncover contextual conditions because the researcher believers they are relevant to the phenomena under review" (p. 545).

Case study design enables the researcher to gain an understanding on how individuals deal with particular phenomena. The "voice" of the participants in research provides the opportunity of raising awareness of their particular issues in the research setting (Yin, 2009). Methods utilised to collect data such as qualitative interviews are able to capture the complexity of the participants' experiences, perceptions and thoughts during the research inquiry (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Accordingly, this inquiry into the professional needs of beginning principals is clarified through the research approach of case study, which will now be explained in further detail.

4.3.2 Instrumental case study

Yin (2009) defined case study as a methodology which " allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events" (p. 4). Stake (1994) distinguished three types of case study – collective, intrinsic and instrumental. Collective case studies involve exploring multiple cases where the focus is both within and across cases in order to jointly examine a phenomena, population or general condition (Punch, 1998, p. 152). Intrinsic and instrumental case studies are based on research into a specific case, which the researcher wishes to understand better, or which provides insight into a precise issue or refinement of a theory where the case is of secondary interest (Punch, 1998). Baxter and Jack (2008) further differentiate intrinsic and instrumental case study types. They suggest that the purpose of intrinsic case study type is to understand "its particularity and ordinariness" (p.548). Instrumental case studies on the other hand, seek to provide further insight into the case rather than understand a particular situation. Baxter and Jack utilise Stake's initial work on instrumental case studies and suggest that:

the case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, and because it helps the researcher pursue the external interest. (p.549)

The phenomena explored in this instrumental case study are the perceptions of the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals during their first four years of appointment.

Underpinning the methodological structure of instrumental case study is the rationale for choosing the case study approach. In this instance, the inquiry was organised around a "snapshot" (Rose, 1991) of the phenomena. Berg (2007) described the "snapshot case study as a detailed and objective study of one research entity at one point in time" (p. 293). The snap shot case study involved research into three perspectives of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals. These were gender issues relating to male and female beginning school principals; the locality of the schooling experience, that is, remote, rural and metropolitan; and the school, specifically, primary or secondary. The issue of gender in this research presented an opportunity to examine gender differences amongst beginning principals in Western Australian Catholic schools in this research. Of particular interest were the various life situations of each participant and the respective impacts on their principalship. The diverse regions where Catholic schools are found provided an opportunity to study the influences of location on the new leaders principalship. The metropolitan region encompasses schools within the Archdiocese of Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. The country region comprises of schools within the dioceses of Bunbury, 250 kilometers south of Perth, and Geraldton, 400 kilometers north of Perth. The remote region involved schools within the Broome diocese, between 2,000 kilometers north

of Perth. Each of these regions provided beginning principals with a particular set of challenges. The type of school explored within this research included primary schools (ages four to 12 year olds) and secondary schools (ages 13 to 17 year olds). Both school types generate their own issues for beginning principals.

However, there are a number of concerns about engaging the case study approach. These include generalisability, subjectivity, volume of information, quality of the research and methodological rigour. These five concerns will now be addressed. One of the standard criticisms of the case study approach is that findings drawn from the study cannot be generalised (Bryman, 2008; Yin, 2009). Bryman counters this criticism with the view that case studies aim to engender an intensive examination of a single case. Bryman adds that case studies are often in a position to generalise by deriving from comparable cases investigated by others (p. 37). Stake (1994) contended that the primary use of a case study is that it seeks "to maximise what we can understand about the case. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case" (p. 4). Thus, this first criticism that generalisability is problematic using the case study method is diffused as the intention of its use is to understand a single research phenomenon.

A second criticism of the case study approach concerns the subjectivity of the researcher. Burns (2000) suggested that case study design, since it is highly subjective and interpretative in nature, can be dismissed as impure methodology, value-laden and questionable. However, Yin (2009), noted that case study researchers can immerse themselves in understanding subjective phenomena and can form close relationships with

their research participants. Yin recognised that bias can enter into the conduct of a variety of experiments and contends that this occurs more frequently in case studies. To counter this challenge, it is necessary for the researcher to report on the collected data fairly and without prejudice. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) contended that "member checks" are useful in verifying interpretations of the collected data (p. 63). Member checks involve the participants approving the accuracy of their data by checking its content. Stake (1994) highlighted the important value of the researchers' intrinsic interest by stating, "the more the researcher has intrinsic interest in the case, the more focus of study will usually be on the case's uniqueness, particular context, issues and story" (p. 243). With regards to this study, the researcher has clearly defined her motivations and bias in Chapter One and provided member checks for all participants.

