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

Debra Sayce

University of Notre Dame Australia
WHAT ARE THE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL NEEDS OF BEGINNING WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS DURING THE FIRST FOUR YEARS OF THEIR APPOINTMENT?

Submitted by

Debra Sayce

Bachelor of Physical Education
Diploma of Education
Post Graduate Diploma of Health Sciences
Graduate Certificate of Religious Studies
Master of Education

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

The University of Notre Dame Australia
2 Mouat St
(P.O. Box 1225)
Fremantle
Western Australia, 6959

June 2014
Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. All research procedures in the thesis received approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame, Australia.

Signed: .............................................. Date: .........................
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my appreciation to the 13 participants in this research. These beginning principals were generous in their time, level of interest and contributions to the study. Their personal stories highlighted their commitment to Catholic education. Their deep sense of vocation was clearly evident in their words and actions. I hope that their voices have been heard.

I would like to acknowledge the interest, encouragement, advice and tangible support that I received from Mr Ron Dullard, the recently retired Director of Catholic Education in Western Australia. I thank Dr Tim McDonald, the current Executive Director of Catholic Education for his interest, encouragement and practical support.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Associate Professor Shane Laverty. I thank Shane most sincerely for his amazing supervisory skills. Shane’s enduring support, guidance, encouragement, unlimited patience, insights, enthusiasm and generosity of time have been significant. My gratitude also extends to the UNDA School of Education, Fremantle Campus. I thank the staff for their interest, encouragement, sense of humour and input to this study.

I thank my parents, Reg and Doreen Sayce. No words can truly express how thankful I am to my parents. Both gave up an enormous amount so that their children can thrive in this amazing country. To my siblings and extended family, I am grateful for their understanding, encouragement and interest in this study. To my husband Patrick and daughter, Rebekah, thank you for your love, inspiration, unconditional support and patience. A family that learns together lives life fully together!
I dedicate this journey of learning to my brother Reginald Francis Sayce. Reg was one of the smartest people I have known – he had a natural curiosity, incredible intelligence, desire to learn and humble approach to life. Whilst he left us too soon, his enduring legacy of learning has been embraced.

This thesis has had the benefit of professional editorial advice from Josephine Smith, Wordsmith WA. This advice was restricted to copyediting and proof reading as covered in Parts D and E of the *Australian standards for editing practice* as specified in the *Guidelines for editing research theses* provided by the Institute of Professional Editors Limited.
Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals in the first four years of their appointment. The role of the Catholic school principal is becoming increasingly complex and demanding as society, schooling and the Catholic Church undergo rapid and unprecedented change. It is imperative that educational authorities redress the impact of the demands and complexities of school principalship in order to better recruit, prepare, and sustain principals. It is therefore timely that the professional and personal needs of beginning Catholic school principals are examined.

The review of literature highlighted four themes, which formed the conceptual framework for this inquiry. These four areas were: beginning principalship which examined the key skills of technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness skills; dimensions of principalship in Western Australia, which included gender, school locality and school type; preparation programs for principalship; and the religious dimension of Catholic school principalship.

The theoretical framework for this study was located within the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research. Specifically, the interpretive lens underpinning this inquiry was that of symbolic interactionism which highlighted the personal perspectives of the participants involved in the research. The methodology used in the research was an instrumental case study design that sought to explore the professional and personal perceptions of beginning principals. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis and researcher field notes were the methods employed for data collection. Miles and Huberman’s (1994) interactive model of data management and analysis was used to
Findings from the inquiry highlighted various concerns and skill deficiencies of beginning principals. Beginning principals identified three key concerns: financial management, people management and community engagement issues. The beginning principals noted the importance of collegial and system support in enabling them to deal with the burgeoning demands of principalship. In addition, the findings and literature suggested that beginning principals need to be self-reflective in order to improve leadership practices. Literature highlighted the need for new leaders to develop resiliency skills to sustain them, particularly when confronted with challenging times. Finally, the findings and the literature emphasised the importance of faith formational activities thus enabling new leaders to thrive in their leadership role as a Catholic school principal.
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Chapter One: The Research Defined

1.1 Introduction to the research

The context in which school education is delivered in Australia is in a state of change (OECD, 2013). There has been the increasing influence of global emphasis on the performance of schools, within and between education systems, between schools, and between countries (Pont, Nusche & Hopkins, 2008). In addressing these various contexts, the Australian Government has brought about a raft of educational reforms in order to improve educational standards and the quality of the schooling experience (Harrington, 2013).

These reforms include the development and implementation of a national curriculum, national testing and national standards for teaching and leading. This reform agenda also has a focus on increasing the autonomy of school principals in leading their school communities. However, this autonomy is accompanied with increasing levels of accountability and high stakes public testing that is affiliated with school funding and school improvement (Harrington, 2013). The increasing levels of accountability are placing considerable demands on the school principal. In responding to the changing nature of school leadership, educational authorities need to redefine and broaden school leaders’ roles and responsibilities. Moreover, there are increasing global concerns that preparation of school leaders to meet the burgeoning demands of contemporary schooling is inadequate (Dempster, Lovett & Fluckiger, 2011). These issues are reflected in the OECD report on school leadership which states: “there is a growing concern that the role of school principal designed for the industrial age has not changed enough to deal with the complex challenges schools are facing in the 21st century” (Pont, Nusche & Hopkins, 2008). The changing nature of school leadership requires
educational authorities to address the recruitment, development and sustainability of school leaders (Mulford, 2003).

The Catholic school principal, in addition to contending with a moving educational landscape, is required to meet the needs of a leader within the educational apostolate for the Catholic Church (Nuzzi, Holter & Frabutt, 2013). The Catholic Church itself is facing a range of challenges in its missionary role. With increasing secularisation and its inherent conflict with gospel values, the once faithful are now questioning religious relevancy in their lives (Rieckhoff, 2014). The Catholic Church is also facing a shifting landscape with decreasing numbers of clergy and religious, low Mass attendance and parish life participation (Pastoral Life Office, 2011) and the impact of institutional sexual abuse within the Church (Sullivan, 2013).

It is within this dual backdrop of increasing accountability demands and challenges within the Catholic Church that the beginning Catholic school principal embarks on his/her leadership role. Beginning principals enter their journey to leadership as classroom teacher, and acquire their educational knowledge, understanding, pedagogical and leadership skills through a range of schooling experiences. The transition from classroom practitioner to school principal is not simply reliant on an accumulation of pedagogical skills over time. The skills required of school principalship range from small-scale classroom, educational and management practices, to large-scale leadership skills that are required to make real a whole school community’s educational goal (Chapman, 2005; La Pointe, Darling-Hammond & Meyerson, 2007). In order for the beginning principal to lead his or her school community with confidence and alacrity, the beginning principal requires considerable support and attention due to the demands
and challenges of the principalship combined with their inexperience in this key leadership role. This research aims to examine the leadership experiences and self-perceptions of beginning Catholic school principals in Western Australia. Central to this research is the belief in the positive influence of quality school principalship on student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008).

1.1.1 Personal statement

The motivation for this research dates back to 2005 when I joined the executive team at the Catholic Education Office in Western Australia in the role of Assistant Director, Religious Education and Faith Formation. In this role, I was given the responsibility of working with beginning principals in the induction program focusing on developing the Catholic identity of schooling. During the course of the programs and subsequent interactions with beginning principals, I heard their many stories of joy and dismay as they journeyed through the first years of their principalship. These interactions drew my attention to the various elements of the principal induction program. I began questioning the program’s usefulness in supporting the ‘new leader’. In my role, I undertook reviews of principals during various stages of their contractual period. Invariably, principals in their first review would talk about their feelings of being under-prepared, overwhelmed and challenged with their role as leader and yet, at the same time, they professed a strong desire to serve in Catholic education as school principal. It was these stories that motivated me to examine the professional and personal needs of beginning principals in order to consider ways the Catholic education system could develop and support its new principals.
1.2 Research participants

Thirteen beginning principals participated in this research into the professional and personal needs of newly appointed principals in Catholic schools. Of the 13 participants, there were seven female and six male participants; nine were primary principals and four were secondary principals; and two were in their second year, ten were in their third year, and one was in their fourth year as principal.

The schools were located across the four dioceses in Western Australia: three participants from the Broome diocese; two in the Geraldton diocese; five from the Archdiocese of Perth; and three from the Bunbury diocese. The schools varied in size: the three primary schools in the Broome diocese had between 40 and 100 students; the primary schools in the Geraldton and Bunbury dioceses had between 90 and 120 students and the four secondary schools had between 800 and 1110 students.

1.3 Identification of the research question

The primary research question sought to explore: What are the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals during the first four years of appointment as principal? In order to address this primary question, three specific research questions were investigated. These were:

1. What technical and managerial skills do beginning principals need to acquire?
2. What cultural and personal relationships do beginning principals need to develop?
3. In what ways do beginning principals integrate the role of principalship with their self-awareness?
1.4 Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to explore the professional and personal needs of newly appointed principals to Catholic schools in Western Australia. Underpinning this purpose is the belief that by understanding the needs of new leaders in both the professional and personal realms, educational authorities can look towards strengthening leadership preparation and ongoing programs in order to support and develop potential leaders and those serving in the role.

1.5 Design of the research

The methodological organisation of this qualitative research utilised an instrumental case study approach. Instrumental case study is the study of one case in order to provide an insight into a particular issue or phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study explored the professional and personal needs of beginning principals. In order to better understand the needs of the beginning principals, three perspectives within the case study were investigated. The three perspectives examined gender issues, school location sites and school types. Data collection methods entailed the use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews, document analysis and researcher generated field notes. An interview guide was used as the basis for the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcriptions were made available to the participants, as a process of member checking (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The documents that were analysed included leadership framework programs for aspirants and principals, Catholic Church documents pertaining to Catholic education, school newsletters and brochures, and policies relating to principalship requirements. Research generated field notes were written during and after the interviews offering additional information to participants’ responses. The data were managed and analysed
using Miles and Huberman’s interactive model (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This model consisted of three main components: data reduction; data display; and drawing and verifying conclusions.

1.6 Significance of the research

The significance of this study into beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals lies in the challenge confronting educational authorities to recruit, support and sustain educational leaders. In identifying the particular professional and personal needs of beginning principals, there is an opportunity to provide appropriate professional support that is specifically designed for new leaders, thus enabling them to do their job well. In addition, the study can offer insight into the professional development, preparation and formation of aspiring principals. It is anticipated that the empirical data collected from the research will highlight appropriate forms of professional development for leaders, and provide opportunities for examining succession planning for leadership not only in Catholic schools, but also other educational systems and sectors.

1.7 Limitations of the research

There were two limitations identified and explored in this research. The first limitation was the perceived power differential of the researcher and the invited participants. The researcher held a senior leadership role in Catholic education in Western Australia. At the time of the study, the researcher was the Assistant Director, Religious Education and Faith Formation. Due to the influential nature of the researcher’s position in Catholic education, participants may have experienced a loss of autonomy and felt inhibited in revealing their true thoughts or experiences during the interview process. To counter-
balance this potential perceived power differential, the researcher made every effort to present herself as a doctoral student when interacting with each participant. She sought to conduct the interviews at the participant’s schools, dressed more as a student rather than a professional visitor, stated that she was on leave from work and indicated that she was conducting the interview on personal time. In addition, she informed the participants that, in her role as Assistant Director of Religious Education and Faith Formation, she would not undertake any principal reviews or formal school visits with those participating in the research.

The second limitation had to do with the number of participants involved in the research. The entire population of 30 beginning Catholic school principals appointed between 2003 – 2007 were invited to participate in the study. Only 13 beginning principals chose to do so. This participant size may be perceived as being low. The number of participants, however, reflected the wider cohort of beginning principals at the time of the research. The participants represented both male and female principals. The participants included the three geolocations of Catholic schools: rural, remote and metropolitan. The participants included both primary and secondary schooling contexts.

**1.8 Definitions**

**1.8.1 Beginning principals**

Beginning principals are in their first four years of their principalship.

**1.8.2 Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia**
The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia [CECWA] has the delegated responsibility from the Bishops of Western Australia to govern Catholic education (Hickey, Bianchini, Saunders, Holohan & Sproxton, 2009).

1.8.3 **Catholic Education Office of Western Australia**

The Catholic Education Office of Western Australia [CEOWA] is considered to be the executive arm of the CECWA, carrying out the operational responsibilities and activities as determined by the CECWA (Hickey, et al., 2009).

1.8.4 **Catholic school principals**

Catholic school principals are employed by the bishop of the diocese and fall under the responsibility of the Director of Catholic Education.

1.8.5 **Catholic schools**

Catholic schools in Western Australia are Catholic educational institutions catering for children from the ages of four to seventeen years old.

1.8.6 **Metropolitan schools**

Metropolitan schools are considered to be located within the major cities in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a).

1.8.7 **Remote schools**

Remote schools in this study are considered to be located between the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia [ARIA] values $5.92 \leq 10.53$ (Australian
For the purposes of this research, these schools are located in the Broome diocese.

1.8.8 Rural schools

Rural schools in this study are considered to be located between the ARIA values $0.2 \leq 5.92$ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a). For the purposes of this research, these schools are located in the Bunbury and Geraldton dioceses.

1.9 Outline of the thesis

The structure of the thesis consists of seven chapters. Table 1.1 provides an overview of this structure.

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1.10 Chapter outlines

Chapter One: The Research Defined introduces the research. It provides a brief introduction to the research background, research participants, primary question and the
three specific research questions that underpinned the study. The chapter also provides
the purpose of the research, a personal statement from the researcher as to her
motivation for conducting the study, and key definitions pertaining to the investigation.
Further, the chapter provides an overview of the research design that includes
methodology, and the significance and limitations of the research. Finally, the chapter
provides a summary of each of the seven chapters of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Context of the Research presents the six dimensions of the context that
underscore this inquiry into the professional and personal needs of beginning principals.
These dimensions are: one, the nature and purpose of Catholic schooling, which
highlights the role of the school in the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church;
two, the governance of Catholic education in Western Australia, including the oversight
of the Bishops of Western Australia by virtue of their canonical responsibilities; three,
the geographical setting of schools in Catholic education, which accentuates the
enormity and diversity of the state; four, the demographic data of Catholic schools in
Western Australia; five, Catholic school principalship in Western Australia which
emphasises the domains of leadership by which the school principal leads; and six, the
background to the three perspectives structuring this inquiry.

Chapter Three: Review of Literature is comprised of four themes that informed this
research into the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian
Catholic school principals. These four themes include: beginning principals; dimensions
of principalship that included gender, school location and school type; preparation for
principalship; and the religious dimension of Catholic school principalship. These four
themes bring into focus the conceptual framework that underpins the inquiry.
Chapter Four: Research Plan maps out the research approach that was utilised to investigate the inquiry. The theoretical framework drew its epistemology from a qualitative foundation, utilising interpretivism as its theoretical perspective. Specifically, the interpretive lens that the inquiry utilised came from a symbolic interactionism perspective, and highlighted the personal perspectives of the participants involved in the research. The methodology employed in the research was an instrumental case study design that sought to explore the perceptions, both professional and personal, of beginning principals. From a potential cohort of 30 beginning principals, 13 volunteered to participate in the research. These 13 participants formed a purposive sample of beginning principals. The method of data collection and management are explained. Issues of trustworthiness are considered and ratified and important ethical considerations for this research are discussed.

Chapter Five: Presentation of Research Findings presents the collected data in terms of the three perspectives of the case study: gender, school locality and school type. Within each perspective, data are presented in order to address the three specific research questions of the research. For each specific research question, the data are analysed with a view to exploring emerging themes within each perspective. Participant perceptions and tabulated summaries of data are then provided.

Chapter Six: Discussion of Research Findings provides an interpretive and analytical discussion of the data presented in Chapter Five. The data presented for each of the three perspectives are analysed alongside relevant literature according to each specific research question. Comparisons are made within each perspective.
Chapter Seven: Review and Conclusions reviews and interprets the results of the research findings in the light of the stated purpose of the inquiry. Following a restatement of the research design each of the three specific research questions is answered. A conclusion to the research is then presented outlining the possible contributions the research makes to the scholarly debate. Lastly, implications for the profession are addressed along with suggestions for further research.
Chapter Two: Context of the Research

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore the professional and personal needs beginning principals to Catholic schools in Western Australia. Underpinning this purpose is the belief that by understanding the professional and personal needs of beginning principals, educational systems and sectors can better recruit, prepare and sustain school principals in their leadership role.

In this chapter, the six dimensions of context contributing to an understanding of the study are reviewed. Dey (1993) suggests that context provides the “lens” that clarifies the conditions in which participants are immersed. That is, Dey argues that one can further understand the meaning presented by participants when the circumstances in which they exist are clarified. Table 2.1 outlines these six dimensions of the research. In particular, these dimensions:

i. Situate the research in the wider goals of Catholic schooling (Nature and purpose of Catholic schooling);

ii. Describe the particular governance structure of the Catholic education system in Western Australia (Governance of Catholic education in Western Australia);

iii. Describe the demographics of Catholic education in Western Australia (Demographic data of Catholic education in Western Australia);

iv. Geographical locations of Catholic schools (Geographical information of Western Australian Catholic schools);
v. Present the professional requirements of principalship in Catholic schooling in Western Australia (Catholic school principalship in Western Australia); and

vi. Place the background to the case study of the research (Backgrounds of the Case Study).

Table 2.1

Six dimensions of the context

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2.2 Dimension one: Nature and purpose of Catholic schooling

The distinctive religious nature of the Catholic school is its role in the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church. The evangelising mission seeks to “proclaim the good news of salvation to all, and through baptism, form people to live as children of God” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 7). The evangelising mission endeavours to transform the human person from within and sets for the person a path that leads to Christian salvation by always defining the person’s reference point that is
“centred on Jesus Christ” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, paras. 29 and 33).

Catholic schools live out a distinctive educational vision (Hansen, 2001). The Congregation for Catholic Education stated:

What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love… it (the school) tries to relate all human culture to the good news of salvation so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the students will gradually come to learn about the world, about life and the human person (1988).

This statement highlighted the importance of the Catholic schooling experience in the integration of faith and life, and faith and culture. Therefore, the purpose of Catholic schooling is to contribute to the development of the young person through education, particularly in the development of his/ her Christian conscience. The experience of a Catholic education seeks to encourage young people to contribute more broadly to the development of the kind of world envisaged by Jesus Christ (Hickey, Bianchini, Saunders, Holohan & Sproxton, 2009, para. 6). All thirteen participants in the case study are beginning principals in Catholic schools.

2.3  **Dimension two: Governance of Catholic education in Western Australia**

Bishops individually lead their dioceses in their episcopal responsibilities. Chief amongst these responsibilities is the oversight of Catholic education (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, cc. 782, 802 and 806). In Western Australia, the four diocesan Bishops, known collectively as the Western Australian Conference of Bishops, have undertaken a joint leadership role for Catholic education. Working in collaboration, each diocesan bishop has articulated his requirements for Catholic education through the *Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2015* (Hickey et al.,
The Western Australian Conference of Bishops had delegated its authority for the running of Catholic education to the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) to “assist them in exercising responsibility for the Catholic schools in their dioceses” (Hickey et al., 2009, para. 105).

The responsibilities underpinning the work of the CECWA are stated in the Terms of Reference of the Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2015 (Hickey et al., 2009). These Terms of Reference are to:

a) Foster the continuous development and improvement of Catholic schools and act on behalf of the Catholic community for the benefit of all Catholic school aged children.

b) Generate official statement policies and also assist individual Bishops with schools in their own diocese.

c) Continue to recognise and make provision for religious institutes that operate Catholic schools in Western Australia and will respect their particular charisms. (Hickey et al., 2009, p. 55)

Uniquely the CECWA has delegated the operation of its function to one Catholic Education Office, which has oversight over all schools in the four dioceses. This governance structure is not common across Australia. Typically every diocese outside of Western Australia has one Catholic Education Office that serves the Catholic schools within the diocese. The Catholic Education Office of Western Australia [CEOWA], regarded as the secretariat of the CECWA, functions to ensure the responsibilities of the CECWA are carried out across the state (Hickey et al., 2009, para.107). To support all dioceses, the CEOWA has one central office in the Archdiocese of Perth and smaller regional offices located in the Broome, Geraldton and Bunbury dioceses. Under the responsibility of the Director of Catholic Education, the CEOWA supports Catholic
schools in their religious and educational endeavours (Hickey et al., 2009). Highlighted within the CEOWA’s function is the requirement to ensure that Catholic school leadership is effective. This function includes proposing suitable applicants for principal appointment to the diocesan Bishop, coordinating appropriate performance reviews of principals, and supporting the professional and religious development of school leaders (Hickey et al., 2009).

2.4 Dimension three: Geographical setting of schools in Catholic education in Western Australia

Western Australia is the largest Australian state. With an area of more than 2,500,000 square kilometres, a 12,500 kilometre coastline and spanning 2,400 kilometre from north to south, it occupies one third of the continent (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2014). There are four Catholic dioceses within Western Australia: Archdiocese of Perth and the dioceses of Broome, Bunbury and Geraldton. Collectively, there are 158 Catholic schools throughout Western Australia. Figure 2.1 illustrates the Catholic diocesan regions and the number of Catholic schools within each diocese (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013).
When describing the geographical location of a Catholic school in Western Australia, the CEOWA utilises the geo-locations identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS provides four categories of geographic location to describe school location: metropolitan, provincial or rural, remote and very remote (ACARA, 2012). Metropolitan locations are deemed as close to the capital city; provincial or rural is determined as an administration division with a state; remote is considered spatially as distant from the capital city of that state or territory; and very remote is an area considered spatially very distant from the capital city. This research utilises the term rural to include Catholic schools designated as provincial, the term remote, to describe
those Catholic schools designated in remote and very remote locations, and metropolitan to describe those schools located in close proximity to the capital city of Perth. Table 2.2 presents the location and number of Catholic schools according to diocese and geolocation (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013).

Table 2.2

*Catholic school location according to dioceses and geo-locations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diocese</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Very remote</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broome</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunbury</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldton</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>99</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>158</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013)

2.5 Dimension four: Demographic data of Catholic education in Western Australia

Catholic education in Western Australia educates over 72 500 students from kindergarten (four year olds) to Year 12 (17 year olds) in 158 schools throughout the State (CECWA, 2013). The type of school includes primary, secondary and composite contexts found throughout all four dioceses. Table 2.3 presents the number of schools according to school type in diocesan regions (CECWA, 2013).
**Table 2.3**

*School type in their diocesan region*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diocese</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Composite</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broome</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunbury</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldton</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>110</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>158</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013)

Catholic education in Western Australia employs over 9000 staff of whom 4,270 are full time equivalent teachers and school principals. With regard to teaching staff, there are 2080 primary school teachers and 2190 secondary teachers (CECWA, 2013). The remaining 4,800 are support staff. With regards to gender of the Catholic school principals and the type of school they lead, data presented indicate that there are twice as many male as female principals. Table 2.4 presents the data on gender and school type with regard to principalship (CECWA, 2013).

**Table 2.4**

*Catholic school principals with regard to gender and type of school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>38 (34%)</td>
<td>74 (66%)</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>8(32%)</td>
<td>17(68%)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>6(29%)</td>
<td>15(71%)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>52(33%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>106(67%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>158</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013)
2.6 Dimension five: Catholic school principalship in Western Australia

The CECWA policy statement on the Appointment of Principals in Diocesan Accountable Schools clearly outlines the requirements for principalship in Catholic schools (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2014). Beginning principals are appointed and reviewed under the leadership framework, which outlines the four domains for leadership. This framework, which is drawn from the Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2015 (Hickey et al., 2009), highlights the professional requirements for leading a Catholic school (CEOWA, 2008). The four domains are: theological leadership; pastoral leadership; curriculum leadership, and administrative leadership (CEOWA, 2008). Each domain has distinct leadership requirements. These are now briefly explained.

Theological leadership incorporates the preservation and growth of the Catholic identity of the school by ensuring the Catholic Church’s mission and vision is embedded with the educational goals. The Catholic school principal needs to ensure that Christian values permeate all aspects of school life. In addition, this domain of leadership requires the principal to be an active witness of faith to the school community.

