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

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## Chapter Four: Research Plan

### 4.1 Introduction

The review of literature in Chapter Three focused attention on the four aspects of 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 review of the literature also culminated in the formulation of four specific research questions that the study seeks to answer:

1. What were aspirant perceptions regarding Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program? What influences provoked discernible perception changes?
2. What were aspirant perceptions regarding the factors enhancing interest in Catholic principalship before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program? What influences provoked discernible perception changes?
3. What were aspirant perceptions regarding the factors diminishing interest in Catholic principalship before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program? What influences provoked discernible perception changes?
4. What were aspirant perceptions regarding self-efficacy to commence Catholic principalship before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program? What influences provoked discernible perception changes?

To respond to these questions, data were collected from the eight aspirants who commenced the program in January 2011 and subsequently analysed.

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for the research including its epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. Additionally, the research participants, measures adopted to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and data analysis processes are described. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the ethical considerations associated with the research and a design summary. An overview of this chapter is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1  
*Overview of Chapter Four: Research Plan*

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## 4.2 Theoretical Framework

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### **4.2 Theoretical Framework**

The term ‘theoretical framework’ refers to the choices made by a researcher when planning and executing a study (Crotty, 1998). These choices include decision-making regarding cases to study and data collection and analysis methods (Silverman, 2013). A theoretical framework is comprised of four elements. The first element, ‘epistemology’ refers to the area of philosophy that underpins the research, the purpose of which is creation of knowledge. The second element, ‘theoretical perspective’ refers to the philosophical stance that influences the third element, ‘methodology.’ Methodology is the body of practices, techniques and rules used to conduct the research. The final element, ‘methods’ refers to the procedures used to collect and analyse data related to specific research questions or a hypothesis (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Schram, 2006; Strauss, 1995).

O'Donoghue (2006) recommended the use of four questions when making decisions regarding the theoretical framework for a prospective study. Firstly, "What research paradigm informs our approach to our research area of interest?" Secondly, "What theoretical perspective do we choose within this paradigm regarding our research area of interest?" Thirdly, "What methodology do we choose as a result of our location of the research area of interest within a particular theoretical perspective derived from a particular paradigm?" Finally, "What methods are most appropriate to use in light of our chosen methodology?" (O'Donoghue, 2006, p. 13). The theoretical framework for this research, illustrated in Figure 4.1, was determined in the light of these four questions. The remainder of this section describes the elements of this framework.

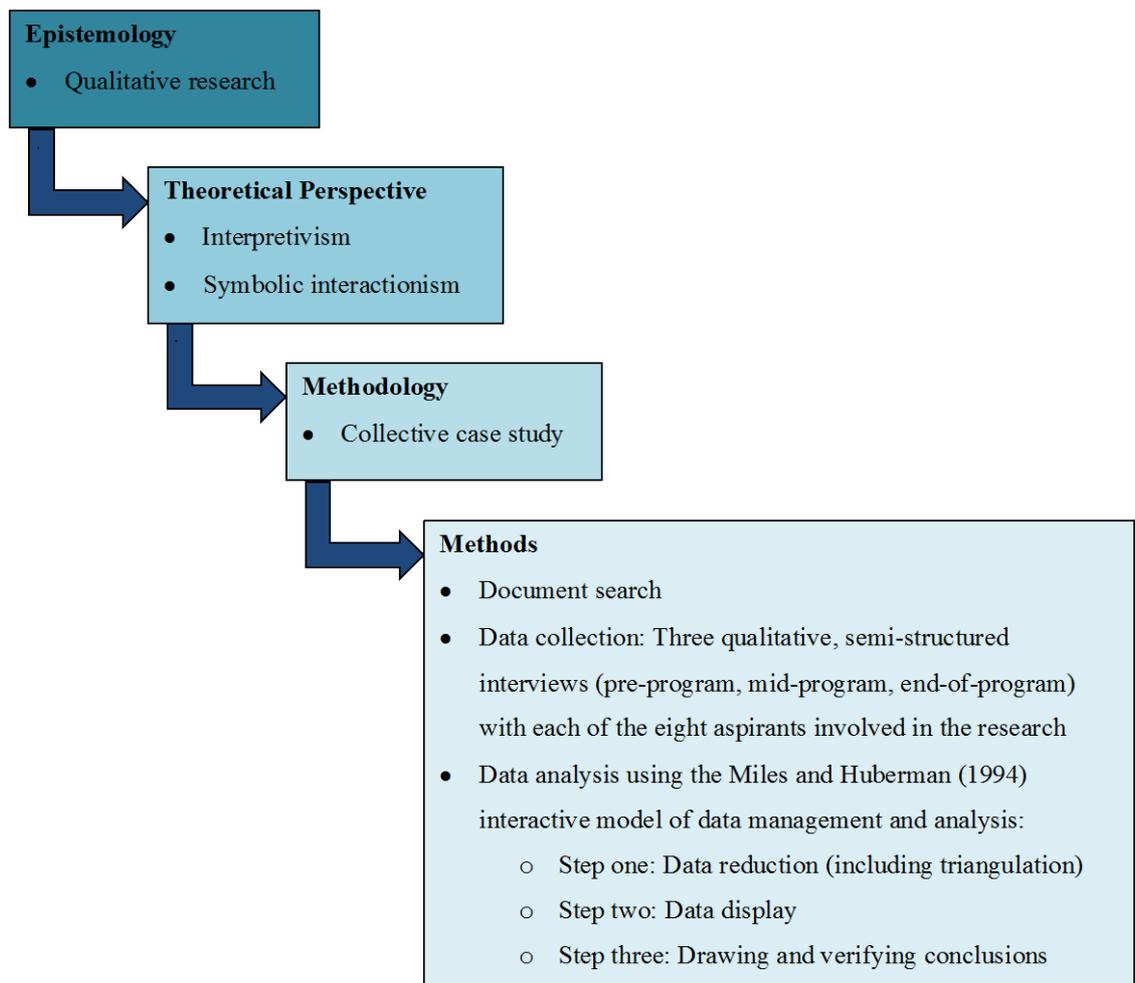


Figure 4.1: Theoretical framework for the research

#### **4.2.1 Epistemology.**

Epistemology broadly refers to the study of knowledge including its generation, validation and application (Brewerton & Millward, 2001; Delanty & Strydom, 2003; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Wiersma & Jurs, 2008). Epistemology may be defined as “a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Maynard, 1994, p. 10). Other authors describe epistemology as the process through which phenomena are explored and discovered through research (Silverman, 2006; J. C. Walker & Evers, 1988). The two main epistemological approaches used to study phenomena and create knowledge are qualitative and quantitative research (Flick, 2014; Punch, 2014).

The epistemological approach selected for this study was qualitative research. Specifically, qualitative research methods were used to collect and analyse data regarding aspirant perceptions of Catholic principalship before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program together with the influences provoking discernible perception changes. The underlying epistemology of qualitative research, and hence the present study, is characterised by a number of important foundational principles which are discussed in the remainder of this section.

##### ***4.2.1.1 Qualitative research.***

Qualitative research is concerned with the systematic gathering, ordering, presentation and interpretation of text-based data (Flick, 2014). Qualitative data may be distilled from conversations recorded in interviews then converted to transcripts, observation of research participants and/or analysis of source documents relevant to the study (Silverman, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggested that qualitative research places “an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (p. 8). The goal of qualitative research is to study participants in their natural context as they experience a phenomenon of some kind (Punch, 2014). The desired outcome of qualitative research is to make conceptual generalisations from the context of the study to other settings (Flick, 2014). Terms such as ‘trustworthiness’, assessed against the criteria of credibility, generalisability,

dependability and confirmability, are used to judge the quality of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Each of the above contentions applies to this research. The study took place in the natural context of aspirants as they participated in and experienced the phenomenon of the Aspiring Principals Program over a two-year period. The research involved the collection and analysis of text-based data, specifically interview transcripts generated through three qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the eight aspirants involved in the study. As a result of the research, an integrated model of principal preparation with potential for generalisability was proposed for the consideration of local, national and international program designers. The trustworthiness of the study, judged according to the criteria of credibility, generalisability, dependability and confirmability, were considered during the design and conduct of the research and are addressed in this chapter.

#### **4.2.2 Theoretical perspective.**

After selecting qualitative research as the epistemological approach for this study, the theoretical perspective was determined. Crotty (1998) described theoretical perspective as the philosophical stance behind the methodology that infuses the reason for the research, its criteria and conduct. Crotty (1998) also proposed five possible theoretical perspectives that may be adopted when conducting qualitative research: positivism; constructionism; interpretivism; critical inquiry; feminism; and post modernism. The theoretical perspective chosen for this research was interpretivism.

