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

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Chapter Seven: Review and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

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. Specifically, four aspirant perceptions were explored by the research: Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance; factors enhancing interest in principalship; factors diminishing interest in principalship; and self-efficacy to commence principalship. The eight aspirants who commenced the program in January 2011 and graduated in December 2012 were the study's participants.

The research was qualitative in nature and used interpretivism, specifically symbolic interactionism, as its theoretical perspective. Collective case study was chosen as the research methodology. Three qualitative, semi-structured interviews (pre-program, mid-program and end-of-program) were the primary instruments used to collect data for the research. Data analysis took the form of the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model of data management and analysis. During the model's data reduction stage, four additional materials were used to triangulate interview transcript data: researcher field notes created during each interview; aspirant journals for each year associated with the program; aspirant leadership vision statements; and cover letters and application forms submitted by aspirants for principalship vacancies. During the data display stage, data were presented in the form of tables and eight, thickly described case study narratives; one for each aspirant involved in the research. When drawing and verifying conclusions from the data, aspirant narratives and data tables were subjected to cross-case analysis using a number of tactics recommended by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014). Tactics included the comparison and contrast of themes and their respective categories with the established body of knowledge presented in the literature review.

This chapter provides a response for each of study's four specific research questions and presents research conclusions. An integrated model of principal preparation is also proposed for the consideration of local, national and international program designers. Implications for the profession together with six

recommendations, three suggested areas of further research and six possible additions to the body of published literature pertaining to principal preparation are tabled. The chapter concludes with an addendum and personal impact statement. An overview of this chapter is provided in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1
Overview of Chapter Seven: Review and Conclusions

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7.2 Section One: Research Questions Answered

7.2.1 Response for specific research question one: Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance.

Before the Aspiring Principals Program, aspirants largely perceived Catholic principalship to be a managerial occupation, dominated by the technical responsibilities associated with the role component, stewardship of resources. For example, aspirants considered school financial management, satisfying systemic accountability requirements and human resource management functions core principalship responsibilities. When discussing the capabilities required for effective performance, aspirants focused on the technical knowledge required of the principal to prudently manage these responsibilities in addition to transformational leadership prowess.

As aspirants participated in and completed the program, they expressed Catholic principalship through five, interrelated role components: Catholic identity; teaching and learning; stewardship of resources (human, environmental, financial and capital resources); community engagement and development; and school improvement. Aspirant articulation of the role components, Catholic identity, stewardship of resources and school improvement were notably thorough and largely reflected the established body of knowledge presented in the literature review. Aspirants also identified three capabilities required for effective performance when leading and managing through each role component: vision and values; knowledge and understanding; and leadership competence. With regard to vision as a capability, aspirants discussed principal capacity to form, communicate and drive achievement of school vision and, in doing so, support the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church. With regard to values, aspirants highlighted the importance of principal capacity to understand and model Gospel values, demonstrated by Jesus, in word and action when leading and managing. Aspirants also referred to principal knowledge and understanding required to effectively lead and manage through the role components, stewardship of resources and school improvement. Finally, aspirants discussed principal leadership competence as a capability. Specifically, aspirants articulated the importance of principal constructive transactional capabilities when managing staff, transformational capabilities when leading the achievement of shared

organisation vision and transcendental capabilities when leading and managing, especially through the role component, school improvement.

However, the research revealed six 'gaps' in aspirant knowledge, suggesting program deficiencies. Firstly, with regard to the role component of Catholic identity, aspirants did not identify the requirement of the principal to nurture the faith dimension of the school community through the provision of opportunities to reflect, pray and participate in sacramental and liturgical celebration. Secondly, when compared with the literature review conducted for the research, aspirant responses indicated a cursory understanding of the role of the principal as educational leader. Thirdly, aspirants inadequately addressed the role of the principal as leader of community engagement and development. Fourthly, aspirants failed to emphasise four vital responsibilities associated with the role component, school improvement. Specifically, aspirants did not stress the importance of the principal promoting the purpose of school improvement to the school community; distributing leadership for the school improvement process to develop the leadership capacity of staff; communicating the outcomes of QCS component-reviews to the school community; and integrating QCS component-review action plans with the school strategic plan. Fifthly, when discussing the capabilities required for effective performance, aspirants focused solely on the knowledge and understanding required to lead and manage stewardship of resources and school improvement, but ignored that pertaining to other role components. Finally, aspirants did not refer to the need for the principal to have strategic planning proficiency, important when 'charting the course' for the achievement of school vision.

When discussing the influences provoking discernible perception changes, aspirants identified three program-related features. Firstly, aspirants attributed improved understanding of role components and requisite capabilities to the program curriculum, especially the explicit study of Leadership Framework domains and capabilities, the QCS Framework and school improvement tool and contemporary leadership theory. Secondly, aspirants discussed the influence of active learning experiences through which they were able to apply program theory and acquire an authentic sense of principalship. Specifically, aspirants nominated school board observation and finance and capital development sub-committee participation as experiences that positively influenced their perceptions of the role component,

stewardship of resources and related capabilities. Aspirants also cited the use of LSI, 360-degree data and coaching sessions for capability improvement as pivotal experiences influencing their perceptions regarding the capabilities required for effective performance. Moreover, aspirants expressed several benefits associated with leading a QCS, school improvement project. These benefits included improved understanding of the role component, school improvement; enhanced appreciation of the capabilities required for effective performance; and the opportunity to apply strategies generated in coaching sessions. Aspirants emphatically endorsed acting principalship or internship as means through which to experience and comprehend role components introduced through the program and test and refine their leadership capabilities. Thirdly, aspirants affirmed the influence of program-developed collegial support networks on their perceptions regarding role components and requisite capabilities. Specifically, aspirants indicated that their perceptions changed over the course of the program as a result of interaction and discussion with their principals, coaches and guest principals invited to host 'Inside Leadership' sessions.

