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

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Publication Details

Chapter Five: Presentation of Research Findings

5.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research findings from this case study examining the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals during their first four years of their appointment. These findings were the synthesis of data gathered utilising qualitative means that included face-to-face interviews with the 13 participants, document searches and field notes. The research findings are organised into three perspectives: gender, which distinguishes data from female and male participants; school location which presents data from rural, remote and metropolitan locations; and school type, which differentiates data from primary and secondary school settings. Table 5.1 presents the three perspectives within the case study.

Table 5.1

Perspective details

Perspective	Description	Participant numbers
Gender	Female	7
	Male	6
School location	Rural	5
	Remote	3
	Metropolitan	5
School type	Primary	9
	Secondary	4

Within each perspective, findings are presented in terms of the three sub questions of the research, namely:

1. What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?

2. What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop/ navigate?

3. In what ways do beginning principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-awareness?

5.2 Perspective one: Gender

The first perspective explores data that is distinguished by gender. Research indicated that male and female leaders offer different perspectives to leadership and what leadership preparation courses need to offer (Derby, 2013; Watterson, 2010). In addition, challenges confronting new school leaders highlights differences between genders (Coleman, 2012; Derby, 2013). The seven female responses are presented followed by the six male participant responses to each of the three sub questions.

5.2.1 Female participants

5.2.1.1 Sub question one

What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?

Under the issue of technical and managerial skills, data from the interview responses of the seven female principals highlighted three distinct themes: lack of financial understanding, concerns with staffing and the transition into principalship.

Lack of financial understanding

All seven female participants were challenged by their lack of financial understanding in administering a school budget. Coupled with this concern was the management of the school board whose primary function is the oversight of the school's finances. Five of the seven female participants commented on their lack of expertise and confidence in dealing with the financial management of the school. One perceived that her strength and primary role lay in the educational domain, yet she saw herself being drawn from this domain into the unfamiliar territory of finance. She commented: "the area of finance really weighs me down; it takes me away from other areas." A second observed: "For me the challenge is the whole area of school boards and to be fully cognizant of the financial management of the school." This particular participant further stated: "I recognize understanding finances is a deficiency in my understanding…the reality is that you are running a multimillion dollar budget which you are responsible for." A third participant, who commented on her personal strength in mathematics and interest in finance, still struggled in the area. She noted: "budgets are still a challenge for me despite my mathematical bent and interest in this area… there needs to be more support." A fourth participant captured the collective feeling of the five female participants by stating: "I think the financials are the biggest area of poor understanding for beginning principals."

Three participants reported on the challenges of the principal's interaction with the school board. All three felt unprepared when dealing with the school board due to their lack of experience in participating in board meetings and the board operating outside of their responsibility. One participant commented:

> Awareness of their role (school board) is very important. Here they thought
> that they made all the decisions and told the principal what to do… I had the

board consultant from the CEOWA come down and clarified for everyone their roles.

Another reported:

> The boundaries of the board's decision-making capacity are an important matter. A board member asked me about staffing. Having read the board manual, I photocopied for them (school board) the constitution and I said that this was not their area of responsibility.

Concerns with staffing

All seven female principals highlighted staff issues as a significant concern for them as beginning principals. Examples of staff issues were diverse, ranging from professionalism of the staff and the quality of teaching, to building the capacity of inexperienced teachers. Two participants had to deal with issues regarding poor teaching performances. One participant reported on her responsibility in dealing with a staff performance issue, stating:

> When I find that a teacher is being unjust and doing the wrong thing by the students, then it is my responsibility to deal with it. These are the yucky bits! But I don't shrug these bits – I have to look after the students and the staff member. If the staff member is in the wrong role, then I need to address this. This is the hardest part.

Two participants began their principalship with new and inexperienced leadership teams. The inexperienced team was challenging for both, particularly as they too were new to their role. One noted: "My whole leadership team is brand new. They don't have the background in policies or strategic thinking. Their inexperience required me to support them considerably." One participant commented on the demand of having inexperienced teachers on staff. She reported: "My current staff are full of graduates who don't have experiences to really know what needs to be done. The challenge is there for me to ensure that I am in the classroom supporting them."

Transition into the principalship

Five of the participants identified three areas of concern relative to the theme of transition. The first related to the participants shift from deputy/ assistant principal to principal. The second was to do with the handover from the outgoing principal to the new principal. The third area was concerned with the quality and content of the new principals' induction program presented by the Catholic Education Office.

Four participants commented on the challenge of moving from the deputy/assistant principal role to that of principal. These participants acknowledged that it took a considerable adjustment to appreciate the enormity of the role and felt bereft at times in understanding the work of principal. One participant's comment captures the collective sentiments of the others when she stated: "It is far more complex than you can ever imagine... the reality of the situation is very different to the perception of the position."

Five of the participants spoke emphatically about the importance of the handover process between the exiting principal and the new principal. Unfortunately their experiences were generally negative. The negativity was primarily drawn from two areas: firstly, the lack of support from the exiting principal; and secondly, uncertainty in not knowing what is to be discussed at the handover meeting. As one participant reported:

> I had an appalling handover... I walked in on January 4 cold. The previous principal went overseas and did not meet with me. There were some people who did not want me here and were going to put up all sort of obstacles and of course there was a secret service mentality and I did not know what was going on in the place.

A second participant noted: "I spent four days at the school prior to my first year. I look at them as wasted days because I did not know what to look for or what to ask for."

All participants commented on the value and benefits of the formal induction program for newly appointed principals presented by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia [CEOWA]. Common to their experience was the sense of collegiality with other new principals and the importance of meeting key CEOWA personnel. Whilst collegiality was seen as a strength of the program, two participants commented on the importance of distinguishing between the needs of primary and secondary principals. One participant articulated this distinction: "Putting primary and secondary principals together just doesn't work because you are talking remote Kimberley schools mixed with small country primary schools and large metropolitan secondary schools." Three of the participants also commented on the need to strengthen the financial dimension of the program. In particular, one participant pointed out the timing of the financial in-service should coincide with the period during which one submits a budget: "Around budget time, it makes sense to have some sort of presentation – linking in some in-servicing to what is actually happening." One participant summarised the importance of the induction program and stated:

> The induction program on the whole is a good one. I saw the benefits of networking with the cohort that I begun with as a new principal. It makes you feel comfortable contacting the people in the Office over different things. This is good support.

5.2.1.2 Sub question two:

What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop/ navigate?

Underpinning the issue of Socialisation skills are the cultural and personal relationships inherent in the role of principalship. The data from the seven female participants revealed four dominant themes: culture of the school community, collegial support, family support and Catholic Education Office support.

Culture of the school community

Three participants reflected on the need to have sound knowledge of key issues affecting the school community prior to commencing their principalship. One participant stated: "I think that one needs full disclosure of what is actually happening at the school." Another reiterated this belief: "If you had a better knowledge of the culture it would hold you in good stead as situations arise". The need to have a good understanding of the current milieu in which the participants began their principalship was acknowledged as an important preparatory requirement for taking on school principalship.

Collegial support

All female participants appreciated and acknowledged the need for peer support as they began their principalship. They recognised that being able to discuss various issues with a peer principal was beneficial in that they received wise advice and support from their mentor and peers. One participant commented: "I have had very good support from my mentor... I have been encouraged by email and phone calls." Each of the participants appreciated the commitment these principals provided in supporting them. They acknowledged the additional demand placed on their peers to mentor them. One stated: "But I think that these people are running their school too and they have their own job to do." Another remarked: "One of my female colleagues has been outstanding. My knowledge of the financials has basically come from her. I spent a few days with her and she helped me hugely."