A third criticism about case studies is that the methodology is time consuming and can result in a large volume of collected information (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yin, 2009). In light of this criticism, Guba and Lincoln (1994) attested that this large volume of information is rich in data and thick in description. Inherent with the amassed information is the potential tendency of the researcher to be biased and selective of the data (Yin, 2009). To avoid this tendency, Burns (2000) suggested that the researcher choose a manageable topic, specify succinctly the initial proposition, identify the essential interviewees and observational settings and analyse the data once it is collected. The following steps outline how the researcher will address the criticism highlighted of case study methodology. With regard to this particular research, the topic was clearly stated and so highlighting the intention of the study. The case study was a "snapshot" (Rose, 1991) examination, rather

than a longitudinal study. The participants self-identified according to their interest and

desire to contribute to this study. Interviews were for one-hour time periods undertaken at

each participant's school site or a venue of their choice. The interviews were focused on

eliciting the research topic questions, and the data was analysed shortly after they were

collected. The fourth and fifth criticisms are concerned with research quality and

methodological rigour respectively. Both criticisms will be addressed in the section 4.6.

4.4 Method

In this research, three data collection methods were employed. The first includes document

search focused on the principalship in Catholic education in Western Australia; the second

utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews with beginning principals; and the third

included field notes recorded by the researcher. These three methods of data collection will

now be discussed.

4.4.1 Documentary search

Punch (1998) described documents as a "rich source of data for social research" (p. 191).

When combined with interviews and observations, documentary sources of data provide

important means of triangulation (Punch, 1998). Neuman (2011) suggests that by

triangulating, our learning increases as we observe a phenomenon from multiple

perspectives rather than from a single perspective. Shenton (2004) recommended the use of

supporting data obtained from documents that "provide a background to and help explain

the attitudes and behaviours of those in the group under scrutiny" (p. 66). In addition to

supporting data, Shenton suggests that any documents referred to by informants during the

course of the interview can "shed more light on the behaviour of the people in question" (p. 66). In this study examples of documents included:

- Key documents that define Catholic education in Western Australia such as the Mandate Letter from the Bishops of Western Australia 2009 - 2015 (Hickey et al., 2009).

- CEOWA Leadership Framework (Appendix A).

- Catholic Education Commission of Western Australian policies related to the appointment process for principalship, including application forms for principalship (CECWA, 2014).

- Documents related to leadership programs that sought to develop aspirants and principals.

- Catholic Church documents relating to Catholic education.

- Local school publications that provide information relating to the context of the school to which the participants belong.

These documents were used predominantly to inform the context of the research.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Central to interpretivism is understanding people from their own frame of reference and perceived reality (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It is necessary, therefore, that the research plan aligns the methods of data collection with what people actually say and do. By examining transcriptions of interviews and listening to participants discussing concerns in their professional environment, the researcher can obtain first hand information on the research topic. What the participants report and how they interact in their unique setting, captures

how they perceive their reality (Taylor & Bogdan). In a similar vein, Bryman added: "the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events, that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns and forms of behaviour" (p. 438). This research utilised single semi-structured in-depth interviews as a primary source of data collection to gain the participants' view on their leadership experiences as beginning principals.

Hennick, Hutter and Bailey (2011) described in-depth interviews as "conversation with a purpose" (p. 109). They contend that the "interviewer asks questions and motivates the interviewee to share their perspectives" and that the in-depth interviews are "knowledge producing conversation" (p. 109). The use of an interview guide to direct the questions ensured that there was consistency of the interview process. As the inquiry used an instrumental case study design approach, the interview guide ensured that there was consistency in the questions used with all participants thus aiding the analysis process (Bryman, 2008). An interview guide is a list of questions that is to be used by the interviewer as a memory aide that guides the interview (Hennick, et al., 2011). The interview guide provides the interviewee with a great deal of freedom in how to respond. The guide enables the interviewer to gain an insight into how the research participants view their social world via questioning (Bryman, 2008; Hennick et al., 2011).