7.2.2 Response for specific research question two: Factors enhancing interest in principalship.

Before the Aspiring Principals Program, aspirants identified two primary factors enhancing their interest in Catholic principalship. The first factor was the opportunity provided by principalship to lead the role component, teaching and learning, especially the development of teaching staff to ensure the holistic development of students. The second factor was a desire to lead the role component, community engagement and development. Specifically, aspirants cited the appeal of the role to build a school community characterised by relationships based on Gospel values; develop partnerships between teaching staff and parents to enhance student educational outcomes; and care for marginalised school community members. Aspirants also cited five other factors enhancing role interest. Specifically, aspirant interest was driven by a desire to: lead the role component, Catholic identity; form a leadership team capable of the prudent stewardship of resources; apply leadership theory studied and advice received from advisors; mentor aspiring female leaders; and learn from the experience of principalship.

As aspirants participated in and completed the program, the most discernible change was the manner in which they expressed their ambitions. Specifically, aspirants conveyed their attraction to principalship through a leadership vision statement developed and refined over the course of the program. Aspirant vision statements reflected a combination of five drivers: desire to develop school Catholic identity; aspiration to lead teaching and learning; drive to lead community engagement and development; motivation to lead school improvement; and ambition to positively influence the lives of school community members through quality leadership.

When discussing discernible perception changes, aspirants highlighted the influence of one active learning experience supported by three program-related features. The active learning experience was the formulation and ongoing refinement of a leadership vision statement. The three supporting program features were: reflection on the program curriculum and related activities; acting principalship or internship; and development of collegial support networks and interaction with network members. Reflection on program theory and related activities coupled with leadership vision statement formulation and refinement assisted aspirants to identify their leadership values and clarify their attraction to principalship. Aspirants also affirmed the importance of acting principalship or internship experiences as means through which to test the veracity of their leadership vision statements and confirm the authenticity of principalship ambitions. Finally, aspirants discussed the benefits associated with the longitudinal sharing of their vision statements with the members of their collegial support networks: program colleagues, their principals and 'Inside Leadership' guest principals. These benefits included the opportunity to assess the efficacy of vision statements and make appropriate refinements, confirm attraction to the role and evaluate the authenticity of principalship ambitions.

7.2.3 Response for specific research question three: Factors diminishing interest in principalship.

Before the Aspiring Principals Program, aspirant perceptions regarding the factors diminishing interest in Catholic principalship focused mainly on the technical responsibilities associated with the role component, stewardship of resources. Specifically, aspirants raised concerns with regard to the requirement of the principal

to manage school finances, resolve legal issues and cope with threats of litigation and adhere to systemic compliance and accountability expectations. Aspirants also cited non-stewardship related disincentives including the detrimental impacts of role intensification; principalship decision-making complexity; and low self-efficacy to commence principalship. Aspirants cited two origins for their perceptions: the 'foreign' nature of these role aspects to their initial training and subsequent experiences of leadership; and daily surveillance of their principals as they struggled with role demands.

As aspirants participated in and completed the program, they reported reduced apprehension with regard to disincentives identified during both the pre-program and mid-program data collection phases. However, at the conclusion of the program, disincentives identified by aspirants were notably personal, the result of five from eight aspirants being appointed as principals with the remainder actively applying for vacancies. For example, aspirants who achieved principalship in country or remote locations cited disincentives associated with the impending loss of personal support networks; separation from existing collegial support networks; and anticipated difficulties establishing new networks in geographically isolated contexts whilst adjusting to the demands of novice principalship.

When discussing the influences provoking discernible perception changes, aspirants identified four program-related features. Firstly, aspirants affirmed that reflection on program theory positively influenced their disincentive perceptions, notably the concept of distributed leadership as a means through which to mitigate the adverse effects of role intensification. Secondly, aspirants cited the benefits associated with two active learning experiences: school board observation and sub-committee participation; and acting principalship or internship. Through these experiences, aspirants were provided with opportunities to experience and manage disincentives such as those emanating from the requirement of the principal to manage school finances, oversee capital development planning and lead the school board. Additionally, through these experiences, aspirants were exposed to the self-efficacy sources of mastery experiences, real-time control of associated physical and emotional states, vicarious experiences and social persuasion. The result of these experiences was re-evaluation of disincentive perceptions and enhanced self-efficacy to commence principalship. Thirdly, aspirants were encouraged by the vicarious

experiences and social persuasion provided by members of their collegial support networks, especially 'Inside Leadership' guest principals. These network members affirmed aspirant capabilities and provided assurances that disincentives were a natural part of the role that could be managed. Aspirants also identified the influence of top-down support networks on their perceptions. Network members comprised CEOWA support staff that facilitated program modules. As aspirants worked with members of their top-down networks, they were not only exposed to specialist knowledge pertinent to Catholic principalship, they were exposed to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Aspirant concerns were further mitigated by assurances provided by CEOWA support staff that they would be available to provide technical advice and support as required during and beyond the novice years of principalship. Fourthly, aspirant application for principalship vacancies toward the conclusion of the program and, for five aspirants, subsequent appointment stimulated fresh, notably personal disincentive perceptions.

The prominence of personal disincentives emanating from aspirant application for principalship vacancies and/or appointment highlights an area of program deficiency. That is, whilst the program appears to have been effective in alleviating aspirant pre-program and mid-program concerns, it does not appropriately prepare aspirants for disincentives associated with the reality of appointment. This is especially the case for aspirants preparing to depart Perth to commence principalship in country and remote areas.

7.2.4 Response for specific research question four: Self-efficacy to commence principalship.

Before the Aspiring Principals Program, aspirant perceptions regarding self-efficacy to commence Catholic principalship were almost evenly split between those with low, moderate and high self-efficacy. Specifically, three aspirants expressed low, two aspirants articulated moderate and three aspirants conveyed high self-efficacy to undertake the role. As aspirants participated in and completed the program, high self-efficacy perceptions were either confirmed or achieved.

Aspirants attributed self-efficacy perception confirmation or changes to the influence of four program-related features. Firstly, aspirants indicated that their self-efficacy perceptions were positively influenced by the program curriculum, notably

program theory that provided an enhanced understanding of Catholic principalship role components and requisite capabilities. Aspirants also confirmed the influence of module facilitators, especially those who provided opportunities to reflect on program theory prior to collegial dialogue. These opportunities allowed aspirants to access and share past mastery experiences with colleagues and, in the course of these conversations, exposed aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion.

