

***Understanding aspiration to principalship:
Perspectives of potential principals in
Catholic Education South Australia***

by

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*Thesis
Submitted to Flinders University
for the degree of*

Doctor of Education

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
November, 2024

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed..........

Date.....1 July, 2024.....

Acknowledgement

My great appreciation and thanks go to Professor Shane Pill, Doctor Bev Rogers, and Professor Heather Smigiel for their patience and guidance as I developed as a researcher. They believed in the importance of this educational leadership research and provided me with great support as they assisted me to develop a research framework that would support the exploration of such important research. Each played such an important role in assisting me to bring this research to reality; thank you for your guidance, support and empathy as you encouraged me to persist to ensure that this research would have impact and make a difference, collectively ensuring that educational sectors would continue to develop principals who can create great schools and colleges so children and young people in future generations can learn and grow into the best versions of themselves.

Thank you to my wife, Jodie, who always continued to love, encourage, and support me through this journey. Your unwavering support enabled me to find the space and time to conduct this important research while I was working. Your belief in my ability never ceases to amaze me.

Thank you to my children, Eliza, Lewis and Imogen, who unknowingly motivated me to be the best person I could be. I hope that through this example of lifelong learning I have demonstrated to you never to give up and continually strive to make an impact.

Finally, thank you to my parents, John and Gail, who prioritised the importance of a good education for me as a child and continually encouraged and supported me to develop myself in all aspects of life. Thank you for always believing in me.

Thanks to the contribution of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship who supported this research.

Thanks also to Dr Liz Charpleix, of Iris42 Editing Services, who proofread my thesis before submission.

Glossary

ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics

AITSL - Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

APRIM - Assistant Principal Religious Identity and Mission

CEO – Catholic Education Office

CESA – Catholic Education South Australia

ESO – Education Support Officer

ILSI - Impediments to Leadership Succession Inventory

MTL – Motivation to lead

NCEC - National Catholic Education Commission

OECD - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

SACCS - South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools

SBREC - Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee

VSAT - Victorian, South Australian and Tasmanian Study

Abstract

The increased demand for principals to lead in educational jurisdictions, due to a significant proportion reaching retirement age, collectively presents a challenge, which has been exacerbated by increasingly more beginning principals leaving prematurely and more teachers perceiving the role of a principal as being too onerous and unattractive. My original contribution to knowledge has generated an understanding of what sustains or diminishes the aspiration to pursue principalship in Catholic Education South Australia (CESA), which is valuable for creating an ongoing supply of motivated and qualified principals to ensure Catholic schools continue to thrive in the future.

The aim of this research was to understand the enabling factors and barriers to principalship with the objective of generating contemporary knowledge and understandings for an educational system to better develop and cultivate practices that meet anticipated school recruitment needs.

Through utilising a qualitative methodology, the data gained from qualitative analysis of 21 semi-structured interviews with teachers registered in the key CESA leadership induction programs (Aspiring Leaders and CESA Middle Leaders Programs) generated insights into understanding the ambition to pursue or relinquish a participant's aspiration to principalship in CESA.

The key findings from the thematic analysis illuminated enabling factors such as the need for a strong supportive network including a mentor and coach who provide clear guidance, the need for a high level of personal confidence, the need for self-awareness, the necessity for opportunities to grow skills necessary for principalship, a personal commitment and the need for alignment with the Catholic Church's teachings. Almost all participants expressed concerns about having to be morally aligned to an organisation with perceived outdated practices surrounding marriage, divorce, non-Catholic, and same-sex relationships. This research also identified the need for more flexible arrangements that cater for family pressures, extra study commitments, competing family priorities and time restrictions, which could alleviate barriers caused by the tension and perceived demand

experienced by aspiring principals who are challenged by the commitment of the school principal role.

Building on this underdeveloped field of research, this qualitative study has captured an understanding of what fosters principal aspiration, providing a valuable insight into factors that contribute to the notion that school principalship is attainable. The interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has the potential to further enhance work engagement and occupational commitment. Work engagement is inextricably linked to career growth, wherein progress towards career goals and professional development strongly relate to work engagement, surpassing extrinsic factors such as promotion and remuneration. Understanding how aspiring principals perceive and value their work will furnish CESA with useful knowledge about how to design more tailored and effective school leadership training.

The creation of systematic approaches to identify potential future leaders and effectively manage their career progression through career guidance, career mapping, mentoring, coaching and networking will empower aspiring leaders to shape their career trajectories, preventing potential misalignment and expediting the mentees' journeys towards professional expertise more efficiently. This will ultimately contribute to the continual progressive trajectory, effectiveness and longevity of the careers of future principals. Knowledge of the enabling pathways and barriers experienced by those who have previously enrolled in either the CESA Aspiring Leaders or CESA Middle Leaders Programs could additionally act as a review and will inform future CESA programs.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This research explores what it is that creates, sustains or diminishes the aspiration to pursue principalship in Catholic Education South Australia (CESA). Specifically, it explores the influences that have resulted in teachers aspiring to principalship and identifies reasons for, or for not, pursuing their aspiration. This study includes consideration of the drivers behind such aspirations and what may lead to renouncement or the continued pursuit of this aspiration. In considering what leads to renouncement, the thesis explores the barriers encountered by CESA teachers with principalship aspiration, and in considering the pursuit of aspiration the thesis explores what was deemed instrumental in the process of maintaining their aspiration for CESA teachers.

International research on principalship is broad; however, research specifically related to the area of understanding aspiration to principalship is limited (Anderson, 2009; Lake, 2016; Simon, 2022). To understand the experience of those aspiring to principalship further, the bulk of the international and Australian research is very localised and specific to a particular schooling system, or state in Australia (Barty et al, 2005; Sayce & Lavery, 2016).

1.2 Significance

There is rich literature on the field of school leadership and principalship, from both international and Australian research. Much of the existing research is “on” principals, and “for” principals, however there is little research “on” the incumbent aspirational leaders from their perspectives. There is a vast amount of research on principals in their first tenure as

principal (Bagi, 2016; Quong, 2006; Sayce & Lavery, 2016); however, to date, there has been little research undertaken with teachers with leadership aspirations (Fuller & Young, 2022; Perrone et al., 2022). There has been no qualitative research conducted in relation to aspiration to principalship in CESA. Globally, there is a calling for cross-national thematic comparative data to advance global understandings of the preparation programs for principalship to address the push and pull factors acting on teacher aspiration to principalship in each country as well as across countries and regions (Montecinos et al., 2022).

Understanding aspiration to principalship in CESA is important, given global indications of difficulty in retention of both teachers and principals. Approximately one in five principals leave their schools each year (DeMatthews et al., 2022). While it is known that high teacher turnover results in unstable learning environments in schools, it would seem reasonable to conclude that the same holds true for principal turnover as there exists a connection between teacher and principal turnover, in that teacher turnover spikes in schools experiencing principal turnover (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

International quantitative literature that highlights alarming findings around the retention of principals also highlights that induction and preparation programs are often insufficient in preparing aspiring principals for the isolation, experiences and challenges associated with the principal role, including those stemming from crises such as COVID-19 and ongoing issues such as the teacher shortage crisis (Bagi, 2016; Grissom et al., 2021). This phenomenon is experienced nationally and internationally.

Research has found that new principals often feel overwhelmed in the role (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Duignan et al., 2003; Duignan, 2004; Heffernan, 2021; Mulford et al., 2007; Simon et al., 2019) and most novice principals perceived they have a lack of specific training to prepare them for the role, citing the complexity of the role of principal (Mahfouz &

Gordon, 2021; Simon et al., 2019). This raises questions about why aspiration would exist for such a demanding and complex role when experienced principals are often failing to cope (Caldwell, 2024; Walker & Dimmock, 2006), identifying the necessity for a ready supply of well-prepared aspirational leaders ready to lead schools. Preparation programs are believed to benefit the “pipeline” of new principals (Gates et al., 2019; Steele et al., 2021). Internationally, studies suggest that aspiration to leadership among teachers exists, but principalship is not always sustained (Béteille et al., 2012; Maxwell & Superville, 2020). Fuller and Young (2022) suggested that from 100 teachers, there will be one principal who has a career longer than 5 years. Around a quarter and sometimes more United States beginning principals leave the profession before commencing their 3rd year of principalship (Fuller & Young, 2022; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Simon et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Also from the United States, studies in New York and North Carolina reported that between 14%–33% of all new principals leave their leadership role within the first 6 years of their tenure (Belt, 2009; Cone, 2014, Yan 2020); this figure may be up to 45% depending on the state (Goldring & Taie, 2018; Maxwell & Superville, 2020).

Australian research notes that historically many principal positions were left vacant or were re-advertised, suggesting that there is insufficient interest in leadership by teachers, or that aspirants are strategic in applying for positions (Collins, 2006; d’Arbon, 2006). Historically, factors such as the location of a school, a school’s student population and prior knowledge of other local applicants influence the number of applicants for a principal vacancy (Barty et al., 2005; Yan, 2020).

An impending principal shortage crisis has been suggested for many years (Colins, 2006; d’Arbon, 2006). The issue has been exacerbated by a decline in the number of individuals choosing the teaching profession and enrolling in teaching programs at universities, thus arguably decreasing the “talent pool” from which aspiration to leadership may arise. Reasons

for this decline in people entering the teaching profession include perception of low pay, work-related stress, challenging working conditions and inadequate public support (Brown, 2022; Mahfouz, 2020; McMurdock, 2022; Sutchter et al., 2019). A shortage of principal aspirants poses challenges for schools and potentially the supply of high-quality principals is reduced.

The capability of principals matters to schools. Effective principals are defined as playing a “central role in improving schools and increasing student achievement” (DeMatthews et al., 2022, p. 77). They have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom and to attract high-quality educators to schools (Bartanen et al., 2019; Fuller, 2012; Mahfouz & Gordon, 2021; Viadero, 2009). Robust school leadership also positively influences student achievement (Fuller, 2012; Yan 2020).

1.3 Addressing the Principal Shortage

To address the impact that a shortage of principal applicants has on meeting school and system needs, significant efforts are required across sectors to rectify the shortage of principals willing to lead schools. This includes ensuring principal preparation programs equip aspirant principals with the capacity when appointed to effectively navigate the elements of the role so that high attrition (Mahfouz & Gordon, 2021; Simon et al., 2019; Yan, 2020) is avoided. Future school leadership needs to be planned for by systems and sectors such that early attrition is avoided, thereby limiting the frequency of succession events through the preservation of educational leadership (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

Investment in principal development programs is essential to address principal development pathways and form a crucial component of a comprehensive strategy to tackle the identified principal shortages that our schools are currently facing, and which were anticipated. When

educational systems invest in professional learning and support for principals, alongside other elements of principal development they are also making an investment in teachers, future education and future principals. This is because well-prepared principals establish strong support foundations for the entire staff and the school community (Brown, 2022). Through tailoring professional aspiring principals' learning, development and job design CESA can begin to develop outstanding potential future principals and manage their career progression accordingly, to supply the identified need (Carlin et al., 2003; DeMatthews et al., 2022).

1.4 Principal Aspiration in Catholic Schools

My research looks specifically at aspiration to principalship in CESA. Earlier research specific to CESA recommended succession planning to ensure future quality of applicants and enhance principal capacity, to counter the trend of high interest in principalship, but a deficit in principal applications (Barty et al., 2005; d'Arbon, 2006). Since the early 2000s, there has been little change in the issue or understanding of the current context, nor rectification of the issue, as evidenced by an absence of research (Bickmore et al., 2021; Davidson, 2017) and my experience as a senior leader in CESA.

The Principal and Leadership of a Catholic School are Central to Matters of Catholic Identity

Catholic school principals have a duty to elaborate on faith leadership. The principal role is distinctly authentic in the mission of the Catholic Church and is charged with maintaining the ecclesial identity of the Catholic school, while simultaneously being charged with maintaining the historical charism and cultural foundations. This dual ecclesial identity requiring a historical charism and culture role is increasingly prominent as a growing number of students and families have Catholic schooling as their major experience of church (Versaldi, 2022).

Further, the need to develop understandings of the Catholic faith in staff has become a main priority of the principal. The need for staff with understanding of the Catholic faith is required for the Catholic school sector to be authentic in its catholicity, serving the Catholic Church's mission through collaboration, inclusivity, advocacy and leadership on educational policy (Versaldi, 2022; Rossiter, 2010).

To prevent a void in principalship in Catholic schools, it has been recommended for some time that Catholic dioceses should develop leaders from the teacher ranks to provide effective formation and build faith leadership capabilities (Dorman & d'Arbon, 2003b; Neidhart et al., 2012). This presents a challenge for Australian Catholic employing authorities that are grappling with the task of upholding authentic Catholic Church beliefs and traditions when there are increasingly fewer people in Australia who identify as being Catholic. The population of Australia with a Catholic affiliation reduced from 25.3% to 20.0% in the period 2016 to 2021, reaching an all-time low (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021). The Australian Catholic employing authorities are also presented with the challenge of providing guidance to staff who identify as Catholic but who have limited understanding of their faith as well as to those who are new to the tenets of the Catholic faith. The stance taken by Catholic employing authorities is that the teaching becomes intertwined with the mission of the Catholic Church. This mission of teaching involves engaging and responding to social, ecclesial and educational contexts while remaining sensitive to the nature and needs of the community (Hall et al., 2019).

The need for my research is pressing because, as I have identified so far, principal supply is now a long-identified concern for Catholic schools. It exists alongside the shift from a majority of religious principals to all lay principals in Catholic schools; this has been occurring for some time as there are not enough parish priests or religious sisters and brothers to supply all

parishes and schools in South Australia with Catholic leadership. This presents a challenge to maintaining the Catholic identity of schools into the future (Lam, 2021; Sharkey, 2002).

In 2010, then-CESA Director Sharkey anticipated the leadership issue in the Archdiocese of Adelaide, estimating only 22 priests would be available in 2020 to lead both Catholic churches and schools. Therefore, the requisite Catholic leadership previously provided by members of religious orders would need to be filled by Catholic laity leadership (Sharkey, 2002).

1.5 Absence of Research

There has been an absence of research in understanding aspiration to principalship over the period since the early 2000s. Therefore, there is a need to update understandings of the factors that encourage, constrain and limit aspiration to principalship in Catholic schools. My research thus aims to explore the experiences of aspirational and therefore potential CESA leaders to understand what creates, sustains, and diminishes leadership aspiration in CESA. The knowledge gained will help to update existing understandings largely derived from the early 2000s by building on the existing literature (Barty et al., 2005; Carlin et al., 2003; d'Arbon, 2006; Dorman & d'Arbon, 2003a; Sharkey, 2002). My study offers current insights into principal aspiration, motivators and inhibitors that will be able to assist CESA to strategise recruitment and retention of principals. My study will shed light on why teachers seek principal positions in CESA schools, what diminishes this aspiration, what keeps aspiring principals in the pipeline and why they might relinquish their aspiration. I anticipate such information could help refine the diocesan value proposition for principal recruitment (Dite, 2020).

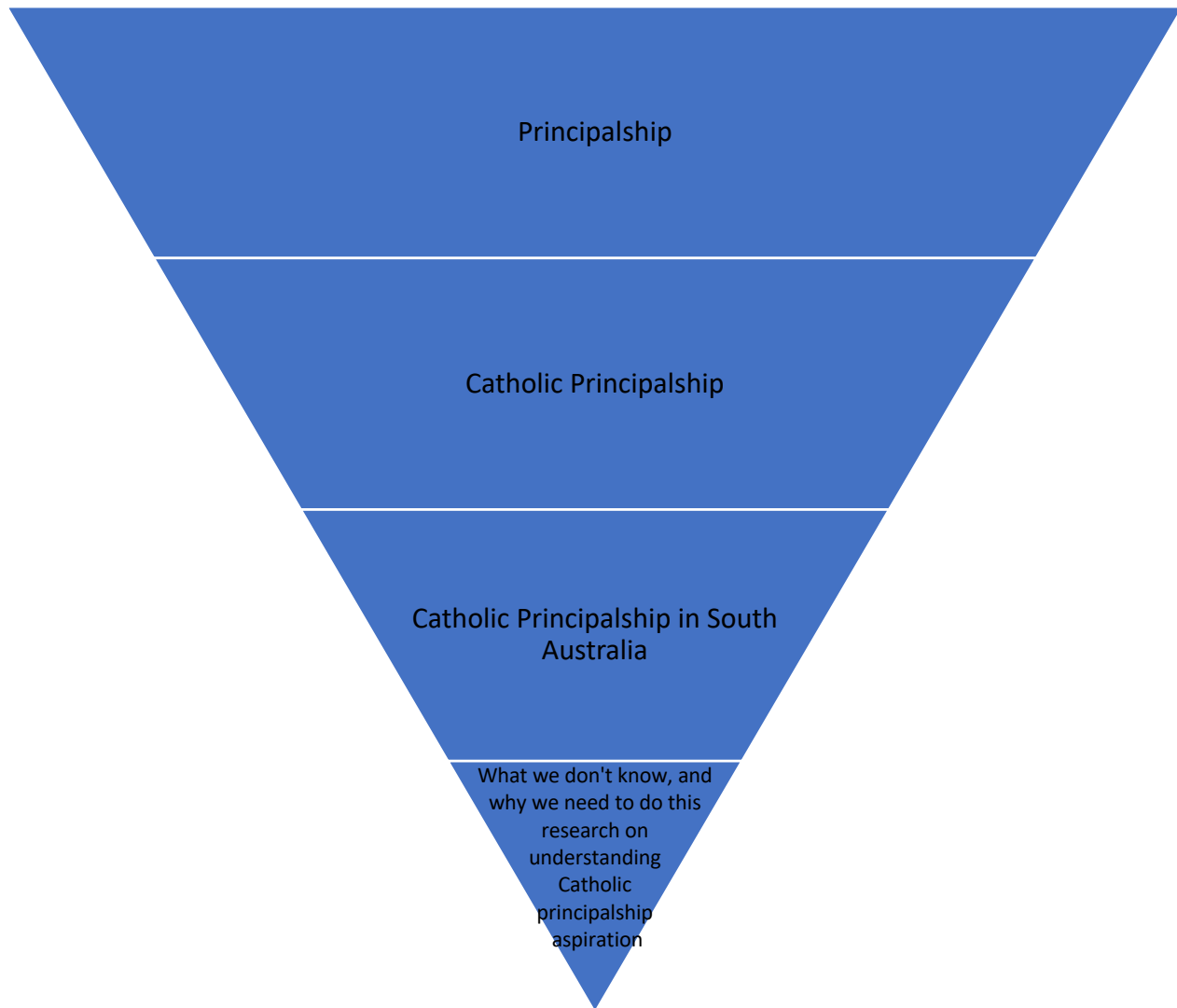
1.6 Purpose

The intent of this research is to support CESA with contemporary knowledge of the positionality of aspiring principals. In doing so, I anticipate that it will assist strategising to develop teachers to be effective principals. Understanding how teachers feel about principalship aspiration could assist CESA to put in place strategies to counteract the possibility of significant turnover of principals (Doneley et al., 2018; National College for School Leadership, 2006). Further, this research will make an original contribution to the currently existing historical knowledge.

I have noted that aspiration to principalship is currently an underdeveloped area of research, and a need exists to develop further research insights (Edmondson & McManus, 2007) that move from broad understandings of aspiration to principalship to understanding of the nuances of specific systems and contexts: in this case, aspiration to Catholic principalship in South Australia. Most recent research relating to CESA principalship explores beginning principals' sense of preparedness for the role (Lewis, 2016). My research, however, will develop understandings of how to better facilitate and sustain the aspiration of the teacher who has desires to become a principal. My research endeavours to contribute to the literature while supporting CESA and delegated authorities of Catholic dioceses in Australia to meet the workforce demand through improved understanding of what enables and inhibits teacher aspiration to principalship. Figure 1 summarises the purpose of this study that I have so far explained in this chapter. I have used an inverted pyramid to highlight the broad and well-researched concept of principalship and narrower and less-researched concepts of Catholic principalship and Catholic principalship in South Australia, from where this specific research originates.

Figure 1

The purpose of this study, exploring aspiration to leadership and narrowing focus to understanding leadership aspiration in CESA



1.7 Catholic School Principalship in South Australia

The South Australian and Northern Territory Dioceses fall under the jurisdiction of the Province of Adelaide. The Diocese of Port Pirie and Archdiocese of Adelaide delegate its authority for the oversight of education in all Catholic schools in South Australia to the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS). SACCS implements decisions and

policies for CESA and for the CESA executive director and Catholic Education Office (CEO) to follow. To this end the CEO is the delegated authority that employs Catholic principals on behalf of the CESA executive director. The CESA executive director is guided by the NCEC's strategic priorities as the peak body for Catholic education in Australia.

Expectations on Catholic School Principals

Catholic school principals have extensive expectations placed on them, as mentioned earlier, being not only accountable to government authorities as are principals in government schools, but also having the responsibility to promote the religious identity of the school and church community, a responsibility that has expanded due to the declining number of parish priests (Neidhart & Lamb, 2016). The NCEC's Strategic Plan 2020-2023 (NCEC, 2019) states that its priority is to strengthen faith experiences in the lives of staff, students and families at Catholic schools, while discerning the research about staff, students and families.

Senior Leadership Roles Available on the Path to Principalship in Catholic Schools

Middle to senior leadership positions that present in CESA schools prior to principalship are positions determined by the principal of the school at the time. They often consist of Deputy and Assistant Principal roles, as the level of leader directly supporting the principal, and may include curriculum, student pastoral care and wellbeing, and school administration leadership. Historically, the role of Religious Education Coordinator, now the position of Assistant Principal Religious Identity and Mission (APRIM), provided Catholic leadership formation in a school, enabling teachers aspiring to become leaders to understand and develop as a faith leader prior to principalship (D'Arbon, 2003; Draper & McMichael, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2003).

1.8 Current CESA Context

CESA is currently the second largest education system in South Australia, behind the South Australian Department of Education and ahead of the South Australian Independent Schools Association. In 2018, then Assistant Director Young indicated there was a diminished number of lay leaders prepared to lead CESA schools through to 2027 (Young, 2018). The data indicated that only 7.5% of CESA principals were at the time aged 38–44, and 50% of CESA principals will reach retirement age between 2023 and 2027, as summarised in Figure 2. This age profile of principals meant that unless aspiration to principalship is cultivated and sustained there will be a potential void of CESA principals and deputy principals in the near future. Figure 3 shows the age profile of CESA principals 6 years after profile in Figure 2, and while the data excludes the data from five non-diocesan schools, the data highlights a significant change in the age profile of principals, deputy principals and APRIMs.

Figure 2

Age demographic of CESA school leaders in 2018

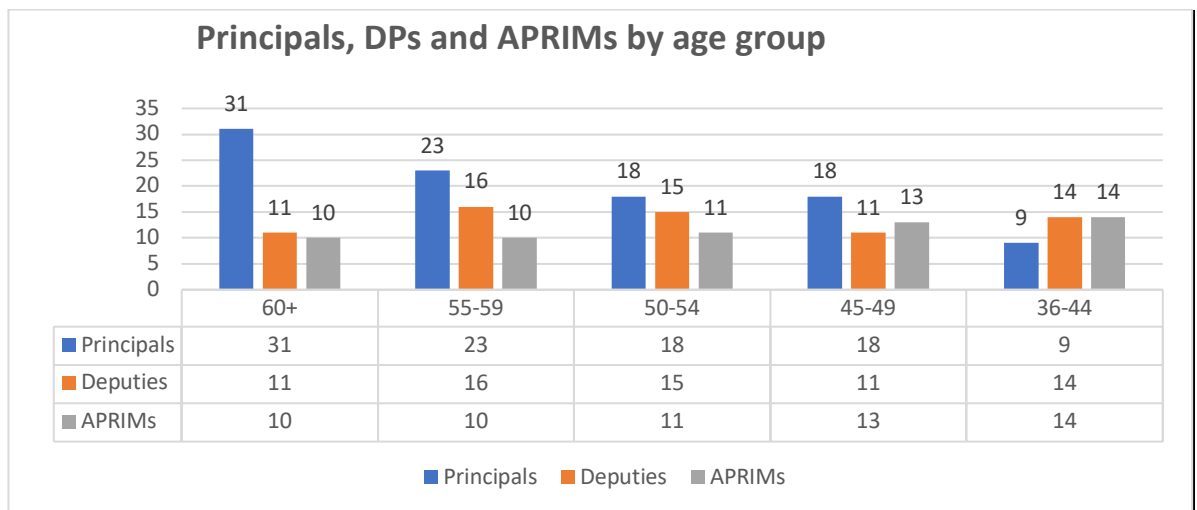
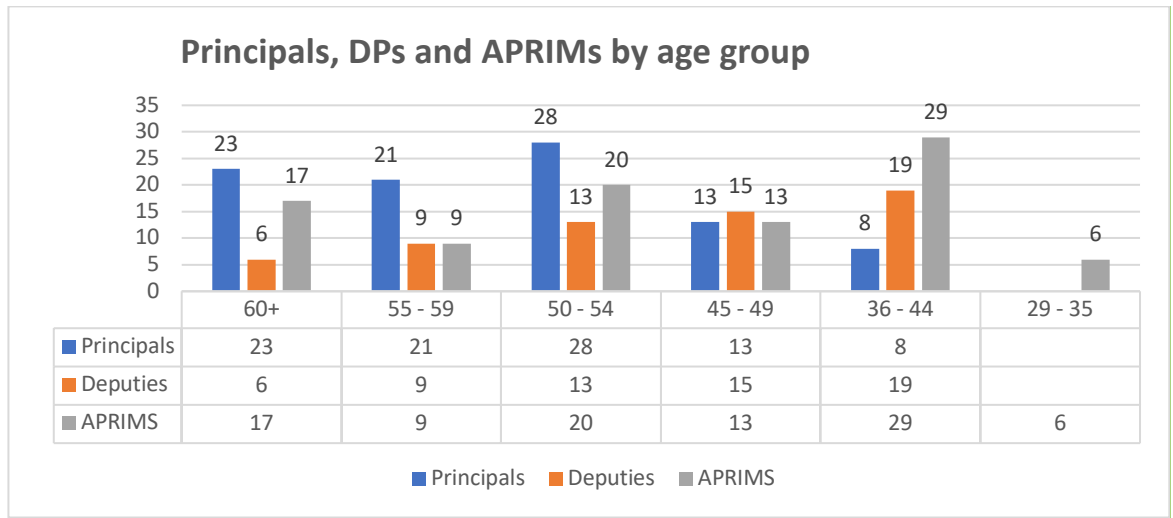


Figure 3

Age demographic of CESA school leaders in 2024



1.9 CESA Aspiring Leaders Program and Middle Leaders Program

To address the need for lay leadership, CESA developed an Aspiring Leaders Program and Middle Leaders Program, which support and develop current teachers interested in pursuing senior leadership positions. The Aspiring Leaders Program has existed in various forms for 25 years and was previously known as the Leadership Discernment Foundation. South Australian Catholic school teachers can self-nominate for these programs or be selected by a school principal. These two programs superseded the Leadership Discernment Foundation 10 years ago. The target cohort is teachers in Diocesan schools who are working towards their first principal appointment and are likely to move into a substantive principal role within two to three years of completing the course,. The Middle Leaders Program is developed in partnership with the National Excellence in School Leadership Initiative (NESLI) and is a preliminary course to the Aspiring Leaders course to explore the CESA Leadership Standard and develop participant's capabilities to lead current and future educational challenges. It was estimated that by 2023 the Aspiring Leaders Program would need to generate a further 1,000 future potential leaders to ensure that CESA had sufficient suitable aspirant leaders to

choose from to lead schools and the CEO into the future (McGoran, 2018). It is therefore apparent that understanding what creates aspiration to pursue leadership pathways in CESA is important. Through understanding what leads to favourable discernment and the continued pursuit of leadership, or the diminished desire to pursue leadership, or a participant's of the Middle Leaders Program over the Aspiring Leaders Program would aid CESA to achieve its ambition to generate enough potential leaders to lead South Australian Catholic schools.

1.10 Research Questions

Pursuing understanding of aspiration to principalship in the context of CESA leads to the central question of this research, which is:

What creates and sustains the aspiration to pursue leadership *in* CESA?

To answer the research question, the following sub-questions guided the construction of the study:

- What motivates a teacher to aspire to becoming a principal?
- What sustains the aspiration to pursue principalship in CESA?
- What are the enabling experiences on the journey to principalship in CESA?
- What factors along the journey to principalship in CESA exert an inhibitory effect on the initial aspirations?

1.11 Researcher Positionality

I am personally invested in this research, as a past-principal who fell into the lowest age demographic (Figure 2). I was a principal of a Catholic primary school when I started this

study, and I am now CESA Schools Performance Leader. I remain concerned deeply about the safeguarding and future development of CESA and its principals.

I attribute my pursuit of principalship to those principals I encountered when I was classroom teaching. Those four school principals saw something in me that prompted them to continually present opportunities that led me to a gradual exposure of what a principal did on a day-to-day basis; this planted the seed for me to aspire to become a principal. That said, this occurred during a period in which there were no formal programs like the CESA Aspiring Leaders or Middle Leaders Programs. During this time, I was also unaware of any of the prerequisites to become an assistant principal, a deputy, or a principal.

In my first 2 years of teaching in CESA schools, it was only by an off-chance conversation with a colleague that I learned about principal prerequisites, and that a principal needed to have or have commenced a master's degree to become a principal. By my 3rd year of teaching, I had established that I wanted to be a principal and so I enrolled in a postgraduate master's programme: the Master of Educational Management and Leadership at Flinders University. This was due to the opportune conversation and not because of any clear career guidance about prerequisites from CESA. At the conclusion of this unsupported postgraduate study, the Aspiring Leaders Program was offered; however, it was made clear that this was a secondary prerequisite to a master's degree qualification.

As years went by, I became part of leadership teams and this experience fostered my aspiration to be a principal. However, concurrently in my personal life I had experienced both marriage and divorce over a 2-year period. Unbeknown to me, being divorced was an impediment that put a halt on my progression towards principalship for the best part of 6 years. That said, my resolve of the said impediments has deepened my own Catholic faith and given me understandings of the Catholic Church that have helped me, and I believe will

assist other principals and aspiring principals, with understanding, compassion, support and resolve.

During the 6-year hiatus in my progression towards CESA principalship, it became evident that failing to address the steps to resolve the impediment would prevent me applying for any further positions as an assistant principal, deputy principal or principal until my marriage was annulled. Advice on steps to take were not readily available. During this period, I went through times of deep discernment as the hurdles to becoming a principal kept appearing. What I encountered were not explicit impediments or prerequisites, rather implicit positions that I liken now to “unpoliced gate-keeping”. Upon reflection, I can only attribute my resolution of the impediments I encountered to becoming a Catholic principal to my belief that in attaining such a position I could make a significant contribution to young people and our future society.

I have now been a school principal of two schools, and as I earlier stated, I hold the position of Schools Performance Leader in CESA at the time of finalising my thesis. This position has been a privilege, which has seen me support principals in the strategic operation of running and improving their schools while guiding aspiring principals on their personal journeys to principalship. I currently work alongside 18 principals as they work to continuously improve their schools and achieve the CESA and NCEC priorities. In my position I also manage complex issues that arise in these schools from time to time. Relevant to this study, my position has also placed me on numerous principal, deputy principal and assistant principal appointment panels, where I have had firsthand experience of the importance placed by the parish priest, school board and CESA representative on making the right principal appointment for a school community. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, quality Catholic leadership, or the right principal, in Catholic schools has added dimensions to that of a principalship of a government school, and impacts and influences outcomes on a variety of levels in schools.

Relevant to all schools and school systems, effective, or “the right”, principals can build staff capacity in schools, which ultimately impacts student learning outcomes in the school (Goode et al., 2023; Leithwood et al., 2020b). Improved student learning outcomes benefit the students, which in turn impacts parental perception of the school, which in turn potentially increases growth and success of the school community (Goode et al., 2023; Mahfouz & Richardson, 2021; Mahfouz, 2020).

A combination of my personal experience and challenges on the way to becoming a principal has created my desire to see CESA be a leading educational sector in South Australia and NCEC, known for its quality principals who extend children and young people beyond their potential. My experience is the catalyst for wanting to contribute new knowledge to this field of research. I hope my research is pivotal to ensuring that CESA can create the environment for a continual supply of quality aspiring principals: an environment that is transparent about the challenges of school leadership and brings deep awareness of the work Catholic principals undertake. In this environment, aspiring principals will be attracted to the position while understanding the commitment, and will also be appropriately supported through and into their aspirational role.

As I explain in Chapter 3, I am conscious that my experiences, journey, and current position do present a potential for bias, but if so, these biases are managed appropriately from a researcher standpoint. I acknowledge the need to be mindful and reflexive in conducting this research to ensure reliable qualitative data that creditably contributes to the scholarship (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Saldana, 2016) on leadership aspiration and that supports the future stewardship of CESA. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the change from religious to lay principalship in Catholic schools across Australia in the past 30 years due to a changing demographic in Australia, in which there has been a decline in people choosing to take holy orders to become a priest, religious brother or religious sister. This decline has produced and will continue to produce a high demand for lay principals to lead Catholic schools in Australia. I have noted that there has been a change from religious principalship to lay principalship, and that in 2018 many of these foundational lay principals were reaching an age of retirement.

The chapter has provided a background to the research previously conducted in the recruitment of principals in CESA and more broadly in other Catholic dioceses and archdioceses across Australia. There has been an enormous attrition rate of 62.55% of aspiring principals who commence, yet do not complete, the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program and Middle Leaders Program, which are targeted at developing the next generation of CESA principals, deputy principals and assistant principals (McGoran, 2019). Contextual to my research is a shortage of principals encountered nationally and internationally by all schooling systems (Barty et al., 2005; d'Arbon, 2006; Dite, 2020; Heffernan et al., 2022; Reyes et al., 2022).