It is also important that in the development of the interview guide, the proposed questions are tested prior to the interviews. Bryman (2008), Hennick, et al. (2011) and Maxwell (2005) advocated the use of piloting the interview guide as a process of determining if the

guide questions work as intended and to assist in revisions as necessary. This process also

enhances the trustworthiness of the collected data. In this inquiry, the researcher piloted the

interview guide with an experienced, current primary school principal and two university

academics with extensive secondary school leadership experience. Within the three pilots,

all participants had experienced leadership roles in rural, remote and metropolitan

schooling localities. Through the piloting process of the interview guide, the feedback

provided the researcher the opportunity to further clarify the questions, thus ensuring the

questions were appropriate, clear and suitable to the research. A second pilot was

undertaken with the modified questions that further refined the questions. The final refined

interview guide was the one used with the participants. Appendix B provides the specific

question that formed the interview guide. The interview guide questions that were

developed were drawn from the three specific research questions. Table 4.2 highlighted the

relationship between the specific research questions and the explicit interview guide

questions.

Table 4.2
Linking of specific research questions to the interview guide

Specific Research Question	Interview Guide Question
SRQ 1 **What technical and managerial skills do beginning principals need to acquire?**	4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15,16, 18, 19, 21
SRQ 2 **What cultural and personal relationships do beginning principals need to develop?**	7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22
SRQ 3 **In what ways do beginning principals integrate the role of**	1, 2,3, 5,7,8, 9, 13, 14, 15,17, 19, 20, 21, 23

principalship with their self-awareness?

The initial contact with the beginning principals was made in the form of a letter that included the following information (Appendix E):

- outline of the research

- an invitation and encouragement to become involved in the study

- the significance of their potential contribution

- approval from Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame Australia

- approval from the Director of Catholic Education to conduct the research in Catholic schools;

- the right of withdrawal at any stage

- a stamped addressed envelope for returning their signed consent.

Once the beginning principal agreed to participate, a consent form was sent and received (Appendix F), and a telephone call was made to establish a mutually agreed interview time and location.

The length of the interview was between 45 and 60 minutes. The majority of the interviews undertaken in this research were conducted in the participants' work place, thus ensuring a more genial atmosphere that was less disruptive for the principal. As the researcher's position was within the Executive of the CEOWA, a sincere attempt was made to promote

her as a student of the university undertaking a research study by dressing less formally and informing the participant that she was on leave from work. Two remote school principals were visiting Perth and decided that it was convenient for them to be interviewed in the researcher's work place. With the permission of the participants, each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Bryman (2008) recommended that the procedure of recording and transcribing interviews is advantageous in that it ensures the accuracy of the data collection and allows a thorough examination of what people say (p. 451). Transcriptions were made available to the interviewees, thus allowing verification of the information provided and clarification of any moot points. Member checking, as this method is termed, is a necessary component of qualitative research adding to the credibility of the data (Bryman, 2008; Stake, 2010).

4.4.3 Field notes

Collecting data in the research site, or "field", is an "orientation toward doing social research" rather than a particular research technique (Neuman, 2011, p. 425). There is an array of techniques to data collection in the field. In this research, recorded interviews, field notes and direct observation notes were utilised. At the commencement of the interview, and prior to turning on the recorder, the researcher explained to the participant how information would be recorded. This included the electronic recording of the interview and hand written notes during the course of the interview. The field notes taken during the recorded interviews contained observations of the participant's work office, demeanour of the participant and other elements noticed by the researcher before, during and after the interview. Neuman (2011) suggested that "jotted notes" are short memory triggers such as

words or phrases for the researcher to enhance the "direct observation notes". Neuman comments that direct observational notes serve as a "detailed description of what you heard and saw in very concrete, specific terms" (p. 429).

4.5 Research participants

In order to explore the professional needs of beginning principals, the whole population of beginning principals appointed between 2003 and 2007 was invited to participate in the study. Giving "voice" (Punch 1998) to these principals would provide rich data in such areas as gender, placement (rural, remote metropolitan) and school (primary and secondary). Dobbert and Kurth-Schai (1992) contend that if researchers are to "treat socio-cultural systems as informationally interwoven, socially evolving wholes, research strategies must solicit and synthesise contributions from all members of the community under study" (p. 123). From the cohort of 30 beginning principals appointed between 2003 and 2007, 13 volunteered to participate in the research. These 13 participants formed a purposive sample of beginning principals. Punch (1998) described purposive selection as a "sampling in a deliberate way, with some purpose or focus in mind" (p. 193).