Secondly, aspirants highlighted the influence of five program-related active learning experiences on their perceptions, each grounded in one or more of Bandura's (1986) four self-efficacy sources. These active learning experiences were leadership vision statement development and refinement; identification of disincentives and development of mitigation strategies; acting principalship or internship; use of LSI 360-degree data and coaching sessions for capability improvement; and leadership of a QCS school improvement project. In addition to exposure to self-efficacy sources, these learning experiences provided aspirants with multiple opportunities to apply program theory and acquire an authentic experience of principalship.

Thirdly, aspirant self-efficacy perceptions were influenced by interaction and discussion with members of program-developed collegial, top-down and bottom-up support networks. The members of collegial support networks: program colleagues; aspirant principals; coaches; and 'Inside Leadership' guest principals, exposed aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Moreover, as aspirants developed relationships with CEOWA support staff, members of top-down support networks that facilitated program modules, they accessed vicarious experiences and experienced social persuasion. Aspirants also expressed confidence provided by the knowledge that CEOWA support staff would be available to provide real-time advice and support as they transitioned to principalship. Finally, aspirants considered social persuasion received from members of their bottom-up support networks during periods of acting principalship or internship powerful influences on their self-efficacy perceptions. Bottom-up network members comprised staff, students, their parents and carers and members from the broader school community.

Fourthly, aspirants identified 'role competence' as a factor influencing their self-efficacy perceptions. Role competence, a phrase coined by one aspirant, refers to mastery of a current leadership role and the resultant urge to experience the unfamiliar and challenging professional territory offered by principalship. Aspirant perceptions were driven by three factors. Firstly, aspirants had been exposed to years of mastery experiences in the context of their respective leadership roles and control of resultant physical and emotional states. Secondly, aspirants were recipients of social persuasion provided by the members of bottom-up support networks associated with their schools. Thirdly, aspirants benefited from constant exposure to the vicarious experiences of program colleagues in addition to social persuasion generated through formal and informal interactions.

7.3 Research Conclusions

Despite its limitations, the Aspiring Principals Program positively influenced aspirant perceptions regarding Catholic principalship role components and the capabilities required for effective performance. Specifically, most aspirants commenced the program with the perception that principalship was a managerial occupation dominated by technical responsibilities associated with the role component, stewardship of resources. Aspirants completed the program with a more holistic appreciation of principalship, involving leadership and management through five, interrelated role components requiring the application of three broad leadership capabilities. Program deficiencies included an inadequate focus on the principalship role components of teaching and learning, community engagement and development and, to a lesser extent, Catholic identity and school improvement; and the use of the strategic plan to 'chart the course' for the achievement of school vision.

The program assisted aspirants to clarify and articulate their perceptions regarding the factors enhancing interest in Catholic principalship. Specifically, prior to program commencement, aspirants were predominantly attracted to principalship because of the opportunity provided by the role to lead teaching and learning and community engagement and development. At the conclusion of the program aspirants expressed attraction to leadership of the same role components in addition to a desire to lead Catholic identity, school improvement and use their leadership strengths to positively influence the lives of school community members.

The program was effective in assisting aspirants to identify, experience and mitigate pre-program and mid-program perceptions regarding Catholic principalship disincentives. These disincentives included the requirement of the principal to manage school finances, resolve legal issues, cope with threats of litigation, meet systemic compliance and accountability requirements and contend with the detrimental effects of role intensification. However, fresh and notably personal disincentives emanating from aspirant application for principalship vacancies toward the end of the program and, for five aspirants, subsequent appointment highlights an area of program deficiency.

The program proved to be a means through which aspirants confirmed or achieved high self-efficacy to commence Catholic principalship. Prior to the program, three aspirants expressed low self-efficacy, two aspirants expressed moderate self-efficacy and three aspirants expressed high self-efficacy perceptions. By the conclusion of the program, all aspirants expressed high self-efficacy to undertake the role.

Across the four dimensions of the research, aspirants attributed discernible perception changes to the influence of three program-related features. The first feature was a well-facilitated, rigorous, systematic and coherent curriculum based on the Leadership Framework, the QCS Framework and school improvement tool and contemporary leadership theory. The second feature were active learning experiences that provided aspirants with multiple opportunities to apply program theory and, in doing so, acquire an authentic experience of principalship. These experiences also exposed aspirants to one or more of Bandura's (1986) four self-efficacy sources: mastery experiences; control of resultant physical and emotional reactions; vicarious experiences; and social persuasion. Highlighted by aspirants as the most significant active learning experience was acting principalship or internship. Notably, these experiences were not a formal part of the program and generally occurred as aspirant principals undertook leave. The final feature was development of collegial, top-down and bottom-up support networks and interaction with network members. Network members provided aspirants with role-specific knowledge, pledged support during the crucial early years of principalship and served as valuable self-efficacy sources, mainly through the provision of vicarious experiences and social persuasion.

7.4 A Proposed Integrated Model of Principal Preparation

As a result of the conduct of this research, including the study's findings and conclusions, the researcher proposes an integrated model of principal preparation for the consideration of local, national and international designers of principal preparation programs. It is suggested that the model be subjected to research to determine its efficacy. The model is designed for generic use, making it possible for designers of principal preparation programs from any system or sector to make modifications to suit their contexts. The proposed model is illustrated in Figure 7.1.