##### **4.2.2.1 Interpretivism.**

The theoretical perspective of interpretivism, linked to the work of Max Weber (1864-1920), is adopted by researchers interested in *Verstehen* (Crotty, 1998). *Verstehen* refers to the attainment of an empathetic understanding of the beliefs, thoughts and behaviours of research participants as they experience a phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). By adopting an interpretivist approach, researchers attempt to “uncover the socially constructed meaning as it is understood by an individual or group of individuals” (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekeran, 2001, p. 74) and “describe it in a way that is meaningful for these research participants” (Saunders, Lewis, &

Thornhill, 2009, p. 84). When adopting an interpretivist approach, researchers engage with the ‘social actors’ involved in the study (Saunders et al., 2009). Interpretivism was considered a suitable theoretical perspective for this research because it required engagement with aspirants, the ‘social actors’ involved in the study, to explore their perceptions regarding Catholic principalship as they experienced the phenomenon of the Aspiring Principals Program.

#### ***4.2.2.2 Symbolic interactionism.***

Within the interpretivist tradition, there exist several approaches that may be adopted to comprehend the beliefs, thoughts and behaviours of research participants (Bryman, 2012). One approach, chosen as the lens for this study, is symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a framework of sociological theory concerned with the symbolic meaning people develop and rely upon when interacting socially with others (Flick, 2014; O'Donoghue, 2006). Although symbolic interactionism traces its origins to Weber's assertion that individuals act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world, the American philosopher George Herbert Mead introduced this perspective to American sociology over 80 years ago:

The individual enters as such into his own experience only as an object, not as a subject; and he can enter as an object only on the basis of social relations and interactions, only by means of his experiential transactions with other individuals in an organised social environment. (Mead, 1934, p. 225)

Mead concluded that people develop patterns of ritual and behaviour through a process of socialisation (Annells, 1996). Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), a student of Mead's, refined and extended the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism to a research approach. According to Blumer, when human beings associate with one other, they are involved in interpretive interaction:

Ordinarily, human beings respond to one another, as in carrying on a conversation, by interpreting one another's actions or remarks and then reacting on the basis of the interpretation. Responses, consequently, are not made directly to the stimulation, but follow, rather, upon interpretation; further, they are likely to be different in nature from the stimulating acts, being essentially adjustment to these acts. (Blumer, 1969, p. 71)

Blumer believed that social life was expressed through symbols, especially language, and that these symbols were intrinsic to symbolic interactionism.

Gray (2013) asserted that symbolic interactionism is underpinned by three principles. These principles are: “people interpret the meaning of objects and actions in the world and then act upon those interpretations”; “meanings arise from the process of social interaction”; and “meanings are handled in, and are modified by, an interactive process used by people in dealing with phenomena that are encountered” (p. 24). Considering these three principles, symbolic interactionism suggests that meanings are not fixed or stable, but change as a result of experiences (Flick, 2014; O'Donoghue, 2006). Blumer (1969) asserted that researchers, in order to understand this change process, must develop an appreciation of the phenomenon being studied from the perspectives of participants. In practice, such study requires the researcher to enter the natural context of participants and actively engage with them (Crotty, 1998; Jeon, 2004). Therefore, research involving symbolic interactionism relies upon the collection and analysis of naturally occurring talk between people (Gray, 2013). Each of these contentions applies to this research that involved ongoing interaction with aspirants over a two-year time period and the analysis of data collected through qualitative interviews.

#### **4.2.3 Methodology.**

Methodology refers to the strategy that underpins the choice and use of particular research methods apposite for a study's desired outcomes (Crotty, 1998). In keeping with the theoretical perspective of interpretivism and the lens of symbolic interactionism, the methodology chosen for this research was case study design.

##### **4.2.3.1 Case study.**

The case study, as a method of qualitative inquiry, provides a means through which to develop fresh insights, establish new theories or challenge existing assumptions (Neuman, 2003; Payne & Payne, 2004). The case study requires an investment of considerable time on site to personally engage in the activities and operations of the case and reflect upon the meanings of experiences (Stake, 1995). Therefore, a case study may be described as “a very detailed research inquiry into a single example (of a social process, organisation or collectivity) seen as a social unit in its own right and as an holistic entity” (Payne & Payne, 2004, p. 31).

A case study has four characteristics, all of which apply to this research. Firstly, a case study has boundaries that must be delineated “as clearly as possible” (Punch, 2014, p. 122). Secondly, a case study “is a case of something” that must be defined to “give focus to the research, and to make the logic and strategy of the research clear” (Punch, 2014, p. 122). Thirdly, when adopting case study as a research methodology, there must be an explicit attempt made to “preserve the wholeness, unity and integrity of the case” (Punch, 2014, p. 122) usually through the use of clearly stated specific research questions. Finally, a case study typically relies upon the analysis of multiple data sources collected from participants in naturalistic settings (Punch, 2014). There exist seven possible foci with regard to case study methodology: individuals; attributes of individuals; actions and interactions of individuals; residues and artefacts of behaviour; settings; incidents and events; and collectives (Brewer & Hunter, 2006).

With regard to this research, the case study had a clear boundary; it was bounded by the two-year time-period associated with the conduct of the Aspiring Principals Program. The case study was ‘a case of something’; an exploration of aspirant perceptions regarding Catholic principalship and the influences provoking discernible perception changes as they experienced the phenomenon of the program. An attempt was made to ‘preserve the wholeness, unity and integrity of the case’ via the use of four specific research questions appropriate for the study’s purpose. The research ‘relied upon the analysis of multiple data sources’ collected from aspirants in their school settings; notably pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program qualitative interview transcripts and triangulation materials. Finally, aspirant perceptions were examined individually and collectively during the data analysis process.

#### ***4.2.3.1.1 Collective case study.***

Stake (1995) established three main case study categories. The first category, the intrinsic case study, involves research undertaken to enhance understanding of a particular case. The second category, the instrumental case study, involves examination of a particular case to provide insight into an issue or refine a theory. The third category, the collective case study, involves extension of an instrumental

case study to examine multiple cases where the focus is both within and across cases. Collective case study was chosen for this research.

One of the main characteristics of the collective case study is that, although it deals with several case narratives and presents them collectively, each case narrative is portrayed with its unique features and context (Shkedi, 2005). Several authors attest that the use of the collective case study enhances the potential of the overall study without forgoing the advantages of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The collective case study yields 'thickly described' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) individual narratives with comparisons and contrasts drawn between them during the data analysis process (Shkedi, 2005).

Yin (2003) proposed the use of four possible reporting formats for the collective case study. One format involves the use of a multi-case report:

This report will contain multiple narratives, usually presented as separate chapters or sections about each of the cases singly. In addition to these individual case narratives, the report will also contain a chapter or section covering cross-case analysis and results. (p. 147)

Similarly, when discussing possible reporting formats for the collective case study, Gray (2013) asserted:

A more focused approach is to present findings in the form of a question and answer format for each of the individual case studies. Here, the reader is then in a position to go to those questions of particular interest for each of the cases. This can be both efficient in terms of the reader's time and allow the reader to draw comparisons across each of the studies. (p. 288)

As previously stated, collective case study was chosen as the methodology for this research. This decision was made because of the compatibility of the methodology with the research purpose: the in-depth exploration of aspirant individual and collective perceptions of Catholic principalship before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program together with the influences provoking discernible perception changes.

During the data analysis phase of the research, a thickly described case study narrative was produced for each of the eight aspirants involved in the study to portray their perceptions. As recommended by Yin (2003), aspirant narratives were

presented individually in a separate chapter, Chapter Five: Research Results. Moreover, as recommended by Gray (2013), each narrative was organised using sub-headings representing the study's four specific research questions to permit reader cross-case comparison. The Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model of data management and analysis was then used to conduct cross-case analysis, the results of which are conferred in Chapter Six: Discussion.

Several researchers raise concerns with regard to the use of case study as a research methodology (Bryman, 2012; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003, 2011). The first concern relates to an inability to generalise from research findings, the result of the unique contexts often associated with case studies (Bryman, 2012; Yin, 2011). A second concern relates to researcher bias. Specifically, the highly subjective and interpretative nature of case studies lends itself to dismissal as an impure methodology that is value-laden and questionable (Yin, 2003). The third and fourth concerns relate to research quality and methodological rigour respectively (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Aspects of this research designed to address these four concerns are detailed later in this chapter. Specifically, concerns regarding generalisability are addressed in 4.4.2: Generalisability. Measures enacted to mitigate potential for researcher bias are described in 4.4.1.4: Mitigating potential for power differential and researcher bias. Measures implemented to enhance research quality and methodological rigour are detailed in 4.4.3: Dependability and 4.4.4: Confirmability respectively.

#### **4.2.4 Methods.**

There were three methods employed in the conduct of this research. The first method comprised a document search, undertaken to provide a description of the context in which the research was conducted. A description of context is provided in Chapter Two: Context of the Research and a detailed description of the Aspiring Principals Program is provided in Appendix A. The second method took the form of qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Specifically, each of the eight aspirants involved in the research participated in three qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted before the commencement of the program, at the conclusion of the program's first year and upon completion of the program. The third

method involved the use of additional materials during the data analysis phase of the research to triangulate data present in qualitative interview transcripts.