In this chapter I have explained that CESA now encounters a period requiring recruitment and replacement of principals in a period in Australia when fewer people identify as Catholic, or are practising Catholics, subsequently reducing the pool of potential candidates for these positions in the coming years. The current principal climate and the absence of literature surrounding aspiring principals in Catholic education since the early 2000s frames this research as being important to create an understanding of what enables and inhibits principal

aspirants. My hope is that this might ensure CESA can appropriately support and develop the required number of future potential principals.

Following the framework of Figure 1, Chapter 2 presents a synthesis of the literature surrounding aspiration to principalship, particularly Catholic principalship, and evolution of the principal shortage predicament in Australia to provide context. I will then consider the importance of literature for the motivation and ideal preparation of the next generation of principals.

2 Literature

2.1 Introduction

This review of existing literature provides a foundation to understand aspiration to Catholic principalship. Firstly, to understand the position that aspirants are pursuing, it highlights the diverse and complex nature of the role of a principal and considers the concept of Catholic principalship, distinguishing how Catholic principalship is uniquely different to other education sectors. This literature review then narrows to identify research on the experiences of principals when they were beginning principals. This will generate an understanding of past induction and preparation programs and the attrition rate and success of such programs. The research in this literature review explores literature on Catholic principal shortages in Australia. It considers what motivates a teacher to aspire to be a principal, to further understand the motivating and inhibiting drivers that can be leveraged to support those with an aspiration to become a principal.

This literature review provides a synthesis and summary of existing relevant literature to substantiate my research, which will make a new contribution in the field. This literature review provides a background to inform Chapters 5 and 6. The review particularly summarises from the existing literature:

- how principalship is defined in the literature;
- how Catholic principalship is unique;
- what studies have been conducted on the shortage of principals;
- what motivates the aspiration to principalship;

- what principal preparation programs are aiming to achieve and what existing research recommends; and
- how formal mentoring may play a crucial part in the development of those aspiring to be principals.

2.2 Principalship

Principals of schools are required to be effective in their ability to lead, relate to others and assist schools to expand their traditional boundaries. This often also requires a school leader to strike a balance between managing building projects, promoting teacher development and involvement in professional development, advising parents and community, while maintaining the highest level of accountability standards for student achievement (Coleman, 2014, Hayes, Anderson & Carpenter, 2021). More succinctly, the principal must lead, mentor, coach and empower staff to succeed. The complexity of a principal's job description is increasing, in particular the number of duties outside of leading and managing the school, including the adoption of national agendas (Custodio, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020a). The core nature of the school principal role in Australia remains focused on management at the expense of leadership in teaching and learning (Watson, 2009), as it does internationally (Goldring et al., 2019).

School leadership is defined as people who occupy roles such as vice principal and principal, who provide direction and exert influence to achieve system and local school goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). "The function of school leadership across OECD countries is now increasingly defined by a demanding set of roles which include financial and human resource management and leadership for learning" (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018, p. 2). With no one clear definition of leadership or principalship, it can be inferred that this role is complex and diverse.

Understanding of the preferable traits for principalship could be debatable, situational, and contextual to a particular school. What is agreed in the international literature is that the key to a principal's effectiveness is their ability to be influential (Barty et al., 2005; Gurr et al., 2021; Lumadi, 2022; Roza et al., 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).

Over time, principalship has continually been linked to the success of a school. Historically, it is considered that "good" schools reflect the attitude and efforts of "good" school principals, although over time, the meaning of "good" has changed (Chopra, 1994). The success of the school's environment, including student learning, is dependent upon school leaders with the skills, abilities, and knowledge to effectively lead (Leithwood et al., 2020a). Quality leadership is the common attribute in all high-performing schools (Duey & Smith, 2018; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). In consideration of what "high-performing" might mean, some authors indicate that influential principals create a vision of stability, and that ignites passion into a school through trust, commitment and fun (Bluestein & Goldschmidt, 2021; Grissom & Harrington, 2010). The presence of an influential principal seems to be one of the major components in creating an improving school climate in which all students achieve (Duey & Smith, 2018; Taylor et al., 2000). Principal success is closely aligned to their value-adding effect on different aspects of the school, such as academic success and enrolment growth, with a lesser focus on community relationships, teacher wellbeing and pastoral care of students (Duey & Smith, 2018; Goode et al., 2023; Leithwood et al., 2020a). A school's success in its initiatives seems closely connected to a principal's leadership, therefore there is a consensus that sustained, ongoing success is dependent upon the principals' continued leadership ability (Duey & Smith, 2018; Semendinger, 2000).

Principalship is a Complex Role

The challenges facing the education system, specifically in the education of school-age children and young people in the 21st century, such as improving teaching and learning, developing a professional community and building school–community partnerships, are complex and have the potential to be enduring if left unaddressed (Bluestein & Goldschmidt, 2021; Fernandes et al., 2023; Ingvarson & De Araugo, 2022). Due to this challenge and the complexity of the principal’s role discussed previously, the position of principal is becoming progressively less desirable to potential applicants (Barty et al., 2005; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Dorman & D’Arbon, 2003a; Yan, 2020).

The role of principalship has become more diverse, with has increased layers of complexity, over the past 10 years (Custodio, 2014; Lewis, 2016; Rogers & Leithwood, 2019; Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021). Increasingly, those aspiring to be principals are finding the job of principal too “big” and unattractive (Barty et al., 2005; Heffernan et al., 2022; Horwood et al., 2019).

Principal recruitment is challenging

As a result of the challenges discussed above, finding suitably skilled and qualified individuals to lead schools is becoming an increasingly difficult task for educational systems. Several previous studies have investigated the effects of working conditions on school principals’ stress and job satisfaction in various contexts (Arnold et al., 2021; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Horwood et al., 2021; Liu & Bellibas, 2018). These studies found that the role of principal is rapidly changing, requiring more organisational commitment and providing less job

satisfaction. Other research has explored the consequences of principals' workload stress, finding that it not only affects principals' health, wellness and responsibilities but also those of other school staff (Liljenberg & Andersson, 2020; Oplatka, 2017). Most recently, post the-COVID-19 pandemic, in Australia school violence and teaching staff shortages have impacted the workload stress of school principals (Arnold et al., 2021; Collie et al., 2020; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2016; Horwood et al., 2021). School violence might increase principals' stress by creating an additional workload of dealing with student misbehaviour. The combination of managing both student and staff wellbeing makes it even more challenging for principals in their work (Cho et al., 2018; Fernandes et al., 2023). In a world post the-COVID-19 pandemic, educational systems globally are finding the need to prioritise the wellbeing of principals, especially in schools facing staffing shortages and high levels of violence (Chen et al., 2023; Mahfouz & Gordon, 2021).

Substantial insights have been gained into the processes necessary to cultivate and support effective school leaders (Brown, 2022). This includes high quality pre-service training, aligned on-the-job support, rigorous job standards that specify what a principal needs to know and do, leader tracking systems that match principal skill sets to principal vacancies, and systems to sustain and support principal pipelines. Creating systematic approaches to cultivating a pool of school leaders is needed to ensure a consistent stream of principals is developed and supported. Part of a systematised approach is the use of professional preparation programs. In the development of principal preparation programs, three key aspects must be incorporated systematically: professional development, socialisation development and organisational development (Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021).

Desirable Principal Characteristics

It has been widely researched that principal leaders are central to improving schools and student outcomes (Chiang et al., 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Steele et al., 2021). There is not a consensus on how to develop effective principals (Steele et al., 2021). There is a large body of literature on the desirable character traits or virtues of principals which varies. (Dykhuis et al., 2023; Hackett & Wang, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2020a; Sergiovanni, 2005; Whang, 2021).

A principal's skillset is multifaceted; effective principals are skilled practitioners who are conscious of how relationships with people in the school community influence the work of members in the school. Principals foster positive relationships with all stakeholders in their schools to promote conversation, open-mindedness and partnership so the school will continue to grow and develop. Principals nurture and encourage others to continually improve and transform, and they establish trust, allowing the organisation to thrive and continually improve (Custodio, 2014; Fincham, 2021; Van der Zee, 2022). To be influential while upholding values of authentic Catholic leadership is a needed type of leadership that cannot be lost, as it includes traits that underpin the values of a Catholic Education (Duignan, 2015).

Australian Professional Standards for Principals

AITSL provide a Principal Standard for current and aspiring principals that allows principals to understand what they are expected to know, understand and do to succeed as a principal. . The Professional Standard aims to assist principals to develop into highly effective principals

that are key to improving schools to maximise student outcomes (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2019). The Standard explores three leadership requirements—vision and values; knowledge and understanding; personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills—and five professional practices to improve the impact of a current or future school leader. In Australia, AITSL allow current principals and aspirants to locate their own practice and provide the opportunity to identify leadership actions that can be developed to create a pathway to success.

CESA have further developed the AITSL Principal Standard, creating the *Leadership Standard (Version 2)* (CESA, 2020), which is informed with contributions from Catholic principals and staff from CESA. The framework states what principals are meant to understand and know to allow them to perform their work. It is an elaboration of *The Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (AITSL, 2014), adding a further two new professional practices to the five AITSL professional practices. (CESA, 2020). This emphasises that the principal role in CESA is more complex and diverse as they are accountable to more standards than principals appraised against the five AITSL professional practices.

Principal Pathways

Historically, across all professions, there is no one set path that a professional, manager or principal takes as they move through their career, suggesting that one person could be entrenched in a role for one phase of their career, while another may progress rapidly through roles progressing to principalship (Aryee et al., 1994; Erikson, 1964; Salomone, 1996; Smart & Peterson, 1997; Super, 1980) Across the world, in general principals are developed from the ranks of teachers and the step into principalship is known as succession planning (Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Dorman & d'Arbon, 2003b; Fusarelli et al., 2018). Succession planning is defined as:

the purposeful and systematic effort of projecting leadership requirements, identifying a pool of high potential individuals with the capacity for development into senior leadership, and developing these candidates through planned work experiences, training, education and personal growth. (Fusarelli et al., 2018, p. 293)

While succession planning is an identified practice that should be utilised in education, often the supply of aspiring principals restricts the effective operation of succession planning (Barton, 2019; Fusarelli et al., 2018). The number of people attracted to the profession as school principal has been on the decline for some time, due to unattractive perceptions of principalship, including stress, overwork, insufficient remuneration and other impediments (Barty et al., 2005; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Dorman & D’Arbon, 2003a; Yan, 2020). The turnover rate of principals is high (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Maxwell & Superville, 2020). In the absence of recent data, historically one demographic that does not report high impediments to becoming a principal or stress symptoms associated with principalship is males aged between 41–50 who have previously held the position of Assistant Principal (Dicke et al., 2022; Dorman & d’Arbon, 2003b). There are many role-related demands on a principal, yet the focus on research pertaining to wellbeing and retention is only emerging.

2.3 Catholic Principalship

In Chapter 1 I outlined that the principal in Catholic schools serves two functions—leader of faith and leader of the business of education—which is emphasised in the differences between the AITSL Principal Standard and the CESA Leadership Standard. In illuminating the complexity and challenge of the dual roles for Catholic school settings, the *Australian Episcopal Conference* (1972) report stressed the importance of employing teachers who can communicate the Catholic Church’s teachings (Lucas, 2012). This dual role is still applicable today. Those applicants applying for positions of Principal, Deputy Principal and Assistant

Principal Religious Identity and Mission are required to be a practicing Catholic and have a reference from a priest. The Vatican states that school principals are more than just managers; they are true educational leaders with an ecclesial and pastoral mission, which is in close partnership with the parish priest. (Versaldi, 2022). Catholic schools endeavour to provide excellent education and maintain the mission, culture, and ethos of the Catholic Church. Catholic school principals must ensure that they maintain the integrity of this mission in a way that promotes the ethical and transformative underpinnings of the Catholic Church (Fincham, 2021; Van der Zee, 2022; Versaldi, 2022). Furthermore, Catholic school principals are charged with promotion and stewardship of the church; the relationship with church hierarchy supports the education and instruction of students to ensure that the Catholic faith is embedded and delivered by teachers using the right doctrine and probity of life (Versaldi, 2022). Educational leadership in Catholic schools is an ethical and moral enterprise, not an individual phenomenon. It is a “moral purpose” collective (Fullan, 2005; Whang, 2021). Canadian Catholic Education identified two types of approaches essential to leadership in Catholic education: spiritual and moral confidence. These approaches highlight that a leader in a Catholic school must have spiritual awareness and a set of principles that promote self-awareness of their own influence on the community they lead. This set of principles and self-awareness should come with a moral confidence that is consistent with an ethical system that is consistent over time (Avenell, 2022; Ryan & Gallo, 2011; Lavery, 2012). The development and induction of a teacher with the aspiration to be a principal in Catholic Education is uniquely different to the path followed by secular principals.

Dual Responsibility

Catholic school principals, in comparison with secular principals, have the additional challenge of maintaining the integrity of the Church’s mission and ensuring that this mission is not lost or diminished (Fincham, 2021; Grace, 2018). Due to this accountability and

responsibility, it is requirement that a Catholic school principal must be a practicing Catholic and a member of the Catholic Sunday Eucharistic community (Versaldi, 2022; CESA, 2024 (March 11)). This commitment to a Sunday Eucharist potentially makes the position a six day week, while this is a gap in the literature and unfounded such a commitment could impact recruitment and retention when there is no such additional commitment required of principals in other sectors. Due to the current substantial shortage of Catholic school principals, they are in significant demand (d'Arbon, 2006; Dite, 2020; Fincham, 2022). This demand for principals, compounded by the additional accountability and responsibility to be a practicing member of a Catholic Sunday Eucharistic community adds further complexity to the challenge for Catholic employment authorities in sourcing teachers with an aspiration to be a principal. Duignan (2004) and d'Arbon et al. (2002) stated that if importance is placed on only employing Catholic teachers it would pose significant barriers in ultimately finding suitably qualified principals in the future. Carlin et al. (2003) identified that aspiring principals found these requirements to be a disincentive to pursue a Catholic principalship. Since 2003, while the requirement is that a Catholic school principal must be a practicing Catholic and a member of the Catholic Sunday Eucharistic community finding Catholic Principals has becomes even more difficult with diminishing Catholic affiliation (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021) and more staff who identify as Catholic but have limited understanding of their faith.

Australian Catholic employing authorities are grappling with the task of upholding authentic Catholic Church beliefs and traditions while also providing guidance to staff members who are new to the Catholic faith, where sacramental knowledge tends takes a secondary role to their teaching career. The stance taken by Catholic employing authorities is that when a teacher is entrusted with teaching the Catholic faith, their teaching becomes intertwined with the mission of the Catholic Church. This mission involves engaging and responding to

social, ecclesial and educational contexts while remaining sensitive to the nature and needs of the community (Hall et al., 2019). This situation highlights both the challenge and the potential for Australian Catholic employing authorities. The expectations and boundaries that Australian Catholic employing authorities impose on principals regarding their participation in the mission and support of these expectations ensure every Catholic school principal has a comprehensive understanding of the Catholic formation process. However, this expectation presents a challenge to the Catholic Church as it adapts to the rapidly evolving Australian society, which has a declining Catholic population. Nevertheless, it offers a significant opportunity for restructuring Catholic systems and school leadership models in a manner that respects canon law. Simultaneously, this scenario creates tension in upholding current discrimination policies, procedures, standards and codes of conduct (Brennan, 2023; Reid, 2020).

Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA) Sections 34–38

The legal landscape in Australia, encompassing both religious freedom and discrimination laws, is characterised by inconsistency and a lack of clear definition for both employees and employers. There is no doubt that religious schools face difficulties in reconciling competing expectations in the Australian context. In South Australia, for instance, sections 34 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)* prohibit discrimination in education based on an individual's gender identity or sexual orientation. However, this provision includes an exemption for educational institutions that align with certain doctrines, especially in relation to employees (Seemann, 2018). Consequently, well-qualified educators who hold ethical and value-based concerns may find themselves in a structured system where their values are at odds with the implicit values of the organisation. The point of tension arises as the Catholic Church adheres to its position, and its highly qualified educators are expected to conform, while in the broader education market and global corporations, a well-qualified workforce is valued and

competitive individualism is endorsed. In these sectors, well-qualified educators are desired but not obligated to adhere to categorical imperatives (Mooney & Moles, 2020; Vera-Toscano & Meroni, 2021). This ultimately reduces the pool of aspiring principal candidates for Catholic employment authorities, and possibly limits the quality of potential principals, as competitive individualism is not a primary desirable trait.

Declining Percentage of Australian Population Affiliating As Catholic

The demand by CESA for potential future principals arises at a time when the number of people in Australia identifying as Christian and Catholic is declining. The population with a Christian affiliation decreased from 52.1% to 43.9% between 2016 and 2021, while those with a Catholic affiliation decreased from 25.3% to 20.0%, reaching the lowest point since 1966. This decline in identification with Catholicism is particularly relevant, as being a practicing Catholic is a requirement to become a principal or deputy principal of a CESA school (ABS, 2021).

The statistics mentioned above regarding Catholicity and societal trends align with the findings from this data collection, indicating that the model of lay principalship in South Australia may have been flawed long before it was addressed (Carlin et al., 2003; Dorman & d'Arbon, 2003a).

2.4 Early Career Principal Experiences

Prior to becoming a principal, aspirants ideally should be provided with a range of experiences that they would encounter in the role of principal. In doing this, aspiring principals would understand the demanding nature of the principal role and be able to develop appropriate strategies of action for managing the tensions of the role that many principals experience in their principalship careers (Outtrim et al., 2023; Swen, 2020; Bagi, 2016).

With the demand for principals high, it is important to be cognisant of the formation experiences of early career principals, to apply their learnings to enhance future development of aspiring principals. While principals improve at different rates, the evidence suggests that the first few years of the role is the time when principals make the greatest gains in their effectiveness (Clarke et al., 2011; Steele et al., 2021). That stated, an external locus of control or reduced opportunities during aspiration may impede a teacher's aspiration or principal's early career success (Dorman & d'Arbon, 2003b; Steele et al, 2021). In giving consideration to aspiration to principalship in my thesis, it is relevant to consider what information the literature can provide about the early career experiences of principals.

Importance of Appropriate Preparation

In-service professional support of aspiring principals can improve principal leadership and retention once an aspirant achieves a principal appointment (Elliott & Hollingsworth, 2020; Fernandes & Wong, 2023). During the formation and early stages of a principal's career, role socialisation is vital to ensure that aspiring principals can navigate the many demands of the job. A lack of systematic support may inhibit the aspiring principal's development and persistence in pursuing their aspiration (Kerins & Spaulding, 2022; Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021). Early career experiences of aspiring principals relating to on-the-job experiences are often ignored in studies of principal preparation experiences (Grissom et al., 2021).

In the United States 8% of early career principals leave the profession entirely within the first 3 years of their first appointment. However, in some states of America, such as Illinois and North Carolina, this figure can be up to 45% of early career principals leaving in the first 6 years (Goldring & Taie, 2018; Simon et al., 2019). Such attrition suggests that many of the induction programs in the United States are not adequate to prepare aspiring principals for the isolation or experiences (Grissom et al., 2021). In contrast, schooling systems in Ontario,

Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai that have systematic approaches to principal training, which includes training, recruiting and strategic deployment of school leaders, have become some of the highest performing education systems internationally (Sparks, 2017). This emphasises the importance of this research to understand the perspectives of potential principals about their preparation experiences and training, to provide informative outcomes for CESA to sustain, improve or enhance future practices.

It has been suggested by some that aspiring principals who move into their first appointment, and so become early career principals, often encounter feelings of frustration as they encounter large amounts of work and are unable to focus on the teaching and learning that brings them joy. For others, there are often feelings of being unqualified to address matters that arise in the principal's work. (Lewis, 2016; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). Unfortunately, these feelings manifest, with many aspiring principals making the transition from teaching to principalship reporting feeling lonely and isolated (Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2019; Lewis, 2016). This emphasises the importance of ensuring that principal formation programs consider the wellbeing of the aspirant to ensure that they have strategies to cope with the demands and consequential health effects with which early career principals are challenged (De Jong et al., 2017; Horwood et al., 2019; Simon, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2017).

The job satisfaction and professional growth of beginning principals can be influenced by both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing experiences. The wellbeing state often serves as a precursor to the perception of work's meaning. Employers who comprehend how future aspiring leaders perceive and value their work can design more tailored and effective school leadership training (Buonomo et al., 2020; Mahfouz & Gordan, 2021). Work engagement is inextricably linked to career growth, wherein progress towards career goals and professional development strongly relates to work engagement, surpassing extrinsic factors like promotion and remuneration (Jensen et al., 2017; Son & Kim, 2021).

In the most recent research specific to CESA principalship, qualitative research explored the experiences of eight principals in their first appointment in a CESA school. This research highlighted that many of the participants felt as if they were not trained adequately for the principal role, noting the areas of industrial relations, human resource management, developing technology, building projects, strategic planning, student violence, staff misconduct, child protection and student expulsion as areas that created self-doubt, sadness, and anxiety (Lewis, 2016). However, there has been no research specific to CESA conducted since 2016.

2.5 Studies on Principal Shortage Across Educational Sectors Conducted in Australia

A deficit in leadership applications could potentially present issues for school leadership into the future, particularly in loss of diversity (Jones, 2001) and reduction of quality of applicants who have experience and are appropriately qualified (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003).

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the shortage of parish priests, religious sisters or brothers to supply Catholic leadership to schools in South Australia creates a challenge for sustaining the Catholic identity of schools into the future (Sharkey, 2002). In 2010, CESA Director Sharkey highlighted the leadership issue in the Archdiocese of Adelaide, anticipating that there would be only 22 priests in 2020 to lead both Catholic churches and schools. This would necessitate replacing Catholic religious leadership with lay leadership (Sharkey, 2002).

The need for my research into aspiration to principalship is pressing due to the longstanding concern of principal supply, with the transition from mostly religious principals to lay principals in Catholic schools.

Principal Shortages in Australia

There have been studies on principal shortage conducted in Australia. Principal pipeline concerns in Victorian government schools have been investigated, finding that better development and preparation programs were required as there were significant variances in job satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Lacey, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Barty et al., 2005). Since this research was conducted there remain issues with recruitment and supply of applicants for principal positions (McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016). There may not be a substantial number of aspiring principals in Australia (Ballantyne, 2017), with applicant numbers diminishing due to workload and emotional intensity (Heffernan & Pierpoint, 2022), in addition to the 20% who are over the age of 60 years (Riley et al., 2021).

This shortage has been exacerbated recently with many beginning principals leaving prematurely (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldring & Taie, 2018). Recently, principal attrition rates have been found to be the result of the stress experienced, insufficient remuneration or ineffective induction programs (Brown, 2022; Grissom et al., 2021; McMurdock, 2022). Post-COVID-19 pandemic pressures on principals and teachers alike have been found to have exacerbated the stress experienced, with suggestions of a resultant shortage of principal aspirants (Beauchamp et al., 2021; Castro, 2022; Redding et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2019). Aspiration to principalship is a difficult issue in the Catholic sector due to the requirement to be a practising Catholic (Dite, 2020).

In summary, I have identified that there is a declining interest in principalship, and the issue is likely to worsen as many young teachers do not express an interest in leadership (Barty et al., 2005; Ballantyne, 2017; Heffernan & Pierpoint, 2022; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016). To counteract this potential lack of interest in future school leadership, it is advised that when

managing Generation X and Generation Y, education sectors encourage, identify and fast-track development of a small number of outstanding candidates who demonstrate a commitment to education and potential to become a future school principal (Australia: Fast-tracking aspiring future school leaders, 2022; National College for School Leadership, 2006; Outtrim et al., 2023).

Impediments to Leadership Succession

Dorman & d'Arbon (2001) developed an instrument called the Impediments to Leadership Succession Inventory (ILSI), for use with teachers. The ILSI was also deployed across New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania in the Victorian, South Australian, and Tasmanian (VSAT) Study. Using the ILSI, each jurisdiction had a large proportion of unwilling respondents; however, the robust data that was collected presented a looming crisis in the provision of principals for Catholic schools in these jurisdictions (d'Arbon, 2003b). In Australia, there is research to suggest that there may be impediments for demographics aspiring to principalship in the Catholic education system, which compounds the shortage of principals in Catholic schools (Neidhart & Carlin, 2003; d'Arbon, 2003b).

Gender has proven to impact the pathway of aspiring female principals, as priests viewed women in a traditional sense as mothers and were sceptical of their leadership skills and abilities. A reducing interest in leadership positions partly because of gender issues, in an era where there is leadership shortage, emphasises that those interested must be nurtured and supported, as good principal practice is not gender-specific (Barty et al., 2005; Outtrim et al., 2023; Sayce & Lavery, 2016). More positively, over the past 20 years in government schools there has been an increase of up to 32% in the numbers of female principals (McGrath, 2020; NSW Teachers Federation, 2018).

2.6 Motivating and Sustaining Perseverance of Those Who are Aspiring to Principalship

In the literature, a notable correlation exists between how aspiring principals perceive their motivation and how it influences their actions, behaviours and perseverance. It becomes evident that those aspiring to be principals must construct their personal calling narrative, from which they derive a sense of purpose and motivation. This self-understanding is essential for them to effectively navigate challenges in their roles. It empowers those aspiring to principalship to bridge their past experiences with their future roles, which is imperative as they transition to becoming principals (Spagnoli & Weng, 2017; Swen, 2020; van Osch & Schaveling, 2017).

Understanding the motivations of both current and aspiring principals is important for the recruitment and retention capable educators wanting to become principals. More crucially, understanding how aspiring principals interpret their personal motivations and contextualise their situations profoundly impacts their behaviours, practices and the tenacity they demonstrate on their path towards principalship. This motivation includes a clear self-awareness of their commitment to education, their service to society, their genuine passion and the fulfilment they derive from their situation. Additionally, this motivation helps resolve internal conflicts and offers clarity to their values, beliefs and expectations (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020; Swen, 2020).

Employers play a pivotal role in career management. Greater work engagement can provide greater job satisfaction. Both can positively impact organisational career growth and occupational commitment for aspiring principals (Spagnoli, 2020; van Osch & Schaveling, 2017). When the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, particularly the pursuit and achievement of an employee's intrinsic goals, is understood, employers can enhance work engagement.

2.7 Aspiration and the Formation of Identity

Aspiring principals must understand why they do what they are doing to ensure that they are able to respond to challenges on the job. This purpose, motivation, mission and passion is important for an aspiring principal to be able to bridge past and future identities when they become a principal (Outtrim et al., 2023; Swen, 2020). Recognising the satisfaction employees derive from fulfilling their career needs, during both initial entry and long-term phases, through appropriate professional development and career progression is essential for employers. This underscores the importance of not compromising happiness and work–life balance while providing employees the chance to grow professionally and advance their careers (Caldwell, 2024). While Generation Y employees appear to prioritise their careers, they also highly value work–life balance (Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2017).

In-service professional support has the potential to enhance principal leadership and retention. During the formative stages, socialisation ensures that aspiring principals can adeptly navigate the diverse demands of the role and understand their identity. Conversely, a lack of structured support during the early stages of aspiring to the role of principal might impede the development and persistence of aspiring principals in pursuing their career aspirations (Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021; Sayce & Lavery, 2016).

Catholic School Mission and Formation of Personal Identity

With respect to Catholic education and identity formation, Dite (2020) offers a framework for principal candidates to ensure their skills align with the Catholic school mission. The framework encompasses key areas of principal effectiveness in the unique climate of a Catholic school. At the core of this framework is the understanding that aspiring principals need to comprehend their ontology, as their sense-making process informs their identity and

intentions, ultimately influencing their commitment or potential transition to another occupation or challenge (Swen, 2020).

In summary, the literature suggests that aspiring principals should be encouraged to think critically about their identity and seize opportunities for growth and learning, but not define themselves by their job as this can cause burn-out due to an exaggerated sense of responsibility. Challenging work becomes more sustainable when approached as a practice through which aspiring principals can evolve, develop and collaborate with other, like-minded principals and aspiring principals. (Sayce & Lavery, 2016; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017).

2.8 Aspiring Principals' Preparation Programs

Recognising that career progression is a collaborative endeavour involving both employees and employers is pivotal in maintaining and nurturing the mission or vision of the organisation. To encourage and prepare teachers for a pathway to school principalship, most systems offer preparation and/or professional development programs (Aravena, 2016; Devi & Fernandes, 2019; Fittock et al., 2020). These programs for aspiring principals serve to aid their development, build essential competencies and skills, enhance their ability to manage job-related stress and foster comprehension of educational policies, all of which contribute to extended tenures in schools and the cultivation of robust professional networks (Outtrim et al., 2023; Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021). Innovative and effective models are being explored to mitigate stress and workload concerns associated with principal development and the role itself. Contemporary alternatives such as co-principalship, elements of teacher leadership and rotating principals can alleviate the tension and demands faced by aspiring principals committed to the role of school principal (Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021). By accommodating these challenges, employers can foster greater work engagement and occupational commitment, ensuring a robust future supply of principals (Simon et al., 2019; Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021).

Considering the rapid changes observed in education in recent years, renewed emphasis on supporting aspiring principals should encompass mentoring, ongoing coaching and learning communities that facilitate the exchange of best practices and provide a support system for addressing contemporary challenges faced by principals. This approach ensures that principals do not find themselves isolated (Walker & Gray, 2022).

Formal Qualification

While numerous models of principal development exist worldwide, two models stand out: the apprentice model and the formal qualification approach. Some countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, have adopted the formal qualification method (Aravena, 2016; Devi & Fernandes, 2019). In contrast, the Department of Education in Western Australia relies exclusively on the apprentice model for principal development and does not mandate additional studies beyond an aspiring principal's initial teaching degree (Fittock et al., 2020).

One challenge associated with the formal qualification approach is that the recruitment process heavily relies on the aspiring principals' teaching record and experience rather than their potential as future principals (Devi & Fernandes, 2019). However, principals who have undergone formal qualifications as aspiring leaders have expressed a strong appreciation for the experiences gained during their postgraduate studies (Fittock et al, 2020). Nonetheless, in the current climate of teacher shortages, educators in schools are grappling with workload management and maintaining work–life balance. The necessity to reallocate work time to teaching activities or administrative duties due to limited staff means that aspiring principals may find it challenging to dedicate the required time to completing a formal qualification (Green et al., 2020).

Models for Preparation

There are various hybrid models of principal development that are skill- and competency-focused. One suggests five ways in which induction programs for aspiring principals can support the aspirant in their development, by assisting in the building of key competencies and skills, developing the capacity to cope with job stress, developing understandings of policy, lengthening tenure in schools and deepening the aspirant's professional networks. (Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021).

The literature on school improvement presents a variety of frameworks and approaches for developing aspiring principal practice and leadership (Bryk, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2020b; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). In research into how teachers aspiring to principalship are supported across the United States, it was identified that there are 51 variations of professional support offered (Fittock et al., 2020; Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021).

Summarising the discussion thus far, there are three aspects that should be considered for principal preparation programs: professional development, socialisation development and the organisational development of aspiring principals (Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021; Fittock et al., 2020; Blossing & Liljenberg, 2019).

Preparation for Catholic School Principalship

Principal preparation holds particular significance for institutions such as CESA, in which the organisational mission sets it apart from other systems (Brennan, 2023). The University of Chicago's Greeley Center for Catholic Education Catholic Principal Preparation Program is aimed at strengthening the essential competencies required for those aspiring to Catholic principalship. This involves a comprehensive approach including coaching, coursework and hands-on field experiences, allowing participants to gain practical experience in financial leadership (Sullivan & Peña, 2019). In another example of specific preparation for Catholic

school principalship, the Catholic Principals Council of Ontario (2004) and Hall (2008) summarised five practical strategies to streamline leadership succession planning, comprising:

- development of a formal leadership development plan;
- development of a succession plan, with a formal process of how it will replace its leaders;
- provision of vertical and lateral capacity building;
- establishment of collaborative leadership teams; and
- making leaders accountable for leadership capacity in their own schools.

Leadership development programs can equip aspiring principals with the knowledge and skills necessary for success and satisfaction in their roles, aligning with the organisation's strategic directions (Austin et al., 2018). Despite varying interpretations across Australia regarding the content of developmental programs for future principals, both the CEO of Melbourne and the CEO of Sydney have proposed frameworks. The CEO of Sydney use a five-part framework centred on faith, teaching and learning, partnerships, resources, and leadership. The CEO of Sydney has put forth six formation foundations for aspiring principals, encompassing religious leadership, human resources leadership, strategic leadership, organisational leadership, leadership for learning and personal dimensions of leadership (Weiner & Holder, 2019).

Research inclusive of South Australian Catholic principals emphasises the critical importance of effective induction programs for aspiring principals, particularly during the first 3 years of their principalship. However, further research is needed to delve into the experiences and challenges faced by aspiring principals during their leadership preparation, induction and ongoing support (Davidson, 2017).

To address the need for lay leadership, CESA introduced the Aspiring Leaders Program and Middle Leaders Program. These initiatives aim to support and cultivate current teachers who are interested in advancing into leadership roles. Historically, leadership development programs have been designed for teachers who are either approaching or have recently undergone a career shift or promotion. Teachers can volunteer themselves for participation in these programs or may be selected by a school principal. While these programs have been in existence for three decades, the goal is to expand their impact. By 2023, CESA aims to produce an additional 1,000 potential leaders through these programs, ensuring a robust pool of competent leaders from which CESA can select individuals to lead schools and the CEO in the years ahead (McGoran, 2018).

2.9 Mentoring Aspiring Principals

Mentoring is one mechanism of supporting early career principals (Hayes, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). Beginning principals value the mentoring support that the department of education provisions for them. It was identified that such support from a Manager of Corporate Services or Regional Executive Director was the most valuable support in their development, and that it prevented feelings of being isolated, unprepared or unqualified (Fittock et al., 2020; Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2019; Lewis, 2016; Service & Thornton, 2020; Walker & Gray, 2022).