Pastoral leadership demands that the dignity of the person be preserved at all times and that the principal needs to ensure that all school community members are cared for (CECWA, 1999). The Catholic school principal is required to provide a safe and supportive school environment, and a curriculum, polices and practices based on the Gospels. The pastoral leadership provided by the principal seeks to promote care, respect, value diversity and is centred on the teachings of Jesus Christ (CECWA, 1999).
Curriculum leadership requires the principal to promote the religious, intellectual, social, cultural and physical development of students in all facets of their educational experiences. The curriculum domain of leadership outlines the educational goals as defined by the Church’s mission: integration of faith and life and faith and culture (Hickey et al., 2009, par. 21-24). The integration of faith and life and faith and culture seeks to inculcate a Gospel vision within young people thus enabling them to be disciples of Christ and which requires “making a total commitment to Christ” (Hickey et al., 2009, par. 23). The domain also stipulates the maintenance of standards of educational instruction that is in accordance with the System Agreement of the School Education Act 1999 (Western Australian Government, 1999).

The final domain for Catholic school principalship deals with the procedural aspects of school operations. The Administrative leadership domain requires understanding of policies, legislative requirements, staffing, management issues and financial sustainability. In collaboration with the school board, the principal must ensure the financial viability of the school and meet the accountability requirements established by the CECWA, state and federal governments (CEOWA, 2008).

2.7 Dimension six: Background of the case study

The research sought to identify the professional and personal needs of newly appointed principals and utilised a case study approach that focused on the perspectives of gender, school location and type of school. The first perspective, gender, focused on the distinctive needs of male and female beginning principals with a particular focus on identifying their professional and personal needs. The second perspective, school location, examined the influence of locale on the beginning principal. The three school
locations that the participants were appointed to included 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. The third perspective, type of school, attended to the particularities of schooling type. The three types of schooling that prevail in Catholic education in Western Australia are shown in Table 2.3 above. Whilst leadership of Catholic schools *per se* highlights generic skills and understandings required of the principal, the nuance of school type highlights particular emphasises in leading schools. This perspective sought to determine whether school type influenced the needs of beginning principals.

### 2.8 Summary

Chapter Two provided the six contextual dimensions that contribute to understanding the study. These six dimensions include: nature and purpose of Catholic schooling; governance structures surrounding Catholic education in Western Australia; the demographic data of Catholic education in Western Australia; the geographical setting of schools in Catholic education in Western Australia; requirements of Catholic school principalship in Western Australia; and the background of the three perspectives in which the inquiry investigated.
Chapter Three: Review of Literature

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore the professional and personal needs of newly appointed principals to Catholic schools in Western Australia. It seemed appropriate therefore, to review the literature on beginning principals, dimensions of principalship in Australia, preparation for principalship, and the religious dimension of Catholic school leadership.

In this chapter, literature on beginning principals will concentrate on two main areas, namely a framework of key skills required for principalship and the experiences beginning principals encounter. The key skills that the beginning principals needs to develop are technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness skills (Daresh, 2006a). In addition to the key skills required for effective principalship, literature will be presented on the experiences, challenges and issues beginning principals encounter in the early years (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Daresh, 2006a; Walker & Qian, 2006).

Literature pertaining to dimensions of principalship in Australia focuses on three perspectives, namely gender, locality of the school and school type (Coleman, 2012; Lock, Budgen, Lunay & Oakley, 2012; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Robinson, Bendikson & Hattie, 2013; Wallace & Boylan, 2007; Watterson, 2010). Literature in the area of preparation for principalship explores key elements that enable beginning principals to effectively and confidently establish their leadership within the school community (Su, Gamage & Mininberg, 2003; Walker & Qian, 2006; Wright, Siegrist, Pate, Monetti & Raiford, 2009;). The final component of the literature
The review will present the religious requirements necessary to lead in a Catholic school (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Nuzzi, Holter & Frabutt, 2013; Sharkey, 2007). The outline of the literature review is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

*Outline of the literature review*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-heading</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Conceptual framework</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3 Beginning principals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Implications for the research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.5 Summary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.6 Dimensions of principalship in Australia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.7 Summary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.8 Principal preparation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.9 Summary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.10 Religious dimension of Catholic school principalship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11 Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12 Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Conceptual framework

The interplay between the four themes mentioned in Table 3.1, i.e. beginning principalship, dimensions of principalship in Australia, preparation for principalship and the religious dimension of Catholic school principalship, brings into focus the conceptual framework that underpins the research. The conceptual framework presented
illustrates the components of the literature underpinning the research. These four themes directly influence the subject central to the research: the professional and personal needs of beginning principals. Literature presented on beginning principals draws not only on the professional skills required for principalship, it also highlights the social and self awareness skills that are required by beginning principals in order to effectively lead their schools. Literature on dimensions of principalship in Australia identifies three perspectives, that is, gender issues in school principalship, location of the school, and the type of schooling environment, namely primary and secondary contexts. Literature on the preparation for principalship highlights the skills necessary for successful transition into the role. The final component of the conceptual framework is the religious dimension of Catholic school principalship. Here literature explores the religious nature of Catholic schools and the requirements of the school to lead in a faith based context. The conceptual framework underpinning the literature is presented in Figure 3.1.

![Conceptual framework underpinning the literature on beginning principals](image_url)

**Figure 3.1** Conceptual framework underpinning the literature on beginning principals
3.3 **Beginning principals**

Principals, both in Australia and internationally, have to deal with increasing changes, with higher levels of accountability placed upon them and a reduced time line to implement these changes (Crow, 2006; Darling-Hammond & LaPointe, 2007; Nuzzi et al, 2013; Walker & Qian, 2006). The beginning principal, in dealing with the rapidity of change and new found levels of accountability to the employer and government, is also challenged on a number of other fronts such as dealing with ineffective staff and the isolation of being the leader. Literature on beginning principalship will concentrate on two main areas: the framework of key skills the new principal needs to develop in order to lead in a time of change; and the challenges and issues experienced in the early years in the role (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Daresh, 2006a; Walker & Qian, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

3.3.1 **Framework of key skills**

Daresh (2006a) posits a framework of key skills based on problems identified by researchers investigating needs of beginning principals. Daresh crystallises these skills into three areas: technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills, and self-awareness. These three key skill areas whilst inter-related, place specific demands on the new leader. Each will now be explored.

3.3.1.1 **Technical and managerial skills**

The first key skills area that beginning principals need to address involves technical and managerial skills. These skills broadly cover the management of the operational details that enable a school to function in a clear and orderly manner. These operational details include government and system accountabilities; financial and facilities management;
and educational direction and staffing which includes recruitment, performance management and development (Daresh, 2006a). Nuzzi et al. (2013) stated that “the principal is both the chief executive officer and chief operating officer, ultimately responsible for the formal and informal educational activities of the school” (p. 1). Beginning principals are under constant pressure to account to parents, governments, school boards and staff on all school policies and practices. It requires a managerial style that ensures that schools are seen to be publicly performing in ways that are measurable (Daresh, 2006a; Perry & McWilliam, 2007).

Daresh (2006a) posited three competencies that beginning principals are required to master in this area of managerial leadership. These are organisational, fiscal and political management. Briefly, organisational management ensures that the administrative function of day-to-day operations is carried out efficiently. These include school scheduling, resource and staff allocations and paper work, which must be attended to in a timely fashion and time managed effectively. Fiscal management includes the balancing of school budgets, overseeing capital works and ensuring that facilities are managed appropriately and effectively. Political management is viewed by Daresh as the ability to perceive critical features of the environment, such as political players, special interest groups and awareness of power structures within the school.

Marzano, Walter and McNulty (2005) described the leadership style required to ensure the operational aspect of running a school as transactional. Transactional leadership draws on management practices with a focus on the importance of the procedural nature of schooling. Bush and Glover (2003) cited the work of Leithwood (1999) who contended that the managerial leadership role assumes that the focus of leaders is on
competently carrying out functions, tasks and behaviours enabling the work of others to be facilitated. Beginning principals, in dealing with the operational aspect of running schools, tend to feel typically overwhelmed due to their limited technical expertise and experience as an administrator (Walker & Qian, 2006). Walker and Qian (2006) commented that the beginning principal’s sense of being overwhelmed is caused by the “excessive paper work, high degree of fragmentation and unpredictability, many different unplanned and expected events” (p. 302) that are encountered daily.

Bush, Bell and Middlewood (2010) suggested that the managerial function of the principal’s leadership role is necessary to ensure the smooth operation of the school; however, they also distinguish between educational leadership and management. Bush et al. contended that school principalship needs to be viewed differently, particularly as the role since 2000 has involved increased autonomy, high stakes accountability and a distinct shift from managerial to educational leadership. This view was echoed by others who also recognise the significant influence principals have in classroom practices and student outcomes (Leithwood, Pattern & Jantzi, 2010; Robinson, 2007). The challenge confronting new principals is balancing the demands of the managerial requirements of the role with the educational demands of leading and improving the learning and teaching practices within the school (Hobson, Brown, Ashby, Keys, Sharp & Benefield, 2003; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008).

3.3.1.2 Socialisation skills
The second key skills area that beginning principals need to develop is that of socialisation. Daresh (2006a) suggested that there are two facets implicit in the theme of socialisation. Firstly, socialisation involves those skills that enable beginning principals
to understand, contribute, participate and lead in the local school context. These skills also include engaging the local community to be active in the school and leveraging opportunities to broaden student-learning experiences. These skills entail the successful immersion of the beginning principal into the social mores of the school community. Secondly, socialisation skills support the enculturation of the principal into the professional life of the educational leader. Daresh suggested that a socialisation problem faced by many new principals is to discover the culture of principalship as a career. That is, new principals need “to understand the big picture of how principals are supposed to act, what they are supposed to know, and even what they are supposed to do” (p. 11). Many new principals can become so focused on surviving their first years on the job that they often ignore the importance of exploring what is happening in the professional world outside their school (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

Crow (2006) and Weindling and Dimmock (2006) suggested that the socialisation of beginning principal’s lay within two categories: professional socialisation and organisational socialisation. Crow (2006) described professional socialisation as the knowledge, skills and disposition “to enact the role” (p. 311). Professional socialisation includes learning to be a principal prior to taking up the appointment and acknowledges a beginning principal’s previous personal experience of school life, the modelling received by previous leaders and the mentoring received from experienced principals. Weindling and Dimmock suggested that as one enters into the school environment, one is taught the knowledge, values and behaviours required in that particular school context. Alternatively, organisational socialisation entails learning the values, knowledge and behaviours required to undertake the specific role. Crow described these skills as necessary “to conduct the role” (p. 311). Weindling and Dimmock stated
that organisational socialisation begins when one enters the school environment in which one is to lead. The uniqueness of the school context shapes this type of socialisation. The interactions with school members are significant in the shaping of beginning principals. An example of organisational socialisation is the active support the school board can provide the new principal in understanding the past and potential contributions the school within the broader community. Weindling and Dimmock suggested that in shaping a new professional identity as principal, the individual needs to form “a new sense of status, image and self-worth in the role and in the career; it means establishing values, priorities and what one stands for – an educational platform” (p. 338). The new principal in assuming the leadership role, comes to the awareness that they are the end point for decision making and direction setting for the school community.

3.3.1.3 Self-awareness

The theme of self-awareness explores the integration of the role of principalship *per se* with one’s own self-identity. An essential element in any integration is to identify important personal and professional values before even walking into the principal’s office (Daresh, 2006a). Beginning principals also need to realise that they have moved from a position of subordination to one of being in charge. Their new position often means that they receive signals from colleagues, staff, parents, students and other community members that they are somehow different because they are in charge (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Linked with this change in status is the fact that irrespective of the size of their school, they are ultimately responsible for its effective running (Daresh, 2006a). Furthermore, as beginning principals assume the leadership role of the school community, they need to appreciate that such leadership has an element of
isolation, and hence, loneliness. The need for personal resilience is required to contend with this isolation, tensions of staff interactions and a variety of problems encountered in the leadership role (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Clarke, Wildy and Pepper, 2007).

Research suggests that newly appointed principals need to develop personal efficacy (Daresh & Male, 2000; Fullan, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The demands of principalship are related to one’s sense of self (Daresh & Male, 2000). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) viewed self-efficacy as “a judgement of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads” (p. 573). They suggest that principalship requires a “robust sense of efficacy” (p. 574) in order to overcome challenges to effect change. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis reported that principals with high efficacy regulate personal expectations to correspond to circumstances, usually remaining confident and calm. They added that the principal’s sense of efficacy plays an integral role in meeting the challenges, expectations and demands of the position.

It is within the early years of leading the school that the principal establishes his or her identity as a school leader. Quong (2006) recognised that new principals are not “learner drivers” (p. 377). The beginning principal comes with many years of successful school experience to draw upon. Through valuing and acknowledging these experiences and professionally developing the technical aspects of leadership, the beginning principal’s personal efficacy will be strengthened and affirmed (Daresh & Male, 2000; Sackney & Walker, 2006).
Reflective practice is regarded as a key skill for those beginning their principalship (Hall, 2008). Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) defined reflective practice “as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development” (p. 2). In order to be reflective, Osterman and Kottkamp suggested that the individual needs to come to an understanding of their own behaviour and need to develop a conscious awareness of their own actions. The time taken for reflecting on personal values, ethical stances, and leadership practices assists first time principals as they embark on a “life transforming experience” (Daresh & Male, 2000, p. 99). Daresh and Male (2000) noted that the impact of work on the personal lives of beginning principals is significant and that “isolation, alienation and frustration encountered often mark the work of those who lead” (p. 99). Walker and Qian (2006) and Daresh and Male suggested that timely access to educational authorities and peer support can assist in overcoming challenging circumstances. Daresh and Male also acknowledged the many highlights of leading a school community lead to a sense of pride and satisfaction.

3.3.2 Challenges and issues beginning principals encounter

Newly appointed principals generally follow a developmental career pathway whereby they experience differing levels of responsibility and accountability in various roles (Su et al, 2003; Wright et al., 2009). Typically this pathway in primary education would include classroom teacher, assistant principal and principal. In secondary education the pathway includes classroom teacher, head of learning area or year level coordinator, deputy principal and principal. When a person reaches the position of principal, that person assumes full responsibility for leading the school and full accountability to the
educational employing authority. Whilst this developmental career pathway is typical, there is significant literature surrounding the beginning principal to suggest that these career pathways are inadequate preparation with regards to dealing with the challenges and issues encountered in the early years of principalship (Hobson et al., 2003; Walker & Qian, 2006; Wright et al., 2009). Browne-Ferrigno (2003), however, recognised that the process of becoming a principal commences when the teacher engages in professional learning that requires leadership beyond the classroom. Browne-Ferrigno stated that “such action displays a willingness to take risks, demonstration of self-confidence, and orientation towards change, which are personal qualities of aspiring principals” (p. 494).

Weindling and Dimmock (2006) reported the findings of a 20-year longitudinal study undertaken in the United Kingdom examining perspectives of new principals. Findings from this study suggested a number of challenges encountered by beginning principals. The first is the legacy, practice and style of previous principals. This legacy, depending on the effectiveness of the previous principal, significantly contributed to the culture of the school. Walker and Qian (2006) reiterated this challenge and state that the “ghosts of principals past” (p.301) have an enduring influence on the school Walker and Qian acknowledged that new principals work in the shadow of their predecessors, where teachers endow “the previous principal with saintly virtues ... even though they noted frailties while in the post” (p.301).

Other findings from Weindling and Dimmock’s (2006) study included professional isolation encountered by beginning principals; staffing issues, particularly dealing with ineffective staff; school financial management and oversight of capital development and
maintenance of the school site. Dealing with multiple tasks and time management were further challenges encountered by new principals. Accountabilities to government coupled with curriculum changes and demands added to their list of challenges. Weindling and Dimmock reported that:

The enduring nature of the processes, challenges and ways of socialisation experienced by the beginning principal (are) almost rites of passage into the role. Loneliness and isolation persist... the exacting demands of the role, managing time and priorities and multiple tasks are prominent challenges confronting heads (principals)...” (p. 338)

Ashton and Duncan (2012) and Walker, Anderson, Sackney and Woolf (2003) described the challenges encountered by beginning principals as typically unanticipated experiences and a belief that they are unprepared for the role. The unanticipated experiences include the amount of work and time required to undertake the role. Here, beginning principals found that they lost their sense of autonomy because of the demands for their time. They found it difficult to balance work, social and family life. The unanticipated staff-related issues challenged beginning principals. These issues included dealing with staff conflict and mediation, the complexity of teacher expectations, the direction and organisation that was required by teachers and the assumption by staff that the principal has assumed knowledge, particularly in the area of instruction (Clarke, et al, 2007; Sorenson, 2005). Another challenge for the beginning principal was their belief that they were unprepared in dealing with staff supervision, particularly underperformance of staff (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). Walker et al (2003) reported that unanticipated parent and school board demands also weighed heavily on the beginning principal. Beginning principals had not anticipated the “tensions, angst, energy that parental issues entail” (p.200). The local “polities” of school boards and
their impact on decision-making were reported as an issue the beginning principal needed to understand.

A further issue confronting new leaders is the sense of isolation that is encountered in the role. Fraser and Brock (2006) reported that isolation is experienced in two forms: isolation from family due to the demands of the position and isolation from the staff of the school due to the position. Campbell, La Forge and Taylor (2006) suggested that the principals’ experience of isolation is partially due to the inability to share responsibilities of decision-making and “the tendency to bear the burden of leadership alone” (p. 1). Campbell et al. defined loneliness as the lack of connection to social networks. They cite the work of Herlihy and Herlihy (1980) who suggested that isolation can be described within four ways: isolation from individuals in positions of authority; isolation from those perceived as influential in the organisation; isolation from friends in the organisation; and isolation from respected co-workers. Beginning principal’s feelings of loneliness can impact on their leadership development as they can be isolated from their colleagues and access to professional learning opportunities. Within the school, the demanding nature of the position and the confidentiality required around issues and circumstances can limit the interaction with school and community members. These issues around loneliness and isolation further impact on the beginning principal’s awareness of self. Not being able to clarify or discuss leadership matters limits the new leader’s creative thinking around issues and can limit their confidence (Fraser & Brock, 2006).
3.4. Implications for the research

The research sought to explore the professional and personal needs of beginning principals in Catholic schools in Western Australia. The literature on beginning school principals concentrated on two main areas, namely, framework of key skills required for principalship and the experiences beginning principals encountered. The three specific research questions were devised to elucidate the research question and explore the literature.

The first specific research question sought to identify the technical and managerial skills beginning principals need to acquire. Literature on skills required of beginning principals in the technical and managerial area highlighted the transactional nature of the principal’s role. Principals are required to lead, understand and manage the overall operational elements of school life (Daresh, 2006a; Marzano et al., 2005, Nuzzi et al, 2013; Perry & McWilliam, 2007).

The second specific research question sought to identify the cultural and personal relationships beginning principals needed to develop. Literature identified the need for principals to be contextually and relationally perceptive within the school community and its local environment. The socialisation of the principal, both professionally and organizationally, are essential if they are to enact the role successfully (Crow, 2006; Daresh, 2006a; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

The third specific research question sought to identify the ways beginning principals integrate the role of principalship with their self-awareness. Literature in the area of

3.5 Summary

The review of literature on beginning principals focused on key skills required of the leadership role and the challenges and issues confronting new leaders. The key skills that have been identified are technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness (Daresh, 2006a). The technical and managerial skills encompass the operational requirements of running a school. These skills include meeting accountability demands, financial management, staffing and performance management of school staff and policy implementation. Research suggests that whilst the technical and managerial skills are important and necessary in the efficient and effective operation of the school (Bush et al., 2010), it is imperative that the educational focus is not lost in the administration demands placed on the beginning school principal.

Socialisation skills require the principal to be immersed in both the school community and acculturated into the professional life of principalship. Both requirements seek to develop relationships within the community and at collegial and professional levels.

Literature around round self-awareness identified the importance of new principals accepting their influential role as school leader and demonstrating confidence within the role through their interactions and decision-making (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004; Daresh, 2006b). Self-awareness requires the beginning principal to develop self-efficacy and
resilience to meet the inherent leadership challenges in this position (Clarke, et al., 2007). The final aspect of literature on beginning principals explored the challenges and issues experienced by the new leader. Research identifies that the career pathway to principalship is inadequate (Hobson et al., 2003; Walker & Qian, 2006; Wright et al., 2009). The challenges and issues encountered by beginning principals highlight their unpreparedness and inability to anticipate the demands placed upon them (Walker et al., 2003). The key issues identified include the legacy of their predecessor, meeting accountability demands, financial management, staffing conflict and performance management, time management and the politics underpinning relationships (Clarke, et al, 2007; Sorenson, 2005; Wright et al, 2003).

3.6 Dimensions of principalship in Australia

The school principal’s role is challenged and burdened by the contemporary Australian educational landscape. The plethora of accountability demands at federal, state and local educational jurisdictional level confronts the principal on a daily basis (Crow, 2006; Fullan, 2004; Moller, 2009). School principals are continually balancing the demands of accountability with the core business of school: leading learning and teaching. Further to these demands of commencing the principalship, beginning principals have to deal with not only the newness of the role, but also the context of their new schooling environment. It is worth noting however, that many of the issues which Australian school principals encounter also are experienced by principals outside of Australia (Chapman, 2005; Crow, 2005). This section draws on literature pertaining to three dimensions that impact on the beginning principal within the Australian context: gender, location of schools and type of school. The literature thus provides the
Australian context for exploring the three specific research questions dealing with technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness.

3.6.1 Gender

Strong school leadership is integral to improving the educational outcomes for young people (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011). It is recognised that first-rate principalship is not gender specific (McLay, 2008; Tarica, 2010; Watterson, 2010). There is a plethora of literature on issues of gender and school leadership; however, the literature focuses on challenges confronting women in attaining leadership positions (Brennan, 2004; Derby, 2013; Coleman, 2012; Marczynski & Gates, 2012; McLay, 2008; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009) rather than issues confronting male leadership. Key issues will be presented pertaining to gender and school leadership, in particular challenges around women in leadership. These issues include recent demographic information on school leadership gender composition, barriers to female principalship, leadership pathway progression for females and males, and opportunities to redress the diminished participation of women in the key school leadership role. There would appear, however, to be a paucity of literature on the female experience of leadership as opposed to the commonly presented challenge to attaining the role.

The Staff in Australia’s Schools [SiAS] 2010 Report (McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon & Murphy, 2010) highlighted low numbers of female school principals. The statistics reveal that teaching has a high proportion of women in primary schools (81%) and slightly lower proportion in secondary schools (57%). Further, the proportion of women undertaking school leadership positions in primary schools is 59% with half the number
being principals. In secondary schools 40% of leadership positions belong to women with less than half of these being principal positions. Table 3.2 presents the data revealing proportions of male and female leaders, by school sector and school location.

Table 3.2

_Proportions of male and female leaders by school sector and school location._

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Primary Leaders</th>
<th>Secondary Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School sector</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School location</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon & Murphy, 2010, p. 27).

Table 3.3 presents the percentage of males and females among principals and deputy principals, thus highlighting the significant difference in gender proportions within Australian school leadership positions.
Table 3.3

**Percentage of males and females among Principals and Deputy Principals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Leadership position</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deputy principals</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>All leaders</strong></td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deputy principals</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>All leaders</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon & Murphy, 2010, p. 30)

Research examining the under-representation of female principals in schools suggest that barriers can be considered in two main groupings, namely internal barriers that are within one’s own agency or control and external barriers encompass structural impediment (Coleman, 2012; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Spiller, 2012; Watterson, 2010). Internal barriers include belief in one’s ability to undertake the role of principal. Researchers suggested that women tend to lack the confidence to consider principalship (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Spiller, 2012; Tarica, 2010; Watterston, 2010). Watterston (2010) indicated that women tended to “underestimate their own capacity for the position and tended to have unrealistically high expectations of the levels of skills and experiences needed” (p. 3). Watterston suggested that coupled with the lack of confidence to consider the role is the belief that women do not feel ready to apply. Oplatka and Tamir (2009) noted that “cultural scripts that identify feminine attributes as contributing to ineffective leadership” (p. 217) limit aspirations towards leadership.
These scripts are reinforced by the dominance of males in leadership roles who model underpinning masculine values and management styles. Oplatka and Tamir suggested that women’s lack of aspiration, fear of failure and lack of competiveness and readiness also contribute to these internal barriers inhibiting women from aspiring to leadership positions.