No attempt was made to ascertain why the other 17 beginning principals did not volunteer. The researcher felt any follow up contact would be intrusive on their decision and might contribute to a perceived power differential, particularly given the researcher's leadership position in Catholic education. Grbich (2007) and Stangor (2010) highlighted the issue of power differential between the researcher and research participant. According to these authors, the relationship between the researcher and research participant is thought of as

one of unequal power. Stangor reports that "the differential occurs because the researcher has a higher status than the participants" (p. 51). To diminish the perceived power difference, Stangor makes two suggestions. The first is giving the participants the option to not participate in the study with no follow up. The second is to ensure that those who wish to participate have the final decision on the content of the transcribed data. Stangor argues these two options alleviate the power differential. Hence in this study, the researcher did not follow up with those invited principals who chose not to participate. In addition each participant was sent a completed transcript within a month of the interview to verify the interview content. Both these activities were used to alleviate the power differential as described by Stangor. Table 4.3 outlines the demographics of the participants according to the three dimensions investigated in this study.

Table 4.3

Demographics of research participants

Gender	School type	Remote	Country	Metropolitan	Total
Female	Primary	1	4	0	5
	Secondary	0	0	2	2
Male	Primary	2	1	1	4
	Secondary	0	0	2	2
Total		3	5	5	13

4.6 Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1994) believed that it is necessary to establish and assess the quality of

the qualitative research. In order to assess the quality of the qualitative research, they

propose one method, that of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness consists of four criteria:

credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Table 4.4 details procedures

used in this inquiry to establish trustworthiness.

Table 4.4

Establishing Trustworthiness

Quality criterion	Research technique
Credibility	Member checking
	Triangulation
Generalisability	Purposive selection
	Detailed description of phenomena examined
Dependability	Case study protocol
	Audit trail - interview guide and pilot of questions
Confirmability	Triangulation
	Reference to researcher's beliefs and assumptions
	In-depth methodological description

(Adapted from Shenton, 2004, p. 64)

4.6.1 Credibility

When considering multiple accounts of a social reality, such as the professional and personal needs of beginning principals, confidence in the truth of the findings is paramount. Credibility, as reported by Bryman (2008), involved establishing the results of qualitative research as believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Bryman, (2008) suggested that there are two techniques for ensuring the credibility of the data. These two techniques are member checking and triangulation. Member checking refers to the opportunities afforded to participants to review the raw data, analyses and reports drawn from research procedures (Stringer, 2007). The aim of member checking, as noted by Stake (2010) and Bryman (2008), is to seek corroboration of the account given by the participant. Shenton (2004) suggested the focus is on whether the participants consider their words match what they actually intended to say. Bryman argued that this form of internal validation "ensures that there is a good correspondence between the researcher's findings and the perspectives and experiences of their research participants" (p. 377). As reported earlier, the researcher presented individual transcriptions of the audio-recorded interviews to respective participants for verification and accuracy. All participants reported that no change to the transcriptions was necessary.

The second technique used to ensure credibility is that of triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of information or methods in the study (Bryman, 2008), and enables cross checking of sources (Bryman, 2008; Stringer, 2007). Neuman, (2011), explained that within social research "we build on the principle that we learn more by observing from multiple perspectives than by looking from a single perspective" (p. 164). Studying a

number of data sources within the social phenomena studied strengthens the findings. Moreover, Shenton (2004) highlighted the use of a wide range of informants can also assist the triangulation process. Shenton stated that: "individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of attitudes, needs or behaviours of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people" (p. 66)

This particular inquiry explored the professional needs of beginning Catholic school principals. By triangulating the data collected according to gender, location, and type of school, the research elicited multiple perspectives on the professional needs of beginning principalship. In addition, the semi-structured interview arrangement, coupled with an interview guide and field notes enabled the researcher to not only ensure comparability of data sources, but also provided the opportunity for more delving deeper in the responses of participants.

4.6.2 Generalisability

Another demand of trustworthiness of the research is the ability of the inquiry to be generalised to other contexts. Punch (1998) suggested that the feature of generalisability is the capacity of the research to be transferable to other settings and contexts. With regards to this inquiry, the question pursued is whether one can accurately generalise from what is learned from a specific group of beginning principals to other populations of beginning principals in Western Australian Catholic schools? Stake (1994) recognised that whilst each case is unique, it can be considered as part of a broader group and thus the research can be

considered as transferable to other studies. Bryman (2008) presented the view that it is "depth rather than the breadth that preoccupies qualitative research" (p. 378). Bryman added that qualitative findings focus more on the contextual uniqueness and significance and as such, requires "rich accounts of the details" in which the research is placed (p. 378). Guba and Lincoln (1994) considered the "thick descriptions" (p. 316) provide the reader to judge the possibility of generalisability of findings to other contexts. With regard to this study, Chapter Two provides the context in which this study is located. Detailed accounts of those circumstances from which each Catholic school is drawn enables the reader to 'transfer' the results to a different context; however, the reader has the responsibility for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is.