Mentors have the capacity to prepare and retain novice principals. By providing support through social, emotional and intellectual challenges, mentors ensure aspiring principals achieve their aspirations and are equipped to meet the demands of their future roles. This contributes to the continuous progress trajectory of schools (Cosner et al., 2018; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020) and ensures effectiveness and longevity of principal careers (Searby & Armstrong, 2016). Such mentorship also nurtures aspiring leaders with networks,

leadership skills and collaborative decision-making abilities (Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022).

Merits and Shortcomings of Mentoring

Mentoring can facilitate both internal and external mechanisms that activate careers and enhance access to specialised and tailored training or work experiences through extensive networks. Purposeful initiatives such as CESA's Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders programs hold particular significance for prospective principals belonging to groups that often face barriers to accessing high-quality coaches, mentors and sponsors (Berry & Reardon, 2022; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Clear guidance and early career advice played a pivotal role in helping teachers aspiring to principalship make decisive choices that contributed to their growth and allowed their ambitions to advance (Cosner et al., 2018; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020). Alongside the effective training of mentors and coaches, the professional skills framework can expedite the mentor–mentee journey towards professional expertise more efficiently (Boon, 2022; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020).

Leadership mentoring needs to be viewed as a positive association, devoid of a hierarchical structure or power dominance (Crew, 2006; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020). Structured mentoring has the potential to sustain engagement by providing a methodical approach with clear guidelines, thus minimising any disparity between mentor principal and aspirant, or misguided advice (Lochmiller, 2018; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020).

In some instances, mentoring provided by veteran principals to aspiring ones can prove problematic or unsupportive, failing to align with contemporary educational approaches (Crew, 2006) or support emerging responsibilities, such as the mandate to be an instructional leader (Swaminathan & Reed, 2020). However, effective mentoring partnerships,

characterised by mutual participation and collaborative time, yield desired outcomes in fostering the development of effective principals (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Hastings & Sunderman, 2020; Krieg, 2021; Orsini & Coers, 2022; Sezer & Engin, 2021; van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2020).

Mentoring and counselling contribute to motivating and assisting aspiring principals to clarify the expectations of the principal's role, better comprehend their strengths, and mitigate the effects of any impostor syndrome. When a mentor and an aspiring principal discuss tangible achievements and the fulfilment of key performance indicators, it can foster celebratory moments and counteract self-doubt. Engaging current principals as mentors also exposes aspiring principals to system priorities and insights into the practices of high-functioning principals, dispelling preconceived notions and illuminating the rewarding aspects of the profession (Outtrim et al., 2023; Parcover & Swanson, 2013).

It is essential to recognise that mentoring not only offers emotional relief by alleviating the isolation and loneliness arising from the intense pressures faced by aspiring principals as they navigate novel situations, but mentors must also go beyond providing intervention and diagnosis to facilitate personal growth. They must offer emotional support and facilitate experiences that foster emotional resilience and capacity building (Farell, 2019; Pariente & Tubin, 2021).

Recognising the significance of mentor access, the provision of mentors and a variety of experiences to aspiring principals enables them to explore their leadership potential and enhance their self-confidence. This support empowers them to demonstrate their leadership strengths, thereby cultivating their self-perception as leaders in a range of contexts.

2.10 Summary of Literature Review

This chapter has shown that there is significant literature in the field of principalship. It also highlights that there is a gap in the research relating to experiences of those teachers who are aspiring to become a principal. This literature review has therefore focussed on:

- what principalship and school leadership is defined as in the literature;
- how Catholic principalship is unique, including identification of efforts required for Catholic principals to be successful;
- what studies have been conducted on principal shortages in Australia;
- understanding the motivation for perseverance in the aspiration for principalship;
- what principal preparation programs aim to achieve; and
- experiences of early career principals.

To provide a foundation for understanding the experience of aspiring principals in CESA, this literature review has scoped the uniqueness of a Catholic principal. It has shown that the principal's role is one that plays a pivotal part in a school. The principal's role in a Catholic school is two-fold as they are not only the leader of education, but also the leader of faith. Understanding that leading a Catholic school extends beyond just leading in educational practices, but places an emphasis on employing Catholic principals, creates an additional criterion for finding suitably qualified leaders in a climate where a shortage is evident across the sector. This provides a broader context to the shortage issue that presents in Australia, particularly in South Australia. Additionally, this literature review has provided insights into how principal preparation programs across Australia are currently endeavouring to develop aspiring principals to avoid further shortages.

This literature review concluded that several important points are pertinent. Firstly, formal training should be a requirement in the process of developing an aspiring principal regardless of the context. Secondly, the aspiring principal's professional identity should be a focus for

development during their formation and preparation. Thirdly, ongoing training should be contextualised and tailored for the principal's needs. Finally, a principal preparation program should be aimed at developing the aspiring principal's competence in the day-to-day management practices and instructional leadership aspect of the principal role, which school-based mentoring could facilitate.

Notably, the bulk of this literature relevant to Catholic education in Australia was published between 2000 and 2010. While it has been identified that future "research could focus on links between specific traits of aspiring teachers and their perceptions of impediments to leadership" (Dorman & d'Arbon, 2003b, p. 137), there is limited research to understand the impediments to leadership, consequently the void remains.

Dorman and d'Arbon (2003b) noted that there are few studies of the impediments to leadership succession in Australian schools, stating "accordingly, there is no substantive body of literature in which the present results can be cited" (p.136). Dorman & d'Arbon (2003b) conclude that while most research focusses on the results of leadership succession, their work focusses on the impediments to leadership for teachers. Therefore, a gap exists in the literature around qualitative perceptions of leadership by those in succession programs. Given the identified void, this research is timely, to build on the knowledge gathered between 2000 and 2010. If left unresolved, this may present greater issues in being able to recruit or entice teachers with leadership skills to consider principalship as a valid career pathway.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and procedure adopted in this study, providing an overview of the theoretical framework that underpins the research. Each section highlights the choices made in the development of both the research design and procedural design. Then, an explanation follows of the coding and analytic approach applied to the data to present the key themes that emerged from this study.

3.2 Epistemology – Constructivist

In this research, I have employed a constructivist epistemology to understand the individual experiences of the aspirant principals in CESA and how these experiences have shaped the participants' perspectives concerning their decisions to pursue or not pursue principalship (Conger, 1998). I needed an approach for this research that would allow me to attribute meaning to the various experiences of aspiring principals to generate evidence. Constructionism is the epistemological position that formed the basis for the framework in this study, as the knowledge and realities of the participants were constructed through conversation and interaction (Guterman & Rudes, 2008; Lather, 1991; Sabnis & Newman, 2023). By adopting constructionism, I have been able to comprehend the ways in which the participants have made meaning of their journeys, bringing an emphasis to the mediation of language and social interaction. Utilising social constructionism enabled me, as the researcher, to understand the realities of the participants from their points of view and how they experienced their journeys in aspiring to become principals. Applying constructionism is underscored by the belief that "truth is a product of the interaction between the subject and object, not something 'out there' waiting to be discovered" (Sabnis & Newman, 2023, p.

628). Interviews enabled me as the researcher and each participant to enter into dialogue and engage in questions that provided insight into how they interacted with and perceived their journey of aspiring to principalship.

Adopting the epistemological position of constructionism, I embraced a view that the participants' reality is continuously being reviewed and reshaped through their personal experiences, encounters, conversations and reflections, which builds knowledge (Dewey, 1963; Crotty, 1998; Ntakumba & de Jongh, 2023; Sabnis & Newman, 2023; Sánchez et al., 2020). Furthermore, the key findings from this research will serve as a springboard for other researchers, authors and organisations such as CESA to develop commentary on this research about policy and practice reforms (Wolgemuth et al., 2022). A constructivist epistemology lends itself to being interpretative, as it is reliant upon the observation and interaction of individuals who realise that they possess an understanding of the environment and their society and actively create a culture based on this understanding (Creswell, 2014; Sabnis & Newman, 2023).

3.3 Theoretical Perspective – Interpretivism

During this research, I used an interpretivist perspective to enable me to understand each participant's experience and journey as an aspiring principal, which offered me insight into the experiences that impacted the participant's decision-making and ultimately what compelled them to pursue or relinquish their personal principalship aspiration. Thus, I was able to understand their construction of reality and how it moulded and informed their lived formational experiences as aspiring principals.

In this study, the lived realities of potential recruits who have been aspiring to leadership in a Catholic school were sought. In utilising an interpretivist perspective, I reject the notion that there is a standard reality experienced by all aspirant recruits, instead positing that all

knowledge and meaningful realities are reliant upon the personal experiences of the recruits' encountered journeys (Klenke et al., 2016). Utilising an interpretivist perspective enabled me to perceive the participants' formational experiences as qualitative knowledge to gain insight into what enables, sustains or inhibits aspirant principals in CESA to pursue or not to pursue principalship (Best & Kellner, 1991). This insight allowed me to comprehend the motivation behind the aspiring principals' actions as well as the significance of their interactions with others on this journey (Chowdhury, 2014).

3.4 Methodology – Qualitative

I used qualitative methodology as I was seeking a rich description of the complex phenomena of creating and sustaining aspiration to principalship. To achieve this, I determined that illuminating the experience and interpretation of those in the aspiring to leadership program would give me the rich description that you were seeking.

I deemed a qualitative methodology most appropriate for this type of study because this research aims to acquire a deeper understanding of what enables and inhibits principalship aspiration and subsequently distil this to create meaning. In undertaking this qualitative study, the participants' perspectives had to be understood (Black, 2006).

To profoundly understand participants' personal experiences of principal development, I conducted semi-structured interviews, collated this interview data and reviewed the data in collaboration with the participants to ensure it was an accurate representation of what the participants wished to say concerning their experiences of aspiring to principalship. Then, I analysed the data utilising reflexive thematic analysis (Heywood-Metz, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive thematic analysis is a disciplined practise that allowed me to interrogate the aspiring principals on what they do, how they did it, why they did it, and how this impacted their journey using the values of a qualitative paradigm. (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

For this reason, I determined that a qualitative methodology was the best approach for my research, as it permitted interconnection and interaction among the different design components (Maxwell, 2013, p.3).

3.5 Method

Having conducted semi-structured interviews, the interview data had to be interpreted to understand each participant's perspective and make meaning in order to answer the research question and sub-questions.

I determined that a case study approach was the best approach for my research, as it was well suited to cultivating a rich description of the complex phenomena of creating and sustaining aspiration to principalship from the standpoint of the individuals involved as they attempted to make sense and interpret their experiences and phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

A case study approach was adopted as it "is a research strategy that focuses on the in-depth, holistic and in-context study of one or more cases" (Punch, 2009, p. 356). A case study method ensured that I could gain in-depth insight into principalship aspiration through multiple participants.

The method is associated with a three-step process of creating meaning through coding, categorising and thematising, allowing myself as the researcher to use the data to build on these themes to interpret a coherent argument (Bhattacharya, 2017; Sabnis & Newman, 2023; Wolgemuth et al., 2022). In undertaking this study, the participants' perspectives had to be understood in their real-world conditions to contribute insights or emerging concepts (Black, 2005; O'Donoghue, 2019). This research aims to acquire a deeper understanding of what enables and inhibits principalship aspiration and subsequently distil this to create meaning.

3.6 Ethics and Permissions

Prior to the commencement of this study, I was granted approval from Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) and CESA Ethics Committee. These approvals from Flinders University SBREC and CESA Ethics Committee are provided in Appendix I. I committed to the guidelines in the ethics criteria set out by the Flinders University SBREC to adhere to the research approval processes for CESA. According to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (2018), I deem the research conducted herein to be low risk. Consequently, as per the SBREC guidelines, I prepared and submitted a “Low/Negligible Risk Assessment Form”, which included:

- *a letter of introduction*
- *an information sheet*
- *a consent form*
- *the interview questions*

My approval for conducting research in Catholic schools was granted on the condition that the individual students, schools and the Catholic sector would not be specifically identified in the published research data and conclusions. While this research complies with the ethics proposal approved by Flinders University, it also conforms to all the provisions under the Privacy Act. To meet with CESA’s ethics approval for conducting research (2020, June 25), “no comparison is to be made between schooling sectors” (Appendix I). As this study was restricted to aspiring principals in CESA, a national application to work across jurisdictions was not required.

For this research, my principal supervisor sent an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study to the CESA Assistant Director. This included a request for participants, which was

dispatched to the 2019 members of the Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders Programs. Participants expressed their interest directly to me as the researcher. For those participants who responded, I provided a further information sheet explaining the research, a consent form and a confidentiality agreement in accordance with the Privacy Act. From this point forward, those who were interested in the research communicated their desire to be involved and provided their informed consent prior to participating in the study. The data collection for this research only commenced once ethics approval had been granted. Permission from CESA and SBREC was also received in advance of the data being collected.

In this study, each participant was informed at the start of the interview of their right to decline to answer any questions or to request that a particular statement not be recorded. Each interview was electronically recorded, transcribed and analysed by me as the researcher. With the individual participants' prior consent, each semi-structured interview was conducted in a mutually convenient and neutral venue. Occasionally, it was not logistically possible for the participant to physically attend. In this scenario, Microsoft Teams was used, which all CESA employees could access. Each participant was assured of anonymity and confidentiality. In the research interviews, transcripts and thesis, pseudonyms have been assigned to maintain participant anonymity.

3.7 Groups in Focus and Participant Selection Process

The participants for each study group were purposefully selected from the CESA Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders Programs. Purposeful sampling was more fitting than probability-driven sampling, as it guaranteed qualitative rigour in the research through the application of saturation as an indicator of sample adequacy for each of the three studies (Suri, 2011).

Participants were recruited from the most recent groups who had graduated in 2019 in the CESA Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders Programs. Table 1 demonstrates that this resulted in participants representing the following three groups:

- aspiring leaders who had completed the Aspiring Leaders Program
- teachers who had completed the Aspiring Leaders Program but had chosen not to pursue leadership
- Middle Leaders Program participants

Participants self-nominated via invitation from the Assistant Director at CESA, who promoted my research. This invitation included an information sheet with my contact details for further information, which minimised any potential bias. The composition of each participant group was specific and the recruitment of participants in particular for participant groups one and three was challenging; considerable time was invested in recruiting and re-recruiting to ensure that saturation was achieved.

The selected three groups in focus in this research arrived with various experiences in either CESA's Aspiring Leaders Program or the Middle Leaders Program. It was decided that these would be appropriate groups to engage with as they were representative of CESA teachers who had been supported by CESA to explore their discernment and further their aspiration towards principalship in CESA. Study 1 involved participants who started and completed the 2-year Aspiring Principal course, while Study 2 was comprised of participants who only completed one of the 2 years before withdrawing or postponing their involvement in the second year. Study 3 was represented by participants who had decided prior to commencing that they did not wish to pursue principalship and hence chose the CESA Middle Leaders Program over the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program.

3.8 Research Methods

The methods utilised for data collection in this study included semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis. An elaboration of reflexive thematic analysis and semi-structured interviews are provided in the ensuing sections.

Through semi-structured interviews, each participant from the groups in focus presented their perspectival reality on what their journey pursuing principalship had been (Black, 2005). Collectively, the data from the 21 semi-structured interviews brought meaning to reality, rather than individual perspectival realities being a neutral conduit (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To profoundly understand the aspirants' principal development, I conducted semi-structured interviews, collated this interview data and reviewed the data in collaboration with the participants to ensure it was an accurate representation of what the participants wished to say concerning their experiences of aspiring to principalship. This process is known as member checking. Member checking was employed to enhance credibility of my findings, as it enabled me to assess validity of the participants' intent, providing them with the opportunity to corroborate, elaborate or disapprove with the transcript (Kienke, 2018).

This study gathered qualitative data from three participant groups by conducting semi-structured interviews to illuminate the enabling and disabling themes that create and sustain the aspirations of potential CESA leaders. Semi-structured interviews were considered most suitable for this research because they enable participants to freely articulate their personal experiences and maintain privacy, ensuring as much information as possible is elicited from each participant to form a deeper qualitative understanding of the impacts on aspirant principals. This was achieved by asking specific questions, albeit with the flexibility to add unscripted follow-up questions to an answer. Each participant had the opportunity to expand on their answers, and I was able to probe for an improved understanding of a participant's perspective (Goller, 2022; Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010)

At the conclusion of each semi-structured interview, I utilised the digital recording to create a transcript. I transcribed all the interviews, which allowed me to immerse myself in the data initially, encouraging familiarity with the data. I then gave copies of the transcripts to the participants for their final consent and approval. At this time, the participants had an opportunity to verify and elaborate upon their responses. During this exercise, only Stella (pseudonym) from participant group three made amendments to their transcript.

There are numerous understandings of an appropriate sample size for case studies. A specific summary of saturation states that sample sizes depend on the nature and scale of the research, concluding that for a professional doctorate, six to 15 interviews are required from three to six focus groups (Terry & Willig, 2017, p. 9). Hennink & Kaiser (2022) refer to a stopping criterion or saturation point of 6 interviews, which achieves saturation of two to three interviews with no new codes and also state that 9 interviews identify 91% of codes. There is no straightforward means of determining the appropriate dataset size or saturation point for a study; research must take into account the complexity, richness and depth of the data. There are many statistical models for determining an appropriate sample size and saturation point, but such formulas are problematic (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

While a range of statistical models has been proffered for ascertaining the appropriate sample size, in reflexive thematic analysis, saturation occurs at the point where the data has become rich but repetitive and the same constructs are seen in multiple interviews, with no further themes emerging from the participants' responses. A sample size of nine interviews was selected, or until code saturation was achieved. It has been found that six to nine interviews achieve saturation substantially representing the entire dimensionality of participant experiences. Small sample sizes are not seen as a limitation to evaluating with rigor (Hennink, et al., 2017; Young & Casey, 2019). I determined the saturation point when I understood the underlying knowledge arising from the study and how it synchronised with

the aims of the research, which tended to be after seven participants had been interviewed in each study group (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Braun et al., 2019; Charmaz, 2006).

Throughout the data collection phase of this study, there was ongoing concern regarding the small number of participants coming forward to take part in this research, potentially inhibiting the ability to achieve saturation. Having specifically targeted three groups of participants derived from CESA leadership courses, there were limited participants volunteering from participant Groups 2 and 3. The data from the interview transcripts were analysed to illuminate the concepts and themes the participants in this research identified as the fundamental reasons for pursuing or relinquishing their primary aspirations.

Table 1 shows the actual interview timeline I followed, highlighting the reality of gathering data, which took place over 10 months rather than the anticipated 6 months. Not having imagined that the recruitment of participants would be difficult, considerable time was invested in recruiting and re-recruiting to ensure that saturation was achieved. My assessment of the situation after a small number of interviews with participants was that many of the participants were dealing with enormous pressure to attain the prerequisites of principalship, were very time-poor in their existing roles and struggled to find an additional hour to be interviewed. Therefore, the reliance on snowballing (Denscombe, 2010) throughout recruitment and re-recruitment allowed the research to reach saturation. Snowballing is a discrete, random and cascading method of recruitment where secondary participants emerge through a process of being referred by a primary participant who trusts the researcher (Streeton, Cooke & Campbell, 2004).

Table 1

Actual interview timeline

August 2020–June 2021														
Group 1	Participant 1 11/1/21	Participant 2 11/1/21	Participant 3 18/1/21	Participant 4 21/4/21	Participant 5 3/5/21	Participant 6 21/5/21	Participant 7 25/5/21	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved			
	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved											Participant 1 18/8/20	Participant 4 19/5/21	Participant 7 28/6/21
	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved											Participant 2 21/9/20	Participant 5 20/5/21	Participant 8 Participant 9
Group 2	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved							Participant 3 4/5/21	Participant 6 21/5/21	Participant 9	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved			
	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved							Participant 1 18/8/20	Participant 4 19/5/21	Participant 7 28/6/21				
	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved							Participant 2 21/9/20	Participant 5 20/5/21	Participant 8 Participant 9				
Group 3	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved							Participant 3 5/2/21	Participant 6 29/6/21	Participant 9	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved			
	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved							Participant 1 24/9/20	Participant 4 3/5/21	Participant 7 30/6/21				
	Further interviews if saturation is not achieved							Participant 2 30/9/20	Participant 5 25/6/21	Participant 8				

3.9 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

I arrived at the use of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) after a process of exploring the most appropriate thematic analytic approach. Due to the scale of this research I avoided learning and using a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS), rather utilising the available time to question, engage and reflect on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thematic analysis was adopted in this study as it was considered ideal at an interpretative level. Specifically, it identifies similarities and differences before generating unanticipated insights and the underlying reasons for the participants pursuing or relinquishing their primary aspirations in CESA schools. Thematic analysis is a popular method in qualitative studies, generates large quantities of data and has the potential to yield a clear and structured set of themes (King, 2004). Reflexive thematic analysis is a disciplined practice that allowed me to interrogate the aspiring principals on what they did, how they did it, why they did it, and how this impacted their journey, using the values of a qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In following the process of reflexive thematic analysis, themes do not arise from the data; rather, they are produced through the researcher's engagement with the dataset and what they bring to it. The six-phase approach for quality thematic analysis provided scaffolding that ensured the analysis in this study was robust and theoretically sound (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

By applying reflexive thematic analysis, I was able to devise codes from the patterns emergent in the data. Reflexive thematic analysis is organic and open to change as the research progresses, which indicates that codes may split as the codification process evolves. Reflexivity required me to critically reflect on my position as a researcher, as well as the process and practice of this study. Acknowledging subjectivity is the primary tool in reflexive thematic analysis, as the generation of knowledge is always subjective and should not be

controlled but understood and treated as both a resource and an interpretative tool to produce analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Adopting reflexive thematic analysis means that “the researcher becomes the instrument for analyses” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2).

Reflexive thematic analysis and coding of the interview data led to the identification of themes to inform the research questions. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed with the understanding that knowledge generation is “inherently subjective and situated” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 8). Nevertheless, I maintained an audit trail to ensure that the data I collected was reliable qualitative data and to credibly contribute to the scholarship on principal aspiration to support the future development of aspiring principals in CESA.

Reflexive thematic analysis began during the data collection period and continued after its conclusion. This assisted me in establishing theoretical saturation, enabling me to observe when identical constructs were present in multiple interviews. As I commenced the interviews with the participants, I simultaneously used some of the transcripts to experiment with reflexive thematic analysis. I started coding the initial interview transcripts according to the recommended six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). While this process is not intended to be linear, it highlighted an approach that provided a transparent data analysis method.

Proportionality was not the primary concern in this study but rather that each identified group of CESA aspirants was represented. At the point when no additional themes surfaced from the participants, I established with my supervisors that no further interviews were required from that participant group (Charmaz, 2006), averting analytic foreclosure (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The first phase of familiarising myself with the data was conducted during the data collection phase. This first phase of immersion in and familiarisation with the data required me to read and re-read the transcripts, listen to the audio and observe how the participants oriented

themselves to the questions while making familiarisation notes. During this stage, it was important to listen for the implications or career consequences in their accounts of their own stories and the effects on others. In this stage, it was important not to begin coding or be selective when shaping and aligning the research questions. Immersion in and familiarisation with the data offered the opportunity to identify assumptions that needed to be acknowledged and reflected on. For instance, Table 2 highlights the familiarisation notes I wrote in the interview with Participant 2.1 (pseudonym, “Cathy”).

Table 2

Familiarisation notes and observations

Participant 2.1	Observations
<p>“Cathy” (pseudonym)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Presents as a born leader.</i> • <i>Has excelled at the highest levels in sport.</i> • <i>Teaching is her third career.</i> • <i>She has experienced charismatic leaders in her work.</i> • <i>She hasn't committed to a career.</i> • <i>She has progressed in each career quickly.</i> • <i>Has identified her areas for development that are foundational and core to teaching.</i> • <i>She sets ambitious standards for herself but doesn't always achieve these.</i> • <i>Sets goals based on perceiving she can achieve better than other participants.</i> • <i>Criticism of religious leaders.</i> • <i>Doesn't come from a Catholic background.</i> • <i>Prioritises family life.</i> • <i>Perceives family life to have slowed her progression.</i> • <i>Wavers from being confident, to lacking self-belief in her ability to lead others and students.</i>

Immediately following the interview, I additionally documented a summary of the interview and penned some general observations and reflections on the interview experience (Punch, 2014); these can be viewed in full in Appendix H. This is an example.

Cathy is a teacher in a secondary school who embarked on a brief career in public health before studying to become a teacher and commencing teaching as her second career. Cathy is a high achiever in many aspects of her life, and she likes to be 100% sure that everything is perfect before embarking on a new venture. As a qualified teacher, she worked as an Education Support Officer (ESO) to gain confidence. She then rose swiftly through to middle-leadership positions before she began to question her development, particularly her impact on staff and her student-management practices. Cathy did not commence year 2 due to an admin error and began to focus on some other prerequisite courses, e.g., the Graduate Certificate in Catholic Education, while raising a young family and balancing her husband's workload with her own commitments.

In the second phase of the reflexive thematic analysis, I began generating code labels for potentially intriguing or meaningful answers to the research questions. In doing so, I was able to capture relevant data and tag it with a few words. Initially, I adopted a paper-based approach, as this allowed for additional creativity, flexibility and ease of access over computer-based techniques. At first, I found it easier to highlight the transcripts manually and scrawl my attempts at a code in the right-hand margin (Gibbs, 2007). As my initial coding progressed, I found it useful to highlight transcripts by hand in the first instance as a way of immersing myself in the data and understanding the evident codes. This was at both the semantic and latent levels, as I endeavoured to obtain a personal analytic interpretation of the interviews at the outset. During this phase, I strived to develop from semantic to more latent codes; that is, I transitioned from not only mirroring the participants' meanings but highlighting the underlying narratives. This is a fundamental personal progression, and I discovered that the more time I spent continuously coding, the better I became at developing latent codes. Appendix A identifies my initial coding attempt.

Once I had established the codes, I then advanced to the third phase of generating initial themes, where I began to identify patterns and formulate themes by examining, combining and clustering codes and collapsing them into meaningful patterns and a concept. Themes are defined as patterns that are anchored by an idea, meaning or broad concept. They are not a summary of everything relating to a topic or theme. Each theme should in turn have an overarching theme or core organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Simultaneously, at this point in the data collection, I realised the merits of a three-column format for thematically analysing data. As evidenced in Appendix B, the central column of the page contained the interview transcript, while the left column provided a space for preliminary notes and shorter codes and the right column detailed the final themes (Saldana, 2016).

From this early attempt at coding, I aimed to generate initial themes. Appendix C demonstrates how I tried to code a further three interviews. I could appreciate the importance of collapsing codes and developing candidate themes where possible and tried to represent each interview in a distinct colour. In this theme development phase, it is recommended that the researcher develop a map or table to conceptualise themes to ensure the themes identified are distinct and do not merge into one another (Terry et al., 2017). Here, I began to observe the shared-meaning-based patterns that captured data to answer my question. I swiftly realised that this approach would need refining, as codes occurred frequently, and the approach became overwhelming after four interviews. Moreover, at this point in my coding, it made sense to digitalise my coding of the transcripts to ensure that the process of collapsing codes and maintaining the collation of themes and codes was attainable and sustainable for the ≤ 27 interviews. Therefore, I shifted to the approach highlighted in Appendix D. From this manual attempt at a three-column format, I experimented with the application of Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel to develop a less paper-based approach. Transitioning to a three-column approach in Microsoft Word was the best advancement in

my journey and allowed me to develop an orderly system for accumulating codes and themes while maintaining a direct line of sight to themes, as can be seen in Appendix E.

As I embarked on the fourth phase, developing and reviewing themes, I decided to improve the process I was using for coding and collapsing codes. Revisiting the full dataset, I checked the themes to ensure they made sense of the vignettes and the extracted codes and were able to tell compelling stories of the shared meanings. This development and review phase was an exercise in quality control. In this stage, the codes and themes became obvious, distinctive and meaningful in terms of the synergy between them as well as in their alignment to the research questions—and, importantly, they encapsulated the research participants' meanings.

Throughout the first four stages, my research supervisors conducted a dual coding check with some data to confirm that the codes and themes had all been identified, and that alignment existed from vignette to code to theme, with each code being appropriate and remaining central to the organising theme. During this dual coding check, my supervisors were additionally able to read the transcripts and offer suggestions on how to enhance my questioning in the interviews to elicit more information. Good reflexive thematic analysis can be achieved through collaboration with fellow researchers or alone (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The fifth phase is a process of defining and naming themes from an interpretive perspective and is distinctly different from a summary list of codes. In this step, it was crucial that insignificant themes were dropped, and rich themes maintained or even divided and developed into sub-themes for an in-depth report. Simultaneously, a brief synopsis of each theme was also devised and utilised in the Discussion chapter.

As I explored digital methods of collating and collapsing codes, I developed a central organising concept in an Excel spreadsheet. This coding book made logging codes easier to keep track of, while the need to collapse codes became easier to identify. Although the use

of codebooks, coding frames or a medium to illustrate a singular viewpoint are not promoted in reflexive thematic analysis, a central organising concept articulates the construct of a theme more expressly, as it conceptualises and draws together the observations of participants more succinctly (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, the use of vignettes in theme development facilitated the process of writing up the thesis. This enabled participants' valuable perspectives to be easily sourced and referenced. Appendix G uses Microsoft Excel to capture comments from the participants so that they could be effortlessly used in the write-up of the thesis, an important process that aided in the refining, defining and naming of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Appendix F provides an example of my elementary attempt at developing and reviewing themes, where collapsed codes could be detected and traced.

The sixth phase, the writing-up phase, occurred as I endeavoured to weave together an analytic narrative that addressed the research questions, with the final write-up being a by-product of this phase of reflexive thematic analysis. Adopting reflexive thematic analysis enabled me to interpret the data from the participants, enabling me to make case-to-case generalisations connecting general understandings from the broader group of individual cases (Stake, 2010) while allowing me, as the researcher, to apply my own cultural understandings of CESA, the Catholic Church and theory in addition to the participants' knowledge (Braun et al., 2019). Table 3 summarises the framework of this research design and how the research methods are utilised in each study.

Table 3*Framework of the research design*

Elements of Research	Approach	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Epistemology	Constructivist	Semi-structured interviews. Interview a group of aspiring principals who have completed the Aspiring Leaders Program until saturation utilising reflexive thematic analysis.	Semi-structured interviews. Interview a group of teachers who have completed the Aspiring Leaders Program but have chosen not to pursue leadership until saturation utilising reflexive thematic analysis.	Semi-structured interviews. Interview a group of teachers who have completed the Middle Leaders Program until saturation utilising reflexive thematic analysis.
Theoretical perspective	Interpretivist			
Methodology	Qualitative			
Methods	Case Study Approach			

3.10 Research Questions

Returning to the research questions that I introduced in Chapter 1, in this research I examined the factors that influence aspirant principals' decisions to pursue or not pursue principalship in CESA. I fully disclosed to the participants that the findings of the research would be used to inform future practice, illuminate the most effective means of reducing the attrition of aspiring principals and encourage principalship aspirations in CESA. Understanding the phenomenon of enabling and inhibiting factors for aspiring principals from the CESA Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders Programs minimised the need to learn new contexts in each individual set of circumstances (Rudnick, 2014).

The research design for this study was transparent and reflexive to guarantee that the conclusions drawn were accountable and objective (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Table 5 summarises the research, detailing the guiding questions used to facilitate each of the semi-structured interviews for each study. These questions were developed to ensure that each participant was able to clearly articulate their experience to answer the sub-questions presented in Chapter 1. Each question was formulated with the support of my supervisors to

ensure each semi-structured interview could elicit comprehensive responses to the sub questions. Questions were designed to create conceptual coherence and maintain methodological integrity, to ensure that interview question was open ended to provide an answer to the main sub-questions (Braun & Clarke. No a pilot study was not undertaken as it was decided that it would not be feasible due to the once-and-for-all nature of the semi structured interviews and dealing with a small cohort of potential candidates (Cohen et al., 2018). For this reason the first three interviews were closely reviewed to; spot my interviewing mistakes, improve my interviewing technique and refine the questions (Atkins & Wallace, 2016). This way I was still able utilise the data.

The questions that this research answers are:

- What motivates a teacher to aspire to becoming a principal?
- What sustains the aspiration to pursue principalship in CESA?
- What are the enabling experiences on the journey to principalship in CESA?
- What factors along the journey to principalship in CESA exert an inhibitory effect on the initial aspirations?

3.11 Further Assumptions and Perceived Researcher Bias

Importantly, this qualitative research is positioned centrally in my field of work in CESA. During this study, I was purposely reflexive regarding my prior knowledge and assumptions, as these may have affected the research. I am conscious of this bias; thus, an audit trail was established to document all the research decisions. My researcher positionality was considered when conducting this study to alleviate biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). My positionality was regularly discussed with my supervisors in the research design process, particularly with respect to the participant groups represented in the study and my personal role as an employee of CESA.

In comprehending my personal position and the bias that this presented in terms of working and simultaneously researching in CESA, I needed to apply qualitative sensibility when using reflexive thematic analysis. As the researcher, it was important to understand inference in reflexive thematic analysis to ensure that the research question was answered. Using qualitative sensibility, I was able to ensure that there was no positivism creep—such as by allowing the qualitative research to contain objectivity, endeavouring to control bias or searching for the ultimate truth—and instead permitted subjectivity and associated researcher bias from interpretation to be the primary tool for knowledge generation (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Although consideration could be given to some perceived implicit bias in this study, this research does not endeavour to examine the influence of gender composition, demographics, variance in the schools' structures or the current work environments of the participants. Nonetheless, Table 4 specifies the current work environments and the varied backgrounds of the participants in each group, making it possible to identify areas for future research or to investigate specific areas in greater depth in future studies.

