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What Does it Mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL IN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA? AN EXPLORATORY INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY

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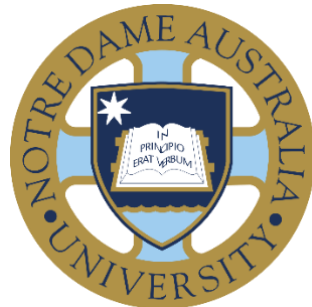
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To the best of the candidate's knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published by another person, except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institution.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated 2018). The study received human research ethics approval from the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00418), Approval Number 2020-062F. Catholic Education Western Australia Limited also granted approval to conduct the study, Reference Number RP2020/15.

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia and is the first empirical study of assistant principals in this context. This research was predominantly qualitative and used interpretivism, specifically symbolic interactionism, as its theoretical perspective. An exploratory instrumental case study methodology was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the viewpoints of assistant principals regarding their role. Data collection methods included an online survey and semi-structured interviews as the primary sources, with a document search and researcher field notes adding further information. Miles et al.'s (2020) interactive data management and analysis model was employed for data condensation, data display and to draw and verify conclusions.

The review of literature highlighted three themes that formed the conceptual framework for this inquiry and led to the development of five specific research questions. These questions focused on exploring the breadth of the role of assistant principal, the aspects of their work that assistant principals felt were most important, their sources of professional fulfilment and challenge and how the Catholic education system of Western Australia could best support them in their work. The research suggested that assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia undertake a wide range of tasks. They are generally satisfied in their work and derive professional fulfilment from many aspects of their role. However, assistant principals also experience challenges in their work, primarily due to their expanding workload and lack of time to complete their tasks. Concerns were raised about the sustainability of the role in its present form due to the negative impact on the wellbeing of assistant principals. Assistant principals also felt conflict between their administrative and leadership responsibilities.

As a result of this research, a framework summarising the leadership of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia was proposed. The model highlights their servant, instructional and transactional leadership, as well as their contribution to the Catholic identity of schools. The research culminated in recommendations for the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, several suggestions for further research and the identification of additions to the body of published literature relating to the role of assistant principal.

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Definition of Terms

Assistant Principal
The leadership position directly under the school principal. Equivalent titles for the role include vice-principal, deputy principal, or deputy head-teacher.

CAPA
Catholic Assistant Principals' Association
The professional association for assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. It provides professional learning, advocacy and networking opportunities.

CEWA
Catholic Education Western Australia Limited
A system of 158 Catholic schools in Western Australia.

Country and Regional Schools
Schools located across the state of Western Australia outside the Perth metropolitan area.

Leadership Team
Generally comprised of the principal and assistant principal(s) in primary schools, but may include other members, such as learning area coordinators, depending upon the size of the school.

Metropolitan Schools
Schools within the city of Perth and surrounding areas.

REC
Religious Education Coordinator
The school leader designated by the principal to support the implementation of the Religious Education curriculum and the religious life of the school.

Chapter One – The Research Defined

1.1 Introduction to the Research

Assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia hold the leadership position directly below that of the principal in the school's leadership hierarchy. The equivalent position is labelled differently in other systems and regions (Kwan, 2019). In Australian schools, the terms assistant principal and deputy principal are used. The label vice-principal is generally applied in Canada and deputy headteacher in the United Kingdom, whilst in the United States of America, the applicable term is usually assistant principal (Anderson et al., 2009; Melton et al., 2012; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). The hypernym 'assistant principal' will be used in this study to address these differences in terminology.

An understanding of the work of assistant principals is underrepresented in the literature as most research in educational leadership focuses on the principal (Cranston, 2007; Searby et al., 2016). There is no universally accepted role description for assistant principals (Anderson et al., 2009; Weller & Weller, 2002); however, it is clear that they carry out critical functions within schools in support of the principal. In an era of expanding principal responsibilities (Leithwood & Azah, 2014), increased accountability (Wang, Hauseman, et al., 2021) and ongoing concerns about the health and wellbeing of principals (Riley, See, et al., 2021), it is timely to explore the work of assistant principals and the contribution they make to school leadership. Armstrong (2015) and Harvey (1991) suggested that the voices of assistant principals should be heard. This study provided that opportunity in the context of Catholic primary schools in Western Australia.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research was threefold. Firstly, it was to develop an understanding of the various aspects of the role fulfilled by assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, including those aspects assistant principals identified as the most important. Secondly, insight was sought into assistant principals' perceptions regarding the rewards and challenges of their roles. Thirdly, it was to provide assistant principals with an opportunity to suggest ways Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) could best support them in their work. Underpinning this research is the belief that it is important to understand the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia from the assistant

principals' viewpoint. Such an understanding has the potential to articulate the factors that make the role effective and fulfilling. Additionally, this understanding may inform the future development of the role to suit an ever more demanding educational landscape.

1.3   Researcher Motives

The motivation for this research lies in my own experiences of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. From the first days of my teaching career, I could readily observe the vital role that the assistant principal played in the life of the school. Their myriad tasks and responsibilities, carried out with efficiency and flair, kept each school running effectively. Even as a new teacher, I could see that the assistant principal was the glue that held the school's daily operations together. Once I became an assistant principal, I had regular conversations with my colleagues in other CEWA primary schools, which provided me with insights into how similar and different our roles were. I observed that many of the struggles I was experiencing were also being felt by my colleagues throughout the school system. Likewise, many of the joys of my work as an assistant principal were being replicated in other school settings. However, there were some distinct differences between the role each of us played as assistant principals, depending on our school context. In my later work as a principal, I viewed my assistant principals as integral to my leadership. I understood that the impact I had as a principal was amplified through the work of my assistant principals, and I was deliberate in ensuring they had autonomy and authority to carry out their role. However, I was also aware that other principals did not share the same philosophy. In my current role as a CEWA Regional Officer and School Improvement Advisor, I work closely with school leadership teams and appreciate first-hand the gifts assistant principals bring to the role and see the challenges and rewards they encounter in their work. These observations and experiences led me to reflect on and be curious about what it means to be an assistant principal in the Western Australian Catholic school system and what can be done to best support them in their important work.

1.4   Context of the Research

Context concerns "what's going on around the people, groups, organisations, communities or systems of interest" (Patton, 2015, p. 8) and provides insight into the research setting. An understanding of the context is important since human beings

construct meaning within their environment (Crotty, 1998). Context is an essential consideration in qualitative research (Patton, 2015) because the interpretation of data is influenced by social and historical circumstances (Miles et al., 2020). The current research has four contextual dimensions: the state of Western Australia; education in Western Australia; Catholic education in Western Australia; and leadership of Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Each of these contexts will now be explained.

1.4.1 The State of Western Australia

Western Australia is the westernmost state of Australia, and its capital city is Perth. At the end of 2021, Western Australia had a population of 2,762,200 people, which is 10.7% of the total population of Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022a). The state has the largest geographical area of all Australian states and territories, with a land area of just over 2.5 million square kilometres (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020b). A map of Australia's states and territories can be found in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Map of the States and Territories of Australia

Note: From *World Atlas*, by Reunion Technology Inc., 2022 (https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/australia). Reprinted with permission (Appendix A).

1.4.2 Education in Western Australia

The responsibility for regulating and funding schools in Australia lies predominantly with the state and territory governments. The Australian government works in conjunction with the states and territories to allocate partial funding and establish priorities and goals at the national level (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.). The academic year for schools in Australia begins in late January or early February and finishes in December (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.). In Western Australia, the school year is divided into four terms of ten weeks each, with a two-week break between each term and a six-week break over the summer between school years. Given the sizeable geographical reach of Western Australia, schools are needed across a spectrum of locations: from the inner city, to pastoral, mining and industry-focused towns in the regions, to remote Aboriginal communities across the state.

Schooling for many students in Western Australia begins in Kindergarten once they are four-years-old, or will be turning four by June 30 of that year. Compulsory education begins the following year in Pre-Primary. Primary school finishes at the end of Year Six, after which students progress to secondary school for Year Seven to Year 12 (Department of Education Western Australia, n.d.). In 2021, there were 1,113 schools in Western Australia, of which 686 were primary schools. Of the Western Australian primary schools, 546 were government schools, 109 Catholic schools and 31 independent schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b). Government schools are funded by the state and federal governments, whereas Catholic and independent schools rely on a combination of private income collected through school fees charged to parents and funding from state and federal governments (Australian National Audit Office, 2021).

Schools in Western Australia must deliver, assess and report on the Western Australian Curriculum. This curriculum covers the eight learning areas of English, mathematics, science, humanities and social sciences, the arts, languages, health and physical education and technologies (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2014). The Western Australian curriculum is based upon the Australian curriculum and has been contextualised to be more suitable to the Western Australian context (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2014).

1.4.3 *Catholic Education in Western Australia*

The first Catholic school in Western Australia was established in 1843 in Perth (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-a). Members of numerous religious congregations, including the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, the Marist Brothers and the Christian Brothers, created schools across the state to meet the needs of the local communities. In 1971, the Bishops of Western Australia created the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia and thereby established the CEWA system of schools (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-a).

Catholic Education Western Australia is a system of 158 schools, one central office and three regional offices, employing approximately 11,000 staff and educating around 74,000 students. It is the second-largest education provider in the state (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2020), with 16.8% of students in Western Australia enrolled in a Catholic school in 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b). Most Catholic schools in Western Australia are part of the CEWA system; however, a small number remain accountable to their founding religious congregations and are not part of the system. Catholic Education Western Australia's central and regional offices support principals in the four dioceses of Perth, Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome. Figure 1.2 provides an overview of the CEWA system and dioceses.

Figure 1.2

Overview of the CEWA System and Dioceses 2022

Diocese Schools Students (K-Y12)

SCHOOLS BROOME **13**
STUDENTS 1,710

SCHOOLS BUNBURY **27**
STUDENTS 10,403

SCHOOLS GERALDTON **11**
STUDENTS 3,995

SCHOOLS PERTH **107**
STUDENTS 58,286

14.7%* of WA primary school students attend a Catholic school

17.0%* of WA secondary school students attend a Catholic school

1 in 6 WA school students attend a Catholic school

7 Catholic schools are the only education providers in their remote communities

34% of Catholic schools are located in regional and remote areas

DIOCESE OF **BROOME**

DIOCESE OF **GERALDTON**

ARCHDIOCESE OF **PERTH**

DIOCESE OF **BUNBURY**

* These numbers are based on Aug 2021 data for the 158 CEWA schools that are currently part of the CEWA system in 2022.

Note: From *Building a Brighter WA* (p. 4), by Catholic Education Western Australia, 2022, *(https://www.cewa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Building-a-Brighter-WA_Web.pdf).* Reprinted with permission (Appendix B).

The CEWA system is comprised of primary schools enrolling students from Kindergarten to Year Six (K-6), secondary schools enrolling students from Years Seven to 12 and composite schools with students from Kindergarten to Year 12 (K-12). In addition to these schools, there is one that enrols students from Year Four to Year 12. In the Broome Diocese, where many schools are located in Aboriginal

communities, six schools enrol students from Kindergarten to Year Ten. Table 1.1 summarises the number of CEWA schools in each diocese by the year levels enrolled.

Table 1.1

Number of Schools by Diocese and Year Levels Enrolled Within CEWA in 2022

Year Levels Enrolled	Archdiocese of Perth	Diocese of Bunbury	Diocese of Broome	Diocese of Geraldton	Total
K-6	75	21	6	7	109
K-10	0	0	6	0	6
K-12	11	4	1	1	17
4-12	1	0	0	0	1
7-12	20	2	0	3	25
Total	107	27	13	11	158

Note: Data sourced from *2022 Directory Schools and Office*, by Catholic Education Western Australia, 2022.

Catholic schools in Western Australia are bound by the same federal and state government legislation as other schools and are required to teach the eight learning areas within the Western Australia Curriculum. However, they have an overarching responsibility to support the Bishops of Western Australia in fulfilling the mission of the Church (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009) and so teach Religious Education as an additional learning area. The Bishops have outlined their expectations of Catholic education in the Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009). This document provides guidance to the system for policy and planning decisions made on behalf of the Bishops. The Mandate outlines that Catholic schools are a means to evangelise, support parents who seek a Catholic education for their children, foster a Christian society, provide educational choice and serve as a model of genuine community (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009). These responsibilities are reflected in CEWA's vision to be a "Christ-centred and child-focused community of engaged learning environments, inspiring all to actively live the Gospel" (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2019, p. 5). Each CEWA school is bound by the policies of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia; however, the principal of each school is

authorised to make localised decisions regarding pedagogy, staffing and the general operation of the school, as suits their context (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c, para. 5).

The strategic directions of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia are organised under four pillars: Catholic Identity, Education, Community and Stewardship. The pillar of Catholic Identity aims to inspire Christ-centred leadership that supports the mission of the Church. The Education pillar focuses on creating Catholic schools of excellence and students who are developed as whole Christian persons. The Community pillar promotes Catholic pastoral communities that are inclusive and diverse, promote engagement with parishes and provide a safe environment for students and staff. The pillar of Stewardship aims to provide accessible, affordable and sustainable schools where resources are distributed in response to the needs of the students (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2019). The Quality Catholic Education (QCE) framework supports schools in enacting these strategic directions and CEWA's vision. This document is arranged under the four pillars and provides school leaders with an overview of their responsibilities in leading Catholic schools.

1.4.4 The Leadership of Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia

Within the Catholic Education system of Western Australia, there are 109 primary schools. These schools range in size from 30 students in the remote town of Southern Cross to 748 students in a two-campus school in the Perth suburbs of Attadale and Myaree (G. De Vos, personal communication, July 5, 2022). Each of these schools has a principal who is responsible to the Executive Director of CEWA "for the design and safe delivery of the educational program to each student in their community of faith by building relationships with students, staff, and the school community" (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c, para. 5). The principal is also tasked with ensuring that system policies and directives are followed at the school level (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c). Principals have the authority to delegate leadership roles within their schools (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009), and the principal has the option to allocate specific tasks and responsibilities to the assistant principal, depending upon the needs of the school. The smallest schools have no assistant principal; however, the

remainder have between one and three, with 168 assistant principals employed across 97 primary schools.

Payroll records reveal that the first assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia were appointed in 1991. Before 1991, many schools had a leadership position other than the principal, but this role was entitled Senior Teacher or Religious Education Coordinator (A. Curry, personal communication, June 25, 2021). Assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia are employed by contract. The contract is initially for three years and may then be extended for a further four years and subsequently another three. The maximum period of employment in one school is ten years, after which the position needs to be advertised (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-d). The professional association for assistant principals in CEWA primary schools is the Catholic Assistant Principals' Association (CAPA). The association's vision is to be "one cohesive voice building agile leaders who advocate for and champion excellence in our Catholic school communities" (Catholic Assistant Principals' Association, 2017, para. 8).

1.5   Significance of the Research

This study is significant for two reasons. Firstly, there is no published research investigating the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. A study was carried out on the equivalent position in Western Australian government primary schools in 1990 through research commissioned by the Western Australian Deputy Principals' Association (Harvey, 1991). Whilst the data from that study may have some commonalities with the experience of assistant principals in Catholic schools, the context of the Catholic school system has implications for the role due to the added religious dimension. In addition, the demands on schools, particularly in terms of accountability, have increased and expanded since that study occurred over 30 years ago (Carlin et al., 2003; Eacott & Norris, 2014; Spillane & Lee, 2014). It is anticipated that this research will contribute to the body of literature regarding the role of assistant principal in primary school leadership, provide insight into the role in Catholic systems, and enhance the understanding of the role in Western Australia.

Secondly, an examination of the reality of the role of assistant principal may be of interest to several bodies. First, CEWA may draw on the research to enhance

the role of assistant principal, determine the professional learning they require and understand how assistant principals contribute to school leadership. Second, the professional associations for Catholic primary school principals and assistant principals may be interested in this research as a source of information for their advocacy of school leaders and in determining the support they could provide.

1.6   Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their role? From this overarching research question, five specific research questions were posed that directed the focus of the research. These were:

1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
2. Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?
3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?
5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

1.7   Research Participants

The research participants were assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. In July 2020, when data collection began, there were 168 assistant principals employed in 97 CEWA primary schools. Three assistant principals were ineligible for participation due to a potential power differential, as they worked at the school where the researcher was principal. Therefore, 165 assistant principals were the total target population, all of whom were invited to participate, conditional upon the approval of their principals. Of these, 68 (41% of the target population) assistant principals completed the online survey and 20 (12%) also participated in a semi-structured interview. A detailed overview of the participants' demographic and career information can be found in Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Results.

1.8   Outline of the Research Design

The epistemological approach used in this research was predominantly qualitative in nature. Some quantitative data were also collected to test and support qualitative information. A constructivist approach was chosen as it allowed participants' experiences to be captured from their viewpoints. The theoretical perspective of interpretivism, specifically through a symbolic interactionist lens, allowed assistant principals to make meaning and share their experiences from within their contexts. In line with the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, the methodology chosen for this research was a case study, specifically an exploratory, instrumental case study. As this is the first empirical research into the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, the study was exploratory and clarified the concepts relating to their role. An instrumental case study was chosen as it allowed for a broad understanding of the role of assistant principal from various contexts and experiences. Data collection for this research was through an online survey, which included quantitative and qualitative questions, and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, a document search and researcher field notes provided further information, which assisted in analysing the results. Miles et al.'s (2020) interactive cyclical process was employed to analyse the qualitative data collected. A process of data condensation, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions was followed. Quantitative data were analysed using strategies such as tabulation, cross-tabulation, gap analysis and graphical representation.

1.9   Limitations of the Research

There are two potential limitations of this research. First, the study explored the role of assistant principal in one school system in one geographical region: Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Therefore, the results cannot be easily generalised to other schools in Western Australia, schools in different states of Australia, or elsewhere in the world. However, the trends and issues identified may assist other researchers in their studies of educational leadership in other school systems. To improve the generalisability of the study, purposive sampling was used to ensure participants from various school sizes and locations and those with a range of years of experience were included in the data collection. Furthermore, rich descriptions of the setting, participants and research results assist the reader in determining the transferability of the study.