4.6.3 Dependability

To ensure dependability, the researcher seeks to demonstrate that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. In order to repeat the research, the researcher is required to adopt an "auditing approach" (Bryman, 2008, p. 379) in the collection of data. Bryman (2008) described the auditing approach as one where complete records of all phases of the research processes are kept, thus ensuring procedural dependability. These records include the collection and recording of raw data; reduction of raw data; and the results of the synthesis of summaries, fieldwork notes and aide memoirs. In addition, records of information about the development of the instruments including the pilot version of interview questions and its process of refinement are required. Miles and Huberman (1994) viewed dependability as a means of ensuring the consistency of the study. This includes the study "being stable over time and across researchers and methods" (p. 278). In this study, all phases of the research

process were reported and documented. In using an instrumental case study approach, each step of data collection was replicated for each individual participant.

4.6.4 Confirmability

The final feature of trustworthiness is that of confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated (Bryman, 2008). Qualitative research assumes the researcher is part of the research process and thereby brings a unique perspective to the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Stake, 2010). Shenton (2004) suggested that confirmability is the qualitative researcher's ability to be objective and to take steps to ensure that research findings are the "result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (p. 72).

Strategies used to ensure confirmability include documentation of the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study and consistency in the analysis procedures. As noted earlier, procedures such as audit trails and triangulation ensure that data collection and analysis procedures limit the potential for bias. Bryman (2008) reported that whilst complete objectivity is impractical in social research, it is essential that researchers "act in good faith; in other words, it should be apparent that they have not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it". (p. 379). In this study, attempts have been made to ensure confirmability through establishing documentation of the procedures undertaken and consistency in the analysis procedure. In addition, the position of the researcher was clearly addressed in Chapter One highlighting her beliefs and assumptions with regard to the study.

4.7 Methodological rigour

Within this research, methodological rigour refers to the precision of the instruments used for data collection. The development, refinement and application of the interview guide was undertaken in order to provide a research tool that enabled a rich source of data to be collected for analysis. The use of the interview guide ensured consistency of the questioning of the research participants thus ensuring participant comparability for analytical purposes. In the development of the interview guide, the proposed questions were tested prior to the interviews. The researcher piloted the interview guide with an experienced current primary school principal and two senior university lecturers with extensive secondary school leadership experiences. All three participants have had combined experience in remote, rural and metropolitan schooling, with one having taught in the eastern states. This pilot enabled the researcher to modify the original set of questions, thus ensuring that the questions were appropriate to the research. The refined interview guide was then re-tested with two experienced school leaders. This final version of the interview guide was used with the participants (Appendix B).

4.8 Data analysis

An interpretive analysis of the research findings sought to ascertain needs of beginning principals within the first term of their appointment. Qualitative approaches to analysis provide ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). Qualitative data management and analysis have a myriad of suggested processes and procedures that draw out the meaning generated by those involved in the research area. This research utilised Miles and Huberman's (1994)

interactive model of data management and analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) considered data analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and verification / conclusion drawing. These three highly interactive and iterative processes occur before data collection begins, during the research design and planning phase, during data collection and post data collection. Figure 4.2 illustrates the approach and components to analysing the data in this study.
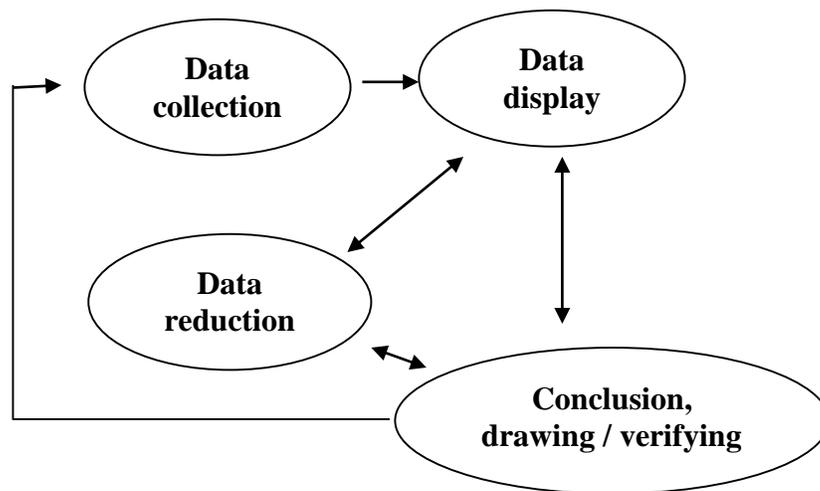
Figure 4.2 *Components of data analysis*