#### ***4.2.4.1 Document search.***

Firestone (1993), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Punch (2014) recommended that a thorough document search be undertaken when embarking upon a research project and emphasised the important role that historical and contemporary documents play in assisting the researcher to define context. With regard to the importance of context in qualitative research, Shenton (2004) stated:

Ultimately, the results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organisation or organisations and, perhaps, geographical area in which the fieldwork was carried out. (p. 70)

A well-defined context enables other researchers to make informed decisions with regard to the generalisability or transferability potential of study findings and conclusions (Shenton, 2004). Considering these perspectives, the provision of a context chapter for this research was deemed important. To draft this chapter, documents pertinent to Western Australian Catholic education system, the CEOWA and aspirant schools were accessed and used. A summary of these documents is provided in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Document Search for the Research*

- 
- a) Catholic Church documents relating to Catholic education (Byrnes, 2004).
  - b) The Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) 2009-2015; A seminal document defining the vision and structure of the Western Australian Catholic education system (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009).
  - c) The 2013 and 2014 CECWA annual reports (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013, 2014a).
  - d) Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) documents relating to the governance structure of the Western Australian Catholic education system (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009).
  - e) CECWA policy document 2-C5: *The Appointment of Principals in Catholic Schools* (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2012).
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- f) The CEOWA application form for principalship vacancies.
  - g) 38 CECWA policy documents used to inform the content and activities of Aspiring Principals Program modules (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014c).
  - h) The Leadership Framework for Catholic Schools in Western Australia (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2008b).
  - i) CEOWA documentation relating to Western Australian Catholic education leadership programs (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014d).
  - j) CEOWA documentation relating to the Western Australian Catholic education Aspiring Principals Program (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2014e).
  - k) CEOWA internal documentation relating to the historical development of the Aspiring Principals Program (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia School Personnel Committee, 1999).
  - l) CEOWA documentation relating to the Quality Catholic Schooling (QCS) Framework and school improvement tool (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2009).
  - m) CEOWA internal documentation relating to Human Resource statistics, specifically principal, assistant principal and deputy principal age statistics and retirement projections (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2013).
  - n) Local school publications that provided information relating to the context of each aspirant's school.
- 

#### ***4.2.4.2 Qualitative interviews.***

Qualitative interviewing is a well-documented and widely used method of data collection that permits engagement with research participants through purposeful and probing conversations (Punch, 2014). Qualitative interviewing is “essentially a technique or method for establishing or discovering that there are perspectives or viewpoints on events other than those of the person initiating the interview” (Farr, 1982, p. 38). The qualitative interview typically involves the researcher establishing trust with participants before asking questions relevant to the study, listening to responses carefully and reflectively and expressing interest in perspectives (Silverman, 2013). Qualitative interviews are usually audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis (Punch, 2014). Consistent with the aims of interpretivism and the lens of symbolic interactionism, the qualitative interview permits the researcher to understand the phenomenon being investigated from the perspective of the social actors who experience it (Saunders et al., 2009).

Punch (2014) used a continuum to describe the variety of interviews available for use in qualitative research. At one end of the continuum exist structured interviews where questions are pre-planned, tightly structured and standardised. At the other end of the continuum are unstructured interviews with several general questions that are used to initiate the interview. With this type of interview, specific questions emerge as the conversation progresses and the participant largely determines the direction of the conversation. In the middle of the continuum are semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview is a conversation guided by a set of well-chosen initial questions asked of the participant by the researcher. These questions focus and channel the conversation. Punch (2014) also suggested that while such questions act as the guides for the interview, the order of conversation is generally not important. Rather, the purpose of the semi-structured interview is for the researcher to remain constantly engaged with the participant and to facilitate discussion rather than dominate it. Further, Punch (2014) asserted that semi-structured interview questions should be prepared and carefully rehearsed prior to the conduct of the interview.

With regard to this research, data were collected through three, semi-structured qualitative interviews with each of the eight aspirants from the 2011 cohort of the Aspiring Principals Program. The cohort commenced the program in January 2011 and graduated in December 2012. The first interview was conducted before the commencement of the program (January 2011) and provided baseline data for the research, a starting point for aspirant perceptions regarding Catholic principalship. The second interview was conducted at the conclusion of the program's first year (December 2011). The third interview was conducted at the conclusion of the program (December 2012). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

One measure adopted to mitigate the study's limitations described in Chapter One: Introduction to the Research, power differential and research bias, was the employment of an experienced qualitative researcher by the CEOWA Executive. The contractor conducted aspirant interviews, transcribed audio recordings and used 'member checking' procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure the accuracy of interview transcripts. To ensure consistency of questioning during qualitative interviews and the collection of data apposite for the study's four specific research

questions, three interview guides (pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program) were designed by the researcher and used by the contractor (Appendix B).

Questions for the interview guides were initially piloted with four participants from the 2010 cohort of the Aspiring Principals Program and the two members of the CEOWA peer-review group assigned by the CEOWA Executive to oversee the research. Participants were selected for the pilot based on their experiences in primary and secondary schools in country, remote and metropolitan settings. It was considered important that both members of the CEOWA peer-review group be included in the pilot because of their role in ensuring the quality and integrity of the research. One member of the CEOWA peer-review group was a former Catholic primary school principal with metropolitan and country school experience whilst the second member had experience in Catholic secondary schools and university environments and with the conduct of qualitative research. The pilot process resulted in the modification of the original set of questions for each interview that were then subjected to a second round of piloting with two additional participants from the 2010 cohort of the Aspiring Principals Program and both members of the CEOWA peer-review group. One participant was a primary school assistant principal and the second was a secondary school deputy principal. The contractor used the final versions of the interview guides to conduct the three interviews associated with the research.

#### ***4.2.4.3 Data triangulation.***

The research method of triangulation refers to the use of materials to verify trends present in collected data and identify and account for inconsistencies (Flick, 2014; Lincoln, 1995; Miles et al., 2014; Punch, 2014). With regard to triangulation in qualitative research, Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) observed:

In effect, triangulation is a way to get to the finding in the first place, by seeing or hearing multiple instances of it from different sources by using different methods and by squaring the finding with others it needs to be squared with.  
(p. 300)

The purpose of triangulation, however, is not to arrive at consistency across data sources. Rather, inconsistencies revealed through the process are valuable because they provide opportunities to uncover deeper meaning in the data (Patton, 2002).

In the context of this research, triangulation occurred in four ways. Firstly, after coding and categorising interview data from aspirant transcripts, the field notes generated by the contractor employed to conduct interviews were used to verify aspirant perceptions and identify inconsistencies. Secondly, aspirant journals (Appendix C), submitted at the end of the program's first (December 2011) and second years (December 2012) respectively, were used to triangulate mid-program and end-of-program interview data related to the study's four specific research questions. Thirdly, aspirant leadership vision statements (Appendix D) developed throughout the program were used to corroborate end-of-program interview data related to specific research question two (factors enhancing interest in principalship). Finally, aspirant cover letters and application forms submitted for principalship vacancies (Appendix E) whilst participating in the program were used to confirm end-of-program interview data related to specific research questions one (Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance) and two (factors enhancing interest in principalship). A specific example illustrating the use of triangulation during the data analysis phase of the research is provided in 4.5.1 Stage one: Data reduction.

### **4.3 Research Participants**

Punch (2014) attested that in qualitative research, participants are selected in a deliberate way, appropriate for the purpose of the study. Amongst the variety of selection approaches available, Gray (2013) discussed the notion of the representative sample whereby the researcher:

...deliberately selects the subjects against one or more traits to give what is believed to be a representative sample. This approach may, indeed, succeed in achieving a true cross-section of the population. (p. 152)

In the context of this research, the entire 2011 cohort of the Aspiring Principals Program was invited to participate in the research because, as a group, they represented a typical sample of other program cohorts. Consequently, it was anticipated that research findings and conclusions had the potential to be generalised to successive cohorts. Moreover, it was envisaged that involvement of a complete cohort might galvanise aspirant interest in the research and result in the provision of and capture of high quality interview data for analysis. A summary of participants,

including their chosen pseudonyms and roles, type and location of schools during the research period, is provided in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3  
*Research Participants*

<b>Aspirant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Aspirant role</b>	<b>School type</b>	<b>Location</b>
Chelsea	Assistant principal	Kindergarten-Year six Catholic primary school	Metropolitan Perth
Frances	Assistant principal	Kindergarten-Year six Catholic primary school	Metropolitan Perth
Helen	Assistant principal	Kindergarten-Year six Catholic primary school	Metropolitan Perth
Jason	Assistant principal	Kindergarten-Year six Catholic primary school	Metropolitan Perth
Jeff	Deputy principal	Year seven-12 Catholic secondary school	Metropolitan Perth
Paula	Assistant principal	Kindergarten-Year six Catholic primary school	Metropolitan Perth
Riley	Head of junior school	Kindergarten-Year 12 Catholic composite school	Country town
Sharon	Assistant principal	Kindergarten-Year six Catholic primary school	Metropolitan Perth

#### **4.4 Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research attempts to build trustworthiness in order to make a claim regarding the methodological soundness of a study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). In this sense, ‘trustworthiness’ refers to the measure of a study’s legitimacy and quality (Silverman, 2013). In qualitative research, trustworthiness is assessed using four criteria: credibility; generalisability; dependability; and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A summary of the measures adopted during the conduct of this research to meet these criteria is provided in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4  
*Measures Enacted to Establish the Trustworthiness of the Research*