The second limiting factor for this study is that the researcher was a principal in a Catholic primary school in Western Australia for most of the period during which the research was conducted. With over 20 years of experience in the Catholic Education system in Western Australia, including four as an assistant principal and five as a principal, the researcher needed to be mindful of ensuring the study was trustworthy and that her personal experiences and opinions did not impact upon the research process or results. Whilst her experience allowed for a thorough understanding of the system context, the researcher understood that constant reflection was required to ensure bias did not unconsciously appear. The measures employed to mitigate the two limitations of the research will be further outlined in Chapter Three: Research Design.

1.10 Thesis Outline and Chapter Summaries

This thesis comprises six chapters, an overview of which is provided in Table 1.2. A summary of the contents of each chapter can be found below.

Table 1.2

Overview of the Thesis Structure

Chapter	Title
Chapter One	The Research Defined
Chapter Two	Review of Literature
Chapter Three	Research Design
Chapter Four	Presentation of Research Results
Chapter Five	Discussion of Research Results
Chapter Six	Review and Conclusions

Chapter One: The Research Defined introduces the research. The chapter describes the purpose of the study, its significance, the research questions used to guide the study's design, and the research context. In addition, the researcher's motives for undertaking the investigation were disclosed, as were the study's potential limitations. A brief description of the research participants and an overview of the research design were also provided. Finally, a summary of each of the six chapters is presented.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature is comprised of three sections. Each section presents an exploration of the literature pertinent to this study on the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The three themes explored are comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal, leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal and leadership of Catholic schools. These three themes bring into focus the conceptual framework that underpins this study and led to the development of the five specific research questions.

Chapter Three: Research Design outlines the research approach employed to manage the conduct of the study. The chapter presents the theoretical framework for the study, which was predominantly qualitative in nature. The epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and data collection methods are explained. A description of the field testing processes, the research participants and the sampling methods used to select them are presented, as are the measures taken to improve the trustworthiness of the research. The data analysis processes are explained, and ethical considerations are outlined. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the research design.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Results begins with a summary of participants' demographic information gathered from the online survey. Each of the five specific research questions is then addressed, qualitative data are presented, and, where applicable, compared with quantitative data. The themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process for each question are outlined.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Research Results provides an analysis and interpretation of the data presented in the previous chapter to address each specific research question. The themes and sub-themes identified during data analysis are explored and explained in light of the relevant literature. Similarities and differences between the results and the literature are acknowledged and discussed.

Chapter Six: Review and Conclusions responds to the five specific research questions that guided this study and expands on some of the broader research themes that emerged. A framework representing the leadership of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia is presented, along with

an overview of the knowledge added to the field of study. In addition, the chapter details the research implications, a range of recommendations for the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia and suggestions for further research. The benefits and limitations of the study are revisited, and the chapter concludes with a personal impact statement from the researcher.

1.11 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research and provided an overview of the approach to the study and a description of the context within which the research took place. The role of assistant principal has existed in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia for just over 30 years, yet no research has been undertaken into the specifics of the role or the experiences of assistant principals. The next chapter delivers a review of the literature relevant to the study, organised into three themes: comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal, leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal and leadership of Catholic schools.

Chapter Two – Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

This research explored the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. It sought insight into the various aspects of the role and an understanding of the role perceptions of assistant principals. In this chapter, the review of literature will concentrate on the three aspects of the broader research most applicable to this topic: comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal; leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal; and leadership of Catholic schools. The conceptual framework underpinning the literature review is presented in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Framework Underpinning the Literature Review
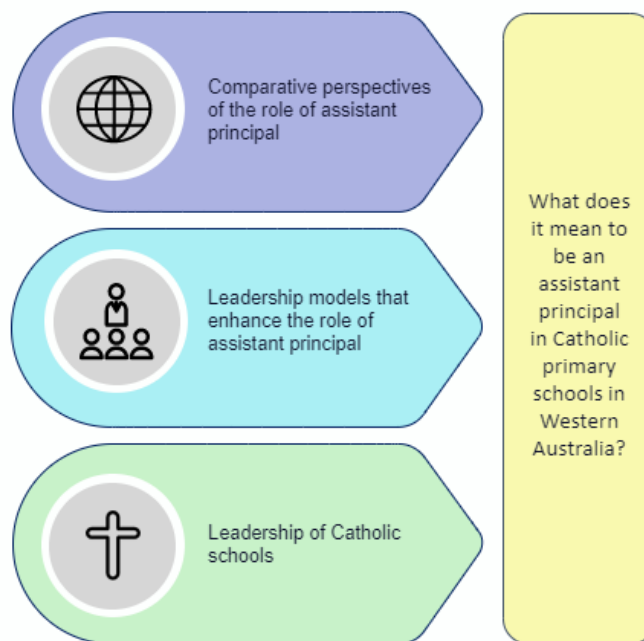
Literature on the comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal outlines the role as experienced in Australian and international contexts. The review of literature on leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal explores four approaches to leadership anticipated to be the most relevant to the role of assistant principal, namely: transactional, transformational, instructional and distributed leadership. Literature that focuses on leading Catholic schools highlights various characteristics and expectations of leaders of schools in Catholic systems.

These three themes inform and support the research questions. The structure of the literature review, based upon the conceptual framework, is provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Overview of Chapter Two: Review of Literature

2.1   Introduction
2.2   Comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal
    2.2.1 Existing research into the assistant principalship
    2.2.2 History and purpose of the role of assistant principal
    2.2.3 Assistant principal role preparation and transition
    2.2.4 Professional development of assistant principals
    2.2.5 The career paths of assistant principals
    2.2.6 The relationship between the assistant principal and principal
    2.2.7 Challenges of the role of assistant principal
    2.2.8 Assistant principal job satisfaction and wellbeing
    2.2.9 Section Summary
2.3   Leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal
    2.3.1 Transactional leadership
    2.3.2 Transformational leadership
    2.3.3 Relationship between transactional and transformational leadership
    2.3.4 Instructional leadership
    2.3.5 Relationship between instructional and transactional leadership
    2.3.6 Relationship between instructional and transformational leadership
    2.3.7 Distributed leadership
    2.3.8 Section Summary
2.4   Leadership of Catholic schools
    2.4.1 Catholic identity
    2.4.2 The dual responsibilities of Catholic school leaders
    2.4.3 Servant leadership
    2.4.4 The Religious Education Coordinator
    2.4.5 Section Summary
2.5   Chapter conclusion

2.2   Comparative Perspectives of the Role of Assistant Principal

    This section of the literature review will examine the scope of the existing research on the role of assistant principal, the history and purpose of the role, their roles and responsibilities and how assistant principals are prepared for and transitioned into their new leadership position. In addition, the professional

development of assistant principals, their career paths, the relationship between the principal and assistant principal, and the challenges of assistant principalship will be discussed. Finally, the job satisfaction and wellbeing of assistant principals will be explored.

2.2.1 Existing Research into the Assistant Principalship

Given the important and senior position assistant principals hold in schools, it is somewhat surprising that they are not featured more prominently in school leadership literature (Bukoski et al., 2015; Cranston, 2007; Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017). Scholarly work on school leadership predominantly focuses on the role of the principal (Armstrong, 2010; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2012; Cranston, 2007; Searby et al., 2016). Some authors have referred to assistant principals as forgotten leaders due to the lack of research into their work (Cranston et al., 2004; Rintoul & Kennelly, 2014). In the early 1970s, Kindsvatter and Tosi (1971) suggested three possible reasons for the paucity of research into assistant principals, and these reasons are possibly still relevant today. Firstly, the position is primarily viewed as operating in the shadow of the principal and therefore assumed to be similar in responsibilities. Secondly, as the position is often seen as a managerial role, it does not have the professional dimension to make it attractive to researchers. Finally, due to the lack of a clearly defined assistant principal job description, the breadth of the tasks involved in their work makes research less appealing to scholars.

The first large-scale study of assistant principals occurred in 1965 in the United States (Glanz, 1994a, 2004; Sun, 2012). Researchers Austin and Brown (1970) undertook a three-part study involving 1,207 high school assistant principals. Their research provided a baseline understanding of the role (Greenfield, 1985b). Until the mid-1980s, studies into the assistant principalship predominantly focused on quantifying their roles and responsibilities (Greenfield, 1985b; Hausman et al., 2002). Greenfield (1985a, 1985b; 1986) was among the first to begin the discussion regarding a reconceptualisation of the role to incorporate "major organisational responsibility for identifying and solving problems of instructional practice and program articulation and for guiding and supporting the efforts of teachers to grapple with and solve those problems" (Greenfield, 1985a, p. 87). In other words, scholars began to see the benefit of incorporating instructional leadership into the work of

assistant principals. During the 1990s, the literature (Harvey, 1991; 1993; 1994b; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993) increasingly called for the role of assistant principal to be reconceptualised so that it could become more than the traditional administrative and disciplinary role. Moving into the 2000s and beyond, researchers (Armstrong, 2009; Barnett et al., 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012) continued to highlight the need to reconfigure the assistant principal's role and elevate their status as leaders. In more recent times, the research has moved away from simply quantifying the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals, although that is still an aspect of some research. A more holistic approach has seen studies explore assistant principal role preparation and transition (Anderson et al., 2009; Busch et al., 2012; Read, 2012), challenges of their work (Barnett et al., 2012; Cansoy et al., 2021), their leadership development (Hayes & Burkett, 2020; Petrides et al., 2014), their relationships with principals (Cohen & Schechter, 2019c; Ho et al., 2021a) and their job satisfaction (Beycioglu et al., 2012; Cranston, 2007; Kwan, 2011). These studies have contributed to a richer understanding of the work of assistant principals that goes beyond their list of duties.

Historically, much of the research and discussion of assistant principals originates from the United States and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom (Harvey, 1994a) and usually pertains to assistant principals in secondary schools. This situation is largely still the case; however, research into the assistant principalship in international contexts has become more evident in the last 15 years. For example, researchers in New Zealand (Cranston, 2007; Shore & Walshaw, 2016, 2018), Turkey (Beycioglu et al., 2012; Cansoy et al., 2021), South Africa (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020), Israel (Dor-Haim, 2021; Shaked, 2020), Canada (Armstrong, 2015; Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Rintoul & Kennelly, 2014; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021), Hong Kong (Kwan, 2019; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Kwan Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010), Malaysia (Tahir et al., 2019) and Singapore (Ho et al., 2020; Ho et al., 2021a, 2021b) have all explored aspects of the work of assistant principals. Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggested that the work of assistant principals is similar across international contexts. Many of the recent international studies cited above have highlighted that the responsibilities, challenges, rewards and expectations of the role of assistant principal are indeed relatively consistent across various school systems.

Research into the role of assistant principal in Australian contexts is uncommon. Cranston et al. (2007; 2004) and Leaf and Odhiambo (2017) conducted studies on assistant principals in Queensland and New South Wales high schools, respectively. There appear to be few studies into the role of assistant principals in Western Australian primary schools, other than research by Harvey (1991, 1994a, 1994b) and Anderson et al. (2009). Harvey researched the role of assistant principal in Western Australian government primary schools. As well as a synopsis of their responsibilities, he reported on the levels of assistant principals' job satisfaction, career characteristics and the challenges they encountered and made a range of recommendations for the future of the role. These recommendations included a reduction in teaching load and greater access to professional learning and career counselling (Harvey, 1991). Anderson et al. (2009) also studied assistant principals in the Western Australian government school system, examining their first-year experiences in the role. They described the stages first-year assistant principals progress through as they "take bearings", "take stock", and "take control" (p. 35). As noted previously, there appears to be no research into the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The current research is long overdue and is the first empirical study examining the role in the Western Australian Catholic school system.

2.2.2 *History and Purpose of the Role of Assistant Principal*

The literature contains some insights into the history and purpose of the role of assistant principal. The position appears to have its origins in the role created in the United States in the early twentieth century, entitled 'general supervisor' (Glanz, 1994b); however, the position may go back even further as there are some references to 'head assistants' in educational literature from the mid-1800s (Pierce, 1935, as cited in Norton, 2015). The general supervisor position was created to handle administrative tasks to reduce the principal's workload (Glanz, 1994b). A male almost always held the position, and he supported the principal in school logistics. Their responsibilities included preparing attendance reports and coordinating school programs (Glanz, 1994b). In addition to his duties in school administration, the general supervisor had some responsibilities for overseeing teachers in the academic areas of science and mathematics. By the 1940s and

1950s, the title assistant principal began appearing in the literature to better reflect the status of the general supervisor position relative to the principal (Glanz, 1994b).

There is no universally accepted role description for assistant principals (Anderson et al., 2009; Harvey, 1994a; Weller & Weller, 2002). However, it appears to be a common expectation in the literature that assistant principals carry out tasks and responsibilities designated by the principal (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Kwan, 2019; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). These tasks are often diverse, and some assistant principals have lamented that they "do what principals don't want to do" (Marshall, 1993, p. 16). Some researchers have assigned descriptive labels to assistant principals. These descriptors include activity coordinator (Stokes, 1973), daily operations manager (Porter, 1996), fire-fighter (Laughery, 1959; Shore & Walshaw, 2018), caretaker, policeman (Koru, 1993) and arbiter, disciplinarian, counsellor and jack-of-all-trades (Garawski, 1978). These labels summarise the scope of tasks assistant principals may be assigned and demonstrate a lack of a clearly defined role description.

The position of assistant principal has been historically associated with maintaining the stability of the school through management and organisation (Greenfield, 1985a; Harvey, 1994b; Weller & Weller, 2002), as well as handling disciplinary matters (Glanz, 1994b; Harvey, 1994a). Early studies of the assistant principalship in the United States by Van Eman (1926), as well as later research by Boardman (1946), Austin and Brown (1970), Cantwell (1993) and Glanz (1994a) all found that administration and clerical tasks took up most of the assistant principal's time. The initial partial role of the general supervisor as overseer of the academic programs for mathematics and science disappeared over time, resulting in an almost total lack of instructional leadership responsibilities for assistant principals (Glanz, 2004). The role became focused on administration, which is still common today, as assistant principals play an essential role in the school's day-to-day operations and are heavily involved in administrative tasks (Cansoy et al., 2021; Searby et al., 2016).

As noted above, numerous scholars in various countries have suggested the need for an evolution of the role of assistant principal. They assert it should be less focused on administration and make better use of these experienced and

knowledgeable professionals to be more engaged in instruction and other leadership tasks (Armstrong, 2010; Barnett et al., 2012; Calabrese, 1991; Cranston et al., 2004; Jayne, 1996). Harvey (1994b) submitted that, due to the preoccupation with administrative responsibilities, assistant principals "have been a wasted educational resource" (p. 17). Armstrong (2010) asserted that the role of assistant principal needs to be defined more clearly with an increase in leadership activities instead of managerial tasks. She further suggested that it is only then that assistant principals will be able to have a transformative effect on schools. Greenfield (1985a) accepted that the stabilising role of assistant principals in schools through administration is essential but underlined that the scope of the role should be restructured to include a focus on instructional aspects without sacrificing the crucial organisational work being carried out. Some contemporary researchers (Ho et al., 2021a; Militello et al., 2015; Shaked, 2020) have found that the work of assistant principals is beginning to overlap with the principal's responsibilities in instructional leadership, with schools in the United Kingdom being the most successful in that regard (Melton et al., 2012). However, research in other contexts reveals that assistant principals still spend more time managing student discipline and completing administrative tasks (Cranston, 2006; De Nobile & Ridden, 2014; Melton et al., 2012; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021).

Classroom teaching is an additional responsibility that assistant principals may have, which receives only minimal attention in the literature. Much of the research regarding assistant principals originates in the United States, and, as assistant principals there generally have minimal or no designated teaching duties (Melton et al., 2012), teaching load is rarely mentioned nor discussed. However, assistant principals in other parts of the world, including the United Kingdom (Guihen, 2019; Melton et al., 2012), South Africa (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020) and China (Melton et al., 2012), frequently have time allocated to classroom teaching each week. In one study in the United Kingdom, 75% of the fifty schools surveyed had assistant principals who were also classroom teachers (Mortimore et al., 1988, as cited in Webb & Vulliamy, 1995). In Western Australia, Harvey (1991) found that assistant principals in government primary schools taught six out of eight periods per day. Almost two decades later, Anderson et al. (2009) noted that some assistant principals in Western Australia had no teaching load, whilst others had substantial commitments.

2.2.3 Assistant Principal Role Preparation and Transition

The assistant principalship is an entry-level position in school administration (Anderson et al., 2009; Armstrong, 2015; Barnett et al., 2012; Kwan, 2019) and involves a significant shift in status and responsibilities from a teaching role (Anderson et al., 2009; Hartzell et al., 1995). Effective leadership succession requires that aspiring assistant principals are well-prepared for leadership challenges (Busch et al., 2012). However, researchers have found that new assistant principals are generally unprepared for their role (Armstrong, 2015; Hausman et al., 2002; Melton et al., 2012; Searby et al., 2016). Some assistant principals experience frustration and stress upon taking up their new position due to the vast differences between their expectations and the realities of the role and lack of adequate preparation (Armstrong, 2015; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021). Hartzell et al. (1994) suggested that a reason for the incongruence between the expectation and reality of the role is that, by its nature, much of the work of assistant principals is hidden from the view of teachers, so new assistant principals are sometimes not aware of all the role entails. Literature regarding the preparation of assistant principals, as well as their transition from teacher to administrator, is scant (Anderson et al., 2009; Cohen & Schechter, 2019b; Hunt, 2011; Read, 2012); however, there is some research regarding learning the role through socialisation.