(Miles and Huberman, 1994 p. 12)

4.8.1 Data reduction

Data reduction is the process whereby the mass of qualitative data is reduced and organised. Miles and Huberman (1994) described data reduction as "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data" (p. 10). These authors suggest that prior to the commencement of data collection, the researcher has

already begun the process of "anticipatory" data reduction through the chosen research methodology. Miles and Huberman reported that "the researcher decides which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions and which data collection approaches to choose" (p. 10). Reducing data is an integral component to analysing data. Miles and Huberman suggest that researchers are making analytical choices as they code data, discern patterns or themes and identify clustering of these patterns. Further, they state that: "data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organise data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified" (p. 11). This inquiry reduced data through the identification of key themes emerging from the transcripts. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) suggested that the initial coding (first cycle) of data would generate an array of initial codes that are associated with their respective data chunks. Miles et al. highlighted the iterative nature of coding. They state: "coding drives on going data collection…it is a form of early and continuing analysis" (p.93). Once the initial coding had taken place, the second cycle of coding occurred. The second cycle of coding is termed pattern coding. Pattern coding groups the initial categories into themes. These themes can be further grouped into overarching or broad themes. The following table schematically portrays the process of analysing the data collected from the transcripts.
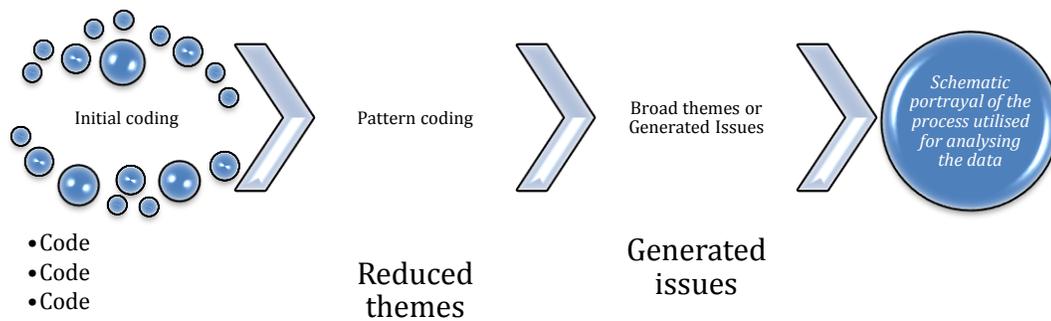
Figure 4.3 *Schematic portrayal of the process utilised for analysing the data*

4.8.2 Data display

Data display provides "an organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11). Displays are utilised at all stages of the analysis phase, and can be an extended piece of text, or a diagram, chart or matrix that provides a way of arranging and thinking about the more textually embedded data. Such data displays enable the researcher to extrapolate from the data patterns and observe relationships of areas under study. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that displays "are designed to assemble organised information into an immediately accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move on to the next step analysis…" (p. 11). Displays used in this research presented and highlighted the three perspectives in terms of gender, locality of the school and school type. Data display for the present study incorporated the use of conceptually clustered tables for each perspective. The researcher was able draw out major themes from the data displays. In addition, the display tables enabled comparisons to be made between perspectives. Tables 4.5 – 4.7 illustrate examples of the coding utilised to identify the key themes that emerged from each specific research question of this study.

Table 4.5

Examples of coding utilised to identify emergent themes for specific research question one:
What technical and managerial skills do beginning principals need to acquire?