PROGRAM DESIGN PRINCIPLES
Program convenor
Rigorous entry protocols
360-degree testing/
capability coach-mentoring
Well-planned curriculum
Longitudinal learning
Facilitated program delivery
Active learning experiences
Support network development
Standards-based assessment
and program evaluation

PROGRAM THEORY
Teaching and learning
Stewardship of resources
Community engagement
and development
School improvement
Leadership Capabilities

ENHANCED ASPIRANT SELF-EFFICACY

ACTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES
Leadership vision statement development
Disincentive identification/experience/mitigation
School board participation
School financial management
Capital development planning
School improvement project/capability
improvement strategies
Acting principalship

Figure 7.1: A proposed integrated model of principal preparation

The centre of the model represents the proposed goal of principal preparation programs; enhanced aspirant self-efficacy to commence principalship. This goal is based on the conclusions of a number of scholars who assert that principals with high self-efficacy are calm; tenacious; set and pursue goals with vigour (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005) using a combination of 'expert', 'informational' and 'referent power'(French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1992); and are gifted with the ability to adapt strategies for achievement to suit the needs and conditions present in their schools (McCormick, 2001; Paglis & Green, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005; Wood & Bandura, 1989). To achieve this goal, the model suggests the use of three, interrelated dimensions represented by the remaining pieces: program design principles; program theory; and active learning experiences.

7.4.1 Program design principles.

The model's first piece, program design principles, is comprised of nine recommended 'building blocks' that could be used by designers when planning new or modifying existing principal preparation programs. The first design principle is the use of a convenor to organise the program, direct its delivery, convoke modules and serve as a constant point of reference for aspirants. It is recommended that four criteria be used when selecting a program convenor. Firstly, the convenor must have the capacity to develop positive relationships with aspirants and be willing to act as a timely source of information, advice, support and affirmation. Integral to the relationship-building process is the ability of the convenor to develop an understanding of aspirant workplace contexts and backgrounds including aspirations, challenges and successes. Secondly, the convenor must have the capacity to understand the needs of the governing system or sector and be capable of garnering support for the program including securing ongoing funding. Thirdly, the convenor must be capable of building relationships with practicing principals and, where possible, central office support staff with specialist knowledge pertinent to principalship before recruiting and training them as program facilitators. Finally, the convenor must be a competent facilitator and trainer of adult learning principles and have the capability to organise and effectively oversee the program underpinned by the following eight design principles.

The second design principle is the development and use of rigorous entry protocols. Principal preparation programs have the potential to be expensive ventures that require significant investment of time, resources and energy on behalf of both aspirants and the governing system or sector. Quality programs also have the potential to enhance the leadership capabilities and self-efficacy perceptions of even the most qualified and experienced aspirants. Consequently, it is in the best interests of the governing system or sector to select the highest quality candidates to participate in the program. It is recommended that entry processes be transparent, thorough and effective in discerning between aspirants with the capacity to learn from the experience and those with fixed leadership mindsets.

After recruitment of a program cohort, the third design principle involves the use of 360-degree testing using a credible and research-based psychometric tool to determine aspirant leadership capability strengths and weaknesses. Post-compilation of results, it is recommended that aspirants be provided with regular opportunities over the course of the program to reflect on their profiles and work to amplify identified strengths and minimise weaknesses. To enrich leadership capabilities, it is suggested that aspirants be paired with a trained coach-mentor who is familiar with the system or sector; principalship role components and requisite capabilities; principalship disincentives; and the leadership roles of aspirants. To enhance the effectiveness of the relationship, aspirants should be provided with the opportunity to select their preferred coach-mentor from an available pool. In terms of the conduct of the coach-mentor/aspirant relationship, it is recommended that, wherever possible, a coaching approach be adopted to facilitate learning. This approach is characterised by the collegial development of leadership capability improvement goals based on 360-degree data. Strategies to achieve goals are subsequently devised and enacted through the leadership roles of aspirants before being evaluated and refined. Likewise, strategies for goal achievement should be applied through a range of program-related active learning experiences conducted in aspirant workplaces. A mentoring approach could be adopted in time-critical situations, such as crisis events experienced during periods of acting principalship, where aspirants are required to act quickly to resolve issues. In these situations, it may be appropriate for coach-mentors to provide aspirants with step-by-step instructions. Post-resolution of the issue, however, it is suggested that coach-mentors adopt a coaching approach to

assist aspirants to reflect upon the situation and process resultant learning. At the conclusion of the program, it is recommended that aspirants participate in a second, 360-degree test to highlight the extent of leadership capability improvement.

The fourth design principle involves the use of a well-planned, rigorous, coherent and systematic curriculum. It is recommended that the program curriculum be modularised with content based on relevant national professionals standards, contemporary leadership theory and a well-defined process for school improvement. Linked with curriculum development is the fifth design principle, the longitudinal delivery of program modules (e.g. over one or two years) involving a significant element of face-to-face interaction between aspirants, the program convenor and module facilitators. Face-to face interaction is vital for the development of aspirant support networks and exposure to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion. The sixth design principle focuses on the facilitation of module theory and activities by personnel trained in the use of adult learning principles. A recommended pattern of facilitation for program modules is delivery of theory complimented by the use of images and/or video; provision of opportunities for aspirants to reflect upon their learning using stimulus materials such as case studies and questions; sharing perspectives with fellow aspirants; and whole-group sharing of learning coordinated by the module facilitator.

With regard to program modules addressing theory or practices 'foreign' to the initial training and/or leadership experiences of aspirants, it is suggested that central office support staff with specialist knowledge pertinent to principalship be recruited and trained as facilitators. Module examples include those related to school financial management, capital development planning, human resource management, industrial relations and legal issues. It is also highly recommended that practicing principals be invited to participate in program modules to share their experiences of leadership success, challenge and resultant learning and affirm aspirant leadership strengths. It is suggested that the program convenor recruit and brief a wide variety of principals for these sessions. Principals invited could include novices through to the very experienced; males and females; those with primary and/or secondary school experience; those with backgrounds in single gender and/or co-education schools; and those serving in metropolitan, country and/or remote school contexts.

The seventh design principle is the use of active learning experiences through which aspirants are provided with opportunities to apply program learning and acquire an authentic experience of principalship. Active learning experiences may assist aspirants to understand principalship role components and requisite capabilities; clarify role attraction; test the authenticity of their aspirations; and identify, experience and mitigate disincentives. Perhaps the most important benefit of active learning experiences, however, is their potential to expose aspirants to Bandura's (1986) four self-efficacy sources: mastery experiences; control of resultant physical and emotional reactions; vicarious experiences; and social persuasion. During the conduct of some active learning experiences, it is recommended that coach-mentors be used to assist aspirants to reflect upon and process their learning. Likewise, it is suggested that the program convenor design and facilitate activities within face-to-face theoretical modules that promote the sharing of aspirant learning emanating from these experiences.