Socialisation is the process of acquiring the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours required to perform a role (Greenfield, 1985b; Mertz, 2006) and may occur formally with intent or incidentally through observation (Brim & Wheeler, 1966, as cited in Greenfield, 1985b; Read, 2012). Assistant principals begin forming an understanding, both intentionally and incidentally, of the role from their first days as a teacher by observing assistant principals in action (Read, 2012). Mertz (2000) described this as gaining a "socialised disposition to the position" (p. 14). This process continues after their appointment to the role. Socialisation has two goals. Firstly, moral socialisation (Greenfield, 1984, as cited in Greenfield, 1985b) or organisational socialisation (Van Maanan & Schein, 1979, as cited in Marshall & Greenfield, 1987) introduces the organisation's group norms, values, and attitudes. Secondly, technical socialisation (Greenfield, 1984, as cited in Greenfield, 1985b), or professional socialisation (Van Maanan & Schein, 1979, as cited in Marshall & Greenfield, 1987), imparts information regarding the knowledge and skills associated

with performing the specific role. The process of socialisation has a significant influence on the preparation of assistant principals for their role and how successfully they transition into it (Armstrong, 2010). In addition, how assistant principals are socialised may impact how the assistant principal later socialises others to the position (Armstrong, 2015).

At least three forms of socialisation are present in the workplace (Van Maanan & Schein, 1979, as cited in Greenfield, 1985b; Hart, 1991). First, custodianship focuses on maintaining the status quo and continuing current practices and responsibilities. Second, content innovation allows for some improvements and the application of some new ideas, but with a general understanding that the traditional norms associated with that position are maintained. Third, role innovation involves a significant redefinition of the role that allows for new responsibilities and innovative practices. The custodial form of professional socialisation dominates the transition into assistant principalship (Armstrong, 2009; Cantwell, 1993; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). As a result, the role of assistant principal has been mired in administrative tasks and unable to comprehensively evolve in response to calls to increase instructional leadership responsibilities. In addition, due to socialisation being relatively random, it may mean that inappropriate role models are used, resulting in behaviours and attitudes that are not considered desirable in the context (Greenfield, 1985b; Hausman et al., 2002).

On-the-job training would be considered part of the socialisation process. Shore and Walshaw (2018) maintained that on-the-job training, whilst necessary due to the absence or inadequacy of formal preparation and induction programs for assistant principals, is not necessarily a particularly kind way to develop leaders. Armstrong (2015) noted a similar sentiment in her study, where participants used terms such as 'sink or swim' and 'trial by fire' to describe their initial experiences in the role of assistant principal. As a smoother start to school leadership, Read (2012) noted that teacher leadership positions, such as curriculum coordinator, may help prepare teachers for the role of assistant principal.

Whilst socialisation receives attention in the limited literature regarding preparation for and transition to the role of assistant principal, formal preparation programs are also addressed to some degree. The research indicates that

leadership preparation programs are generally inadequate for preparing for the transition from teaching to leadership (Armstrong, 2015; Barnett et al., 2012; Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2012; Cantwell, 1993). Some scholars have made suggestions about the necessary components of successful formal preparation programs and highlighted that these programs need to consider the specific needs of those in such a complex frontline role (Armstrong, 2015; Barnett et al., 2012). Preparation programs can be appropriate when designed for specific purposes, such as upskilling participants in the technical aspects of their role or matters regarding the law or educational policy (Armstrong, 2015; Read, 2012). Armstrong (2015) also noted that preparation programs should provide an understanding of the role the assistant principal plays in the leadership hierarchy of the school. Armstrong and Craft et al. (2016) recommended the inclusion of support in navigating the relational aspects of their interactions with the principal and other assistant principals on their team. Hartzell et al. (1995) identified three areas of support required for a successful transition to the assistant principalship: accurate information about the role of assistant principal; assistance in interpreting the various aspects of their new role and setting; and the chance to develop relationships with others in similar positions. Similarly, Craft et al. confirmed that providing aspiring assistant principals with a realistic view of the role and enabling peer support from other administrators is essential to assistant principal preparation.

Thorough preparation of assistant principals moving into the role may allay some of the health and wellbeing impacts that can occur in the transition. A study by Armstrong (2015) identified that new assistant principals experienced physical challenges as they learned their new role. Some participants reported that their overloaded schedules sometimes meant they ignored essential bodily functions and had to write 'use washroom' on their schedule. Other assistant principals reported unhealthy weight loss, elevated blood pressure levels, and lack of sleep. Novice assistant principals also described large cognitive demands as they are expected to quickly acclimatise to their new role, manage crises and solve problems. Additionally, new assistant principals experienced socio-emotional challenges as they managed relationships, struggled with self-doubt, and their sources of support shifted (Armstrong, 2015).

Anderson et al. (2009), in their study of assistant principals in government primary schools in Western Australia, outlined three phases within the first year of assistant principalship that reflect the transition from teaching to leadership. During the first two months, assistant principals are 'taking bearings' and developing their understanding of the role by learning on the job. Anderson et al. found that, in general, participants in their study had a good understanding of the basic administrative requirements of the role but were not prepared for the reactivity of the position in response to the needs of others. Armstrong (2015) and Craft et al. (2016) also found that novice assistant principals were challenged by being at the beck and call of others in the school community, which is in stark contrast to their previous teaching role, where their responsibilities were clearly defined, and their schedule did not vary significantly on a day-to-day basis. After the initial 'taking bearings' stage, assistant principals in their third to eighth months on the job may go through the 'taking stock' phase, which is focused on building relationships with others in the school community (Anderson et al., 2009). During this phase, novice assistant principals ensure they are accessible, supportive and establish positive communication with staff. Many assistant principals struggle with the change in their role and realise they are no longer part of the teacher group within the school, which impacts relationship building (Armstrong, 2015; Craft et al., 2016; Kwan, 2019). In Western Australian government schools, where Anderson et al. (2009) conducted their research, most assistant principals have a fractional teaching load, so the extent to which they felt this teacher-administrator divide is unclear. The final phase in the first year of assistant principalship comes after approximately eight to 11 months in the role when novice assistant principals may experience the 'taking control' phase (Anderson et al., 2009). By this point in the year, they may feel they have some understanding and ownership of the role. They begin to see the results of their labour within the school as projects and achievements come to fruition and their self-confidence increases.

Armstrong (2010, 2019) had a different view of the transition of an assistant principal from teaching to leadership. She identified that the socialisation process for new assistant principals takes several years, unlike Anderson's (2009) finding of reaching the 'taking control' phase in under one year. Armstrong described a four-stage process of transition from teacher to leader. The first stage, entry-exit, sees

the teacher beginning to contemplate a leadership role. They may take on additional responsibilities and fulfil any certification requirements for an assistant principal position. The second stage, immersion-emersion, begins when the new assistant principal is appointed and expected to immerse themselves immediately into their new role. Descriptions of this phase include: "sink or swim", "jumping in the deep end", "swimming against the tide", and "baptism of fire" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 701). The third stage, disintegration-reintegration, spans the latter part of the assistant principal's first year and continues through most of their second year. This phase sees a realisation that the expectations of the role do not match the reality but may also include pushing some boundaries within their sphere of influence to avoid some of the negative aspects of their role. The fourth and final stage, transformation-restabilisation, usually in the assistant principal's third year in the role, sees them feeling fully integrated into their position in the school. They feel better able to deal with the role's challenges and more able to balance the personal and professional aspects of their lives.

In a study in Hong Kong, Kwan (2019) drew on Armstrong's (2010) finding that the tenure of assistant principals impacted how they transitioned to the role. Specifically, Kwan sought to understand three factors affecting the transition from teacher to assistant principal in their first three years in the position: school structural feedback, principal sponsorship, and peer affirmation. In their first year in the role, assistant principals were primarily concerned with establishing themselves as leaders in the eyes of staff, so peer affirmation was the predominant factor impacting their transition. In their second year, the sponsorship of the principal and structural feedback about their performance became more important as the assistant principal shifted their focus to ensuring they were positively impacting the school. The second year of tenure also proved to be the most challenging stage due to the difficulties in managing their position in the school hierarchy. In their third year of experience, assistant principals gained more confidence in their performance, and their focus returned to peer affirmation.

2.2.4 Professional Development of Assistant Principals

The limited literature regarding the development of school administrators, including assistant principals, has been focused on the preparation and transition phases, with further career stages receiving very little attention (Greenfield, 1985b;

Hunt, 2011; Oliver, 2005). Oliver (2005) and Harvey (1994a) each suggested that professional learning is essential to improve assistant principals' capacity as instructional leaders and encourage their aspirations for principalship. When compared to professional development opportunities for teachers and principals, assistant principals have less access to professional learning specific to their responsibilities (Barnett et al., 2012; Harvey, 1991; Hunt, 2011; Jayne, 1996; Marshall, 1993; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019; Searby et al., 2016). This paucity in professional learning opportunities specific to assistant principals may reflect the largely undefined role of assistant principal resulting in considerable variation in the professional learning needs of these school leaders.

There is some contention around the effectiveness of professional learning for assistant principals, with some researchers finding it helpful and others questioning its impact. For example, Camburn et al. (2003) found that professional learning for school leaders, including assistant principals, improved instructional leadership. The researchers noted that providing school leaders with opportunities to reflect upon their practice enhanced their performance. Marshall (1993) asserted that professional learning targeted at assistant principals is essential and effective. On the other hand, Weller and Weller (2002) identified that educational leadership programs do not provide adequate training to assistant principals in motivating teachers, resolving conflict, developing curriculum, effective teamwork, improving instruction or dealing with the politics of the job. Hausman et al. (2002) found that participation in professional learning, or post-graduate education courses, did not improve performance as an assistant principal. Hausman's research reflected the findings of Haller et al. (1997), who also uncovered that graduate-level study in school administration had no effect on improving school leadership.

Various authors have suggested that professional development opportunities for assistant principals need to be targeted at their specific needs to be the most effective (Barnett et al., 2017; Oliver, 2005; Petrides et al., 2014). Harvey (1991) asserted that professional learning for assistant principals should focus not only on knowledge and skills but also on attitudes and values. Whilst assistant principals desire to engage in professional learning, the program's time, delivery mode, and focus must be carefully considered so that assistant principals see it as worthwhile (Oliver, 2005). Some research has identified the skills and knowledge assistant

principals feel they need to improve their performance. These areas include finance and budgeting (Hausman et al., 2002; Oliver, 2005), student discipline (Hausman et al., 2002; Oliver, 2005), facilities management (Hausman et al., 2002), educational law (Calabrese, 1991; Oliver, 2005), conflict resolution (Barnett et al., 2012; Oliver, 2005) and public relations (Oliver, 2005). In addition to these primarily managerial tasks, assistant principals also desire support and training in instructional leadership activities such as teacher supervision, curriculum, instruction, assessment and student learning (Oliver, 2005; Petrides et al., 2014; Searby et al., 2016).

Whilst opportunities to engage in high-quality external professional learning are important, the principal also plays a vital role in the development of assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2012; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Gorton, 1987). The principal can provide job-embedded professional development that targets the needs of the assistant principal within their context (Barnett et al., 2012). In particular, Oliver (2005) encouraged principals to promote and provide ongoing professional learning to assistant principals through professional growth plans. This plan would ensure the professional development approach is carefully considered to ensure the content meets the individual needs of the assistant principal, as well as the priorities of the school and school system. A professional growth plan aids in developing competence and capability (Calabrese, 2000) and should consider the context of the individual assistant principal and be reviewed regularly to ensure its continued relevance (Oliver, 2005).

Responsibility for the development of assistant principals does not lie solely with external programs nor with the principal. Assistant principals must assume ownership of their development, individually and collectively (Harvey, 1991, 1994b). Harvey (1994b) outlined a range of strategies assistant principals should consider to gain greater control over their work and professional growth. He advocated for increased reflection upon the nature of the role of assistant principal and the continued shaping of the position to include increased and expanded responsibilities. Through negotiation with principals, assistant principals should seek secondment opportunities and work experience in other contexts to broaden their skills and renew their sense of purpose in their own schools. Additionally, assistant principals should focus on expanding their skills in instructional leadership and develop skills for facilitating rather than directing.

2.2.5 The Career Paths of Assistant Principals

Assistant principalship can be viewed as a significant step up the career ladder from teaching (Armstrong, 2009). Researchers have identified numerous factors influencing a teacher's decision to move into an assistant principal role. These include: having a greater impact on students (Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021); a desire for a professional challenge, and to test their personal and professional capabilities (Shore & Walshaw, 2016; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021); the opportunity to influence the direction of the school and make a positive contribution (Shore & Walshaw, 2016); encouragement from someone else to pursue the opportunity (Shore & Walshaw, 2016; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021); job variety (Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021); and a personal desire to advance in their career (Shore & Walshaw, 2016). Once in the role, there appear to be two general mindsets regarding the career development of assistant principals. Some assistant principals see the role as a stepping-stone to principalship, and others view the assistant principal position as a terminal career (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Harvey, 1991; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017; Shore & Walshaw, 2016).

Research by Marshall et al. (1992) outlined six assistant principal career orientations. First, the 'upwardly mobile' assistant principal plans to pursue principalship and has developed the skills and support network to enable this. Second, the 'career' assistant principal is happy to remain in their role. Third, the 'plateaued' assistant principal sought promotion but was unsuccessful, usually due to inadequate mentorship or interpersonal skills. Fourth, the somewhat inappropriately labelled, 'shafted' assistant principal has sought principal roles but has been unsuccessful despite possessing the requisite skills and support. The final two of Marshall et al.'s assistant principal career orientations encompass those who neither see the assistant principal role as a career position nor seek principalship. Some of these assistant principals are described as 'considering leaving' as they contemplate moving away from the field of education into an alternative career. Others, defined as the 'downwardly mobile' assistant principals, return to a teaching role, either by choice or circumstance.

As Marshall et al. (1992) indicated, a cohort of assistant principals are content in the role and view the assistant principalship as a terminal career. Scholars have suggested several possible reasons for the contentment of these assistant principals

to remain in their role. Some assistant principals feel their skills and interests mean the role of assistant principal is the most suitable position for them (Marshall et al., 1992; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). Others decide to prioritise their family (James & Whiting, 1998; Marshall et al., 1992), and some assistant principals are dissuaded by the inherently political nature of the principal role (Marshall et al., 1992). Additionally, role stress and role overload were cited as disincentives to principalship (James & Whiting, 1998), as was low self-efficacy regarding managing the technical aspects, such as the financial management and compliance requirements of the position (Glasson, 2014).

Some data regarding the proportion of assistant principals interested in pursuing principalship are available in the literature. Other than Austin and Brown (1970), who found that three-quarters of male and half of female assistant principals in high schools in the United States wanted to become a principal, most research has indicated that around half, or just under half, of assistant principals have a serious interest in promotion to the principalship. For example, 55% of assistant principals in Harvey's (1991) research in Western Australia indicated principal aspirations. In the United Kingdom, James and Whiting (1998) noted that 43% of assistant principals aspired to principalship. More recently, Shore and Walshaw (2018) identified 43% of their New Zealand study cohort as principal aspirants.

Whilst a proportion of assistant principals desire a principal role, the literature suggests that the assistant principalship does not adequately prepare candidates for the position of principal (Greenfield et al., 1986; Hartzell, 1993; Hausman et al., 2002; Koru, 1993; Kwan, 2009; Mertz, 2006; Webb & Vulliamy, 1995). This lack of preparation is predominantly due to the focus of the assistant principal on managing, supervising and maintaining the stability of the school rather than leading learning (Greenfield et al., 1986; Hausman et al., 2002). Harvey (1991) asserted that the lack of a clearly defined role description has resulted in the assistant principal being an "aide to the principal, rather than being an apprentice principal" (p. 15). Gorton and Kattman (1985) expressed a similar idea with their suggestion that the undefined and ambiguous nature of the role of assistant principal may lead some to see it merely as a required rite of passage towards the more desirable role of principal rather than a career goal in itself.

2.2.6 *The Relationship Between the Assistant Principal and Principal*

Literature on the association between the principal and assistant principal has found it to be an important relationship and one that can be mutually beneficial (Cohen & Schechter, 2019c; Hartzell et al., 1995; Hunt, 2011; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021; Wong, 2009). Gorton (1987) noted that "the principal is the key to improving the assistant principalship" (p. 3), and Marshall and Hooley (2006) stated that "principals need to recognise their responsibility to provide their professional colleagues with opportunities for satisfying work, adequate support, advanced training and effective resources" (p. 21). For these reasons, when examining the role of assistant principal, it is pertinent to consider the relationship between the principal and assistant principal (Cranston et al., 2004).

The association between the principal and assistant principal has a significant impact on the work and development of the assistant principal (Armstrong, 2015; Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019a; Daresh, 2004; Hartzell et al., 1995; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021). A collaborative and supportive relationship allows for the smooth running of the school, which benefits each leader and the entire school community (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Marshall, 1993; Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991). Marshall and Hooley (2006) explained that a collaborative team approach to school leadership multiplies the principal's effectiveness to benefit the school and its students. On the other hand, there is potential that differences in philosophy, or possibly even a power struggle, may result in conflict and distrust between the two leaders (Baker et al., 2018; Cranston, 2007; Gonzales, 2019; Harvey, 1991; Marshall, 1985; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). Ho et al. (2021a) emphasised that principals have the power to either enable or disable the leadership authority of assistant principals.

Numerous authors (Hartzell et al., 1995; Hunt, 2011; Marshall, 1993; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021) have highlighted the importance of assistant principals developing positive and collegial relationships with their principal. However, Austin and Brown (1970) concluded that the principal holds prime responsibility for determining the nature of the relationship between the principal and assistant principal. The principal's ideas and understanding of the role of assistant principal is a significant determinant in the shaping of the relationship, as the responsibilities of the assistant principal are decided by the principal (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020;

Kwan, 2019; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). Austin and Brown (1970) also suggested that the principal's understanding of their own role will influence the tasks they assign to their assistant principal.