Codes	Reduced Themes	Generated issues
(F) Finance (C) Capital (SB) School board (Trans) Transactional	Managing school budgets Managing capital development School board matters	Financial management
(S) Staff (R) Recruitment (PM) Performance management	Human resource issues Recruitment Managing staff conflict	Staffing Issues
(TM) Time management (A) Accountability (B) Bureaucracy	Managing time Attending to system and government accountabilities Communication issues Demanding pace	Meeting bureaucratic demands
(LS) Leadership skills (HO) Handover (Del) Delegation (CA) Career aspirations	Leadership skills and issues Handover with previous principal Prior leadership experience Diverse nature of the role	Transition into principalship

Table 4.6

Examples of coding utilised to identify emergent themes for specific research question two:
What cultural and personal relationships do beginning principals need to develop?

Codes	Reduced Themes	Generated issues
(SC) School culture (SBM) School board matters (Pol) Politics	Culture of the school community School board management	Socialisation skills that enhanced political and contextual awareness
(P) Parish (LC) Local community	Community issues Parish life	Development of community engagement

		strategies
(CE) Community expectations		
(PA) Principal associations (Col) Colleagues (CEOWA) Catholic education office WA	Collegial support CEOWA support	Augment collegial relationships

Table 4.7

Examples of coding utilised to identify emergent themes for specific research question three: In what ways do beginning principals integrate the role of principalship with their self-awareness?

Codes	Reduced Themes	Generated issues
(P) Prayer (F) Faith (V) Vocation	Prayer life Access to faith opportunities Vocation	Faith development
(SR) Self reflection (CR) Critical reflection	Reflective practice Perceived criticism on leadership	Importance of self reflection in building leadership capacity
(Lon) Loneliness (Iso) Isolation (Res) Resiliency (SE) Self-efficacy (PQ) Personal qualities (WLB) Work life balance	Work life balance Feelings of loneliness Professional isolation	Resiliency

4.8.3 Drawing verifications and conclusions

Drawing and verifying conclusions from the tabulated data was the final component of data

analysis. This stage enables the researcher to step back from the analysed data and

understand its meaning and to examine the implications for the research. Verification of the

data requires the researcher to revisit the data multiple times to cross check or verify the

emergent conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that "the meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their confirmability – that is, their validity" (p. 11).

The initial phase of data collection provided the researcher with the opportunity to "note emerging patterns, regularities, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). The process of organising the data enables the large volume of data to be reduced thus giving the researcher the opportunity to draw out data patterns and trends. As signaled in Figure 4.2, the process of qualitative analysis is an iterative process. The researcher "steadily moves along the four processes "interacting with each in a continuous manner" (Miles & Huberman, p. 12). Whilst the researcher focuses on one process, the other two are in the background, being drawn in as required.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

The questions studied by researchers confront basic issues around the protection of the intended participants in the pursuit of knowledge. The protection of the welfare and rights of participants is recognised as the primary purpose for ethical principles underpinning research. Secondary to this purpose is to enable research that will be of benefit to humanity (National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia, 1999). This research into the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals was conducted in accordance with the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Ethics Research Committee in which ethical clearance was obtained (Appendix C). The detailed process undertaken by this researcher included the following:

1. Approval gained from the Director of Catholic Education, Western Australia (Appendix D).

2. Participants completed consent forms prior to their involvement (Appendix F).

3. Participants and their individual schools were not identified.

4. All records of interviews have been stored electronically on password secured computers of the researcher and supervisor.

5. All recorded data will be destroyed after a five-year period upon final submission of the research.

4.10 Design Summary

Table 4.8 presents a chronological summary of the research design.

Table 4.8

Chronological summary of the research design

Schedule	Source	Activity
April 2007	UNDA	Ethics clearance
August 2007	CEOWA	Director's approval to undertake the research in Catholic education
October 2008	Catholic schools	Letters sent to 2003 - 2007 cohort of beginning principals
May to June 2008	Pilot Interviewees	Pilot of Interview Guide
August 2008 to March 2009	Participants	Interviews conducted of those wishing to participate in the inquiry

Transcription of interviews |
| April to June 2008 | CEOWA | Document search |

July 2009 to July 2010	Analysis of data
March 2014	Draft report
June 2014	Submit thesis

4.11   Conclusion

The research sought to explore the perceptions of beginning principals on what they believed were their professional and personal needs in order to lead a Catholic school. This chapter explained the methodological components that informed and directed the study. The chapter provided justification for the use of interpretivism as the theoretical perspective of this qualitative research and outlined the reasons for selecting an instrumental case study design. Consideration was also given to explaining the use of data collection methods and data analysis procedures. The following chapter will present the data on the three perspectives of gender, school location and school type. The data presented for each perspective will address the three research areas.