Table 4

Participants by school structure

School Structure	Participant Group 1	Participant Group 2	Participant Group 3
Primary Education	4	3	7
Secondary Education	1	2	0
Combined (R-12) Education	2	0	0
CESA	0	2	0
Total	7	7	7

3.12 Summary of the Methodology

This chapter has outlined the theoretical underpinnings of the research and the reasoning behind the selection of the various elements of its design framework. This chapter has also detailed the procedural design that I followed to generate the contents in Chapter 4: Findings, and the definitions of the themes in Chapter 5. From an epistemological standpoint of constructionism, in which knowledge and realities are constructed through conversation and interaction, the semi-structured interviews gathered from 2019–2020 over 10 months via 21 semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to share their perspectival realities to create meaning. Each participant interview lasted between 29 to 48 minutes, which allowed all participant's to elaborate on all the questions asked.

Through an interpretivist approach, the data from the semi-structured interviews generated significant data. Reflexive thematic analytic practices were then applied during a period of deep engagement with and immersion in the data, resulting in quality codes and themes.

Table 5 summarises the elements of each study and the questions used to guide the semi-structured interviews.

In Chapter 4, the findings from each of the three studies are summarised, by looking at the themes that emerged and highlighting the commentary that contributed towards a theme emerging in that study.

Table 5*The connection between the study, participant groups, the research questions, the methodology and the methods*

Question	Participants	Recruitment Method	Data Type	Method of Collection	Analysis
Study 1 1. What has led to your aspiration to pursue principalship? 2. When did you have this aspiration? 3. How did this aspiration evolve? 4. When did you know you wanted to be a principal? 5. Why did you choose a principalship pathway?	Aspiring principals who have completed the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program ≥9 people	Via CESA Aspiring Leaders Program	Qualitative	Semi-structured interview	Thematic analysis
Study 2 1. What led you to consider principalship? 2. When did this occur? 3. What was the driver behind this interest? 4. When did you establish that principalship wasn't the pathway for you? 5. What were the drivers behind this decision? 6. What made you change your mind and choose an alternative to the principalship pathway presented in the Aspiring Leaders Program? 7. What have been the barriers? 8. What factors acted against your initial aspiration?	Teachers who have completed the Aspiring Leaders Program, but have chosen not to pursue principalship. ≥9 people	Via CESA Aspiring Leaders Program	Qualitative	Semi-structured interview	Thematic analysis
Study 3 1. Why have you engaged in the Middle Leaders Program? 2. Do you intend to aspire to principalship? Why? Why not? 3. Why have you decided to aspire/remain in the middle leadership space?	Aspiring leaders/teachers from the CESA Middle Leaders Program ≥9 people	Via CESA Middle Leaders Program	Qualitative	Semi-structured interview	Thematic analysis

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to understand the motivation to aspire to Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) principalship positions and the perceived barriers to such initial aspirations.

This chapter presents findings for the following research questions:

What motivates a teacher to aspire to becoming a principal?

What sustains the aspiration to pursue principalship in CESA?

What are the enabling experiences on the journey to principalship in CESA?

What factors along the journey to principalship in CESA exert an inhibitory effect on the initial aspirations?

In this chapter, each of the transcripts from the three participant groups were reviewed using reflective thematic analysis, and a summary of the emergent themes extracted from each group will be produced. At the end of the review for each participant group, a conclusion will be offered that provides a meta-analysis of the understanding gained from the interviews. Pseudonyms were used for site locations, school names and participants' names to protect the participants' anonymity.

4.2 Study 1

Data Analysis

Study 1 consisted of participants who had completed 2 years of the Aspiring Leaders course. From reading all the transcripts from participant group one, conducting a process of coding and then

collapsing the codes into themes, three themes emerged as items that sustained the aspirations of the group members. In this group, the following three categories of themes emerged strongly:

- a strong network
- self-awareness
- opportunity

Strong Network

A theme that emerged as a factor that sustains and supports aspirations was the importance of a strong network. This was derived from the ideas presented by the participants and particularly refers to a network of mentors, broadly including principals or deputies who set an excellent example to follow or have high expectations for the participant, ensuring that the participant is always developing, and a group of like-minded colleagues who offer support and are interested in the participant's career and personal development.

Participant 1.1: Trevor

Trevor remembered having a mentor who cared about his performance and was willing to have difficult conversations with him to draw more out of him. The mentor demanded more of him, as they saw leadership potential in him.

Tim McPherson [principal] wanted me to do more, and he had an expectation that he didn't feel I was reaching. So, we had a very frank, honest and open chat about it, and I managed to respond really well to that, and I've, sort of, continued in that path the same way. It made me reflect on where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do.

Participant 1.2: Andrew

Andrew reflected on how his journey to principalship has been a long, 20-year journey, and he has been mentored along the way by multiple principals, deputies and assistant principals. He described them as influencing the progress that he made. However, most importantly, they ensured that Andrew was continually developing himself and progressing further. His mentors were always trying to ensure that he pursued professional development; they involved him in situations and provided challenges that would extend his capabilities so that he could decide if principalship was something in which he was genuinely interested. He described the three principals as particularly encouraging and supportive. He suggested that it was these experiences with his mentors that made him realise the positive influence he could have on others.

You're not going to all of a sudden be in a school and be a leader, at least the sorts of things that will come up in discussion, the sorts of topics that will be addressed, will start to guide you a bit to see if this is the sort of thing that you're interested in.

Participant 1.4: Mary

Mary explained that she believed that her mentors were the leadership team in her school at the time who were identifying her leadership characteristics, and she also had friends who were reinforcing this message. Upon reflection, she recalled that early in her career, she valued the fact that her mentors never pushed or pressured her but were more focussed on her development and getting her to a position in which she could make her own decision. This was especially important to her, as she was newly married at that time and just starting a family.

I appreciated that it wasn't a push as well. It was just, kind of, an offer of opportunity. It was a very gentle offer of opportunity, and as it progressed, it was very supportive. I never

felt pushed or anything like that or pressured. And it was presented in such a way regardless of whether I came out at the end as a principal or not.

Participant 1.6: Karl

Karl said that he was fortunate to have a few big characters as principals who modelled the impact that a principal could have. In addition, he valued one deputy principal most highly, as he had identified that Karl was displaying early signs of having the ability to become a principal and gave him advice on working towards completing the CESA prerequisites for being a principal, i.e., a Graduate Certificate in Catholic Education, a Master of Educational Leadership and the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program. Karl said that he was fortunate to have been involved in some high-functioning leadership teams and believes that they were the key to sustaining his aspiration.

If someone said, “What was the main factor as to why you feel the need to want to get up and bother with this leadership stuff?”, I would say, it’s because I know how good it can be because of the culture I experienced amongst staff in the early years of teaching, where you felt like everyone’s kicking in the same direction, everyone wants what’s best, everyone’s working their absolute backside off. We’re here ‘til 7 o’clock at night, not because we need to be but because we want to be, and we’ll do it tomorrow, and we’re seeing the results, and how good’s this?

Participant 1.7: Russell

Russell spoke about being fortunate to have two strong leaders who always gave him a nudge to move forward. He also spoke about being presented with early middle-leadership opportunities that gave him the ability to forge ahead when other leadership opportunities presented themselves. Russell, like Karl, spoke about how he had a mentor who encouraged him to focus on completing the CESA prerequisites for principalship positions. Russell elaborated further on the influence of his second

mentor, his current principal, who models the reflective, evaluative and innovative sides of principalship. He attributes his development strongly to this influence. He described his ideal mentor as one who can:

get in between me and my thinking and my goals and my aspirations, not to do anything for me or anything like that, just to redirect or get me to think about my thinking about where I want to go and what processes and what steps I need to do to take that.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a theme that emerges from various codes, i.e., self-motivated; aware of CESA prerequisites; their progress towards achieving the prerequisites; understanding the recruitment processes; and intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, through the support of others, to move swiftly through the development phase. Self-awareness means that the participant is aware of their progress in the process of developing into a candidate for principalship positions and is working towards developing themselves to be able to fulfil such a role in the future.

Participants identified that coaching, fostering development and guidance in terms of their own leadership abilities were key to their ongoing aspirations to principalship. For all participants, there was a time when they received support from others, and their journey to principalship was mapped and planned. They were given clear advice on the CESA expectations of leaders prior to enrolling in the Aspiring Leaders Program, and many of them began working towards these prerequisites while simultaneously completing the Aspiring Leaders Program.

Participant 1.2: Andrew

Andrew had naively invested many years eyeing his ideal position as assistant principal and was shocked when he wanted to apply for the position and was told that he wasn't ready for it. He reflected that he was grateful to the new principal of the school for being honest with him and

developing a plan that would make him eligible for similar positions in the future. Andrew described this event as enlightening, as he thought that school principalships were awarded through succession plans, and he had felt that it was his time. However, he reflected that he had been given explicit feedback that allowed him to create a development plan, which would allow him to achieve his ideal principalship position. He recalled the conversation in which the principal had highlighted CESA's prerequisites for principalship.

Without being disrespectful to me, [he] said, "You're just not even in the ballpark." That's when Tony said, "Well you know what? Then you need to be looking at masters; you need to be looking at getting yourself on the registrar; you need to start gaining some experience." And he said, "And another step in the right direction would be to get yourself involved in the Aspiring Leaders Program."

Within 6 months, Andrew felt motivated to work towards fulfilling the CESA prerequisites that would allow him to apply for the position that he had initially thought would naturally be his through seniority.

Participant 1.6: Karl

Karl also demonstrated the theme of self-awareness, which he attributed to his deputy principal having a clear conversation with him in which he emphasised that Karl exhibited principalship qualities, and they mapped out a journey to principalship or to a point at which Karl could decide about whether principalship was something that he wanted to pursue. He recalls that in that conversation, the deputy principal highlighted the CESA prerequisites but also placed a strong emphasis on advising Karl on how to achieve the prerequisites most efficiently. Karl received this advice after making his first application to the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program, which was not accepted. However, Karl said that this motivated him, and he ended up simultaneously completing his Master of Educational Leadership and the Aspiring Leaders course.

If you do have any aspirations for leadership to try and move into that quickly, and I found that quite useful because if I didn't get that, I probably just would've rested on my laurels a bit and said, "No, let's just survive this first couple of years of this teaching business and then move onto it." But as things progressed, I was quite glad that I had completed that so I could move into the Aspiring Leaders because I understood the grad cert to be part of what was required for application.

Participant 1.5: Ryan

Ryan said that through early conversations about his personal development, he was able to map out a 6-year development plan, which gave him an awareness of what he needed to achieve to become a principal. He also said that the progression was swift; he was advised to complete the prerequisites while he was young, as it would be hard to achieve once he started a family. He reflected on how he methodically moved through the mapped and planned prerequisite components, which allowed him to maximise the potential of most of the other opportunities that were presented to him. Ryan reflected on conversations that he had and the commitment that he needed to complete the prerequisites to become a principal.

Conversations about mapping out a pathway like, right, in 2 years' time you should be off your graduate, registration onto your (registered as) proficient, or whatever it was at the time, and then in 4 years you could be having a POR 1 role and doing your Aspiring Leaders. And then at the time, I was working in a regional environment, and I was living in Adelaide. There was that conversation around when might be the right time to change schools as well and meet new contacts and be involved in the system at a different level. I guess my progression came reasonably quickly, but that was just more an opportunity popped up. I think there's a balance. I mean, the study aspect's hard with young families and things like that. I think when you reach a certain ... perhaps 26, 27, 28, you realise

missing out on a social event, sort of, goes away a little bit, and you realise that there'll be another time where you can catch up.

Participant 1.4: Mary

Mary reflected that, much like the other participants, she was identified as a leader early in her career. She acknowledged that she appreciated the fact that she never felt any pressure to pursue principalship developmental opportunities. She recalled that this was important to her, as she wanted to have a family. However, in mentoring conversations, she was forced to reflect on where she wanted to be in 12 months and in 5 years. In hindsight, she believed that this, coupled with the support that she received, was good for her development.

I think being a person of vision, but also action as well, I was someone who was quite willing to make a plan and map things out and get things done and work with other people. So, for people who don't have that support network, I can imagine it's incredibly hard to take those opportunities and further their studies, and I guess that would be a big turnoff for some people, in itself. So, I'm very fortunate that it's working out the way it is.

Participant 1.7: Russell

Russell exemplified self-awareness, reflecting on his time doing the CESA Aspiring Leaders course as an opportunity to develop a greater alignment with the vision of Catholic education. Russell saw himself as a lifelong learner and the prerequisite courses as stepping stones that motivated him to continue to develop his skills as a principal. He also focussed on completing these prerequisites swiftly to ensure that his foundation was developed and his theoretical knowledge developed simultaneously with the practical experience he gained through the middle-leadership opportunities that were presented to him at this time.

Just get your Master of Educational Leadership done, and then you can decide on what you want to do as a leader moving forward. So, you've got the study base and the theoretical framework of what you want to do to be a leader. I think it really got us to have a greater alignment with the vision of Catholic education.

Opportunity

Opportunity is a theme that emerges from the following codes: a strong sense of self, assured and self-confident and leadership development opportunities. The opportunity to lead presents as a theme that sustained and enabled participants on the journey to principalship in CESA. Participants highlighted that when a principal gave them the opportunity to lead the staff or a project with the staff, they got a taste of what principalship was about, which gave them the confidence to progress in their journey towards principalship. This theme also emphasised participants' self-doubt in accepting opportunities despite feeling that they did not necessarily possess the skills and experience for the role, which required them to exhibit self-belief, confidence and vulnerability.

Participant 1.1: Trevor

Trevor acknowledged that he is still developing, and the CESA Aspiring Leaders course is valuable in the sense that, given the opportunity, he could see himself using many of the learnings at a practical level. He valued the opportunity to listen to principals talk about their personal journeys. However, he is still looking for opportunities to practically apply his learnings and makes the following suggestion in this regard.

I would have dearly loved to have seen, perhaps, like a year 3, where it's almost like an apprenticeship, so to speak, or you are tied, essentially, with a mentor, or you are provided with a term's placement somewhere where you are shadowing someone and really seeing the nuts and bolts of what they do.

Participant 1.4: Mary

Mary also acknowledged that the Aspiring Leaders course was great for developing her knowledge of the practical things that a principal must manage, e.g., school finances and family law. She said that learning about areas with which she was not familiar made her confident that she could fulfil a principalship role if the opportunity arose.

I do genuinely think these opportunities present themselves if you are open to them, and in my case, this has certainly been true. I have just seen it as important to be equipped for opportunities that may come around, and these sorts of professional development opportunities are a way of doing that.

Participant 1.6: Karl

Karl reflected on the culmination of being in a school leadership team as a middle leader, where he was immersed in environments that consistently developed and challenged him, and his learnings from the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program, allowed him to seize opportunities that were presented to him. As a result, he found his next steps towards principalship easy.

[The] Jesuit Society of Australia said, "Yes, we'll give you a go."... That's not lost on me, the fortune of just time and place.

Participant 1.7: Russell

Russell also reflected on all the learning opportunities that the CESA Aspiring Leaders course provided, particularly around family law incidents, human resource management and the various landscapes a leader needs to navigate. He spoke about the opportunities presented to him that kept him interested. Initially, it was a coordinator position, looking after student leadership. He remembered this

opportunity giving him the experience of leading others and the ability to continue to pursue principalship.

To be honest, I think when it dawned on me was when the current deputy principal of the school got an acting role somewhere else, and the principal said to me, “Look, I think you’ll be ready for this”, and then that got me thinking, well yes, I am, and bring it on.

Considerations Emerging from the Interviews

Although this participant group presented many views on what sustained their aspirations to principalship, there were also issues that could derail these aspirations:

- time commitment
- alignment

Time Commitment

While the participants remained committed to their aspirations to principalship, a theme that emerged was time commitment, which was derived from the following codes: sustainability, time devoted, system requirements and time commitments.

Participant 1.2: Andrew

Andrew said that despite his experiences, he was concerned about the additional time commitment and the toll that it would take to fulfil the obligations of being a principal. He spoke about the difference between being a Catholic and a practising Catholic and the time required to be a practising Catholic who is a leader in their parish. He suggested that for him, the question of whether he really wants a principalship still requires thought.

I need to do some more thinking in this space, as I'm a bit of a go-through-the-motions kind of person when it comes to church, kind of, turn up, do what you need to do, go home, but, I guess, probably some thinking I need to do.

Participant 1.6: Karl

While being super-enthusiastic about his aspirations and having a great love of being part of a well-functioning team, Karl still raised the issue of the demand of the 4 am starts and late nights. He questioned whether this was sustainable, especially as he had recently started a family.

You get up on Monday morning and say, "Goodbye, and I'll see you Saturday." It feels like that. So, is that what you want? I don't think so.

Alignment

Many participants felt that their personal beliefs and circumstances did not necessarily align with the Catholic Church. While they understood why the Catholic Church and CESA continue with these practices, they were unsure about whether they wished to represent an organisation that does not have contemporary views.

Participant 1.2: Andrew

Andrew completed the Aspiring Leaders course, but he is still considering his perceptions of the church and whether it aligns with his views. He wondered if it would be possible to represent CESA and the Catholic Church as a leader.

I don't know, does the church really represent what I want to be involved in as ... as a ... as a leader? I don't know. That's just some thinking I have to do.

In addition, he noted that the obstacles to principalship were raised in the Aspiring Leaders course. The leader of the course asked the students what they perceived as some of the barriers to them fulfilling their aspirations to become a principal. Andrew stated that he is undecided about whether they align with his own morals and beliefs.

I was the brave one; I put my hand up, and I said, "Oh, that's pretty easy, divorce. That's going to knock you out. Your sexuality. That's probably going to knock you out too." What was the other one? Oh, and I think I said, "Abortion." So, I thought, well, let's just go for the deadly three, let's just ... let's just go straight for the jugular.

So, he said, "Okay, glad you raised that. So, let's talk about that." And, yeah, just the really interesting thing, and you probably heard this from others, is the nature of how you actually got married. Did you get married in the Catholic Church? And if you didn't, like, you'd better damn well organise it quickly before you hold a principal position.

Participant 1.6: Karl

Karl reflected on his alignment, and he said that he was fortunate. He still vividly recalled how a conversation around sexuality and the requirement to be married in the Catholic Church hit him hard and was heartbreaking for many of his colleagues with whom he was completing the Aspiring Leaders course.

I remember having been married 2 months before that conversation, or the month before, I think, it was November, so, I suggest it was the last session, and thinking we nearly went the other way with a nice little winery ceremony, whereas we actually ended up going in the Catholic Church. For that very reason, unknowingly at the time, I'm now in a certain tick box that the person next to me is not, which just didn't sit well with me. I suppose that was a bit of a turning point for me, far less so than others because I was on the right side of the hammer but a bit of a turning point around, jeez, where are we

headed in leadership? Can I genuinely lead in a place where that's the bottom line of what we're on about?

Summary

In conclusion, participant group one illuminated the importance of a strong, reliable network to support and appropriately advise on how to act effectively on their aspiration. They suggested that clear guidance and advice early in their career motivated and assisted them in making decisive choices that aided their development and enabled their aspirations to progress.

Participant group one also acknowledged that a strong, supportive network identified and facilitated opportunities, but these opportunities needed to be recognised by the individual, acknowledged and capitalised on.

Most importantly, participants from group one had a high level of self-awareness in the process of working towards principalship, and they were motivated and left nothing to chance. They acted on advice from their mentor or network to fulfil the CESA prerequisites quickly and acknowledged that they made sacrifices to ensure that they were achieving what was required to keep their aspirations alive. They also acknowledged that there was a time commitment required, but they were conscious of needing to create a balance between their careers and home lives.

One interesting consideration acknowledged by group one was that they were conscious of aligning their lifestyle to the beliefs of the Catholic Church to enable their aspiration. While none of the participants from this group had issues with alignment impediments, some believed that they were fortunate to have coincidentally ticked the required boxes. Some of the participants felt bad for their colleagues who never made it to the 2nd year of the Aspiring Leaders course because their personal circumstances were not aligned with church beliefs, particularly those who had not been married in a Catholic church, those who were divorced or in same-sex relationships or those who had had an

abortion. Participant 1.3 views were consistent with other participant's from Study 1, however their data was not being represented as other participants views were more clearly articulated.

4.3 Study 2

Data Analysis

Study 2 involved participants who had completed only 1 year of the 2-year Aspiring Leaders course before withdrawing or postponing their involvement. From reading all the transcripts from participant group two, conducting a process of coding and then collapsing these codes into themes, four themes emerged as items that inhibited the aspirations of the group members. In this group, the following four categories of themes emerged strongly:

- commitment
- alignment
- self-doubt
- unclear guidance

Commitment

The theme commitment is derived from the following codes: family pressure, competing family priorities, time-poor and capacity threshold. These codes were presented as barriers that hindered aspirations. Commitment is a theme that many participants raised.

Participant 2.1: Cathy

Cathy spoke about the many challenges that she faced. Although she did not present these challenges in a self-pitying manner, she discussed many hurdles that would ultimately prove to be barriers. She spoke about maternity occurring at the height of her early career and returning from leave to a

teaching position and not the middle-leadership position that she had held prior to commencing her parental leave.

Cathy also mentioned maintaining the balance in her household, stating that her husband ran a successful business that employs 40 people.

And for all things to remain stable, I need to be not aspiring too greatly. He'd die for me to say that, but if I started to go full time and go pursue something over this way, I think it would tip our boat at home at the moment. Oh, principalship is very daunting, like, the amount of hours that you put in is phenomenal.

Participant 2.2: Rosemary

Rosemary mentioned that she thought the comments made by principals and deputies at the presentations in the CESA Aspiring Leaders course around work commitments resulting in them not having time for their family and their own children were too much for her, despite her children being adults already. In addition, she noted that she already felt time-poor because of the number of hours that she put into her current middle-leadership role before even entertaining the idea of investing more time in completing any of the CESA prerequisites.

And the thought of continuing that, which I wanted to do, and picking up a master's degree, which I hadn't enrolled in, was just too overwhelming. I ... I wouldn't have managed. And so, I'm not averse to the work, but I did think that it would push me over the limit, taking on that study, and I don't want to be completely consumed with work all my waking hours. And a couple of people were saying, you know, that, sort of, got to be present for the job 24/7 virtually. That was a little bit of a turnoff in that regard.

Participant 2.3: Martin

Martin also reflected on how time devoted to work and progressing himself was a big consideration when endeavouring to create a balanced home life.

Work is always a factor in balancing home life with school life, and yes, it is all-encompassing, whether it be phone calls that you receive at 11, 12 o'clock at night because there is a security alarm going off and you're the person who responds to it, or getting an early phone call at half past five in the morning because a teacher can't come in.

Participant 2.5: Dave

Dave also reflected on his aspirations and believes that after everything he has done to develop himself to the point where he could consider a principalship, he would not pursue it further owing to the pressure that he sees his current principal is under. Principals have pressure from the directors above them and the teachers below them.

I also look now and think I don't want it because I see the nonsense that Michael has to do here at our school and all of the pressure from the director coming down through the pipeline, and I think, thank God. I'll do my job in the room the best I can, and I get the feeling Michael's a bit of a middleman. He's getting pressure from us to say, "Let's be realistic" but also pressure from his coaches and the director and assistant to say, "Listen, we've got to lift this and do that ... enrolments." Yeah, it'd be a tough gig.

Alignment

Many participants had questions about the alignment of their personal beliefs and circumstances with the Catholic Church. They understood why the Catholic Church and CESA follow certain practices, but they were challenged as to whether they wished to represent an organisation that does not have contemporary views.

The alignment theme was derived from the following codes: marriage, de facto, same-sex relationships, contemporary views, parish commitment and the church's dark history.

Participant 2.1: Cathy

Cathy noted that she was not aligned to a parish for a priest to be a referee but also had doubts, with everything going on in her family, whether she would have time to attend weekly Mass. She found the Graduate Certificate in Catholic Education course to be mind-opening and motivating in terms of new interpretations of scripture, but she acknowledges:

My biggest barrier is often I think about that I'm not aligned to a parish. And then I think how am I ... how would I fit that in as well? I probably would see myself aligning with the parish down the line.

Participant 2.2: Rosemary

Rosemary says that she understands that to be a leader in a Catholic school, you must be Catholic. She can also see why they are saying things like you cannot be de facto in a live-in or a same-sex relationship. However, she was most disappointed to hear in the Aspiring Leaders course that the advice to people in those situations was, "Don't tell us, and then we won't know."

And that sort of floored me a bit because, you know, that was at the time when we're looking at Pell, we're looking at Wilson, and I'm saying, you know, we haven't changed. And if that's what leadership are saying, then that's a really big red flag for me. I can't see the progressive nature. So, the way they answered it, I think, was wrong. I think they needed to focus that we do accept, you know, everyone and who they are and that sort of thing, and ... and for these ... for these reasons, we have these regulations, and ... and

we need to follow the letter of the law. I get it. But it ... just the way it was presented and then, sort of, brushed under the carpet I ... it didn't sit comfortably with me.

Participant 2.5: Dave

Dave, who was de facto in a live-in relationship found the same conversation very difficult after just starting a relationship. Dave had completed his master's degree and graduate certificate and was a member of his local parish, where he actively participated as a reader at Sunday Mass. However, despite his preparedness, he could not get married in a Catholic Church due to his de facto partner's beliefs and opposition to getting married in a Catholic church.

The reason for the spell was that they wanted to interview people after the first to see who's suitable to go on. At that time, I'd just moved in with my partner, and I didn't think I would've passed the interview process. So, I dropped out. Well, Susan, my partner, says, "Just marry me." She wants to marry me. And I said, "Look, it'd probably have to be in a Catholic church." And she's so against the Catholic Church that she wouldn't do that. So, it's like, well, I'm stuffed anyway. So, that was a slam in the face, a kick in the you-know-what.

Participant 2.6: Lisa

Lisa is very much a practising Catholic, but she does not attend church every Sunday. However, she feels like it is an imposition to have to go every Sunday just because that is a CESA prerequisite. She also says that to fulfil the prerequisite of a master's degree in Catholic education would be incredibly hard, and she would prefer to study something of interest, considering that it is such a big undertaking.

I also had discerned that I sometimes feel like I don't fit the Catholic model because I am a practising Catholic, and I do have a strong faith, but I also feel like I don't need to go to church every Sunday and be on show and do that just to satisfy Catholic education. If I

want to do that, I will do that for me. That's also a challenge for me, the Catholic side of it, and if I wanted to do my master's, I would like to do master's in special ed or curriculum, so that's the other block for me. For me to do religious components would be incredibly hard. I appreciate that I'm working in a Catholic school, and I value this, and I fully support it in the school context and in my own life, but for me to study it, my brain would just explode.

Self-Doubt

Many of the participants in this group implicitly identified a lack confidence in their own ability. Consequently, they often spent years attempting to prepare themselves or believing that they need achieve perfection before pursuing principalship. The theme of self-doubt was derived from the following codes: lacking self-belief, lacking confidence, perceived competition, questioning development, questioning ability to inspire and questioning ability and skills.

Participant 2.1: Cathy

Cathy is a high achiever, but through her dialogue, she exhibited many insecurities that would suggest that her self-doubt was a barrier to achieving to her potential. Many comments suggested that she didn't have the confidence that her abilities would be developed enough to undertake a principalship.

Yeah, well even the first question about considering principalship, well I ... well I'm not ... I wasn't, and I'm not ... well, I'm considering leadership. And so, I feel if I was going to be a principal, I would obviously need to know how the classroom works a bit better, and ... and also the challenges that the young people face because you're first ... you're frontline as a teacher, but head of house, I was getting it secondary, and I wasn't ... I was still understanding, but I think I feel like more on the pulse with being in the classroom ... I would ... I would definitely be not ... I wouldn't have any ... much strength in

understanding SACE [South Australian Certificate of Education] ... No, I don't think so. I don't think I've ... have I had much influence over my colleagues ... And then, so, just reframing how I saw my career, so it was ... so just setting some goals up around my teaching and knowing that there was a bit of a gap in my leadership journey.

Participant 2.6: Lisa

Lisa also spoke of an extensive career of being supported and cognitively coached to be able to perform aspects of her work. She also spoke of her peer group at the CESA Aspiring Leaders course as being intimidating, which appeared to be underpinned by self-doubt in comments such as the following:

Me knowing lots of those people that were in my group was almost a little bit of a hindrance, particularly Imogen because I was working with her, and she clearly knew her stuff, and I was probably a little bit intimidated by that. I don't know that it was the right group for me.

Unclear Guidance

This theme came out in contrast to the enabling theme of a strong network. For many participants in group two, it became apparent that their network was small and trusted, and in some cases, the advice given to them was misleading or lacking in clear direction. This theme was derived from the following codes: misinformed, lacked guidance, weak feedback and poor advice.

Participant 2.4: Cameron

Cameron had a career marked by unclear guidance. Despite these many setbacks, he persisted where others may not have done so. To become a teacher, he pursued an arts degree for 2 years because he

was told that he could not get into a Bachelor of Education. He was later told by UniSA that they would have accepted him 3 years earlier.

His first principal gave him the advice to be loyal to his principal. He stuck to this advice to his own detriment. Despite this loyalty, future principals did not have conversations with him that would allow him to develop further along his career path. Cameron also experienced the same unclear guidance from one panel chairperson on 12 occasions when applying for jobs. He said the following about this experience:

Di gave me nothing, absolutely, um, no direct comments about my application, my interview, nothing, and it was so frustrating. And I guess, I wish I had other people to, kind of, along the way, have a look at what I was doing and maybe give me something.

However, Cameron later received good mentorship, although it was too late.

Mary gave me three pages, sat with me for an hour, told me what was strong, told me what needed working on and told me to go and get myself beaten up by a principal somewhere, but that was towards the end of my opportunities, and those other opportunities were very, very frustrating. You need somebody, as a panel chair, to be very honest about where you're at. And if you don't get the feedback, you don't learn anything. So, I was very frustrated.

Participant 2.1: Cathy

Cathy also discussed how teaching was her second career, and how, after completing her teaching degree, she worked as an ESO to determine whether she liked teaching. She then halted her swift progression into middle management to develop a relationship with students, while also questioning her impact on colleagues and contemplating undertaking studies to develop this aspect further. In this

case, with the right guidance and motivation, Cathy could have saved valuable years in her development as a leader.

Considerations Emerging from the Interviews

A consideration that emerged was the importance of a quality mentor. What was apparent in participant group two was that in the presence of a good mentor, the principalship aspiration existed. However, for those participants with mentors who provided unclear advice or advice that was not explicit, the principalship aspiration waned or ceased to exist.

Mentor

Participant 2.1, Cathy, participant 2.3, Martin and participant 2.6, Lisa were particularly grateful for the mentoring that they had received, which created the belief that principalship was a valid aspiration. This mentoring instilled confidence and sustained the aspiration to pursue principalship.

Participant 2.1: Cathy

Cathy said that the boss she had before she started teaching, her deputy and her peers on the CESA Aspiring Leaders course provided great examples of leadership and displayed the impact that she could have on students and her colleagues if she pursued principalship. As a result of the Aspiring Leaders course Cathy said:

I was thriving. I ... I loved the guest speakers. I thought that was a great way to learn and to hear people share their experiences.

Participant 2.3: Martin

Martin spoke highly of his deputy principal who instilled confidence in him, causing him to believe that he could meet the demands of principalship and realise that he had the skill to take on a principalship role. Of his deputy principal, Barry, Martin said:

[He] had, sort of, pointed it out to me when I'd had a professional conversation. He said, "You should really pursue the Aspiring Leaders course because that's exactly what it's for." And, yeah, so I did.

Participant 2.6: Lisa

Lisa spoke of her principal as being exceptional because of the way that he encouraged her to have confidence. She believed that her principal, Tim Hogan, believed that she could do things that she thought she could not. He gave her opportunities and exhibited a high level of trust in her abilities. She reflected on Tim's ability to build relationships with everyone and especially with her.

[Tim would] always talk me through it. He wouldn't do it for me. He would talk me through it and give me suggestions and work through it, and he would be there if I needed him to be there. But yeah, just instilling that confidence within me.

Summary

This participant group revealed that they had not made it to the 2nd year of the Aspiring Leaders course. In most instances, this was because they were not aligned with the Catholic Church in some way. The views expressed by the Catholic Church were often perceived as being offensive, which inhibited the participants' aspirations to progress further, or they were viewed as being problematic and requiring further thought and discernment.

In this group, it was apparent that many of the participants lacked a mentor to provide them with clear guidance to motivate and sustain their aspiration. Therefore, their career plan or direction was indecisive, and it was obvious that many years had been wasted as they waded through the indecision

of where they were going. In some cases, this was evidenced by multiple career or study paths, but it was most strongly characterised by periods in which they were not developing their leadership capacity or acting on their aspirations.

This group was also characterised by self-doubt. They doubted their preparedness, career pathway, contribution and ability to influence others that impacted their motivation and proved to be an inhibiting factor.

Participant 2.7 views were consistent with the other participants data and represented saturation.

4.4 Study 3

Data Analysis

Study 3 involved participants who had completed the CESA Middle Leaders course. For participant group three, the same process was adopted as in groups one and two. The transcripts were coded, and the codes were collapsed into themes. Due to the diversity of the group, in participant group three there were many considerations. However, two themes emerged strongly:

- strong network
- commitment

Strong Network

As with group one, a strong network emerged as a theme in group three and was derived from the following codes: mentored, encouraged, supported by a colleague, skills identified, and opportunities given. Unlike in group one, these participants were not exclusively mentored by principals and deputies but rather by trusted colleagues, still attributing this network as a sustaining force who enabled experiences on their journey.

Participant 3.1: Gail

Gail felt that she was fortunate to have a supportive principal at Kindness College who encouraged her to do the Middle Leaders course. Gail was selected to do the Middle Leaders course with her colleague, which she found to be helpful, as they travelled to and from the course from the country. Although she thought such encouragement and consideration was normal, when she moved from Kindness College to a Catholic school in Adelaide, she realised that this wasn't always the case. Samantha, the principal, also tapped Gail on the shoulder to take on various roles, not necessarily leadership roles or roles with a leadership title, but Gail valued these experiences. Gail said about Samantha:

She was really quite open with her views on me moving into leadership, and that was long before I actually took up a formal leadership role.