External barriers to principalship include the notion of work-life balance. Spiller (2012) reported that some women limit their career aspiration on the basis that they believe their family life becomes vulnerable to the demanding nature of the principalship and the perceived time required to do the job. The Commonwealth, State and Territories Ministerial Conference on the Status of Women [MINCO] (2004) echoed this belief. The report from MINCO highlighted the significant role women play in the primary care for their families. Coleman (2012) and McLay (2008) reiterated these findings and add that women make choices between their careers and domestic life.

Another external barrier resulting in women’s reluctance to be school principals is the lack of female role models in the position of principalship. McLay (2008), Tarica, (2010) and Spiller (2012) reported that with diminished numbers of current female school principal’s there is a shortage of female role models to inspire women. The lack of female principal role models perpetuates the notion that male dominance in educational leadership roles requires a masculine nature (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009). A lack of female school principals maintains the socialised norm that underpins the assumptions, beliefs and values highlighting men could be and should be principals (Trinidad & Normore, 2005).
Researchers report that men tend to aim towards leadership positions early in their career whilst women tend not to have specific career strategies (Tarica, 2010; Watterston, 2010). McLay (2008) suggested that women “lack career strategies” (p. 360) and tend not to aim for principalship at the beginning of their career. Conversely, men are very specific in planning their careers and “do whatever it takes to get there as soon as possible” (Watterston, 2010, p. 2). Watterston (2010) reported that women tend to wait until they believe that they have acquired all of the necessary skills and knowledge that principalship requires before they apply for principalship. Tarica (2010) also added that women tend to be nominated by their principal before they consider themselves in the role of principal. Tarica states “female principals had only thought about leadership roles when it was suggested by someone else or they had been required to fill in for a short period and found that they enjoyed the role” (p.1).

It is recognised that being an excellent principal is not gender specific (McLay, 2008; Tarica, 2010; Watterston, 2010). However, pathways and career development for men and women leading towards principalship can and need to be differentiated in order for there to be a more “even playing field” (Watterston, 2010, p. 4). Spiller (2012) suggested that there needs to be better opportunities for women to prepare for principalship. She noted that this requires a twofold response. Firstly, there needs to be a personal commitment and preparedness of women to better position themselves for the role and seek opportunities to broaden their skill base to include experiences of leadership and enhanced qualifications. Secondly, support and encouragement should be given to women for career planning and mentoring. Spiller argued that the opportunities for mentoring “open doors to memberships and organisations” (p. 29) that will “demystify” the principal’s role.
Trinidad and Normore (2005) reiterated the importance of mentoring and networking in supporting women’s desire for principalship. They suggested mentoring provides opportunities, experiences and exposure to leadership that “serves to gain visibility” (p. 582) for women. Coleman (2012) highlighted that making professional connections through associations and organisations can be beneficial for women aspirants to principalship in that they come to realise their own abilities and potential. Watterston (2010) suggested that networking with other like-minded women could assist in building confidence, highlight that other women share similar concerns and determine practical ways of dealing with challenges through shared dialogue.

Preparation programs for school principals need to be more targeted and supportive of gender differences (Coleman, 2012; Watterson, 2010). Transition programs into principalship need to assist with the understanding and context of the principal’s role in order to develop leadership strategies. For example, work life balance issues, which are reported to be a major deterrent for women seeking principal appointments, can be addressed and solved (Watterston, 2010).

3.6.2 Location of the school

Australia is regarded as one of the most urbanised countries in the world, with over 69% of the population living in major cities (Baxter, Gray & Hayes, 2011). In Australia, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA] provided four categories of geographic location to describe schools site (Jones, 2004). These four categories are metropolitan (or city), provincial (also termed inner and outer regional), remote and very remote. Metropolitan and provincial locations are considered to be areas in each state or territory within close proximity to
its capital city. Remote and very remote classifications draw upon the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia [ARIA]. The ARIA is an index of remoteness taken from measures of road distance between populated locations and service centres. The road distance measures are used to generate a remoteness score for any location in Australia (Baxter et al., 2011). The ARIA index has values ranging from zero, which defines high level of access to services to 15, which defines high remoteness, with very limited access to core services. The current classification of school locations using the ARIA classification is in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Remoteness areas and ARIA values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARIA values</th>
<th>Remoteness area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 0.2</td>
<td>Major cities in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2 ≤ 2.4</td>
<td>Inner regional Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 ≤ 5.92</td>
<td>Outer regional Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.92 ≤ 10.53</td>
<td>Remote Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.53 +</td>
<td>Very remote Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a)

Baxter et al. (2011) report that 69% of the Australian population live in a major city; 20% live in inner regional; 9% in outer regional; 1.5% live in remote and 0.8% very remote Australia. Baxter et al, also noted that Aboriginal populations have a much greater concentration in the more remote areas. Wallace and Boylan (2007) commented that smaller school populations tended to be located further from large regional centres and cities. Wallace and Boylan suggested that small schools characterise remote and
very remote regions. Typically, beginning principals commence their new role in outer regional, remote and very remote locations (Clarke, Wildy & Pepper, 2007; Ewington, Mulford, Kendall, Edmunds, Kendal & Silins, 2008; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002). Whilst the small size of the school appears to be manageable for the beginning principal, there are significant challenges confronting remote and very remote regions in which the beginning principal needs to navigate (Clarke, et al., 2007; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Starr & White, 2008; Wallace & Boylan).

Challenges facing regional and remote Australia include the economic and social decline of communities. Coupled with extreme weather patterns of flood and drought, many living in rural and remote areas face lowering of living standards, few educational and employment opportunities and poorer health outcomes (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b; Wallace & Boylan, 2010). These challenges are further compounded in very remote locations with high Aboriginal populations. Remote locations are typically characterised by low life expectancy, high mortality rates of Aboriginal children, poor educational outcomes and low employment opportunities (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). Wildy and Clarke (2012) described these challenges as “chronic social and economic disadvantage” (p. 2). The Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2009) states that disadvantage of remote and very remote Aboriginal communities have necessitated the need to ‘close the gap’ (2009). The Australian Government, through its peak intergovernmental council, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), has coined the term “closing the gap” to reflect its strategy to improve the lives of Aboriginal Australians, particularly seeking to improve the lives and futures of Aboriginal children (Council of Australian Governments, 2009).
With regard to specific issues in education, the ABS (2013b) suggested that the key issues concerning regional and remote schooling include low student retention rates, low high school completion rates, and low participation in post-school education and attainment of post-school qualifications. The trend in student results from rural and remote locations from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 reflect the disparity of the socio-economic issues. According to the 2012 NAPLAN data, results indicated that rural and remote schools consistently performed below their metropolitan counterparts (ACARA, 2012). These results reflect the trend since national testing first started in 2008 (Anderson, Davis, Douglas, Lloyd, Niven & Thiele, 2010; Wildy & Clark, 2012). In addition, where there are high Aboriginal student populations, on average, “students experience lower participation, attainment and learning outcomes compared to students in non-remote locations” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011, p. iv).

Other educational issues confronting rural and remote schooling include the recruitment and retention of suitable staff, particularly those with leadership experience. New leaders are also confronted with staff who have had limited training in the use of information and communication technologies for digital educational purposes and staff who are not cognisant and practiced in contemporary pedagogies, cultural and community awareness (Pietsch & Williamson, 2009). Also in rural and remote schooling contexts issues such as student attendance and ageing school facilities are evident (ABS, 2013b; Lock et al, 2012; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009).

The influence of the community on the school, and in particular on the principalship, is an important aspect for the principal to consider. Literature suggests that there are tacit
expectations placed upon the school principal thus requiring the principal to be contextually literate (Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Halsey, 2011; Wallace & Boylan, 2007). Evidence portrays small communities, such as rural and remote areas, as being parochial and conservative by nature and thus requiring a degree of sensitivity by the school principal in understanding community participation and communal responsibilities (Halsey, 2011; Wallace & Boylan, 2007). Halsey (2011) suggested that the high visibility of the school principal in understanding community affairs needs careful consideration. Halsey advised that the demand that can be placed on the principal’s time could over burden the new leader as these demands compete with the burgeoning workload of leading the school. Halsey highlighted the need for the principal to develop strategies to deal with community demands, which include creating boundaries of what the principal should and should not participate in.

3.6.3 School type

Australian society values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008). Successive Australian governments, both state and federal, have endorsed national statements on schooling, setting broad educational priorities. The current statement is the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008). The Declaration strengthens the focus on the developmental years, highlighting early years education, middle years and senior years of schooling including youth transitioning into post school destinations such as work, vocational and tertiary opportunities (ACARA, 2009). The Australian schooling structure is reflective of the developmental progression. Schools consist of primary
education, which educates children from the ages of five to eleven years, and secondary education from twelve to eighteen years of age (ACARA, 2009).

Hattie’s (2009) seminal work on factors influencing student achievement, acknowledges the significant role that the school principal plays in orchestrating school improvement. Hattie stated that instructional leadership provided by the school principal creates the environmental conditions that are optimal for student learning. Hattie suggested that the principal’s high expectations of staff and students provide the foundation for improved learning. In addition, Hattie highlighted the specific dimensions of instructional leadership that have the greatest effect on student outcomes. These dimensions include the participatory action of principals in the professional development of teachers, planning, coordinating and assessing teaching practices; regular classroom visits; strategic resourcing; and establishing goals and expectations.

Robinson, Bendikson and Hattie (2013,) utilising the work of Hattie, defined instructional leadership as both the engagement with classroom teachers about their teaching, known as direct instructional leadership, and the development of the organisational conditions that enable such direct engagement, described as indirect instructional leadership. The differences and similarities of primary and secondary school principalship in light of their key responsibilities in contributing to the role education plays in Australian society are discussed below.

Primary education lays the foundation skills of literacy and numeracy for young people. In addition, primary school teachers assist the child in developing a natural curiosity and love of learning (Australian Primary Principals Association, 2011). Robinson et al.
(2013) suggested that primary school principals provide direct instructional leadership as they are in frequent direct contact with the classroom teacher. Primary school principals tend to be more involved with curriculum delivery and pedagogical oversight. Typically, primary schools are smaller in size and the principal tends to have a more intimate knowledge of what is occurring in each classroom. Smaller primary schools have fewer staff, including limited leadership roles and specialist teachers. The smaller staff size has tended to lead to workload intensification for the principal and his or her staff (Angus, Olney & Ainley, 2007). Principals leading primary schools tend to have limited staff and resources to assist in the administrative area leaving them to do most of the administrative work. Angus et al. (2007) noted that the primary school principal is required to meet the same accountability standards as their secondary school counterpart.

The primary school teacher teaches across all eight learning areas (ACARA, 2009). Angus et al, (2007) reported that there are practical limits to the breadth of specialised curriculum and expertise that regular primary classroom teachers demonstrate. The primary school principal tends to have more generalist knowledge in order to support staff across the breadth of the curriculum.

Secondary schools need to provide students with learning environments that engage diverse interests, learning styles and provide numerous pathways for post schooling destinations (Robinson et al., 2013). In order to meet these varied requirements, the secondary school principal is called upon to provide a broad and all encompassing educational experience for adolescent learners. Hattie (2009) highlighted the importance of the school principal’s role as instructional leader as a significant component to
student achievement. Robinson et al. argued that secondary school principals play more of an indirect instructional leadership role than their primary school counterparts. Robinson et al., highlighted three underpinning areas that define the secondary principal’s instructional role. These are size of the school, departmental organisation and adolescent learners.

The larger the size of the school the more students and therefore more teaching and support staff. By the very nature of the secondary school, the diverse curriculum offerings preparing the adolescent for post school destinations require more elaborate organisational structures. These include layers of leadership roles such as deputy principals, heads of learning areas and middle leaders that oversee student well being, pastoral matters and discipline (Robinson, et al., 2013). Secondary principals tend to delegate key positions within the school’s organisational structure to manage and lead specific curriculum areas and pastoral matters. Departmental organisation requires specialist teachers and heads of department to provide “credible instructional leadership to classroom teachers” (Robinson, et al., 2013, p. 135). The principal’s oversight of subject departments tends to be limited to monitoring of results rather than involvement with instructional practices.

The secondary school principal exercises indirect instructional leadership through areas such as student management, resource allocation and community and external agency relationships, thus providing the context for learning. Robinson et al. (2013) suggested that the role of principal in educating adolescent learners needs to meet multiple educational goals in order to cater for diverse ages, needs and transition to post school destinations. Robinson et al. reported that the secondary school principal’s challenge is
“attaining a whole school focus” (p. 135). They likened the secondary school principal as a conductor of an orchestra, whereby they coordinate the instructional practices in the classroom.

3.7 Summary
This section drew on literature pertaining to the three dimensions highlighted in this research that impact on the beginning principal, that is, gender, school location and school type. Literature on gender predominately addressed the disparity between men and women in leadership positions. The under-representation of women in principalship suggests that there are barriers to women seeking principalship. These barriers have been identified as internal and external (Spiller, 2012; Tarica, 2010; Watterson, 2010). The internal barriers included issues regarding poor self-belief and cultural scripts (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Watterson, 2010). External barriers included the notion that women limit their career aspirations due to the perceived work-life imbalance (Coleman, 2012; McLay, 2008; Spiller, 2012).

Literature addressing the impact of school location on the beginning principal highlighted the challenges of leading in rural communities. Some of the challenges identified in rural and remote communities emphasise the economic and social decline of communities resulting at times in lower living standards, limited educational and employment opportunities and poorer health outcomes (ABS, 2013b; Wallace & Boylan, 2010). The living conditions are further exacerbated in remote communities where conditions are sub-standard resulting in chronic social and economic disadvantage. These poor living conditions have led to governments focusing efforts on closing the health and educational gap of remote Aboriginal communities. The impact
on the location of the school places the beginning principal in challenging circumstances. Rural and remote principals face lower student performance in national literacy and numeracy testing (ACARA, 2012), experience difficulty in finding experienced and suitable staff (Lock et al., 2012; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009) and live in communities that may be parochial and demanding.

The Australian school setting includes both primary and secondary environs for student learning. Primary school principals educate children aged between four and eleven years old. Primary education focuses predominantly in establishing literacy and numeracy skills for the students. Primary schools often have small school staff and student populations enabling the principal to offer more direct instructional leadership. Secondary school principals tend to have large student populations, multi-disciplinary staff and a variety of facilities that cater for a broad curriculum. Secondary schools have multiple layers of leadership positions that engage with a variety of areas, including the curriculum. Secondary principals are considered to be indirect instructional leaders as they have specialist heads of department who are responsible for specialist areas.

3.8 Principal preparation

Since early 2000, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of suitable applicants for principalship within Australia and outside of Australia and an increasing average age of principals (Collins, 2006; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Hargreaves, 2008). Educational systems and authorities are concerned about the impending principal shortages (Bezzina, 2012; Canavan, 2007; Collins, 2006; Cowie & Crawford, 2007). Research has highlighted the need for preparation programs to attract, retain and develop suitable aspirants to take on this significant leadership role (Chapman, 2005;
LaPointe, Darling-Hammond & Meyerson, 2007). Literature on the preparation for principalship will concentrate on two main areas, namely research surrounding the changing nature of preparation programs and the essential elements required to ensure successful transition into the role of school principal. The literature thus provides an understanding of leadership preparation as a backdrop to exploring the three specific research questions dealing with technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness.

3.8.1 Changing nature of preparation programs
The changing nature of principal preparation programs highlights the complexity of leadership skills required for principalship (Clarke, Wildy & Styles, 2011; Huber & Pashiardis, 2008). The complexity and the demand of the principal’s role in current times require significant consideration in the preparation of leaders. Chapman (2005) highlighted the breadth of the school principal’s role where she noted that “those involved in the provision of leadership training need to take into account the diverse nature of the role that includes the conception of the principal as pedagogical, administrative and community leader” (p. 2). Huber and Pashiardis (2008) recognised this diversity. They described this diversity during times of increased accountabilities to government, educational authorities and community combined with increased autonomy to manage change “is a coloured patchwork of many different aspects” (p.179).

Since the 1980s, principal preparation programs have shifted from a managerial emphasis of leadership skill development to one that is more transformational and instructional in nature (Balyer, 2012; Hallinger, 2007; Leithwood & Sleegers, 2006). From an historical perspective, programs tended to focus on a “top-down managerial
roles created around management concepts” (Huber & Pashiardis, 2008, p. 237). Huber and Pashiardis suggested that the managerial aspect of the principal’s role encompasses administrative and organisational tasks. Grogan and Andrews (2002) and Beatty (2008) confirmed this view highlighting that managerial leadership emphasised the functions, tasks and behaviours. Hallinger (2007) noted gradual changes in conceptual models of leadership development programs from a managerial emphasis to that of instructional and transformational models. Hallinger noted “these approaches (instructional and transformational) focus explicitly on educational leadership... they seek to explain the means by which leaders bring about improvement in school conditions and student outcomes” (p. 2). Clarke, Wildy and Styles (2011) reiterated the importance of delineating the managerial training models from the core of principalship that they surmise to be equipping aspirants in the areas of building relationships.

Increasingly, research has highlighted the need for school principals to lead the vision for schooling, innovation and creativity (Huber & Pashiardis, 2008). La Pointe et al. (2007) added to the burgeoning requirements of school principalship by noting that in addition to being educational visionaries, principals need to be organisational change-agents and community builders. More recent times has seen the evolving nature of principal preparation programs focusing on the need to ensure that graduates of such programs have adaptive leadership skills training that address educational trends, policies, changing demographics and political shifts (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Preparation for principalship is regarded as an ongoing process (Chapman, 2005; Crow, Lumby & Pashiardis, 2008; Ribbins, 2008). Crow et al. (2008) explained that learning to be a school leader “is not a one-time event but a career long process” (p. 3). They reported that both the preparation prior to principalship and developing the skills after
being appointed into the school leadership position have different emphases in preparing and supporting principals throughout his/her career.

Principal preparation programs are diverse in nature across countries. This diversity according to Wildy, Clarke and Slater (2007) has attributed to the variety of contexts in which the principalship serves. Wildy et al. argued that differing political, social and professional contexts require tailor-made programs to meet the needs of that particular educational jurisdiction or context. Overall, it appears that principal preparation programs tend to be based along a continuum: apprenticeship style programs at one end and highly organised certificated programs that include placements into school at the other (Anderson, Kleinhenz, Mulford & Gurr, 2008; Su, Gamage & Mininberg, 2003; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Figure 3.2 graphically illustrates the leadership preparation continuum developed by Ylimaki and Jacobson (2013).

![Leadership learning continuum](image)

*Figure 3.2 Leadership learning continuum*

(Adapted from Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013, p. 21)

Researchers reported that countries such as Australia, Britain and China utilise the traditional model of “apprenticeship” as the means for aspirant principal development (Su et al., 2003; Wildy et al., 2007). Future leaders are prepared throughout their educational career by gaining leadership experiences from classroom practitioner to middle management roles to deputy principalship (Su et al., 2003; Wildy et al., 2007). Countries such as Norway, Denmark and Sweden take the “middle ground” in the
leadership continuum (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Ylimaki and Jacobson reported that these Scandinavian countries ensure that school leaders are prepared to deal with managerial aspects of being a leader; however, the programs are not mandatory prerequisites. Ylimaki and Jacobson also noted that formal professional learning occurs after the principal is appointed.

Countries such as Canada and the United States tend to use the model of on-the-job training or internships with formal mandatory preparation programs for leadership preparation. Included in the requirements is a prerequisite Master-degree level of study before being given a licence to become principals. Typically, aspirant principals participate in a one-year internship with a successful and experienced principal. This on-the-job training provides the aspirant with experiences in developing an educational leader’s perspective on school improvement, collaborative problem solving and leading the decision making processes (Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward & Bansom, 2011; Pounder, 2011). Perez et al. (2011) found that the on the job training engaged the aspirants in authentic tasks and increased their confidence in their capacity to deal with the uncertain elements and complexities of principalship.

Some researchers suggested that preparation programs for aspirant leaders have been deficient in equipping principals to deal with the burgeoning demands and challenging contexts of schooling (Beatty, 2008; Chapman, 2005; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Walker, Anderson, Sackney & Woolf, 2003; Wright et al., 2009). Su et al., (2003) suggested that programs which make theory distinct from practice fail in the preparation of aspirants to principalship. They stated: “in making recommendations for improving existing in-service training programs, there needs to be more practical (experiences)
with actual school situations... more nut and bolts of site organisational structure and change and better connections between theory and practice” (p. 54). Wright et al. (2009) reiterated this criticism and added, “the induction or orientation of new principals is not well organised and often non-existent” (p. 2).

3.8.2 Essential elements of principal preparation programs

There has been extensive international commentary on the diverse nature of principal preparation programs and their effectiveness in preparing new leaders for the challenges of school leadership (Clarke, Wildy & Styles, 2011; Kottkamp, 2010; La Pointe et al, 2007; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Chapman (2005) argued that there are foundational approaches in leadership preparation programs: “Quality leadership cannot be assumed or acquired without a coherent, integrated, consequential and systematic approach to leadership development” (p. 1). Research has identified a number of key features that are integral to contemporary principal preparation programs in order to ensure quality educational outcomes are afforded to young people (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, La Pointe & Orr, 2009; Tucker, Young & Koschoreck, 2012; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2012). These features include:

1. A focus on instructional leadership that embrace 21st century learning practices and school improvement as core components.
2. Problem and field-based learning approaches to real issues.
3. Social and professional support from cohort models and networks.
4. Skills in reading the macro and micro political environments of schooling.
5. Recruitment of suitable aspirants who are committed to improved student educational outcomes and continual improvement.

These features will now be briefly explored.
Instructional leadership that embraces 21st century learning practices

Principal preparation programs that enable aspirants to meet the challenges of 21st century schooling better ensure that the young people experience contemporary pedagogical practices thereby improving their post schooling opportunities (Clarke, Wildy & Styles, 2011; Darling-Hammond & LaPointe, 2007; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Grogan and Andrews (2002) identified the need for strong instructional leaders who emphasise curriculum and instruction as the highest priorities. They stated that instructional leaders “create a climate of high expectations for academic achievement and respect for all students” (p. 239). They added, “educational leaders must attend to what is known about learning and to advance professional practice so that both children and adults grow academically and socially” (p. 242).

La Pointe, et al. (2007) stated that preparation programs need to have as a guiding philosophy the concept of the principal as instructional leader. They added that preparation programs needed to focus on the ability to diagnose the learning needs of students and teachers and then plan for professional development in order to differentiate the curriculum to cater for diverse learners. Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) and Ylimaki and Jacobson (2013) added to the discourse of 21st century schooling by suggesting that an important element in leading instruction is the establishment of a professional learning community. Ylimaki and Jacobson described professional learning communities as schools that “possess a collective purpose, share norms and values, de-privatize teaching practices, have high trust and experience transformational leadership” (p. 240).
Problem and field based learning approaches to real issues

Leadership preparation programs need to emphasise the important relationship between theory of leadership and practical experiences. The combination of both theory and practice exemplify leadership in action thus enabling the aspirant to understand the complexities and demands required of principals. A number of researchers suggest that program content with more emphasis on practical skilling with realistic issues and problems greatly assist in equipping aspirants for principalship (La Pointe et al, 2007). La Pointe et al., (2007) and Su et al., (2003) reported “adults learn best when exposed to situations requiring the application of acquired skills, knowledge and problem solving strategies within authentic settings” (p. 8). In addition to catering for adult learning, Chapman (2005) noted, “field based learning guided by leadership practitioners begins initial socialisation, increases role clarification and technical expertise, and develops skills and professional behaviours” (p. 16).