Family support

Four of the seven female participants commented on the support of their families as being crucial to overcoming challenges. One participant appreciated the support of her husband during a particularly challenging day. She commented: "I remember some of those difficult days. I was grateful to have my husband here. The fire was lit, he cooked dinner and listened." Another reiterated this sentiment and stated: "My husband is with me and his support has been tremendous – we are in it together."

Catholic Education Office Support

Three participants commented on the relationship they had developed with the regional Catholic Education Office personnel. The support from the Office was considered worthwhile and important. The comment from one of the participant's exemplified the appreciation and level of support given to the school principal:

> The regional officer [RO] was outstanding and very supportive. The RO went into classes and modelled to the teachers what was to be done. They felt very comfortable with the RO. The teachers did not feel checked upon.

5.2.1.3 Sub question three:

In what ways do newly appointed principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-identity?

Foundational to the issue of self-identity was the ability of participants to identify themselves as principals who lead a school community. Data from the seven female participants revealed three key issues. These issues were the need for resiliency, principalship as a vocation and the importance of confidence.

Need for resiliency

Five participants believed that one had to be resilient to deal with the demands of the

role of being a principal. One commented on the need for a certain level of toughness.

She stated: "Be prepared to be well and truly knocked off your perch. You have to be

well and truly resilient." Another participant recognised that the work of being the

school leader presented challenges; however, she acknowledged that the challenges

need to be put in perspective. She commented:

> What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. This has been my mantra all year. I
> think that this is one of the kinks in the road and I will get around it or go
> through it. I am pretty resilient. But this comes from a sense of keeping things in
> balance.

This comment is reiterated by another participant who stated:

> At the end of the year, you hear half a dozen criticisms and you take it on board.
> You are the nearest kicking board. You need to continually have to try to keep a
> balance and make sure you don't get sucked into the pool of despair.

Principalship as a vocation

The theme of vocation stemmed from the participants' family upbringing and

educational background. All seven female participants were educated within Catholic

institutions, with all completing post-graduate studies at the local Catholic university.

Each noted the significance of faith formation within their family. As one stated: "For

me my Catholic upbringing is very important in that it has shaped me as a person. I also

believe that I am a Catholic educator not just an educator." The centrality of faith

expressed by this participant is echoed by another:

> I had a Catholic upbringing and went to Catholic schools. It is just part of who I
> am. I have never ever considered not being in a Catholic school. Being able to
> lead a faith community is a privilege. If I am instrumental in instilling the life of
> Jesus into the life of children, what more is there?

Another commented: "I think that it's the fact that you can express your faith... you can talk about your faith... you can help young people to develop their faith. These are important to me." A third participant noted that through her principalship, she had grown in her faith: "I feel that I have grown in wisdom and the experience has made me look at my relationship with God."

Importance of confidence

Four of the seven female participants reflected on their confidence in the role of principal. One participant commented that her confidence was challenged and it affected her greatly. She stated:

> The job is draining and hard going. But I am my worst enemy. I expect perfection. At a personal level I need to be more confident in myself. I can be easily shaken. I am sensitive to people's criticism and I take it to heart.

Another participant appeared to harbour doubt in her capacity as principal. She commented: "there is a lot of self doubt... I sometimes think that I am a fraud in the role. My deputy once said to me to stop beating myself up."

Two participants identified the Women in Leadership [WIL] program, conducted by the Catholic Education Office for leadership development for women, as key to reinforcing their pursuit of principalship. This one participant reported: "What really cemented my aspiration for principalship was the WIL program... it gave me the confidence to apply for principalship".

5.2.2   Male participants

5.2.2.1 Sub question one:

What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?

Under the issue of technical and managerial skills, data from the interview responses of the six male principals highlighted two distinct themes. These themes were the bureaucratic demands of the position and the importance of delegation.

Bureaucratic demands

All six male participants commented on the bureaucratic demands of the principalship. The participants remarked on the increasing accountabilities placed upon them in a variety of areas. These accountabilities included government compliance issues, system requirements and local demands such as teacher housing. Whilst these accountabilities were challenges for each participant, more than half commented on enjoying the rigour of the demand. One participant stated: "In terms of the demand of the role, I enjoy the challenge". Another spoke on the demand of managing the school finances and stated: "the financials of the school have been extremely challenging, but I have enjoyed the challenge.

Importance of delegation

A second theme that the male participants highlighted focused on the managerial skills required by the principal. A particular skill was in the area of delegation. Four participants commented on the need to delegate to staff in order to not only build staff capacity, but also to avoid taking on additional responsibilities. The following comments by one participant express the importance of delegation: "As principal you have to think more globally; you therefore need to delegate to others – it is not abdicating your responsibility, you are enabling others."

5.2.2.2 Sub question two:

What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop/ navigate?

Within the issue of cultural and personal relationships, three themes were drawn from the six male participants: collegial support, family support and Catholic Education Office support.

Collegial support

All six male participants noted varying degrees of collegial support. Four participants experienced positive, helpful and sincere support and interest from their peers. This collective experience was exemplified by one participant's comments: "I don't have trouble accessing my colleagues for support...you are part of a collegial group." However, the same participant noted that "you pick your mark". He explained that you access certain colleagues for certain areas of support. The particular example given by this participant was in the area of information technology. His belief was that some principals were more familiar with technologies than others.

Family support

Four of the participants recognised their family as a main source of support. Two participants commented on their respective wives' support in their decision to pursue principalship in country and remote areas. The participants noted that their pursuit of principalship would mean uprooting and re-establishing the family unit. One commented on his concern for the family. He stated: "I have a young family, and my first and foremost concern is for my wife and children. I know that it is a big commitment on my wife." Another issue reported from one participant was the

precarious situation families are placed in when relocating and establishing new friendship networks.

> My wife is a member of the community and is developing friendships with various people. I have to be careful in what I say to her so that it doesn't impinge on her friendships. There are certain things I talk to her about, but others that I wouldn't.

Catholic Education Office support

All six male participants acknowledged and appreciated the support given to them by the CEOWA. The type of support included problem solving issues related to curriculum delivery, summative appraisals on staff, teacher housing and sounding board for areas of concern. One participant commented that it was important that he be able to access the relevant CEOWA person to discuss confidential matters. He found that there was no one on his staff with whom he could discuss confidential issues. Whilst each participant accessed the services in a variety of areas, they all viewed the support as necessary and an important function of the CEOWA. This statement by one participant was shared collectively: "I see the role of the CEOWA is to help me."

5.2.2.3 Sub question three:

In what ways do newly appointed principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-identity?

The six male participants' responses presented three themes relating to self-awareness: career aspirations, need for self-efficacy and position of authority.

Career aspirations

All of the six male participants highlighted their career journey to principalship. Four participants reflected on their leadership development over their teaching career leading to their appointment as principal. In each of these four responses, all realised very early on in their teaching career that their pathway would lead to a principalship. One participant captured the sentiment of the others and stated:

> All through my teaching career, except the first year, I have been in a managerial role. Principalship was a natural progression for me. I had in the back of my mind to become principal.

Another participant commented on his disappointment at not being appointed to principalship in the school in which he was acting principal:

> I started applying for principalship and wasn't successful. In one school, I was acting principal and then I applied for the substantive role and was not successful. I was very disappointed. I felt like I got a kick in my gut because I was working extremely hard. I was glad when I was appointed to another school.

Need for self-efficacy

All six participants remarked on the need for self-belief or self-efficacy in their ability to fulfil their role as principal. One participant who realised his early career aspiration towards principalship stated: "Before I started to apply for principalship I felt that I had to start thinking like a principal. My teaching career has always inspired me to climb the ladder." Another noted the need to be confident and trusting in one's judgement in making decisions. This was further developed by a third participant who commented: "One needs to have the confidence that they have developed the wisdom over the years." One participant offered advice to aspirant principals. He stated:

> My advice to new principals is that you need to adopt a philosophy that what is a problem today, isn't going to be one next week. Don't get weighed down. This

doesn't mean you have to be callous or cold hearted; for the tough things that have to happen you deal with them justly, fairly and openly.