As previously noted, custodial socialisation is most common in the on-the-job training and development of assistant principals and principals are also socialised into their role in the same way (Greenfield, 1985b). This socialisation can result in a lack of innovation and the tendency to maintain the status quo regarding role responsibilities without considering how to best apply the abilities and interests of the principal or assistant principal. For example, in studies of assistant principals in the United States, Pellicer and Stevenson (1991) found that nearly half of the assistant principals had no input into the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them by the principal, and Melton et al. (2012) noted that around 83% of their participants had no say in their work. In Canada, Wang, Pollock, et al. (2021) had a slightly different result, finding that almost 78% of assistant principals carried out tasks negotiated with the principal or decided upon independently. One study in the United Kingdom, with a small number of participants, indicated that all assistant principals had an opportunity to negotiate their tasks (Melton et al., 2012). Where there is dissonance between the tasks assistant principals are assigned by the principal and those they would prefer to engage in, assistant principals report deficiencies in feelings of self-actualisation and job satisfaction (Harvey, 1994a; Hausman et al., 2002).

The organisational hierarchy of the school can either complicate or simplify the work of the assistant principal (Hausman et al., 2002). Hartzell (1993) described the school leadership hierarchy as being on two levels. As first-level leaders, principals are responsible for stimulating change and improvement, whilst assistant principals, as second-level leaders, are tasked with maintaining the stability of the school. Cranston et al. (2004) summarised Hartzell's idea by describing the principal as a leader and the assistant principal as a manager. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the role of assistant principal was initially intended as a primarily managerial role and designed to relieve some of the administrative tasks of the principal (Glanz, 1994b). The label 'assistant principal' was introduced to reflect their status in relation to the principal in the school's hierarchy (Glanz, 1994b). However, some scholars have suggested that titles such as 'assistant', 'deputy' or 'vice' principal have contributed to the subordinate understanding of the role, and this subservient

phrasing may have caused the position to be undervalued in educational leadership (Cranston et al., 2004; Hartzell et al., 1995).

The development of the principal and assistant principal as a collaborative leadership team is important as it may assist in overcoming the possible negative perceptions of the assistant principalship (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Hausman et al., 2002; Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991; Pounder & Crow, 2005). A collaborative approach to leadership by the principal will communicate to staff that the assistant principal is an important leader in the school (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991). Cohen and Schechter (2019a) underscored the importance of a team relationship by stating that "assistant principals derive their professional and managerial authority and their power over the staff from the level of support they get from the principal and the measure of coordination between them" (p. 105). To develop a collaborative leadership team, Pellicer and Stevenson (1991) argued that the principal and assistant principal should jointly decide how the tasks required to run the school will be accomplished, considering each of their skills and interests.

Cantwell (1993) and Marshall (1993) each highlighted that the lack of clear and open communication could hinder the development of an effective leadership team. Austin and Brown (1970) noted that the proximity of the principal and assistant principal's offices aids in encouraging positive working relationships, as well as awareness of each other's work. Moreover, there is some evidence that a lack of communication and role awareness can result in the principal and assistant principal having divergent views regarding the work in which each engages (Cantwell, 1993; Tanner & Dennard, 1995). Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) asserted that the development of trust between principal and assistant principal, achieved through the principal being vulnerable and sharing their concerns and confidences, will strengthen communication and the leadership team's development.

Scholars propose that reflective practice, aimed at building communication and trust, has the added benefit of assisting in the growth of a mentoring relationship between the principal and assistant principal (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Hunt, 2011). Daresh (2004) described a mentor as "someone willing to assume the challenge of assisting another in the formation of ideas and patterns of thinking" (p. 497). Principals play an essential part in developing assistant principals, and

"effective principals are mentors by nature" (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991, p. 68). To assist in the mentoring process, Hunt (2011) indicated that "the principal should serve as the best loving critic of the assistant principal" (p. 166). The mentoring of assistant principals has tended to happen by chance rather than by design (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991). Therefore, some scholars have called for the implementation of more intentional mentoring practices (Armstrong, 2014; Cohen & Schechter, 2019a; Oliver, 2005). Mentoring is an important form of professional development, especially if the career goals of the assistant principal include future principalship (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Daresh, 2004; Hunt, 2011; Retelle, 2010). Retelle (2010) found that high-quality mentoring by their principal resulted in assistant principals who were well prepared to lead schools. She also referred to some principals as "principal-makers" (Retelle, 2010, p. 5) for their ability to successfully mentor their assistant principal towards an appointment to the principalship. Mentoring is not just for those aspiring to principalship. Career assistant principals will also benefit from mentoring by their principal, especially regarding instructional leadership (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Oliver, 2005).

2.2.7 Challenges of the Role of Assistant Principal

Assistant principals encounter challenges in their work, and some of these were examined earlier in this chapter. For example, the literature regarding assistant principal role preparation highlighted a lack of adequate training and readiness for the role (Armstrong, 2015; Searby et al., 2016). Likewise, a paucity of appropriately targeted professional learning opportunities was identified in the section discussing the development of assistant principals (Marshall, 1993; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019; Searby et al., 2016). Finally, in the literature addressing the relationship between assistant principals and principals, reliance on the principal to enable a positive and meaningful work-life for the assistant principal was noted as a possible challenge (Armstrong, 2015; Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991). In addition to these difficulties already described, several other challenges experienced by assistant principals are outlined in the literature.

One such challenge is the role's breadth and lack of clarity (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Due to the absence of a universally accepted role description (Anderson et al., 2009; Harvey, 1994a; Weller & Weller, 2002) and the fact that the principal decides their responsibilities (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Kwan, 2019; Rintoul &

Bishop, 2019), the work of each assistant principal varies from school to school, depending upon the context (Harvey, 1994a). With a wide range of possible duties, and with few parameters around their list of responsibilities, the workload of assistant principals can change and increase with each newly-imposed external requirement, internal change, or whim of the principal (Armstrong, 2010; Harvey, 1994b; Morgan, 2018). Unspoken, unclear and changing expectations of the work of assistant principals result in a lack of definition of their responsibilities, which leads to role ambiguity (Ho et al., 2021b). This ambiguity can, in turn, result in decreased job performance (Celik, 2013). Gronn (2003) suggested that the work of school leaders is "greedy work" (p. 14), characterised by heightened demands and expectations. School leaders never feel that their work is complete (Mulford, 2008), and as a result, assistant principals find it challenging to manage excessive workloads and multiple tasks simultaneously (Barnett et al., 2012; Leithwood & Azah, 2014). The lack of role clarity can lead to uncertainty and stress, especially concerning time management and maintaining a balance between personal and work lives (Barnett et al., 2012; Shore & Walshaw, 2018).

The literature on work intensification indicates that assistant principals have difficulty completing their tasks during their work hours due to the expansion of the demands of their role, which also increases the amount of time needed to address those demands (Cansoy et al., 2021; Lim & Pollock, 2019; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021). An Australian longitudinal study into the health and wellbeing of school leaders found that assistant principals reported feelings of conflict between their work and family demands at double the rate of the general population (Riley, See, et al., 2021). This finding reflects other literature, which indicates that assistant principals find that the demands of their work detract from their personal lives (Lim & Pollock, 2019) and excessive work hours negatively impact assistant principals' relationships with their families (Guihen, 2019).

Several researchers have investigated the work hours of assistant principals. For example, in New South Wales, assistant principals work an average of 58 hours each week during school terms, with around 45 hours at school and 12 hours at home (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018). Other researchers reported similar results. In Canada, the average hours of work each week for assistant principals is 54.5 hours (Pollock et al., 2017, as cited in Lim & Pollock, 2019; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021),

with 97.3% of assistant principals working more than 40 hours each week (Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021). Assistant principals in Maine in the United States worked an average of 55 hours per week (Hausman et al., 2002). Half of the assistant principals in a study in New Zealand worked between 50 and 59 hours per week, and a quarter worked 60 hours or more (Cranston, 2007). These results indicate that many assistant principals are working hours that are just shy of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (2020a) definition of 'very long' working hours as being 60 hours or more.

A further challenge for assistant principals is that their work is usually in response to the needs of others and reactive in nature (Anderson et al., 2009; Armstrong, 2015; Harvey, 1994a). Shore and Walshaw (2018) described the assistant principalship as a "fire-fighting role" (p. 317) in responding to urgent, unscheduled and unplanned daily events. This description is consistent with Harvey's (1994b) finding that for assistant principals, "much of their work is spontaneous, reactive and non-cumulative" (p. 27). Assistant principals find that responding to unscheduled events takes priority over their scheduled tasks (Cohen & Schechter, 2019b; Craft et al., 2016; Guihen, 2019), and they express difficulties in managing their time juggling the multitude of duties for which they are responsible (Barnett et al., 2012; Craft et al., 2016). Novice assistant principals find the unpredictable nature of the role particularly disconcerting as their recent experience in a structured and ordered classroom teaching position is in stark contrast to their new demanding, haphazard and hectic daily work (Armstrong, 2019; Craft et al., 2016).

Role conflict is another area of challenge for assistant principals. It can be defined as occurring "when people attempt to balance the incompatible expectations of their position" (Morgan, 2018, p. 4). Role conflict can manifest in assistant principals through the disconnect between the types of tasks they are assigned and spend their time on (actual tasks) compared to the responsibilities they believe they should be involved in (preferred tasks) (Cranston, 2006, 2007; Harvey, 1994a; Kwan & Walker, 2008). Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggested that assistant principal role conflict can occur "when the immediate demands of the school interfere with doing the work they value as an expression of their professionalism" (p. 8). Several researchers (Cranston et al., 2004; Glanz, 1994a; Harvey, 1991; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) have identified that a source of role conflict for

assistant principals lies in the struggle between leadership and management responsibilities. Assistant principals want more opportunities to engage in leadership but are often frustrated by the need to address administration and management activities (Sun & Shoho, 2017).

Some evidence in the literature indicates that the role conflict experienced by assistant principals in balancing their leadership and administrative tasks is shifting in favour of leadership. For example, Sun (2012) identified an increase between 1994 and 2010 in the engagement of assistant principals in leadership tasks and a reduction in management activities. Furthermore, a recent study in Singapore provided evidence that it is possible to reduce and even eliminate the role conflict experienced by assistant principals. Ho et al. (2021b) found that assistant principals did not appear to experience conflict between leadership and management activities. The authors explained that this lack of conflict might be due to assistant principals in Singapore being able to share their management duties with other staff, thereby reducing their administrative burden. Additionally, assistant principals in Singapore do not have teaching loads, leaving them with more time to engage in tasks they feel are important. Whilst there is some evidence that assistant principals are being allowed more opportunities to engage in leadership, other evidence points to assistant principals continuing to be mired in administration at the expense of leadership when they do not have the benefit of distributing their administrative duties (Cranston, 2006; Melton et al., 2012; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021).

The assistant principal's hierarchical position within the school can also create challenges (Hausman et al., 2002) as they are both leading and being led (Kwan, 2019). Ho et al. (2021b) suggested that assistant principals experience role conflict due to this position. Assistant principals provide an important line of communication between students, teachers and the principal (Anderson et al., 2009; Cantwell, 1993; Ho et al., 2020). However, this vertical communication can sometimes result in confusion regarding whose priorities take precedence: are they a support for the principal or an advocate for teachers? (Anderson et al., 2009). Sometimes the priorities of each stakeholder are conflicting, and the assistant principal can find themselves in an intermediary position trying to keep multiple groups satisfied (Hartzell et al., 1994). Exacerbating the challenge of the hierarchical placement of the assistant principal are misconceptions regarding the amount of discretionary

authority the assistant principal holds in the school (Austin & Brown, 1970). Teachers and students view assistant principals as having broad decision-making power and authority. However, principals, and the assistant principals themselves, understand that assistant principals have parameters around their power within the school (Austin & Brown, 1970).

The position of the assistant principal as neither principal nor teacher also impacts their social placement in the workplace. Dor-Haim (2021) and Armstrong (2015) found that assistant principals may experience loneliness in their work. This loneliness may result from a lack of a sense of belonging, a sense of abandonment, a heavy burden of responsibility and feeling alone in their commitment to their work within the school (Dor-Haim, 2021). Assistant principals find they no longer have the collegial and social support from the teaching group (Armstrong, 2015; Cohen & Schechter, 2019a) as they find themselves sandwiched by their rank between the teachers and the principal. Assistant principals need to separate themselves from friendships with teachers to take up the role of being "trust builders and conflict managers with distanced friendships" (Craft et al., 2016, p. 14). As part of this process, they adjust from thinking like a teacher to thinking like an administrator (Craft et al., 2016) and, over time, assistant principals become less aligned with the values and beliefs of teachers and more affiliated with managerial and administrative goals (Armstrong, 2010).

Conflict in the school community is another area assistant principals find challenging (Armstrong, 2015; Barnett et al., 2012; Cohen & Schechter, 2019b). Some assistant principals, especially novice ones, feel ill-prepared to manage difficult relationships (Barnett et al., 2012). Assistant principals might find themselves in challenging situations with disgruntled parents (Barnett et al., 2012; Rintoul, 2010; Tahir et al., 2019), teachers who are resistant to change or are underperforming (Barnett et al., 2012; Hausman et al., 2002; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021), peer assistant principals (Armstrong, 2015; Hartzell et al., 1995; Rintoul, 2010) or their principal (Armstrong, 2015; Harvey, 1991). In addition, as part of their role as disciplinarians, assistant principals will inevitably experience conflict with students regarding behavioural issues (Barnett et al., 2012).

Another challenge for assistant principals is that they may have teaching responsibilities in addition to their leadership role. Glasson (2014) noted that large teaching loads are a barrier to leadership development due to the time it consumes. Harvey (1991) identified classroom teaching as the most problematic area for assistant principals, with some assistant principals viewing teaching and administration as incompatible responsibilities (Harvey, 1994b). Western Australian assistant principals in government schools described that managing their time and giving due consideration to both teaching and leading can be a significant challenge (Harvey, 1994b). Frustration with large teaching loads was also evident in the research of Webb and Vulliamy (1995), who identified that assistant principals in the United Kingdom prioritised their classrooms and students over their leadership role. More recently and in contrast to that finding, Guihen (2019) noted that assistant principals in the United Kingdom experience guilt that teaching cannot always be their priority and that their lessons are not always to the standard they would like them to be. Whilst most assistant principals in Webb and Vulliamy's study did not want to lose the teaching component of their work, they expressed concern about how they could give adequate attention to each aspect of their job. Assistant principals also identified that their teaching might be interrupted frequently to deal with aspects of their assistant principal responsibilities, such as student discipline, that required an immediate response (Harvey, 1994b; Webb & Vulliamy, 1995). Melton et al. (2012) supported the removal of assistant principal teaching responsibilities, so they could use that time to undertake leadership training and development. Similarly, Harvey (1991, 1994b) suggested that removing teaching duties from the workload of assistant principals may be ideal, or at the very least, they should negotiate teaching responsibilities that do not involve prime responsibility for a classroom.

2.2.8 *Assistant Principal Job Satisfaction and Wellbeing*

Many assistant principals find their work to be a rewarding career experience, despite the challenges of the role. Harvey (1991) found that just over 83% of assistant principals in his study either liked or were very enthusiastic about their work. Cranston (2006) identified that more than 90% of assistant principals experienced job satisfaction. More recently, Riley, See et al. (2021) discovered that Australian assistant principals have job satisfaction levels above those of the general

population but just below that of principals. Some studies have indicated that assistant principal job satisfaction is highest for those aspiring for principalship (Beycioglu et al., 2012; Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Kwan Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). However, Shore and Walshaw (2018) did not find a significant difference in satisfaction levels between career assistant principals and those aspiring to principalship.

Building on a framework developed by Hausman et al. (2002) and later expanded by Donaldson et al. (2003, as cited in Kwan Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010), researchers in Hong Kong articulated four main dimensions to assistant principal job satisfaction: 'professional commitment', 'level of personal challenge', 'sense of efficacy' and 'sense of synchrony' (Kwan Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Professional commitment describes the enthusiasm of the assistant principal for their work and their views of the worthiness of the profession. The sense of efficacy component reflects the belief of the assistant principal in their capacity to carry out their work to improve schools. The level of personal challenge refers to the capability of the assistant principal to deal with the stress associated with their work, including their ability to balance their work-life and their home-life. Sense of synchrony is related to the school environment, the level of support the assistant principal receives from their colleagues and the congruence among the leadership team regarding the school's mission (Kwan Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010).

The literature identifies a range of factors that positively impact the job satisfaction of assistant principals. For example, working with students (Glanz, 1994a; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) and teaching (Guihen, 2019; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017) are sources of job satisfaction for assistant principals. Several researchers have identified that a positive relationship between the assistant principal and the leadership team, including the principal, can positively impact the professional fulfilment of assistant principals (Beycioglu et al., 2012; Cansoy et al., 2021; Cranston, 2006; Riley, See, et al., 2021; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). In particular, Palmer (1997, as cited in Shore & Walshaw, 2018) suggested that a supportive leadership team provides some protection for assistant principals from "the stress, loneliness and high administrative workload associated with the role" (p. 324). The literature also reveals that assistant principals gain satisfaction from improving the instructional program of the school (Beycioglu et al., 2012; Cranston, 2006;

Hausman et al., 2002; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) and working with staff to improve their teaching (Marshall, 1993; Shore & Walshaw, 2018).

Although many assistant principals enjoy high levels of job satisfaction, the literature indicates that not all assistant principals experience elevated levels of enjoyment in their work. One significant source of dissatisfaction is role conflict (Cranston, 2007). Assistant principals derive satisfaction from engaging in tasks they believe are most important (Harvey, 1991; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Therefore, misalignment of actual versus preferred tasks has a negative impact on assistant principal job satisfaction, whereas a close alignment between actual versus preferred tasks results in increased job satisfaction. Celik (2013) indicated that to reduce role conflict, it is necessary to better articulate the role, mission, authority and responsibilities of assistant principals and that this may reduce the chance of burnout.

Several other factors may negatively impact job satisfaction for assistant principals. These factors include the reactive nature of the work, lack of recognition for their professional efforts from colleagues and parents, limited professional development opportunities, and unfulfilled career progression (Harvey, 1991, 1994a). Continually dealing with student discipline can also harm assistant principal job satisfaction (Glanz, 1994a; Hausman et al., 2002). Glanz (1994a) asserted that assistant principals should be relieved of managing student discipline to "engage in more creative and intellectually stimulating instructional/curricular activities" (p. 286), as this should improve assistant principal morale. In addition, a challenging relationship with the principal may also be detrimental to the wellbeing of assistant principals (Baker et al., 2018; Cranston, 2007; Gonzales, 2019; Harvey, 1991; Marshall, 1985; Shore & Walshaw, 2018).