The eighth design principle involves the development of aspirant collegial, top-down and bottom-up support networks. Support networks have the potential to enhance aspirant self-efficacy to commence principalship by providing exposure to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Collegial networks may develop as aspirants interact with one another and their principals, coach-mentors and guest principals involved in the program through structured program activities and incidental conversations. Top-down support networks may develop as aspirants and central office support staff, engaged as program facilitators, work with one another in the context of program modules and active learning experiences such as periods of acting principalship. Bottom-up support networks may develop as aspirants engage with staff, students, their parents and carers and members of the broader school community in the context of their current leadership roles and during periods of acting principalship.

The final design principle involves the use of assessment and evaluation. Firstly, standards-based assessment tasks, linked to active learning experiences, should be incorporated into the program. This form of assessment has the potential to add rigour to the program and provide aspirants with opportunities to showcase their learning. With regard to self-efficacy development, standards-based tasks may expose aspirants to mastery experiences, control of resultant physical and emotional

reactions and social persuasion in the form of constructive feedback from the program convenor who assesses tasks. Secondly, the program convenor should ensure that review data is routinely collected from aspirants, their principals, coach-mentors, program facilitators and guest principals to ensure a focus on the continuous evaluation and improvement of program structure, content and activities. Aspirants who know that their program is the subject of serious and continuous review for improvement purposes are more likely to have faith in the program as a tool for leadership development and, as a consequence, develop healthy self-efficacy perceptions. Likewise, review data and improvement actions are likely to convince the governing system or sector that the program is rigorous and worthy of continued investment.

7.4.2 Program theory.

The model's second piece, program theory, offers a possible curriculum structure for principal preparation programs and a method of facilitation. It is recommended that program theory involve a detailed examination of four, interrelated role components through which the principal leads and manages and three capabilities that could be applied when doing so. The four suggested role components are: teaching and learning, stewardship of resources (human, environmental, financial and capital resources), community engagement and development and school improvement. School improvement focuses on enhancement of the quality of all activities, processes and services described through the remaining three role components.

The three suggested capabilities are: vision and values, knowledge and understanding and leadership competence. The capability of vision refers to the intellectual capacity of the principal to understand the vision of the system or sector to which his or her school belongs. Based on these understandings, the principal is required to demonstrate competence when working with staff, students, their parents and carers and members of the broader school community to form, communicate and drive achievement of school vision. The capability of values refers to the ability and willingness of the principal to demonstrate standards when leading and managing. Values modelled by the principal may include a passion for learning, high standards

for self, integrity, ethical behaviour and the promotion of democratic values such as active citizenship and inclusion.

Knowledge and understanding refers to the capacity of the principal to comprehend the responsibilities associated with the four role components identified previously. Implementation of knowledge in a practical way, appropriate for task, forms part of this capability. An example from the role component, teaching and learning is the requirement of the principal to be cognisant of the latest research and legislative developments influencing curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, reporting and student wellbeing (Australian Council for Educational Leaders, 2009; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011; Dinham et al., 2011; Dinham et al., 2013).

Leadership competence refers to the wherewithal of the principal to understand and convert contemporary leadership theory to action when enacting the role on a daily basis. For example, the literature confirms the importance of principal constructive transactional leadership capabilities when managing staff. Constructive transactional capabilities include the ability of the principal to work with staff to clarify expectations, set appropriate goals, suggest strategies for improvement as they work, provide feedback, praise and recognition when warranted and exchange rewards for accomplishments (Avolio, 2010; Lowe et al., 2013; Marzano et al., 2005).

A second example present in the literature is principal transformational capabilities. Such capabilities are considered important when attempting to harness the collective effort of the school community to achieve school vision (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978; Lowe et al., 2013; Walumbwa & Wernsing, 2013). Transformational strategies used by the principal to achieve this aim include the use of individual consideration, intellectual stimulation (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Bass, 1990; Lowe et al., 2013), inspirational motivation and idealised influence (Marzano et al., 2005).

A third example revealed by the literature is principal transcendental leadership capabilities, considered vital for working with people, especially when leading school improvement. These capabilities relate to the capacity of the principal to develop non-hierarchical unity and a reflective, values-centred culture through the

use of genuine, collaborative dialogue (Beckwith, 2011; Cardona, 2000; Gardiner, 2006; Kishore & Nair, 2013; Lavery, 2012; Liu, 2007). The principal as transcendental leader also engages in regular reflective practice, is deeply aware of leadership strengths and weaknesses, is quiet but fully present, open in mind, body and heart, listens unconditionally and models leadership that places service of others before self (Beckwith, 2011; Gardiner, 2006; Kishore & Nair, 2013; Lavery, 2012; Liu, 2007). A final example highlighted by the literature is principal distributed leadership capability. The principal enacts this capability when working with all staff to ascertain leadership capacity and aspirations before providing opportunities appropriate for development (A. Harris, 2008).

As explained in the previous section, program design principles, facilitation of program theory by personnel trained in the use of adult learning principles may enhance aspirant learning and inspire the development of support networks, crucial for the development of healthy self-efficacy perceptions. Specifically, well-trained facilitators use strategies that stimulate reflection and inter-aspirant discussion and, as a result, nurture the development of aspirant collegial support networks. Likewise, practicing principals invited to host sessions during theoretical modules may become members of aspirant collegial support networks as they share their experiences of leadership and resultant learning and affirm aspirant strengths. Collegial interaction between aspirants, module facilitators and guest principals also has the potential to expose aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion.

Further, facilitation of theoretical program modules by central office support staff with specialist knowledge pertinent to principalship has the potential to benefit aspirants in three ways. Firstly, aspirants may be provided with information regarding the principalship deemed 'foreign' to their initial training and/or leadership experiences such as that relating to school financial management. Secondly, aspirant interaction with central office support staff may enhance the development of top-down support networks and provide exposure to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Thirdly, relationships with central office support staff may provide aspirants with a sense of comfort in that they know who to contact for advice and support during the difficult times they will encounter during and beyond their novice principalship years.