Position of authority

Four participants remarked on the influential nature of the principalship. This influence was highlighted by one participant in the following comment: "the principal's role is tremendously powerful and influential". The same participant remarked that he experienced this realisation over time in the role of principal. It was also noted by the same participant that the staff, students and parents saw the role of principal before they saw him as a person.

5.3 Summary

Table 5.2 provides a summary of key themes emerging from the data for perspective one: gender.

Table 5.2

Summary of key themes for perspective one: gender

Theme	Female	Male
Technical and managerial skills	Financial understanding Staffing issues Transition into principalship	Bureaucratic demands Importance of delegation
Culture and personal relationships	Culture of the school community Collegial support Family support	Collegial support Family support Catholic Education Office support

	Catholic Education Office support	
Self identity	Need for resiliency	Career aspiration
	Principalship as a vocation	Need for self-efficacy
	Importance of confidence	Position of authority

5.4   Perspective two: School location

 The second perspective examines the influence of the school's location on the
beginning principal. The three locales the participants were appointed to include: rural
Catholic schools located in the Bunbury and Geraldton dioceses, remote Catholic
schools located in the Broome diocese and metropolitan Catholic schools in the Perth
Archdiocese.

5.4.1   Rural Catholic schools

5.4.1.1 Sub question one:

What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?
 Under the issue of technical skills, data from the five rural primary principals suggest
five distinct areas that caused considerable consternation. These areas were staffing
concerns, financial management, school board management, size of the school and the
experience of handover from one principal to another.

Staffing concerns

Staffing was a significant concern for all five participants. The challenge of recruiting
and retaining suitable Catholic teaching staff was a recurring subject reported by all

participants. As one participant remarked: "To achieve good student outcomes, you need quality teachers." All participants reported that the main type of teaching staff recruited were graduates. The participants acknowledged that the enthusiasm and energy beginning teachers bring to a school community was significant. However, the participants also acknowledged that graduate teachers required enormous amounts of support, time and encouragement from the principal in order to begin their teaching career. One participant commented that:

> My current staff are full of graduates who don't have experiences to really know what needs to be done. The challenge is there for me to ensure that I am in the classroom with these graduates and support them in their programming.

Coupled with the graduates' newness to the profession, two participant's reported that in the rural school there are limited opportunities for the new teacher to view quality pedagogy in the classroom. As one stated:

> There are limited places to send them to support them. In the country you can develop a narrow focus on what the classroom practice looks like. If you look next door and it looks like yours, it doesn't necessary mean you are doing a good job.

All five participants remarked on the problem of retaining staff. This problem was twofold. Firstly, where there was a high staff turnover there was a challenge to the continuity of programs and the annual establishment of priorities. Secondly, where there was little staff turnover, there was stability and sustainability of programs and priorities; however, there could also be little innovation or aptitude for contemporary pedagogical practices.

Attracting teaching staff that are Catholic and able to teach Religious Education in the rural Catholic school is another area that caused a great deal of consternation amongst

all participants. One participant summarised the sentiment: "We get graduate teachers and these days some of them do not necessarily follow the faith." This issue becomes further exacerbated because the teaching of Religious Education will then lie predominantly with the principal. One participant reinforced this concern and reported that "…the evangelizing role is difficult… sharing of the load is limited to myself and another teacher." All five participants reported that they were required to teach Religious Education across varying year levels because their staff were not Catholic. Whilst some teaching is required of the principal because of the size of the Catholic schools, it was a perceived problem for some of the participants as exemplified by this statement: "Having teachers who aren't Catholic means that I pick up the RE teaching. All of these challenges make it busy and endless."

A requirement of principals employing staff in rural regions was the finding of suitable accommodation for the staff member. One participant commented on his role in acquiring suitable accommodation for staff. He found this responsibility particularly challenging and time consuming. Due to the housing shortage in the region and limited realtors in the area, he found himself door knocking when he heard an accommodation vacancy was on the market.

Financial management

Four participants commented that the financial management of the school had been a considerable challenge. Apart from the newness to managing the school budget, there were limited funds due to the small enrolment for the rural school. Each wanted greater assistance at the school level from the CEOWA, particularly at budget time. Coupled with the issue of financial management was the area of capital development of the

school site. Two participants remarked that as soon as they began their principalship, they began building programs. One reflected:

> I came to this school and on day one I had capital development to undertake. Had I not had experience of this at my last school, I don't know how I could have undertaken the build. It was very difficult.

Two participants commented on the limited funds they had for staff relief. One commented: "The money side of things is very restrictive… trying to provide staff with some relief time to complete additional tasks is prohibitive."

School board management

Four of the five participants stated the difficulty in managing the school board. Initially, they all felt out of their depth in dealing with the school board. Reasons given included their lack of experience in understanding the function of the board and incorrect practices of the board that had evolved prior to their appointment and required an intervention from the CEOWA. In addition, three participants commented on the parochial nature of the country school board. Whilst recognising the commitment of the parents to support the school in this aspect, the participants noted that the some board members were community leaders who held strong opinions and views of how the school should function. One participant commented: "The chair [of the school board] is a prominent member of the community and tended to think he owned the town. In negotiating this important relationship, this participant acknowledged that one had to be "… fairly knowledgeable and strong".

Size of school

Four of the participants believed that the small size of the rural school limited the scope of their role as the principal. Three of the participants believed that the absence of administrative support provided normally by an assistant principal [AP] in larger schools placed an undue demand on their time and their confidence to perform the role. One stated: "Because the school is a little school, the principal is everything. Not only do you teach, you are the DOTT [Duties Other Than Teaching] person, you are the relief person – you don't have time." Another reported feelings of inadequacy in the role of principal because of the limited support:

> I think that the whole package of a 1A school is a huge challenge. On any particular day you are involved in a variety of roles. You are it because there isn't anybody to do it or be it. It is harder to feel satisfaction in any one area for very long because you feel a great sense of inadequacy over the fact that I can't be the best in everything. There isn't anyone to help you because you don't have an AP.

The one participant who did appoint an AP had limited choice of teachers due to their inexperience. The AP who was appointed was placed on conditional appointment status because of the limited number of years teaching experience and incomplete accreditation requirements. The participant commented: "This year I have had an assistant principal, but she is only in her 4th year of teaching. She is more skilled than other teachers, but she also needs a great deal of support and development."

Experience of handover

All participants commented on the experience of handover from the exiting principal. Two participants reported that the experience of handover as almost wasted time. Both spent three to four days at the school site with the exiting principal, but found the time was ill spent and pointless. Another issue confronting four of the rural participants was

that they did not know what to look for, what to ask and how best to utilise their time with the exiting principals. One stated:

> I spent four days at the school prior to my first year. I look at them as wasted days because I did not know what to look for or what to ask for. I know that if I left here the next principal would have everything for them. I came down and met lots of people, went to a board meeting and had dinner. Everything was absolutely great – but on the practicality side, things weren't addressed.

In addition to these experiences of handover, three participants reflected on the need to have sound knowledge of the key issues surrounding the school community prior to commencing their principalship. As one stated: "I think one needs a full disclosure of what is actually happening at the school." Another reiterated this belief: "If you had a better knowledge of the culture it would hold you in good stead as situations arise."

5.4.1.2 Sub question two:

What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop?

Under the issue of socialisation skills, the data from the five country primary participants indicated that there were three main themes. These were collegial support, community issues and Catholic Education Office support.