Job satisfaction has been found to correlate to an individual's wellbeing (Judge & Locke, 1993; Sironi, 2019). Wellbeing can be defined as "ongoing positive thoughts and behaviours that engage and fulfil and make us content" (Parker et al., 2021, p. 99). The wellbeing of assistant principals is an underrepresented topic in the literature; however, some information can be gathered from Riley et al.'s (2021) Australian longitudinal study of the health and wellbeing of Australian school leaders, which included assistant principals. Four significant areas of stress for Australian

school leaders were identified in the study: the quantity of work, lack of time to focus on teaching and learning, students' mental health issues, and employer expectations. Riley et al.'s (2021) research also revealed two factors that had 'huge' negative impacts on the wellbeing of assistant principals compared to the general population. These were stress and the demands for hiding emotions, including downplaying real emotions or acting out emotions they are not feeling. A further four factors were found to have a 'very large' effect size compared to the general population. These aspects were sleep difficulties, burnout, a negative impact on family life and emotional demands caused by the necessity of dealing with other people's emotions or being placed in emotionally challenging situations (Riley, See, et al., 2021). Tahir et al. (2019) suggested that the stress experienced by assistant principals is a routine challenge they cannot avoid. To assist in managing the stresses of their roles, school leaders draw on various sources of support, including their partner, colleagues in their workplace, friends, other school leaders and family members (Cansoy et al., 2021; Riley, See, et al., 2021).

Factors impacting assistant principal wellbeing are shared across international contexts. In addition to Riley, See, et al.'s (2021) Australian study, some research has also been undertaken into wellbeing and occupational stress among school leadership in Japan and New Zealand. A Japanese study found that 30% of assistant principals demonstrated depressive symptoms. The main predictors of job stress in this study were what the researchers referred to as quantitative workload (a lack of time to complete the list of expected tasks), lack of job control, role conflict, role ambiguity and lack of support from the principal (Nitta et al., 2019). In New Zealand, the most significant sources of stress for assistant principals were the sheer quantity of work and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning (Riley, Rahimi, et al., 2021).

2.2.9 Section Summary
This section of the literature review focused on the comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal. It detailed the existing research, the history and purpose of the role, the duties and responsibilities of assistant principals, how assistant principals prepare for, transition into and develop in their role, as well as the various career paths generally followed by assistant principals. In addition, the relationship between the assistant principal and principal was examined, as were the

challenges of the role and assistant principal job satisfaction. It is clear from the literature that the assistant principalship is important, complex, and needs further research. In particular, the review of literature regarding the comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal has revealed that much of their work is ill-defined, reliant upon cultivating positive relationships with others, often entrenched in a traditional role mindset and frequently forgotten in the educational leadership landscape. This section of the review of literature has informed the following four research questions:

- How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
- Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?
- Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
- Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?

The review of literature now considers the leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal. As a senior leadership position in schools, the assistant principal will undoubtedly engage in various leadership activities, each with a different purpose and outcome.

2.3 Leadership Models That Enhance the Role of Assistant Principal

Assistant principals hold senior leadership positions in schools. Their work potentially draws on a variety of leadership models. Transactional leadership is a key feature of the work of assistant principals as they undertake numerous managerial and organisational tasks in their leadership of the school. Transformational leadership is prominently featured in the school leadership literature and instructional leadership is focused upon the work of school leaders in the improvement of student learning. A distributed leadership model is also relevant to the work of assistant principals as they draw their authority not only from their position in the school's leadership hierarchy but also from delegated responsibility from the principal. This section of the literature review will address each of these four leadership models separately, exploring their origins and opinions of key scholars. In addition, relationships between models will be explored. Furthermore, the relevance of each leadership model to the work of assistant principals will be outlined.

2.3.1 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is an essential element of the work of assistant principals. Transactional leadership, at its very simplest and as its name implies, is an exchange of one thing for another (Marzano et al., 2005). Burns (1979), in his context of political leadership, saw the exchange as involving economic, political or psychological rewards. Bass (1985) expanded this list slightly to include feedback and public recognition as rewards. Transactional leadership involves an agreement as to what a subordinate needs to achieve and, if accomplished, what the leader will provide as the agreed-upon reward (Bass, 1985). Essentially, it relies on extrinsic motivation for action (Connolly et al., 2019). Transactional leadership seeks to use "contingent rewards and sanctions to make individual employees pursue their own self-interest while contributing to organisational goal attainment" (Jensen et al., 2019, p. 12).

In 1973, Downton (as cited in Antonakis, 2017), and later Bass and his colleagues (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Hater & Bass, 1988), outlined three forms of transactional leadership. First, contingency reward is the act of providing positive reinforcement, such as praise, financial gain, or the avoidance of a reprimand, when agreed-upon tasks are successfully completed. Second, management-by-exception in its passive form sees the leader intervening in the work of others only when a problem occurs. Third, management-by-exception in its active form involves the leader deliberately anticipating potential issues, noticing and addressing sub-standard work and setting up procedures and standards to avoid these issues (Bass, 1985).

Active management-by-exception and the associated transactional behaviour of creating and maintaining an orderly work environment have led many scholars to liken transactional leaders to the traditional role of managers (Bass, 1985; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Managers direct the operation of the organisation and expect that organisational members will efficiently carry out their responsibilities, which will, in turn, lead to the facilitation of the work of others (Leithwood & Duke, 2004). Managers focus on planning, coordinating, budgeting, organising, and the administration of human resources (Leithwood & Duke, 2004). The importance of management to the success of an organisation was described by Burke (2008): "an organisation can survive for some period of time (not long, however) without

leadership but can hardly survive at all without management" (p. 235). There has been some controversy around the terms 'leader' and 'manager', with debate regarding how they overlap and whether management tasks can be considered leadership (Lunenburg, 2011; Zaleznik, 2004). Connolly et al. (2019) supported the notion that management is a form of leadership as it results in others being influenced by the manager's actions. A similar view was expressed by Cuban (1988), who asserted that administrative tasks, such as managing resources and activities, when directed at advancing the organisation's goals, are an inherent and essential aspect of leadership. In most cases, where educational management is referred to in the literature, the skills and behaviours described are within the realm of transactional leadership.

Transactional leadership is necessary to ensure the smooth running of the school and is essential for the continuing stability of the organisation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). In schools, transactional leadership is often linked to the accountability demands of systems and governments (Smith & Bell, 2011) and is focused on maintaining the status quo (Silins, 1994). It does not enhance long-term commitment to the school's improvement, vision, or values (Bush, 2007); however, the work of school leaders as they seek to improve student outcomes can result in transactional but necessary behaviours. These behaviours may include managing underperforming staff (Smith & Bell, 2011) or ensuring a predictable and orderly school environment that allows teachers and other staff to carry out their tasks with minimal interruption and with certainty about what is required of them (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Leithwood and Duke (2004) identified ten common transactional leadership responsibilities in their meta-analysis of 40 studies of school leadership. These included ensuring the school is adequately resourced and that those resources are distributed effectively, managing school facilities and the student body, buffering staff from disruptions to the teaching programs and accommodating district policies. Additionally, anticipating problems and taking measures to respond to them, mediating conflict and attending to the political demands of school functioning were identified as transactional leadership responsibilities. More recent literature also notes the importance of transactional leadership in schools. Leithwood et al. (2020), in an update of their 2008 review of literature about successful school leadership, noted the existence of 11 mediators, or conditions, of leadership that are within the

leader's control and that have significant direct effects on students. These mediators were grouped into four categories, one of which was labelled as organisational, which describes transactional behaviours, including creating a safe and orderly environment and the organisation of planning and instructional time.

Assistant principals undertake many transactional leadership responsibilities within the school (Greenfield, 1985a; Harvey, 1994b; Weller & Weller, 2002). A study by Melton et al. (2012) found that in the United States, assistant principals spend 55% of their time on management tasks, while in the United Kingdom, the figure was 30% and in China, 36%. Harvey's (1991) research revealed that assistant principals wanted to spend less time on management tasks in Western Australian government schools. However, he also observed that there was reluctance from assistant principals to forgo the 'traditional' aspects of the role, which he defined as being centred on staff management, administration and students. Specifically, assistant principals wanted to remain responsible for emergency procedures, the school's day-to-day operations, equipment and supplies, teacher duty schedules, and student discipline. Harvey speculated that assistant principals saw these management tasks as a source of power, status and visibility within the school community. He also posited that assistant principals realised that no other role within the school could realistically take over these management responsibilities.

2.3.2 Transformational Leadership
Transformational leadership is one of two educational leadership approaches, the other being instructional leadership, garnering the most attention in the literature on school leadership (Berkovich, 2018; Murphy et al., 2006; Robinson & Gray, 2019; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Its origins lay in Downton's concept of charismatic and inspirational leadership, proposed in 1973 (Antonakis, 2017; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Hater & Bass, 1988) and was further articulated by Burns (1979) and Bass (1985). Burns' (1979) definition of transformational leadership saw "leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Transformational leadership focuses on developing trusting relationships to inspire and motivate employees to improve their performance. A transformational leader attempts to formulate a vision, share it with employees and sustain the vision over time (Jensen et al., 2019). These behaviours aim to internalise the organisation's values and objectives so that "employees transcend self-interest and strive toward

organisational goals" (Jacobsen et al., 2022, p. 118). Transformational leadership in education was described by Hattie (2012) as being "attuned to inspiring teachers to new levels of energy and commitment towards a common mission" (p. 154).

There has been a shift in the literature away from the 'great man or woman' or 'hero' leadership models associated initially with transformational leadership (Harris, 2013; Mulford, 2008). At the core of transformational leadership is relationships: "It is the quality of the relationship that the leader has with each and every person they are leading that is the most important characteristic of transformational leadership" (Branson et al., 2019, p. 221). Influence is enacted through reciprocal relationships rather than positional authority or power (Printy et al., 2009). Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) suggested that the most effective transformational leaders share their relational power and influence to achieve the organisation's goals, which leads to higher performance and productivity. Whilst the principal would need to be supportive, the role of transformational leader can be held by anyone in the school (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Pont et al., 2008; Printy et al., 2009).

Bass (1985) identified four dimensions of transformational leadership: charisma, inspirational leadership, individualised consideration and intellectual stimulation. He later replaced the term 'charisma' with 'idealised influence', and these dimensions became known as the "Four I's" (Bass & Avolio, 1994, p. 3). The first dimension of the 'Four I's' model, idealised influence, sees the leader admired, trusted and respected. The leader can be relied upon to do as they say, has high standards of moral conduct, and followers aspire to emulate the leader. The second aspect of Bass's transformational leadership model, inspirational motivation, has the leader inspire and motivate their followers by providing meaning and challenge to their work. Enthusiasm, optimism and team spirit are generated, and the leader creates clearly articulated expectations that their followers want to meet. Intellectual stimulation is the third component of the 'Four I's' and entails the transformational leader challenging followers to be innovative, creative and approach situations in new and progressive ways. New ideas are welcomed, even when they differ from the leader's beliefs, and there is no public criticism of others' mistakes. The fourth aspect of Bass's transformational leadership model, individualised consideration, involves the leader acting as a coach or mentor to support followers. Individual differences are accepted and valued, and there is genuine concern for the needs and feelings of

followers. Tasks are delegated to develop followers, and the leader interacts personally and genuinely, encouraging two-way communication (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Initially basing his work on Bass's 'Four I's', Leithwood, both alone and in conjunction with a variety of his colleagues (e.g., Leithwood, 2012, 2017; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005, 2006; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Sun & Leithwood, 2012), has been instrumental in expanding the body of literature regarding transformational leadership in schools and the impact it has on students and teachers (Berkovich, 2018; Hallinger, 2003; Kwan, 2020; Mulford, 2008). Leithwood and his collaborators have created several iterations of transformational leadership behaviours (Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, 2005, 2006; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). His initial conceptualisation of transformational leadership had six dimensions: vision and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support and performance expectations (Leithwood et al., 1999). Leithwood's most recent summary of effective leadership behaviours, the Ontario Leadership Framework (Leithwood, 2012), incorporates many aspects of his original transformational leadership practices; however, with the benefit of extensive research and testing, he has broadened the scope to include elements of instructional and transactional leadership (Leithwood, 2012, 2017; Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

2.3.3 Relationship Between Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Burns (1979) viewed leadership as a continuum, with transformational leadership at one end and transactional leadership at the other. He identified transactional leadership as the least effective of the two extremes and believed that leaders are either one or the other (as cited in Leithwood & Duke, 2004; and Silins, 1994). Therefore, as a leadership approach, Burns saw transactional leadership as less likely to fully meet the needs of successful and progressive organisations on its own. In contrast to Burns, Bass (1985) saw transactional and transformational leadership as having an orthogonal relationship, being that a leader can, and should, demonstrate both leadership behaviours.

Numerous authors (Bendikson et al., 2012; Leithwood, 2012, 2017; Leithwood & Duke, 2004; Robinson & Gray, 2019) have stated that it is difficult to separate management responsibilities in school settings from other leadership roles and that school leaders need to be able to address both management and leadership tasks. Smith and Bell (2011) likewise noted that leaders need to draw on both transactional and transformational practices, and the extent to which they demonstrate each model depends upon their leadership experience and context. Avolio et al. (1999) also found a strong correlation between transactional and transformational approaches and that successful leaders demonstrate skills in both areas. In addition, they suggested that transactional leadership may provide a foundation of trust and dependability for transformational leadership to achieve higher levels of performance and staff motivation. Leithwood and his colleagues (Leithwood, 2012, 2017; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012) agreed with this correlation and identified that transformational approaches are built upon transactional practices. These researchers incorporated transactional leadership strategies into their transformational leadership framework to make explicit this important relationship. Specifically, the following transactional behaviours were identified as essential to support transformational leadership: "establishing effective staffing practices, providing instructional support, monitoring school activities, and buffering staff from excessive and distracting external demands" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005, p. 181).

2.3.4 Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership has its origins in the effective schools movement in the United States in the late 1970s (Kwan, 2020) and 1980s (Hallinger, 2003; Mulford, 2008; Robinson & Gray, 2019). This leadership model emerged as a result of research that focused on the impact of the principal on student learning (Gumus et al., 2018). Instructional leadership was the focus of intense research and popularity from 1980 until 1995 but gave way to interest in transformational leadership in the early and mid-1990s (Gumus et al., 2018; Hallinger, 2003).

This move away from instructional leadership was primarily due to disillusionment with the top-down approach, which was characteristic of instructional leadership at the time (Hallinger, 2003). One of the most popular and often cited instructional leadership models was created by Hallinger et al. (1983). They

described three components that were essentially principal-centred (Gumus et al., 2018): "defining the school's mission, managing curriculum and instruction and promoting a positive school learning climate" (Hallinger et al., 1983, p. 85). Contributing to the top-down approach of instructional leadership, the effective schools movement in the United States predominantly focused on poor urban schools needing substantial improvement. Principals of these schools were expected to be strong and directive to ensure change was implemented, and they were viewed as the coordinators, controllers and supervisors of curriculum and instruction (Bamburg & Andrews, 1991). The focus on instructional leadership returned in the early 2000s and was assisted by a meta-analysis by Robinson et al. (2008), which reported that instructional leadership's effects on student outcomes were three times as impactful as transformational leadership. After this point, instructional leadership became a contributing solution to increased school accountability and performance standards.

Instructional leadership has become a well-researched topic in modern literature, usually relating to the role of the principal (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson & Gray, 2019). The research has been concerned with leaders' direct and indirect influence on students' learning and teachers' pedagogical practices. Scholars have explored the vital role school leaders play in improving student outcomes through instructional leadership (Dempster et al., 2012; Hattie, 2009, 2012, 2015; Hattie & Zierer, 2019; Robinson, 2007; Robinson & Gray, 2019; Robinson et al., 2008; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012; Timperley, 2011). Hattie and Zierer (2019) noted that instructional leadership is the most impactful leadership approach on student achievement, and Sharratt (2019) saw instructional leadership as an essential aspect of improving classroom practices. In a meta-analysis of research into school leadership approaches, instructional leadership practices were found to have a significantly positive impact, and the closer school leaders were involved in the teaching and learning of the school, the stronger the effect on student learning (Robinson et al., 2008). Day et al. (2016) noted that instructional leadership emphasises "the importance of establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum, and evaluating teachers and teaching" (p. 224), and Hattie (2015) asserted that instructional leaders "look to the teachers' and the school's impact on student learning and instructional issues" (p. 37).

Robinson and Gray (2019) detailed five leadership dimensions evident in successful schools based on a meta-analysis by Robinson et al. (2008). While not explicitly labelled, these dimensions align with instructional leadership practices. The authors note that the extent to which each dimension is focused upon will be contextual to the school's needs regarding student performance (Robinson & Gray, 2019). The first dimension is setting goals and expectations and involves school leaders determining appropriate goals, communicating them effectively and gaining commitment from others to achieve them. The second dimension is resourcing strategically, which sees available resources being deployed towards the agreed-upon goals. The third dimension is ensuring the quality of teaching and incorporates three aspects: developing a coherent instructional framework, monitoring and using evidence about student outcomes and evaluating teachers and their teaching. The fourth of Robinson and Gray's leadership dimensions is leading teacher learning and development and includes providing high-quality and targeted professional learning. The fifth dimension is ensuring an orderly and safe learning environment that provides a physical and social atmosphere conducive to effective teaching and learning. These dimensions share common themes with many of the instructional leadership practices outlined by several researchers (Blase & Blase, 1999; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger et al., 1983; Krug, 1992). However, Robinson and Gray also pointed out the importance of relationships, usually associated with transformational leadership, within each of these dimensions in ensuring staff understand, and are committed to, the school's goals.