7.4.3 Active learning experiences.

The model's final piece comprises seven recommended active learning experiences that may be subjected to standards-based assessment. Through these experiences, aspirants may be provided with opportunities to apply program theory, attain an authentic sense of principalship and develop or confirm high self-efficacy to commence the role. Each of the following experiences is grounded in one or more of Bandura's (1986) four self-efficacy sources: mastery experiences; the control of resultant physical and emotional reactions; vicarious experiences; and social persuasion. These experiences also have the potential to enhance aspirant self-efficacy perceptions by developing collegial, top-down and/or bottom-up support networks. Interaction with network members may also expose aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion.

The first active learning experience is the use of a structured framework through which aspirants reflect upon and discern their leadership values and develop a leadership vision statement that may be used with a variety of audiences including their current and future school communities. A by-product of vision statement development is aspirant clarification regarding the factors enhancing interest in principalship. As the program proceeds, it is recommended that aspirants be provided with opportunities to share their emerging vision statements with their principals, program colleagues, coach-mentors and guest principals involved in the program before making appropriate refinements. Sharing vision statements also has the potential to develop aspirant collegial support networks, important sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion.

The second experience involves structured program activities prompting aspirant reflection regarding principalship disincentives. Such activities could be simple, self-reflection questions such as 'What principalship responsibilities do you find daunting and challenging?' and 'Why did you identify these responsibilities?' As the program proceeds, it is recommended that the program convenor provide aspirants with opportunities to share their perceptions with colleagues, their principals, coach-mentors, central office facilitators of theoretical modules and guest principals. In the context of these discussions, aspirants could also be encouraged by the convenor to explore strategies to mitigate concerns. This learning experience not only has the potential to reduce aspirant anxiety with regard to the challenging

aspects of principalship, it may assist development of collegial and top-down support networks. These networks, as stated previously, represent important sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion.

The third, fourth and fifth experiences involve the inclusion of aspirants on their school boards and, where they exist, board finance and capital development sub-committees for the duration of the program. These three experiences have the potential to provide aspirants with opportunities to develop a comprehensive understanding of aspects of the role component, stewardship of resources including the school board constitution, school financial management and capital development planning. Some aspirants consider these role aspects disincentives and the opportunity to experience them may mitigate concerns. Moreover, these learning experiences may assist aspirants to develop collegial support networks, the result of longitudinal interaction between themselves and their principals, school business managers and board and sub-committee members. Network members may expose aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Moreover, aspirant leadership of initiatives associated with these experiences, such as overseeing the construction of new buildings and facilities, may expose aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of mastery experiences and control of resultant physical and emotional reactions. Finally, these experiences represent opportunities for aspirants to develop bottom-up support networks, valuable sources of social persuasion, as consultation occurs with school community members including students and their parents.

The sixth experience involves aspirants leading a school improvement project in their workplaces. Leadership of the project has the potential to enhance aspirant understanding of the role component, school improvement including the use of the school improvement framework and tool sanctioned by the governing system or sector. If a school improvement framework and tool does not exist, program designers may consider the use of an 'off-the-shelf' product such as the Australian Council for Educational Research national school improvement tool. Leadership of the project also has the potential to expose aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of mastery experiences and control of resultant physical and emotional reactions. Additionally, the project may assist the development of aspirant collegial networks by prompting interaction between aspirants, their principals and members of their

school improvement teams. Bottom-up support networks may also be developed as aspirants form and nurture relationships with school community members involved in the project. Network members represent sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion, important for the development of healthy aspirant self-efficacy perceptions. Finally, there is potential for the school improvement project to double as a means through which aspirants implement, evaluate and refine leadership capability improvement strategies devised during coach-mentor sessions.

The final experience, acting principalship, assumes prime importance because it presents aspirants with an opportunity to apply program theory and the cumulative learning from the previous six experiences. Specifically, acting principalship has the potential to assist aspirants to apply program learning and develop an improved understanding of the role and requisite capabilities; test the veracity of their leadership vision statements and confirm the authenticity of principalship motives; and confront, experience and mitigate disincentives. Where possible, it is recommended that periods of acting principalship be organised in contexts suited to the ambitions of aspirants. Such experiences have the potential to provide aspirants with a realistic experience of the role post-appointment and thoroughly prepare them for the challenges they are likely to face. It is also recommended that coach-mentors work with aspirants during periods of acting principalship to assist role adjustment; provide support; and encourage the application, evaluation and refinement of leadership capability improvement strategies developed during coaching sessions. Acting principalship experiences may also enhance aspirant self-efficacy to commence the role by facilitating exposure to mastery experiences and the control of resultant physical and emotional reactions. Social persuasion received from members of collegial, top-down and bottom-up support networks during these experiences may also positively influence aspirant self-efficacy perceptions.

7.5 Implications and Recommendations for the Profession

The findings and conclusions of this research have implications for the following individuals and groups. Specifically, six recommendations, three areas of further research and six additions to the body of published literature pertaining to principal preparation are proposed.

7.5.1 The Bishops of Western Australia.

7.5.2 Members of the CECWA School Personnel Committee.

7.5.3 Executive Director, Catholic Education in Western Australia.

7.5.4 CEOWA support staff.

7.5.5 CEOWA Learning and Development Consultants.

7.5.6 Western Australian Catholic school principals.

7.5.7 Researchers interested in the field of principal preparation.

7.5.1 The Bishops of Western Australia.

This research has relevance for the Bishops of Western Australia who, ultimately, are the employers of principals in their respective dioceses. The Bishops require their principals to support the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church whilst satisfying the secular educational demands and priorities of the state and federal governments. The findings and conclusions of this research provide the Bishops with insight into the capacity of aspirants, who may ultimately replace existing principals as they vacate their roles, to meet these requirements. It is therefore recommended that a summary of research findings, conclusions and recommendations be forwarded to the Bishops, through the Chair of the CECWA, for their consideration.