Participant 3.2: Stella

Stella thought that she was provided with opportunities to win a middle-leadership position in her first 9 years at St Joseph's College. She also recalled that when she returned to Catholic education after taking some leave for personal reasons, she was asked to do the CESA Middle Leaders course by her deputy principal, which she thought was a bit of an honour.

I think for me to have that tap on the shoulder said that there was a recognition that I obviously had the skills to some extent and that they wanted me to develop those skills and that thinking.

However, having been at two colleges and seen a myriad of leadership styles, Stella reflects that her biggest mentor was a teacher who she encountered in her first job at St Joseph's College and who looked out for her. Stella implied that although this teacher had never reached her full potential, she provided Stella with an example of how to make a remarkable difference while holding a middle-leadership position.

I think if I've learnt ... if there's anyone, I model my teaching and my leadership style, it'd be from her. She has a huge amount of integrity. She's very upfront, so she's not afraid to say the things that other people might be too scared to say. She's very clear about what she wants to achieve and what she wants for students and staff in her house. So, she's still in middle management, and she ... she just did a lot of leadership stuff and wanted to pursue higher leadership positions and it ... it just never worked out for her.

Participant 3.3: Marissa

Marissa reflected on principals who had supported her by providing her with opportunities, even although she knew that she could not seize all the opportunities presented to her, as she needed to prioritise her family at that time, but she valued the support that they gave her despite this.

[My principal,] knowing that ... that there was that goal and that progression in mind, and she was supportive of ... of that and then allowed me to have different opportunities, not so much formal leadership there, it was ... the pivotal point for me was when I moved, in 2018, to Emmaus, and that principal straight away was saying, "Like, why haven't you been doing some other leadership, you know, why aren't you a bit further along?"

Participant 3.4: Pamela

Pamela reflected on having mixed feelings surrounding the support offered by her principal. She didn't know if he was just trying to tick a box for his personal performance indicators. The conversation was brief, and it was conducted at a time when she was busy teaching her class. However, her deputy took time to discuss it with her and assured Pamela that she could do the work.

Mae Jones also spoke to me, and she goes, "Oh, I think it'd be great", and yeah, so she was very affirming, and she knew that Geoff had asked me. I felt like I had the support of

Geoff and Mae, so, I said yes. I had no idea what it was about. It was a yes, and I just, yeah, went, “Okay, no worries. Yeah, I can do that.”

Participant 3.5: Gail

Gail spoke about how a mentor and her principal gave her plenty of encouragement and support in the first few years of her first permanent appointment. She spoke about her principal encouraging her to do the Middle Leaders course, suggesting that it could be of great benefit. This support and encouragement gave her the confidence to take on opportunities and feel like she could be successful.

The Early Years Coordinator who was there at the time, she was so lovely, super encouraging, and she was almost like a mentor. And once she left, she got a permanent position elsewhere, but she really encouraged me to go forward and apply for the Early Years Coordinator position the following year. And I guess her little push really helped me build my own confidence up, and I went for it.

Participant 3.6: Brian

Brian also spoke about the Middle Leaders course as one that provided a stepping stone. He learnt a lot about himself as a leader. It allowed him to understand his personal leadership styles, strengths and areas for growth. However, most importantly, it supported his growth and developed his network.

I had a very positive experience from that program; I was able to build my leadership network and my professional network. I was able to understand myself better as a leader through the content delivered in the course.

Commitment

Commitment was a theme that emerged strongly from participant group three and was derived from the following codes: time, extra study commitments, family commitments and competing priorities.

This theme surfaced numerous times, particularly with the women who were mothers. They reflected on the balance they needed to achieve to be able to attend the leadership courses, fulfil the prerequisites for a Graduate Certificate and Master of Leadership and, at the same time, manage family commitments. Group 3 participant's sustained commitment to ensure that they achieved a work-life balance was something that sustained their aspiration to pursue principalship.

Participant 3.1: Marie

Marie spoke about her aspirations to enter principalship and always needing to balance her commitment towards leadership development and her family life, suggesting that to do everything at once was not achievable. As a result, she placed an emphasis on the need to strike a balance and have an extended pathway to leadership, which involved the steppingstone of the Middle Leaders course before taking on the Aspiring Leaders Program, but she explicitly valued opportunities to lead in schools over formal leadership training.

I can't [jump in too quickly,] like, I've got three young children as well, so I've got a 5-year-old, a 9-year-old ... I need to be fairly realistic in terms of what I can actually cope with in terms of balancing or just, you know, keeping a home life and a work life. I can manage, okay, I'm happy just to coast along with that for a couple of years, I think.

Participant 3.3: Marissa

Marissa also noted that raising her family was a big consideration when planning her career. Although she wanted to be involved in the professional development suggested by her principal, she knew that she had to be realistic and consequently, developed a career plan that afforded her the time to spend with her family. Now that her children are a little older, she is fulfilling her aspiration.

[The principal] was suggesting that I take on the Aspiring Leaders at that time. I just said, "You know, there's ... I ... I ... I wasn't in a space that I could do that. Just wanting to ... to

be able to do my classroom stuff well and also the family stuff.” I had a ... a young daughter, and then, not long after, had a son, and so, I remember saying to the principal, “You know, I think around when I’m 40, I think that’s the time that would suit me in ... being in a position to be able to apply.” So, just chipping away and doing whatever needed to happen before that.

Participant 3.4: Pamela

Pamela also reflected that even the commitment required for the Middle Leaders Program on top of a full-time teaching load and her family commitments was overwhelming, mentioning there are only 24 hours in a day and her wellbeing had to be a focus.

You’re up at quarter to six, and you’re getting ready, and you get your family ready. You go and teach, you’ve got meetings after school, and then you come home, and then you’ve got your parenting between 5 and 8, and then you have to be a wife and a mum and clean the house, and then you’re starting work at 9.30 at night, and you’re burning the candle until after midnight every night: classroom prep plus the online stuff for the course. It came down to wellbeing. I felt like I was going to burn out. I guess to go back and say, “Yeah, I’ll put my hand up and do more study.” It’s not very comforting.

Participant 3.5: Gail

Gail also reflected on having to put her principalship aspirations on hold, saying that being a first-time mum needed to take precedence and a home–work balance needed to be achieved to ensure her wellbeing. She is content with being in the classroom for now but has not lost sight of her principalship aspirations, suggesting that it could be something she focusses on in the future.

I think because being a first-time mum, this is my first child, my head is definitely very much in my home life at the moment with my family, and I’m just getting that balance

together ... But it's definitely something I see myself wanting to pursue more in the future, but we'd like to have more children too. And it's just, you know, that work–life balance. You've got to weigh up when's the right timing for all of those things to happen.

Considerations Emerging from the Interviews

Other considerations that were brought forward by group three were:

- remote aspiration
- same-sex relationships

Remote Aspiration

Remote aspiration was a theme that emerged and should be considered. It was derived from the following codes: country life sacrifice and remote location complexities. While this was not a recurrent theme, it did present as a challenge that country teachers with principalship aspirations encountered, and it should be recognised in this context.

Participant 3.1: Marie

Marie did the Middle Leaders course, and she acknowledges that she was fortunate to be able to do it with her colleague from the same regional town. However, to further pursue her aspirations, she knew that she would have to relocate to Adelaide, despite fulfilling a range of middle-leadership positions. However, showing great sacrifice, she gave up her middle-leadership position in the country to take on a teaching position in the classroom and pursue her dream principalship.

I had concerns leaving my country town and leaving Kindness College where I was in a position that I really loved and ... and moving. And I wasn't sure if that ... that was going to really derail my ... my leadership opportunities. And so, I ... when I moved to Adelaide,

it was just going into a classroom, so I worked in the classroom last year, even although I wasn't in a leadership role.

Same-Sex Relationships

While this theme permeated all the participant groups, it was in participant group three that highlighted that same-sex relationships had an inhibitory impact on their aspiration. Participant 3.2, Stella, spoke about her same-sex relationship being an ultimate barrier to her principalship aspirations. Stella came from a strong Catholic background, held pivotal leadership positions and had diverse experiences before realising her sexuality. She spoke about the sense of trauma, loss and ultimately grief that she experienced when she realised that despite her desire, skills and knowledge of the Catholic system, she would not be able to hold a principalship position in Catholic education.

But on a more personal level, I'm not ... well, certainly in the Catholic system, not able to become a deputy or a principal because I don't fit the criteria for that ... I'm in a same-sex relationship. So, I won't ever be able to be considered for those positions. The highest positions that I can achieve are a director role. So, I can't get beyond that. I won't be able to ever be an APRIM, I won't ever be able to be a deputy, and I won't ever be able to be a principal until those criteria change. It was a real challenge, and I think that connects with where ... that's part of the reason why I left St Joseph's College because that ... that recognition of my identity happened at that time for me. That came late in my life, and it was a real struggle for me on a very personal level around trying to reconcile my faith with my identity on a very personal level, and I had spent a long time ... and which is why I did the TRT [temporary replacement teachers] gig because I just ... I needed to go out and see what else is out there. I needed to think about whether I even stayed in Catholic ed. So, I've had to do a lot of work around reconciling the fact that there will always be limitations. And I'm okay with that because when I ... it took me a long time for all the ...

And so, I, kind of, try and be a really good example to the kids that, you know, I can be a happy, productive teacher who's also in a same-sex relationship, who also works in a Catholic school, and that's all perfectly okay. Yeah, and that's ... that's church-decided, that's ... that's Catholic Ed-decided, that's not school-decided, and I'm aware that there are limitations to it their end, of what they can and can't do and where they can place people. So, I'm not, you know, I don't harbour any resentment or sadness around that.

Summary

This participant group presented themselves as a group that truly values relationships and receives great fortitude and motivation from having a strong network around to enable them. They value collegial support and the affirmation of the colleagues around them. They presented as a group that has a strong work ethic and mostly enjoys the classroom environment, to the point where participant 3.5, Gail, chose classroom teaching over leadership for the love of teaching.

However, one inhibiting theme that presented strongly for this group was commitment, and one of the major challenges facing them in furthering their aspirations is that they are time-poor and have competing priorities. Most of the members of this group are endeavouring to support their family and rightfully struggle to prioritise their commitments to develop their aspiration while considering their family responsibilities. This group spoke of striking a work–life balance and realised that if this balance is out of kilter, it has the ability to negatively impact their wellbeing.

This group also presented themes and views on living remotely and how it can inhibit aspirations, as more opportunities are presented to those who live in cities. This group included a participant who, despite perhaps being best prepared to represent the Catholic Church, had to put aside their principalship aspirations owing to being in a same-sex relationship, which is deemed an impediment by the church. Participant 3.7 views were consistent with the other participants data and represented saturation in the findings.

Table 6 summarises the themes that emerge from each of the participant groups.

Table 6

Themes that emerged from each participant group

Group	Theme	Considerations Emerging
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a strong network • self-awareness • opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time commitment • alignment
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commitment • alignment • self-doubt • unclear guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentor
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong network • commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remote aspiration • same-sex relationships

4.5 Meta Analysis

The data collected from each participant group and the themes that emerged address the answers to the research questions. Table 7 positions the emerging themes from the three participant groups to answer the research sub questions.

Table 7

Themes answering the sub questions

Question No.	Question	Theme
Question 1	What motivates a teacher to aspire to becoming a principal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intrinsic factors • extrinsic factors • mentor • self-awareness
Question 2	What sustains the aspiration to pursue principalship in CESA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a strong network • self-awareness
Question 3	What are the enabling experiences on the journey to principalship in CESA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunity • a strong network
Question 4	What factors along the journey to principalship in CESA exert an inhibitory effect on the initial aspirations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time commitment • alignment • remote aspiration • same-sex relationships • self-doubt • commitment • unclear guidance

This research illuminates that there are many intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to the formation of a teacher with an aspiration to become a principal. However, there are also intrinsic factors that can inhibit that same aspiration.

In answering Question 1 “What motivates a teacher to aspire to become a principal?” participants presented a range of motivations. Principalship is presented as a choice that teachers can aspire to and there is a myriad of reasons why teachers choose to pursue their initial aspiration. What was illuminated was that principalship was in most cases something that participants did not set out to aspire to when they commenced their teaching degree; rather, their aspiration progressively evolved through a period in their career after commencing teaching.

In summary, there were various motivators for a teacher to pursue principalship. Some were motivated by doing the job better, while others were motivated by seeing how principals impact and influence others. Some discovered they were leading and therefore wanted to do it to the best of their ability, so they liked the idea of exploring the next level up. Some were motivated by the challenge of developing themselves in a different field, while others were motivated by the enjoyment from leading others. One wanted to influence policy, while another said they were in a rut and couldn’t see themselves teaching in a classroom forever. Many aspirants identified that they were flattered by someone else identifying leadership skills in them, presenting them with an initial opportunity.

Participants gave insight into what sustains aspiration to pursue principalship in CESA. Two themes emerged strongly across all three participant groups. Both opportunity and self-awareness were identified as two aspects that sustain aspiration. Those that saw their selection into a course as a gift suggested it enabled and sustained their journey. There is a connect between a participant’s desire to continue to strive towards their aspiration and those who see their principalship journey as an opportunity. Also evident was that participants who were given the opportunity to lead simultaneously with completing the Middle Leaders course or Aspiring Leaders course appeared to be content with their growth. One other theme that emerged, which sustains aspiration, was self-

awareness. A participant's self-awareness on their journey of aspiration enabled them to see themselves on a pathway to principalship, rather than an unknown pathway. Often a participant would have in the first instance been encouraged by a mentor or a network of people who had advised them of a clear pathway to principalship; therefore, the participant, through their self-awareness, knew the course of action required to pursue their aspiration.

In exploring the question "What are the enabling experiences on the journey to principalship in CESA?" two main themes emerged: a strong network and a mentor. However, having a strong network was a stronger theme than having a mentor. It appeared that those who relied on a network had manufactured a clear pathway to principalship with the assistance of those mentors around them. Those who relied on only one mentor had a longer journey to principalship. Whether singular or plural, both forms of mentorship were considered enabling experiences.

Finally, the question "What factors along the journey to principalship in CESA exert an inhibitory effect on the initial aspiration?" elicited a broad array of themes. Across all three participant groups, the themes of time commitment and alignment emerged. Most, if not all, participants referred to the observed time commitment of the job of principalship or the time commitment required to achieve the prerequisites (regular attendance at Mass, time required to pursue a master's degree and the time required by the job) on top of full-time work, without remuneration. This was viewed as time lost from being spent with family or friends, and a sacrifice.

Alignment was a theme that emerged also in all three participant groups. Alignment was acknowledged by almost all participants, either those impacted by alignment, or others who were relieved that they were not impacted by alignment. Alignment arose from the codes of marriage, divorce, non-Catholic, and same-sex relationships. Many mentioned that they were concerned that the Catholic Church was outdated, and they were concerned about having to be morally aligned to an organisation with perceived outdated practices.

Other themes that emerged as having an inhibitory effect on participants included perceived unclear guidance from mentors. In participant group two, this theme emerged in instances of aspirants being led down a path from aspiration to one where they were told by a mentor that their skills were not sufficient for principalship; this guidance was drawn out over many years. The learning was that a strong network, as opposed to a mentor, could have established other strategies that could have led to principalship.

Self-doubt was a theme identified by some participants as being inhibitory to their success and perceived ability to take on the role of principalship. Therefore, participants were at the mercy of their line manager's willingness to instil confidence in them so that they might believe in their ability to pursue principalship.

Self-awareness became evident as a theme. Many participants did not realise it was within their own capacity to pursue their aspiration, having spent many years of their careers awaiting opportunities that would allow them to pursue their principalship aspirations, rather than forging their own career pathways.

It was a poignant inhibitory theme that emerged for those born, bred and established in the country or regional locations. It was identified that many aspiring principals in the country could not further their aspiration without moving to the city, uprooting family to do so. Participants identified that there were perceived ceilings that could not be moved through, without taking up opportunities elsewhere or alternatively waiting decades before a higher-level position became vacant.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined findings from the semi-structured interviews of all the three participant groups. Several themes emerged from the interview transcripts, illuminating the perceived factors that would answer what leads to continued pursuit of principal aspiration, or a teacher to abandon their aspiration to become a principal. Through illuminating these factors I answer the sub questions:

- What motivates a teacher to aspire to becoming a principal?
- What sustains the aspiration to pursue principalship in CESA?
- What are the enabling experiences on the journey to principalship in CESA?
- What factors along the journey to principalship in CESA exert an inhibitory effect on the initial aspirations?

Three participant groups were purposefully selected for this study to represent a range of experiences on the pathway to exploring principalship. Each participant group had been supported to undertake a CESA program to develop their personal aspiration. Participants from Study 1 started and completed the 2-year Aspiring Principal course, while those in Study 2 had completed half of the course before withdrawing or postponing their involvement in the 2nd year. Study 3 participants chose the CESA Middle Leaders Program over the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program, as a bridging course into CESA Aspiring Leaders Program. This study has only taken the view of participants from the Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders programs, as it can be difficult to measure thoughts on principal development programs from principal mentees owing to the requirement for confidentiality on their part.

This chapter discusses these enabling and inhibitory influences or themes, which sustain or limit an aspiring principal's discernment and how each theme correlates to current research and scholarship. This discussion focuses on the themes (strong network, alignment, commitment, self-awareness, self-doubt, opportunity and remote aspiration) that have been identified through reflexive thematic analysis. While participants' responses indicate that there is a diversity of reasons why a teacher aspires to become a principal in CESA, it is a culmination of multiple enabling experiences with minimal inhibitory experiences that sustains their aspiration.

This chapter connects the ideas in the findings of this study to other scholarship to integrate discourses and find commonalities. The findings about what enables and inhibits aspiration to principalship in CESA are theorised, culminating in a diagram that conceptualises this original contribution to scholarship.

5.2 Strong Network

A strong network is a theme that emerged across all three participant groups. A strong network was a support system and a catalyst for growth and development. It was a factor that enabled and sustained a teacher's aspiration to principalship, but when limited to a single mentor, it could inhibit the aspiration to principalship. The destiny of many of the participants aspiring to principalship was shaped by the principal who had appointed them or their delegated line manager in the Catholic system. Often for teachers, the only example of a principal was their employer; therefore, as employees, teachers who aspired to become principals would usually look to their principals for mentorship.

In some instances, participants in groups two and three stated that their principal or mentor was not committed to the mentee, leading to misleading or false promises or advice. Despite this, the aspiring principals held their mentors in high regard, to their own detriment. Previous research has found that lack of commitment and support can significantly impede career development (Spagnoli, 2020;

Swaminathan & Reed, 2020; van Osch & Schaveling, 2017). It was found in my study that where those aspiring to principalship relied solely on one person for career advice, there were participants who felt that they were left inadequately supported. The concept of a strong network and its necessity will be covered further in the following discussion.

Many participants in groups 2 and 3 lacked a network of people who could provide them with clear guidance. This lack of clear guidance in their career planning led to indecisiveness about how to progress their career or address the prerequisites for principalship, resulting in lost time and opportunities as they waded through the indecision of how they would progress their aspiration, inhibiting their progress. In some cases, participants went through multiple career or study paths during a period characterised by time in which they were not addressing the prerequisites or seizing opportunities to build their leadership capacity or act on their aspirations.

Many participants from group 1 spoke about how grateful they were for the support they received and they referred to a sense of satisfaction from their engagement with their principal and their interactions with their mentors. Many group 1 participants referred to multiple mentors, reporting support and increased satisfaction and collegiality. In most cases, participants in this study saw this coach or mentor as their principal. This highlighted that “coaching” and “mentoring” were often used interchangeably and are conflated by the participants in this study.

Mentor

A “guide on the side” is how Gimbel & Kefor (2018) define a mentor, whereas van Nieuwerburgh et al. (2020) explain that coaches focus on providing self-directed learning and challenges. Both definitions imply that each plays an essential yet different role. Similarly, Ng (2015) found that those aspiring to principalship place significant importance on a supportive mentor and a long-term nurturing relationship where opportunities are structured for discussing difficult questions. Hayes and Mahfouz (2020) reviewed 20 years of literature on principal development and concluded that

mentoring should occur in all principal preparation programs. Building on Hayes and Mahfouz's (2020) recommendation, for the betterment of quality future leaders in CESA, effective training of mentors in the professional skills framework would move the mentor and mentee to professional mastery more efficiently (Pariante & Tubin, 2021), as most mentors tend to be unaware of what principalship looks like beyond their personal experience. Mentors can prepare and retain beginning principals. Mentors can support beginning principals through social, emotional and intellectual challenges to ensure they achieve their aspirations and have the capacity to fulfil their future positions with longevity and effectiveness (Farell, 2019; Pariante & Tubin, 2021; Searby & Armstrong, 2016), allowing CESA schools to maintain a trajectory of continuous progress (Cosner et al., 2018; Sandvik et al., 2019; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020).

Coach

Ideally, a coach would be situated in the place of work as a mentor principal, providing an example of best practice, while the mentor acted as the medium to access appropriate development and discuss observations of principalship in action (Cosner et al., 2018; Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020; Lochmiller, 2018; Pariante & Tubin, 2021; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020).

My research identifies that principals are important in supporting teachers aspiring to become principals. Spagnoli (2020) and van Osch & Schaveling (2017) concur that employers play a pivotal role in career management, impacting organisational career growth and occupational commitment. Both conclude that understanding the pursuit and achievement of intrinsic goals contributes to greater job satisfaction for aspiring principals.

Network: Mentor and Coach

My research identifies that, ideally, a network would comprise both a mentor and a coach, as each plays a valuable role. Strategic consideration and application should be given to aligning appropriate

coaches and mentors to aspiring principals, which can positively influence a teacher's aspiration to become a principal (Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022).

The importance of mentors and coaches offering professional development lies in their ability to foster trust and create a supportive environment, facilitating the ongoing development and engagement of mentees (Augustine-Shaw & Liang, 2016; Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018; Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020; Lochmiller, 2018; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020). Encouraging teachers and aspiring principals to enter the leadership pipeline can be transformative. Aspiring principals have noted that it significantly bolsters their careers when someone in a position of influence, such as a principal, recognises their strengths and capabilities and encourages them to pursue a principalship (Boon, 2022; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020; Swen, 2020). What is apparent is that a strong, structured network consisting of a qualified coach and mentor can prevent unclear or inexplicit advice being given by an ill-appointed mentor, causing the aspiration to wane or cease to exist.

Most participants in this research were generally satisfied with any support they received, although they were not in the position to question inhibitory support if it was their line manager providing this support. This suggests there are practical implications for CESA, such as teaching aspiring principals how best to select an appropriate mentor and constructively engage in an interactive process that benefits their development (Augustine-Shaw & Liang, 2016; Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018; Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020; Lochmiller, 2018; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020). It is particularly important to encourage long-term nurturing relationships using a model that allows difficult questions to be asked and prerequisites to be illuminated (Pariente & Tubin, 2021).

One distinguishing element of group three was that it presented itself as a group that genuinely valued relationships and received great fortitude from having a strong network around them. Unlike group one and group two, they valued collegial support and the affirmation of the colleagues around them instead of seeking a principal, deputy or APRIM for support and guidance. Leadership mentoring is a positive relationship that implies a hierarchical structure or power dominance (Swaminathan & Reed,

2020). Strategically designed networking opportunities can also facilitate the development of collegial connections (Outtrim et al., 2023; Tschopp et al., 2016).

By implementing structured mentoring, the engagement of aspiring principals can be sustained, and the potential for mismatch or misguidance can be minimised (Lochmiller, 2018; Outtrim et al., 2023; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020). Structured mentoring programs, such as CESA's Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders Programs, with clear development aims and objectives are well received by the participants. That said, the andragogy must be co-constructed between the system and the aspirant so that all facets of the aspirant leader are developed and effective principals are created (Boon, 2022). As a result, future programs will achieve career development, psychosocial development, professional development and role modelling (Swaminathan & Reed, 2020). Mentors must be aware that too much intervention can be professionally weakening in the long term (Pariente & Tubin, 2021).

In conclusion a coach and mentor collaboratively supporting a teacher aspiring to principalship through a multifarious structured model allows the aspiring principal two career development perspectives in helping them navigate their aspirations successfully. Participants felt that receiving clear guidance and advice early on in their careers was crucial for their development and progress towards their goals (Cosner et al., 2018; Lochmiller., 2018; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020).

5.3 Alignment

Many participants had questions about the alignment, or lack of alignment, of their personal beliefs and circumstances with the requirements of the Catholic Church. While they understood why the Catholic Church and CESA continue with these practices in the most part, they were unsure about whether they wished to represent an organisation that does not have contemporary views and hence which negatively impacts teachers' aspiration to principalship. Some aspiring principals believed that they were fortunate to have coincidentally ticked the required boxes. They felt bad for their colleagues who did not make it to the 2nd year of the Aspiring Leaders course because of their personal circumstances not being aligned with church beliefs, particularly those who had not been married in

a Catholic church, were divorced, were in same-sex relationships, or had had an abortion. These participants believed the views expressed by the Catholic Church were offensive, which halted the participants' aspirations to progress further in their leadership development. They viewed their personal circumstances as being problematic for a career in CESA and required further thought and discernment before committing any further time to the pursuit of a leadership role.

In group three, as an example of the disconnect between the life of a participant and the views of the Catholic Church, Stella spoke about her same-sex relationship being an ultimate barrier to her principalship aspirations. Stella came from a strong Catholic background, held pivotal middle leadership positions, and had diverse experiences before realising her sexuality. She spoke about the sense of trauma, loss and ultimately grief that she experienced when she realised that despite her desire, skills and knowledge of the Catholic system, she would not be able to hold a principalship position in Catholic education. This ultimately presented a barrier to her aspiration to become a principal in CESA (Neidhart & Carlin, 2003; d'Arbon, 2003b).

Glass Ceiling Preserving Catholic Church Beliefs

The issue of same-sex relationships in the Catholic Church is a point of tension as the view conflicts with the messaging of dignity, respect, equal opportunity, harassment, and discrimination. It is also a point that places tension on the upholding of current discrimination policies, procedures, standards, and codes of conduct (Reid, 2020). Beyond Stella's example, what presented for many participants who discussed a barrier to future principalship aspiration was the unseen "glass ceiling" that prevented them further pursuing their aspiration or caused them to relinquish their aspiration. The unseen glass ceiling was also encountered by participant Dave with his divorce, Lisa with her study prerequisites, Trevor for not being married in a Catholic church, and Gail, Pamela, Cathy and Marissa for being unable to commit to attending Mass. The affected participant's considered that there was an ethical obligation for a Catholic principal to make new employees aware of the prerequisites, earlier

rather than later, if they wished to aspire to principalship, to enable them to progress their career and principalship aspiration in another system if necessary.

The Dual Role of Catholic Principals

Australian Catholic employing authorities are challenged by the task of being authentic to Catholic Church beliefs and traditions while providing Catholic formation to staff new to the Catholic school, for whom sacramental knowledge and alignment to the Catholic Church is secondary to their teaching career. The position held by Catholic employing authorities is that, if a teacher is tasked to teach the Catholic faith, their work becomes inseparable from the mission of the Catholic Church, which is to engage and respond to social, ecclesial, and educational contexts while being sensitive to the nature and needs of the community (CESA, 2020; Hall et al., 2019).

The need for principals of Catholic schools to be leaders of the church as well as leaders of the school presents both challenges and possibilities for Australian Catholic employing authorities. When teachers are able to provide a worthy account of the Catholic faith and allow students and parents in Catholic schools to find them places of witness, then Catholic schools are enriched, not diluted (Sharkey, 2019). The data from my study highlight that many of those aspiring to principalship do not hold the Catholic faith to be of great importance; however, during interviews each exercised an affinity for inclusion and social justice. For all teachers, being Catholic begins with understanding the Catholic formation process and the expectations and boundaries Australian Catholic employing authorities place on the principals to participate in mission and support these expectations (Versaldi, 2022). This is a challenge for the Catholic Church and CESA as they adapt to Australia's rapidly changing society; however, it presents a great opportunity to redesign Catholic systems and schools' leadership structures respectfully in canon law to ensure that diversity is enriching the Catholic faith.

Legislation in Education

In Australia, both religious freedom and discrimination laws are inconstant and not well defined for the employee or the employer. There is no doubt that religious schools will encounter challenges if further discrimination laws in Australia are exercised. In South Australia, s34 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)* prohibits discrimination in education on the grounds of a person's gender identity or sexual orientation but provides an exemption to an educational institution that is conducted in accordance with the doctrines, specifically in relation to an employee (Seemann, 2018).

As individualism and pluralism become more widely accepted, fewer aspiring principals are willing to unquestioningly follow categorical imperatives (Turco, 2016). Second demographic transition theory describes how individualistic values are incompatible with Catholic concepts such as the sacrament of marriage. Each of the growth of education, secularisation, women's labour force and birth control have contributed to changes in the foundations of family formation, resulting in more people delaying marriage to pursue education or establish a career, with cohabitation becoming more acceptable (Vera-Toscano & Meroni, 2021).

Consequently, some well-qualified aspirants with ethical and value-based concerns find themselves in a structured system where their values are inimical to the implicit values of the organisation. The point of tension lies at the junction between the Catholic Church holding this neoliberal position, requiring its qualified educators to follow categorical imperatives, while the broader education market and global corporations value and desire well-qualified employees who espouse competitive individualism (Mooney & Moles, 2020).

Influencing Societal Trends

With second demographic transition theory in effect in Australia, the ABS (2021) cited a decline of 5.3% of Australians identifying as Catholic from 2016 to 2021. While 60.3% of Australians identify as being associated with a religion, 20.0% of the population identify as Catholic. This statistic would be of concern for Australian Catholic employing authorities, as it reflects a declining number of teachers eligible to be principals in Catholic schools in Australia. Further, from 1975 to 2017 the median age of those getting married increased 7 years for both men and women, while 65% more couples cohabited before their religious marriage. Only 22% of weddings were celebrated by a minister of religion as opposed to a civil celebrant (Collins, 2020). The abovementioned statistics on Catholicity and societal trends align with findings from this study. This identifies that the model of lay principalship perhaps became flawed due to societal trends long before Dorman and d'Arbon (2003a) and Carlin et al. (2003) addressed the issue in South Australia.

Recently, Pope Francis has broadened the Catholic Church perspective, suggesting he is promoting a wider mandate to forgiveness and penance in relation to marriage, divorce and remarriage. He is not offering a hermeneutic free-for-all, but a respectful penance respecting tradition while acknowledging contemporary perspectives (d'Arbon, 2006; Dite, 2020; Fincham, 2022; McGavin, 2019). How quickly Pope Francis's perspective is distilled into CESA leadership policies and practice will be crucial, as CESA needs to be agile to ensure that potential aspiring principals are not discouraged from applying for principal positions on the grounds of impediments.

In conclusion, many participants across all participant groups espoused contemporary views on the position of the Catholic Church in today's society, and were particularly concerned that the church's morality does not align with that of the general populace on matters relating to marriage, same-sex relationships or divorce. While Pope Francis has offered some understanding, penance needs to be carefully navigated to ensure that those aspiring to principalship are not diminished by fear of direct or indirect discrimination to themselves or colleagues. Time is of the essence for CESA in this discernment, to ensure that future principal talent can be retained and developed now, for the future.

Reading the signs of the times while preserving the principles of Catholic education will be essential to ensure there is not a hermeneutic free-for-all. Re-evaluating the policies and expectations pertaining to principal positions presents an opportunity for CESA to positively attract a broader spectrum of aspiring principals, who will be able to realise their dreams of becoming a Catholic principal, consequently assisting the issue of a shortage of principals.

5.4 Commitment

One of the major challenges facing a person aspiring to principalship in furthering their aspirations is that they are time-poor and have competing priorities. Most of the members of groups one, two and three are endeavouring to support their family and rightfully struggle to prioritise their commitments to develop their aspiration while considering their family responsibilities. Participants spoke of striking a work–life balance and realised that if this balance is out of kilter, it had the ability to negatively impact their wellbeing. They reflected on the balance they needed to achieve to be able to attend the leadership courses, fulfil the prerequisites for a Graduate Certificate and Master of Leadership and, at the same time, manage family commitments.

The frequency of this theme emphasises the support and time that needs to be given to aspiring principals to develop skills to be effective and alleviate future demands and tensions. Time is central to allowing an aspiring leader’s confidence to develop and to allow them to embrace their new professional identity and its associated commitments (Simon et al., 2019; Bagi, 2016; Simon, 2022; Swen, 2020). This research acknowledges how individual lives impact professional lives, identifying that there can be various personal circumstances that impact an aspiring principal’s commitment and development and determine whether or not they can fulfil the existing prerequisites of study and onboarding programs such as the Aspiring Leaders or Middle Leaders Courses (Boon, 2022; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020; Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021). The study notes the issue that participants raise in relation to commitment. Aspiring principals are seeking flexible arrangements that cater for

family pressure, extra study commitments, competing family priorities and time restrictions, all which are identified barriers to future aspiration. CESA could achieve greater work engagement and occupational commitment in seeking solutions that could further support aspiring principals. Greater engagement with career growth could see a deeper engagement from the aspiring principal, ensuring future principal supply (Simon et al., 2019; Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021).

Retention and Attraction

Schooling sectors facing difficulty attracting aspiring principals to sustain their leadership demand should determine whether they have the appropriate attraction and retention strategies. Particularly important is a supported development program for leadership that provides aspiring principals with the knowledge and skills required to be successful and satisfied in their roles while maintaining the strategic directions of their organisation (Caldwell, 2024; Orsini & Coers, 2022; Krieg, 2021; Sezer & Engin, 2021; Davis & Anderson, 2021; Hastings & Sunderman, 2020; van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2020; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018). Often the principals state of wellbeing can be the precursor to job satisfaction (Arnold et al., 2021; Collie, et al., 2020; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2016; Horwood et al., 2021). The greater the understanding employers have of how future aspiring principals perceive and value their work, the more employers can tailor effective school leadership training (Buonomo et al., 2020; Outtrim et al., 2023; Swen, 2020). Importantly for CESA, understanding that work engagement is inextricably linked to career growth is vital; that is, career goal progress and professional development are more strongly related to work engagement than extrinsic factors such as promotion and remuneration (Son & Kim, 2021; Swen, 2020).