Social and professional support from cohort models and networks;

Research findings in the area of preparation programs for principalship recommend that collaborative skills sharing and peer group problem-solving enhance the leadership attributes of collaboration and capacity building (Chapman, 2005). Wright et al. (2009) found that peer group problem solving and idea sharing are necessary experiences for aspirants, encouraging collaborative skills to be developed. Grogan and Andrews (2002) and La Pointe et al. (2007) reiterated these requirements and commented on the importance of building relationships within cohorts of the preparation program. These researchers suggested that the opportunities for collaborating with peers strengthen the skills of teamwork and mutual support, thus highlighting this important feature for future school leadership teams. La Pointe et al. added that these natural opportunities for
collaboration encourage the exchange of knowledge and collective reflections on leadership development. In addition to working with peers undertaking the leadership preparation program is the professional interaction aspirants have with experienced and successful principals. Researchers highlight the benefit of working with current principals as important modelling and role clarifying opportunities (Chapman, 2005; O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2006; Orr, 2011; Winton & Pollock, 2012).

**Skills in reading the macro and micro political environments of schooling**

Research suggested that principal preparation programs need to assist aspirants in recognising the political roles of principals; the political skills to strategically navigate through demands and policies and understand the principal’s role in influencing pedagogy, governance, relationships and reform (Cheung & Walker, 2006; Crow & Weindling, 2010; Winton & Pollock, 2012; Wright et al. 2009). The micro politics of the school’s life require principals to operate with a political acumen (Winton & Pollock, 2012). Winton and Pollock cite the work of Young, Levin and Wallin (2008) who suggest that “politics, broadly conceived, may be defined as the way each of us, whether individually or working with others, tries to make the kind of school, community, or society we want to have” (p. 41). Winton and Pollock added that politics “involves choices (often conflicts) about how to distribute power, opportunities, wealth and other social goods based on values and the processes used to determine those outcomes” (p. 41). Crow and Weindling (2010), described politics as “power and influence” (p. 138), thus suggesting that if leadership preparation programs ignore the political nature of school principalship, it will “leave the school, its staff, pupils and parents vulnerable to competing social forces” (p. 138). They also recognised that within the school’s micro politics, the influence of the school principal in agenda
setting, negotiating and aligning school personnel to the educational direction of the school are important political activities for instructional improvement and creating professional learning communities (p. 141). Winton and Pollock reiterated that the influence of the school’s micro political culture “affects teaching, learning, relationships and change efforts” (p. 49).

The ability to navigate the politics of schooling requires targeted preparation and learning opportunities. Crow and Weindling (2010) suggested that learning political knowledge and skills from others is foundational in building personal capacity. They viewed mentors and role models as valuable sources for learning and noted that “being deliberate and intentional about the use of mentors and role models who can help new school leaders be critically reflective about their political roles is also important for the effective socialisation of (aspirants) and school leaders” (p. 155).

Recruitment of suitable aspirants who are committed to improved student educational outcomes and continual improvement

Researchers noted the paramount importance of attracting and recruiting quality educators to lead the school who already demonstrate skills focusing on student learning, possess strong commitment to instructional improvement and who are dynamic teachers (Chapman, 2005; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Huber & Pashiardis, 2008; La Pointe et al., 2007; Wildy, Clarke & Slater, 2007). Wright et al. (2009) reiterated this requirement and nuanced their comments by suggesting that educational authorities need to identify, recruit and develop aspirants with proven track records for raising student performance. Early identification and preparation of future leaders is
essential in ensuring a cadre of future leaders is on hand. Canavan (2007) stressed the importance of focused attention on future leaders and their development.

3.9 Summary

Literature points to the importance of principal preparation programs as an essential means of equipping aspiring principals with the skills required to lead a school community (Leithwood, Pattern & Jantzi, 2010; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Pounder, 2011). With the decreasing numbers of suitable applicants for principalship, educational authorities need to focus on attracting, retaining and developing suitable aspirants for principalship. Principal preparation programs have shifted from managerial skilling to leadership skill development. Equipping aspirants to focus on building relationships and lead the school community focuses more on the transformational skills rather than managerial transactional skilling. Vision, creativity and innovation are skills that leadership programs are seeking to develop in leaders of contemporary schooling. In addition, the ability to lead during times of educational change is a core skill required of principals.

The focus of the principal as instructional leader is increasingly being emphasised in leadership preparation programs. Underpinning leadership programs is the matching of the theory of leadership with practice. Problem solving strategies combined with field based learning are considered necessary elements of preparation programs. In addition, preparation programs that are collaborative in nature endow aspirants and new leaders with essential skills for leading a school community. Research strongly suggests that mentoring by experienced and capable principals provides important modelling and role clarification opportunities (Chapman, 2005; Winton & Pollock, 2012).
3.10 Religious dimension of Catholic school principalship

As outlined in Chapter Two, the nature and purpose of Catholic schooling is twofold: its evangelising mission and its contribution to the development of the whole child in the school’s educational context (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, 1997; Hickey, et al., 2009; McLaughlin, 2005). The integration of the religious nature of the school and broader society, whilst essential, brings the Catholic school at times, into conflict with the demands, values and direction placed upon it by governments and educational authorities (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Holter & Frabutt, 2012; McLaughlin, 2005). It is acknowledged in these contemporary times that the Catholic school principal is constantly challenged in managing this tension between accountabilities to government and its rationalisation of education according to the Catholic Church (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Hutton, 2002; Schutloffel, 2012; Sharkey, 2007;). Belmonte and Cranston (2009) commented that:

…in an era when change is evident in the theory and practice of education, in its funding and accountability to governments… the Catholic education ethos is no longer an unquestioned element of school culture. It is contested from within the Church by shifts in the spirituality of its members and especially the tendency of modern youth to reject formal expressions of religion (p. 15).

This tension is compounded by the conflict of the “technological – secular – consumerist culture… and the raison d’être for Catholic education, its Catholic identity” (Schutloffel, 2012, p. 152). The literature thus provides the religious dimension of Catholic school leadership for exploring the three specific research questions dealing with technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness.

In order to lead the Catholic school community, grow its Catholic identity and form young people as Christian men and women, attention needs to be drawn to the religious dimension of leadership required of the principal. The religious dimension of the
Catholic principal’s leadership role requires significant faith-based grounding and knowledge about the Catholic Church’s tradition in order for the principal to carry out his or her duties and responsibilities (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Hansen, 2001; Nuzzi et al., 2013; Sharkey, 2007). Catholic school leaders are required to have public assent to their faith in order to be public witnesses to the environment they lead (Brownbridge, 2009; Sharkey, 2007). Belmonte and Cranston (2009) reported on research undertaken on the religious dimension of the Catholic school principal’s role. They highlighted the “habitus” (p. 202) of the principal’s familial background and personal educational experiences as laying the foundation for a vocational call to Catholic school leadership. Grace (2002) reiterated these findings and posits the belief that Catholic school principalship is strengthened when school leaders are well developed in their spiritual and cultural “capital” (p. 237). Grace argues that maintaining and growing Catholic identity is strongly influenced by the vocational call the principal has from within.

Nuzzi et al. (2013) argued that the Catholic school principal needs to interplay the secular demands required of educational authorities with the religious demands of leading a faith based community. They purported that “the Catholic school principal’s efforts at managing the building and animating instructional leadership are not devoid of spiritual substance; they are precisely the tool one uses in a school to exercise spiritual leadership” (p. 3). Lennan (2005) reiterated this sentiment and added that it is incumbent of Catholic leaders to be “attuned to the contemporary context” (p. 3) in which they are located and ensure their leadership is integrated with an authentic expression of the Catholic tradition.
Belmonte and Cranston (2009), Lennan (2005), McLaughlin (2005), Ranson (2005) and Rieckhoff (2014) portrayed the religious dimension of leadership required of Catholic leaders as undergoing a transformative period. These authors suggested that Catholic leadership is dealing with changing demographics whereby those assenting and practicing their faith are in decline. The challenges of an increasing secularised and pluralistic society have questioned religious relevancy. There are declining numbers of ordained ministers. Families choosing Catholic education for their children have a desire more for a private education than one that is religiously orientated.

Disconnectedness to parish life, results in declining Mass attendance. To deal with these sociological phenomena, Catholic school principals need to be well grounded in their faith and professionally armed to deal with the secular context of principalship. Ranson suggested that Catholic school principals need to “possess administrative capacity, are grounded in faith, possess spiritual maturity, have a vocational sensibility and be very aware of their ecclesial responsibility” (p. 9).

Belmonte and Cranston (2009), Hickey et al. (2009), Rieckhoff (2014) and Robinson and Ciriello (1994), argued that a key factor of the principal’s role is leading and building the faith community. Belmonte and Cranston viewed Catholic principals as both the symbolic and cultural leaders of the school whereby they “transmit the values, attitudes, philosophy and norms of the school” (p.301). Rieckhoff suggested that “school leaders are required to integrate gospel values and Christian social principles in the curriculum… thus integrating Christian values into the curriculum” (p. 29).

An important relationship for the Catholic school principal is with the parish church and community (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Congregation of Catholic Education, 1988;
Hickey et al., 2009). Roman documents highlighted that the pre-eminent place of the propagation of faith is with the family (Paul VI, 1965a) and is to be nourished within the parish (John Paul II, 1979). A number of authors however, acknowledged the challenge between the vision of these statements and the reality of modern, first-world life. Literature on contemporary Australian Catholic life notes diminishing parish participation and the declining number of clergy (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Pastoral Research Office, 2011; Ranson, 2005). In addition, literature reports that whilst Catholic school enrolments in Australia have increased over a ten-year period, there has been an increase in non-Catholic student enrolments and little growth in Catholic enrolments (National Catholic Education Commission, 2012). Ranson (2005) claimed that the Catholic school principal’s religious leadership role is becoming increasingly important in the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church. Ranson stated:

School leadership will, more and more, need to be seen as religious leadership. This will demand persons who are deeply conscious not only of their own vocation for leadership but also highly aware of the vocation of the Catholic school community… and at the same time, of the relative and participative place of the school community in the wider evangelical mission (p. 9).

Ranson acknowledged the importance of the principal and Catholic school community in the role of evangelisation.

Australian research into the parish and Catholic school dynamic highlighted the significant expectations placed on the principal in supporting the parish (Australian Catholic Primary Principal Association [ACPPA], 2005; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Fraser & Brock, 2006). In particular, research has reported that the relationship between the principal and priest is pivotal in ensuring that a balance is maintained with regards to the principal’s workload demands. The research of ACPPA (2005) and Belmonte and Cranston (2009) observed that whilst principals accepted the ministry role within the
parish, the research findings also acknowledged that the consequence of these demands intrude into the personal life and private spirituality of principals. Rieckhoff (2014) highlighted the importance of cultivating the relationship between pastor and principal. She believed that the success of the relationship can support beginning principals in their role as leader of the Catholic school community. Rieckhoff stated, “Pastors are in a position to help new principals understand the prevailing culture and its challenges while providing additional support” (p. 51). In addition, Rieckhoff suggested that the pastor could further assist the new principal by “nurturing the principal’s faith life and faith identity… and be available to discuss with the principal’s opportunities to deepen the faith experiences of the community” (p. 52).

3.11 Summary

The religious dimension of school leadership is integral to the role of Catholic school principal. The Catholic school principal promotes the vision and mission of the school as envisaged by the Catholic Church (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Congregation of Catholic Education, 1988; Hickey, 2009; Ranson, 2005). The leadership required of the Catholic school principal demands a personal assent and public witness to the Catholic tradition and faith. This in turn is modelled through leadership within the school and broader community. In an increasing secularised world marked by pluralism, questioning of religious relevancy, declining numbers of clergy, decline of parish participation and Mass attendance, and an increase in non-Catholic enrolment into Catholic schools, the religious dimension of the principal’s role is more often called upon, thus adding to the complexity of the role. The requisite active participation of the Catholic school principal within the local parish community whilst acknowledged as a foundational relationship (ACPPA, 2005; Congregation of Catholic Education, 1988;
Hickey, et al., 2009), adds increased workload to the already burgeoning requirements. At the same time, the Catholic Church is increasingly looking to the Catholic school and principal for greater participation, support and leadership in its evangelising mission.

3.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, literature was presented to identify the professional and personal needs of beginning principals in Catholic schools in Western Australia. The literature covered the following areas: beginning principals; dimensions of principalship in Western Australia that included gender, school location and school type; preparation of principalship; and the religious dimension of Catholic school principalship. The following chapter presents the research plan that is to be utilised in this inquiry.
Chapter Four: Research Plan

4.1 Introduction

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

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

Overview of Chapter Four: Research Plan

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4.2 Theoretical framework

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

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

4.2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology is an area of philosophy that is concerned with the creation of knowledge that focuses on how we know what we know or what are the most valid ways to reach the truth (Neuman, 2011). Crotty (1998), stated that epistemology “deals with the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis” (p. 8). Epistemology provides a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how one can ensure that the knowledge is both adequate and legitimate. Research methodology rests upon a foundation of epistemological assumptions (Neuman, 2011).

The epistemological approach for this study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is based on an inductive approach that focuses on specific situations or people with an
emphasis on words rather than numbers (Bryman, 2008; Maxwell, 2005). One of the main features of qualitative research is the emphasis on uncovering meanings by participants in a particular social context (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1992). Maxwell (2005) suggested that the term “meanings” should be understood in its broadest sense and includes “… cognition, affect, intentions and anything else that can be encompassed in what qualitative researchers refer to as the participant’s perspective” (p. 22). Through the collection of empirical data that take the form of descriptive rather than numerical information, the researcher unlocks a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) positioned the qualitative researcher into the inquiry. They posited that the researcher “understands that [the] research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity” (p. 3). Schwandt (1998) believed the purpose of the qualitative researcher is to acquire an inside understanding of the participants involved in the research phenomena. Additionally, qualitative research has an “inherent openness and flexibility” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 23) that enables the researcher to uncover new discoveries and relationships through a variety of methods. Qualitative research enables the researcher to better explain the outcomes of actual events (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study concerning beginning principals’ perspectives is well placed within a qualitative research because it explicitly addresses their professional and personal needs. In addition to the abovementioned features of qualitative research, the role of the researcher is an important element in investigating phenomena. Bryman (2008) suggested that the qualitative researcher “seeks close involvement with the people being investigated, so that he or she can genuinely understand the world through
their eyes” (p.394). The research draws on the researcher’s particular background and understanding in Catholic education, thus enabling a deeper insight into the participants’ perspectives and professional needs.

4.2.2 Theoretical perspective

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

The process of understanding or interpreting is differentially represented and projected through the different philosophies of interpretivism (Schwandt, 1998). The term Verstehen or “interpretive understanding” is often used as a central view in describing interpretivism and stemmed from the ideas of the German sociological philosopher, Max Weber. Verstehen gives those observing social activity a method of investigating social phenomena
without distorting his or her social world. According to Marsh et al. (2009), what people do needs to be interpreted “in the light of the meanings, motives and intentions behind their action” (p.118). *Verstehen* sociology, according to Weber (Crotty, 1998), positions the study of society in the context of the actions and interactions of people, or as O’Donoghue (2007) stated, “the researcher is to use research skills to attempt to understand how others understand their world” (p. 10). The interpretivist approach seeks interpretations of the socially based world that are culturally connected and historically situated.

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

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

In adopting a symbolic interactionist perspective, Clarke (2000) suggested that researchers are fundamentally concerned with how individuals “cope with, deal with, handle or manage particular phenomena” within the course of their inquiry (p. 4). Much of the research in symbolic interactionism involves the collection and analysis of naturally
occurring talk between people, as well as textual analysis of written material. Consistent with a symbolic interactional perspective, this study concerning beginning Catholic school principals sought to explore the perspectives of participants as they navigated their first principalship. The data that was collected drew from the personal context of each participant. In keeping with the theoretical perspective of interpretivism and the lens of symbolic interactionism, the methodology chosen for this inquiry is a case study design. The methodology underpinning this inquiry is now discussed.

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Case Study

Case study design is concerned with the “complexity and particular nature of the case in question” (Bryman, 2008, p. 52). Bryman (2008) suggested that case study design “favours qualitative methods such as participant observation and interviewing … because these methods are viewed as particularly helpful in the generation of an intensive, detailed examination of a case” (p. 52). A case study research design was chosen for this inquiry because it is consistent with a symbolic interactionist approach. Yin (2009) argued that the case study approach as a methodology should be considered when the researcher is seeking to “explain some present circumstance such as the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a social phenomenon … and when the questions require an extensive in-depth description (of the phenomena)” (p. 4). In addition, Baxter and Jack (2008) suggested that the case study approach be considered “when you want to uncover contextual conditions because the researcher believes they are relevant to the phenomena under review” (p. 545).
Case study design enables the researcher to gain an understanding on how individuals deal with particular phenomena. The “voice” of the participants in research provides the opportunity of raising awareness of their particular issues in the research setting (Yin, 2009). Methods utilised to collect data such as qualitative interviews are able to capture the complexity of the participants’ experiences, perceptions and thoughts during the research inquiry (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Accordingly, this inquiry into the professional needs of beginning principals is clarified through the research approach of case study, which will now be explained in further detail.

4.3.2 Instrumental case study

Yin (2009) defined case study as a methodology which “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events” (p. 4). Stake (1994) distinguished three types of case study – collective, intrinsic and instrumental. Collective case studies involve exploring multiple cases where the focus is both within and across cases in order to jointly examine a phenomena, population or general condition (Punch, 1998, p. 152). Intrinsic and instrumental case studies are based on research into a specific case, which the researcher wishes to understand better, or which provides insight into a precise issue or refinement of a theory where the case is of secondary interest (Punch, 1998). Baxter and Jack (2008) further differentiate intrinsic and instrumental case study types. They suggest that the purpose of intrinsic case study type is to understand “its particularity and ordinariness” (p.548). Instrumental case studies on the other hand, seek to provide further insight into the case rather than understand a particular situation. Baxter and Jack utilise Stake’s initial work on instrumental case studies and suggest that:
the case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, and because it helps the researcher pursue the external interest. (p.549)

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

Underpinning the methodological structure of instrumental case study is the rationale for choosing the case study approach. In this instance, the inquiry was organised around a “snapshot” (Rose, 1991) of the phenomena. Berg (2007) described the “snapshot case study as a detailed and objective study of one research entity at one point in time” (p. 293). The snapshot case study involved research into three perspectives of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals. These were gender issues relating to male and female beginning school principals; the locality of the schooling experience, that is, remote, rural and metropolitan; and the school, specifically, primary or secondary. The issue of gender in this research presented an opportunity to examine gender differences amongst beginning principals in Western Australian Catholic schools in this research. Of particular interest were the various life situations of each participant and the respective impacts on their principalship. The diverse regions where Catholic schools are found provided an opportunity to study the influences of location on the new leaders principalship. The metropolitan region encompasses schools within the Archdiocese of Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. The country region comprises of schools within the dioceses of Bunbury, 250 kilometers south of Perth, and Geraldton, 400 kilometers north of Perth. The remote region involved schools within the Broome diocese, between 2,000 kilometers north
of Perth. Each of these regions provided beginning principals with a particular set of challenges. The type of school explored within this research included primary schools (ages four to 12 year olds) and secondary schools (ages 13 to 17 year olds). Both school types generate their own issues for beginning principals.

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

A second criticism of the case study approach concerns the subjectivity of the researcher. Burns (2000) suggested that case study design, since it is highly subjective and interpretative in nature, can be dismissed as impure methodology, value-laden and questionable. However, Yin (2009), noted that case study researchers can immerse themselves in understanding subjective phenomena and can form close relationships with
their research participants. Yin recognised that bias can enter into the conduct of a variety of experiments and contends that this occurs more frequently in case studies. To counter this challenge, it is necessary for the researcher to report on the collected data fairly and without prejudice. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) contended that “member checks” are useful in verifying interpretations of the collected data (p. 63). Member checks involve the participants approving the accuracy of their data by checking its content. Stake (1994) highlighted the important value of the researchers’ intrinsic interest by stating, “the more the researcher has intrinsic interest in the case, the more focus of study will usually be on the case’s uniqueness, particular context, issues and story” (p. 243). With regards to this study, the researcher has clearly defined her motivations and bias in Chapter One and provided member checks for all participants.

A third criticism about case studies is that the methodology is time consuming and can result in a large volume of collected information (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yin, 2009). In light of this criticism, Guba and Lincoln (1994) attested that this large volume of information is rich in data and thick in description. Inherent with the amassed information is the potential tendency of the researcher to be biased and selective of the data (Yin, 2009). To avoid this tendency, Burns (2000) suggested that the researcher choose a manageable topic, specify succinctly the initial proposition, identify the essential interviewees and observational settings and analyse the data once it is collected. The following steps outline how the researcher will address the criticism highlighted of case study methodology. With regard to this particular research, the topic was clearly stated and so highlighting the intention of the study. The case study was a “snapshot” (Rose, 1991) examination, rather
than a longitudinal study. The participants self-identified according to their interest and desire to contribute to this study. Interviews were for one-hour time periods undertaken at each participant’s school site or a venue of their choice. The interviews were focused on eliciting the research topic questions, and the data was analysed shortly after they were collected. The fourth and fifth criticisms are concerned with research quality and methodological rigour respectively. Both criticisms will be addressed in the section 4.6.

4.4 Method

In this research, three data collection methods were employed. The first includes document search focused on the principalship in Catholic education in Western Australia; the second utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews with beginning principals; and the third included field notes recorded by the researcher. These three methods of data collection will now be discussed.

4.4.1 Documentary search

Punch (1998) described documents as a “rich source of data for social research” (p. 191). When combined with interviews and observations, documentary sources of data provide important means of triangulation (Punch, 1998). Neuman (2011) suggests that by triangulating, our learning increases as we observe a phenomenon from multiple perspectives rather than from a single perspective. Shenton (2004) recommended the use of supporting data obtained from documents that “provide a background to and help explain the attitudes and behaviours of those in the group under scrutiny” (p. 66). In addition to supporting data, Shenton suggests that any documents referred to by informants during the
course of the interview can “shed more light on the behaviour of the people in question” (p. 66). In this study examples of documents included:

- Key documents that define Catholic education in Western Australia such as the Mandate Letter from the Bishops of Western Australia 2009 - 2015 (Hickey et al., 2009).
- CEOWA Leadership Framework (Appendix A).
- Catholic Education Commission of Western Australian policies related to the appointment process for principalship, including application forms for principalship (CECWA, 2014).
- Documents related to leadership programs that sought to develop aspirants and principals.
- Catholic Church documents relating to Catholic education.
- Local school publications that provide information relating to the context of the school to which the participants belong.

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

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Central to interpretivism is understanding people from their own frame of reference and perceived reality (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It is necessary, therefore, that the research plan aligns the methods of data collection with what people actually say and do. By examining transcriptions of interviews and listening to participants discussing concerns in their professional environment, the researcher can obtain first hand information on the research topic. What the participants report and how they interact in their unique setting, captures
how they perceive their reality (Taylor & Bogdan). In a similar vein, Bryman added: “the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events, that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns and forms of behaviour” (p. 438). This research utilised single semi-structured in-depth interviews as a primary source of data collection to gain the participants’ view on their leadership experiences as beginning principals.

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

It is also important that in the development of the interview guide, the proposed questions are tested prior to the interviews. Bryman (2008), Hennick, et al. (2011) and Maxwell (2005) advocated the use of piloting the interview guide as a process of determining if the
guide questions work as intended and to assist in revisions as necessary. This process also enhances the trustworthiness of the collected data. In this inquiry, the researcher piloted the interview guide with an experienced, current primary school principal and two university academics with extensive secondary school leadership experience. Within the three pilots, all participants had experienced leadership roles in rural, remote and metropolitan schooling localities. Through the piloting process of the interview guide, the feedback provided the researcher the opportunity to further clarify the questions, thus ensuring the questions were appropriate, clear and suitable to the research. A second pilot was undertaken with the modified questions that further refined the questions. The final refined interview guide was the one used with the participants. Appendix B provides the specific question that formed the interview guide. The interview guide questions that were developed were drawn from the three specific research questions. Table 4.2 highlighted the relationship between the specific research questions and the explicit interview guide questions.