Notwithstanding the strong support in the literature for the effectiveness of instructional leadership, it is not always successfully implemented, despite the best intentions of the principal. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) described three barriers principals might encounter in adopting an instructional leadership approach: expertise, time and the conflict between what principals traditionally do and what they want to be doing. Furthermore, Hallinger and Murphy highlighted the challenge of ensuring instructional leadership by principals is both possible and sustainable in the longer term. To address these challenges, Hallinger and Murphy outlined three strategies that, when used together, can assist principals in finding the capacity and time to lead learning sustainably. Firstly, principals should articulate their personal vision and then align their day-to-day tasks to it, using it as a lens to prioritise the

importance and urgency of their work activities. Secondly, the instructional leadership role should be expanded to include other leaders, whether they be in formal or informal leadership positions. Thirdly, professional learning and capacity-building are essential to build the staff's collective capacity to improve student learning outcomes. These strategies align with the assertions by some authors that instructional leadership needs to be less focused on the principal and instead follow a model where responsibility for instructional leadership is more widely spread (Gumus et al., 2018; Printy et al., 2009).

Effective instructional leadership requires a sound contemporary understanding of high-quality educational practices and full engagement in their implementation. As Cuban (2004) put it, "no school can become effective without the visible and active involvement of a principal hip-deep in the elementary [primary] school instructional program" (p. 57). Numerous scholars and researchers have provided principals with the professional knowledge required in this regard. Hattie (2009) conducted meta-analyses of the research into the most impactful teaching strategies on student learning. He and his colleagues (Hattie, 2012, 2015; Hattie et al., 2016; Hattie & Zierer, 2019) have updated these data as new research comes to light. Marzano et al. (2001) identified nine high-yield instructional strategies, and Sharratt (2019) and Sharratt and Fullan (2012) described strategies and approaches for building the instructional capacity of teachers. Muijs et al. (2014) summarised the findings of educational effectiveness research and the need for up-to-date and relevant professional learning for teachers. In addition, school systems, such as the Australian state of Victoria's Education Department, produce summary documents of high-impact teaching strategies to support the work of principals as instructional leaders (Department of Education Victoria, 2020).

Research into the role of assistant principals as instructional leaders is largely neglected in the literature (Searby et al., 2016; Shaked, 2020) and did not consistently appear in lists of assistant principal responsibilities until the 2000s (Oleszewski et al., 2012). However, there have been recommendations over the decades for leadership of teaching and learning to be incorporated into the role of assistant principal in primary schools (Calabrese, 1991; Greenfield, 1985a; Harvey, 1994b; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017). Gallop et al. (2021) asserted that assistant principals should be seen as "influencers of a good school

and quality teachers" (p. 111) and that a cohesive leadership team is an essential element of a good school. Having a supportive principal was found to be the most significant factor in enhancing assistant principals' contribution to instructional leadership (Celikten, 2001). In research in New South Wales, 92% of assistant principals reported that sustaining quality teaching and learning in their schools was hindered by administrative demands imposed by their Department of Education (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018). Similarly, Celikten (2001) found that a lack of a clear role description and the need to perform a wide range of duties in the course of their work inhibited the ability of assistant principals to engage in instructional leadership.

The importance of instructional leadership to assistant principals has evolved, as evidenced by Glanz (1994a) and Sun (2012). These researchers used similar research instruments 16 years apart. In 1994, assistant principals viewed instructional leadership as the fifth most important task and twentieth in terms of the opportunities to engage in it (Glanz, 1994a). In 2010, there was a shift to instructional leadership being viewed as the most important part of the work of assistant principals and sixth in terms of how often assistant principals had opportunities to lead in this area (Sun, 2012).

2.3.5 Relationship Between Instructional and Transactional Leadership

Several researchers have incorporated transactional practices into instructional leadership models. For example, Peterson (1989, as cited in Kleine-Kracht, 1993) identified that instructional leadership could be described in two ways: direct and indirect. Direct instructional leadership involves working directly with teachers to improve teaching practices, whereas indirect leadership shapes the conditions for successful teaching and learning (Kleine-Kracht, 1993). Shaping school conditions includes elements of transactional leadership, such as strategic resourcing, creating a safe and orderly environment (Bendikson et al., 2012) and activities that ensure school activities operate in alignment with the school's mission (Hallinger, 2005).

Links can also be made between transactional leadership and student-centred leadership, which could be considered a form of instructional leadership, as described by Robinson and her colleagues (Robinson & Gray, 2019; Robinson et al., 2008). Five student-centred leadership practices were identified through a meta-

analysis of research into the practices that had the most significant impact on student learning and wellbeing (Robinson & Gray, 2019; Robinson et al., 2008). Of those five practices, two contain elements of transactional leadership. The second dimension, resourcing strategically, involves ensuring that "scarce resources such as money, time on the timetable, teaching materials and instructional expertise [are allocated] in ways that give priority to key goals" (Robinson & Gray, 2019, p. 176). The fifth dimension, ensuring an orderly and safe environment, includes creating a "physical and social environment that makes it possible for teachers to teach and for students to focus on, enjoy and succeed in their learning" (Robinson & Gray, 2019, p. 181).

2.3.6 Relationship Between Instructional and Transformational Leadership

Whilst sometimes viewed in the literature as alternative models (Kwan, 2020), numerous researchers have seen a need for principals to be both instructional and transformational leaders (Hattie & Zierer, 2019; Kwan, 2020; Robinson et al., 2008; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Day et al. (2016) suggested that a combination of transformational and instructional leadership has the most potent effect on student learning. Sun and Leithwood (2012) highlighted that in schools where improving educational outcomes for students is core business, it is unrealistic to separate transformational leadership from instructional leadership practices. Hattie and Zierer (2019) go further in suggesting that the synthesis of instructional and transformational practices results in collective teacher efficacy, which is particularly impactful on student learning.

There has been a move away from adopting leadership models as a whole and a greater focus on a collection of leadership practices, which may be drawn from several models (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Robinson & Gray, 2019). For example, the term 'integrated leadership' was proposed by Marks and Printy (2003) to describe a leadership approach where transformational and instructional leadership practices coexisted. Marks and Printy (2003) highlighted the functions of each approach: "transformational leadership builds organisational capacity whereas instructional leadership builds individual and collective competence" (p. 377). Whilst acknowledging the different purposes of each leadership style, these researchers observed that school leaders who successfully combine both leadership models

create a culture of shared instructional leadership that sees the principal and teachers having a mutual influence on the school's educational program.

In their research in 22 schools in the United States, Marks and Printy (2003) found that schools using an integrated model, combining transformational and instructional practices, saw higher student achievement and teacher commitment. They also observed that transformational leadership was a pre-condition to the development of shared instructional leadership; however, the presence of a transformational leader did not automatically result in shared instructional leadership. Instead, their research indicated that if teachers saw the principal as an authentic and trustworthy instructional leader, then "instructional leadership can itself be transformational" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 393). A follow-up study by the same researchers (Printy et al., 2009) confirmed the results of the previous research, adding that transformational leadership could be shared to ensure relationships within the school were conducive to the ongoing improvement of teaching and learning. Building upon the work of Marks and Printy, Kwan (2020) sought to explore the moderating effect of transformational leadership on instructional leadership and, therefore, on student performance. Her research in secondary schools in Hong Kong indicated that the level of transformational leadership in a school directly affected student outcomes through instructional leadership.

Leithwood developed the Ontario Leadership Framework (Leithwood, 2012), building upon his extensive research in educational leadership, particularly transformational leadership. This integrated leadership model was aimed at school leaders, including assistant principals, and outlined 21 leadership practices organised under five domains. Leithwood (2017) defined a practice as a "bundle of activities by a person or group of persons which reflect the particular circumstances in which they find themselves with some shared outcome(s) in mind" (p. 32). These practices aim to capture the direct efforts of school leaders to improve the quality of the pedagogical approaches in the school and create the organisational conditions to support these improvements. The first three domains of practice in the Ontario Leadership Framework are setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organisation to sustain desired practices (Leithwood, 2012). Leithwood aligned these domains to social theory, suggesting that "the performance of organisational members is a function of their motivation, ability and

the settings in which they work" (Leithwood, 2012, p. 12). The fourth domain of practice is improving the instructional program, which Leithwood links to the core work of schools in teaching and learning. The fifth and final domain of practice is accountability, which reflects the increasing requirements for principals and schools to justify their work (Leithwood, 2012).

2.3.7 Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is "leadership practice [that is] stretched over multiple leaders" (Spillane, 2006, p. 33). In the literature, it is sometimes referred to as shared, team, or democratic leadership; however, these terms are not synonyms for distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005). Harris (2013) suggested that each of these leadership labels has nuanced definitions that may cause confusion when used interchangeably. Yukl (1999) noted that the benefit of a shared approach to leadership means that the organisation "does not require an individual who can perform all of the essential leadership functions, only a set of people who can collectively perform them" (p. 292). However, Harris (2014) cautioned that distributed leadership should not be a means of simply transferring workload to others but rather is a "collaborative and interdependent professional practice" (p. 6) that can be a strategy for attaining better organisational outcomes in the right conditions.

The need for schools to engage in distributed leadership is supported in the literature. Jansen and du Plessis (2020) identified that principals who use a distributed approach are considered to be more successful leaders. Using a term often associated with transformational leadership, Gallop et al. (2021) stated that "the 'influencers' of a good school and quality teachers involve not only principals but also school leaders of all sorts" (p. 111). The notion of a principal acting independently is not realistic in meeting the needs of modern education systems (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020). School leadership requires formal leaders to actively build leadership capacity and capability in others through distributed leadership (Harris, 2013). The role of the principal is "to support those with the expertise to lead, wherever they reside within the organisation" (Harris, 2013, p. 551). A report commissioned by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development described the importance of recognising and rewarding distributed leadership to meet the challenges of contemporary schools and to support the principal in their

ever-expanding responsibilities (Pont et al., 2008). A longitudinal Australian study of school leadership similarly noted that:

> the best leadership for organisational learning (and a community focus) was a principal skilled in transformational leadership and administrators (deputy principals, heads of departments) and teachers who are actively involved in the core work of the school (shared or distributive leadership) (Mulford, 2003, p. 20).

Leithwood et al. (2020) also supported distributed leadership when they asserted that "school leadership can have an especially positive influence on school and student outcomes when it is distributed" (p. 13).

Spillane (2006) outlined three types of distributed leadership in schools. First, division of labour sees leaders taking responsibility for discrete areas of practice. Second, co-performance sees leaders working collaboratively on the same task or responsibility. Third, parallel performance involves leaders each working on the same task independently. Distributed leadership can be enacted formally and informally (Harris, 2013; Spillane, 2006). The formalisation of distributed leadership might result in team structures and the designation of formal leadership roles, such as the assistant principal. Informal distributed leadership may be exercised through individuals, ad hoc groups or committees with skills to meet particular needs (Gallop et al., 2021; Mulford, 2003; Pont et al., 2008). Spillane (2006) suggested that principals and assistant principals tend to be generalist leaders with expertise and responsibility for a range of tasks, but those in other leadership roles, such as coaches, or subject-area coordinators, tended to take on more specialist leadership tasks. Distributed leadership does not align itself with other forms of leadership; leadership can be transformational or transactional and still be distributed (Spillane, 2006).

Formal distributed leadership involving assistant principals has three main advantages for principals. First, when two or more people, such as the principal and assistant principal, develop a close working relationship and build trust in each other, the distribution of leadership begins to evolve so that the strengths and weaknesses of individuals are balanced out within the relationship (Spillane, 2006). Gronn (2003) described this process as "intuitive working relationships" (p. 43). Second, rather than diminishing or diluting the power and influence of the principal, distributed

leadership has been shown to serve and extend their leadership (Pont et al., 2008; Silins, 1994). Third, distributed leadership strengthens leadership succession planning, especially in small schools (Pont et al., 2008).

2.3.8 Section Summary

This section of the literature review outlined four models of leadership that may enhance the role of assistant principal. Transactional leadership is required to ensure the smooth running of the school to allow for other forms of leadership to occur. Transformational leadership focuses on supportive relationships with staff members to inspire and motivate them towards greater achievement and commitment to the purpose of their work. Instructional leadership, which is unique to education settings, addresses the core business of schools in providing optimal learning opportunities to students through high-impact teaching practices. Distributed leadership allows for the sharing of power within the school leading to broader influence. The literature identifies advantages in adopting an integrated model of leadership, which combines leadership behaviours drawing, to various degrees, from transactional, transformational, instructional and distributed approaches. This section of the review of literature has informed the following research questions:

- How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
- Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?

The review of literature now considers the aspects and considerations in leading Catholic schools.

2.4   Leadership of Catholic Schools

Catholic schools in Australia have their origin in the early Australian Church, with faith-based schools being among the first in the country (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014). By 1833, there were ten Catholic schools in Australia (Dixon & Hughes, 2005). Having initially received government funding to run Catholic schools, in the period between 1872 and 1893 all Australian states had withdrawn this financial support. As a result, the Bishops of Australia appealed to religious congregations in Ireland and Europe to provide staff for their schools (Dixon & Hughes, 2005). Religious brothers, priests and sisters were dispersed across Australia by their congregations to establish schools for poor and disadvantaged children. Over time, as the number of religious declined or they diverted their attention to non-educational

priorities, more lay teachers and leaders began working in Catholic schools (Hansen, 2001; Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014). By 1970, government funding of Catholic schools in Australia had been reinstated (National Catholic Education Commission, 2020). By the late 1980s, most Catholic schools in Australia were staffed entirely by lay teachers and principals (Hansen, 2001), meaning that lay leadership of Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) schools is a relatively new reality.

This section of the literature review will describe the work of leaders in Catholic schools. The dual responsibilities of Catholic school leaders to provide both faith and educational leadership, as well as the responsibility of leaders in cultivating the school's Catholic identity, will be outlined. In addition, servant leadership, often associated with the leadership of Catholic organisations (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014; Walker & Scharf, 2001), will be explored. The role of the Religious Education Coordinator, frequently assigned to the assistant principal, will also be outlined.

2.4.1 Catholic Identity

Catholic identity is the integration of the religious dimension into all aspects of Catholic education and is a defining feature of Catholic schools. The Vatican describes Catholic identity as "faith, culture and life… brought into harmony" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 34). The Catholic identity of a school allows it to be an instrument of the evangelising mission of the Church (Miller, 2006). The Church recognises that Catholic schools may be the only contact some families will have with the Church and that Catholic schools act as a conduit of the local parish to evangelise, educate and form healthy and morally sound members. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982). Therefore, a school's Catholic identity is essential in fulfilling the Church's evangelising mission, and the school principal has a key role to play in this task (Branson et al., 2019).

Based upon Vatican documents, Miller (2006) identified five essential marks of a Catholic school that give a school a Catholic identity. First, a Catholic school is "inspired by a supernatural vision" (p. 20). The Church sees education as forming good citizens who enrich society with Gospel values and who have a supernatural destiny in the afterlife. The dignity of the human person is emphasised through the development of the spiritual life of members of the school community. Second, a Catholic school is "founded by Christian anthropology" (p. 22). The school is focused

on Jesus Christ, and the Gospel is the centre of all actions and considerations within the school. Christ is brought to life in the lives of the students. Third, a Catholic school is "animated by communion and community" (p. 28). The school community requires teamwork among its members, cooperation between the school staff and bishops, personal interactions between educators and students, and a physical environment that includes visible signs of Catholic culture, including prayer. Fourth, a Catholic school is "imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum" (p. 42). Students are developed intellectually, physically, psychologically and morally, and their religious capacities are improved through the lens of the Gospel and Church teachings. Fifth, a Catholic school is "sustained by Gospel witness" (p. 53). Teachers and leaders are responsible for creating a Christian school environment and should serve as authentic witnesses of their faith.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (2021a) reflected Miller's (2006) summary of Vatican documents in their pastoral letter commemorating the bicentennial of Catholic education in Australia. They noted that leaders and staff must be fully committed to developing and maintaining its Catholic identity for a school to be genuinely Catholic. Young people should be afforded opportunities to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and form a genuine connection with the Church. The Bishops also expressed that the Religious Education curriculum should be given priority and be engagingly and professionally delivered so that students can integrate faith, culture and life successfully. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference emphasised the relationship between schools and parishes and the need for this relationship to be reciprocal. This partnership should include opportunities for the school community to celebrate through liturgy, sacrament and prayer. Additionally, Catholic schools should provide visual representations of the Catholic faith within their environments.

The development of a faith community is at the core of the work of Catholic school leaders. Catholic Education Western Australia (n.d.-c, para. 1) explains it thus: "Catholic schools offer a rich religious life to their communities. They nurture and enrich students' religious and spiritual formation through prayer and liturgical experiences; the celebration of sacraments; faith formation and social justice activities". Ciriello (1994, as cited in Spesia, 2016) identified four responsibilities for principals of Catholic schools in fostering faith communities. There should be

opportunities for staff to engage in spiritual growth, students should receive high-quality religious instruction, there should be occasions for the school community to celebrate faith and, finally, the fostering of Christian service should be a priority.

A study by Schuttloffel (2013) found that "school leaders tend to create a Catholic identity within their Catholic school community that mirrors their own personal Catholic identity" (p. 89). Lay Catholic school leaders may feel underprepared to take on the responsibility of faith leader (d'Arbon et al., 2002). In the past, when Catholic schools were predominantly staffed by members of religious orders, Catholic culture was "transmitted, almost through osmosis" (Cook, 1998, p. 133) throughout the community. Lay leaders, from a range of backgrounds, with various levels of religious knowledge, must be more intentional in transmitting Catholic identity and culture (Cook, 1998). The expectation that principals should be exemplary models of catholicity and responsible for the school's Catholic identity was found to be a disincentive for assistant principals in New South Wales to apply for principalship of Catholic schools (d'Arbon et al., 2002). Therefore, it is essential that the leadership team and all members of the school community share the responsibility of nurturing a faith community (d'Arbon et al., 2002).