Managing Career Management

CESA has a significant role in career management for aspiring principals, which impacts organisational career growth and occupational commitment. Commitment can be impacted by the time required to commit towards fulfilling aspiration (Aravena, 2016; Devi & Fernandes, 2019; Fittock et al., 2020).

Innovative and effective models are being called for to address stress and workload issues associated with the time required to devote to personal development of principals and exposure to the principal role. Contemporary alternatives such as co-principal, elements of teacher leadership and rotating principals can be mediums to alleviate issues caused by the tension and demand experienced by those aspiring to principalship who are challenged by the commitment required by the role of school principal (Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021; Fittock et al., 2020; Blossing & Liljenberg, 2019). Thought should be given to organisational career growth and whether time and financial resources can be afforded to reduce the demand on those aspiring to principalship, or whether there is a need to reduce the prerequisites in the short term and adopt a longer period to pursue and attain prerequisite goals, which may lead to higher work satisfaction. Alternatively, releasing aspirants from their teaching load to attend to the compulsory prerequisites should also be considered.

Further research should be conducted to determine whether there is too much demand on those aspiring to principalship to complete prerequisite programs in addition to their teaching loads, particularly in this period when demand is outstripping supply (Green et al., 2020; Kerins & Spaulding, 2022; Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021).

5.5 Self-Awareness

Self-awareness means that the participant is aware of their progress in the process of developing into a candidate for principalship positions and is working towards developing themselves to be able to fulfil such a role in the future (Avenell, 2022; Ryan and Gallo, 2011; Lavery, 2012; Swen, 2020).

Participants from group one talked about a high level of self-awareness of their personal career growth and the process of working towards principalship. These aspiring principals were strategic in how they progressed their aspiration. They acted on advice to fulfil the CESA prerequisites quickly and acknowledged that they made sacrifices to ensure that they were achieving what was required to keep their aspirations alive. They also acknowledged that there was a time commitment required and an

element of sacrifice, but they were conscious of the need to create balance in their careers and home lives. These participants identified that coaching, personal development and career guidance were key to their ongoing aspirations to principalship. For all participants, there was a time when they received support from others, and their journey to principalship seemed to be mapped and planned. They were given clear advice on the CESA expectations of leaders prior to enrolling in the Aspiring Leaders Program, and many of them began working towards these prerequisites while simultaneously completing the Aspiring Leaders Program. Self-awareness sees the participant take control of their destiny, notwithstanding that they also encountered their trials and tribulations. Participants who display self-awareness show great understanding of their career growth. They make sense of their motivation to challenging work and respond positively to the increased pressure in achieving CESA prerequisites.

Motivation

Self-awareness is the antecedent to the “motivation to lead” (MTL) (Vilkinas et al., 2020, pp. 147–148). An aspiring principal’s MTL is dependent on an understanding of “behavioural repertoire”, a person’s learning ability and “motivation”. If an aspiring principal is motivated to be a principal, has developed a broad range of the skills, or behaviours, required to be a principal (a behavioural repertoire), can observe the trajectory to principalship, read situations, learn from their or others’ past failings, critically reflect on their personal position and apply these learnings, the aspiring principal will be able to fulfil their aspiration. However, without these they will not be a highly effective principal or leader (Dite, 2020; Swen, 2020; Spagnoli & Weng, 2017; Vilkinas et al., 2020). An aspiring principal must have an intrinsic motivation to lead. They must enjoy leading and view themselves as a leader, see leading as a social responsibility and understand the personal costs and benefits (Caldwell, 2024; Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Jackson, 2015; Outtrim et al., 2023; Sandvik et al., 2019; Spagnoli & Weng, 2017; Swen, 2020; van Osch & Schaveling, 2017).

Identity and Self-concept

Those aspiring to principalship are encouraged to think critically about their identity and seize opportunities to grow and learn. Challenging work is more sustainable when it is observed as a practice in which a person aspiring to principalship can grow, develop and collaborate with other, like-minded, principals, rather than an identity that is seen as a source of burnout (Brewer, 2018; Sayce & Lavery, 2016; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). Similarly, Swen (2020) states understanding of their calling, or sensemaking, is a major component of self-awareness and is grounded in identity formation. It is maintained through consistent, positive understanding of self-concept. As aspiring principals make sense of who they are and their intentions about whether they commit, or move on to another occupation or challenge, they form their personal and professional identity (Swen, 2020).

Understanding motivation is important for CESA's future recruitment and retention of talented potential principals. How those aspiring to principalship understand their personal motivation and make sense of their situation can significantly impact how they persist on the pathway to principalship (Sayce & Lavery, 2016; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017; Sperandio, 2020; Swen, 2020). Motivation resolves personal conflicts through clarifying values, beliefs and expectations (Spagnoli & Weng, 2017; Swen, 2020). As aspiring principals make sense of their personal circumstances and motivation, they have the potential to act in accordance with their understandings or relinquish their aspiration (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020; Swen, 2020; Weick, 1995). There is a correlation between how those aspiring to principalship understand their motivation and how it affects an early career principal's practice, action and persistence to continue beyond the first 3 years of their first principalship (Swen, 2020). Uncovering intrinsic motivation is important for CESA and those aspiring to be Catholic principals, so they can develop their personal calling narrative and make sense of their purpose and motivation (Avenell, 2022; Kerins & Spaulding, 2022; Spagnoli & Weng, 2017; Swen, 2020).

5.6 Opportunity

Opportunity presented as a theme that sustained and enabled the aspiration to principalship in CESA. Participants noted that when a principal gave them the opportunity to lead the staff, or a project with the staff, they acquired a taste of what principalship was about, which gave them the confidence to progress in their journey towards principalship. This theme also emphasised participant's self-doubt in accepting opportunities, feeling that they did not necessarily possess the skills and experience for the role, which required them to exhibit self-belief, confidence and vulnerability.

Seeking Opportunities

What is evident in this research is the participants' desire to have experiences and opportunities to develop themselves and opportunities to perform in acting roles. Generally, those aspirants who were mentored and given the opportunity felt prepared for their acting experiences. Interestingly, the aspirants who completed the 2nd year of the Aspiring Leaders Program and were still excited by the proposition of one day becoming a principal, all believed that they had been given opportunities that they had grown from. Many of these aspirants appeared to thrive on the thought of being trusted enough to be given an opportunity to act in a higher position. These aspirants also indicated that they valued these experiences and the opportunities to grow and develop over being remunerated or well paid.

Impact of Age on Opportunity Seeking

It could be concluded that this enthusiasm was almost age-related, as those in their early to mid-career sought opportunities to develop and succeed in their career development. It appears that they were managing their career progression, self-directing towards principalship and seeking opportunities to develop (Pryor & Bright, 2011). These participants described their career differently to those who resigned from pursuing the profession of principalship. They spoke of their progression

as being core to them as a human being. They saw their career as a part of their life and not something that is separate, albeit many still discuss the balance that they need to achieve.

The characteristic of seeking opportunities over remuneration is often seen in people born between 1977 and 2000, commonly referred to as Generation Y (Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2017). It has been found that employees who are Generation Y have high expectations for engaging work, quality training and opportunities to develop their career (Tews et al., 2015), and place value on their work–life balance (Caldwell, 2024; Broadbridge et al., 2009). In Australia, early studies on Generation Y identified that Generation Y employees understand fair pay and conditions, and, unlike in other countries, have a preoccupation with their right to development opportunities and promotion opportunities (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Richardson, 2010). This emphasises that work engagement and developing aspiring principals through career goal progress and professional development, rather than extrinsic factors such as promotion and remuneration, are inextricably linked to enabling their career growth towards principalship (Outtrim et al., 2023; Son & Kim, 2021).

Opportunities Being Sought

During post-recession-like economies and unstable labour markets, such as the present post-COVID recovery climate, many employees seeking opportunities to progress their careers will appear somewhat self-centred as they not only seek the best opportunity for career progression, but also financial remuneration (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Dorman & D’Arbon, 2003a; Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2017; Yan, 2020). This suggests that CESA need to understand the expectations that Generation Y aspiring to principalship hold for their careers in order to engage them in their progression and principalship aspiration. Through CESA’s tailoring of development opportunities to support Generation Y aspirations to principalship, offering enjoyment, career progression and personal development opportunities, an aspirant’s expectations can be fulfilled (Jackson, 2015; Outtrimetal, 2023; Trede & McEwen, 2015.; Son & Kim, 2021). Fulfilling the expectations of a teacher aspiring to

principalship ensures that they continue to commit to aspire to principalship and ultimately arrive at principalship knowledgeable and well equipped to handle the demands of the position. The alternative is that the pool of aspiring principals from this generation might become shallower and exacerbate the void of principal candidates.

Providing Opportunities: A Two-way Proposition

By providing opportunities for development, enjoyment and career progression (Australia: Fast-tracking aspiring future school leaders, 2022; Jackson, 2015; Outtrim et al., 2023; Spagnoli & Weng, 2017; van Osch & Schaveling, 2017), CESA might be able to attract the best graduates from their preferred universities in South Australia or create a pathway from interstate. If this attraction were to occur it would mean that CESA would generally have more employees with a positive mindset, aligned to the system priorities, who would positively contribute to the workplace. For CESA to understand Generation Y and attract employees, they could begin by tailoring their job design, opportunities, and professional development towards principal development programs earlier in the employees' careers. This would help to ensure that the void of future leaders is filled and becomes less of a problem into the future.

Understanding that career progression is a two-way consideration between those aspiring to principalship and CESA as an employing body is essential to maintain and sustain the mission or vision of the organisation. This is important for organisations such as CESA, as the mission of the organisation sets it apart from other organisations (Glen, 2007). Glen (2007) proposes tailoring job design to offer coaching, project and stretch opportunities. I anticipate that CESA can begin to engage those aspiring to principalship and fulfil their personal expectations through ensuring personal satisfaction. Through a system-led appraisal process of this identified pool aspiring to principalship, CESA can begin to identify the gaps and provide opportunities and resources to appropriately support and develop the

aspirants. Providing a range of opportunities to allow those aspiring to principalship to transition from teacher to principal, inclusive of preceptorship, mentoring and coaching is advisable.

Understanding the enjoyment that aspiring principals receive from meeting their career needs through appropriate professional development and career progression is something that should not be forgotten by CESA. This involves not forgetting that providing aspiring principals with the opportunity to develop themselves and progress their careers should not come at the expense of happiness and work-life balance. While Generation Y aspiring principals may appear to centre their lives around their careers, above all, they mostly value work–life balance (Caldwell, 2024; Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2017; Broadbridge et al., 2009).

5.7 Self-Doubt

The theme of self-doubt was also characterised by lacking confidence in their ability and preparation. These participants aspiring to principalship doubted their preparedness, career pathway, contribution and ability to influence others. Many of the participants identified a lack confidence in their own ability. Consequently, they often spent years attempting to prepare themselves or believing that they needed to achieve perfection before pursuing principalship. The theme of self-doubt was derived from the following themes: lacking self-belief, lacking confidence, perceived competition, questioning development, questioning ability to inspire and questioning ability and skills.

Impostor Syndrome

As teachers transition into leadership positions in their pursuit of principalship, they encounter feelings of being an impostor (Ramsay & Spencer, 2019; Simon et al., 2019). As teachers transition, naturally they are moving through phases of capacity-growing, and consequently at times feel like they do not have the ability to perform their role, or that they are not ready for the role. Unfortunately, those that encounter this impostor syndrome can often experience higher levels of fear, burnout,

stress or a reduction in confidence and self-concept, and are reluctant to take the next step in their journey to principalship (Brewer, 2018; Sayce & Lavery, 2016; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017).

Those participants who displayed impostor syndrome indicated self-doubt, despite indicating that they were in the prime position to achieve their aspiration of becoming a principal. Many of these participants came from alternative career backgrounds and entered teaching as mature-age students. Many of these participants were influenced by their mentor, believing that they needed “years of experience” in education versus “experiences in the years”. This embedded culture that exists amongst many mentors highlighted that it would be a great concern for CESA if only those in mid- to late career could attain principalship, particularly in a climate where there are high rates of retirements and high dropout rates of teachers in the first 5 years in the teaching profession.

As participants shared their aspiration to pursue principalship, often unknowingly they would express a fear in leading their colleagues and articulate how anxious they felt when being in this position or imagining leading their colleagues. Participants indicated that they were not worthy of filling the principal position, or that they did not have the additional time in their day-to-day life to fulfil the perceived additional duties of the role. In doing this, ultimately participants indicated that they were not worthy of the role of principal. Additionally, for CESA this highlights “attraction issues” to the role of principal, if the role is seen as impossible from a time perspective.

This lack of self-confidence and self-doubt arose from the participants’ perceptions of their inability to fulfil the role they were currently undertaking, let alone the role of principal. Often the participants feeling this way were located in larger schools and spoke about limited access to the principal, holding a perception that the principal was inaccessible. Therefore, these participants clearly had limited access to a mentor or mentors. They painted a picture that they were left to their own devices, and unfortunately those with self-doubt would often flounder.

Unfortunately, impostor syndrome deepens if these feelings are not addressed or supported by a colleague or mentor who can provide productive feedback to support the aspiring principal’s

development. Impostor syndrome should be addressed, and structures should be established to capture aspirants in this space, because if left unaddressed, like these participants, as their insecurity manifests they will become more averse to the risk of taking on new positions that would progress their career towards principalship (Brewer, 2018; Ramsay & Spencer, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Unfortunately, as this data set reveals, impostor syndrome is more common amongst women, especially in early to mid-career (Brewer, 2018).

Supporting Commitment and Development to a New Professional Identity

Time and support must be given to enable aspiring principals to build their self-confidence, embrace their new professional identity and embrace their new workloads and commitments (Green et al., 2020; Simon et al., 2019). Various personal circumstances and commitments can significantly impact the commitment and development of a person aspiring to principalship (Boon, 2022; Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020). Organisational socialisation, professional socialisation, mentor access and a variety of experiences enable aspiring principals to enhance their resilience and cultivate their self-perception as a future principal in a range of contexts (Fittock et al., 2020; Blossing & Liljenberg, 2019).

As found in the study by Fittock et al. (2020), participants in this research who talked about resilience and self-confidence demonstrated career optimism about being capable of fulfilling the role of principal. They discussed self-belief, optimism and an enduring attitude that one day they would be a principal. Their belief in themselves, and their persistence to continue to the best of their ability, explore challenges as they arise and see their previous failures as opportunities to develop appeared to shape their approach and attitude. Those participants who talked about a lack of confidence or optimism often discussed successes in other elements of their life or gave examples of when they previously held significant positions in a school where they had displayed success or excellence. This previous success or mastery, however, often manifested in an unfavourable attitude or avoidance of

the prerequisites required to achieve mastery in their aspiration to principalship. This previous mastery often placed them in an unfamiliar position in which they had a perceived fear of comparison to others. Often these participants highlighted career periods when they failed to take the calculated risks required to further progress their career, due to that perceived fear.

Self-doubt and Optimism

Understanding that self-doubt and optimism are linked, it is important for CESA to consider the importance of cultural unfreezing to enhance the capacities of future aspiring principals. That said, this highlights the importance that access to mentors has for CESA. Through being provided with mentors and a range of experiences, such as shadowing an experienced principal, those aspiring to principalship can exercise their leadership potential and develop their self-confidence through being supported to exhibit their leadership strengths. In this way, they can build their self-perception as a leader in a range of settings (Simon et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

Optimism and a positive vision may prove to be one of the biggest factors in motivating those aspiring to principalship to proactively design their career path and required development (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Carver & Scheier, 2014; Sandvik et al., 2019). Often those participants who displayed self-confidence and optimism discussed the pivotal role that a mentor, or mentors, played in their previous positions. These participants noted the opportunities they had to discuss the operational running of their school and their access to their principal, and to have continually ongoing informal appraisals of their own performance. Career counselling can allow those aspiring to principalship to review their career progress and develop a strategic plan to build skills and make informed decisions about their future career progression (Del Corso & Briddick, 2015; Outtrim et al., 2023; Parcover & Swanson, 2013). CESA has the opportunity to think creatively about how to enhance programs that build confidence amongst aspiring principals. Career counselling can also be a medium to reduce self-doubt,

create career optimism and unfreeze those aspiring principals to be able to make calculated risks in their journey to principalship.

Mentoring and Counselling to Facilitate Moving from Teacher to Principal

Mentoring and counselling would support aspiring principals to ascertain what is expected of the principal role and allow the aspiring principal to greater understand their strengths and lessen the effects of any impostor syndrome. When a mentor and an aspiring principal discuss evidence of achievement and fulfilment of key performance indicators, it has the potential to create moments to celebrate and stymie self-doubt. Having access to current principals as mentors would also expose those aspiring to principalship to system priorities and understandings of how current high-functioning principals operate, dismissing any preconceived ideas and illuminating the joys of the profession (Lochmiller, 2018; Marinova et al., 2015; Parcover & Swanson, 2013; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020).

Mentoring and counselling allow those aspiring to principalship to design their career to move from teacher to principal. The aspiring principal is encouraged to think critically about the path they wish to take through scanning, mapping goals, being open and planning the steps on this path to principalship. Networking opportunities also allow for aspiring principals to develop collegial networks (Brewer, 2018; Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021; Tschopp et al., 2016). Career mapping, mentoring and networking shift the responsibility away from CESA and back to the aspiring principal and mentor, and allow the aspiring principal to shape the next steps of their career (Arthur, 2017; Lochmiller, 2018; Swaminathan & Reed, 2020).

Focussing on self-concept and optimism could reduce the feelings of being an impostor and improve self-concept in the aspiring leader cohort (Fittock et al., 2020). Self-concept is constructed of three components: self-care, self-knowledge and self-leadership. Poor professional self-concept results in burnout. Developing aspiring principals must also develop self-concept, which should be inclusive of

knowledge, skills, communication, teamwork and leadership, and normalising the feelings of self-doubt. Through desisting teachers aspiring to principalship time to develop their self-concept CESA can proactively ease the impostor syndrome that is felt by those with the aspiration to become principals (Ramsay & Spencer, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). By those aspiring to principalship being allowed time to visualise their future career selves, themselves in various school environments and their potential impact, they become more open to change and will seek out opportunities to develop themselves (Green et al., 2020; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Simon et al., 2019).

As those aspiring to principalship move through their careers and advance towards principalship, it is understandable that they will inevitably experience change within themselves. Through mentoring, the ability to readily recognise and understand personal and social changes as they occur will influence the subsequent career directions these aspiring principals take. Consequently, they will be more open to change and recognise opportunities and respond appropriately with agility, adaptability and continued aspiration (Marinova et al., 2015).

5.8 Remote Aspiration

Living remotely can influence principal aspirations, as more opportunities are presented to those who live in cities. Participants, despite perhaps being best prepared to represent the Catholic church, had to put aside their principalship aspirations as they could forecast that they would have to move their family out of the location in which they lived in order to fulfil their aspiration. They also discussed the travel they had to do to participate in courses such as Aspiring Leaders or the Middle Leaders Program, which took an additional toll.

A participant doing the Middle Leaders Program acknowledged that they were fortunate to be able to do it with a colleague from the same regional town. However, to further pursue their aspirations, they knew that they would have to relocate to Adelaide, despite having filled a range of middle-leadership positions in the past. However, showing great sacrifice, they gave up their middle-leadership position

in the country to take on a teaching position in a city classroom to pursue their dream to become a principal.

Impact of Geographical Location on Aspiration

Geographical location in career development has been largely overlooked in research. Although career theory focuses on the individual, there is limited research on the geographical location in which the career is pursued and the challenges and adversity a person must overcome (Alexander & Hooley, 2018; Downes & Roberts, 2017).

As was found in the studies by Downes & Roberts (2017) and Alexander & Hooley (2018), participants discussed the discernment they undertook when coming to the realisation that they wished to pursue principalship. They discussed the difficult decisions required when living in country and regional areas, which often involved various dynamics beyond the individual's desire to become a principal. Often a participant in a remote area would need to consider uprooting a family unit and moving to Adelaide to pursue their principalship aspirations. This would involve selling the family home, their children moving schools, breaking local connections and moving to another geographical place. Being aspirational in a career involves more lifestyle transitions than the previously conceptualised lineal understandings of progression from school to career, to career advancement. These huge life decisions impact more people than just the person aspiring to become a principal, and are testament to their commitment. This level of discernment is on a level that many aspiring principals living in metropolitan areas would not need to consider. These participants are not just making a career decision to pursue their aspiration, they take on board huge stress endeavouring to make the right decision and to avoid negative consequences for both them and their family. The situations of those aspiring to principalship are distinctly different to that of a young person from a regional area seeking an undergraduate qualification, who can be more mobile in pursuing their career (Faggian et al., 2007; Green et al., 2020; Simon et al., 2019). Studies show, however, that graduates have a marked

preference for staying in their home regional town, or in the place where they studied (Sage et al., 2013; Stone & O'Shea, 2019).

While aspiring principals from remote regions have enormous decisions to make to pursue their principalship aspirations, their dilemma emphasises that CESA may be missing out on an opportunity to develop potentially great aspiring principals who are not prepared to move beyond their geographical location. Understanding mobility capital in aspiring principals would be advantageous for CESA. Through ascertaining who is willing to pursue their aspiration to principalship due an inability to relocate and who would pursue principal aspiration and be willing to move from their home geographical location would be great knowledge. Understanding that mobility is not equally available to all aspirants could be immensely powerful (Corbett, 2007; Stone & O'Shea, 2019; Yang et al., 2021).

Career mobility may be a privilege not afforded to everyone, particularly those living in remote areas. Considering how CESA could create equity to avoid financial restrictions or relocation restrictions placed on remote aspirants could unveil many more potential aspiring principals (Alexander & Hooley, 2018; Hansen & Davidson, 2022). If CESA understands mobility capital and the burden that moving location places on people from regional areas, career counselling in this space could assist aspiring principals and alleviate the stress during this period of career indecision (Brown & Lent, 2013; Stanley et al., 2019). Likewise, this can also be done for aspiring principals in the metropolitan area, to generate an interest in country principalship as a legitimate career move, which could increase a ready supply of principals to regional and country settings.

Career Guidance and Support to Those from Regional and Remote Locations

Offering career guidance achieves two functions. Firstly, it aims to support the aspiring principal through the heavy discernment of whether to stay in the remote community and wait for an opportunity to present or to let go and move on to pursue their career (Shepperd & Hooley, 2016). Secondly, it serves to assist CESA in understanding the depth of the principal market in remote and

regional areas, so they can strategically plan to ensure that there are no shortages of principals willing to take on remote principalships. Through the understanding that geographical place is very important for many aspiring principals, career guidance gets into a very personal and somewhat political space in which aspiring principals discuss their aspirations while balancing various needs in their life. These include peripheral communities, staying or leaving, severing family associations and breaking community connections, alongside financial security. Consequently, when offering career guidance to aspiring principals there needs to be sensitivity to issues relating to geographical location and moving out of the geographical area, albeit they need to be raised if the information is not forthcoming.

My research identified that aspiring principals from country and regional areas find it difficult to access principal development programs and often did not access professional learning. Concerns regarding the cost of professional learning for the school, excessive time out of the school or fear of incurring associated accommodation costs that the school would forfeit were all reasons for not undertaking development activities. This raises the point that there should be equality of access to professional learning for aspiring principals, as principal development is important for the principal, school and students. Its importance for regional teachers aspiring to principalship should be recognised and supported to highlight the ongoing benefits and dismiss the negative perceptions of the cost for the school. Consideration needs to be given to how country teachers can access such development and formal qualifications (Aravena, 2016; Slater et al., 2018). South Australian education sectors should provide sessions to prepare novice principals for their tenure in rural schools, especially small rural schools, as due to the remoteness, the feelings of loneliness are exacerbated (Halsey, 2011). It is easy for employers to find themselves endeavouring to prioritise filling difficult positions without taking the career and life narrative into account. Those CESA senior leaders offering career guidance to those aspiring to principalship must have a broad understanding of what creates a successful career, as a narrow interpretation would discount factors such as family and community in this intersection. It would be advisable for CESA to consider that this career guidance would be progressive, informal and

unframed, as a part of the initial Aspiring Leaders Program and beyond (Watts et al., 2015). It is important for CESA personnel to understand remote and regional schooling contexts and their demographics. Understanding when to prioritise supporting a local appointment needs to be carefully handled (Alexander & Hooley, 2018; Downes & Roberts, 2017). Due to the multitude of factors influencing a remote aspirant's discernment and ultimate loyalty to CESA by deciding to leave a geographical location to pursue their aspiration, CESA have a social imperative to support aspiring principals. While mentoring, coaching and supervision have been mentioned earlier, all must be commissioned unequivocally in the development of a remote aspiring principal.

A broader evaluation of how CESA could support aspiring principals who live remotely could also explore how online learning can be further used to optimise the aspiring principals' time and make the commitment more equitable with that of their city counterparts, preventing the numerous hours lost in commuting to and from course commitments (Gao et al., 2022; Graham & Miller, 2015). Barriers that can hinder motivation if workloads are too high can be reduced by flexibility in arrangements, such as part-time offerings, understanding of parental responsibilities and understanding the time commitment of the inevitable travel for those aspiring to principalship who come from remote and regional areas (Aravena, 2016; Slater et al., 2018; Stone & O'Shea, 2019).

Furthermore, to be strategic in regional and remote areas, CESA must consider exploring current high school graduate trends to determine future trends that may influence future recruitment in these areas. Past research says that young people graduating from high school have greater opportunities to fulfil their career aspirations in their rural and remote community (Gao et al., 2022; Graham & Miller, 2015). Recent research suggests that graduating high school students are imagining lives away from their rural and remote communities to fulfil their career aspirations (Ronan, 2020). The most recent research and demographic studies will have ramifications on who future aspiring principals will be and what expectations they will have; for CESA, the question is: how can they develop, manage, and foster this new generation of future principals to understand remote communities?

Through CESA strategically developing future human resource management plans that draw on previous studies on this subject and working with community stakeholders, there is potential to bring about real change in Catholic schools and student aspiration for higher education and careers as principals in regional areas. Advocating that one's home location should not be a barrier to aspiration could solidify people's understanding of a family-centred church and exemplify CESA's commitment to the development of people's identity and obligation and how this is irrevocably linked to connection to community.

5.9 Conclusion

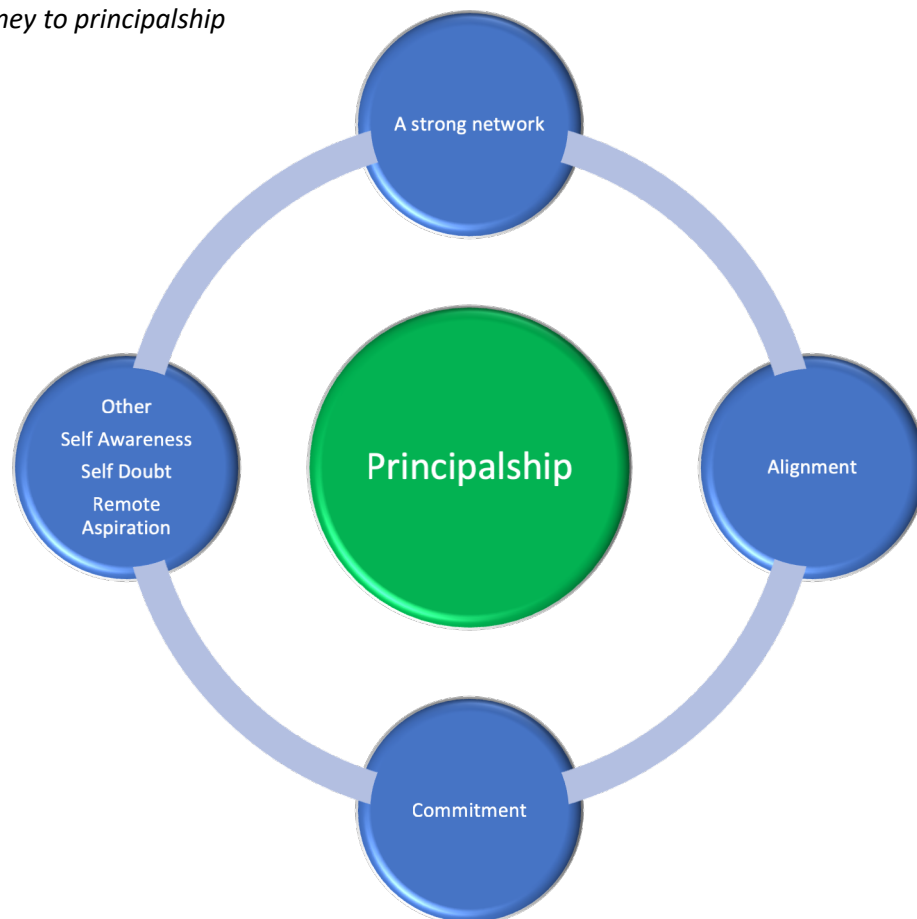
My research identifies that CESA can proactively create systematic approaches to identify potential future leaders and effectively manage their career progression through progressive career guidance, career mapping, mentoring, coaching (Augustine-Shaw & Liang, 2016; Bektaş et al., 2022; Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018; Farrell, 2019; Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Swen, 2020; Walker & Gray, 2022) and networking to empower those aspiring to principalship to shape their career trajectory (Sandvik et al., 2019; Tschopp et al., 2016). This will prevent potential misalignment and expedite the mentee's journey towards professional expertise more efficiently (Fittock et al., 2020; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Rogers & VanGronigen, 2021; Blossing & Liljenberg, 2019). This systemic pathway will ultimately contribute to the continual progressive trajectory of schools (Swaminathan & Reed, 2020) to ensure the effectiveness and longevity of the careers of future principals (Searby & Armstrong, 2016).

The themes discussed in this chapter have been collated into a conceptualised model to demonstrate each theme's importance in enabling a teacher's aspiration to principalship (Figure 4). Principalship aspiration is represented centrally as the pinnacle of the participant's aspiration. The outside orbiting balls represent the external and internal loci of control identified by the participants, which have emerged as enabling or inhibiting factors that could sustain aspiration or inhibit an aspirant's ability

to sustain the journey to principalship. While each theme hovers and orbits, the aspiration to principalship is enabled. However, when one of the themes (the orbiting balls) becomes an unresolvable issue then aspiration can be halted. The model highlights the delicacy of the journey to principalship. This study makes an empirical contribution to knowledge, emphasising the various controllable and uncontrollable factors at play for CESA and the person aspiring to principalship.

Figure 4

Model representing principalship aspiration, with outside orbiting balancing balls conceptualising external loci of control that have the ability to sustain aspiration or inhibit an aspirant's ability to sustain the journey to principalship



My research finds that CESA can play a pivotal role in career management, impacting organisational career growth, organisational alignment and occupational commitment. These three key aspects must

be incorporated systematically in principal induction programs. My research proposes that CESA could also consider more attraction and retention strategies, such as flexible arrangements that cater for family pressures, extra study commitments, competing family priorities and time restrictions. CESA could overcome barriers identified by aspirants to alleviate issues caused by the tension and perceived demand experienced by aspiring principals who are challenged by the commitment of the school principal role (Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021). Immediate consideration needs to be given to how this can be appropriately funded and resolved with the same importance as the teachers' shortage crisis to ensure CESA's future stability.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this research, I investigated what creates, sustains or diminishes the aspiration to pursue principal leadership options in CESA. I conducted semi-structured interviews with three focus groups seeking to move into school leadership: (a) teachers who had completed the Aspiring Leaders Program, (b) teachers who had completed the Aspiring Leaders Program but did not pursue leadership further and (c) teachers who preferred to participate in the Middle Leaders Program rather than the Aspiring Leaders Program. My research gathered insights from 21 participants in total and identified why they did or did not pursue their leadership aspirations. The results highlighted some of the barriers encountered by CESA teachers aspiring to principalship and what elements were enabling and deemed instrumental to a person with aspiration to become a principal in CESA.

6.2 Outline of Thesis and the Research Questions

My research aims to inform future practice and determine the most effective means of encouraging principalship aspirations in CESA. My goal is to understand what enables and inhibits principal aspirants and assist CESA in avoiding future principal shortfalls. My research supports CESA in developing 1,000 future potential principals to cater to the demand for appropriately qualified and motivated principals in CESA schools.

Since d'Arbon (2006) and Barty et al. (2005), there has been a lack of research specific to CESA principalship. My research provides CESA and any other Australian Catholic diocese an understanding of what creates, inhibits and fosters principalship aspirations, to better facilitate and sustain the aspirations, and describes how aspirations can be more frequently realised in principalship. My research contributes to the research literature about the aspiration to principalship by adding

awareness to the need for an ongoing supply of high-quality principals for Catholic schools. The research emphasises the importance of effective formation programs that ensures that Catholic leadership is understood; CESA provides appropriate support programs to those with impediments, so formation is attractive to all and aids retention. In addition, this study provides a springboard for future research to combat the challenges that the future may hold in fostering future principal talent (d'Arbon, 2006).

In Chapter 1, I outlined my interest in conducting this research. I highlighted my standpoint, which stemmed from my journey to becoming a Catholic school principal and my current position in CESA as a school performance leader. These experiences led me to be concerned about CESA employing an appropriate number of competent Catholic principals to lead their schools into the future. The chapter highlighted the changing landscape of Catholicism in Australian society, including the diminishing number of Catholics in Australia, from which group is derived the religious people who have historically been Catholic school principals. As a result, 25 years on, there is an increase in retirement-aged CESA principals and a limited pool of teachers willing to become principals in the Catholic system. Additionally, a substantial percentage of teachers who start the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program for principalship development do not complete the course's second year. My research explored the demographic and societal landscape that impacts teachers with aspirations to become a principal and conceptualised what creates and sustains leadership aspirations in CESA.