Table 4.2
*Linking of specific research questions to the interview guide*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Guide Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SRQ 1 What technical and managerial skills do beginning principals need to acquire?</td>
<td>4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRQ 2 What cultural and personal relationships do beginning principals need to develop?</td>
<td>7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRQ 3 In what ways do beginning principals integrate the role</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The initial contact with the beginning principals was made in the form of a letter that included the following information (Appendix E):

- outline of the research
- an invitation and encouragement to become involved in the study
- the significance of their potential contribution
- approval from Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame Australia
- approval from the Director of Catholic Education to conduct the research in Catholic schools;
- the right of withdrawal at any stage
- a stamped addressed envelope for returning their signed consent.

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

The length of the interview was between 45 and 60 minutes. The majority of the interviews undertaken in this research were conducted in the participants’ work place, thus ensuring a more genial atmosphere that was less disruptive for the principal. As the researcher’s position was within the Executive of the CEOWA, a sincere attempt was made to promote
her as a student of the university undertaking a research study by dressing less formally and informing the participant that she was on leave from work. Two remote school principals were visiting Perth and decided that it was convenient for them to be interviewed in the researcher’s work place. With the permission of the participants, each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Bryman (2008) recommended that the procedure of recording and transcribing interviews is advantageous in that it ensures the accuracy of the data collection and allows a thorough examination of what people say (p. 451). Transcriptions were made available to the interviewees, thus allowing verification of the information provided and clarification of any moot points. Member checking, as this method is termed, is a necessary component of qualitative research adding to the credibility of the data (Bryman, 2008; Stake, 2010).

4.4.3 Field notes

Collecting data in the research site, or “field”, is an “orientation toward doing social research” rather than a particular research technique (Neuman, 2011, p. 425). There is an array of techniques to data collection in the field. In this research, recorded interviews, field notes and direct observation notes were utilised. At the commencement of the interview, and prior to turning on the recorder, the researcher explained to the participant how information would be recorded. This included the electronic recording of the interview and hand written notes during the course of the interview. The field notes taken during the recorded interviews contained observations of the participant’s work office, demeanour of the participant and other elements noticed by the researcher before, during and after the interview. Neuman (2011) suggested that “jotted notes” are short memory triggers such as
words or phrases for the researcher to enhance the “direct observation notes”. Neuman comments that direct observational notes serve as a “detailed description of what you heard and saw in very concrete, specific terms” (p. 429).

4.5 Research participants

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

No attempt was made to ascertain why the other 17 beginning principals did not volunteer. The researcher felt any follow up contact would be intrusive on their decision and might contribute to a perceived power differential, particularly given the researcher’s leadership position in Catholic education. Grbich (2007) and Stangor (2010) highlighted the issue of power differential between the researcher and research participant. According to these authors, the relationship between the researcher and research participant is thought of as
one of unequal power. Stangor reports that “the differential occurs because the researcher has a higher status than the participants” (p. 51). To diminish the perceived power difference, Stangor makes two suggestions. The first is giving the participants the option to not participate in the study with no follow up. The second is to ensure that those who wish to participate have the final decision on the content of the transcribed data. Stangor argues these two options alleviate the power differential. Hence in this study, the researcher did not follow up with those invited principals who chose not to participate. In addition each participant was sent a completed transcript within a month of the interview to verify the interview content. Both these activities were used to alleviate the power differential as described by Stangor. Table 4.3 outlines the demographics of the participants according to the three dimensions investigated in this study.

Table 4.3

Demographics of research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6 Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1994) believed that it is necessary to establish and assess the quality of the qualitative research. In order to assess the quality of the qualitative research, they propose one method, that of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness consists of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Table 4.4 details procedures used in this inquiry to establish trustworthiness.

Table 4.4

*Establishing Trustworthiness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality criterion</th>
<th>Research technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credibility</strong></td>
<td>Member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Triangulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generalisability</strong></td>
<td>Purposive selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detailed description of phenomena examined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependability</strong></td>
<td>Case study protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audit trail - interview guide and pilot of questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confirmability</strong></td>
<td>Triangulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reference to researcher’s beliefs and assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth methodological description</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Shenton, 2004, p. 64)
4.6.1 Credibility

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

The second technique used to ensure credibility is that of triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of information or methods in the study (Bryman, 2008), and enables cross checking of sources (Bryman, 2008; Stringer, 2007). Neuman, (2011), explained that within social research “we build on the principle that we learn more by observing from multiple perspectives than by looking from a single perspective” (p. 164). Studying a
number of data sources within the social phenomena studied strengthens the findings. Moreover, Shenton (2004) highlighted the use of a wide range of informants can also assist the triangulation process. Shenton stated that: “individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of attitudes, needs or behaviours of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people” (p. 66)

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

4.6.2 Generalisability

Another demand of trustworthiness of the research is the ability of the inquiry to be generalised to other contexts. Punch (1998) suggested that the feature of generalisability is the capacity of the research to be transferable to other settings and contexts. With regards to this inquiry, the question pursued is whether one can accurately generalise from what is learned from a specific group of beginning principals to other populations of beginning principals in Western Australian Catholic schools? Stake (1994) recognised that whilst each case is unique, it can be considered as part of a broader group and thus the research can be
considered as transferable to other studies. Bryman (2008) presented the view that it is “depth rather than the breadth that preoccupies qualitative research” (p. 378). Bryman added that qualitative findings focus more on the contextual uniqueness and significance and as such, requires “rich accounts of the details” in which the research is placed (p. 378). Guba and Lincoln (1994) considered the “thick descriptions” (p. 316) provide the reader to judge the possibility of generalisability of findings to other contexts. With regard to this study, Chapter Two provides the context in which this study is located. Detailed accounts of those circumstances from which each Catholic school is drawn enables the reader to ‘transfer’ the results to a different context; however, the reader has the responsibility for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is.

4.6.3 Dependability

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

4.6.4 Confirmability

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

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

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

4.8 Data analysis

An interpretive analysis of the research findings sought to ascertain needs of beginning principals within the first term of their appointment. Qualitative approaches to analysis provide ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). Qualitative data management and analysis have a myriad of suggested processes and procedures that draw out the meaning generated by those involved in the research area. This research utilised Miles and Huberman’s (1994)
interactive model of data management and analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) considered data analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and verification / conclusion drawing. These three highly interactive and iterative processes occur before data collection begins, during the research design and planning phase, during data collection and post data collection. Figure 4.2 illustrates the approach and components to analysing the data in this study.

![Components of data analysis](image)

Figure 4.2 Components of data analysis

(Miles and Huberman, 1994 p. 12)

4.8.1 Data reduction

Data reduction is the process whereby the mass of qualitative data is reduced and organised. Miles and Huberman (1994) described data reduction as “the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data” (p. 10). These authors suggest that prior to the commencement of data collection, the researcher has
already begun the process of “anticipatory” data reduction through the chosen research methodology. Miles and Huberman reported that “the researcher decides which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions and which data collection approaches to choose” (p. 10). Reducing data is an integral component to analysing data. Miles and Huberman suggest that researchers are making analytical choices as they code data, discern patterns or themes and identify clustering of these patterns. Further, they state that: “data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organise data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified” (p. 11). This inquiry reduced data through the identification of key themes emerging from the transcripts. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) suggested that the initial coding (first cycle) of data would generate an array of initial codes that are associated with their respective data chunks. Miles et al. highlighted the iterative nature of coding. They state: “coding drives on going data collection…it is a form of early and continuing analysis” (p.93). Once the initial coding had taken place, the second cycle of coding occurred. The second cycle of coding is termed pattern coding. Pattern coding groups the initial categories into themes. These themes can be further grouped into overarching or broad themes. The following table schematically portrays the process of analysing the data collected from the transcripts.
4.8.2 Data display

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

Figure 4.3 Schematic portrayal of the process utilised for analysing the data
### Table 4.5
Examples of coding utilised to identify emergent themes for specific research question one:
What technical and managerial skills do beginning principals need to acquire?

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

### Table 4.6
Examples of coding utilised to identify emergent themes for specific research question two:
What cultural and personal relationships do beginning principals need to develop?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Reduced Themes</th>
<th>Generated issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(SC) School culture</td>
<td>Culture of the school community</td>
<td>Socialisation skills that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SBM) School board</td>
<td>School board management</td>
<td>enhanced political and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matters</td>
<td></td>
<td>contextual awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pol) Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P) Parish</td>
<td>Community issues</td>
<td>Development of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(LC) Local community</td>
<td>Parish life</td>
<td>community engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.7

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

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

4.8.3 Drawing verifications and conclusions

Drawing and verifying conclusions from the tabulated data was the final component of data analysis. This stage enables the researcher to step back from the analysed data and understand its meaning and to examine the implications for the research. Verification of the data requires the researcher to revisit the data multiple times to cross check or verify the
emergent conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that “the meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their confirmability – that is, their validity” (p. 11).

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

4.9 Ethical Considerations

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

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

3. Participants and their individual schools were not identified.

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

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

4.10 Design Summary

Table 4.8 presents a chronological summary of the research design.

Table 4.8

*Chronological summary of the research design*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2007</td>
<td>UNDA</td>
<td>Ethics clearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2007</td>
<td>CEOWA</td>
<td>Director’s approval to undertake the research in Catholic education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>Catholic schools</td>
<td>Letters sent to 2003 - 2007 cohort of beginning principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May to June 2008</td>
<td>Pilot Interviewees</td>
<td>Pilot of Interview Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2008 to March 2009</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Interviews conducted of those wishing to participate in the inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April to June 2008</td>
<td>CEOWA</td>
<td>Transcription of interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Document search</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.11 Conclusion

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Participant numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School location</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School type</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 came 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*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<tr>
<td>Technical and managerial skills</td>
<td>Financial understanding</td>
<td>Bureaucratic demands</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staffing issues</td>
<td>Importance of delegation</td>
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<td>Transition into principalship</td>
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<td>Culture and personal relationships</td>
<td>Culture of the school community</td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
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<td>Collegial support</td>
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<td>Family support</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office support</td>
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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”.

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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 commented 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Rural Catholic schools</th>
<th>Remote Catholic schools</th>
<th>Metropolitan Catholic schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical / Managerial Skills</strong></td>
<td>Staffing concerns</td>
<td>Staffing issues</td>
<td>Bureaucratic demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial management</td>
<td>Educational outcomes for Aboriginal students</td>
<td>Communication issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School board management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Size of school</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience of handover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture and personal relationships</strong></td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community issues</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office support</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic Education Office support</td>
<td>Remote community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self Identity</strong></td>
<td>Feelings of isolation</td>
<td>Principalship as a vocation</td>
<td>Professional and personal faith formation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings of loneliness</td>
<td>Need for resiliency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for resiliency</td>
<td>Feelings of loneliness</td>
<td>Work–life balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 to 15 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Primary school</th>
<th>Secondary school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical and managerial skills</td>
<td>Accountability demands</td>
<td>Demanding pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing Issues</td>
<td>School size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and personal relationships</td>
<td>Community and parish relationships</td>
<td>Collegial relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collegial network</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self identity</td>
<td>Classroom teaching</td>
<td>Principalship as a vocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diversity in the role of principalship</td>
<td>Need for reflective practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
Chapter Six: Discussion of Research Findings

6.1 Introduction

The three perspectives of gender, school location and school type provide the overarching organisational structure for the discussion of findings. For each perspective the discussion focuses on three research areas based on the three research sub questions:

1. What are the technical and managerial skills that newly appointed beginning principals need to acquire?
2. What are the socialisation skills that newly appointed beginning principals need to develop?
3. In what ways do newly appointed beginning principals integrate the role of principalship with their own self-awareness?

Three perspectives underpin the instrumental case study research: gender, which distinguished data from female and male participants; location of the school, which presented data describing the experiences of leading in rural, remote and metropolitan locations; and school type, which differentiated data from beginning principals in primary and secondary school settings. Within each perspective, findings were presented in terms of the three aforementioned research questions. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the qualitative data collected through individual semi-structured interviews, researcher field notes and document searches in light of literature in educational leadership. Discussion is organised around the three case study perspectives Table 6.1 outlines the structure of Chapter Six.
Table 6.1 Outline of Chapter Six: Discussion of Research Findings

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Section Heading</th>
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6.2 Perspective one: Gender

The first perspective, gender, distinguishes data from male and female participants with regards to their issues and challenges as they began their principalship. Of the 13 participants, nine were female and four were male. A discussion of these issues and challenges is now presented within the context of the three research areas: technical and managerial skills; socialisation skills and self-awareness.

6.2.1 Female

Challenges encountered by the female participants relating to technical and managerial skills focused on the administrative requirements of principalship: financial understanding, school board management and transitioning into the role of principalship. In addition, female participants commented on the principal induction program. Data on the socialisation skills area identified the impact of the school
community’s culture on the principalship and the importance of collegial, family and CEOWA support. Within the area of self-awareness, key themes included resiliency, confidence and sense of vocation. These themes are now explored in light of the literature related to gender and school leadership.

6.2.1.1 Technical and managerial skills

The female participants identified three administrative challenges relating to the technical and managerial skills, namely, difficulty in understanding the financial management of school budgeting, school board management and transition into the principal’s role. The majority of the female participants acknowledged their limited understanding of financial management as a major challenge in their leadership role. Along with managing the school board, whose primary role is financial management of the school resources, the female participants reported that the extra time and energy placed in understanding finances took time from what participants saw as the core work of leading teaching and learning. These identified challenges are reflected in the literature which highlighted the importance of the transactional skills required by principals for the smooth running of the school (Bush & Glover, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005;). The female participants reported sense of being overwhelmed by their limited financial expertise is echoed in the literature (Walker & Qian, 2003). Literature also pointed to the political nature of the principalship, particularly when dealing with the school community and interest groups such as the school board. The challenges reported by the female participants in working with school boards reflected inexperience in the power structures and special interest groups within the school. This is supported by the work of Daresh, (2006a).
The majority of female participants reported three challenges confronting them as they transitioned into the principalship. These challenges were the shift in mindset required in leaving the deputy/assistant principal role to one of overall leader; the quality of the handover experience with the previous principal; and the nature of the leadership preparation programs the participants engaged in prior to their first appointment. The female participants remarked on the enormity of the challenge of moving into the principalship. Their expectations did not match the adjustments required to be the leader of the school community. A common comment by the female participants focused on the complexity of leading a school and its initial toll placed on the new leader. The female participants’ reported experiences are supported by the literature, which identified the enormity of the role leading to increased anxiety and sense of being overwhelmed (Bush et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Five of the seven female participants commented on their experiences of the handover from the previous principal. Specifically, they considered their experiences to be negative as their handovers were poorly managed. Key to their negative experiences was their inability to discern what needed to be asked at the handover meetings with their predecessor. The inexperience of beginning leaders in not knowing the operational aspects of principalship created anxiety, frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed at the complexity and perceived magnitude of the role. Such feelings of inadequacy are well reflected in the literature (Bush & Glover, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Walker & Qian, 2006;).

All seven of the female participants commented positively on the formal principal induction program presented by the Catholic Education Office Western Australia.
[CEOWA]. Their comments highlighted four aspects of their experiences: the sense of collegiality they encountered with their peers who were also in the beginning stages of school principalship; the importance of engaging with key CEOWA personnel whose responsibilities were to serve the schools varied needs; the importance of differentiating between primary and secondary school leadership needs, and the importance of understanding school budgets. These four aspects regarding the induction program for new principals are reflected in the general literature on principal preparation programs. Grogan and Andrews (2002), La Pointe et al. (2007) and Wright et al. (2009) suggested that principal preparation programs need to include collaborative skills sharing and peer problem-solving as these types of skills enhance the leadership attributes of collaboration and capacity building. Daresh (2006a) highlights fiscal management as an important priority in the development of technical and managerial skills of the new principal. Browne-Ferrigno (2003), Daresh (2006a) and Weindling and Dimmock (2006) identify the importance of developing key relationships outside of the school in order for the new leader to be enculturated into the educational environment.

One recommendation the female participants made regarding the CEOWA induction programs was that certain aspects of the program might well occur at relevant times of need. That is, rather than have all the information provided during the designated induction days, the participants suggested that some of the operational information should be provided when required. They referenced this comment to financial presentations needing to occur during the beginning of the school’s budgetary processes.
6.2.1.2 Socialisation skills

Underpinning the socialisation skills area are the cultural and personal relationships intrinsic to the role of principalship. The female participants highlighted the importance of knowing the general tenor of the culture of the school community prior to commencing the principalship. Their belief was predicated on the notion that if they were forewarned on challenging issues prior to the commencement of taking up the position, the better prepared they would be to deal with the issues. This desire to be fully prepared for impending challenges and knowing the cultural context of the school is reflected in the literature on women leaders. Spiller (2012) and Watterson (2010) reported female leaders believed that they needed to have the necessary skills and knowledge for principalship prior to applying for principalship.

Female participants reported the importance of family and collegial support as key relationships that sustained them, particularly in challenging times. Literature reiterated the research findings in that the inherent sense of isolation, excessive time demand of the role and the masculine values and management style expected by the school community meant that new female leaders need strong support structures (Crow, 2006; Daresh, 2006b; Watterson, 2010; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Literature in leadership development points to mentoring and coaching as key support structures for new leaders (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Highlighted in the literature is the importance of establishing peer mentors and coaches early in the career. These key professional relationships are not only an avenue of practical advice from experienced principals, these relationships also provide clarity of the role, positive modelling and professional interactions amongst colleagues (Chapman, 2005; Orr, 2011; Winton & Pollock, 2012).
6.2.1.3 Self-awareness

Three key themes emerged from the responses of female participants within the area of self-awareness: need for resiliency, lack of self-confidence and sense of vocation. The majority of female participants highlighted the need to be resilient in meeting the demands and challenges of the principalship. Along with this recognition of the need for resilience was the awareness by five of the participants of their lack of confidence in meeting the requirements of principalship. The realisation that final decisions and subsequent consequences lay with the principal created a “high stakes” mindset on all decision-making. Such a realisation contributed significantly to increased levels of anxiety for some of the female participants. The literature identified these two phenomena as key features of why women initially struggle in their leadership roles (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Watterson, 2010). Beginning female principals perceived a lack of readiness when commencing their principalship. These perceptions, coupled with a lack of confidence, are highlighted by research as major limitations that hinder female principals flourishing in their new role (Coleman, 2012, Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Watterson, 2010).

All of the seven female participants commented on the centrality of their faith as an important motivator in choosing to lead in a Catholic school. All participants were educated by Catholic education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The participants reported that their religious formation began with their families, and was later supported in their schooling and tertiary experiences. All seven female participants commented on growth of their faith in the role of principalship. Participants also commented on the increasing sense of responsibility for the faith formation of their school community. All participants acknowledged that their leadership role is integral in
promoting the schools Catholic identity. These research findings are consistent with the literature on the vocational call of serving the mission of the Church in the role of Catholic school principal. Belmonte and Cranston (2009), Holter and Frabutt (2012), McLaughlin (2005), Rieckhoff (2014) and Sharkey (2007) describe the need for personal assent to the faith and the vocational service Catholic school principals have in their ministry role of leadership. Belmonte and Cranston (2009), Lennan (2005), Nuzzi et al. (2013), Ranson (2005), Rieckhoff (2014) and Schutloffel (2012) reiterate the need for strong leadership in preserving and growing the Catholic identity of the school.

6.2.2 Male
Data collected from the six male participants highlighted two themes within the area of technical and managerial skills: the bureaucratic nature of the principalship and the importance of delegating appropriate tasks to others. The socialisation skills area drew out three key support areas for the male participants. These were: collegial, family and Catholic Education Office support. Three themes emerged from the responses of the male participants within the area of self-awareness: career aspirations, importance of self-efficacy and the authority of the principal’s role. These themes are now discussed in light of the literature related to gender and leadership.

6.2.2.1 Technical and managerial skills
All six male participants expressed concern with the increasing bureaucratic demands of the principalship. Underpinning these bureaucratic demands were the increased accountabilities placed upon them. Compliancy to government and system requirements were consistently reported by the participants as consuming their time. These demands are consistent with research on beginning principals. Bush et al. (2010), Hobson et al.
(2003) and Leithwood et al., (2010) all commented on the high stakes accountability demanded by government. Four of the male participants remarked on the importance of delegation as a key attribute in their leadership role. These participants noted that due to the myriad of responsibilities that lay with the principal, it was necessary to discern what they should do and what they should delegate. Highlighted within this finding was the perception by the male participants that delegating to staff various operational matters of school life built staff capacity and interest. General educational research on new leaders identifies the excessive time spent on operational matters of schooling by the beginning principal (Bush & Glover, 2003; Marzano et al, 2005; Walker & Qian, 2006). The ability to balance the operational aspects of schooling with educational leadership is an important hallmark of successful school principalship (Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson, 2007).

6.2.2.2 Socialisation skills

The male participants identified the importance of key relationships in supporting them in their principalship. These relationships included: family, colleagues and the Catholic Education Office. The majority of participants strongly associated with the importance of family supporting their role as principal. Two participants noted the self-sacrifice of their wives in uprooting the family thereby enabling the participants to take on a principalship in rural and remote locations. Both participants were mindful of the significant efforts their partners needed to undertake in order to re-establish the family unit. Three male participants highlighted the feelings of isolation they experienced in a new community and the “fishbowl” existence they experienced as newcomers. These findings were consistent with the literature of principal appointments to rural and remote locations. Literature identified the importance of family support structures to
curtail the social and personal isolation experienced by new principals (Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Halsey, 2011; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009; Wallace & Boylan, 2007). Literature also confirmed the experience of the new principal joining into the life of the local community. The parochial nature of the community and the presence of the new principal in local affairs shone a spotlight on the new leader that was unnecessarily demanding and challenging (Clark and Stevens, 2009; Halsey, 2011; Wildy & Clarke, 2012).

All participants noted varying degrees of support from their colleagues. The majority saw collegial support as essential in their development as principals. Most participants experienced positive and helpful relationships amongst their peers. Literature acknowledged the importance of beginning principals forming key relationships amongst their colleagues in order to assist their enculturation and development of their leadership role (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; O’Mahony & Matthews, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

The majority of the male participants acknowledged the support of the CEOWA in their role as principal. Of particular note was the support in the operational functions of the school. This support included advice on human resource issues such as summative appraisals of dysfunctional staff, curriculum development and financial resourcing guidance. These findings are consistent with literature addressing the practical support offered by educational authorities as key in supporting the new principal (Anderson et al., 2010; Lock et al., 2012; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009).
6.2.2.3 Self-awareness

Responses from the six male participants highlighted three key themes within the area of self-awareness: career aspirations, self-efficacy and authority of the principal’s role. The majority of the male participants reported a strong aspiration for school principalship early in their careers. This research finding resonated strongly with literature that acknowledged the early career aspirations of male educators (Tarica, 2010; Watterston, 2010). All six male participants commented on the need for self-efficacy or selfbelief in order to lead the school community. Each participant identified the importance of being confident in the role. Coupled with self-belief, the majority of male participants recognised the authority of the principalship as being definitive and influential. Both the importance of self-efficacy and the influential nature of the principal roles are recognised in educational leadership literature as key characteristics required for successful principalship (Daresh & Male, 2000; Fullan, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004)

6.3 Comparison of female and male beginning principals

The first perspective explored gender responses within the three research areas of technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness required of beginning principals. Similarities between the female and male participant responses occurred predominantly within the area of socialisation skills. Both genders identified support from family and colleagues as vital in enabling them to operate as a principal. Both genders recognised the essential support role that family played in dealing with the challenges encountered in the principalship. The male participants however, acknowledged the impost of relocating their wives and children to their new school. The female participants did not raise this issue because their personal circumstance did not
warrant comment. Three were not married and the others had grown up families and their husbands were supportive of relocating to country and remote areas. The male and female participants both recognised the value of collegial support. All participants appreciated the practical advice and professional interactions colleagues gave, particularly in challenging times.

The key differences between the female and male participant responses occurred within the areas of technical and managerial skills and self-awareness. Within the area of technical and managerial skills, the seven female participants identified challenges in dealing with the finances, school board and transitioning into the new role. A possible explanation as to why the female participants reported on these challenges may lie in the tendency of women having unrealistically high expectations of the skill levels and experiences needed to lead in these unfamiliar areas (Watterson, 2010). Whilst the female participants felt inadequate in dealing with these operational matters, they in fact managed these areas successfully.