Collegial support

All participants appreciated and acknowledged the need for peer support as they began their principalship. They recognised that being able to discuss various issues with a peer principal was beneficial in that they received wise advice and support from an experienced educator. One participant commented: "I have had very good support from my mentor and others who have offered their support. I have been encouraged to email or phone." However, three of the participants would have liked to have had an

experienced principal spend time at their school. They collectively believed that a much richer understanding of their particular school community context and needs would have enhanced the support they received from their peer mentor.

Four of the five participants did not consider the support afforded by the Catholic Primary Principal's Association [CPPA] as helpful. Each believed that only superficial support and understanding was given by the CPPA upon their appointment to principalship. One stated that: "My honest opinion of the primary principals association is that they neglect country principals." He further stated that: "Yes they are a reference point, but what is offered to rural principals are more on the lines of a lip service." Another reiterated this sentiment and stated: "With regards to the principals' association, I don't find them supportive. When you go to events, people are quite superficially supportive." The fifth participant, however, was grateful for the direct support received from a member of the Executive of the Association. She stated:

> I feel that the association is reasonably interested in what we are doing. They are trying to support country principals. I had a city principal release one of their teachers to come up here because they knew I was teaching pretty much full time.

However she qualified this by adding: "I think that we are not there yet and they can be more supportive."

Community issues

All of the participants commented on the parochial nature of the small rural Catholic school community. Two commented that they felt under the spotlight with regards to how they conducted themselves within the school and parish community. One reported that until recently, the community was suspicious of her absences, particularly regarding Sunday Mass: "When I am not at Mass on Sunday, they are no longer suspicious of

what I am doing." The other felt the pressure placed upon her by the community with regard to her involvement in the parish:

> In a small community the connections are there but it is also difficult because you are under the spotlight. The community has expectations of the school. They expect a lot of me in assisting [the parish] in things one way or another.

However this pressure with regard to parish involvement was not experienced by two other participants. Both of these participants reported that they believed that it is their responsibility to support the parish. One reported:

> On my arrival I was advised that I would be on a parish council and a liturgy committee of the parish. In addition my involvement of sacramental preparation was required. I don't have a problem with this… country situations don't have a lot of people to draw upon... and leadership has to be seen on all fronts – but in a balanced way.

Another stated that: "The expectation is that you attend their meetings, they are welcoming. I am a parishioner and I am a principal. The distinction in the roles is clear."

Catholic Education Office of Western Australia

All five participants commented favourably on the Induction Program for new principals. They appreciated the networking opportunities amongst their colleagues and the interaction and input from the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia [CEOWA]. One participant echoed this sentiment: "The principal induction process on the whole is a good one. I saw the benefits of networking with the cohort I was in with. It makes you feel comfortable contacting people in the office over different things." Another believed that the program "was tailor-made" for them.

With regard to the ongoing support the CEOWA provided newly appointed principals, all appreciated the interest and commitment. The tangible support the Principal School

Advisor and regional consultants offered to the country school was acknowledged as being critically important. One participant who struggled with providing key pedagogical development for her staff greatly appreciated the professional advice and practical support. She stated: "She was outstanding and very supportive…she went into classes and modelled for them, listened to them… they did not feel checked up and were very comfortable with her."

5.4.1.3 Sub question three:

In what ways do newly appointed principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-identity?

In the area of self-awareness three key themes emerged from the data pertaining to the five rural participants. These were feelings of isolation, feelings of loneliness and the need for resiliency.

Feelings of isolation

 All five rural participants commented on the inherent feeling of isolation experienced in the role of principal due to the secluded location of the school. All five participants commented that the location of their schools in regional areas limited their opportunities to access and participate in professional development. Whilst there were key times in which the principals collectively met during the academic year, mostly the participants commented on their inability to attend professional development due to the geographical distance and their lack of access for suitable replacements for them.

Feelings of loneliness

The data suggested that the geographical isolation of the school community presented two types of loneliness: professional isolation and personal loneliness. The first type was to do with professional isolation from their peers and access to professional development. As one participant stated: "Loneliness that I experienced in my first year was not about having someone to relate to at a personal level, but rather about the limited access to my colleagues." The same participant felt the isolation with regard to attending the principals' associations' members day: "…accessing member's day is difficult. With the time involved in getting to the event and back again created too much trouble. I didn't go".

The second type of loneliness reported by three of the rural principals was to do with personal and social loneliness. This experience of loneliness was exemplified by one participant's simple statement: "It is a lonely position". The isolated location of one of the participant's houses saw him have very little human interaction during the weekend. He recalled that on some weekends, apart from attending Mass, he did not speak to another person. Whilst all participants recognised the personal loneliness in the position, all believed in the importance of a "good support network". The following sentiment expressed by one participant, was a recurring belief of all participants: "the support of other principals and the regional officer is vital in country areas…. I think that it is a lonely role."

Need for resiliency

Three of the five rural principals recognised the importance of being able to "bounce back" after experiencing setbacks. Collectively, the three rural principals noted that they

needed to" pick themselves up" after experiencing difficulties. One participant realised quickly that she needed to be courageous when she encountered a particularly difficult time and stated: "Couple steps forward and a step back, and then another step forward, and another back. You need to be courageous in this role".

5.4.2 Remote Catholic schools

5.4.2.1 Sub question one:

What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?
Under the issue of technical and managerial skills, data from the three remote primary school participants suggested two areas that were challenging: staffing and the educational outcome for Aboriginal students.

Staffing issues

All three participants reported being unprepared for the issues surrounding staffing of the school. All three participants commented on the challenge of recruiting suitable Catholic educators to work in remote locations. Limited applications were received for positions; moreover, the requirement for the teacher to be Catholic to teach Religious Education further restricted the appointment decision. Typically, staff in these three schools were inexperienced and had limited exposure to remote schooling. In addition, each participant cited the transiency of staff. Staff turnover was high in remote schools. One participant stated:

> Staffing is the big issue. I have been a teacher short most of the year... when they come here; they encounter something completely different from teaching mainstream. They are inexperienced teachers. Socially they are very isolated here. Some struggle more than others. It is difficult at the interview to explain the social isolation.

Another participant reported the loss of five staff after his first year as principal. "I have lost five staff this year. Four who are leaving are out of my control. One I lost I believe is because of me and my inexperience."

All three participants reported that dealing with staff issues was demanding. Their inexperience in dealing with staff conflict created tension and stress for them. Upon reflection, one participant noted: "It is a fine balance getting your staff working collaboratively." All three participants reported the importance of the suitability of staff to the local situation. The participants acknowledged the difficulty of staff appraisals and the pastoral support for the staff who were not coping. The ramification of dealing with staffing issues can create tensions throughout the small remote school community. This was exemplified by one participant's experience:

> I have been tossing and turning lately because I have to review a contract of a temporary teacher. This has caused turmoil in the school. But the reality is that she is not suitable for the remote school context. I don't think that she is a good educator… she doesn't listen.

A final issue regarding staffing was the importance of the Aboriginal Teaching Assistant [ATA] in the school community. Two participants commented on the critical role these staff have within the remote school. One participant reported that he had a highly motivated and capable ATA who was a positive role model within the broader community. He stated:

> I have excellent ATAs. They work very closely with me and they are good role models for the community. The ATAs and I go out every Monday morning to the community and talk – some parents get abusive, but we persist and ask why their child isn't at school.