In Chapter 2, I explored five main themes of the principal's role: principalship, early career principal experiences, Catholic leadership, principal shortage and aspirational principal preparation programs. My review of the literature highlighted the diverse and complex nature of the role of a principal, explored the research on principalships and discussed the concerns for all educational sectors for the preparation of beginning/early career principals. The literature on CESA revealed a lack of research on principal shortages, principal aspirations and principal preparation programs (Lewis, 2016).

In Chapter 3, I outlined the study design, which examined the research question and sub-questions. An ontological and epistemological view is in a constructivist position. My interpretivist theoretical perspective enabled my study to understand each participant's experience and journey as an aspiring principal. It also offered insights into the experiences that impacted the participants' decision-making and compelled them to pursue or relinquish their personal principalship aspirations. The qualitative approach used allowed me to incorporate different research methods to conduct semi-structured interviews and analyse the collated interview data. I utilised reflexive thematic analysis to gather and investigate rich and meaningful data to answer the sub-questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022):

- What motivates a teacher to aspire to become a principal?
- What sustains the aspiration to pursue principalship in CESA?
- What are the enabling experiences on the journey to principalship in CESA?
- What factors along the journey to principalship in CESA exert an inhibitory effect on the initial aspirations?

In Chapter 4, I outlined the research findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and the subsequent process of reflexive thematic analysis. I summarised the themes that featured strongly and some emergent themes from each participant group. At the end of reviewing the three participant groups, I provided a meta-analysis of my findings. Table 7 identifies the themes that emerged in each of the participant groups. The table summarises the themes that emerged, which were very similar across each of the three groups in focus, albeit paradoxical. For those who had sustained their aspiration it was a strong network and an understanding of themselves that allowed them to seize opportunities that enabled and sustained their aspiration to principalship. The antithesis was an unsupportive mentor or network, malalignment to Catholic Church doctrine and a lack of time that created inhibiting factors for participants who initially aspired to principalship.

Table 7*Themes and emergent themes from each participant group*

Group	Theme	Emerging Considerations
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong network • Self-awareness • Opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time commitment • Alignment
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment • Alignment • Self-doubt • Unclear guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong network • Commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote aspiration • Same-sex relationships

In Chapter 5, I discussed the major themes (strong network, alignment and commitment) and three of the sub-themes (self-awareness, self-doubt and opportunity) that presented as enlightening factors influencing the continued pursuit of principal aspiration. I explored the answers to the four questions and discussed the opportunities that presented for a deeper engagement in understanding apathy and the sustaining factors that supported principal aspiration.

The last chapter concluded that CESA, through adapting its leadership program, could create systematic approaches to identify potential future leaders and effectively manage their career progression through a range of identified strategies. This will generate better productivity of principal development programs and prevent future misalignment. It also concluded that there are multiple “attraction and retention” strategies that could be employed to alleviate many of the barriers and inhibitors that prevented many of the participants in this research from further pursuing their aspiration. These could bolster supply and increase the longevity of principal careers.

6.3 Personal Reflection

When I commenced this research, I understood that there was a growing concern about the number of CESA leaders who would be able to fill future principalship positions. I applauded CESA’s efforts in identifying its need to develop leaders to become the best educational sector in Australia. As a past-principal, previously in the youngest demographic, and now CESA Senior Leader, who for years aspired

to be a CESA leader, I spent ten years witnessing a high percentage of leaders retiring. Personally, I wanted to ensure that CESA became the best sector in Australia by having an adequate supply of qualified Catholic principals readily available. With this desire, I thought it was important to understand the enabling and inhibiting factors affecting those aspiring to principalship and the actions that could be taken to increase enabling experiences on the pathway to a principalship. I believed there were people who assumed that the pathway to principalship had a linear trajectory. Furthermore, I understood through my own experience of becoming a principal that this was certainly not the case, as numerous factors can influence a teacher's aspiration to become a principal. By determining these factors, I believed a broader understanding of the various trajectories for an aspiring principal could be achieved and through greater understanding, each could be supported and developed to their full potential. Time plays a significant role in enabling aspiring leaders to build confidence, embrace their new professional identity and embrace its associated commitments. Various personal circumstances can significantly impact an aspiring principal's commitment and development. Finding a way to reduce the time burden could result in a way of nurturing those aspiring to principalship. As a result of my research, I discovered that for those aspiring to principalship, it was their experiences on their teaching journey that influenced whether they would be successful or unsuccessful. Specifically, how an aspirant's journey is nurtured can greatly influence an aspirants' success or relinquishment of aspiration.

6.4 Research Questions Answered

In gaining perspectives and understanding from aspiring principals, I have been able to answer the following questions:

- What motivates a teacher to aspire to becoming a principal?
- What sustains the aspiration to pursue principalship in CESA?
- What are the enabling experiences on the journey to principalship in CESA?

- What factors along the journey to principalship in CESA exert an inhibitory effect on the initial aspirations?

What Motivates a Teacher to Aspire to Become a Principal?

In the research, I identified that teachers are motivated by their external environment. This environment, including their current principal, plays a valuable role in developing an aspiring principal. Often, a successful principal will establish a strong leadership team, which serves as a motivational pull toward increased satisfaction and aligned collegiality. Being immersed in such an environment creates a safe, interactive space with dynamic influences that provide social, emotional and intellectual challenges and result in continuous skill development.

What Sustains the Aspiration to Pursue Principalship in CESA?

Group one participants presented as having a high level of self-awareness and understanding of their circumstances and position on their career path to a principalship. They understood the principalship prerequisites and acted on advice to continually progress and develop themselves swiftly. They were agile, ensuring that the prerequisites were addressed quickly. While acknowledging their personal time sacrifice and challenges, they presented as self-motivated by drawing on the coaching offered. They sought and connected with additional credible and supportive mentors from their network inside and outside the school or college. Underpinning this group was an ability to think critically about themselves, their values and their beliefs. They established personal identities and developed a sense of their personal motivation to lead.

What are the Enabling Experiences on the Journey to Principalship in CESA?

In this research, I determined that a defining moment among participants was when they experienced leadership in their careers. The trust and opportunity to lead staff or a project in their school fulfilled their motivation to lead and gave them an understanding of principalship practices. In most cases, it

gave them the confidence to progress in their journey toward a principalship. Early career aspirants seemed to embrace the opportunity to engage in stimulating work and develop their careers with quality training opportunities. Participants who discussed the opportunity to work closely with a mentor or principal displayed self-confidence, positivity and a professional self-concept across a range of work situations. Interestingly, self-concept is a construct of three components (self-care, self-knowledge and self-leadership), which become a pivotal part of career longevity and impact principalship roles.

What Factors Along the Journey to Principalship in CESA Exert an Inhibitory Effect on the Initial Aspirations?

The two major factors that had an inhibitory effect on participants' aspirations of principalship were moral misalignment and the required additional commitment. In my research, the misalignment of participants' personal beliefs and circumstances with that of CESA or the Catholic Church became a major inhibitor. Many aspirants encountered this inhibitory factor through alignment impediments and were conflicted by progressing in an organisation that held non-contemporary views on certain matters, such as marriage, same-sex relationships and abortion. Furthermore, many found the time commitment to develop their aspiration amongst the competing priorities in life too much on top of their full-time job. In my results, it became evident that many female aspirants found time commitment inhibitory.

My research identified opportunities for the Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders Programs to be improved based on the findings. Figure 5 endeavours to conceptualise answers to the four questions, from my discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.

Figure 5

The model represents a conceptual answer to the four questions raised about how CESA influences the development of principals through motivating, sustaining and enabling practices.

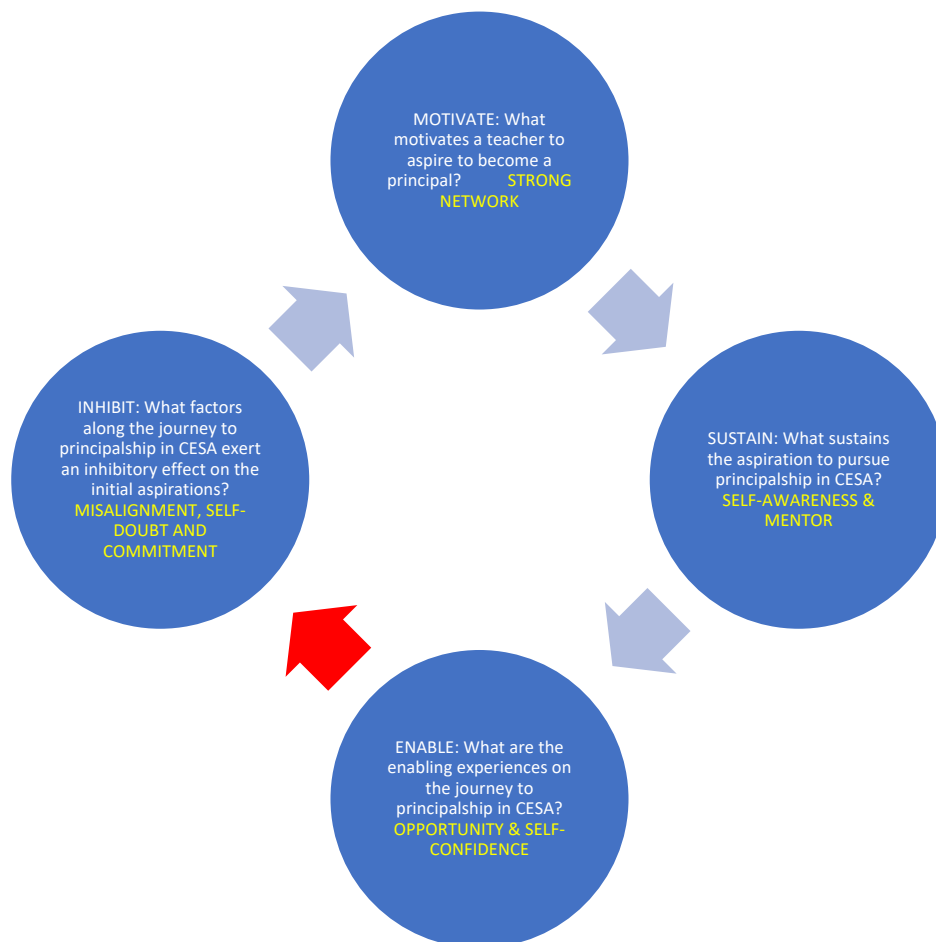


Figure 5 conceptually expands upon the sub-questions used to understand aspirations to principalship to answer the primary research question: What creates and sustains the aspiration to pursue leadership in CESA?

6.5 Limitations of the Research

I acknowledge that my research was only conducted in CESA and does not represent issues that may be present in other educational sectors. As a result, my recommendations may not be applicable to other sectors of education due to the faith-based elements raised, which are specific to Catholic

education. While the research was conducted in CESA, the findings and recommendations may not be congruent, nor applicable for other educational sectors. Future research may explore other schooling sectors or other Catholic Archdioceses in Australia.

A second limitation is the possibility of implicit bias in my research, as it does not endeavour to examine the influence of gender composition, demographics, variances in school structures, such as reception to year 12 or diocesan and non-diocesan, or the current work environment of participants. Future research could consider the balance of gender, location, schooling type and background (primary, secondary, diocesan or non-diocesan).

A further limitation of the research is my positionality as a researcher while simultaneously working at CESA. At the start of the research, I was a CESA principal and later became a School Performance Leader in the Catholic Education Office. This was managed by protecting the participants and always ensuring their anonymity, through using pseudonyms for sites and participants and also explaining that I would not blur the lines between researcher and professional. On occasions, after interviewing some participants, I was introduced to them on a professional level, yet made no triangulation to this research. Finally, the recommendations made from the findings in this research did not consider the financial implications for CESA to action the recommendations.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Through my research I have determined the most effective means of encouraging and developing principalship aspiration in CESA. It has been approximately 20 years since research into the Catholic schools in Australia's principalship pipeline was conducted; this research and that specific to Catholic Education South Australia principalship concluded simultaneously (Barty et al., 2005; Carlin et al., 2003; Dorman & D'Arbon, 2003; d'Arbon, 2006; Sharkey 2002). While this dated research identified the issue pertaining to principal shortages that would remain present to this day, in both Australian Education and more specifically CESA, no further research has been conducted since that time to determine the reasons why the volume of aspiring principals has diminished, to find the reasons why

some teachers are aspiring to principalship, or to understand what is required to increase the number of eligible prospective principals.

The challenge to source quality teachers to educate children and young people in CESA schools is complex. This complexity is one that makes the challenge to source appropriate leaders for the position of principalship more difficult than ever before. Understanding that quality principals have significant impact on school practices and the learning outcomes that occur in schools, through creating safe teaching and learning environments, means that the importance of investing in the identification and development of our next generation of school principals cannot be overlooked. Much like the concerted effort to develop teachers of the highest calibre in schools, understanding how to identify and develop principals will ensure that the retention of teachers is high, and schools remain a safe environment for teaching and learning.

It has been widely observed that effective principal leaders are central to improving schools and student outcomes (Chiang et al., 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). However, high rates of principal turnover threaten school improvement, school stability and the very healthy and positive environments that improve student learning outcomes (Bluestein & Goldschmidt, 2021; Goldring & Taie, 2018; Rangel, 2018).

My research explored the experiences of aspirational Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) leaders to understand what creates, sustains and diminishes leadership aspiration in CESA. My research presents the participant's perspectives, understanding of aspiration, pathways and barriers to principalship in CESA, which builds on previous research in understanding leadership aspiration in Catholic leadership, which is dated. In my research, the lived realities of 21 participants aspiring to leadership in a Catholic school were discovered. Through utilising an interpretivist perspective, I was able to reject the notion that there is a standard reality experienced by all aspirants, which enabled me to understand the participant's formational experiences as qualitative knowledge. This insight

allowed me to comprehend the motivation behind the aspiring principal's actions as well as the significance of their interactions with others on this journey (Chowdhury, 2014).

My research has identified that there are various motivators for teachers to pursue principalship. Some are motivated by doing the job better, while others are motivated by seeing principals' impact and influence on others. Others had discovered they were leading and therefore wanted to do it to the best of their ability, so liked the idea of exploring a higher level of responsibility. Some were motivated by the challenge of developing themselves in a different field, while others were motivated by the enjoyment found in leading others. One wanted to influence policy, while another said they were in a rut and couldn't see themselves teaching in a classroom forever. Many aspirants indicated that they were flattered by someone else identifying leadership skills in themselves, presenting them with an initial opportunity. Future research could explore the three participant groups in a longitudinal study to assess their preparedness for principalship, or career longevity and engagement as a result of their pursuit of principalship. Therefore, it could be advantageous for CESA to undertake further research, including answering the following questions:

- What are the enabling and inhibitory experiences aspiring principals encounter in the South Australian independent or public sectors? (A comparative study)
- How effective is the CESA principal preparation program for developing principals to sustain a long and effective career?
- What is the most effective and expedient process or principal development program to develop aspirants from a wellbeing and cost-effectiveness standpoint?
- How can the longevity of a principal be supported to ensure that there are no future shortages?
- What are effective ways of talent spotting and maximising the cost spent on development, and how can running such programs with high drop-out or low conversion rates be avoided?
- What are the merits and risks of early identification of prospective principals?

Future research is also recommended to further understand the notion of cognitive load of principal development and its lineage to job satisfaction, career growth, engagement, performance, and ongoing career commitment.

Additionally, further research in this field could be conducted using critical, latent and deductive approaches.

6.7 Implications for CESA and Recommendations

This research presents aspiring CESA leaders' perspectives, using an interpretivist epistemology capturing aspiring leaders' views of their ambition, interpreted to unveil the underlying discernment that underpins or underpinned the participants' aspiration and their discernment to pursue or relinquish this career aspiration, thereby adding to the knowledge that exists around understanding leadership aspiration. Those teachers aspiring to principalship require additional skills to be learnt beyond the skills developed in the undergraduate teaching qualification, or the experiences as a teacher, which provide sufficient preparation to commence a principalship. Aspiring principals who had undertaken formal qualifications highly value the experience of their postgraduate studies (Fittock et al., 2020). Just as early career teachers are given support in their early career, preparation for principalship should be given the same priority. It is clear that support must be in the form of time.

Several noteworthy points are pertinent to the development of a suitable program for those aspiring to principalship. First, formal training should be a fundamental requirement in the development process, regardless of the specific context. Second, nurturing the professional identity of those aspiring to principalship should be a central focus during their formation and preparation. Third, continuous training should be adapted to the specific context and tailored to meet the unique needs of each principal. Finally, principal preparation programs should aim to cultivate a deep understanding of day-to-day management practices and instructional leadership, incorporating practical approaches that emphasise human relations and opportunities for networking (Outtrim et al., 2023; Tschopp et al., 2016). Socialisation is vital for the development of aspiring principals and is a key piece in the

development of sufficient numbers of principals, highlighting that socialisation is comprised of organisational socialisation and professional socialisation. It is important that the context is known; knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the staff and a capacity to build, develop and maintain relationships are essential. However, beyond this organisational socialisation, professional socialisation and understanding of system knowledge and values are vitally important to avoid any shock from realising that the aspirant's understanding of the role of principal is incorrect (Fittock et al., 2020; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2020).

Mentoring and coaching are suggested as effective mediums to provide a suitable alignment between mentor and mentee in terms of knowledge and experiences (Bektaş et al., 2022; Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022). Professional support from mentors and coaches provide opportunities to learn from other principals and access to the aspirant's own network can reduce future feelings of isolation, burnout and attrition of principals (Watts, 2023). In business, it is common in leading companies for there always to be a successor undergoing development for important leadership positions to ensure seamless leadership transitions (Sobol et al., 2007). Succession planning is necessary and beneficial for capacity building (Barton, 2019; Fusarelli et al., 2018; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Such succession plans create mechanisms of mentoring and development for those aspiring to principalship (Fittock et al., 2020).

My research summarises that while CESA is ultimately accountable for finding and developing aspirants, the enabling and inhibiting aspects of an aspirant's development often occur in the school and outside the CESA sphere of influence. Moreover, CESA's Aspiring Leaders Program could be further enhanced based on the findings of this research, as highlighted in Chapter 5 and the proposed considerations for CESA in Appendix J. These proposed recommendations in Appendix J could greatly influence more aspirants to become principals by creating new programs and approaches and enabling those leaders with an aspiration to principalship.

Through the consideration of the 19 recommendations in Appendix J, CESA can create a system of choice for employees aspiring to be principals through enhanced attraction and retention strategies. In doing so, CESA will attract and support quality teachers with an aspiration to become a principal, who will improve the learning outcomes for the students in their care and enable CESA to become the leading education sector in Australia. My research proposes that immediate consideration needs to be given to how this can be appropriately funded and resolved with the same importance as the teacher's shortage crisis to ensure CESA's future stability.

6.8 Conclusion of this Study

Teachers aspiring to principalship are shaped by their experiences and are a product of their environment and most principals commence principalship after developing their teaching skills, my research suggests that each teacher arrives at this stage of their career with a diverse set of skills, abilities and experiences. To advance to a principalship, a new set of skills is required beyond teaching mastery. Furthermore, all aspirants have had completely different experiences up to this point in their career, either from being exposed to an excelling principal, a supportive mentor or a strong network or the context of their work environment. The most prevalent theme emerging in my research is time commitment. My findings suggest that it is important to understand that when more principals are required, an individual's prior and current experience must be analysed to establish an advanced program with opportunities to build confidence while not overburdening the aspiring principal with additional time commitments. It is understood that many aspiring principals have to juggle a full-time teaching load with numerous other out-of-hours activities, such as Sunday Mass, school board meetings, pastoral parish councils, sacramental programs, sports programs and community engagement activities. In conclusion, my research was conducted to support CESA in understanding the perspectives of aspiring principals on what has enabled or inhibited their journey. My research was conducted in the hope that discussing the reality of the journey of current aspiring principals can

determine opportunities to enhance the journey for future leaders aspiring to principalship and ultimately assist in addressing the potential shortfall of principals.

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Appendix A

Example of My Initial Coding

Yep.

Worked there for three years in contract as a key year nine teacher. Went for a couple of leadership positions but wasn't successful, and then I think it must've been 2016 – I can't remember if it was 2016 or 2017, my dates are – I'm losing them as I get older.

Yeah, me too.

They – I couldn't get a contract for the following year and so I started one of those years without a job. Picked up a job, a contract, at St Paul's College and it was a job where they'd had two teachers already employed that hadn't lasted. So it was about week four of the term, and they'd had two teachers that had lasted no longer than two years.

Yep.

It was an interesting school to work at, to come from the middle school which is – at that time, it's a pretty affluent, like, middle class-----

Yeah.

Kids are pretty compliant, like – to a – to a community that's so culturally, racially, diverse. The climate at the school was interesting at the time. There's a bit of tension in the staff and that sort of thing that was evident to me the minute I walked in there, and I remember walking into my year nine class and they were saying – the first thing the boys said to me is, how long you are going to last, Miss? And I went, well, I'm contracted to the end of the term, so I'll see you on the last day at the end of the term. And they tried really hard to see if that was – that was going to stick. But, like, I was – you know, I'm a bit of a tough nut. It does – it takes a lot to rattle me, and – and I really enjoyed – I think having the – the experience of all boys at the middle school taught me a lot around relationships, behaviour management, I really actually enjoy working with all boys.

Yeah.

There's something really spontaneous about all boys that I find really engaging. Like, you just turn up to work and you never know what you're going to get.

Yeah.

You have to have a bit of a sense of humour, and you have to have a quick wit.

Yeah.

And I've got a bit of a sharp tongue, so I think I'd get on better with boys in that regard than I can do with girls at the same age who can tend to be, you know, hormonally a little bit more sensitive.

Yeah.

So I did well with the boys there, and they were actually really disappointed when I left at the end of that term. I got a call from St Michael's College – what was St Michael's College Senior School.

Yes.

They knew that I hadn't picked up work for the start of that year, needed someone to teach English for year 10s, mostly, in term two and I've been there ever since.

Okay.

Yeah.

There you go.

So-----

There you go. So there was a key marker there, wasn't there, around that REC position in St Joseph's College?

Yep. Yep.

And that was your first taste of leadership-----

Yep.

-----which was a platform to other things.

Yeah.

But you – the – I guess the key interest in there is English-----

Yep.

-----but also religion as well, and you've worked in the church-----

Yeah. And I've always taught religion across my 17 years; I've always taught religion. The REC role was an interesting one because it was before the APRIM position was – and I was actually on some of the consultation panels around the development of that APRIM role.

Yes. Because that was changing, wasn't it, at that time?

Yeah. And so I was in leadership at that time, so I was part of some of those conversations.

Yep.

The model that the – St Joseph's College had used at the time was a team approach, so we had curriculum, liturgy, and faith formation; three of us all doing that together.

Yes.

And while I had specifically a curriculum role, the team that I worked with, we were very well attuned to each other, it's a very tight-knit community. So we kind of just did everything together.

Yeah.

So we did – I did retreats, I did liturgies in that community. I even assisted with families with funerals out – you know, outside of school, and – and that sort of, you know, bereavement counselling. Well, not counselling, but support.

Yes.

We did staff retreat days, we did all the student retreat days; so there was a lot of work in it.

Yeah. Yeah.

And I think that's why I'm like – I don't have enough theological background to feel like I could do – like, I did in – from a personal point of view because I've come from a strong catholic background, but I really wanted to have the piece of paper, I think, more than anything to say that, yes, I've got the formal qualifications, rather than anecdotal and personal experience.

- Set backs oversighted

- Diverse Experiences

Aware of soft skills.

- System leadership experience

- Soft skills awareness.

- Lifelong learner doubt

Appendix B

Manual Attempt at Three Column Format and Code Collapsing

Interview 1

	Right. Okay.	
Opportunity	Because opportunities present quite a lot actually in schools—	- Progressed due to opportunities to those willing and ready
	Yeah, fantastic.	
	—if you're willing and ready.	
Rapid progression	Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So that was a time period of three—?	- Rapid rise
	Three or four years.	
	Three to four years.	
	Yeah.	
	That's great, yeah.	
Driver	Yeah. So that was really exciting. And I, I really enjoyed being a part of Head of House meetings, where you are privy to information before it goes out and where you can make decisions and have an impact.	- liked decision making - ability to have impact.
	Yeah.	
	I, then probably, I guess at the height of my career I had to have maternity leave.	
	Right, okay.	Life long learner.
Life long learner	And I still wanted to maintain my learning, and so I did my Aspiring Leaders course whilst on maternity leave.	
	Right, yep.	
	So that, that's where I ended up, yeah. And I loved it.	Love of leadership.
Evoked emotion	Oh good. So were you tapped on the shoulder for the Aspiring Leaders?	
	No.	Not targeted.
	Was it through your Principal?	
Oversight	No.	
	It was just your interest that you'd thought — right, this my trajectory. I'm going to follow through on this. And this will be the next step.	
	Yeah.	
	Yeah, okay. Fantastic. So it's a big undertaking to do it in your maternity leave as well.	
	Yeah.	
	I have had one of these conversations before around it would be great to achieve something while you're on maternity leave. How did you find it while you were on maternity leave?	Entrustment.
Extravert	Oh, fantastic. Like just a really great chance to get away from the baby and meet other people and feel like I was pursuing something for myself. But from a practical point of view, I was still breastfeeding, so I was off in the toilets, you know, pumping and—	

Appendix C

Example of my Data Coding and Collapsing of Codes and Generating Initial Themes

<p>Doubt. Didn't apply because others 1st Experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time commitment. I may go back and study. - Scriptural robbery. I don't know if I want to be a document. - Ability & skills. Finances. - Ability to inspire. need to do more study. 	<p>Alignment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't align. Positive experience. Question development. Barriers. Demanding. Prerequisites. Study on top of job ✓
<p>Uncertainty.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - daunting. needed further diploma 1st School Experience. more clout. - perception of high standards. not up to it. - parish commitment. - Age and study commitment. - Multiple Careers. 	<p>Progression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast Rapid Rise. Next level up.
<p>Second Career.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience in managerial. - Experience in University. 	<p>Pressure / Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wife. Children. Other things in my personal life.
<p>Driver.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose. Those failing. - Success. Influence Ed. - Hopeful. Influence Ed & School. - Impact. ✓ - Love of Leadership. 	<p>Emotion Evoked.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoyed Strategic. Want to make it engaging.
<p>Opportunity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progressed due to opportunities. Those willing to open room. - Identified leadership skills. - offered middle leaders without quals. 	<p>Enjoy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passion. Excitement. ABT
<p>Unidentified / Overlooked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not targeted. - Second guess. Job based could collapse. - Didn't apply because of older experienced teachers. 	<p>Life long learner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts Degree in recommitment. Didn't, study to get more clout.
<p>Role Modelled?</p>	<p>Extravert.</p>
	<p>Inspiration / Inspired</p>
	<p>Support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By principal.
	<p>Guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> misinterpreted.
	<p>Support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By principal.
	<p>Hierarchy in Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> husband Ph.D.
	<p>Balance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work balance already work 10/11 hrs day. Middle Management gives class time and leadership.

Appendix D

Example of Elementary Manual Coding Using Microsoft Word

Partly, it's the – again, the relationships and being in the classroom and not wanting to be too far away from the classroom.

Brady Stallard
Balance

Yeah.

I'm not ready – and maybe that would change, so that – but on a more personal level, I'm not – well, certainly in the catholic system, not able to become a deputy or a principal because I don't fit the criteria for that.

Brady Stallard
Moral alignment

Okay. What's that?

I'm in a same-sex relationship.

Okay.

So I won't ever be able to be considered for those positions. The highest positions that I can achieve are a director role.

Brady Stallard
Barrier

Right. Okay.

So I can't get beyond that. I won't be able to ever be an APRIM, I won't ever be able to be a deputy, and I won't ever be able to be a principal until those criteria change.

Right. And it's not going to change, is it?

Not really.

Yeah. No.

Not in my lifetime.

You can't just flick a switch; no.

No.

No.

No.

How does that make you feel, though, with your alignment with catholic teachings-----

Yep.

-----but also where you're limited, the limitations it puts on you in your career as well?

It was a real challenge, and I think that connects with where – that's part of the reason why I left St Joseph's College because that – that recognition of my identity happened at that time for me. That came late in my life.

Brady Stallard
Moral alignment

Yep.

And it was a real struggle for me, on a very personal level, around trying to reconcile my faith with my identity on a very personal level, and I had spent a long time – and which is why I did the TRT gig because I just – I needed to go out and see what else is out there. I needed to think about whether I even stayed in catholic ed.

Brady Stallard
Moral alignment
Challenge

Yep.

Appendix E

Use of Constructed Digital Three Column Format

<p>1st Career leadership experience</p> <p>Self-doubt</p>	<p>couple of years after I finish? How did it all happen?</p> <p>Okay. So I, I had a great mentor who once said, 'Two steps forward, one step back is still moving forward'.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>And I – so I did my teaching and I left a managerial position in local government and took up a job as a permanent ESO in the library.</p>	<p>Early Managerial Position held</p>
<p>Self-doubt</p> <p>Rapid progression</p>	<p>Oh yeah.</p> <p>Even though I was a qualified teacher, as a foot in and just to see if that's what I wanted to do. And then through – over about a three-year period at Holy Heart I went from the library to Home Room Teacher to Teacher to Boys Sport Coordinator, Assistant Head of House and Head of House.</p>	<p>Self-doubt</p> <p>Rapid career trajectory</p> <p>Held positions of responsibilities</p>
<p>Opportunity</p>	<p>Right. Okay.</p> <p>Because opportunities present quite a lot actually in schools----</p> <p>-</p> <p>Yeah, fantastic.</p> <p>----if you're willing and ready.</p>	<p>Willing and ready, therefore progressed</p>
<p>Rapid progression</p>	<p>Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So that was a time period of three----?</p> <p>Three or four years.</p> <p>Three to four years.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>That's great, yeah.</p>	<p>Rapid rise</p>
<p>Driver</p>	<p>Yeah. So that was really exciting. And I, I really enjoyed being a part of Head of House meetings, where you are privy to information before it goes out and where you can make decisions and have an impact.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>I, then probably, I guess at the height of my career I had to have maternity leave.</p> <p>Right, okay.</p>	<p>Enjoyed decision making and having impact</p>
<p>Lifelong learner</p>	<p>And I still wanted to maintain my learning, and so I did my Aspiring Leaders course whilst on maternity leave.</p> <p>Right, yep.</p>	<p>Life long learner</p>

Appendix F

Attempt at Developing and Reviewing Themes, Where Collapsed Codes Could be Evidenced and Traced

Exec Summary			
Code	Collapsed Codes	Frequency	
Alignment	Doesn't align	1	
	Positive experience	1	
	Question development	1	
Barriers	Demanding	1	
	Prerequisite's	1	
Doubt	I may go back and study	2	
	Time Commitment involved	1	
	Questioning Development	1	
	Questioning ability and skills	1	
	Scripture Knowledge	1	
	Questioning ability to inspire	1	
Driver	Purpose	1	
	Success	1	
	Hope filled	1	
	Impact	1	
	Love of Leadership	1	
	Falling	1	
	Influence Education	1	
First Experience	Taste	1	
First School experience	First School experience	1	
Uncertainty	Age and study commitment	2	
	Multiple careers	2	
	Daunting	1	
	Perception of not holding high standards	1	
	Parish commitment	1	
Second Career	Experience in University	2	
	Experience in managerial position	1	
Role modelled	Previous Principal	2	
	Previous Deputy	1	
	Inspirational leader	1	
Progression	Naturally the next level up	2	
	Fast paced	1	
	Rapid rise	1	
Emotion evoked	Enjoyed being strategic	1	
Enjoyment	Passion	1	
	Excitement	1	
Life Long Learner	Life Long Learner	1	
	Arts degree in retirement	2	
Barriers	Study on top of job	2	
	Study	2	
Hierarchy in the family	Husband PhD	2	
	Hierarchy in the family	1	
Balance	Work balance as already works 10/11 hours a day	2	
	Balance	1	
Return to Education		2	
Change		2	
Security	Wanting permanency	2	
Identified	Supported by a rolemodel	2	
	Acknowledged as a future leader	2	
Unidentified/Oversight	Not targeted	2	
	Second Guess	2	
Negative role model	Speakers	2	
	Lack of time for family	2	
	Got to be present 24/7	2	
Moral alignment	Bigots	2	
	Same sex	2	
	I don't have to espouse all that stuff	2	
Restricted	Time poor as a result of current position	2	
Hope/Optimism	The role will change	2	
	The church will change	2	
Comeback	Retirement focused	2	
Still aspirant		1	
System bound	I'm not looking outside the system	2	
System aligned	I am knowledgeable about the system	2	
Extravert		2	
Inspiration	Impact through policy writing	2	
Pressure	Family	2	
	Being a wife	2	
Guidance	Misinterpreted	2	

Appendix G

A More Advanced Process of Theme Refining, Defining and Naming That Highlights the Vignette, Code and Collapsed Code