Male participants, however, commented on the bureaucratic nature of the position with excessive accountabilities placed upon them. Male participants also reported on the value of delegation of some responsibilities to key staff. Their view on delegation was twofold: firstly, it built capacity of the staff, and secondly, it enabled the principal to focus on more pressing matters by alleviating them of less important tasks. None of the female participants mentioned the idea of delegating responsibilities to staff. Rather, the female participants reported the tendency of doing the majority of tasks themselves rather than burdening their staff. In attempting to explain the difference in responses between male and female participants in the area of delegation, literature suggests that
women can lack confidence in their ability to lead and therefore find it difficult to ask staff to pick up particular responsibilities (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Spiller, 2012; Tarica, 2010; Watterson, 2010).

Within the area of self-awareness, both male and female participants identified the issue of self-confidence and self-efficacy. However, the female participants reported a lack of confidence in not only seeking principalship but also when first appointed. Female participants reported low levels of confidence, particularly when dealing with challenging matters. There are two possible reasons why the female participants expressed a lack of confidence, particularly in seeking principalship. The first includes the under-representation of female principals as role models, which promotes the socialised norm that underpins the assumptions, beliefs and values that men could be and should be principals (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). The second is a lack of career strategies early in the women’s career (McLay, 2008). On the other hand, male participants reported self-efficacy and self-belief as important attributes in the leadership role. The male participants acknowledged that it was important to be confident in their role as they saw their authority as being definitive and influential. The summary of common and divergent themes by the seven female and six male beginning principals to the three research areas are presented in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2
Summary of common and divergent themes by gender (perspective 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Common themes</th>
<th>Divergent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical and managerial skills</td>
<td>There were no common themes across perspective 1, gender.</td>
<td>Financial understanding Management of school board Transition into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialisation skills</td>
<td>Colleagial support</td>
<td>Culture of the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CEOWA support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>There were no common themes across perspective 1, gender.</td>
<td>Need for resiliency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Need for self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Principalship as a vocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Position of authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.4 Perspective two: School location

The participants worked in three different schooling locations: remote, rural and metropolitan. Each location presented various challenges and issues that the participants needed to deal with in their new leadership role as school principal. A discussion of these challenges and issues is now presented within the context of the research areas: technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills, and self-awareness.

#### 6.4.1 Remote

**6.4.1.1 Technical and managerial Skills**

Responses from the data of the three remote participants indicated two key themes related to the area of technical and managerial skills area: staffing and concern for the low educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in the remote school context. Staffing issues were related to the recruitment of suitable teachers to teach in remote locations. Typically, staff were inexperienced in both the classroom and working in a remote setting. In addition, retaining staff was problematic as there was high annual staff turnover in these schools. These issues of staffing are reflected in the literature whereby
inexperienced leaders and teachers are typically found in staff remote schools (Lock et al., 2012; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009). Literature also substantiates the difficulties of retaining staff in the remote school (Pietsch & Williamson, 2009).

Participants in the remote regions were very concerned about the poor educational outcomes of the Aboriginal students. All three of the remote participants reported poor attendance and a high transitory nature of the Aboriginal students between schools and found that this situation created limited learning opportunities. The research is supported by the literature. The Australian Government has coined the term ‘closing the gap’ to deal with a variety of Aboriginal issues, including health, housing, welfare and education that are brought about through living remotely and in impoverished conditions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). There is a plethora of literature that identifies the issue of poor academic achievement, poor school attendance and low graduation rates of students living remotely (Anderson et al., 2010; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009; Western Australian Department of Education, 2011; Wildy & Clarke, 2012).

6.4.1.2 Socialisation skills

The data from the three remote participants identified three themes within the area of socialisation skills: collegial support, support from the Catholic Education Office of, and remote community issues per se. All of the participants recognised the importance and need for collegial support; however, due to the remote location of the school, support was typically through telephone conversations and email contact. Research literature recognises the importance of mentoring and coaching in building the professional capacity of new leaders (Crow, 2006; O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). In particular, O’Mahoney and Matthews (2006)
identified key benefits of mentoring and coaching as reducing feelings of isolation, frustration and stress. They highlighted the need for contextual awareness of the mentoring relationship and the importance of ‘face to face’ meetings at the school site. The second area identified by the remote participants concerned the support offered by the CEOWA. The three participants noted the important role the regional office in the Broome Diocese played in providing support in situ. They also acknowledged the diocesan office as accessible and aware of the contextual needs of the remote school. Highlighted in the data, however, was the disparity of support from the metropolitan office. Participants noted that the support offered from the metropolitan office did not always take into account the needs of remote school’s, suggesting that the regional office had a better appreciation of the schools cultural and community contexts. Literature identified the importance of contextual awareness in the provision of support to remote schools (Anderson et al., 2010; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Wallace & Boylan, 2007; Wildy & Clark, 2012). In particular, Wallace and Boylan (2007) reported on the need for a “remote lens” when providing support to remote contexts thus ensuring that support is appropriate, differentiated and contextual.

The final theme within the socialisation skills area is that of leading in a remote community per se. The three participants recognised the key role the school has within the remote community and the importance of sustaining positive relationships with the community. Highlighted by the research were the school’s Catholic identity and its positive contribution to the community. The Catholic school was viewed as an important focal point in the spirituality of the community. General literature in the area of schools in rural and remote areas recognise the positive influence and presence the school has within the community (Anderson et al., 2010; Starr & White, 2008; Wildy &
Clarke, 2012). Literature reiterated the tendency of the community to look towards the school for support, especially when there is a particular need within the community (Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Halsey, 2011; Wallace & Boylan, 2007). Pietsch and Williamson (2009) noted that the beginning principals experienced an “intensification of workload” (p.3) due to the challenges of leading a remote school and the demands of supporting the remote community. Wildy and Clarke (2012) reported that remote Indigenous communities tend to have chronic social and economic disadvantage which impact significantly on both school life and the principals. Wildy and Clarke noted that the disadvantage include high levels of unemployment, significant health, justice and social welfare issues and limited resources to support community development. Thus, school principals dealt with a culture of accepting low student achievement, lack of parent engagement and low expectations.

6.4.1.3 Self-awareness

In the area of self-awareness, data from the three remote participants generated three themes: vocation, loneliness and resiliency. Within the theme of vocation, all three participants identified strongly with a desire to serve as school principal of a Catholic school community. The inclusive nature of the Catholic school and its mandate to serve the marginalised were strong motivations for the participants to seek school principalship in remote locations. In addition, the participants recognised the importance of personal faith formation and the provision of faith formation opportunities to the community as key aspects of their leadership role. Literature in the area of the religious dimension of Catholic school principalship reflects the research findings. Literature identified the importance of the principal in leading and growing the faith of the community through active engagement with the mission and vision of the
school (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Nuzzi et al., 2013; Rieckhoff, 2014; Schutlofelf, 2012). The vocational emphasis reported by the participants strongly resonated with the literature (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Fraser & Brock, 2006; Holter & Frabutt, 2012; McLaughlin, 2005; Nuzzi et al., 2013; Rieckhoff, 2014; Sharkey, 2007). In addition, literature identified the importance of the school principal having knowledge of the faith tradition and in the proclaiming of their personal assent to the Catholic Church (Nuzzi et al., 2013; Rieckhoff, 2014; Sharkey, 2007). One remote participant highlighted his relationship with the local parish priest as being nurturing and supportive. He reported that this particular relationship supported him personally and spiritually in dealing with the demands of remote school principalship.

Remote school participants reported on the demanding nature of the work and the toll it placed on their personal lives. In particular, the isolation they experienced professionally, socially and personally was extremely challenging and difficult to overcome. The challenges were further exacerbated by the inexperienced staff who tended to begin their teaching careers in remote schools. Coupled with the demands of working with inexperienced staff, the participants expressed concern about dealing with matters of a confidential nature. The inability to work through issues with other staff in situ, and therefore the need to rely on oneself, created an intensified sense of isolation. These feelings of being overwhelmed by the nature of the work and the consequences of geographical and social isolation are mirrored in literature on the remote school principalship. Literature identified multi-age classes, limited resources and funding, inexperienced teachers, access to timely advice and community demands as intensifying the new principals workload (Anderson et al., 2010; Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002). Literature also highlighted the importance of having peer mentors to
alleviate the professional and personal loneliness encountered by new leaders. The ability to discuss a broad range of issues with mentors within a confidential context provides the new leader with support and opportunities to seek clarity and confirm direction (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

The remote school participants reported on their personal need to be resilient in dealing with the many challenges they encountered. They realised that due to the geographic isolation of their school, their opportunities for socialisation were limited. One participant recognised the importance of being professionally distant from the staff of the school and so tended to be more reserved with staff at social events. Participants also noted the importance of not seeking friendships within the remote community, as they believed that this would be perceived to be establishing an exclusive social group amongst some community members. The participants’ responses to establishing a social network in small communities are reflected in the literature. Clarke and Stevens (2009), Halsey (2011) and Wallace and Boylan (2007) reported on the parochial nature of small communities. Halsey (2011) highlights the need for new leaders to develop strategies to navigate and establish boundaries when participating in the broader community. The participants also recognised the importance of talking to other principals, particularly those who were in their diocese as these principals were familiar with the context of remote schooling. In addition, the participants noted that it was important to access the regional officer, mentors, family and friends through phone calls and emails to alleviate their social and professional loneliness. Literature strongly advocates the development of relationships amongst peers to support development into the leadership role (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).
6.4.2 Rural

6.4.2.1 Technical and managerial skills

Data from the five rural participants noted three themes within the technical and managerial skills area: administration requirements of the position, size of the school and the handover from the previous principal. The participants found the demands of the administrative requirements excessive and time consuming. Particular areas in which the participants were challenged included staffing issues, financial management and managing the school board. Staffing concerns centred around recruitment and retaining suitable staff. Participants found that typically, graduate teachers were attracted to rural schools and the time they spent at the school was relatively short. The participants found that supporting graduate teachers required a great deal of attention and reported that the support of graduate teachers consumed an excessive amount of time that took away from other pressing matters. The opportunity to sustain programs at the school was limited due to the staff turnaround. Both the nature of rural staff and issues around retention of staff (Lock et al., 2012; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009; Wildy & Clarke, 2012) and the heavy imposts on the principal’s time (Lock et al., 2012; Wallace & Boylan, 2007) are well documented in literature.

Participants reported that the challenges around finances were considerable partly due to their limited knowledge in this area and partly due to the limited funds available in small schools. Literature substantiates the challenges encountered by participants in the financial realm of technical and managerial skills. For example, Daresh (2006b) highlights the challenges encountered by new principals regarding the financial management of the school. He noted that the new principals’ inexperience in this area tends to consume their time and focus. Participants reported that they felt intimidated
and inexperienced in leading parochial school boards. Daresh (2006b) and Perry and McWilliam (2007) and reiterated the difficulties working with special interest groups, such as school boards and in particular the politics and power structures and processes that occur. Crow and Weindling (2010) and Winton and Pollock (2012) add that the beginning leader needs to appreciate the importance of understanding the micro politics affiliated with school boards and other parent bodies.

The majority of the rural participants reported the difficulties in leading Catholic schools with low enrolments and small staff size. All of the participants had a teaching component to the principalship because of the small size of the school. Whilst they recognised that it was important to be in the classroom, it limited their administrative time. A number of participants also commented on the absence of having an assistant principal due to the small staff. The one participant who did have an assistant principal commented on this person’s lack of experience due to the inability to attract an experienced leader to the rural school. A challenge of leading small rural schools with its limited staffing capacity and leadership support is reflected in the literature. The Australian Catholic Primary Principals Associations’ (2005) research into Catholic primary school principals found the workload of leaders is not lessened due to a school being smaller. In addition, Ashton and Duncan (2012), Clarke, Wildy & Pepper (2007), Wallace and Boylan (2007) and Wildy, Clarke and Elkin (2010) highlight the greater time demands placed on rural principals and report that the administrative requirements from government and educational authorities are not differentiated or accommodating with respect to the size of the school. Ashton and Duncan stated, “unlike large schools with sizeable administrative staffs and numerous resources, small school leaders often
face these challenges alone, but are required to meet the same accountability standards as their larger counterparts” (p. 20).

The final emerging theme within the technical and managerial skills area was the experience of handover from the previous principal. The five rural participants commented that in retrospect, the experience was mainly negative. They reported that in their fledgling state, they were unaware of what to ask the exiting principal and the limited time at handover spent at the school did not give a complete picture of the school’s operations and context. Three of the five participants later found out about challenging situations within the school community, however, at the time of handover, the exiting principal did not discuss these issues. General literature on beginning principals recognise the limited understanding of new leaders in the operational areas of running a school (Daresh, 2006b; Marzano et al., 2005; Walker & Qian, 2006) and literature on preparation programs identified the importance of spending time at the school prior to taking up the appointment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Tucker et al., 2012; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2012;). In addition, literature points to the legacy of the previous principal as impacting on the new principal’s leadership. This degree of impact is dependent on the legacy the previous principal left. A positive legacy tends to assist the beginning leader, whilst a negative one can be very challenging for the incumbent (Walker & Qian, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

6.4.2.2 Socialisation skills

The data from the five rural participants identified three emerging themes in the area of socialisation skills. These themes were: collegial support, community engagement and Catholic Education Office Western Australia support. All of the participants
acknowledged and appreciated the support from their peers, particularly as mentors and access to experienced principals for advice and guidance was greatly appreciated. The participants, however, commented on the importance of their colleagues being aware of their specific rural context. Their preference was for their mentor to spend time at their school to appreciate and understand their unique context. The participants also expressed varying degrees of disappointment in the support offered by one of the professional associations. They believed that the Catholic Primary Principal’s Association (CPPA) did not fully support the beginning principal in the rural school and reported a number of negative experiences. These experiences included not feeling welcomed at Member’s Day events conducted by the CPPA; issues such as recruitment of experienced school staff to rural locations not being discussed and lack of consideration for sustained and suitable mentoring at the rural school location by the Association. Literature highlights the importance of collegial support through mentoring, that is, experienced mentors support the beginning principal in enculturation into the leadership role. Mentoring builds capacity and confidence in new leaders, thus enabling them to develop their leadership role (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Crow, 2006; Daresh, 2006a; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). O’Mahoney and Matthews (2006) highlighted the importance of contextual understanding of the mentor for the beginning principals situation and add that personal contact is prized over secondary means such as telephone conversations. Understanding the social mores attached to principal associations is an important facet of the socialisation skills required of the beginning leader (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Daresh, 2006b).

All five rural participants identified the parochial nature of the communities in which their schools are located. They highlighted the relationship between the school and
parish, in particular, the demands of the parish on the school and the principal. The participants felt that there were demands placed upon them by the parish that included having a high profile within the parish, involvement in parish activities and an expectation of tangible support in parish affairs. Whilst the participants acknowledged the importance of engaging with the parish, they felt that in their early years of principalship the demands were excessive. These findings are consistent with the literature on the relationship the Catholic school principal has with the local parish community, particularly in rural settings. The Australian Catholic Primary Principals’ Association [ACPPA] (2005) reported on the importance of the cooperative relationship the Catholic school principal should have with the local parish community. The report also highlighted the cumulative demands placed on principals when absorbing additional work from the parish community. These cumulative demands are further intensified in rural settings when principals are expected to worship in the parish affiliated with the school (ACPPA, 2005).

The final theme identified by the rural participants related to CEOWA support of the beginning principal. This support was identified in two forms: the induction programs for new principals and the support provided at the school site. The five participants were positive in their comments about the induction program into principalship and the ongoing support given in situ. They highlighted the usefulness of the program with regards to its content, collegial interaction and ongoing support. The importance of such support is echoed in the literature on preparation programs for principalship. Literature identified the need to have principal preparation programs that are adaptive in the leadership skills area and address the changing educational landscape (La Pointe et al., 2007; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2012). Literature also acknowledged the ongoing nature of
principal preparation programs. Once the principal is at the school, support needs to be offered in a continuing fashion (Chapman, 2005; Crow et al., 2008; Ribbins, 2008). The collaborative emphasis in principal preparation programs is a necessary component in developing new leaders. Grogan and Andrews (2002), Wright et al. (2009) and LaPointe et al., (2007) argue the importance of group work in preparation programs. They highlighted the importance of teamwork, mutual support and building relationships within cohorts of the preparation programs. They also reiterated the importance of working collaboratively as a model for future school leadership teams.

6.4.2.3 Self-awareness

The data from the five rural participants identified three emerging themes within the area of self-awareness. These were, feelings of isolation, loneliness and the need for resiliency. The participants acknowledged the geographical isolation of their school contributed to their feeling of loneliness in the role as principal. The five rural participants recognised two forms of loneliness: professional isolation and personal loneliness. The participants reported feeling disconnected from the wider professional life outside of the school. The inaccessibility of professional development, the excessive costs to participate in these events and the limited opportunities to build networks amongst their peers compounded their feelings of professional isolation. The rural participants highlighted personal loneliness as a challenge that needed to be overcome. The limited interactions with others, particularly at the end of the school day, confronted the “single” participants. Coupled with the personal feeling of loneliness was the importance of being resilient in addressing the challenges. Participants acknowledged the importance of being resilient in adapting to particular circumstances. They expressed the need to look after themselves and to seek support as they
encountered challenging situations. All participants acknowledged the vital role of peer networks and regional CEOWA staff in supporting the new leader. Literature stresses the importance of being personally resilient (Daresh, 2000a; Fullan, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006) in meeting challenges encountered in the role (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The feelings of isolation, both professionally and personally are also reflected in the literature (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Campbell et al., 2006; Fraser & Brock, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Literature points to peer mentoring as an important means of building capacity of beginning principals and alleviating the professional isolation encountered, particularly in the early years of leadership (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Campbell et al., 2006; Crow, 2006; O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2006).

6.4.3 Metropolitan

6.4.3.1 Technical and managerial skills

The data from the five metropolitan principals indicated three themes in the area of technical and managerial skills. These were, the bureaucratic demands, communication and staffing issues. The bureaucratic demands related to balancing time in dealing with burdensome administrative requirements from government and educational authorities. The second theme reported by the metropolitan participants was concerned with the demanding level of electronic communication from both internal and external sources. Responding to the excessive number of communications consumed a great deal of time. These themes are consistent with literature on beginning principals. Daresh (2006b) and Walker and Qian (2006) acknowledge that beginning leaders can easily become overwhelmed by the administrative demands placed upon them by external sources.
The third theme concerned staffing issues. Here, participants reported on challenges such as recruitment of quality educators, particularly in leadership roles and dealing with recalcitrant staff. Three of the five participants were seeking to appoint deputy principals; however, all applicants had no senior leadership experience. This situation left the two participants with completely new leadership teams. The participants felt that not only did they have to deal with a new role and school context, they had to support the new leaders into their role and environment, thus adding to their workload. This concern highlighted the issues regarding recruitment of quality teachers and leaders. Literature concerned with successful student outcomes highlighted the importance of the classroom teacher in the teaching and learning process (Hattie, 2009; Timperley, 2013; Zammit et al., 2007) which in turn is to quality school leadership (Robinson et al., 2013; Zammit et al., 2007). Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) highlight the centrality of school leaders in improving staff performance through the influencing staff motivation, commitment and work conditions.

6.4.3.2 Socialisation skills

The five metropolitan participants identified two themes within the socialisation skills area. These were, collegial support and CEOWA support. All five participants acknowledged the support of their peers with three joining leadership positions within their respective principal’s associations. Their motivation for actively participating in the association early in their principalship was to assist them in understanding their role as leader and to increase their networking relationships amongst their colleagues. The importance of working with peers is strongly encouraged in the literature on beginning principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Daresh (2006b) acknowledges that the relationship which beginning
principals have with their peers facilitates the enculturation process into the leadership role. All but one of the metropolitan participants were generally positive about the support provided by the CEOWA. They acknowledged the support as being appropriate, timely and of a good standard. One participant, however, had a negative relationship with a key support person from the CEOWA. The participant felt that the CEOWA person did not offer tangible support when needed at the time and the participant reported that she was left to resolve a significant issue on her own.

6.4.3.3 Self-awareness

Two key themes emerged from the responses of metropolitan participants within the area of self-awareness: the importance of personal vocation and work-life balance. All five participants reported on their personal desire to serve in Catholic education in a leadership capacity. The participants recognised the vocational basis to their role as principal in a Catholic school and all five of the participants reflected on the evangelising purpose of the Catholic school and how important it was for them to lead and support the school community in faith formation. The participants also reflected on the importance of sustaining their own faith in order to be authentic witness to their Christian identity as leaders in a Catholic school. These findings are consistent with the literature on the religious leadership required of Catholic school principalship. Catholic school principals are required to embody the values and mission of the Catholic school through personal witness (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Brownbridge, 2009; Hickey et al., 2009; McLaughlin, 2005; Nuzzi et al., 2013; Rieckhoff, 2014; Schuttloffel, 2009). Catholic school principals are also required to lead the faith community and ensure that its religious purpose permeates all aspects of school life (Congregation for Catholic
Education, 1997; McLaughlin, 2005; Nuzzi et al., 2013; Rieckhoff, 2014; Robinson & Ciriello, 1994).

The second theme rising from the data acknowledged the challenges of balancing the demanding role of principalship with the personal lives of the participants. The five metropolitan participants reported that the role of principal can be all-consuming. When participants were not at school, they thought a great deal about school business. The participants recognised that this preoccupation on the school impacted significantly on their personal time. Literature on the demands placed on principals to lead learning and teaching, meet internal and external accountabilities, process high stakes external assessments and deal with the operational issues of running a school are plentiful (Bush et al., 2010; Clarke & Wildy, 2010; Crow, 2006; Day, 2013; Fullan, 2004; Moller, 2009; Robinson, 2007). Literature on beginning principals reflects the intensification of workload that is experienced by new leaders and calls for a redress to this issue (Bush et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2003; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009; Walker & Qian, 2006).

6.5 Comparison school location and the beginning principalship

The second perspective explored the impact of the school’s location on the beginning school principal’s leadership within the three research areas of technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness skills. Responses from the beginning principals indicated certain common experiences across all three locales such as dealing with staff issues. The responses from the participants also suggested divergent needs and challenges from each of the three locales such as dealing with Aboriginal student outcomes in remote schools, the feelings isolation and loneliness from rural and remote participants.
A major technical and managerial concern for all participants was the issue of staffing in their schools. All reported issues on attracting quality staff. For example, the remote and rural participants described concerns about staffing their schools with mainly graduate teachers. They commented that these were the only applicants for the advertised positions. The new graduates inexperience in the classroom combined with working in remote and rural locations for the first time placed increased demands on the new principal. This issue was coupled with high annual staff turnover, which created problems in sustaining programs. Metropolitan participants, on the other hand, conveyed their concerns about dealing with recalcitrant teachers. In particular, these participants were dealing with some teachers who were below standard in their teaching performance with some even breaching professional practices. Three of the five metropolitan participants were seeking to fill deputy principal positions. These participants reported that all applicants were inexperienced in this leadership role and consequently they found themselves supporting the newly appointed deputy, which further compounded the challenges of their own fledgling status.

All three of the remote participants were concerned about the poor educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. They reflected on the transitory nature of the students, the students’ limited attendance rates and the poor living standards within remote communities. The rural participants also reported on the challenges of leading a small school. Apart from supporting new graduates, they reported on the limitations of small budgets in resourcing projects and the inability to appoint staff to leadership positions because of school size. In particular, due to small student populations, participants were required to have a teaching load combined with their leadership role. Metropolitan participants found the excessive time spent on bureaucratic demands of the position.
Whilst all three groups had varied concerns in the technical and managerial skills area, the common challenge confronting the new principals was the excessive time spent in operational requirements of school principalship.