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<b>Quality criterion</b>	<b>Measures adopted during the conduct of the research</b>
4.4.1 Credibility	Utilising established qualitative research methods Exploring related research findings Documenting the research context and establishing trust Mitigating potential for power differential and researcher bias
4.4.2 Generalisability	Assisting readers to determine generalisability potential by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• defining research context;</li> <li>• producing thickly described case study narratives;</li> <li>• providing detailed cross-case analysis;</li> <li>• linking research findings to the literature review; and</li> <li>• proposing an integrated model of principal preparation.</li> </ul>
4.4.3 Dependability	Stating research questions and using them to guide the study Collecting data as required by research questions Member checking interview transcripts and triangulating data Demonstrating meaningful parallelism across data sources Participating in a CEOWA peer-review process Adopting an ‘auditing approach’ to data collection
4.4.4 Confirmability	Explicitly stating concerns regarding research limitations Adopting measures to mitigate research limitations Explicitly detailing research methods and procedures Linking research conclusions with reduced/displayed data Retaining research data for five years post-submission of thesis

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#### **4.4.1 Credibility.**

Several authors posit that qualitative research is considered credible when results reflect the perspectives of participants (Bryman, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Four measures were adopted to ensure credibility in the

conduct of this research: utilising established qualitative research methods; exploring related research findings; documenting the research context and establishing trust; and mitigating potential for power differential and researcher bias.

#### ***4.4.1.1 Utilising established qualitative research methods.***

Yin (2003) emphasised the use of established research methods when planning and conducting the study of phenomena. Likewise, Shenton (2004) concluded:

The specific procedures employed, such as the line of questioning pursued in the data gathering sessions and the methods of data analysis, should be derived, where possible, from those that have been successfully utilised in previous comparable projects. (p. 64)

Considering these perspectives, a document study was undertaken to inform the research context. Instruments appropriate for the research were devised and used to collect data for analysis. These instruments were interview guides and three qualitative, semi-structured interviews (pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program) with each of the eight aspirants involved in the research. Data, in the form of interview transcripts, were analysed using the three stages of the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model of data management and analysis. In stage one, the processes of coding and categorising were used to reduce the data. During this stage, triangulation was used to verify trends in the data and identify and account for inconsistencies. In stage two, data were displayed using a series of tables and eight thickly described case study narratives; one for each aspirant involved in the research. Narratives largely comprised the natural language of aspirants in the form of quotations extracted from interview transcripts. In stage three, data tables and aspirant narratives were subjected to cross-case analysis using selected 'tactics' recommended by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) for stage three of the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model of data management and analysis: drawing and verifying conclusions.

#### ***4.4.1.2 Exploring related research findings.***

The ability of researchers to relate their findings to an existing body of theory is a key criterion for evaluating works of qualitative inquiry (Silverman, 2013). In the context of this research, a review of relevant literature was undertaken for two

reasons. Firstly, the review of literature culminated in the formulation of four specific research questions that, collectively, were used to guide the study. Secondly, the literature review provided a body of knowledge against which themes emerging from the analysis of collected data could be compared and contrasted. Comparison and contrast, a tactic recommended by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014), was instrumental for the cross-case analysis process. Such analysis contributed to the formulation of responses for each of the four specific research questions; research conclusions; a proposed integrated model of principal preparation; implications and recommendations for the profession; and potential additions to the existing body of theory pertaining to principal preparation.

#### ***4.4.1.3 Documenting the research context and establishing trust.***

Several authors recommend prolonged engagement between the researcher, research participants and where appropriate, their organisations in order to accurately describe the context associated with a research project (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Accurately describing context is important because it permits other researchers to make informed decisions regarding the potential for study findings and conclusions to be generalised (Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Punch, 2014; Shenton, 2004). Prolonged engagement between the researcher, research participants and their organisations when documenting the research context also increases the probability that trusting relationships will develop. Development of trust is vital for ensuring the provision and capture of high-quality data for analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Considering these conclusions, a review of the context of the Western Australian Catholic education system, Catholic education leadership programs and the Aspiring Principals Program was undertaken. Additionally, the researcher is a long-established member of the system who has served in a variety of school-based and systemic roles over a 25-year period. As such, the researcher was privy to ‘key insider knowledge’ regarding the context and culture of the Catholic education system and schools. That is, because of his role in the organisation, the researcher was able to access information pertinent to the study that may not have been available to parties external to the organisation. Furthermore, as stated in Chapter One: Research Defined, the researcher is also the designer and convenor of the

Aspiring Principals Program. Despite the potential limitations associated with this reality, a benefit was the development of collegial, trusting relationships with aspirants over the two-year period associated with the conduct of the program and the research.

#### ***4.4.1.4 Mitigating potential for power differential and researcher bias.***

As detailed in Chapter One: Research Defined, there were two interrelated limitations associated with the research. Firstly, there existed a potential power differential between the researcher and the eight aspirants involved in the study, especially during the early stages of the program and the study where there existed little opportunity to establish trust. Secondly, because the researcher held the dual role of program designer-convenor and researcher, there existed potential for readers of this thesis to perceive researcher bias. To mitigate these potential limitations, six safeguards were adopted and applied during the conduct of the research.

Firstly, the researcher strictly adhered to the ethical requirements for conducting research as detailed by both The University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee and the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia Research Ethics Committee (see 4.6 Ethical Considerations). Secondly, both potential limitations and the researcher's motivation for conducting the study were explicitly stated during the research proposal and ethics approval phases of the research and in Chapter One: Research Defined (see 1.3 Researcher Motives and 1.7 Limitations of the Research). Thirdly, the CEOWA Executive decided to contract the services of an experienced, qualitative researcher to conduct the three sets of interviews associated with the study. The contractor also transcribed interview audio recordings and member checked resultant transcripts to ensure accuracy. Following the completion of the member checking process, the contractor met with the researcher and his supervisor to examine the field notes, generated during qualitative interviews, and discuss preliminary observations with regard to the data.

Fourthly, the researcher was required by the CEOWA Executive to participate in a peer-review process for the duration of the study (2011-2014) to ensure the quality of the research and mitigate the potential for researcher bias. The CEOWA peer-review group comprised the researcher, his immediate line manager (Team Leader, Leadership and Organisational Development Team) and the Assistant

Executive Director, Catholic Education in Western Australia. The CEOWA peer-review group met monthly to review the progress of the research, discuss the procedural quality of data collection methods and assess the integrity of data analysis methods. The peer-review group also scrutinised responses for the four specific research questions; conclusions; the proposed integrated model of principal preparation; implications and recommendations for the profession; and potential additions to the existing body of theory pertaining to principal preparation.

Fifthly, the CEOWA peer-review group determined that triangulation would be used during the data analysis process to verify trends detected in collected data and identify and account for inconsistencies. Finally, the CEOWA peer-review group determined that the eight, thickly described case study narratives, produced during the data display stage of the data analysis process, would be subjected to a member-checking regime with aspirants. Member checking occurred as case study narratives were built progressively over the course of the research (pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program) and prior to their inclusion in the final thesis.

#### **4.4.2 Generalisability.**

Generalisability, also referred to as transferability, is concerned with the extent to which the findings of a research project can be applied to other studies (Merriam, 2009). Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) offered the following observations with regard to the generalisability of research conclusions emanating from the case study, the chosen methodology for this research:

We need to know whether the conclusions of a study, a case study in particular, have any larger import. Are they transferable to other contexts? Do they fit? How far can they be generalised? (p. 314)

Likewise, Punch (2014) stated: “A common criticism of the case study concerns its generalisability: ‘This study is based on only one case, so how can we generalize?’ Because this reaction is so common, we need to take this question seriously” (p. 122).

Considering this assertion, Punch (2014) made two recommendations with regard to generalising from the case study. Firstly, he asserted that a case might be “so important, interesting or misunderstood that it deserves study in its own right”

(p. 122). In these situations, it is not the intention of the researcher to generalise, “but rather to understand this case in its complexity and its entirety, as well as in its context” (p. 122). Secondly, the value of the case study approach to research may lie in the opportunity to develop propositions. Punch (2014) stated: “To develop propositions means that, based on the case studied, the researcher puts forward one or more propositions, they could be called hypotheses, which link concepts or factors within the case” (p. 123). Such propositions do not prove generalisability, but rather suggest it with a caveat that testing through further research be undertaken to determine validity (Punch, 2014).

Other authors suggest that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that sufficient contextual information regarding the study is provided to enable others to make decisions regarding the potential for findings and conclusions to be generalised (Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These authors maintain that since the researcher knows only the ‘sending context’ of the study, he or she cannot make inferences regarding the transferability of findings to other contexts. As such, the responsibility lies with other researchers who are considering using findings or replicating the study. Shenton (2004) reached a similar conclusion: “After perusing the description within the research report of the context in which the work was undertaken, readers must determine how far they can be confident in transferring to other situations the results and conclusions presented” (p. 70).