Catholic schools operate in an increasingly secular society. They receive less support for their religious mission from families and communities than in the past when family engagement in the Church was higher (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2021a). The development of the school's Catholic identity may be made more difficult by a lack of connection between the school's families and the Church. This disconnection results from families who identify as Catholic but do not practise their faith or attend Mass and from the enrolment of other-than-Catholic students (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2021a; Rymarz & Franchi, 2019). In 2022 in CEWA's system of schools, Catholic students made up 61.5% of enrolments. In the Perth metropolitan area, 65.4% of students were Catholic, and in non-metropolitan areas, the figure was 47.1% (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2022b). Of those that are Catholic, the majority are not actively engaged in the Church. In 2016, just 11.8% of Catholic Australians attended Church, with the median age of churchgoers being 68 years old (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2021b). The challenge of low levels of 'churched' families results in

Catholic school leaders needing to work purposefully and deliberately to cater to students who do not share a common experience of the Church (Rymarz, 2022).

2.4.2 The Dual Responsibilities of Catholic School Leaders

Catholic school leaders have dual responsibilities: they are required to have both professional and spiritual competence to carry out their role successfully (Belmonte & Cranston, 2007; Neidhart & Lamb, 2013). This expectation adds complexity and challenge to their work, especially when considered against the backdrop of increasing educational demands and an increasingly secular society. Belmonte and Cranston (2007) noted that the "expectations on [Catholic school principals] and the demands on them, make being a lay principal of a Catholic school today and in the future, a role perhaps only the most dedicated and able might choose to take on" (p. 18). The dual responsibilities of Catholic school leadership for principals may also impact the role of assistant principals in their senior leadership position.

Leaders in Catholic schools have the same educational and organisational responsibilities as their counterparts in government schools. All Catholic schools in Australia must deliver the curriculum specified by the laws relevant to their jurisdiction. Schools in Western Australia are mandated to teach the Western Australian Curriculum and meet the school standards set out by the School Education Act 1999 (Department of Education Western Australia, 2019), the School Education Regulations 2000 (Department of Education Western Australia, 2020) and the Registration Standards for Non-Government Schools (Department of Education Western Australia, 2022). Catholic schools in Western Australia are also bound by the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia policies and are required to teach Religious Education as an additional learning area (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009).

In addition to fulfilling the requirements set out by governing authorities, Catholic school leaders have the responsibility of helping to fulfil the evangelising mission of the Church (Nuzzi et al., 2012; Spesia, 2016). Evangelisation is "the process by which the Church, moved by the Spirit, proclaims and spreads the Gospel throughout the entire world" (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 48). Neidhart and Lamb (2013) noted that Catholic school leaders "are required to

balance an educational agenda with a religious mission" (p. 70). In Catholic schools in Western Australia, CEWA policy states that "the principal must serve the Church and contribute to its evangelising mission" (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c, para. 5). Additionally, the Bishops of Western Australia ask Catholic school leaders to bear personal witness to their faith and to view their role as Christian service (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009). Neidhart and Lamb (2013) found that Catholic school principals entered the role with a sound understanding of the behaviours associated with faith leadership and that this understanding was reinforced through a combination of socialisation and formal studies.

To help fulfil its evangelising mission through Christian service, the Church asks that lay educators and leaders in Catholic schools see their work as a vocation, not just a profession (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982). The employment contracts for both principals and assistant principals in CEWA schools emphasise this vocational view by calling upon school leaders to be in support of Church teachings in all aspects of their work and personal lives:

> Through both work and personal example, the Employee shall strive to help students and staff to understand, accept and appreciate Catholic doctrines, tenets, beliefs, teachings and values and will avoid, whether by word, action or lifestyle, influences upon students and staff that are contrary to the teaching and values of the Catholic Church (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-d, p. 4).

However, Watkins (2018) conducted a large-scale study of Catholic school leadership in England and Wales and cautioned that the term 'vocation' in reference to lay leaders in Catholic schools could be problematic. Due to an historical association with being called to commit a lifetime to become a member of a religious denomination, the term vocation may imply that Catholic school leaders are expected to devote so much of themselves to their work that they may be led to burnout (Watkins, 2018). Nonetheless, even with that danger recognised, participants in Watkin's study readily used the term vocation to define their work.

Several of the leadership models previously discussed in this chapter are also identified as essential aspects of Catholic school leadership as they help further the mission of the Church. Nuzzi et al. (2012) described Catholic school leaders as

exercising leadership in managerial, instructional and spiritual domains. They cautioned, however, that these should not be seen as three separate responsibilities. Rather, the Catholic school leader demonstrates spiritual leadership in all aspects of their role, distinguishing their position as a religious one. Lichter (2010, as cited in Spesia, 2016) found a high correlation between intrinsic religiosity, which is the focus of the individual on prayer and meditation, and transformational leadership. She suggested that this link is due to the leader embodying the teachings of the Church they represent and therefore fulfilling its mission. The importance of instructional leadership in Catholic schools is evident in the Church's mission to educate and develop the whole person. The Vatican calls on Catholic school staff to act professionally and seek ongoing professional learning to ensure they use up-to-date pedagogical methods (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982). The Bishops of Western Australia reinforce this focus on quality teaching by stating that "for a school to be Catholic, it must first be a good school … otherwise it will be unable to fulfil its mission" (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, p. 12). Catholic school leaders must not lose sight of their core business as educators but must do so in the context of the Church's mission.

Catholic school leaders are responsible for building and enhancing relationships with members of the school community so that their duties in the school's educational and religious leadership can be enacted. A positive school climate, underpinned by healthy relationships built upon Christian values, is essential for a Catholic school (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014). The pre-eminence of relationships is emphasised in Catholic schools in Western Australia as the principal is:

> responsible to the Executive Director [of CEWA] for the design and safe delivery of the educational program to each student in their community of faith by building relationships with students, staff, and the school community. This duty takes precedence over all others (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c, p. para. 5).

Leaders are called upon to be contemplative in their decision-making to build community and develop the school's Catholic identity (Schuttloffel, 2013).

2.4.3 Servant Leadership

While not exclusive to the leadership of religious organisations (Nsiah & Walker, 2013), servant leadership is a model of leadership often associated with Catholic schools (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014; Walker & Scharf, 2001). It is attributed to Greenleaf (1977), who saw leadership as rooted in the desire to help and nurture others. He stated that servant leadership "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first … then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13). Spears (2021) suggested that the terms 'servant' and 'leader' are paradoxical but that Greenleaf was able to bring them together in a meaningful manner. Working from a need to serve others may imply servitude, but this is not the reality of Greenleaf's message about leadership (van Dierendonck, 2011).

One of the reasons that servant leadership is often associated with Catholic organisations is that the core principles of servant leadership align with Gospel values. Christians recognise Jesus as exemplifying the qualities of a servant leader. (Boone & Makhani, 2012). Greenleaf and Spears (1998) noted there are over 1200 references to 'servant', 'service' or 'serve' in the Bible. For example, in the Gospel of John, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, thereby serving others from his position of leadership (American Bible Society, 2001, John 13:1-17). In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus called upon his followers to serve others: "Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, 'whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all'" (Mark 9:35). Leaders of Catholic schools in Western Australia, where the current research was undertaken, are specifically called to model their leadership on Jesus Christ, who "came to serve rather than to be served" (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, p. 43). Nsiah and Walker (2013) suggested that servant leaders should "see their leadership position as a privileged gift and he/she needs to be exemplary in their faithfulness to Jesus and to those they serve" (p. 16). Similarly, Walker and Scharf (2001) saw servant leadership in Catholic schools as "a fundamental, foundational and essential expression of their vocation within the faith-community" (p. 16).

Servant leaders prioritise the growth of others. Whilst, in general, leadership places the organisation's interests first, servant leadership prioritises the needs of the individuals within it (Greenleaf, 1977). Organisational outcomes are influenced by

fostering the growth and wellbeing of those within the organisation (Liden et al., 2008). Greenleaf (1977) suggested that leaders should ask themselves questions such as: "Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while they are being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (p. 13). This focus on people creates the conditions for safe and strong relationships (van Dierendonck, 2011), whereby those being served grow as human beings and aspire to replicate the actions of the servant leader (Nsiah & Walker, 2013). Servant leadership in schools has been shown to improve school climate (Black, 2010) and teachers' job satisfaction (Shaw & Newton, 2014).

Various authors have listed the critical skills required by servant leaders. Spears (2021) identified the skills most often mentioned in a study of Greenleaf's essays. These were listening, healing, empathy, persuasion, awareness, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth and community building. Marzano et al. (2005) included an understanding of the needs of those the leader works with, an ability to resolve and heal conflict, effective stewardship of resources, developing the skills of others and being an effective listener in their list of skills required of servant leaders. Nsiah and Walker (2013) identified 36 day-to-day servant leadership characteristics, including listening, fairness, healing, sharing successes, tenacity, role modelling, humility and courage. Liden et al. (2008) found emotional healing, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, behaving ethically, putting subordinates first, creating value for the community, and conceptual skills to be the essential dimensions of servant leadership. Whilst the scope of skills required for servant leadership is broad, servant leaders do not need to possess these skills simultaneously, and there is no identifiable hierarchy of attributes. Instead, the context of the school may dictate which skills and attributes are most essential (Nsiah & Walker, 2013).

In a study of a Catholic school in Western Australia, Striepe and O'Donoghue (2014) identified three lenses through which servant leadership could be viewed. First, being called to serve reflects the altruistic understanding of leadership of a Catholic school. Using the model of Jesus Christ, servant leaders focus on developing others and ensuring they feel valued and fulfilled. Second, leading as a community sees the leader nurturing relationships with school community members. They make an effort to get to know people, forming connections that assist in

understanding the needs of others and improve the performance of both students and staff because of increased levels of trust. Additionally, servant leaders establish teamwork, in particular amongst the leadership team. Third, building the capacity to serve focuses on "empowering, affirming, supporting and entrusting others" (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014, p. 145). Servant leaders are present in their community, moving around the school and gaining an understanding of the needs of staff and students. Servant leaders lead by example and create a psychologically safe working environment where the ideas of others are respected and valued and, when things do not go to plan, a solution-focused approach is adopted rather than a punitive one.

Servant leadership is not without its challenges. Nsiah and Walker (2013) identified three downsides to servant leadership in their study of leaders in Catholic high schools. First, some followers are reluctant to collaborate or be empowered by their leader. Second, it can be difficult for the servant leader to be humble and share control. Third, the challenge of being a role model to others may result in vulnerability and frustration. Palumbo (2016) also highlighted a potential problem with the enaction of servant leadership. He found that, in the non-profit sector, whilst servant leadership grew the team's trust, loyalty and cohesion, it also resulted in increased dependence on the leader, resulting in the followers being unable to make decisions or act for themselves.

Some authors correlate servant leadership and transformational leadership, as both focus on developing trusting interpersonal relationships. Farling et al. (1999) suggested that a servant leader is a transformational leader. Liden et al. (2008) posited that servant leadership resembles some aspects of transformational leadership, specifically the leadership components of idealised influence and intellectual stimulation. Both servant and transformational leadership models result in leaders setting an example for their followers, inspiring followers and encouraging followers to express views divergent from the leader. Whilst there are some similarities between transformational and servant leadership, Graham (1991) identified three distinct features of servant leadership that differentiate it from a transformational model: servant leaders place service to others as their prime responsibility, actively contribute to the community, and purposefully cultivate servant leadership in others. Additionally, the servant leader prioritises the needs of

those being served, whereas the transformational leader places the organisation's needs first (van Dierendonck, 2011). Moral safeguarding is another feature of servant leadership that is not necessarily present in the transformational model. Graham (1991) noted that transformational leadership can have undesirable consequences when morality is overcome by charismatic inspiration, such as in the case of dictators or cult leaders. Servant leadership provides a moral safeguard against such an outcome.

2.4.4 The Religious Education Coordinator

The leadership position of Religious Education Coordinator (REC) was created in Australian Catholic schools to assist the principal in carrying out their complex work, particularly in spiritual and religious leadership (Doherty, 2010). In Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, the role is often delegated by the principal to an assistant principal and entitled Assistant Principal Religious Education. The position of REC was introduced in Australia in the late 1960s in response to the changes seen in the Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council (Crotty, 2007). With the decline in the number of members of religious orders working in Catholic schools, and the resultant increase in lay educators teaching Religious Education, it became evident that leaders specialising in religious leadership were needed to provide support to teachers (Buchanan, 2015). Research indicates that the position of REC is both valued and significant in the life of a Catholic school and enables "the mission of the Catholic school to be more explicit and focused" (Crotty, 2007, p. 779).

The REC is usually a member of the Catholic school's leadership team (Crotty, 2007; Rymarz, 2022). Their position is often the only one with a distinctly religious focus and title, with other leaders and teachers having the religious components of their roles incorporated within their overall responsibilities (Crotty, 2007). The REC's leadership responsibilities align with other Catholic school leadership roles as they are responsible for curriculum, pastoral care, administration and community involvement (Doherty, 2010). As such, they require the same skills as other leaders, particularly in understanding contemporary pedagogy, developing a vision, and capabilities in management (Dowling, 2011). As part of the Catholic school leadership team, the REC integrates the Catholic worldview into each of their responsibilities (Crotty, 2007) and identifies opportunities and initiatives that are

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"cohesively integrated with the culture, mission and vision of the school" (Doherty, 2010, p. 23). Crotty (2007) described the REC role as being positioned both within education and the Church.

The REC is assigned to work with teachers to implement the Religious Education curriculum and coordinate the liturgical and sacramental life of the school in accordance with the school's mission (Crotty, 2007; Doherty, 2010). Crotty (2005) and Fleming (2001) suggested that the REC may be the most visible religious identity of the school. However, Neidhart and Lamb (2013) warned that the principal should never fully delegate faith leadership responsibilities as it is an integral part of their role. Crotty (2007) also cautioned that an REC would be less effective if the religious leadership of the principal is not strong, as a shared faith commitment and consistent messaging about the importance of the school's religious life is essential. This finding was supported by Buchanan (2015) and Rymarz (2022), who confirmed that effective Religious Education is more likely to occur with support from the principal.

The REC positively impacts the religious development and formation of teachers through the Religious Education curriculum and the liturgical and prayer life of the school (Buchanan, 2015; Crotty, 2007). They promote professional conversations between teachers about improving curriculum delivery (Doherty, 2010). Additionally, the REC provides opportunities for professional development and personal and spiritual growth and reflection, including through leading by personal example (Doherty, 2010). Rymarz (2022) identified that RECs need to find ways to work with other-than-Catholic staff members, those who have become disengaged from the Church, or young Catholic teachers who have not been enculturated into the Church by their families.

The role of REC can be challenging. Crotty (2007) found that the position may be too demanding and complex for one person to carry out successfully. Some RECs have teaching loads, and the pressures of combining the role of REC with teaching responsibilities "contribute an inordinate amount of stress to the position and diminishes the role" (Doherty, 2010, p. 25). The RECs in Rymarz's (2022) study expressed that they were time-poor, needed access to better resources for teaching Religious Education and would benefit from increased opportunities to network with

other RECs. Another issue facing RECs is that the role can lack definition and is ever-changing and expanding (Crotty, 2007; Dowling, 2011). Doherty (2010), however, saw the core elements of the role of REC to be reasonably consistent across Catholic schools and suggested that each REC must shape the role in response to the particulars of the school context and their knowledge and experience. Dowling (2011) indicated that the role of REC may be wrongly seen as more of a coordinator role rather than one of authentic leadership and that explicit leadership development of those in the role needs to occur.

As noted earlier in this chapter, very few Catholic school families have any connection with the Church, even among those who identify as Catholic. The work of the REC in providing opportunities for parents to engage in liturgical celebrations with their children is an essential means of evangelisation (Doherty, 2010). Religious Education Coordinators identified the increasing number of families not involved in the Church as a significant challenge to their work (Rymarz, 2022). The REC also plays an integral part in the sacramental program of the Catholic school. They provide the link between the school and the parish in enacting a "family-focused, parish-based and Catholic school-supported" (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c, para. 3) sacramental program. This support may include providing resources and personnel to support the program or membership of the parish sacramental team (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c).

The REC has a vital part to play in forging and maintaining the relationship between the school and the parish. They should be involved in the life of the parish and develop a positive working relationship with the parish priest (Buchanan, 2015; Doherty, 2010). However, the REC needs to ensure that clear expectations are established so that the demands of the parish priest on the REC are fair and reasonable (Doherty, 2010). A poor relationship with the parish priest may result in an increased workload for Catholic school leaders as they work to manage unrealistic expectations from the school's priest (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). Crotty (2007) suggested that the need to relate well both with the principal and parish priest is a significant deterrent to some individuals in applying for the position of REC.

2.4.5 Section Summary

This section of the literature review explored the particularities of the leadership of Catholic schools. It described the dual responsibilities of leaders to provide both educational and religious leadership, the importance of developing the school's Catholic identity and the perspective of servant leadership. In addition, the role of the REC, a responsibility often delegated to assistant principals, was explored. This section of the literature review has informed the following research questions:

- How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
- Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?
- Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
- Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?
- In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature concentrating on three themes relating to the research. The three themes were: comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal; leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal; and leadership of Catholic schools. The review of the literature led the researcher to develop an overarching question to guide the research: What are the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their role? From the overarching research question, five specific research questions were posed, namely:

1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
2. Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?
3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?
5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

The following chapter presents the research plan used in this enquiry.

Chapter Three – Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The literature review in Chapter Two focused attention on three themes pertinent to the study of assistant principals in the Western Australian Catholic school system. These themes were comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal, leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal and leadership of Catholic schools. The review of literature resulted in the development of the overarching research question, which formed the purpose of the study: What are the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their role? From this overarching research question, five specific research questions were posed that directed the focus of the study:

1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
2. Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?
3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?
5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

This chapter describes the research plan employed to conduct the research. It includes descriptions of the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. In addition, the study participants, measures adopted to ensure the trustworthiness of the project and data analysis procedures are discussed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the ethical considerations associated with the research, as well as a design summary. An overview of the chapter is provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Overview of Chapter Three: Research Design

3.2   Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the scaffolding of the study and serves to provide a lens for the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The framework summarises the "four elements" (Crotty, 1998, p. 5) required to design and inform an effective research study. The first element, epistemology is the overarching theory of

knowledge embedded within the theoretical perspective and methodology (Crotty, 1998). Examples of epistemology include objectivism, constructivism and subjectivism. The second element, theoretical perspective, is the "philosophical stance" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3) behind methodology selection. Some examples include positivism, interpretivism and critical inquiry. The third element, methodology, explains the strategy, plan or design behind the choice of methods (Crotty, 1998). Some examples include experimental research and action research. Finally, methods, are the techniques used to gather and analyse data related to the research questions (Crotty, 1998). Examples of methods include interviews, surveys and observations.