All participants identified collegial and CEOWA support as key in dealing with challenges and issues in their new roles. Remote and rural participants acknowledged the importance of connecting with peers in their principal association; however, they found there was a limited understanding of their different contexts by association members. Collectively, these participants wanted a greater understanding of their unique locations by their peers and a differentiated support structure to meet their needs. Metropolitan participants also appreciated the support the associations provided. They found that there were greater opportunities to participate in the varied roles the principal association offered, thereby enhancing their own professional growth.

All participants, irrespective of location identified the support of the CEOWA as an important means in enabling them to lead their schools. Overall, all 13 participants found the support timely, *in situ*, appropriate and essential in dealing with challenges in their schools. Remote and rural participants appreciated the regional support from the local office. They reported that the support they received took into account the context of the school’s location, its cultural context, and the unique circumstances of small school issues within a rural or remote community. Remote participants reported on the limited understanding of the metropolitan office to the unique context of remote schooling highlighting the need for differentiated and bespoke services. Rural participants commented positively on the induction program for beginning principals
conducted by the CEOWA. They appreciated its focus, collegial interactions and the ongoing support once the participant began their principalship.

Remote and rural participants highlighted the impact and importance of the community in which their school is located. Rural participants commented on the parochial nature of the community and the community’s perceived need of the principal to actively contribute to community activities. They reported that the demand was mainly made from local parish community. Remote principals saw that an important feature of their leadership was to provide support to the remote community, particularly in its faith development and parish life. Literature identifies the important role the Catholic school principal has within the local parish community. The ACPPA (2005), Belmonte and Cranston (2009) and Fraser and Brock (2006) highlight the significance of the role the principal has with the local parish in assisting the faith life of the parish and their professional expertise. The research also highlights the excessive demand placed on the principal can be detrimental to the principals wellbeing, including the time required of the principal and their personal spiritual growth (ACPPA, 2005; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009).

Within the area of self-awareness, participants from remote and metropolitan localities identified the vocational element of their role as an important basis of their principalship. Inexplicably the rural participants did not comment on their sense of vocation. This omission by the rural participants would be worth following up in further research. The majority of participants across all three localities reported that the religious purpose of leading a Catholic school was a strong feature in seeking principalship. This acceptance and understanding of the religious nature of Catholic
school principalship is highlighted in literature. Belmonte and Cranston (2009), Lennan (2005), McLaughlin (2005), Nuzzi, et al. (2013), Ranson (2005) and Rieckhoff (2014) report on the vocational call to lead a Catholic school community as an almost prerequisite requirement for leadership. Coupled with personal assent and public witness to the Catholic faith, Catholic school principals need to ascribe to their “ecclesial responsibilities” (Ranson, 2005, p.9). Remote and rural participants found the professional and social isolation encountered in their respective locations as key challenges to overcome and both groups recognised the loneliness of the principalship. This experience was partly due to the geographical isolation of their school’s location and also the loneliness attributed to the role. These participants identified that in order to maintain confidences when dealing with staffing, student and community issues, they needed to work through solutions outside of the school with their peer mentors or CEOWA staff.

Both rural and remote locale groups recognised the need to be resilient in order to overcome the burgeoning challenges that they encountered in the principalship. Participants reported the need to work through situations with support from colleagues and CEOWA personnel and to look after themselves. On a slightly different note, the metropolitan participants reported the need to develop a work life balance and acknowledged the all-consuming nature of the principalship. Research is replete in the excessive workload of beginning principals. Clarke et al., (2007), Sorenson (2005) and Walker et al., (2003) suggest that beginning principals are typically overwhelmed by the variety of issues that they need to deal with. They add that their lack of preparedness coupled with unanticipated issues generally consume the time of new principals.
summary of common and divergent themes from the three remote, five rural and five metropolitan beginning principals to the three research areas are presented in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3
Summary of common and divergent themes by school location (perspective 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Common themes</th>
<th>Divergent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical and managerial skills</td>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Financial management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School board management</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School size</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Handover</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational outcomes of Aboriginal students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bureaucratic demands</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communication issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialisation skills</td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
<td>Remote community issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CEOWA support</td>
<td>Community issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>There were no common themes across perspective 2, school location</td>
<td>Feelings of isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings of loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Need for resiliency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Principalship as a vocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work-life balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.6 Perspective three: School type

The third perspective in the case study looks at the needs, concerns and challenges of beginning principals in primary and secondary school settings. Of the 13 participants, nine were beginning their principalship in primary schools and four in secondary schools. Both primary and secondary school settings presented various challenges and issues with which the participants needed to deal with. A discussion of these challenges and issues is now presented within the context of the three research areas: technical and managerial skills; socialisation skills; and self-awareness.
6.6.1 Primary schooling

6.6.1.1 Technical and managerial skills

The data from the nine primary school participants highlighted two key themes within the technical and managerial skills area: challenges of dealing with the many accountability demands placed upon them and staffing issues. The reported accountability demands expressed by the participants were to do with managing their time with the many operational aspects of school leadership. Highlighted areas include management of data, leading curriculum development, coordinating staff development and meeting externally imposed deadlines. The participants collectively described the administrative demands as “paper work” which consumed their time both in and outside of school hours. Literature on the beginning principal strongly resonates with the participant’s sense of being overwhelmed in dealing with the operational demands of leading a school. Marzano et al. (2005) describe the operational demands requiring transactional leadership skills. The focus on the operational demands in the early years of principalship tends to both preoccupy and overwhelm the new leader (Daresh & Male, 2000; Walker & Qian, 2006). Literature also identifies the excessive accountability demands that are placed upon principals, both within the school and externally (Angus et al., 2007; Bush et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson, 2007).

The second theme concerned staffing issues. Participants recognised the vital role teachers have in ensuring quality educational outcomes for the students and all nine primary participants identified that recruitment of quality staff was extremely important. However, due to reasons such as location of the school, attracting experienced quality teachers was often problematic. Literature suggests that in order for teachers to provide
students the learning conditions to thrive, it is essential that school leadership provide quality learning environments (Robinson, et al., 2013). There has been a definite shift of focus from managerial leadership to instructional leadership in the principal’s role over the last decade (Bush et al., 2010; Hattie, 2009; Hobson et al., 2003; Robinson et al., 2013). This focus on instructional leadership requires the school principal to be active in leading the teaching and learning within the school. The concern expressed by the primary participants in the area of quality teaching staff resounds with the literature on the principal’s role as chief teacher. Robinson et al. (2013) contend that primary school principals have a more direct instructional leadership influence in the school and tend to be more aware of what happens in the classroom.

6.6.1.2 Socialisation skills

Within the area of socialisation skills, the data from the primary school participants revealed two main themes: relationships with the local community, in particular the parish community and collegial networks. All nine participants highlighted the importance of the relationship the school has with the local community. The participants reported that the principal occupies a key leadership role within the community and is expected to be an important resource in growing the community. Literature addressing the relationships with the local school and the broader community reiterates the participants’ comments on community life and the interaction with the school (Anderson et al., 2010; Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Starr & White, 2008; Wildy & Clarke, 2012). Halsey (2011) notes that the principal needs to be contextually aware of the community’s needs, as there are tacit rules and expectations placed upon the school principal.
The primary school participants noted the key role they have within the community interacting with the local Catholic parish. The majority of the participants viewed their particular participation within parish life as integral to their role as a Catholic primary school principal. Others reported that it was the expectation of the parish that the principal would be a key member of the parish council and participate in activities of the parish. Literature in the area of religious leadership highlights the important relationship the Catholic school has with the local parish church. Hickey et al., (2009) recommend that the Catholic school and parish leadership work together in promoting the faith dimension of both school and parish communities. The ACPPA (2005) report into the participation of primary school principals in parish life found that whilst there was recognition of the positive dynamic between the two, there was also an acknowledgement of the increasing impost of time the principal spends in supporting the parish. The report highlighted that not only was the principal’s time taken away from his or her core work of leading the school, there was also concern regarding the detrimental impact on the personal spirituality of the principal and the impact on family life. Here, excessive participation in the local parish life took time away from spending with the family. In addition, the varied roles the primary school principal was called upon to fulfil, particularly during Mass drew away the time for personal prayer and reflection to more public and active roles.

The second socialisation theme that the primary participants reported on concerned their relationships with their principal colleagues. All nine participants recognised the importance of networking with their peers. They saw networking as an important support mechanism as they developed their leadership capabilities and mature in their role as school principal. Five of the participants commented on the Catholic Primary
Principal’s Association [CPPA]. There were mixed feelings with regards to the overall support the CPPA provided. One participant commented favourably on the support he received, particularly in the professional role the association provided through its annual conference. However, the majority regarded the association as unhelpful, particularly in understanding their needs as principals in rural locations. Literature highlights the importance of collegial support in assisting the beginning principals understanding his/her roles and responsibilities (Chapman, 2005; Orr, 2011; Winton & Pollock, 2012;). Literature also acknowledges the challenges confronting beginning primary principals accessing their peer networks (Clarke & Stevens, 2009). Compounding the challenge of accessing peers is the need expressed by beginning principals for peers to be contextually aware of the particular circumstances in which the new principal operates (O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2006; Wallace & Boylan, 2007).

6.6.1.3 Self-awareness

The responses from the nine primary school participants in the area of self-awareness resulted in two themes: realisation of their role as principal and the diverse demands placed upon them as school leader. Five of the primary participants commented on the realisation that the principalship redefines their role as educator. The participants recognised that the reality of leading the school takes them out of the classroom and into other tasks required of leadership. Whilst they reported that they sought active ways of getting back into the classroom, such as relieving for classroom teachers, they realised that their sustained teaching of a class of students had effectively ended. Weindling and Dimmock (2006) highlighted that an important milestone in the beginning principals journey of principalship is the awareness of transitioning from the classroom to the administrative role of school leader with its increased accountability. They report that as
the beginning principal transitions into the leadership role, the realisation of the positions status, image and requirements of the principal becomes clearer for the individual.

The second theme that the primary school participants identified was their growing appreciation of the diverse demands of the principalship and the need to be knowledgeable across a variety of areas. Their comments were underpinned by a sense of being overwhelmed by the varied demands placed upon them that they did not always understand the nature of the demands. Ashton and Duncan (2012), Browne-Ferrigno (2003), Clarke et al., (2007) and Daresh (2006a) reiterate these sentiments and acknowledge that beginning principals feel overwhelmed by the diversity and enormity of the role.

6.6.2 Secondary schooling
6.6.2.1 Technical and managerial skills
The data from the four secondary school participants identified three key themes that were related to the technical and managerial skills area. These were the demand and pace required of the leadership position, the size of the school and the importance of prior leadership experience. All four participants commented on the demanding pace of the principalship. They remarked on the constant volume of work that needed to be attended to by the principal and the recognition that the principal had full responsibility to get the job done. Literature is replete on the demands placed upon principals (Crow, 2006; Darling-Hammond & La Pointe, 2007; Day, 2013; Walker & Qian, 2006). The literature also acknowledges the challenges in keeping up with the rapidity of change,
public accountability and increased autonomy (Bush et al., 2010; Robinson, 2007; Leithwood et al, 2010; Walker et al., 2003).

The four secondary school participants reported on the demands associated with the large size of their schools. They felt the weight of responsibility of the principalship given the sizeable populations of students and staff at their respective schools. They experienced the high stakes pressure involved with student achievement, the responsibility of leading and managing a large and multi-disciplinary staff, and the accountability of a multi-million dollar budget and school plant site. Literature reports that the role of secondary school principals is distinct from their primary principal colleagues. Key differences include secondary schools being greater in size, having a more diverse staff due to the specialist subjects and catering for an older age group of the students (Robinson et al., 2013). Literature on beginning principals reiterates the demands of high stakes accountability, particularly in the public scrutineering of student achievement (Bush et al., 2010; Garcia-Garduno et al., 2011; Hobson et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2008). Hobson et al. (2003) identify the challenges of beginning principals in their interpersonal relationships with and among staff, particularly in their dealings with staff who are ineffective.

The final theme reported by the four secondary school participants related to the importance of their various leadership experiences and opportunities that formed their career pathway. All participants appreciated the diverse leadership journeys that they had undertaken in secondary schools. They collectively commented that these opportunities gave them a breadth of experiences that held them in good stead for when they began their principalship. Literature on beginning principalship identifies the
importance of varied leadership experiences as necessary preparation for school principalship (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Robinson et al., 2013; Su et al., 2003; Wright et al., 2000).

6.6.2.2 Socialisation skills

The data from the four secondary school participants highlighted three dominant themes within the area of socialisation skills: collegial relationships, CEOWA support and parish-school relationships.

All four participants acknowledged and valued the support of their colleagues. They found their peers to be openly supportive of them as new principals and typically they would seek the help from particular colleagues. Further, they believed that it was important to be proactive in asking for assistance and advice. The majority of the participants found the Catholic Secondary Principals Association [CSPA] to be very supportive of new principals. The organisational structure of the Association encouraged all secondary principals to be part of the leadership structure and actively participate in varying activities. One participant did remark that she found the Association was not meeting her needs with regards to allocating her a mentor. However, she suggested that this situation was more to do with the Association being distracted with its negotiation of the principal contract with the CEOWA than neglecting her needs. Literature identifies the significance of collegial support for the beginning principal (Chapman, 2005; Orr, 2011; Winton & Pollock, 2012) support that includes modelling, role clarification and advice in order to navigate challenges (Orr, 2011; Winton & Pollock, 2012).
The second identified theme acknowledged the support provided by the CEOWA. The four secondary school participants found the personnel, accessibility, timeliness of support and personal interest in them as people very positive. For example, two of the secondary school principals were facing significant staffing issues and were very appreciative of the advice and direction offered by CEOWA personnel. Specifically, the participants commented on the CEOWA consultant’s particular concern for them as new leaders as they confronted difficult circumstances. That beginning principals gain confidence and skills to lead their school community more effectively when educational authorities are supportive of their particular needs is identified in the literature (Anderson et al., 2010; Lock et al., 2012; Pietsch & Williamson, 2009).

The third theme reflected the concerns that the four secondary school participants had with school and parish relationship. The secondary participants were anxious about the large number of parishes from which their school drew enrolments, citing upwards of ten parishes. The participants recognised the importance of parish school relationships in order to enhance the efforts of faith formation of students and their families. In practice, the participants tended to have closer relationships with the local parish in which the school was positioned. The importance of the Catholic school linking with the students’ local parishes is well supported in the literature (Ciriello, 1996; Hickey et al., 2009; Rieckhoff, 2014). The desire of the secondary school participants to have stronger links with the local parish is necessary and important; however, they found it difficult to work with all parishes with the same level of interaction. Literature highlights the impost the parish community can have on the workload of the principal, and that principals need to be safeguarded from overcommitting themselves to parish life, other than for their own faith nurturing purposes (ACPPA, 2005).
6.6.2.3 Self-awareness skills

Two key themes emerged from the responses of the secondary school participants within the area of self-awareness. These were to do with the vocational call to lead a Catholic school and the need for reflective practice in the leadership role. The four secondary school participants reported on the importance of their aspiration to lead within Catholic education and their desire to nurture and grow the faith of the Catholic school community was very strong. Participants had close affiliations with Catholic education having been educated within the system and brought up by their families as Catholic. Literature examining the reasons underpinning the motivation as to why people pursue Catholic school principalship identified the importance of their vocational call to lead (Belmonte & Cranston, 2007; Fraser & Brock, 2006; Holter & Frabutt, 2012; Nuzzi et al., 2013; Sharkey, 2007). Personal assent to the Catholic faith and a sense of mission and commitment to Catholic education are important motivational factors underpinning the desire to lead in Catholic schools (Lennan, 2005; Nuzzi et al., 2013; Sharkey, 2007).

The second theme focused on the importance of reflective practice in the demanding role. Participants acknowledged the importance of separating work from personal life and the need to adopt strategies to alleviate the pressures and demand of leadership. Literature identifies the skill of reflective practice as essential for the new leader in order to process the demands of the role (Daresh & Male, 2000). Branson (2007) and Hall (2008) argue that reflective practice skills are essential for school leaders. Both authors base their premise on the fact that reflective skills assist school principals to become more aware of themselves which in turn, enables them to understand the “tacit truths that govern their choices” (Branson, 2007, p. 239). In addition, Hall (2008)
suggests that reflective skills provide an internal mechanism to debrief decision making and consider the leaders actions and consequences.

### 6.7 Comparison of primary and secondary Catholic schooling

The third perspective explored the beginning principals’ responses according to school type as they related the three areas of technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness. Responses from the 13 participants indicated common experiences across both types of schooling. Within the area of technical and managerial skills, all participants identified the excessive workload demands and accountabilities placed upon them in leading their schools. Collectively, they noted the excessive volume of work and fast pace in which they were required to deal with the responsibilities of principalship.

The noticeable differences underpinning the operational demands placed upon both primary and secondary school principals were the size of the school, the age of the students and the nature of the curriculum. The secondary schools participants typically led secondary schools that had large student populations catering for students aged between 12 and 17 years. Such large student populations exacerbated the need for differentiated curriculum catering for varied needs that included high stakes testing which ultimately established career paths for students leaving school and entering the work force. The size of the school impacted significantly on the management and leadership of large multi-disciplinary staff, accountability of a multi-million dollar budget and large school site with specialist areas. As the primary schools were smaller in scale, the primary school principals did not experience the issues to the same extent as their secondary school colleagues. However, the primary school participants were
still required to meet all obligatory requirements of government and educational authorities. The primary principal did not have the personnel to delegate any managerial tasks and was therefore required to undertake all bureaucratic requirements by themselves.

Within the socialisation skills area, all participants reported on the importance of good working relationships with both their colleagues and the parish community. Collegial support was recognised by all participants, irrespective of school type, as an important factor in building their leadership capabilities. Whilst both groups reported on their relationships with their respective principal associations, the secondary participants tended to be more interactive and proactive in their participation within the Association. The primary participants tended to be more passive and less demanding of their Association and were critical of the lack of differentiated support they were subsequently offered. A possible explanation for this difference may lie in the actual size of membership of the respective associations. The Catholic Secondary School Principals’ Association [CSPA] has 40 members, whilst the Catholic Primary School Principals’ Association [CPPA] has over 110 members (CECWA, 2013). The smaller, more intimate secondary association would provide greater familiarity, collegiality and support amongst principals; whereas the CPPA’s larger membership could be daunting for beginning principals.

A noticeable difference between primary and secondary school participants was found within the area of self-awareness. The primary participants reported on how they regretted leaving the classroom as a consequence of moving into the leadership role. This lament expressed by the primary participants could be explained by the educational
journey of primary principals. Primary principals tend to move from being a classroom teacher to an assistant principals role, which has a significant teaching component, to principalship. The movement to principalship is the first time that primary school principals move out of the classroom. The primary school participants also reported on an overwhelming sense of the diverse demands placed upon them as principal. On the other hand, the secondary school participants reported on their desire to serve as leader and acknowledged their vocational call to principalship. A possible explanation for this difference may lie in the fact that secondary participants acknowledged that their diverse leadership pathway to principalship enabled them to deal with the varied demands the position required. Whereas their primary counterparts tended to have a limited career path leading from classroom teaching to assistant principal and onto principalship. This linear pathway from classroom teacher to assistant principal to principal could limit leadership experiences. The summary of common and divergent themes from the nine primary and four secondary beginning principals to the three research areas are presented in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4
Summary of common and divergent themes by school type (perspective 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Common themes</th>
<th>Divergent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical and managerial skills</td>
<td>There were no common themes across perspective 3, school type.</td>
<td>Accountability demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demand and pace</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Size of school</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socialisation skills</td>
<td>Collegial relationships</td>
<td>Community relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parish relationships</td>
<td>CEOWA support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>There were no common themes across perspective 3, school type.</td>
<td>Classroom teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diverse nature of the principalship</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Need for reflective</td>
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</table>
6.8 Summary

This research examining the professional and personal needs of beginning principals in Catholic schools in Western Australia identified a number of common and unique themes across the three perspectives of gender, school location and school type. Within the area of socialisation skills, all participants commented on the importance of their respective principal’s associations in their early career as school principal. The majority of participants across all three perspectives highlighted the influence of community demands, both local and parish on the leadership role. In addition, the majority of participants commented on the role the CEOWA has in supporting them through advice, direction and professional development in their fledging status.

Within the area of technical and managerial skills, participants across the three perspectives reported on the excessive demands the administrative role had on their professional and personal lives. The administrative requirements that participants reported included areas such as financial management; staffing issues, such as recruitment and performance management of staff; attending to external accountabilities from government and educational authorities; and dealing with the day-to-day aspects of the role.

Within the area of self-awareness, the majority of the participants across the three perspectives reported on the importance of their vocational call to serve as leader of a Catholic school. Comments from both gender and locality perspectives highlighted the
professional and personal loneliness experienced by the participants as a school leader, particularly if they lead rural and remote schools.

Unique to the gender perspective, the female and male participants proffered particular views on the issue of confidence. The female participants voiced a lack of confidence in their ability to lead, whilst their male counterparts expressed confidence in their ability to delegate tasks in order to build capacity of others and lessen the more menial tasks of their burgeoning responsibilities. In addition to the males’ responses to their leadership ability was their desire to lead early in their teaching career. Conversely, females only considered principalship on the encouragement from their principals. Another unique theme emerging from the type of school setting was offered by the primary school participants. They lamented the loss of their substantive teaching role when they became principals. Table 6.5 details participants’ perceptions on their professional and personal needs across the three perspectives.

Table 6.5

*Key themes emerging across the three perspectives addressing the three research areas of technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness skills.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Technical and managerial skills</th>
<th>Socialisation skills</th>
<th>Self-awareness skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Financial understanding</td>
<td>Culture of the school</td>
<td>Need for resiliency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management of the school board</td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
<td>Need for resiliency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Transition into principalship</td>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>School location</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bureaucratic demands</td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>Staffing concerns</td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial management and school board management</td>
<td>Community issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CEOWA support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>Staffing issues</td>
<td>Collegial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational outcomes for Aboriginal students</td>
<td>CEOWA support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communication issues</td>
<td>CEOWA support</td>
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<td>Staffing issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>School type</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>Accountability demands</td>
<td>Community and parish relationships</td>
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<td>Staffing issues</td>
<td>Collegial networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>211</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>Demand and pace</td>
<td>Collegial relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Size of school</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>CEOWA support practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parish-school relationship</td>
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</table>

### 6.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided an interpretive and analytical discussion of the data provided in Chapter Five. The data presented for each of the three perspectives were analysed alongside relevant literature according to each research question. This chapter provides the basis for the final chapter: Chapter Seven: Review and Conclusions.
Chapter Seven: Review and Conclusions

7.1 Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research was to explore the professional and personal needs of newly appointed principals of Catholic schools in Western Australia. Specifically, the research focused on the professional and personal needs of 13 beginning principals. The case study explored three perspectives relating to beginning principals, namely: gender, school location and school type. Foundational to this purpose was the view that school principals have a significant influence on student educational outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013). Simply stated: quality leadership brings about quality educational outcomes for young people (Chapman, 2005). It is necessary, therefore, to develop and support beginning principals so that they can provide excellent educational opportunities for young people.

7.2 Design of the research

The theoretical framework underpinning this research drew from a qualitative approach utilising interpretivism as its theoretical perspective. The interpretivist lens which this research used was that of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism was chosen because it highlights the perspectives of individuals and the meanings individual attach to interactions and events (Clarke, 2000). The methodology employed in this research was that of an instrumental case study which sought to highlight the perceptions, both professional and personal, of beginning principals. In order to examine these perceptions, three research perspectives were covered: gender, school location and school type. Three specific research questions were investigated to explicate the three perspectives. The specific research questions were:

1. What technical and managerial skills do beginning principals need to acquire?
2. What cultural and personal relationships do beginning principals need to develop?

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

The methods of data collection included semi-structured interviews, document search and researcher field notes. The analysis of the data applied the framework developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This interactive model of data management and display consisted of three processes: data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions. The discussion found in Chapter Six drew from the analysis of the data and critical reflection of the relevant literature. The following section addresses the response to the specific research questions proposed by this research.

7.3 Research questions answered

7.3.1 What technical and managerial skills do beginning principals need to acquire?

The findings of the research suggest that the technical and managerial skills required for beginning principals lay within four areas, namely, financial management, dealing with staffing issues, meeting bureaucratic demands and the transition process into the leadership role. These areas will now be explained.