Educational outcomes for Aboriginal students

All three participants collectively commented on the dire situation surrounding the education of Aboriginal children in remote schools. The two key issues they were confronted with were the lack of school attendance and poor level of literacy amongst the Aboriginal students. All three participants were committed to the belief that improved educational outcomes would improve life outcomes for their Aboriginal students and the broader remote community. One participant echoed the sentiment of the others. She stated: "I wanted to bring to the school what I am about – children learning." Another participant commented: "The educational focus is about literacy." He tempered this statement by adding that of equal importance was Aboriginal student school attendance and their engagement with learning. He reported:

> We need to ensure that Aboriginal children attend school and once this is achieved, then the children participate in learning and once this is achieved, you look towards achievement. The only opportunity for a future for kids in the remote community is an education. If this opportunity doesn't happen for them, well that is it for life.

The third participant commented that one of his prime tasks was school attendance. He stated:

> My objective is attendance. We have 93 Aboriginal students who live close by and their attendance is good. It is the students in the outstations who don't come regularly to school. We are in the process of getting a cross-terrain bus that can pick up these students. This will not only be good for the academic side but also it will improve the social side for these students.

The same participant believed parents fundamentally want the best for their children. He saw good student academic achievement when there was regular attendance at school and parent support. He stated: "The students who are regular attendees and have good family support can achieve the targets. The students who are working well need to be challenged and extended."

5.4.2.2   Sub question two:

What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop?

In the area of socialisation, the data from the three remote Catholic school primary principals indicated three main themes. These were peer support, CEOWA support and remote community issues.

Peer support

All three participants recognised the importance and need for peer support. However, the remoteness of each school's location limited face-to- face contact. Whilst the Kimberley Catholic school principals collectively gathered together a number of times throughout the year, between meetings the participants were limited to telephone conversations and email contact. One participant commented:

> In the Kimberley we have all said that we are not good at making a strong network. We all get on with each other, but when we get back into our respective schools, we forget about our promise to keep in close communication. What I have noticed is that we tend to network with the school closest to us.

In the same vein another participant also relied on the closest principals for advice and support; however, there is recognition that these principals are also busy with their own schools. She stated: "I talk to the principals closer to me, but they are very busy." This participant also accesses her designated mentor principal. She was grateful that this person visited her school and spent time understanding the schools remote context. She added: "I have a mentor who visited me – this has been very helpful and given me confidence in decisions I make. The affirmation has been very good. The mentor also put me in touch with principal associations." Similarly another participant stated: "My principal mentor has been up twice in the last year – and he does have some idea of

what it is like. I also have another principal in the diocese which I contact. He is a great source of support." The third participant reiterated the importance of the mentor role. In speaking regularly with his mentor principal, he has appreciated the advice and support. He commented: "Being a brand new principal I have sought the advice of my mentor principal on a variety of issues. He talks to me weekly." The same participant commented on the difficulties in communicating with other Kimberley principals. The reliance on emails was difficult at times because internet access was lost due to technical difficulties. A final role that peer principals provide was one of friendship. One participant commented that: "When I get snowed under I ring up my peer principal and ask is there anything urgent that needs to be done. We talk things through and help each other in this way. It is a friendship."

Support from the Catholic Education Office, Western Australia

All three participants valued and acknowledged the support of CEOWA staff. They all commented on the ability and access provided by either the central or regional offices. The main support was one of advice and direction. One participant echoed the sentiment of the other two when he stated: "The office support has been fantastic. I probably ring up people a lot, but ultimately I see their role as helping me in my role. I cannot speak highly enough of these people." Another principal reiterated this point. She stated: "I am on the phone a lot to the regional office to check things out. Sometimes I think they are fed up with me." However, two of the participants voiced concerns on the limited support the regional office provided. One participant noted:

> The support from the regional office has not been as strong as I would have liked. I know that they are short staffed and haven't been able to fill the curriculum roles. I appreciate this – but there hasn't been the support that I had expected.

The participant added that accessing curriculum support from the central office does have limitations. He commented that:

> The Perth consultants don't understand the climate and conditions in which we are in. The regional consultants do have an understanding as they regularly visit remote schools. They can identify strategies that are successful and they know how students can achieve success. Some Perth consultants do not really understand this.

All three participants commented on the role of the regional officer as being very important. The trust between the principal and the regional officer was viewed as paramount. Confidentiality shared by this person and the principal was critical to the professional support that was given. Once participant commented on this relationship:

> The regional officer has to be someone who is really confidential. You have to trust them to use the information wisely from the perspective that you are just one person providing the information. My fear would be that you say something and it happens to be your perspective in the situation. But the person takes it to another level. I would hesitate to speak.

Remote community issues

Each participant strongly identified that the Catholic school was central to the remote community and therefore it was essential to build positive community relationships. One stated that: "the school is a beacon". Another commented:

> I need to work very closely with the community. The school is a very big part of the community – a real focal point. I had two main objectives at the start of my principalship. The first was to build community relationships and where possible seek parental involvement.

Another reiterated this sentiment and saw the hope that can permeate out of this positive relationship between school and community. He reported:

> When they (students) want to be part of the school, they want to be part of the bigger picture; they want to participate in a wider community. This is the exact opposite of when you sometimes see some adults just sitting and doing nothing. I see this (interaction) as a hopeful sign. When most people speak of indigenous communities they see no hope. But this is not always the case – or at least in my experience.

All three participants viewed the Catholic school as the representative of the Catholic Church in the community. Their collective experience was that the community didn't outwardly practice their faith; however, when there was a death in the community, its members draw upon the Catholic rituals to express their grief. One participant reported his experience:

> When it comes to someone passing away, there is a rosary and you will get 40 – 50 people from the community attending. It means a lot and the funerals are huge events. But in terms of regular mass attendance, the importance of this isn't highly valued.

Another area where the Catholic school and community interfaced was in the sacramental preparation of the students. One participant suggested that whilst the parents were happy for the children to undertake the sacramental preparation, they typically do not participate. He tended to believe that there is a great deal of trust between the Church and the community and parents tend to let the school organise and prepare the children. He reported:

> There is no hesitation for parents to let their children be prepared for the sacraments. But they don't come to witness or support their children. I don't know if they aren't supportive or they are just happy for us to do it. They have typically had a good experience of the Catholic Church.

One participant commented on the relationship he had with the parish priest. He believed that this relationship was very important with regards to his own faith and professional support. He made a concerted effort to include the priest in school activities. Their regular meetings offered a confidential avenue to discuss issues and also to offer faith development. He stated that the parish priest was a good sounding board: "I know whatever I say to him stays with him. I have a cup of tea with him Saturday morning. He gives me little scriptural readings to help me along. I really value his friendship".

One participant reported on the local community dynamics and the importance of not getting too involved in community activities. He found that if he interacted with some members, he could be perceived as favouring them. He stated: "There are two groups and I need to talk and listen to both groups. I cannot be showing favouritism to any one person. I learned the hard way. How can you be prepared for this?" The same participant also commented on the decision he made of not consuming alcohol publicly as the consumption of alcohol is an issue in the community. He commented:

> With regard to drinking alcohol, I drink at home with my wife, but I don't drink with staff or people in the community. This is my decision. I just feel very strongly that I should be modelling correct behaviour. Alcohol is a real issue here.

5.4.2.3 Sub question three:

In what ways do newly appointed principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-identity?

Three key themes emerged from the data collected from the three remote school participants with regards to self-awareness. These were: principalship as a vocation, need for resiliency and feelings of loneliness.

Principalship as a vocation

All three participants saw their role as a Catholic school principal as vocational. All three principals commented on their desire and commitment to serve as a leader of a Catholic school community. Whilst all have been educated in Catholic education and taught in Catholic schools, two of the participants had taught overseas and in state education. Two participants were encouraged to apply for principalship in remote schools. Two have had experience teaching in indigenous schools in the Kimberley and in the eastern states prior to their principalship.