Code	Compressed From	Occurrence Pg	Quote
Feeling towards/Definition	I love it - it is when	5	I love, I love leadership and I, I love learning about people and I think you learn about yourself a lot when you're learning about leadership and that's motivating for me
Early experience of Leadership	Initial experience	5	And then my background would be sport, so captaining teams. No, I, I probably was a captain maybe 13. And that, and that carried throughout my youth. And then I'm still a sprinter now. And I'd be a leader within my squad.
Doubt	Time Commitment involved	10	Oh, principalship is very daunting, like the amount of hours that you put in is phenomenal.
	Perceived competition	9	So making sure that we were working, and that's priceless as well because I think as a young person wanting to network with people further along in their career, I can get a little bit shy starting those conversations. But we all felt quite even in our hierarchy because we're all there at the same time and a bit nervous and a bit excited. So it was, yeah, really good.
	Questioning Development	10	I just had an administration error really, because I desperately wanted to do the second year of the Aspiring Leaders and I had almost completed my application, and lost it on my computer. And then found it the day it was due, and I just, I just didn't have it in me to put the pressure on my Principal to sign immediately. Yeah. I just felt really bad that I was going to [laughs], so I just decided not to do it and I went on and did my Grad Cert in Catholic Ed, I started that instead as a - and it was a prerequisite anyway - so I thought I was still moving forward, I just missed the boat on the Aspiring Leaders.
		14	And my other leadership qualities into the classroom and understanding the classroom a bit better. Often at my Head of House meetings, I would, I would definitely be not - I wouldn't have any - much strength in understanding SACE. The one other driver behind why I wanted to become a Teacher was I wanted to be able to influence policy in education. And I felt it would be unreasonable to try and do that without having been in a school. So, I suppose that's still very much at the end, end zone for me. But I'm enjoying this in-education journey.
	Questioning ability and skills	12	Well, I, yeah, I was looking at the Masters and thinking of doing that - as well at the same time as the Grad Cert. And then I thought, no, Cathy, you - I do too much and then get stressed out. So another barrier in my personal circumstances is that I have - I've never taught very much. So I've also spent this year focusing on teaching.
	Scripture Knowledge	11	But my previous understanding of the Bible was very literal, and it all came from being taught at high school.
	Questioning ability to inspire	12	And so I feel if I was going to be a Principal, I would obviously need to know how the classroom works a bit better and, and also, the challenges that the young people face, because you're first - you're frontline as a teacher, but Head of House, I was getting it 2 secondary and I wasn't - I was still understanding but I think I feel like more on the pulse with being in the classroom.
		13 to 14	No. I don't think so. I don't think I've - have I had much influence over my colleagues? No, I don't think so. Yeah. So that would be a, a space that I haven't had impact on - not directly.
		16	But I, I don't think I've had much impact at all on influencing my colleagues.
		17	I think I'm thinking that I don't motivate them or that they don't think I'm inspiring them or, like that sort of thing I'm thinking I don't really do, but -
	Questioning gaps	13	But not wanting - not having the capacity to return to a leadership position. And then, so just reframing how I saw my career, so it was - so just setting some goals up around my teaching and knowing that there was a bit of a gap in my leadership journey -
Uncertainty	Indecision	5	Yeah. Well even the first question about considering principalship, well I, well I'm not, I wasn't and I'm not - well, I'm considering 2 leadership.
		15	But I really liked that strategic planning and vision. And I did start my Project Management Diploma, but I was far too green to take it on at the time and it - I didn't have enough projects under my belt to properly do it.
	Daunting		
	Perception of not holding high standards	10	Yeah. I suppose if I did really think that, I wouldn't, wouldn't have minded bothering them for - I don't know why I felt that way. I just, I just thought it looked really unorganised to - oh, it's due at four o'clock and it's three thirty, can you - I - sorry, I could have done - no, I probably could have organised an extension, but [laughs].
	Parish commitment	10	Yes, I hope to apply next year. But my biggest barrier is often I think about that I'm not aligned to a parish. And then I think how am I - how would I fit in as well?
Second Career	Experience in managerial position	6 to 7	I came to teaching as a second career. I was working in local and state government in health promotion. And I - so I did my teaching and I left a managerial position in local government and took up a job as a permanent ESO in the
Driver	Purpose	15	And, and I, I saw that that was a - one of the best ways to have an impact rather than a one on one impact. You can reach more people with a policy.
	Success		
	Hope filled	7	when I was in schools, I just realised I loved the feeling of hope. Like opportunity and just it was always exciting, even though it isn't always exciting for the young people, but there's always a chance for an opportunity to happen
	Impact	14	The one other driver behind why I wanted to become a Teacher was I wanted to be able to influence policy in education. And I felt it would be unreasonable to try and do that without having been in a school. So, I suppose that's still very much at the end, end zone for me. But I'm enjoying this in-education journey.
	Love of leadership	5	I love, I love leadership and I, I love learning about people and I think you learn about yourself a lot when you're learning about leadership and that's motivating for me
	Falling		
	Influence Education	8	Yeah. So that was really exciting. And I, I really enjoyed being a part of Head of House meetings, where you are privy to information before it goes out and where you can make decisions and have an impact.
Unidentified/Oversight	Not targeted	8	Oh good. So were you tapped on the shoulder for the Aspiring Leaders? NO. Was it through your Principal? YEAH
Role Modelled	Previous Deputy		
	Inspirational leader	9	I was thriving. I, I loved the guest speakers. I thought that was a great way to learn and to hear people share their experiences.
		15	2. And then they did a lot of collaboration, like with the students in the - well, the Teachers in the class. Our - the State Manager of DIAMONDS (Previous place of employment) was very motivational
First School experience	First School experience		
Progression	Fast paced	7 to 8	And I - so I did my teaching and I left a managerial position in local government and took up a job as a permanent ESO in the library. Even though I was a qualified teacher, as a foot in and just to see if that's what I wanted to do. And then through - over about a three-
	Rapid rise	7 to 8	
			But I really liked that strategic planning and vision. And I did start my Project Management Diploma, but I was far too green to take it on at the time and it - I didn't have enough projects under my belt to properly do it.
Emotion evoked	Enjoyed being strategic	15	Yeah. So that was really exciting. And I, I really enjoyed being a part of Head of House meetings, where you are privy to information before it goes out and where you can make decisions and have an impact.
		8	
Life Long Learner	Life Long Learner	8	I, then probably, I guess at the height of my career I had to have maternity leave. And I still wanted to maintain my learning, and 2 so I did my Aspiring Leaders course whilst on maternity leave.

Appendix H

Respondent Profiles

Participant 1.1: Trevor

Trevor is a teacher who holds a position in a secondary school and has worked in two states. He spoke about his experience of completing the Aspiring Leaders Program as one that he did not enjoy, especially in the first year. At that time, he was also completing his Master of Education, which is another prerequisite for achieving a principalship position in CESA. Trevor, a life-long learner with PhD aspirations, completed the 2nd year of the Aspiring Leaders Program and said that he felt equipped to move into a deputy role, as a developmental role towards one day becoming a principal. However, he envisions his future principalship as a more balanced and family-friendly role than the role articulated by current principals.

Participant 1.2: Andrew

Andrew is a teacher who has been teaching for more than 20 years and described himself as a relational person who really dislikes confrontation and is not assertive. Andrew presented as a loyal team member who had believed that he was next in line for the APRIM position after spending several years in a school and having many strong relationships with community members. However, he was unaware of CESA's prerequisites for holding principal, deputy principal and APRIM positions.

Participant 1.3: Jamie

Jamie presented as a skilled teacher who had selected teaching over a career as a lawyer and had been teaching for 13 years, although he has a varied skillset that would afford him a choice of other careers. He is continually developing himself and pursuing opportunities, including developing his wider skillset to ensure that other career opportunities remain open to him, e.g., administrator or software engineer. Jamie presented as a life-long learner and pursued his enrolment in the CESA Aspiring Leaders course on two occasions. The first time, he was unable to participate as a result of limited

vacancies on the course. On his second attempt, his application was supported by his principal, and he was accepted onto the course. Jamie described his aspirations to principalship as being built over his years of holding middle-leadership positions. As he worked with and observed multiple principals, he learned from their successes and failures, and these experiences made him feel that he should explore principalship.

Participant 1.4: Mary

Mary was the only female participant in group one. She completed the Aspiring Leaders course, and she is still working on her Master of Education. She presents as a lifelong learner who enjoyed learning about educational leadership. Principalship was mentioned to her in her first 6 years of teaching, but she postponed these thoughts to prioritise other things in her personal life, particularly her marriage and children. Upon returning to teaching after parental leave, Mary's principalship aspirations developed naturally, and she began to take on leadership opportunities in the school. Mary juggles many roles in her family, and the remoteness of where they live will always define the opportunities that are available to her. However, Mary's biggest strength is also her biggest weakness, as she is renowned for shouldering extra responsibilities wherever she goes, whether at work, in the local community or in sporting clubs.

Participant 1.5: Ryan

Ryan described his progression as reasonably quick, saying that his family instilled in him the importance of a career. Ryan said that he had aspirations of becoming a principal while he was studying his undergraduate course in teaching. He believes that commencing the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program and his Master of Education before starting a family provided a sustainable balance in his life, suggesting that it would be difficult to complete these courses or attend the meetings that are required when starting out in a principalship position while maintaining a work-life balance with a family.

Participant 1.6: Karl

Karl described himself as experiencing many leadership roles prior to commencing his undergraduate degree, such as being the Year 12 college captain and the First XVIII and First XI captain. He was also a youth minister and became Diocesan youth minister within 2 years, leading other youth ministers. His career progression was swift, moving from a POR 1 position assisting research projects to a POR 4 position. He attributes his rapid rise to being involved with good leaders, particularly deputy principals, along his journey. One deputy advised Karl very early on to complete his graduate certificate and master's degree and enrol in the Aspiring Leaders Program as soon as possible, which he believes was instrumental to his quick rise.

However, he was not accepted into the CESA Aspiring Leaders Program on his first attempt, as the course had reached its quota. Despite this, it would seem that Karl is destined for a role as principal because while participating in this interview, he was holding a position as acting principal. However, he describes his passion as deriving from the need to be a contributing member of a thriving team or community.

Participant 1.7: Russell

Russell is also a young, aspiring leader. Having been a deputy house leader at school, he continued to be a leader throughout university as the leader of his band. He was not only the lead singer but was instrumental in coordinating music festivals and writing songs for the band. Russell says that he was fortunate in his 1st year of teaching to be placed in a POR 1 position, leading the school's leadership, and to experience success in this position. During this time, he says that he was fortunate to have a mentor who encouraged him to complete his graduate certificate, start his Master of Education and be enrol in the CESA Aspiring Leaders program.

Participant 2.1: Cathy

Cathy is a teacher in a secondary school who embarked on a brief career in public health before studying to become a teacher and commencing teaching as her second career. Cathy is a high achiever in many aspects of her life, and she likes to be 100% sure that everything is perfect before embarking on a new venture. As a qualified teacher, she worked as an Education Support Officer (ESO) to gain confidence. She then rose swiftly through to middle-leadership positions before she began to question her development, particularly her impact on staff and her student-management practices. Cathy did not commence year 2 due to an admin error and began to focus on some other prerequisite courses, e.g., the Graduate Certificate in Catholic Education, while raising a young family and balancing her husband's workload with her own commitments.

Participant 2.2: Rosemary

Rosemary is a teacher in a secondary school who has worked on and off in CESA schools since 2000, accumulating approximately 20 years of service. Rosemary commenced studying another degree and moved away from schools for a period of 3 years, working in university. She then realised that she wanted to come back to work in CESA schools. Rosemary currently holds a middle-leadership position (POR 2) and works 10–11 hours per day. She thought that studying on top of her significant workload was too overwhelming and could push her to the limit. She is not averse to work, and she acknowledges that she aspires to become a principal. However, she would need to reduce her commitments to be able to study and create a work–life balance. At the back of Rosemary's mind is that she wants to work for a progressive organisation, and she notices a few red flags relating to how the Catholic Church is managed and the expectations it places on its young leaders.

Participant 2.3: Martin

Martin recalls that while he was at school, he did not really want to go into teaching, but he discovered himself doing teaching after wanting to do something more sports-oriented. He enjoyed his first teaching position, but he reflects that he possibly stayed at that school for too long, which may have

prevented him from pursuing principalship earlier. However, he mentions that he would not change this decision if he could. He is proud of the relationships that he created and the support that he offered to his colleagues over the 12 years before he started pursuing principalship opportunities. The first time that Martin applied for the Aspiring Leaders Program, he submitted his application late, and he was unable to attend, as the course was full. After being awarded a position as an assistant principal, in which he was mentored by a deputy that he respected, he commenced the Aspiring Leaders course. However, while at this school, he was awarded a deputy principal position, and the 2nd year of the Aspiring Leaders course was put on hold. However, as Martin progresses, he considers his work–life balance.

Participant 2.4: Cameron

Cameron was a mature-aged student when he studied teaching at university after working for a finance company for 6 years. After initially commencing his studies towards a Bachelor of Arts degree for 2 years, as he was not able to get into a teaching degree, Cameron discovered that the University of South Australia (UniSA) would have accepted him, and he finally started teaching at 26 years old. His first principal's parting advice had been to remain extremely loyal to his future principals, and Cameron still holds onto this advice. Cameron was awarded a position as a religious education coordinator early in his teaching career and undertook a master's degree to broaden his experiences. In this role, he coordinated parents and friends, attended school board meetings, coordinated rosters and ran major events. The responsibilities in this position led Cameron to think that he would like to pursue principalship further, and he was awarded a position as acting deputy principal within 5 years. However, over the course of the next 2 years, he fulfilled another acting deputy principal role and unsuccessfully applied for another 13 substantive positions, which was a frustrating experience. During this journey, he discovered that the person who provided a reference for him did not completely support his application and past performances, and the panel chair did not provide constructive feedback. However, after being frustrated, he sought out a mentor who was able to

provide honest, constructive feedback that was difficult to hear at the time. Upon his return, he commenced the Aspiring Leaders course. However, he had the feeling that he was not going to be awarded a position.

Participant 2.5: Dave

Dave commenced the Aspiring Leaders Program and completed the first year. However, he deferred the second year, as he had just moved in with his partner and her daughter, and he thought that he would fail the interview process, so he dropped out. A year later, he commenced the 2nd year. However, while endeavouring to pursue acting positions, Dave was informed by his principal that he could not sign off on his applications as he was in a de facto relationship, and CESA were not prepared to sponsor him. Dave recalls that his principal later described this as the toughest thing he ever had to do. Although his partner wanted to marry him, she was against getting married in the Catholic Church, which ended his pursuit of principalship. While Dave attended Mass regularly and played a leadership role in his parish, had his master's degree and eventually completed his 2nd year of the Aspiring Leaders course, he sees the pressure that principals are under and realises that at his age, swapping sectors would not be worth the effort. Disillusioned, Dave's advice for teachers aspiring to principalship is choose a mentor that is willing to be honest with you.

Participant 2.6: Lisa

Lisa was blessed early in her career with plenty of responsibility and opportunities to lead when her principal encouraged her and pushed her beyond her comfort zone. She described the principal as a person who would discuss strategies with her and instil a confidence in her. After commencing the Aspiring Leaders course, she noted that the group was large, and she often felt intimidated. She always had a fear that she did not know enough and presumed that she had gaps, particularly in relation to finance. However, through meeting principals more recently, she now realises that she is more than capable. Currently, she is considering the additional prerequisites.

Participant 2.7: Hayley

Hayley went to university to study teaching as a mature age student after seeing her two girls commence school. After teaching for six years she had applied for various positions of responsibility unsuccessfully at her school, her principal suggested that she enrol in the Aspiring Leaders program. Hayley enjoyed the program initially, however after the first year her principal who had supported her commencing the Aspiring Leaders Program moved to another school. Hayley described that she felt overwhelmed with a change of principal and felt like she needed to prove herself as a teacher, therefore began to prioritise planning and programming a little too much to demonstrate to the new principal that she was a capable teacher. In the midst of this she missed the first session and decided to withdraw from the program.

Participant 3.1: Marie

Marie completed the Middle Leaders course in South Australia while working as an R-6 coordinator. At that time, she was approached by her principal who suggested that she should do the course with her colleague who was the 7-9 coordinator. Ultimately, she moved to Adelaide to pursue principalship opportunities, such as a religious education coordinator and acting assistant principal position in the Religious Identity & Mission, indicating a commitment to her aspiration. Marie said that she would often get tapped on the shoulder by her principal to take on various roles, without being offered an official leadership title. Her principal encouraged and instilled confidence in Marie. Marie thought that being in a country location may have derailed her leadership aspirations. She was indecisive about her aspirations and commented that principalship and other "leadership avenues" are currently "down the track" for her while her children are young.

Participant 3.2: Stella

Stella says she came from a strong Catholic background and was heavily involved in church life throughout her adolescence. She began her career in the APY Lands at Amata before moving to St Joseph's College where she remained for 9 years and held middle-leadership positions. She began

studying theology for 2 years to support her in her roles as a religious education coordinator and because it was an area of interest to her and something she was passionate about. She resigned from her permanent role and took up temporary teaching positions to ensure she could manage the workload. During this time, Stella's personal circumstances changed, and she discovered that being in a same-sex relationship would impede her ability to pursue a principalship in a Catholic school. However, despite the struggle she had in reconciling her personal circumstances with the Catholic education system, she returned with her faith intact, winning another permanent teaching position in a Catholic school.

Participant 3.3: Marissa

Marissa aspired to be a Deputy Principal 10 years ago. However, she acknowledged that she had a young daughter at that time, with a son on the way. Therefore, she knew that it would be an aspiration that she would need to gradually work towards achieving. While her principal encouraged her to enrol in the Aspiring Leaders course, Marissa acknowledged that she did not have the time, as at that time, she was balancing a young family and work. She thought that she was capable and did not give up on her aspirations. She committed to positions of responsibility in which she could make some decisions and exercise leadership. The principal, seeing that Marissa had a goal and was progressing towards it, suggested that she attend the Middle Leaders course. When she took a job at another school, the principal there started to expand her responsibilities to push her to extend herself, and prior to the interview, the principal had recently asked her to enrol in the Aspiring Leaders course and start her master's degree. She was also asked to join the school's leadership team, and she has greatly valued being able to see the work involved in being a deputy and a principal.

Participant 3.4: Pamela

Pamela's principal offered her a place in the Middle Leaders course, and she had to respond within 24 hours. She was not sure whether he just wanted to tick a box or really get her involved. However, the

deputy principal reaffirmed their faith in her abilities, even although they did not know anything about the course. As a result, Pamela agreed to the offer.

Although Pamela knew her colleagues doing the Aspiring Leaders course and knew that the time commitment took them out of their class for significant periods, she did not know what she was getting herself into. She ended up being the only one to complete this course in her school and recalled that there was no support network for her, although her two colleagues had each other. Pamela completed the Middle Leaders course but noted that it was a significant time commitment on top of a full-time teaching load and family commitments.

Participant 3.5: Gail

Gail graduated with a Bachelor of Junior Primary/Primary in 2010. After travelling and doing temporary relief teaching work, she commenced a full-time teaching role in 2013 and eventually received a permanent position in 2016. Gail taught in reception and was encouraged by the retiring early years coordinator to apply for that position the following year. Gail recalled that this small amount of support helped to develop her confidence, and she enrolled in the Middle Leaders program.

Soon after completing the course, Gail fell pregnant, had a baby and took parental leave. She says that she is focussing on balancing her work and home life routines and adds that taking on another middle-leadership role would be crazy. Therefore, she is happy to take a step back from her pursuit of principalship.

Participant 3.6: Brian

Brian is a young man who completed 4 years in a Catholic school in a regional area before finding a middle-leadership position in a suburban school. In his first year, he applied for the Aspiring Leaders course. However, the positions on the course were given to other teachers who had been at the school for longer than he had. Brian did not feel despondent and completed the Middle Leaders course and suggested that it was an appropriate course, which created a stepping stone that kept his aspirations

alive. He spoke of the course as providing him with a network of colleagues who he could draw on to further assist him fulfill the duties of his middle-leadership position to a high standard.

Participant 3.7: Philippa

Is a mid to late career teacher who began teaching in 1998. Philippa reluctantly commenced the Middle Leaders course, despite being identified by her Principal as being a competent teacher. She had held various positions of responsibility as required by her Principal. She was often asked to take on student teachers and beginning teachers to mentor when they commenced at her metropolitan Catholic school. While Philippa stated that she enjoyed this facet of her job, the additional work of the middle leaders program became an added duty on top of the various additional tasks that she was already undertaking at school. Ultimately Philippa came to the realisation that she couldn't do the work she loved like supporting beginning teachers and her various Positions of Responsibility, and take on more responsibilities and still be present for her family.

Appendix I

Ethics Approvals

Brady Stallard

From: Human Research Ethics <human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au>
Sent: Monday, 27 April 2020 10:10 AM
To: Brady Stallard; Shane Pill; Bev Rogers; Heather Smigiel
Subject: 8581 ETHICS approval notice (27 April 2020)
Importance: High

Dear Brady,

Your conditional approval response for project 8581 was reviewed by the Deputy Chair of the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) and was **approved**. The ethics approval notice can be found below. Please also note the important information regarding COVID-19 Virus below.

COVID-19 Virus Considerations

The minimisation of risk and harm to human research participants is paramount, in line with the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#), where risk is defined as a potential for harm, discomfort or inconvenience, including physical harms including injury, illness or pain. Flinders researchers must operate at this time with a heightened consideration of doing no harm.

Where possible, avoid face-to-face testing and consider rescheduling face-to-face testing or undertaking alternative distance/online data or interview collection means. Ethics approval for a modification to your protocol may need to be sought for these changes.

Avoid contact with vulnerable people, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, elderly and immune-deficient people and people with disabilities or certain mental health problems. New permission to access these populations in the current climate must be sought from the appropriate institution.

- For fieldwork and collaborations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, please note that the Northern Land Council and the Northern Territory Government are halting any non-essential travel to these communities.
- Note that the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies, requires ongoing consultation and negotiation with Aboriginal organisations and communities as to their wishes and responses to research.
- Avoid entering hospitals, hospices, aged care facilities, medical centres etc.
- People with mental health problems may be prone to infection (e.g., eating disorders), while others are prone to fears about infection (e.g., OCD, anxious cohorts). Maintain strict health and mental health strategies. Honours, Masters and HDR projects should be reassessed in the light of this advice.

Where participants do attend a data collection session:

- Contact participants prior to data collection activity by phone or email to confirm they have no COVID-19 symptoms or are not in a required period of self-isolation.
- Ensure all equipment is cleaned in line with the appropriate techniques to avoid the spread of COVID-19 disease. Safe practices such as ensuring social separation and hand washing must be applied.

APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:	8581		
Project Title:	Understanding Principal Aspirations: Perspectives of potential principals in Catholic Education South Australia		
Principal Researcher:	Mr Brady Stallard		
Email:	bstallard@sjms.catholic.edu.au		
Approval Date:	27 April 2020	Ethics Approval Expiry Date:	1 April 2022

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently provided with the addition of the following comments.

Additional comments:

1. Please ensure that copies of the correspondence granting permission to conduct the research from Director, Catholic Education South Australia are submitted to the Committee *on receipt*. Please ensure that the SBREC project number is included in the subject line of any permission emails forwarded to the Committee. Please note that data collection should not commence until the researcher has received the relevant permissions (item D8 and Conditional approval response – 6).
2. Information Sheet – The Information Sheet has asked for the consent forms to be returned by April 30th. This date will need to be revised before being distributed to participants.
3. COVID-19 – Interviews will be unable to be conducted in person. The researchers will need to submit a modification request to conduct the interview online.

ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety is the new online platform for human research ethics at Flinders University.

It can be accessed via Okta (add the "ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety" chicklet to your dashboard) and allows researchers to apply for human research ethics approval, including modifications, online.

We note that your current project will expire after 31 December 2020. As you may be aware, all current projects approved under the old system that do not expire on/or before 31 December 2020 will need to be transferred into the new online system. Therefore, we would like to request that you complete the short HREC Transfer Project Form. To transfer your project, please

- login to ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety through your Okta dashboard. ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety will need to be added to your Okta dashboard via the "+ Add Apps" green button (top right) in the first instance.
- Ensure you are on the "Home page", you will see "Work Area" at the top of this page.
- Select the "Create Project" tile from the left hand "Actions" menu.
- A pop-up appears. Type in the "Project Title" and in the "Main Form" drop-down select "HREC Transfer Project Form".
- Click "Create" and save your project application form.
- Select "Project Information" under "Questions", complete the form and submit it.

During the transfer, you can also modify your existing project

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

1. Participant Documentation

Please note that it is the responsibility of researchers and supervisors, in the case of student projects, to ensure that:

- all participant documents are checked for spelling, grammatical, numbering and formatting errors. The Sub-Committee does not accept any responsibility for the above mentioned errors.
- the Flinders University logo is included on all participant documentation (e.g., letters of Introduction, information Sheets, consent forms, debriefing information and questionnaires – with the exception of purchased research tools) and the current Flinders University letterhead is included in the header of all letters of introduction. The Flinders University international logo/letterhead should be used and documentation should contain international dialling codes for all telephone and fax numbers listed for all research to be conducted overseas.
- the SBREC contact details, listed below, are included in the footer of all letters of introduction and information sheets.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 'INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval'). For more information regarding ethics approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

2. Annual Progress / Final Reports

In order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (updated 2018)* an annual progress report must be submitted each year on the **27 April** (approval anniversary date) for the duration of the ethics approval using the report template available from the [Managing Your Ethics Approval](#) web page.

Please note that no data collection can be undertaken after the ethics approval expiry date listed at the top of this notice. If data is collected after expiry, it will not be covered in terms of ethics. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that annual progress reports are submitted on time; and that no data is collected after ethics has expired.

If the project is completed *before* ethics approval has expired please ensure a final report is submitted immediately. If ethics approval for your project expires please either submit (1) a final report; or (2) an extension of time request (using the modification request form).

First Report due date:

27 April 2021

Final Report due date:

1 April 2022

Student Projects

For student projects, the SBREC recommends that current ethics approval is maintained until a student's thesis has been submitted, assessed and finalised. This is to protect the student in the event that reviewers recommend that additional data be collected from participants.

3. Modifications to Project

Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee. Such proposed changes / modifications include:

- change of project title;
- change to research team (e.g., additions, removals, researchers and supervisors)
- changes to research objectives;
- changes to research protocol;

- changes to participant recruitment methods;
- changes / additions to source(s) of participants;
- changes of procedures used to seek informed consent;
- changes to reimbursements provided to participants;
- changes to information / documents to be given to potential participants;
- changes to research tools (e.g., survey, interview questions, focus group questions etc);
- extensions of time (i.e. to extend the period of ethics approval past current expiry date).

To notify the Sub-Committee of any proposed modifications to the project please submit a Modification Request Form available from the [Managing Your Ethics Approval](#) SBREC web page. Download the form from the website every time a new modification request is submitted to ensure that the most recent form is used. Please note that extension of time requests should be submitted prior to the Ethics Approval Expiry Date listed on this notice.

Change of Contact Details

If the contact details of researchers, listed in the approved application, change please notify the Sub-Committee so that the details can be updated in our system. A modification request is not required to change your contact details; but would be if a new researcher needs to be added on to the research / supervisory team.

4. Adverse Events and/or Complaints

Researchers should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 08 8201-3116 or human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au immediately if:

- any complaints regarding the research are received;
- a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs that effects participants;
- an unforeseen event occurs that may affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

Kind regards
Rae

Please note: Both Executive Officers are currently working from home to assist with the management of COVID-19 and to ensure everyone's safety and wellbeing Flinders University. During this time we will still able to be contacted by email. Thank you.

Andrea Mather and Rae Tyler

Executive Officers, Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee
Research Development and Support | human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au
P: (+61-8) 8201 3116 | andrea.mather@flinders.edu.au
P: (+61-8) 8201 7938 | rae.tyler@flinders.edu.au (Mon, Wed, Frid mornings)

Flinders University
Sturt Road, Bedford Park, South Australia, 5042
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, South Australia, 5001
http://www.flinders.edu.au/research/researcher-support/ebi/human-ethics/human-ethics_home.cfm



Proactively supporting our Research

CRICOS No: 00214A. This email and any attachments may be confidential. If you are not the intended recipient, please inform the sender by reply email and delete all copies of this message.

Mr Brady Stallard
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Dear Brady

RE: Understanding Principal Aspirations: Perspectives of potential principals in Catholic Education of SA

Thank you for your email of 13 May in which you seek permission to conduct research in South Australian Catholic schools. I am pleased to advise your research proposal is approved subject to the following conditions:

- copies of any questionnaires or surveys have been provided to the Principal
- the active consent of parents and teachers/school staff - if applicable - has been obtained
- the research complies with the ethics proposal approved by of the university or the research organisation's generally accepted ethics requirements
- the research complies with any provisions under the Privacy Act that may require adherence by researchers in gathering and reporting data
- no comparison between schooling sectors is made
- the researcher will be carrying out the research within view of the class teacher or authorised school observer, where students are involved
- sector requirements relating to child protection and police checks are met by researchers:
 - where researchers obtain information in relation to a student which suggests or indicates abuse, this information must be immediately conveyed to the Director of Catholic Education SA
 - all researchers and assistants, who in the course of the research interact in any way with students or student data, are required to provide evidence of an acceptable police clearance direct to the school.

At the conclusion of the study a copy of the research findings should be forwarded to:

Director
Catholic Education Office
PO Box 179
TORRENSVILLE PLAZA SA 5031 or
director@cesa.catholic.edu.au

Please accept my very best wishes for the research process.

Yours sincerely



Bruno Vieceli
Assistant Director

25 June 2020

REF: 202008

Appendix J

Recommendations to CESA

Further to finding what creates and sustains the aspiration to pursue leadership in CESA, I have provided the following recommendations to address the inhibitors and maximise the enabling factors identified in this study:

1. Mentoring and coaching are equally important to the aspiring principal. As such, strategic system planning should be devoted to mentoring and coaching identified aspiring principals, and professional development should be offered to experienced principals mentoring others and system leaders who are in coaching positions.
2. There should be effective training of mentors and coaches in a professional skills framework. This can further the mentor and mentee relationship through accuracy of CESA policies and procedures, and particularly CESA financial and business acumen.
3. There are implications for the Aspiring Leaders Program to educate aspiring principals on how best to select appropriate coaches and mentors and how to constructively engage in a dynamic and interactive process that benefits their development. This particularly emphasises the importance of nurturing long-term relationships.
4. All aspiring principals should be offered a network of mentors and coaches. Each network should operate cohesively. Ideally, a coach would be situated in the place of work as the principal, while the mentor should be outside of the work environment. Designated training time should also be prioritised to ensure that the aspiring principal can effectively meet with the mentor.
5. The regional context should be considered to ensure the context, resources, materials, mentors and coaches continue to enhance the learning and development of an aspirant principal.

6. Mentoring can facilitate internal and external levers that can mobilise careers and increase access to unique and specifically tailored training or work experiences through broader networks. Intentional programs, such as CESA's Aspiring Leaders and Middle Leaders Programs, are particularly important for aspiring principals from groups who typically lack access to quality coaches, mentors and sponsors (Berry & Reardon, 2022).
7. The Aspiring Leaders course should be co-constructed between the system and aspirant so that all facets of the aspirant leader are developed to become effective principals. As a result, future programs will achieve career development, psychosocial development, professional development, Catholic alignment and role modelling.
8. Programs such as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) could be offered as an extension of the Aspiring Leaders Program to aspirants who genuinely realise that principals need to be Catholic. This would be a softer introduction to Sunday Eucharist for aspirants who align with but have not been born into the Catholic faith.
9. Counselling processes for those who encounter impediments should be made accessible for aspiring principals. This allows for the opportunity to rectify impediments through respectful penance and respecting tradition while acknowledging contemporary perspectives, thereby reducing the stress caused by career-limiting impediments.
10. CESA should consider more flexible arrangements to cater to family pressures, extra study commitments, competing family priorities and time restrictions, which have been identified as barriers to future aspiration. Alternatively, financial remuneration should be provided for the time taken to achieve the prerequisites.
11. Innovative and effective models that address stress and workload issues associated with the development of principals and the principal role should be considered. Contemporary alternatives, such as co-principal, rotating principals and new teacher leadership

opportunities, can help alleviate issues caused by the tension and demand experienced by aspiring principals who are challenged by the commitment of the school principal role.

12. Further research should be conducted to determine whether there is too much demand for Aspiring Leaders to complete prerequisite programs in addition to their teaching loads, particularly in this period where demand is outstripping supply. Thought should be given to organisational career growth, including how time can be used to reduce the discussed demand on aspiring principals and whether there is a need to reduce the prerequisites in the short term or adopt a longer period to attain the prerequisites. These changes can help lead to higher work satisfaction and reduce burnout.
13. Consideration should also be given to the spotting of “behavioural repertoire” and “motivation” signs in aspiring principals. As talent acquisition programs become opt-out rather than opt-in, consideration must be given to the quality and quantity of leaders that CESA is producing.
14. Mentors and coaches should ensure that each aspirant has a career plan and is achieving their milestones through leading engaging work and having opportunities to lead both in their school and other settings whilst managing work-life balance. This emphasises opportunities to take on acting positions and career progression opportunities.
15. Mentoring and counselling would support aspiring principals to ascertain what is expected of the principal role and allow the aspiring principal to become more familiar with their strengths, thereby lessening the effects of any impostor syndrome. Mentoring and counselling also allow aspiring principals to design their career paths as they move from teacher to principal.
16. It would be advisable for CESA to consider progressive career guidance and counselling, particularly to support the burden of moving people from regional areas. Career counselling in this space could assist aspiring principals and alleviate the stress during this period of career

indecision. Conversely, this can also be done for aspiring principals in the metropolitan area by generating an interest in country principalship as a legitimate career move, demonstrating that such regional positions can be life-giving stepping stones in a principal's career in an informal, and unframed manner, as a part of the initial Aspiring Leaders Program.

17. A broader evaluation of how CESA could support aspiring principals living remotely could also explore how online learning can be further used to optimise the aspiring principal's time commitment. This would make the commitment more equitable to city counterparts and prevent losing numerous hours while commuting to and from course commitments.
18. Enabling flexible arrangements, such as part-time roles, regional travel and parental arrangements, can reduce barriers that hinder motivation if workloads are too high.
19. I encourage the CESA to be strategic in regional and remote areas. The CESA must consider exploring current high school graduate trends to determine future trends that may influence CESA recruitment in these areas and how the development, management and fostering of the new generation of future aspiring principals can be achieved from in the existing community connections.
20. As recommended by the examiner, SACCS and Representatives from the Catholic Education Office members should be interviewed to understand their perceptions of the policies that govern practice in developing and appointing.