7.5.2 Members of the CECWA School Personnel Committee.

This research has implications for the members of the CECWA School Personnel Committee who are responsible for devising succession planning initiatives, including the Aspiring Principals Program, to address the anticipated principal shortage. Specifically, the research highlights the effectiveness of the program as a means through which to create a pool of role-ready, resilient aspirants to replace exiting principals as they retire *en masse* by 2020. Moreover, the implementation of recommended program changes has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of the program. Consequently, it is recommended that a summary of research findings, conclusions and recommendations be forwarded to committee members for their consideration.

7.5.3 Executive Director, Catholic Education in Western Australia.

The research has implications for the Executive Director as the person with delegated responsibility from the Bishops of Western Australia to form, recruit and appraise Catholic school principals. Specifically, the research confirms the effectiveness of the Aspiring Principals Program as a means through which to prepare aspirants for the rigours of Catholic principalship, thereby enabling the Executive Director to meet the Bishops' expectations. The research also offers five insights that warrant his attention and possible action.

Firstly, deficiencies exist with regard to the Leadership Framework for Catholic Schools in Western Australia. The Leadership Framework is a seminal document that informs Western Australian Catholic education leadership programs and the principal selection and appraisal processes. Specifically, when compared with the literature review conducted for this research, the Leadership Framework inadequately articulates the principalship role components of teaching and learning and community engagement and development. Further, there is no mention of the role component, school improvement within the Leadership Framework.

Secondly, a lack of knowledge and/or reluctance on behalf of some principals to distribute leadership translates to a lack of opportunity for aspirants to garner 'on the job' exposure to important role responsibilities such as the management of school finances and the resolution of legal issues. For some aspirants, this situation also creates disincentive perceptions and adversely impacts self-efficacy to commence principalship. Thirdly, a barrier to distributed leadership and aspirant learning is the current structure of most assistant principal roles. Specifically, assistant principals who teach for 80% of a typical week have little time to invest in activities or lead initiatives with potential to assist their formation.

Fourthly, because assistant principals are remunerated at a rate of 80% of their principal's salary and principal salaries are determined by student enrolments, potential exists for some assistant principals to be financially disadvantaged despite promotion to principalship. This is especially the case for assistant principals from large, metropolitan primary schools considering applying for principalship of small country or remote schools. One potential consequence is that talented, well-formed candidates may make a decision not to apply for vacancies. Often, such schools are

those most in need of quality leadership. Further, some aspirants who achieve promotion in these contexts appear to be financially disadvantaged by the costs associated with moving from Perth to country or remote settings to commence principalship.

Finally, the research has revealed the positive influence of acting principalship and internship on aspirant perceptions regarding role components and requisite capabilities, factors enhancing and diminishing interest and self-efficacy to commence principalship. Presently, this vital active learning experience is not part of the program and occurs by chance as aspirant principals undertake leave. Consequently, it is recommended that the Executive Director endorse acting principalship or internship as an integral component of the Aspiring Principals Program. Further, to mitigate aspirant disincentive perceptions emanating from the need to migrate from Perth to country and remote locations to commence principalship, it is recommended that acting principalship opportunities occur in contexts suited to their ambitions.

7.5.4 CEOWA support staff.

The research highlights the positive influence of CEOWA support staff that facilitated program modules on aspirant self-efficacy perceptions. Personnel not only conveyed principal-specific knowledge, they exposed aspirants to vicarious experiences and social persuasion, supported aspirants during periods of acting principalship and pledged the provision of real-time support during and beyond their novice years as principals. It is recommended that support staff be apprised of these findings and encouraged to continue as module facilitators in future iterations of the program.

7.5.5 CEOWA Learning and Development Consultants.

The research exposed six program deficiencies that warrant the attention and action of the CEOWA Learning and Development Consultants currently responsible for Western Australian Catholic education leadership programs. Firstly, with regard to the role component of Catholic identity, the program does not emphasise the importance of the principal providing school community members with opportunities to participate in reflection, prayer and sacramental and liturgical celebration.

Secondly, when compared with the literature review conducted for this study, the program does not adequately address the responsibilities associated with the role component, teaching and learning. Thirdly, the program fails to provide aspirants with a realistic understanding of the role of the principal as leader of community engagement and development. Fourthly, the program does not highlight four vital elements associated with the role component, school improvement. Specifically, the program fails to emphasise the importance of the principal promoting the purpose of school improvement to the school community; distributing leadership for the school improvement process to interested staff as a means through which to develop leadership capacity; communicating the outcomes of QCS component-reviews to the school community; and integrating QCS component-review action plans with the school strategic plan. Fifthly, the program inadequately highlights the importance of principal knowledge and understanding pertinent to leadership and management of role components other than stewardship of resources and school improvement. Finally, the program does not address the principles of strategic planning as a way to 'chart the course' for achievement of school vision. It is recommended that a meeting be convened with CEOWA Learning and Development Consultants to discuss these deficiencies and explore remediation strategies.

7.5.6 Western Australian Catholic school principals.

The research confirms that principals contribute to aspirant formation in both positive and negative ways. Specifically, aspirant perceptions regarding Catholic principalship, especially disincentive perceptions, are influenced by *in situ* observation of their principals as they enact the role on a daily basis. Principals, therefore, must be mindful of their words, actions and reactions. Further, principals are valued members of aspirant collegial support networks who contribute to the formation of healthy self-efficacy perceptions in three ways. Firstly, principals who permit aspirants to lead and manage aspects of the role provide mastery experiences and opportunities to control resultant physical and emotional reactions. Secondly, structured and incidental discussions between aspirants and their principals are opportunities for the provision of vicarious experiences and social persuasion. These discussions also assist aspirants to acquire a deeper understanding of the role and its capabilities, clarify role attraction and develop strategies to mitigate disincentive perceptions. Thirdly, 'Inside Leadership' guest principals who openly share tales of

leadership success, challenge and resultant learning and affirm aspirant leadership capabilities expose aspirants to vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Considering these influences, it is recommended that a summary of research findings and conclusions be forwarded to all Western Australian Catholic principals through their respective associations. As part of this recommendation, it is suggested that the Executive Director encourage principals to support aspirants and consider participation in the program as coach-mentors and/or 'Inside Leadership' hosts.