All three remote participants individually stated the importance of providing quality Catholic education to all children. One participant commented: "Catholic schools are for everyone." Another reiterated this comment and stated: "For me Catholic means making sure that all kids are included and have opportunities. Catholics have a preference for the poor or the excluded." The third participant had a very strong desire to work in an Aboriginal school community and to make a difference in the children's lives. She stated:

> I always wanted to teach in an Aboriginal community school. When I came up here it made such a big impact and I did not want to go back to mainstream. I wanted to connect the spirituality and faith component. In the Catholic system you bring the whole Catholic ethos – looking towards Jesus and our faith, drawing on the Holy Spirit.

Another issue encountered by the three participants was the limited opportunities to participate in personal faith formation activities. One stated there was "a real hunger for these times". The participant felt that she was the source of faith support in both the school community and the Aboriginal community. She commented: "When you give out you start to dry out and I hunger for some spiritual input."

Need for resiliency

Each participant reported times where they were totally stretched with regard to their leadership role. They commented on the demanding nature of their work and the need to draw upon their own resources to deal with the situations. The participants reported on the need to be resilient. One stated: "The job is draining, the climate is harsh and it is actually hard going. But I am my worst own enemy. I expect perfection." She added: "At a personal level I need to be more confident in myself. I can be easily shaken. I am sensitive to people's criticism – I take it to heart." Another appreciated that as he

progressed in the role, he became more confident. He stated: "Six months down the track, I feel a lot more confident as a principal then when I first started."

Feelings of loneliness

Each of the three remote school participants experienced a sense of loneliness. The participants recognised that this loneliness was largely due to the remote location of the school. The participants recognised that the remote geographical location of the school resulted in feelings of professional, social and personal isolation. Access to professional development [PD] opportunities for each participant was dependent upon suitable replacement staff. One participant commented: "Leaving the community for professional development causes me stress and worry. Not having someone to rely on and take over while I am away is problematic." She added: "When someone did take over, there were more issues to deal with upon my return." Another participant was frustrated with the fluctuating access to the internet. For him his professional reading was curtailed by limited availability to the internet. He stated: "I did not expect poor internet access. We have it down three to four days regularly. It is frustrating and severely limits my journal searches for my professional development."

All three participants commented on the social and personal loneliness encountered in the role. The loneliness experienced was both of a professional and personal nature. As all three participants did not have an assistant principal to share in the leadership role, they expressed the isolation experienced in decision making and dealing with sensitive matters. One participant stated: "The buck stops with me... I don't have anyone here to talk professionally about sensitive issues". The participant went on to comment that even if they had an assistant principal they were limited on what to discuss. He stated:

"Confidentiality is the issue. When you are in a two teacher school, it is very hard. I want to protect the confidentiality of the situation."

Two of the three participants had their spouse with them. Both were grateful for the support their spouses gave them. One stated: "My husband is with me and his support has been tremendous." The other participant commented: "I am very much a family man. The most important thing is my family. My job is extremely important to me... but my family comes first. If my wife said to me tomorrow let's go back to Perth, I would resign." This same participant also reported that his wife is part of the community and in not wanting to compromise her relationships within the community he cannot talk to her about school matters. He reported:

> I am very mindful that she is a person in the community and is developing friendships with various people, particularly the school staff. I have to be careful in what I say to her so that it doesn't impinge on her friendships.

5.4.3 Metropolitan Catholic schools

The five metropolitan participants consisted of two female and three male principals representing one primary school and four secondary schools. The primary school was a single stream school consisting of 250 students, whilst the secondary schools were considered medium to large in size, ranging from 700 students to 1100 students.

5.4.3.1 Sub question one:

What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?

Under the issue of technical and managerial skills, data from the five metropolitan principals suggested three distinct areas that caused consternation: bureaucratic demands, communication issues and staffing concerns.

Bureaucratic demands

Each of the five metropolitan principals commented on the bureaucratic nature of the position. Included in this area was the balancing of their time to meet bureaucratic requirements of the system and government. One participant found the burden quite heavy and unexpected. He stated:

> I never knew the amount of administration involved in the role. This is where I get buried and get lost and where I do a lot of work at night or early morning. The work load has increased tenfold.

Three participants commentated on what they perceived as the excessive "paperwork" that needed to be addressed. One participant captured the sentiment of the other two when he stated his need to deal with this demand more strategically:

> I fall behind on the paperwork – this can be a bit of a nightmare. So much going on around you; I have to learn to manage this differently. Strategies have to be put in place to get on top of the work.

Communication issues

Two participants commented on the large volume of electronic communication (emails) from both the system and government to schools. The participants indicated that, with the use of electronic communication, information was sent continually and from a more diverse group of people within the CEOWA. Coupled with the external emails, internal emails were often considered excessive, laborious and time consuming. Both participants acknowledged significant time needed to be spent on addressing emails.

Staffing concerns

All participants acknowledged the importance of quality staff in the education of the students. Three participants commented on the difficulty they experienced when dealing with very challenging staff issues, one of which ended in the law courts. One of these participants noted the ripple effect of difficult staff on other staff. The participant also realised that the way she dealt with a particularly recalcitrant staff member was carefully monitored by other staff.

Three participants reported on their mixed feelings in the recruitment of suitable staff. Each of the participants typically received a significant number of applications; however, two participants, who were in search of experienced leaders, only received applications from inexperienced staff. One participant's comments reflected the disappointment:

> The nature of the school (located in the outer metropolitan suburbs) has only inexperienced leaders at all levels. I advertised for a deputy principal and received 12 applicants; only one was an experienced deputy.

A third participant encountered a similar experience advertising for two deputy principals. She received only applications from inexperienced leaders. This situation concerned her. Her newness to the role, coupled with the newly appointed inexperienced deputies presented the school with an untested leadership team.

5.4.3.2 Sub question two:

What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop?

Underpinning the issue of socialisation skills were the cultural and personal relationships inherent in the role of principalship. The data from the five metropolitan

participants indicated that there were two main themes: collegial support and Catholic Education Office support.

Collegial support

Each of the five metropolitan principals acknowledged the interests and ongoing support of their peers. Three of the participants became members of the various committees of their principal association with the express purpose of understanding their roles better, developing strong networks and contributing to Catholic education beyond their school. Two of these principals commented on their active participation in the regional committees whereby within their local area, principals gather with informal agendas that focus on particular issues with their colleagues.

Support from Catholic Education Office, Western Australia

Four participants acknowledged the direct support of the CEOWA. Overall, these participants were appreciative of the timeliness of the support, the focus on particular issues needing to be addressed and the professionalism of the CEOWA personnel. One participant captured the collective sentiment of the others with her recall of a particular issue at her school and the support she received from CEOWA personnel. She stated:

> The CEOWA member, who worked closely with me in dealing with a very difficult personnel issue, was superb. He gave me wonderful support and I cannot repay him for his work. I tried not to be at the end of the phone constantly, but he assured me that his role was to support and serve.

However, one participant, whilst generally acknowledging the support from the CEOWA, was disappointed with the lack of support that she had received from the principal school advisor [PSA]. She commented that the PSA should have offered more tangible support over a particular matter and not left her to do the groundwork to resolve an issue.

5.4.3.3 Sub question three:

In what ways do newly appointed principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-identity?

In the area of integrating the role of principalship with the participant's self-awareness, two key themes emerged from the data pertaining to the five metropolitan participants. The first was to do with the participant's own professional and personal faith formation and the second was to do with balancing the demands of work and one's personal life.

Professional and personal faith formation

All five participants acknowledged the vocational element of their role. Each expressed their desire to work in Catholic education and to serve the Catholic Church in this leadership role. One participant stated this sentiment, and remarked: "No matter what you do, you always have to make sure that you bring Jesus into it." Another reflected on the nature of Catholic education and commented: "We need to immerse our students in an environment that acknowledges God's presence through prayer and liturgy." All five participants conveyed the importance of nurturing their personal faith in varied ways. These ways included strengthening their prayer life, reading scripture or attending retreats.