The first technical and managerial skills area which the beginning principals recognised was in the area of financial management. The beginning principals collectively reported that they struggled with understanding the financial processes required of running a school. The beginning principals acknowledged that they need to become familiar with financial resourcing in order to run multi-million dollar school operations.
The second technical and managerial skills area beginning principal’s identified concerned staffing. Here, beginning principals noted three main concerns: the recruitment of suitably qualified school staff, building staff capacity and management of under-performing staff. Beginning principals recognised the need for attracting new staff who were experienced and capable. They recognised that in order to provide students with the best educational outcomes, they needed to develop professionally their staff. A final skills area the beginning principals commented on with regards to staffing was how to deal with under-performing staff. Beginning principals recognised that they were not fully equipped to deal with poor performing staff.

The third technical and managerial skills area identified by the beginning principals was that of meeting the bureaucratic needs of system and governments. The new leaders reported that the time demands placed on meeting accountabilities to multiple masters left little time for what they believed was their core work as principal, namely, leading teaching and learning. Beginning principals noted that they needed skills to manage time more effectively and discern high order tasks from less important ones.

The final area within technical and managerial skills that the beginning principals identified lay in the process of transitioning to principalship. Beginning principals reported that the handover they encountered with the exiting principal was an inadequate process and required more structure and organisation. Beginning principals recognised the importance of preparing themselves for the handover with the exiting principals in order to make the transition into principal of the new school a smooth one.
7.3.2 What cultural and personal skills do beginning principals need to develop?

The beginning principals identified three areas relating to the cultural and personal skills required of them for effective leadership. These three areas involved socialisation skills that enhanced their political and contextual awareness, the development of community engagement strategies and the need to augment collegial relationships.

The first cultural and personal skill area that beginning principals identified related to developing political and contextual awareness. The beginning principals who began their principalship in rural or remote locations noted that their school context was located within a broader local community that included the parish. In order for the beginning principal to lead within the school community and participate actively in the local community and parish, it was important that he or she understood the socio, cultural, political and communal milieu and mores. Beginning remote and rural principal’s recognised the importance of developing professional sensitivity to the school’s cultural context in order to enhance their awareness to the needs of the school and the broader community.

The second cultural and personal area that the beginning principal’s highlighted was the potential demands placed upon new leaders when participating in the broader local community. Whilst beginning principals noted the value of the school in the local community, some experienced excessive demands placed upon their time by both local and parish communities. The beginning principals recognised that they needed to balance school, personal and communal responsibilities in order to be an effective school leader.
The third cultural and personal skills area identified by beginning principals focussed on the importance of building strong collegial relationships. The beginning principals recognised their principal colleagues as an important source for support, advice and encouragement in understanding the role requirements of leading a school. An important socialisation skill recognised by the beginning principals was augmenting relationships with local Catholic school principals and other like schools. By doing so they could enhance collaboration, improve problem-solving skills and view different perspectives on educational issues.

7.3.3 In what ways do beginning principals integrate their role of principalship with their self-awareness?

The beginning principals identified three areas that they needed to develop in order to integrate the role of principalship with their self-awareness. These areas were the importance of faith development in their principalship, the importance of self-reflection in building their leadership capacity and the importance of being resilient in order to deal with the burgeoning demands of principalship.

Firstly, the majority of beginning principals identified the importance of faith development in their vocational call to Catholic school principalship as a key role of integrating the principalship with their own sense of self-awareness. The majority of beginning principals’ firmly believed in the need to serve and lead within a faith-based context. The principals’ personal assent to the Catholic faith was publically manifested in the religious dimension of their leadership. Beginning principals recognised the need to persist with nurturing their faith while at the same time being ever mindful of the influence they have in the faith development of their school community.
The beginning principals highlighted the importance of self-reflecting on their leadership as the second area of integrating the principal’s role with their sense of self-awareness. The new leaders recognised that spending time reflecting on their actions and decisions assisted them in moderating their behaviours. In particular, this skill of self–reflection provides the new leader with the opportunity to be attuned to the influential nature of the principalship.

Beginning principals recognised the need for skill development in the area of resiliency in order to meet the demands of principalship as a third area of integrating the principal’s role with their sense of self-awareness. The beginning principals reported on the challenges of the principalship. These challenges included feelings of loneliness, isolation and anxiety in meeting the burgeoning demands and accountabilities. In addition, they noted the importance of managing work–life balance issues. Beginning principals need to develop their resiliency skills to counter these onerous challenges. These skills will build the leadership capacity of beginning principal, enabling them to deal with complex and challenging tasks with confidence and success.

7.4 Conclusion

This study was concerned with exploring the professional and personal needs of beginning principals in Western Australian Catholic schools. The motivation behind the study was to understand the needs of beginning principals in order to consider ways the Catholic education system could develop and support its new leaders. In bringing to the fore their challenges and issues, the study sought to identify ways to nurture new leaders in meeting these challenges and concerns encountered in the initial years of principalship.
7.5 Implications for the profession

The findings from the study have implications for the following groups or individuals:

1. Bishops and parish communities
2. Catholic Education Office in Western Australia
3. University programs related to school leadership programs
4. Principal associations and current experienced and successful principals
5. Aspirant principals
6. Other researchers

The bishops are the employers of principals in Western Australian Catholic schools in the dioceses in which the school is located. The bishops require their school principals to integrate successfully the missionary priority of the Catholic Church with the secular educational demands and priorities of the state and federal governments. The findings from this study provide bishops with an insight into how their principals are dealing with their first years of principalship. The study’s findings, therefore, have implications for bishops and parishes with regards to supporting the needs of beginning principals. Bishops and parish priests need to nurture the faith of beginning principals as a matter of priority; the principal’s role as a religious leader in the school community requires them to be confident in themselves and secure within their faith. The research suggests that parish priests and the parish community have a role to play in supporting and nurturing the faith of beginning principals. Key to this role of support is the need for the bishop and parish priests to monitor the demands placed upon the new leaders and to provide opportunities for faith formation.
The Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, as the executive arm of the CECWA and therefore, of the bishops, is required to ensure that the quality of leaders and potential leaders is nurtured and developed. The nurturing and developing of beginning principals will then in turn provide the best educational outcomes for young people and support the missionary purpose of the Catholic Church. The findings from this study provide evidence of the needs, both professional and personal, of beginning principals. In order for the CEOWA to recruit and support those new to principalship, leadership preparation programs are required, which accurately reflect the skills required of Catholic leaders.

Tertiary providers, who offer programs in school leadership development, need to consider the findings of this research in order to provide learning opportunities for potential school leaders that hone in on appropriate and relevant understandings for contemporary school principalship. Such understandings might include interpersonal skills, communication skills, organisational development and conflict resolution. Principal associations have a significant part to play in the support of beginning principals. Findings of this research suggest that a more coordinated and active mentoring of beginning principals by current successful principals is central to developing and sustaining these new leaders. In addition, this research highlighted the role of experienced principals in building the leadership capacity of current teachers, particularly women, and encouraging them to aspire for principalship. Such an action is crucial for succession planning for school principalship.

This study has relevance to those considering principalship. This research offers first hand stories of beginning principals. In particular, this research provides aspirants with
the reality of the school leadership, its joys and pitfalls. The findings highlight areas that aspirants need to consider, develop and practice in order to be a Catholic school principal. For instance, the following areas that challenged beginning principals include financial management; staff recruitment, development and performance management; community engagement; political and cultural sensitivities; and personal and faith development. Amidst the challenges and issues that confronted the new leader, a foundational characteristic of all participants was their desire to serve as a leader in Catholic education. The vocational call for these participants should provide aspirants with an understanding of what Catholic school principalship is fundamentally about, namely, the school’s support in the missionary purpose of the Church.

For researchers interested in the professional and personal needs of beginning principals, this study provides a foundation for further research. It would be worthwhile replicating the study in other educational sectors and systems within Western Australia, across Catholic education systems in other states and territories and internationally. Comparative case studies across educational systems and sectors would provide a more in-depth analysis of the professional and personal needs of beginning principals.

7.6 Recommendations

Six recommendations are drawn from the findings of this study. These recommendations are now presented.

Firstly, the CECWA and CEOWA adopt a rural and remote lens when developing and implementing policies for Catholic education. Such a lens would ensure that the impact of such policies would be cognisant of the limitations encountered by beginning
principals who lead in rural and remote locations. These limitations include limited access to professional support in implementing changes to policies and practices; inexperience of the principal in delivering system changes; and the limited number of experienced staff in small schools who could effect change and meet accountability requirements posed by the system and governments.

Secondly, leadership preparation programs for aspiring principals need to emphasise the technical and managerial skills necessary for the operational requirements of running a school. These types of skills include financial management, and recruitment and development of school staff. In addition, leadership preparation programs need to develop the aspirant’s awareness of the micro-politics that exist within the school and the broader community. The development of the abovementioned skills will assist aspiring principals in understanding the transactional areas of school principalship.

Thirdly, principal preparation programs need to have differentiated elements to cater for gender, school location and school type. Specifically, it is essential that the content of principal preparation programs be differentiated to meet the diverse needs of the participants, the variety of school contexts and locations, and the particularities associated with leading primary and secondary schools. This differentiation of content will ensure that the principals programs are better designed to contribute to the individual and collective needs of beginning principals.

Fourthly, principal associations should consider a more consistent and targeted focus on the needs of beginning principals as a matter of priority. Associations are recommended to establish networks for beginning principals to ascertain what their particular
challenges and needs are, and then facilitate opportunities to strategize around these concerns. Associations are encouraged to collaborate with the CEOWA in catering for the professional and personal needs of beginning principals. A joint focus would benefit the Catholic education system enormously as it will support current and future beginning principals.

Fifthly, the CEOWA needs to facilitate the development of an enculturation program for school boards and parishes that bring into focus the needs of beginning principals. The program’s content should consider developing the new leader’s profile within the local community that is commensurate with managing a healthy work–life balance. The program should be developed with input from beginning principals, community and parish personnel and school staff.

Finally, the CEOWA needs to introduce appropriate faith formation activities specifically designed to nurture the faith of beginning principals. Activities such as spiritual retreats, faith renewal programs and sabbatical opportunities can provide the beginning principal with the time and opportunity to reflect; to become more attuned to their vocational call and strengthen their resolve to contribute to the Church’s mission; and to nourish their spiritual needs.

7.7 Addendum

The research has already made some impact. As a result of this study, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia has moved to adopt changes to the existing leadership preparation programs. Firstly, these changes include the participation of aspiring principals with school boards. This participation exposes the aspiring principal
to governance and community awareness issues. Secondly, a number of CEOWA beginning principals leadership programs have now adopted the use of factual school data. These data includes school financials, budgets, capital development plans and staff accreditation details. The use of real data provide program participants with the opportunity to understand the fiscal, resource and personnel context of individual schools situations. Thirdly, as a consequence of this study, there has been further refinement of the handover processes between the exiting and incumbent beginning principals. This process has enabled the beginning principal to be better equipped to transition into the school at the start of his or her contract with sound working knowledge of the school’s operation.

7.8 Personal impact statement

This research has had a significant impact on me. The motivation for the study was drawn from spending time with beginning principals and listening to their stories of challenge and joy. These interactions highlighted the imperative for appropriate professional and personal support for beginning principals. Such support not only enables beginning principals to lead their school communities more successfully in its educational endeavours, but also to flourish in their vocational call. This research has enabled me, as a member of the Executive who leads Catholic Education in Western Australia, to provide a voice for beginning principals at the executive discussion table. Examples of discussions in which I have contributed include the following: development of leadership preparation programs; impact of policies and practices on rural and remote schools; challenges in embracing accountabilities to system and government and the well-being of beginning principals per se.
APPENDIX A

LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL
Catholic schools are important means through which the Church proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ and evangelises in the world of today. They are privileged places of evangelisation. It is for the principal to give leadership to the school community, promoting its evangelisation purposes, aims and ethos, its development as a faith community, its religious dimension and the outcomes of curriculum, including the religious education program.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
This conceptual representation of the framework uses the metaphor of a growing tree to capture the organic unity of Catholic School Leadership. Behind this metaphor lies the parable of the sower.

Jesus is the soil in which the tree is planted. He is the source of nutrients. The four capabilities in which Catholic leadership is expressed are the roots, which anchor and draw nutrients into the tree.

The trunk is the structural support and system, which circulates the religious dimension that makes the Catholic school distinctive.

The branches, the five domains in which leadership is exercised, are the various ways in which the tree expresses its identity.

Catholic school leadership is devoted to the total formation of the individual and works towards this goal guided by a Christian vision of reality. Its task is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life. The first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught in light of the Gospel: the second in the growth of the virtues and characteristics of the Christian.

Catholic school leadership is complex, dynamic and organic:
I have come so that you may have life, and have it to the full.

Support for this conceptual representation can be found in the literature. The quality of contemporary school leadership is influenced by the professional practices of school leaders (what they do), the specific contextual factors and situations with which they engage as school leaders (why they do what they do) and the capabilities of leaders (how they lead).

Quality school leaders possess a range of Personal, Relational, Professional and Organisational. Capabilities that they employ effectively in complex and changing circumstances.
School leaders’ professional practices have to be highly adaptable and attentive to their ecclesial, economic, political and socio-cultural contexts. The domains of leadership of Catholic schools in Western Australia have been identified as Catholic Identity, Education, Stewardship, Community and Future Focus.

**DOMAINS**

Domains are leaders’ significant action areas in promotion of the educational mission of the Catholic Church.

**CATHOLIC IDENTITY**

Catholic leadership promotes the purposes and aims of evangelisation. School leaders develop the school community as a faith community, its religious dimension and the outcomes of its curriculum. School leaders ensure that Christian values are reflected in attitudes, policy and practice in their schools. They also recognise the ecclesial nature of Catholic education and maintain links with the diocesan Church, actively contributing to the Church’s mission of evangelisation.

**EDUCATION**

Leadership in the domain of education requires a strong sense of the educational mission of the Church. It involves the capacity to lead, manage and monitor the school improvement process, attainment of knowledge, the acquisition of Christian values and the discovery of truth. Educational leadership supports learning across the local school and the wider system, offering a multiplicity of learning experiences that nurture a lifelong love of learning and enquiry leading to wise and moral choices that support a fullness of life. The educational leader demonstrates the capacity to model important values and behaviours to the school community, including a commitment to creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities within the school and across all levels of the system.

**STEWARSHIP**

The domain of stewardship recognises that God is creator of the universe and that policies and organisational structures serve individual and communal development, as well as care for the earth. Stewardship involves policy development, the provision, use and maintenance of the human, physical and financial resources of the school and appropriate processes to monitor, review, report and provide accountability to Church and government authorities and to the wider community. Stewardship requires responsible management and allocation of resources so as to add value to the Catholic education provided in schools; to take account of equity and diversity of school needs and to be open, transparent and accountable to public scrutiny.

**COMMUNITY**

Leaders sustain and promote the Catholic life of the school community. Community leaders demonstrate the ability to foster a safe, purposeful and inclusive learning environment, and a capacity to develop constructive and respectful relationships with
staff, students, parents and all involved with schooling. A community in the Catholic tradition is underpinned by principles of Catholic Social Teaching including the Common Good, subsidiarity, solidarity and participation. Consequently, leaders of school communities design organisational structures characterised by service, collaborative decision-making, genuine participation and patterns of cooperation.

FUTURE FOCUS

Future-focused leaders recognise their role in the ongoing story of Creation, Redemption and furthering the Kingdom. School leadership is grounded in present realities but not constrained by these realities. Beyond maintenance and improvement, school leaders imagine new visions through which sustainable change is realised. This form of school leadership involves creative thinking that blends intuition with rationality. Future-focused leaders demonstrate the capacity to promote a vision for the future, underpinned by common purposes and values that unify the school community in realising the potential of all students.
APPENDIX B
Interview Guide

1. What was your ‘road’ to principalship and why travel this road?
2. What are your main beliefs and values about Catholic school leadership?
3. What has motivated you to become a Catholic school principal?
4. The Catholic Church has particular demands on Catholic school principals. What is your understanding of these demands? How have you responded to these demands? How have you prepared yourself to be a leader of the Catholic school?
5. How have you prepared yourself for the educational demands currently being experienced in schools? Individual/personal; professional development; external
6. Considering experiences thus far, what have been the highlights as principal?
7. What have been your success stories?
8. What are the areas of challenge that you have encountered in your role?
9. Was there a significant moment when you realized that you are the principal in your first year?
10. What has the transition been like from your previous role to the one of principal?
11. Who has given you the greatest support in your new role? Who have been your role models of principalship?
12. What type of support has the CEOWA given you as principal? Was this request for support of your making or need or didn’t you have a choice?
13. What or who are your key supports in the role?
14. What support networks have you accessed (professional associations, mentors, colleagues)?
15. With regard to your personal relationships, have these changed as you have assumed the role of school principal?
16. Do the professional development programs offered by the CEOWA meet your particular needs?
17. What support have your colleagues given you since taking up your appointment?
18. Do you believe that you were adequately prepared for your principalship role through the road to principalship?
19. If you were to develop the Induction Program for newly appointed principals what five main areas would you definitely have in the program?
20. In recalling your experience of the Principal Induction Program, what aspects would you consider the most helpful / least helpful?
21. With regard to the four domains of principalship in the Catholic school, how well prepared were you for being the:
   a. Theological leader
   b. Educational leader
   c. Pastoral leader
   d. Administrative leader
22. What organizations do you belong to beyond the school fence and why?
23. If you were to have a metaphor for your school principalship, what would it be and why choose this?
APPENDIX C
Approval from the University of Notre Dame Australia School of Education Research Committee Clearance

Dean, College of Education
Bernie Prindiville Chair

19 April 2007
Debra Sayce
23 Patricia St
East Victoria Park
6101

Dear Debra,

On the 12 April the School of Education Research Committee received your application for ethical clearance for your proposal research to be undertaken for your doctoral studies.

The title of the project is: Professional Needs of newly appointed principals in Catholic Schools in Western Australia: the first five years of Principalship.

Your proposal has been reviewed by the school research committee to assess the extent to which it complies with the guidelines for expedited ethical clearance.

Your application has been assessed as having met all expected ethical standard that are relevant to the nature of your intended research and the instrumentation you have chosen to use. Your proposed research project has been granted ethical clearance by expedited ethical review from (April 2007 – December 2009) and consequently your research may now commence.

Clearances granted by ethical review are subject to confirmation by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The HREC may elect to review the School Research Committee’s decision or request further information and/or amendments to the research project.

Should the design of the study, the choice of instrument, or the manner of administration be altered in any significant way as your study progresses, you must provide an update of your clearance application for renewed consideration.

On behalf of the University, I wish you well with what promises to be a most interesting and valuable research project.

Yours sincerely

Michael O’Neill
Dean, School of Education, Fremantle

CC: Jaki Creavin, Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee
APPENDIX D
Approval Letter from the Director of Catholic Education

DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

2 October 2007

Debra Sayce
23 Patricia Street
EAST VICTORIA PARK WA 6101

Dear Debra

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN WA

I am writing with regard to your proposal outlining your research study investigating Professional Needs of newly appointed principals in Catholic schools in Western Australia: the first five years of Principalship. I am pleased to give in principle support for this valuable research, and encourage principals in Catholic schools to participate in the study. However, it is the decision of the individual principal with regards to their participation in the research project.

I would like to request that, at the completion of the project, a copy of research findings be forwarded to the Catholic Education Office of WA.

The contact person at the Catholic Education Office of WA is Desirée Grzenda-Day who can be contacted at grzendaray.desiree@cathednet.wa.edu.au or Tel: (08) 6380 5379.

I wish you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

Ron Dullard
Dear (Participant)

My name is Debra Sayce. I am a student at The University of Notre Dame Australia and enrolled in the Doctor of Education course.

I would like to invite you to participate in a study titled: What are the professional needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals during the first term of appointment?

The purpose of this research is to explore the professional needs of newly appointed principals in Catholic schools in Western Australia since 2003 in order to better support principals in their demanding roles. All principals who have been appointed within this time frame are being invited to participate in this research. It is anticipated the analysis of the data collected will promote sustainable quality leadership in Catholic education in Western Australia.

Your involvement will require a sixty-minute interview with myself, which will be taped and transcribed with your permission. Prior to analysis of data, you will have an opportunity to read and edit the transcription. You can be confident that your contribution will be entirely confidential and neither you nor your school will be identified in any way. Strict coding of identifiable material will be adhered to thus ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. This material will also be stored securely at the School of Education at the University for a minimum of five years. Should you choose to participate in the research and subsequently change your mind, you have the right to withdraw at any stage without any form of penalty. The findings of this research will be made available to you upon the completion of the study in either electronic or hard copy form.

I will be contacting you by telephone in the near future to seek your response. Should you accept the invitation, I will send you a consent form that is required to be completed and returned to me in the attached prepaid envelope. Upon receiving this I will schedule an interview time that is mutually acceptable at your place of work.

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Notre Dame, Australia has given research ethics approval for the conduct of this research. In addition, the Director of Catholic Education, Ron Dullard, has also given his consent to the research. If you have any concerns regarding the research, you can contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Notre Dame Australia, ph: 9443 0870 or fax 9433 0855.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact me on 9472 4276 (home), 9212 9217 (work) or debrasayce@bigpond.com.au My supervisor is Associate Professor Shane Lavery (9433 0173; slavery@nd.edu.au) who is also available to discuss any aspect of this research.

Finally, your potential contribution to this research will be of significance in supporting all principals in Catholic education. Sustainability and durability of principals in this time of educational change cannot be underestimated. Beginning principals are to be applauded for their desire to serve Catholic education. It is anticipated that this research will contribute to your success as a principal and to the continued success of the Catholic education system in its provision of quality Catholic education.

I thank you for your consideration and hope you will agree to participate in this research project.

Yours sincerely

Debra Sayce
Student ID: 20051284
APPENDIX F
Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Research Title: What are the professional needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals during the first term of appointment?

Researchers: Debra Sayce, doctoral student (Student ID: 20051284)  
Associate Professor Shane Lavery, Senior Lecturer (UNDA)

Research Purpose:
The purpose of this research is to explore the professional needs of newly appointed principals in Catholic schools in Western Australia in order to better support them in this demanding role. The findings from this research will contribute directly to addressing the professional needs of newly appointed principals. It is anticipated that the empirical data collected from the research questions will provide feedback to current practices and professional development for all principals in the system. The general patterns emerging from the empirical data will contribute to the formation of principal induction, principal professional development and future succession planning in school principal leadership for Catholic education.

Participant Rights
Permission has been granted from the Research Ethics Committee of UNDA and the Director of Catholic Education to research this area of principal leadership. Your commitment will be to participate in a one hour, in-depth and semi-structured interview. The interview will be conducted in your work environment at a mutually convenient time. The interviews will be taped and transcripts will be developed verbatim. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you for validity purposes. You have the right to edit your transcripts. Anonymity and confidentiality will be afforded to you through coding techniques and the secure storage of the data both at the university and in my home study through secure filing cabinets and rooms. In addition, access to the collected data will be limited to me and to my supervisors, Associate Professor Shane Lavery. Should you choose to participate in the research and subsequently change your mind, you have the right to withdraw at any stage without any form of penalty. You will also have the right to withdraw any unprocessed identifiable data previously supplied.

If you agree to participate in this research, can you please read and sign this consent form. This form will be retained for the duration of this study.

I (printed name)………………………………. give consent to participate in the abovementioned research. I am aware that the requirements will be an hour interview that will be audiotaped and transcribed. I accept the conditions regarding the ethical considerations including that I or my school will not be identified, that the researchers will keep all information pertaining to me confidential and that security surrounding my data is acceptable. I am also aware that I can withdraw at any stage prior to data analysis and that any unprocessed identifiable data can be withdrawn pertaining to my information without penalty.

| Participant’s Name: Debra Sayce | Date: |
| Researcher’s Name: | Debra Sayce | Date: |

If you have any complaint regarding the manner in which this research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Notre Dame Australia, ph: 9443 0870 or fax 9433 0855.
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