7.5.7 Researchers interested in the field of principal preparation.

For researchers interested in principal preparation, this study provides a basis for further research. This study could be replicated in systems and/or sectors locally, nationally or internationally. Comparative case studies across systems and sectors may provide a more in-depth understanding of the influence of principal preparation programs on aspirant perceptions regarding role components and requisite capabilities; factors enhancing and diminishing interest in principalship; and self-efficacy to commence principalship. However, in the light of the recommendations of numerous researchers (Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Punch, 2014), it is strongly suggested that researchers read and consider the context of the research presented in Chapter Two prior to making decisions. Alternatively, it may be worthwhile conducting post-doctoral research to explore if, how and why the perceptions of aspirants involved in this study change as they experience principalship during their novice years. To truly ascertain the value of the program as a medium for principal preparation, it may be worthwhile exploring the perceptions of novice principals who participate in the program compared with those who enter the principalship via the traditional apprenticeship pathway.

The research has also revealed six possible, although highly contextualised, additions to the body of published literature pertaining to principal preparation. Firstly, the research suggests a unique relationship between aspirant reflection on program theory, leadership vision statement formulation and capacity to identify and articulate the factors enhancing interest in Catholic principalship. Additionally, aspirants cited two valuable means through which to test the veracity of vision statements and assess the authenticity of their principalship motives. The first

medium was formal and informal discussions with members of collegial support networks, notably aspirant principals, program colleagues and 'Inside Leadership' guest principals. The second medium was acting principalship or internship.

Secondly, financial concerns identified by aspirants as they prepared to move from metropolitan to country settings to commence Catholic principalship represents potential new knowledge for the field. Specifically, several aspirants expressed financial hardship associated with reduced disposable income; the result of having to pay the shortfall between rental income received for their family homes and existing mortgages in addition to the non-subsidised rental costs for accommodation in their new contexts. Likewise, for some aspirants, notably assistant principals from large metropolitan primary schools, financial disadvantage created by the negative difference between their existing salaries and those they would receive as principals of small country schools was revealed as a disincentive.

Thirdly, the research highlighted one aspirant's concerns regarding the withdrawal of her children from an existing metropolitan school before enrolling them in a new school where she would be both parent and novice principal. The potential for her children to be exposed to social unrest and emotional distress as a result of this reality was raised as a concern. This finding represents a potential new principalship disincentive.

Fourthly, the research appears to have confirmed the positive influence of principals, members of collegial support networks, on aspirant self-efficacy to commence principalship. Specifically, structured and incidental discussions between aspirants and their principals and between aspirants and principals invited to host program 'Inside Leadership' sessions exposed aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Further, willingness on behalf of some principals to provide aspirants with opportunities, time and resources to experience the role and lead initiatives exposed aspirants to mastery experiences and control of resultant physical and emotional reactions.

Fifthly, the research focused attention on the positive influence of adult learning principles, used by facilitators of program modules, on aspirant self-efficacy to commence principalship. Specifically, aspirants cited opportunities to reflect upon program theory before engaging in discussion with program colleagues as effective

methods through which to access and share past mastery experiences. In some cases, these discussions also exposed aspirants to the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experiences and social persuasion.

Finally, the research appears to have revealed a relationship between the four aspects of this study. Specifically, high self-efficacy to commence Catholic principalship was confirmed or achieved as aspirants acquired a more comprehensive understanding of the role and its capabilities, clarified the factors enhancing role interest and identified, experienced and developed strategies to mitigate disincentives.

7.6 Conclusion

"Action today can prevent a crisis tomorrow" (Shallenberger, 2014, p. 45). The Western Australian Catholic education system has adopted this mentality with their Aspiring Principals Program that aims to create a pool of role-ready, resilient aspirants to replace existing principals as they transition, *en masse*, to retirement by 2020. The research suggests that the program has the potential to achieve its aim. Nonetheless, the program is not perfect and the research has revealed deficiencies that could be addressed to enhance its effectiveness. Furthermore, the problem created by the looming retirement of existing principals and fewer willing, well-formed aspirants to take their places is not a problem localised to the Western Australian Catholic education system; it is a serious issue nation-wide and internationally. One outcome of the research is a proposed integrated model of principal preparation that could be used by local, national and international designers as they seek to create new or modify existing programs to proactively address this problem.

7.7 Addendum and Personal Impact Statement

The research has already had an impact. The draft thesis has been forwarded to the Executive Director, Catholic Education in Western Australia and a discussion convened regarding research findings; conclusions; the proposed model; implications and recommendations for the profession; and potential additions to the existing body of theory pertaining to principal preparation. As a result of this meeting, the literature review was forwarded to the CEOWA Director, School Improvement for use as a

data source to inform the review and refinement of the Leadership Framework, commencing January 2015. A meeting has also been held between the researcher and his Learning and Development colleagues from the CEOWA School Improvement directorate responsible for leadership programs. At this meeting, program deficiencies identified through the research were tabled and discussed. Consequently, a restructure of the program's theoretical component is underway with the refined version scheduled for implementation at the end of January 2015.

Conducting the research has also positively influenced my capacity as a CEOWA Learning and Development Consultant responsible for the formation and development of leaders at all levels of the Western Australian Catholic education system. The process of proposing a research topic, reviewing relevant literature, formulating research questions, collecting and analysing data, drawing and verifying conclusions and making recommendations has exponentially enhanced my professional capacity. Further, despite my belief in the potential of the Aspiring Principals Program to prepare aspirants for principalship, prior to conducting the research, my observations were anecdotal. The research has confirmed my perceptions. However, of greater importance are research findings, conclusions and recommendations that have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of the program. I look forward to working with my colleagues from the CEOWA to implement these changes to form an even more role-ready, resilient pool of aspirants to meet future demand. I am also excited at the prospect of sharing research findings with fellow local, national and international program designers who share my passion for principal preparation.