Two participants commented on the accessibility, variety and convenience of opportunities for professional learning, particularly as both had worked in rural schools where there were limits to participating in professional development. Both participants also appreciated the opportunities for their staff to participate in particular professional learning. One commented on her ability to participate in national and international professional development. She found these experiences not only broadened her thinking

beyond Catholic education, but also gave her confidence in professional dialogue with her school community and peers.

Work-life balance

All five participants commented on the demands of the principalship and its impact on their personal lives. The participants identified the need to balance work and their personal lives. Each participant noted that work occupied a significant part of his/her day. One participant noted that she recognised the importance of pastoral care for the staff and students. However, she believed she did not pay attention to her own pastoral needs: "The pastoral dimension we do well in our schools; we possibly don't do it well for ourselves as principals". The same participant recognised the importance of key relationships in her life to assist her in reflecting on her own development. She commented:

> I think that self-development is very important... you do this in a myriad of ways. Relationships are key: your parish community, your family, your personal knowledge. I read a lot. I think that taking time to reflect on things is necessary. When you are in a task orientated mode you are in the moment. It is very hard to step back and look at the total picture.

Another participant was able to leave school issues at school with his ability to "leave things at the school gate". The same participant talked about being disciplined on how he used his work and home time. A third participant acknowledged the all-consuming nature of work and how important it is to balance work with home. He stated: "You give so much of yourself [to work] and you get exhausted. You have to balance things and look after yourself". A fourth participant acknowledged the importance of "gathering yourself and receiving some spiritual nourishment"; highlighting the need for quiet time away from work.

5.5 Summary

Table 5.3 provides a summary of key themes emerging from the data of perspective two: school location.

Table 5.3

Summary of key themes for perspective two: school location

Theme	Rural Catholic schools	Remote Catholic schools	Metropolitan Catholic schools
Technical / Managerial Skills	Staffing concerns Financial management School board management Size of school Experience of handover	Staffing issues Educational outcomes for Aboriginal students	Bureaucratic demands Communication issues Staffing issues
Culture and personal relationships	Collegial support Community issues Catholic Education Office support	Collegial support Catholic Education Office support Remote community issues	Collegial support Catholic Education Office support
Self Identity	Feelings of isolation Feelings of loneliness Need for resiliency	Principalship as a vocation Need for resiliency Feelings of loneliness	Professional and personal faith formation Work–life balance

5.6   Perspective 3: School type

This perspective presents findings under two categories: primary schooling that includes educational focus on Kindergarten to Year Seven (four to 12 year olds) and secondary schooling that includes students from Year 8 to Year 12 (13 to 17 year olds). There were nine primary school participants and four secondary school participants.

5.6.1   Primary schooling

5.6.1.1 Sub question one:

What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?

The data collected from the nine primary school principals highlighted two key themes with regards to the technical and managerial skills required of the primary school principalship. These were the accountability demands placed on the principal and the issue of staffing.

Accountability demands

Of the nine primary school principal participants, seven commented on their struggle to keep up with the variety of demands placed upon them. The multifarious demands included management of data, coordinating all professional development for staff, organising the curriculum and meeting deadlines imposed externally. Three participants had not realised the full extent of the principal's administrative responsibility. This realisation was captured by one participant who stated:

> I never knew the amount of administration required. This is where I get buried and get lost and where I do a lot of work at night or early morning. The workload has increased tenfold… on any particular day you are involved in a variety of roles.

The time to deal with the "paper work" was typically undertaken after the school day. As noted by one participant: "Realistically, I would start the administrative work around

4.00pm. Generally during the day you get caught up in the day to day running of the school." A second participant highlighted her extraordinary work hours by stating: "Most days I am at school at 6.00am and I get a couple of hours of peace. And the same after school. On the weekend I tackle the non-urgent work." The enormity of the pressure to keep up with deadlines was felt by one participant who was piqued by a letter received from the Director of Catholic Education. She stated: "At the start of the year, I missed sending school data for the NAPLAN testing. During the first holidays, I received a fairly strong letter from the Director [of Catholic Education]. It was confronting and demoralising".

Staffing issues

Key staffing issues confronting the nine primary school participants were centred on the quality of teaching and recruitment of staff. Five participants noted that their desire to provide quality education to the students rested on the quality of teachers. One lamented: "staffing is the big issue". This participant, located in a remote school found it very challenging to get suitable and experienced staff. All nine participants commented on staff recruitment, citing they mostly recruited beginning teachers who required a great of support the principal. Four participants highlighted the transient nature of the staff. These four participants found the high turnover of staff created challenges around sustainability of school priorities and programs.

5.6.1.2 Sub question two:

What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop?

All of the nine primary principal participants commented on the importance of the

relationship between the school and the community. Included in these relationships was

the role the school has with the local parish community. In addition to these

relationships a number of participants commented on the importance of collegial

network.

Community and parish relationship

All nine participants commented on the important role the school had within the

community in which their school was located. This was captured by one participant's

comment:

> You get inundated by the community with lots of questions and concerns.
> You seem to be considered the source of information and knowledge. Every
> problem comes to you and you are expected to know everything.

A key highlight of the school's relationship with the local community was the strong

links within the Catholic parish community. Seven of the participants highlighted their

personal involvement within the parish. One participant echoed the belief held by three

participants that they were required to be part of the parish pastoral council. She stated:

"On my arrival I was advised that I would be on the parish council and liturgy

committee. In addition, involvement of sacramental preparation was required".

Typically, the seven participants see their parish involvement as important, particularly

in supporting the parish priest. This acceptance is exemplified by this participant's

comment: "Our parish priest works very hard and I want to support him in his role. We

work together".

Collegial network

All nine participants commented on the importance of networking with colleagues. The type of networking was primarily to do with the support their colleagues offered. The support given to them by their colleagues included sending short term staff placements, professional dialogue, organisation of cross school professional development and friendship. This type of support was identified by one participant's comment, who stated: "If I did not have the huge support network of principal friends, I would be really stuck."

Five of the participants commented on their membership of the Catholic Primary Principal's Association [CPPA]. One participant commented positively in attending their annual conference and the general professional renewal received when interacting with the Association. She stated: "The CPPA conference was valuable with regard to networking... the information presented was very good in that they refreshed me and renewed me..." Three participants were not as enamoured with the Association's support given to new principals. One participant stated: "In my honest opinion the primary principal association neglects country principals". Another had not received the promised support and was disappointed in their inactivity. She stated:

> Apart from the mentor that I was assigned, there wasn't a lot happening with regard to support from the Association. There is a file that is prepared by the Association to support new primary principals. Never got one. I contacted them and they apologised for not sending out one to me... it still hasn't arrived.

5.6.1.3 Sub question three:

In what ways do newly appointed principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-identity?

The data from the nine primary participants highlighted two key themes in the area of self identity. The first was to do with coming to terms with the limited opportunity to be in the classroom teaching and the second   was with regards to the diverse nature of the principal's role.

Classroom teaching

Four participants commented on the limited time that they have available to access classroom teaching. The participants realised that the demands of the principalship required them to be out of the classroom rather than in it. This realisation was exemplified by the following comment: "I miss teaching and I try to get back into the classroom, but it is too hard. I cannot commit to a class; my principal work pulls me into other areas that demand attention." Another stated her access to the classroom was taking teacher relief classes. This opportunity enabled her to not only teach the students, but also keep her eye on what is actually happening in the classroom.