Each of these contentions applies to this research. This study appears to be unique and, from the perspective of the CEOWA Executive, is worthwhile because findings and conclusions have the potential to enhance the quality of the program and system succession planning capability. In this sense, the decision to conduct the research confirmed Punch’s (2014) conclusion that “it deserves study in its own right” (p. 122). Whilst it is acknowledged that the unique nature of the context of this research limits the degree to which findings and conclusions may be transferred to other studies, an integrated model of principal preparation with generalisability potential is proposed. The model is comprised of three, integrated pieces with the potential to enhance aspirant self-efficacy to commence principalship: program design principles or the ‘building blocks’ of effective programs; program theory; and active learning experiences. It is suggested that local, national or international designers of principal preparation programs could use this model when seeking to

modify existing or develop new programs. Finally, the conclusions of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Firestone (1993) and Shenton (2004) apply to this study. Specifically, it is the responsibility of other researchers to determine whether or not they are able to test the model or use the findings and conclusions of this study when conducting planned research.

Four specific measures suggested by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) were adopted in the conduct of this study to assist other researchers to make decisions regarding the generalisability of findings and conclusions. Firstly, a description of the research context was furnished in Chapter Two: Context of the Research and Appendix A: The Aspiring Principals Program. Secondly, eight, thickly described case study narratives were provided in Chapter Five: Research Results and the results emanating from cross-case analysis were detailed in Chapter Six: Discussion. Thirdly, within this chapter, the themes emerging from data were compared and contrasted with the literature review provided in Chapter Three. Finally, the proposed integrated model of principal preparation, provided in Chapter Seven: Review and Conclusions, contained an explicit statement regarding generalisability potential including the caveat that the model be subjected to research to determine its efficacy.

#### **4.4.3 Dependability.**

Dependability refers to the use of techniques that would enable the attainment of similar results if the research were to be repeated in the same context with the same methods (Shenton, 2004). Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) made similar claims when discussing the dependability of qualitative research:

The underlying issue here is whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods. We are addressing issues of quality and integrity: Have things been done with reasonable care? (p. 312)

Similarly, Gray (2013) stated: “Dependability refers to the stability of findings” (p. 184). Therefore, it is important that researchers enact measures to strengthen the dependability of their studies.

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) posed 10 recommendations for enhancing the dependability of qualitative research, six of which were employed in the conduct of this study. Firstly, the research questions were clearly stated “and the features of the study’s design were congruent with them” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). That is, the four specific research questions underpinning the study were designed to explore aspirant perceptions before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program together with the influences provoking discernible perception changes. Each specific research question influenced the design of questions for the interview guides that were subsequently used to conduct the three qualitative, semi-structured interviews (pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program) with program aspirants. The four specific research questions also directed the data analysis process, the results of which influenced the formulation of responses for these questions, research conclusions; the proposed integrated model of principal preparation; implications and recommendations for the profession; and potential additions to the existing body of theory pertaining to principal preparation.

Secondly, Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) suggested that one way to demonstrate dependability is for the research findings to “show meaningful parallelism across data sources (participants, contexts, times)” (p. 312). The timing and conduct of each set of aspirant interviews is an example of a measure enacted to ensure parallelism. Specifically, all aspirant interviews for the time period (i.e. pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program) were conducted consecutively using the same interview guide to ensure consistency of questioning and collection of data apposite for the aims of the research. Thirdly, and related to this recommendation, data for the research was “collected across the full range of appropriate settings, times, respondents, and so on, as suggested by the research questions” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312).

Reflecting the fourth and fifth recommendations of Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014), data quality checks were made to mitigate bias and forms of peer or collegial review were enacted. Several measures, described previously, were implemented during the conduct of the research to ensure adherence to these recommendations. These measures included the member checking of aspirant interview transcripts and case study narratives and participation in a CEOWA peer-review process. Finally, an ‘auditing approach’ to the collection of data was adopted

(Miles et al., 2014). That is, complete records of all phases of the research have been maintained in a form that would enable other researchers to replicate the study if a decision were made to do so post-consideration of contextual factors (Bryman, 2012). It was envisaged that this approach would enable readers to ‘follow the trail’ from potential additions to the existing body of theory backwards through implications and recommendations for the profession; research conclusions; responses to specific research questions; aspirant case study narratives and data display tables; to aspirant categories and codes identified within qualitative interview transcripts.

#### **4.4.4 Confirmability.**

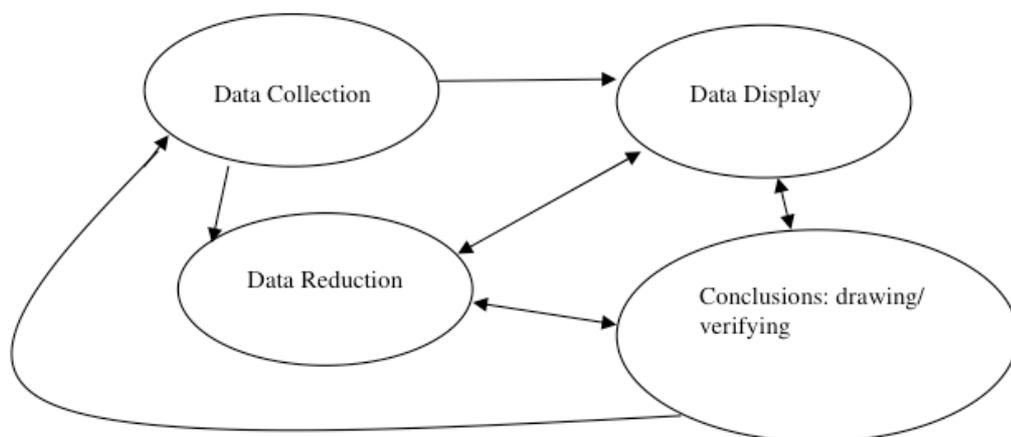
Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the perspectives of the researcher are grounded in the perspectives of research participants (Gray, 2013). With regard to the issue of confirmability, Shenton (2004) insisted: “Steps must be taken to help ensure, as far as possible, that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (p. 72). Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) attested that confirmability “can be framed as one of relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases or, at the minimum, explicitness about the inevitable biases that exist” (p. 312). Researchers, therefore, must enact measures to enhance the confirmability of their studies.

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) posed seven recommendations for enhancing research confirmability, five of which were adopted in the conduct of this study. Firstly, the researcher was “as explicit and as self-aware as possible about personal assumptions, values and biases, and affective states, and how they may have come into play during the study” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). As detailed in Chapter One: Research Defined, the motivations of the researcher were explicitly stated. Further, statements were made regarding the two limitations associated with the study: potential for a perceived power differential between the researcher and participants and researcher bias. To address these limitations, several measures were enacted including the engagement of a contractor to conduct interviews, transcribe audio recordings and member check transcripts. Aspirant interview data were also subjected to triangulation, case study narratives were member checked and a

CEOWA peer-review process was transacted over the research period. Secondly, the study’s general methods and procedures, including those for data collection and analysis (data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions), were explicitly described (see Chapter 4.5 Data Analysis). These methodological and procedural descriptions were provided to guide readers through “the actual sequence of how data were collected, processed, condensed/transformed, and displayed for specific conclusion drawing” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). Thirdly, it is suggested that these methods and procedures are “detailed enough to be audited by an outsider” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). Fourthly, responses for each of the four specific research questions used to guide the study, provided in Chapter Seven: Review and Conclusions, are “explicitly linked with exhibits of condensed/displayed data” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312) provided in Chapter Six: Discussion. Finally, the study’s data have been retained and are available for reanalysis by others as required by The University of Notre Dame Australia.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative research may involve the collection of large amounts of text-based data requiring analysis and interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data analysis involves four practices: identification of textual codes; categorisation; theme generation; and theory building (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013). With regard to this research, these four practices were enacted through the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model of data management and analysis, illustrated in Figure 4.2.



*Figure 4.2: The Miles and Huberman interactive model of data management and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 12)*

This model is comprised of three interrelated stages: data reduction; data display; and drawing and verifying conclusions from the data. However, these stages do not represent a sequential process, but an interactive one where “even at the final stage of writing up, gaps or inconsistencies may trigger the need for further data collection” (Gray, 2013, p. 612). An overview of the data analysis process as it pertains to this research is provided in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5  
*Data Analysis Stages for the Research*

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#### 4.5.1 Stage one: Data reduction

Coding interview transcript data  
Categorising  
Triangulating data  
Using categories to create preliminary data tables

#### 4.5.2 Stage two: Data display

Refining preliminary data tables to identify draft themes  
Drafting thickly described case study narratives  
Member checking case study narratives

#### 4.5.3 Stage three: Drawing and verifying conclusions

Using refined data tables and case study narratives to:

- note patterns and themes;
- see plausibility;
- cluster;
- count; and
- compare and contrast.

Confirming themes by:

- differentiating; and
- subsuming particulars into the general.