Diversity in the role of principalship

All nine participants commented on the varied role the principal played in leading the school. The diversity of the role, however, left some participants feeling that they could not master any one aspect of the role and were left feeling overwhelmed. This sentiment was captured by one participant who stated: "It is harder to feel satisfaction in any one area for very long because I feel a great sense of inadequacy over the fact that I can't be the best in everything." Another participant commented: "There is so much to do. I never knew the amount of administration required."

5.6.2 Secondary schooling

5.6.2.1 Sub question one:

What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?

The data collected from the four secondary school principals suggested three main themes related to the technical and managerial skills required of the secondary school principal. These three themes were the demanding pace of the position, the leadership required of a large school and the importance of prior leadership experiences in enabling the participant to deal with the enormity of the role.

Demanding pace

All four participants found the demands of the principal's role imposing, and the pace unbelievably fast. The participants reported that the dynamic nature of the position pulled them in many directions by the needs and demands of different groups and events. As one participant, who was still coming to terms with the position remarked: "I find the pace of things extraordinary and keeping ahead of the game a challenge." Another believed the requirements of the position excessive. She stated: "You think I would have worked it out by now… maybe next year. The buck stops with me and the work must be done. There is no one reminding you to do the work." A third participant noted: "The sheer volume of work is a lowlight… and my time management becomes an issue." The forth participant stated: "The job can be all consuming."

School size

The four participants lead large secondary schools with student populations between 700 and 1000 students. Staff sizes varied from 55 to 120 teaching and support staff. The participants collectively acknowledged the responsibility of managing an annual

recurrent budget in excess of A\$15 million and maintaining an expensive plant site. Whilst the operational part of their role occupied their time, the participants acknowledged their focus on student achievement, appreciating that it was high stakes with regard to student achievement. One participant captured the collective thinking in this statement: "Student wellbeing and achievement are of paramount importance to me – all that I do needs to be focused on this."

Prior learning and leadership experiences

The four secondary participants acknowledged that their preparation for principalship was established through the varied leadership opportunities that they experienced over their years in education. Collectively, the four participants had experienced different types of leadership opportunities. These included being Head of Department, Year Coordinator, House Coordinator, Middle and Senior School Coordinator and Deputy Principal. Coupled with these designated leadership roles, the four participants commented that they felt they were involved in the forefront of educational change and school improvement. They believed their previous principals provided them with varying degrees of responsibility to engage with school improvement activities. One participant stated:

> Having opportunities in a variety of leadership roles has helped a great deal in being a principal. I found that when I actually became principal, there wasn't much that I hadn't come across in some way shape or form – or at least I knew who to contact to get assistance. I felt well prepared and ready to become a principal.

5.6.2.2 Sub question two:

What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop?

Underpinning the issues of socialisation skills are the cultural and personal relationships inherent in the role of principalship. The data revealed three dominant themes: collegial relationships, CEOWA support and parish relationships.

Collegial relationships

All four secondary participants acknowledged the importance of good collegial relationships. The participants all accessed their peers for support. One commented on the openness and support given to him by his peers. He remarked:

> Being a new principal on the block you are never made to feel that you have to sit in the corner. You feel very much part of a collegial group – it doesn't matter if you have been in the role for 20 years or one year – your voice and your concerns are just as important.

In addition to a sense of belonging amongst their peers, two participants commented that one has to be proactive in seeking support. One participant stated that "probably because I have been gregarious enough, I went and sought support from them". Two participants commented on their active participation in the Catholic Secondary Principal's Association. They joined the various standing committees of the Associations within two years of their appointment to principalship. Their active participation brought about a sense of belonging to the Association. The following comment exemplified their experience: "I was voted onto the Executive of the Association, so I have really enjoyed my membership. I found the Association to be very supportive." One participant found the Association needed to be more consistent and efficient with regards to one particular aspect of their role. She commented: "I haven't got an official principal mentor from the Association. With the current review of the principal's Deed of Agreement, I think the members are distracted – I don't get a lot of support from them."

Catholic Education Office support

All four secondary participants acknowledged the support from the CEOWA personnel, in particular, their accessibility and timeliness of the support. All four participants appreciated the genuine interest and concern shown to them by CEOWA personnel. Two participants recalled harrowing staffing issues to negotiate in their first two years. They were complimentary of the advice and support they received acknowledging the professionalism, encouragement and specialist advice received from CEOWA personnel. A third participant voiced his appreciation of the support he received in the area of educational leadership. He believed the level of support provided him with current information. He stated: "I find the work done through the CEOWA is done particularly well. The Office distils the information and provides you with the essence... it gives you the chance to get ahead." One participant, whilst acknowledging the support of the CEOWA, did not see the need of the Principal School Advisor [PSA] in her particular context. She stated:

> We need someone touching base regularly. The Principal School Advisor role is not necessarily the answer because my experience hasn't been positive. I requested information from the PSA. I thought that he would find the information for me – but it ended up me doing the ringing around.

Parish relationship

Three of the four secondary metropolitan participants commented on the parish – school relationship. The secondary school typically draws students from a catchment area upwards of 10 to15 parishes. The large number of parishes was perceived a difficulty due to the importance of maintaining a close working relationship with parishes and parish priests. Whilst it was acknowledged by the participants that they have a close relationship with the parishes in close proximity to the school, they

believed that it was difficult to connect with all parishes from where the students were drawn.

 5.6.2.3 Sub question three:

In what ways do newly appointed principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-identity?

Two themes arose from the data collected from the four secondary school participants. The first was to do with the vocational element of leading a Catholic school. The second theme identified the need for reflective practices in the leadership role.

Principalship as a vocation

 The first theme focused on the participants' view of principalship as a vocation. Foundational to this understanding was the faith and educational background of the participants. All participants were brought up as Catholics and educated in the Catholic education system. Three participants had taught only in Catholic schools with the fourth moving into Catholic education after a short stint teaching in public schools. The compelling theme of vocation arose from their collective desire to lead a Catholic school and to serve young people, educating them in a faith based tradition. As one participant commented:

> The whole notion of working in Catholic education is to provide the best teaching and learning environment where God is part of the conversation. We are about immersing our students in an environment, giving them an alternative view of reality; providing them with opportunities to acknowledge God's presence through prayer and liturgy.

Each participant had a strong commitment in providing the students with a quality education that is permeated with a religious dimension. On reflected on this aspect of her principalship and stated: "You can't take God out of the conversation."

Need for reflective practice

The four participants acknowledged that the role of principal can be all consuming and stressful at times. The participants highlighted the need for strategies to refocus and reflect on their work. One participant believed that he had the ability to deal with the demanding nature of the principal's position by leaving the job at the school gate. Another participant acknowledged the importance of not being overburdened by the job. He believed in the importance of self-renewal in faith and in the profession. He stated: "I think that principals need a time for professional renewal leave. You need to stop and then look at what is happening – gather yourself and receive some spiritual nourishment." Table 5.4 provides a summary of key themes emerging for the perceptive three: school type.

Table 5.4

Summary of key themes for perspective three: school type

Theme	Primary school	Secondary school
Technical and managerial skills	Accountability demands Staffing Issues	Demanding pace School size Leadership skills
Culture and personal relationships	Community and parish relationships Collegial network	Collegial relationships Catholic Education Office support
Self identity	Classroom teaching Diversity in the role of principalship	Principalship as a vocation Need for reflective practice

5.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the case study research under three perspectives: gender, school location and school type. The data presented in each perspective, addressed the three sub questions:

1. What technical and managerial skills do newly appointed principals need to acquire?

2. What cultural and personal relationships do newly appointed principals need to develop/ navigate?

3. In what ways do newly appointed principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-identity?

Each sub question focused on a particular research area that sought to examine the skills required by beginning principals to lead their school community. Chapter Six: Discussion of the Research Findings provides an interpretive and analytical discussion of the data. The data presented for each of the three perspectives is analysed alongside relevant literature.