Building a logical chain of evidence and making conceptual/theoretical coherence to:

- formulate responses for the four specific research questions;
  - present research conclusions;
  - propose an integrated model of principal preparation;
  - pose implications and recommendations for the profession; and
  - suggest potential additions to the existing body of theory pertaining to principal preparation.
-

In the context of this research, the first stage, data reduction, involved the compression of interview transcript data through coding and categorisation to make it manageable and coherent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Post-categorisation, triangulation using additional materials was used to verify categories and search for, identify and account for inconsistencies. The second stage, data display, involved the “organisation of compressed information to permit conclusion drawing and action” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Several researchers recommend the use of quotations, narrative text or tables with text rather than numbers in its cells when displaying data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2011). Different display techniques permit the extrapolation of patterns from the data and ensure ease of readability for others (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Data display for this research assumed two forms. Firstly, a series of tables reflecting the three research stages (pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program) were used to display data. Secondly, eight thickly described case study narratives were created; one for each aspirant involved in the research. Each narrative was organised using sub-headings representing the four specific research questions. The final stage, drawing and verifying conclusions, involved the use of multiple tactics to analytically reflect upon data presented in the previous stage before making and confirming conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2013).

#### **4.5.1 Stage one: Data reduction.**

Data reduction involves the compression, sorting and organisation of data to permit conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data reduction process for this research involved the coding and categorisation of data present in qualitative interview transcripts. The coding and categorisation processes were based on those articulated by Saldaña (2013) in his streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry illustrated in Figure 4.3.

The first data reduction step involved a careful reading of each transcript at least twice whilst listening to the audio recording of the interview. This process occurred each time a set of aspirant transcripts was received from the contractor employed to conduct interviews, transcribe audio recordings and member check transcripts. This practice was enacted as a result of the recommendations of several researchers who suggest repeated ocular and auditory scanning of qualitative data

sources to identify initial patterns and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

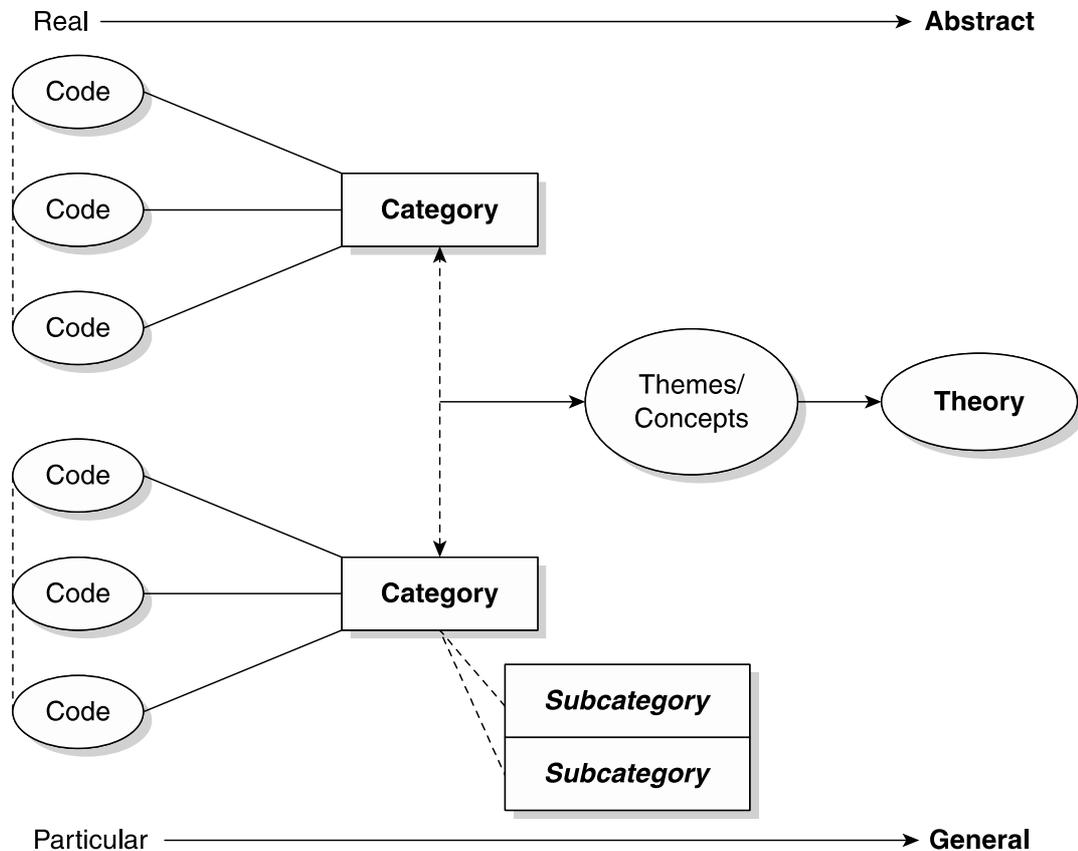


Figure 4.3: A streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry (Saldaña, 2013, p. 12)

Upon completion of transcript reading, one hard-copy transcript was selected at random and processed using Saldaña’s (2013) coding method. According to Saldaña (2013), a code is “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Therefore, coding involves the identification of words or short phrases from a qualitative data source that capture the essence of a research question (Saldaña, 2013). When engaging in the coding process, a combination of coloured highlighters and symbols were used to identify codes on the hard copy transcript. As the process unfolded, a coding legend was constructed and maintained on a separate Word document to ensure consistency.

After coding the first transcript, categorisation occurred. Categorisation refers to the process whereby coded data sharing similar characteristics are grouped together (Saldaña, 2013). This practice involved the use of “tacit and intuitive senses to determine which data ‘look alike’ and ‘feel alike’ when grouping them together” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 9). For example, during the pre-program phase of the research, one aspirant described the role of the Catholic principal as “a pseudo human resource manager responsible for the recruitment, development, appraisal and wellbeing of staff.” In this example, the following codes were applied: ‘Staff recruitment’; ‘Staff development’; ‘Staff appraisal’; and ‘Staff wellbeing’. After considering the relevant body of knowledge presented in the literature review, a decision was made to group these codes together under the category, ‘Human resource management.’

Upon completion of the coding and categorisation process for the first transcript, both processes were repeated for each transcript in the series. As new codes and categories were identified, previously analysed transcripts were revisited to ensure appropriate data coding and categorisation. As the coding and categorisation processes progressed, a series of preliminary data tables were constructed. An excerpt from a preliminary data table is provided in Table 4.6. This table displays the pre-program categories associated with specific research question one: aspirant perceptions regarding Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance. For each of the research phases (pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program), tables reflecting the four research questions were produced with categories presented in horizontal rows and aspirant case study numbers placed atop vertical columns. A tick was placed below an aspirant’s case study number if the category was evident in their transcript and a total frequency across all case studies was indicated in the final column.

Upon completion of the coding and categorisation processes for both mid-program and end-of-program interview transcripts, triangulation was used to validate categories and search for, identify and account for inconsistent findings. As explained previously, four additional sources of data were used during the triangulation process: field notes generated by the contractor during each set of interviews; aspirant journals submitted at the end of the program’s first and second years respectively; aspirant leadership vision statements; and aspirant cover letters

and application forms submitted for principalship vacancies whilst participating in the program.

Table 4.6

*Excerpt from a Preliminary Data Table: Aspirant Pre-program Perceptions Regarding Catholic Principalship Role Components*

Categories	Case study number								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
• Managing school finances	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
• Establishing and nurturing relationships with school community members using Gospel values	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	6
• Ensuring accountability	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		5
• Leading instruction, motivating staff and driving performance		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	5
• Human resource management	✓		✓			✓		✓	4
• Leading school Catholicity using Gospel-based words and actions	✓	✓	✓					✓	4
• Resolving legal issues			✓		✓		✓	✓	4
• Managing capital development	✓	✓		✓					3
• Catering for staff wellbeing						✓		✓	2
• Managing industrial relations						✓			1
• Resolving conflict							✓		1

Anomalies detected through triangulation triggered the re-assessment of data collection methods, the data itself and data reduction processes. In some cases, aspirants were contacted to clarify inconsistencies. For example, the aspirant referred to by the pseudonym, Helen indicated disincentives in her end-of-program journal that were not present in her corresponding interview transcript. Specifically, Helen stated:

Separation from immediate family to commence principalship in a town where I know no one is a disincentive, especially for my young children who are emotionally connected to their grandparents. The loss of family support,

particularly from my mum when it comes to before and after school care for my children, is a significant challenge for me.

After carefully re-examining the aspirant's interview transcript and listening to the audio recording, Helen was contacted and the anomaly was discussed. As a result of the conversation, Helen's journal entry was coded and categorised. The process of triangulation was highly valued during the data reduction phase of the research because it provided a "more three-dimensional perspective of the phenomenon" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 300).

#### **4.5.2 Stage two: Data display.**

Data display involves the re-assessment, refinement and presentation of categories produced through data reduction to permit decision-making with regard to further analysis or the drawing of preliminary conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Based on the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994), two forms of data display were selected and used during this stage of the analysis process. The first form comprised a series of refined data tables reflecting aspirant responses for the four specific research questions (pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program). The second form comprised eight, thickly described case study narratives; one for each aspirant involved in the research.

When constructing refined data tables, the established body of knowledge presented in the literature review was used to re-organise preliminary data table categories into draft themes. For example, analysis of aspirant pre-program perceptions regarding Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance revealed a number of categories. These categories included 'Managing school finances'; 'Ensuring accountability'; 'Human resource management'; 'Resolving legal issues'; 'Managing capital development; 'Catering for staff wellbeing'; 'Managing industrial relations'; and 'Resolving conflict'. These categories were identified in the literature review as principalship responsibilities associated with the role component, stewardship of resources. Consequently, the categories were regrouped under the draft theme by the same name. An excerpt from a refined data table illustrating this example is provided in Table 4.7. Refined data tables associated with all phases of the research, provided in Chapter Six:

Discussion, were subsequently used during the third data analysis stage, drawing and verifying conclusions.

Table 4.7

*Excerpt from a Refined Data Table: Aspirant Pre-program Perceptions Regarding Catholic Principalship Role Components*

Themes and categories	Case Study Number								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
<b>1. Catholic Identity</b>									
• Leading school Catholicity using Gospel-based words and actions	✓	✓	✓					✓	4
<b>2. Teaching and Learning</b>									
• Leading instruction, motivating staff and driving performance		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	5
<b>3. Stewardship of Resources</b>									
• Managing school finances	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
• Ensuring accountability	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		5
• Human resource management	✓		✓			✓		✓	4
• Resolving legal issues			✓		✓		✓	✓	4
• Managing capital development	✓	✓		✓					3
• Catering for staff wellbeing						✓		✓	2
• Managing industrial relations					✓				1
• Resolving conflict							✓		1
<b>4. Community Engagement and Development</b>									
• Establishing and nurturing relationships based on Gospel values	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	6

Data displayed in this way achieved three aims. Firstly, the tabulation process ensured a consistent approach to the display of data. Secondly, voluminous text-based data from aspirant interviews were distilled and displayed in a concise, readable form. Thirdly, presentation of data in this manner permitted decision-making with regard to further data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Refined data

tables and aspirant interview transcripts were then used to build the second form of data display: eight thickly described case study narratives; one for each aspirant involved in the research.

The case study narrative construction process comprised three steps. Firstly, refined data tables containing draft themes and their respective categories were re-examined. Secondly, aspirant interview transcripts were studied and quotations consistent with draft themes and categories were identified. Thirdly, relevant quotations, the natural language of aspirants, were used to construct case study narratives using sub-headings representing the four specific research questions as an organiser. The sub-headings were: ‘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 result of this data display technique were thick descriptions capturing aspirant perceptions regarding Catholic principalship before, during and upon completion of the Aspiring Principals Program together with the influences provoking discernible perception changes. Aspirant case study narratives are provided in Chapter Five: Research Results.

#### **4.5.3 Stage three: Drawing and verifying conclusions.**

The final stage of the Miles and Huberman (1994) model is the analysis of data, displayed in the previous stage, to draw and verify conclusions. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) suggested the use of 13 possible tactics when drawing and verifying conclusions from displayed data. These tactics are “arranged roughly from the descriptive to the explanatory and from the concrete to the more conceptual and abstract” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 277). A summary of suggested tactics and the purpose of each are provided in Table 4.8.

In the context of this research, nine of the 13 suggested tactics were used in the cross-case analysis process to draw and verify conclusions. These tactics were: noting patterns and themes; seeing plausibility; clustering; counting; making comparisons and contrasts; partitioning variables; subsuming particulars into the general; building a logical chain of evidence; and making conceptual/theoretical coherence. Each of these tactics will now be briefly described.

Table 4.8

*Recommended Tactics for Drawing and Verifying Conclusions* (Miles et al., 2014, p. 277)

<b>Tactic</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
1. Noting patterns and themes 2. Seeing plausibility 3. Clustering	To assist the researcher to determine 'what goes with what'
4. Making metaphors	To further the process of integration
5. Counting	To permit rapid assessment of significant trends
6. Making comparisons and contrasts	To sharpen understanding of displayed data
7. Partitioning variables	To re-assess themes and categories presented in refined data tables
8. Subsuming particulars into the general 9. Factoring 10. Noting the relationships between variables 11. Finding intervening variables	To identify more abstract relationships between variables
12. Building a logical chain of evidence 13. Making conceptual/theoretical coherence	To systematically assemble a coherent understanding of data

When engaging in the cross-case analysis process using refined data tables and aspirant narratives created during the data display stage, four tactics were used to determine “what’s there” and “what goes with what” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 277). These tactics were: noting patterns and themes; seeing plausibility; clustering; and counting. The first tactic, noting patterns and themes, involved observing “recurring patterns, themes, or ‘gestalts’ that pull together many separate pieces of data” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 277). For example, when analysing aspirant pre-program perceptions regarding the factors enhancing interest in principalship, three recurring categories were observed. These categories were: ‘Establish and nurture a Catholic school community with relationships based on Gospel values’; ‘Build school-community partnerships to enhance student educational outcomes’; and ‘Support marginalised

school community members.’ Based on the established body of knowledge presented in the literature review, these categories were eventually grouped together to form the theme, ‘Community Engagement and Development.’

The second tactic, seeing plausibility, involved the use of intuition when interpreting data (Miles et al., 2014). For example, collegial support networks comprising aspirant principals, program colleagues, coaches and guest principals who hosted ‘Inside Leadership’ modules appeared to exert a positive influence on aspirant perceptions regarding self-efficacy to commence Catholic principalship. However, care was taken not to move quickly to conclusions and preliminary interpretations were subjected “to other tactics of conclusion drawing and verification” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 278) examined in the remainder of this section.

The third tactic, clustering, was used better understand aspirant perceptions of Catholic principalship by “grouping and then conceptualising objects with similar patterns or characteristics” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 279). For example, when analysing aspirant end-of-program perceptions regarding the factors enhancing interest in principalship, several categories with similar characteristics were observed. These categories were: ‘Develop teacher capacity’; ‘Lead holistic student development’; ‘Encourage students to apply learning to benefit others (Christian service learning)’; and ‘Establish high expectations for teaching and student learning.’ Using the tactic of clustering, these categories were ultimately grouped together to form the theme, ‘Teaching and Learning.’ This decision was based on the established body of knowledge presented in the literature review.

The fourth tactic, counting, was used during both the data display and drawing and verifying conclusions stages of the data analysis process. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) recommended the use of this tactic “(1) to see rapidly what you have in a large batch of data, (2) to verify a hunch or hypothesis, and (3) to keep yourself analytically honest, protecting against bias” (p. 282). An example of the use of counting as a tactic occurred when analysing aspirant pre-program perceptions regarding the factors diminishing interest in principalship. The refined data table and every aspirant narrative associated with this research question indicated concerns with regard to the requirement of the Catholic principal to manage school finances.

This observation was confirmed by the literature and could not be overlooked because of the frequency of appearance in the data.

The fifth and sixth tactics, making comparisons and contrasts and partitioning variables respectively, were used to sharpen understanding of data displayed in refined data tables and aspirant case study narratives. With regard to the fifth tactic, making comparisons and contrasts, Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) stated:

Although comparisons are supposedly odious, they are what we do naturally and quickly when faced with any life experience, including looking at a qualitative data display. (p. 284)

This tactic was used two ways when analysing data. Firstly, comparisons and contrasts were made when reading tabulated data across cases. For example, the refined data table displaying aspirant pre-program perceptions regarding self-efficacy to commence Catholic principalship indicated that three aspirants perceived high self-efficacy whilst three aspirants expressed low self-efficacy. The question was asked: 'What is the difference between the groups?' Analysis of data from relevant interview transcripts revealed the answer. Aspirants from the high self-efficacy group were supported by their principals through the provision of opportunities to lead school-based strategic initiatives, access to necessary resources and time in the form of reduced classroom contact. Such support and opportunities were absent from the experiences of aspirants who expressed low self-efficacy perceptions.

Secondly, aspirant data were compared with and contrasted against the established body of knowledge presented in the literature review. This tactic assisted the analysis process in three ways. Firstly, the tactic enabled the verification of patterns detected in the data (Miles et al., 2014). For example, end-of-program data regarding aspirant self-efficacy to commence Catholic principalship indicated the positive influence of top-down support networks on aspirant perceptions. Aspirants considered CEOWA support staff, facilitators of several program modules, valued network members. Aspirants indicated that these personnel not only delivered principal-specific knowledge, they provided vicarious experiences and social persuasion, two important self-efficacy sources defined by Bandura (1986), and assurances of technical support during and beyond the novice years of principalship. Additionally, the positive influence of top-down support networks reflected the

conclusions of other researchers such as Orr and Orphanos (2011), Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) and Versland (2009). Secondly, the tactic enabled the identification of findings present in the literature review, but absent in the data (Miles et al., 2014). One example was aspirant articulation of the role of the Catholic principal as educational leader, identified in the literature as the role component, teaching and learning. Despite aspirants identifying this role component and deeming it an attractive aspect of principalship, none articulated understanding in a manner consistent with leaders in the field such as Robinson (2011) or DuFour (2002). This finding highlighted an area of program deficiency that was subsequently recommended for refinement. Thirdly, the tactic assisted the identification of aspects of the research that were present in the data, but absent in the literature review, representing potential additions to the existing body of theory (Miles et al., 2014). One example was the unique relationship between aspirant reflection on program theory, leadership vision statement formulation and capacity to articulate attraction to Catholic principalship.

With regard to the sixth tactic, partitioning variables, Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) stated: “At the stage of initial conceptualization, it pays to ‘unbundle’ variables rather than assume a monolithic simplicity” (p. 285). This tactic was used when considering refined data tables and aspirant narratives across all four specific research questions used to guide this study. For example, aspirants overwhelmingly endorsed acting principalship or internship as positive influences provoking discernible perception changes. Acting principalship or internship was initially categorised then grouped with other program-related activities under the theme, ‘Active Learning Experiences.’ However, because of the apparent importance of these experiences across all dimensions of the research, a decision was made to partition these variables.

The seventh tactic, subsuming particulars into the general, was used when attempting to identify more abstract relationships between variables. This tactic involved the re-examination of previously clustered categories and asking: “What is this specific thing an instance of?” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 285). For example, when analysing aspirant end-of-program perceptions regarding self-efficacy to commence Catholic principalship during the data reduction stage, three influential support network categories were identified. The first category, ‘Collegial support networks’,

comprised aspirant principals, program colleagues, coaches and ‘Inside Leadership’ guest principals. The second category, ‘Top-down support networks’, comprised CEOWA support staff with specialist knowledge that facilitated program modules. The third category, ‘Bottom-up support networks’, comprised teachers, support staff, students, their parents and carers and members of the broader school community. Each of these networks exposed aspirants to one or more of Bandura’s (1986) self-efficacy sources, notably vicarious experiences and/or social persuasion and, in doing so, influenced self-efficacy perceptions. Using this tactic, the three categories were eventually incorporated into the theme, ‘Support Networks.’

The eighth and ninth tactics, building a logical chain of evidence and making conceptual/theoretical coherence, were used when attempting to systematically assemble a coherent understanding of the data. First, a trail of evidence was gradually built. The construction process involved:

...getting an initial sense of the main factors, plotting the logical relationships tentatively, testing them against the yield from the next wave of data collection, and modifying and refining them into a new explanatory map, which then gets tested against new cases and instances. (Miles et al., 2014, p. 290)

This tactic required the use of two interlocking cycles. The first cycle, ‘enumerative induction’, involved the collection of “a number and variety of instances all going in the same direction” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 290). The second cycle, ‘eliminative induction’, required the testing of “hypothesis against alternatives” and looking “carefully for qualifications that bound the generality of the conclusion” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 290).

The final tactic, making conceptual/theoretical coherence, involved the “move from metaphors and interrelationships to constructs, and from there to theories” and accounting “for the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the phenomena under study” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 292). This tactic was applied in four ways, when: formulating responses for each of the four specific research questions used to guide the study; presenting conclusions based on these findings; proposing an integrated model for principal preparation for the consideration of local, national and international program designers; posing implications and recommendations for the profession; and suggesting potential additions to the existing body of theory pertaining to principal

preparation. In the context of these actions, findings were delivered from the “bottom up, from the field to the concepts” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 293) and were directly applicable to the research. At no time was a construct devised without the support of a logical chain of factual evidence.

#### **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are an essential part of research (Silverman, 2006).

Likewise, Punch (2014) stated:

Social science researchers need to be alert to the various constraints around their research and to the ethical implications of any decisions they make. They engage in principled deliberation about morally salient issues and acceptable courses of action in particular research situations. In doing so, they can draw on their understanding of the particulars of each situation and of the personal and professional values infusing it, as well as on their critical interpretation of the regulation and various guidelines available to them. (p. 37)

Considering these assertions, this study was conducted in accordance with the requirements of both The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) Human Research Ethics Committee and the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia Research Ethics Committee. Firstly, ethics clearance and research approval was granted from both committees prior to the conduct of the study (Appendix F and G). Secondly, the following measures were enacted:

- a) The researcher drafted and mailed a letter to each of the eight aspirants from the 2011 cohort of the Aspiring Principals Program inviting and encouraging their participation in the research. The letter emphasised the importance of the study for the Western Australian Catholic education system, encouraged aspirant honesty and highlighted the confidential nature of the research (Appendix H).
- b) A research information sheet was included with the invitation letter (Appendix I). This sheet contained specific details regarding the research including data collection processes, research limitations and planned mitigation measures. The sheet also contained details regarding the ethical dimensions of the research including the voluntary and confidential nature of the study, the right of aspirants to withdraw, publication protocols and data storage and retention arrangements.

- c) A participant consent form (Appendix J) was included with the invitation letter and information sheet. This form reiterated the purpose, dimensions and procedures of the research. Each aspirant was asked to sign and return the form prior to the commencement of data collection.
- d) The researcher scheduled a meeting with aspirants at their respective schools. During these meetings, the purpose and procedures of the research and the two potential limitations and planned mitigation measures were tabled and discussed. Aspirant questions were answered and concerns resolved.
- e) All interview audio recordings, interview transcripts, triangulation and data analysis materials have been stored electronically on password secured computers with hard copies kept in a locked filing cabinet.
- f) All electronic and hard copy data will be destroyed five years post-submission of this thesis for examination.

#### 4.7 Design Summary

A design summary for the research is provided in Table 4.9. Details regarding the timeline of the research, milestones and person(s) responsible are provided within this table.

Table 4.9  
*Design Summary for the Research*

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Responsible person(s)</b>
December 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low risk ethics clearance granted by The University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee</li> <li>• Research approval granted by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia Research Ethics Committee</li> <li>• Approval to proceed with research granted by the Executive Director, Catholic Education in Western Australia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee</li> <li>• Catholic Education Office of Western Australia Research Ethics Committee</li> <li>• Executive Director, Catholic Education in Western Australia</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter of invitation, research information sheet and participation consent form confirmed and mailed to aspirants. Individual meetings organised with aspirants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher</li> </ul>
January 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual meetings with aspirants. Signed consent forms collected</li> <li>• Interview guides drafted, piloted and confirmed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher</li> <li>• Researcher in consultation with supervisor and CEOWA peer-review group</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative interview one, transcription of audio recordings and member checking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research contractor</li> </ul>
January 2011 to June 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document search</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher</li> </ul>
February 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of interview audio recordings, transcripts and contractor field notes for qualitative interview one. Discussion regarding contractor observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research contractor, researcher and supervisor</li> </ul>
February 2011 to December 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of data from qualitative interview one. Drafting of preliminary data tables and case study narratives including member checking. Thesis writing commences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher in consultation with supervisor and CEOWA peer-review group</li> </ul>
December 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative interview two, transcription of audio recordings and member checking</li> <li>• Collection of triangulation data: Aspirant mid-program journals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research contractor</li> <li>• Researcher</li> </ul>
February 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of interview audio recordings, transcripts and contractor field notes for qualitative interview two. Discussion regarding contractor observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research contractor, researcher and supervisor</li> </ul>

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February 2012 to December 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of data from qualitative interview two. Ongoing drafting of preliminary data tables and case study narratives including member checking. Ongoing writing of thesis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher in consultation with supervisor and CEOWA peer-review group</li> </ul>
September 2012 to December 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of triangulation data: Aspirant cover letters and application forms for principalship vacancies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher</li> </ul>
December 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of triangulation data: Aspirant leadership vision statements</li> <li>• Collection of triangulation data: Aspirant end-of-program journals</li> <li>• Qualitative interview three, transcription of audio recordings and member checking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher</li> <li>• Researcher</li> <li>• Research contractor</li> </ul>
February 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of interview audio recordings, transcripts and contractor field notes for qualitative interview three. Discussion regarding contractor observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research contractor, researcher and supervisor</li> </ul>
February 2013 to December 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of data from qualitative interview three. Ongoing drafting of preliminary data tables and case study narratives including member checking. Ongoing writing of thesis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher in consultation with supervisor and CEOWA peer-review group</li> </ul>
January 2014 to December 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refinement of data tables and final member check of case study narratives. Cross-case analysis of data tables and case study narratives. Ongoing writing of thesis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher in consultation with supervisor and CEOWA peer-review group</li> </ul>
December 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thesis submitted for examination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher and supervisor</li> </ul>

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#### **4.8 Chapter Conclusion**

The purpose of the research 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. This chapter explained the methodological components that informed and directed the conduct of this research. The chapter provided justification for the use of interpretivism, with a lens of symbolic interactionism, as the theoretical perspective of this qualitative research and collective case study as the methodology. The methods adopted for the collection and analysis of data were also explained. A description of the research participants was provided along with measures adopted to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Finally, the ethical considerations associated with the study were explained and a design summary for the research was provided. The upcoming chapter, Research Results, is comprised of eight, thickly described case study narratives; one for each aspirant involved in the research. Aspirant narratives reflect the draft themes identified through the data analysis process described in this chapter. Case study narratives are largely comprised of the natural language of aspirants in the form of quotations extracted from interview transcripts and are organised using sub-headings representing the four specific research questions used to guide the study.