Based on the work of Crotty (1998), O'Donoghue (2019) formulated four questions researchers need to consider when making decisions about the theoretical framework of the study: 1) What research paradigm informs our approach to our research area of interest?; 2) What theoretical perspective do we choose within this paradigm regarding our research area of interest?; 3) What methodology do we choose as a result of our location of the research area of interest within a particular theoretical perspective derived from a particular paradigm?; 4) What methods are most appropriate to use in light of our chosen methodology? (p. 13). An overview of the theoretical framework of this study, based on these four questions, is presented in Figure 3.1, and each element is further outlined below.

Figure 3.1

Theoretical Framework of the Study
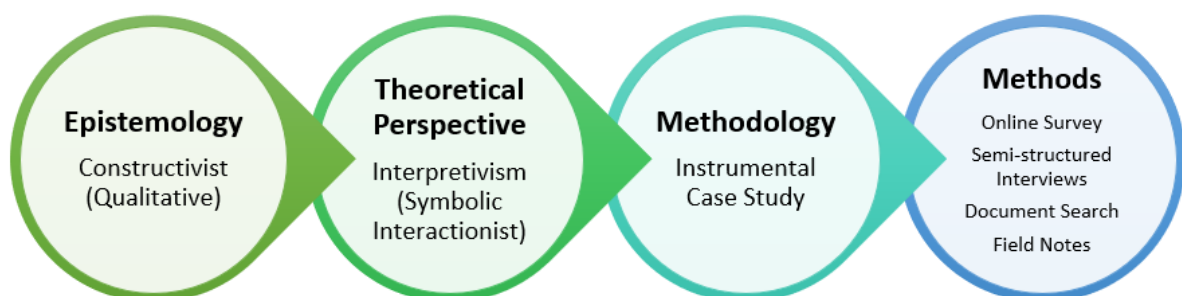
Note: Adapted from *The Foundations of Social Science Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (p.4), by Crotty, 1998.

3.2.1 *Epistemology*

Epistemology is concerned with the creation of knowledge and "how we know what we know" (Neuman, 2014, p. 95). It is "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). In other words, the epistemological stance adopted in a study guides how the research is conducted and how the truth is identified. Crotty (1998) described three major epistemological approaches: objectivism, subjectivism and constructivism. Objectivism holds that truth exists independently of thought and is waiting to be discovered. Subjectivism suggests that human beings impose meaning onto the world. Constructivism sees knowledge and meaning constructed in the mind through engagement with objects and phenomenon in the world (Crotty, 1998). This research adopted a constructivist epistemological stance to reveal the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia from the viewpoint of the assistant principals themselves.

Constructivism is typically associated with qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and allows for the capturing and honouring of multiple realities (Patton, 2015). Crotty (1998) identified three assumptions of constructivism, each of which supports qualitative methodologies. First, as constructivism focuses on making meaning within the human mind, each person's experience and interpretation of their own reality will likely be different, and each reality is valid and valuable (Crotty, 1998). The use of open-ended questions aids in discovering the constructed meaning within the individual (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Crotty's second assumption regarding constructivism is that individuals' social and historical perspectives will impact how they engage in and react to their world. Therefore, the context and environment from which an individual operates will impact their experience. Researchers working from a constructivist stance seek to understand this context, and interpretation is shaped by the researcher's own experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, meaning is derived from interactions with other humans (Crotty, 1998). Hence, the researcher captures meaning from the diverse viewpoints of the participants through interviewing and attempts to interpret these meanings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).

In line with the constructivist approach, this study was predominantly qualitative in nature. From a constructivist worldview, qualitative research seeks to

establish meaning from the views of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Corbin and Strauss (2008) described qualitative research as allowing "researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed … and to discover rather than test variables" (p. 12). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) had a similar description, also with an emphasis on making meaning: "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). As is evident from these descriptions, qualitative research is not just about recording details but also delving deeper to understand how that information is experienced and understood by the participants.

Qualitative research adopts a wide range of methodologies and methods. Within this range, five features are generally evident in qualitative research. First, the study is naturalistic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Miles et al., 2020), and the researcher may observe the participants in their natural environment, with the setting serving as a data source. The interpretation of the data collected in the natural setting will be assisted by the researcher's knowledge and experience of the context. Second, the research focuses on meaning and understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher wants to learn about the participants' perspectives of their world and capture those viewpoints accurately. Third, the researcher is "the primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). The ability of a human being to observe, respond, probe, clarify and make links supports the researcher's aim of understanding meaning. Fourth, qualitative research is inductive (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data are not analysed to prove or disprove hypotheses but are instead constructed from the bottom up, pulling related information together. Finally, qualitative research features rich descriptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is descriptive, usually using words or pictures instead of numbers. Data are analysed as closely as possible to their original form so that the details are not lost.

The use of constructivist qualitative research in this study allowed for an in-depth and rich understanding of what it means to be an assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Due to the variety of locations in which the participating assistant principals work, it was not possible to visit them all to observe

them in their natural environments, as is desirable in qualitative research. Instead, semi-structured interviews were conducted via video call or telephone. The researcher's experience working in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia gave her insight into the assistant principals' context. However, the need for the researcher to use her personal understanding of the assistant principals' context had implications for the trustworthiness of the study. It meant she needed to be particularly careful to ensure her own experiences did not impact the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from assistant principals. The measures undertaken by the researcher to ensure the trustworthiness of the study will be addressed later in this chapter in Section 3.7.

3.2.2 Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective is the stance informing the research methodology (Crotty, 1998). Some authors have used the term 'paradigms' (Cohen et al., 2018; O'Donoghue, 2019) to describe theoretical perspectives. There are numerous distinct paradigms, including positivism, critical theory, interpretivism, postmodernism (Cohen et al., 2018; O'Donoghue, 2019) and post-structuralism (Cohen et al., 2018). Each theoretical perspective serves to clarify the organisation of the research in its own way. The theoretical perspective of interpretivism was chosen for the current study.

An interpretive paradigm is the most common type of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It assumes that multiple realities of a single phenomenon exist and that the researcher's role is to interpret and construct knowledge based on those realities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Within the interpretivist paradigm, several theoretical positions exist, one of which is symbolic interactionism (O'Donoghue, 2019). Primarily based on the work of Mead (1942, as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), symbolic interactionism emphasises social interaction as the basis for knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; O'Donoghue, 2019). It aims to understand and explain society and the human world (Crotty, 1998) and is closely associated with qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In their habitation of their social world, human beings use symbols, such as language, to give meanings to objects (Cohen et al., 2018). Woods (1979, as cited in Cohen et al., 2018) identified three basic ideas encapsulating symbolic interactionism. First, human beings act towards phenomena based on how

meaningful the phenomena are to them. Second, individuals construct meaning in a continuous process in response to their experiences. Third, the process of making meaning takes place in a social context, with individuals aligning their actions to those of others.

Consistent with the symbolic interactionist approach, this study sought to capture the experience and perspectives of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Data were gathered to allow the participants to share their interpretations of their world. The interpretivist theoretical perspective informed the methodological choice in this research.

3.3 Methodology

Methodology is the link between the research paradigm and the methods used to answer the research questions (O'Donoghue, 2019). Crotty (1998) described research methodology as "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods linking the choice of methods to the desired outcomes" (p. 3). In keeping with the theoretical perspective of interpretivism and the lens of symbolic interactionism, the methodology for the current research was a case study, specifically an exploratory, instrumental case study.

3.3.1 Exploratory Study

An exploratory study seeks to clarify concepts, develop hypotheses or articulate problems (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Sue & Ritter, 2016). It delves into topics to reveal something new or unknown (Neuman, 2017). Yin (2018) recommended that exploratory studies are appropriate for research aiming to answer "what" questions, which would include the current study's overarching research question: What are the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their role? Patton (2015) suggested that exploratory research, using qualitative design, contributes to an understanding of new fields of enquiry. The perception of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their role has not been studied previously, so an exploratory approach was used.

3.3.2 Case Study

Case studies are frequently used in social science research (Yin, 2018). They are "a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of

documents, or one particular event" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59). A case study may focus on phenomena such as an event, an organisation, a period of time, a process, a geographical area or, as is the case in the present research, a job role (Miles et al., 2020). The emphasis is on providing an in-depth understanding of a singular phenomenon (Leavy, 2014; Stake, 1995) which, in the current research, is an understanding of what it means to be an assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia.

Punch (2014) suggested that a case study has four characteristics. First, case studies have boundaries within a context. While Yin (2018) stressed that those limitations might not initially be evident, Punch asserted that the researcher's responsibility is to ensure boundaries are explicitly described. Second, the researcher needs to ensure "the case is a case of something" (Punch, 2014, p. 122). There must be a focus to the research which makes the study's design clear. Third, the researcher should attempt to "preserve the wholeness, unity and integrity of the case" (Punch, 2014, p. 122) whilst also ensuring the study remains focused with the help of the research questions. Finally, data are collected from multiple sources, using multiple methods and usually in a naturalistic setting (Punch, 2014). Yin also listed numerous sources of evidence as a feature of the case study methodology.

The current research shows evidence of all four of Punch's (2014) case study characteristics. The study was bounded by both the role of assistant principal and by the context of Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The case was a 'case of something'; it was an exploration of what it means to be an assistant principal in Catholic schools in Western Australia. The five specific research questions ensured the study remained focused on the case. Finally, the research gathered data from multiple sources, which included 68 assistant principals via an online survey and 20 of those assistant principals via semi-structured interviews.

One of the strengths of the case study approach is its "methodological eclecticism" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 19) which allows the researcher to choose whichever methods are most appropriate to the study (Leavy, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Punch, 2014). While the case study approach is predominantly qualitative (Punch, 2014), quantitative data are also helpful (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Miles et al., 2020; Punch, 2014; Yin, 2018). The current research employed

some quantitative survey questions. These questions gathered demographic and career characteristic data and information about how assistant principals felt about the time they spent on various work tasks. The quantitative survey questions allowed the researcher to generate descriptive statistics to support or challenge the results from the semi-structured interviews.

3.3.3 Instrumental Case Study

Stake (1995) identified three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. An intrinsic case study seeks insight into a particular phenomenon, focusing solely on learning more about the specific case. There is no intention to extrapolate the information to any other topic or problem. An instrumental case study aims to gain insight into a research question by studying a particular case. The subject of the study serves to provide information which is then used to answer the research question. A collective case study is sometimes referred to as a multiple case study or a comparative case study (Punch, 2014). It is based upon an instrumental model but includes the study of several cases and may be used to compare and contrast between cases (Stake, 1995).

An instrumental case study design was chosen for the present research. An understanding of the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia was developed by studying individual assistant principals' experiences. In keeping with an instrumental case study design, the perspectives of assistant principals were gathered from various geographical locations, school sizes, and varying degrees of experience in the role. The assistant principals themselves were not the focus of the study. Rather, the information and perspectives they provided from their own lived experiences contributed to an overall picture of what it means to be an assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia.

3.3.4 Criticisms of Case Study Methodology

When selecting a research methodology, it is important to consider the potential criticisms regarding its use and to take appropriate measures to minimise those concerns. There are several criticisms of using case study design as a research methodology. These concerns include generalisability, subjectivity and the volume of information produced, which will each be addressed below. One further critique of case study research, the possible lack of methodological rigour (Yin,

2018), will be addressed during a discussion on the trustworthiness of the research in Section 3.7 later in this chapter.

Generalisability refers to the extent to which the findings of a research project can be applied to other studies (Bryman, 2016; Leavy, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The inability to generalise the research findings of case studies has been noted as a potential concern by numerous authors (Cohen et al., 2018; Wellington, 2015; Yin, 2018). Leavy (2014) disagreed with this criticism but acknowledged that the generalisation of case studies is different to research conducted using other methodologies where large sets of easily comparable data were presented. She posited that making generalisations from case studies relies on a process of interpretation within the context of the research. Bryman (2016) and Yin (2018) both suggested that it is possible to generalise case study research to theory instead of specific populations. Stake (1995) had a slightly different opinion. He indicated that the primary goal of a case study was to "maximise what we can understand about the case. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case" (p. 4). In line with Stake's view, generalisability is less of a concern as this research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of a single case: what it means to be an assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Further discussion of the generalisability of the research, specifically "reader or user generalisability" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 256), will be found in Section 3.7.4.

The potential subjectivity of the researcher is a further critique of a case study approach (Bryman, 2016; Leavy, 2014; Patton, 2015). Subjectivity is "believed to bias enquiry, deflecting us from the truth that we would otherwise discover" (Hammersley, 2011, p. 97). A feature of qualitative enquiry is that the researcher is able to get close to the subjects of the research to understand their lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This closeness, however, can be viewed as resulting in a lack of objectivity as the researcher serves as both the instrument of data collection and data interpretation (Leavy, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Hammersley (2011) argued that researchers are dependent upon their personal knowledge and experiences to make observations and then make sense of them. Leavy (2014) supported this argument by recognising that researcher subjectivity is inevitable and should be viewed as an essential aspect of the process

of understanding the experience of the research participants. She cautions, though, that any subjectivity needs to be disciplined and that the researcher needs to be explicit regarding how their potential biases have been addressed. As detailed in Chapter One: The Research Defined, the researcher's motivations for the study were explicitly stated in a personal statement (see Section 1.3). The potential for personal bias was identified as a limitation of the research in the same chapter (see Section 1.9). Furthermore, the strategies adopted to improve the objectivity of the research will be outlined in Section 3.7.3.

Further concerns regarding case study methodology are that case studies are time-consuming (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2018) and tend to produce large amounts of data (Leavy, 2014). One strategy for overcoming these concerns is to ensure the research design is realistic regarding any time restraints or data analysis challenges (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). With regard to the current study, the research questions have been clearly stated, and the data collection methods are closely aligned with the aims of the study. Data analysis was supported using NVivo as a tool for the initial organising and coding of the research information. A comprehensive explanation of the data analysis processes used in the current research will be found in Section 3.8.

3.4 Method

Research methods describe the specific research techniques to collect data (Crotty, 1998; Silverman, 2013). Four methods of data collection were utilised in this research, and whilst primarily qualitative, some quantitative data were gathered concerning the participants' demographic and job characteristics. The methods used in this study were an online survey, semi-structured interviews, a document search and researcher field notes. This combination of data collection methods was included to provide a rich and in-depth understanding of assistant principals' perceptions regarding their role whilst also providing some descriptive statistical information about their work. The four methods of data collection will now be examined.

3.4.1 Online Survey

A survey is an effective method of data collection, usually associated with quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, surveys can also be a

useful method for collecting data in qualitative research (Neuman, 2017). Surveys provide opportunities to collect "quantitative descriptions of trends, attitudes and opinions" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 147) within a target population and may be cross-sectional, meaning the data are collected at one point in time, or longitudinal, where data are collected over a period of time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Surveys can be presented and distributed in many ways, including by post, by telephone, face-to-face and online. Online surveys are fast and efficient, generally low in cost, eliminate the need for the researcher to engage in data entry and allow for a broad geographic reach (Sue & Ritter, 2016). One of the downfalls of online surveys includes possible coverage bias (Sue & Ritter, 2016), meaning that some potential participants may not be able to access the survey (Dillman et al., 2014). In this research, the study population is technologically competent and familiar with completing online surveys as part of their work, so it is unlikely that this method was a barrier to participation. In addition, the research was well publicised among the target population, so it can be assumed that awareness of the invitation to participate was high.

For this research, a cross-sectional online survey (Appendix C), published using Survey Monkey, was chosen chiefly because it allowed for the rapid return and analysis of the data from respondents. In addition, it provided easy access for assistant principals in a wide range of geographical settings across the state of Western Australia. The survey served four purposes through a combination of both quantitative and qualitative questions. Firstly, it provided quantitative demographic and job characteristic information, which helped provide context for the research. Secondly, it provided quantitative data regarding how assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia felt about the time they spent on various tasks. Thirdly, the online survey included short answer questions that directly related to each of the research questions and allowed for the efficient collection of qualitative data from more participants than could realistically be interviewed. Finally, the survey served as a recruiting tool to find participants for the semi-structured interview phase of the research.

All assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia were invited to participate in the online survey which employed a census approach within

a closed population. Dillman et al. (2014) described a census-style survey as being designed to elicit responses from the entire target group. Sue and Ritter (2016) suggested that closed populations are the ideal environment for conducting online surveys due to the ease of contacting potential participants. Participants may see the research results as being particularly relevant to them and are then more likely to participate.

The survey used in this research comprised four sections, based on both the question type and purpose. These were multiple-choice questions, Likert scale questions, open-ended questions and a single question inviting participants to provide their contact information if they wanted to express interest in being interviewed. The survey design began with simple multiple-choice questions and became more complex as the respondent worked their way through the survey. This design is in line with recommendations to ensure that participants become invested in the survey early on by presenting short and simple questions in the first part of the survey (Dillman et al., 2014; Sue & Ritter, 2016). An overview of each section of questions can be found in Table 3.2

Table 3.2

Overview of Online Survey Sections

Questions	Section overview
1-19	Multiple-choice questions gathered basic demographic and career characteristic data, including age, gender, length of experience as a teacher and assistant principal, teaching load, career goals, qualifications, time spent at work and job satisfaction.
20-21	Likert scale questions sought to determine how assistant principals felt about the time they spent on various tasks. They were provided with a list of 41 responsibilities typically associated with the work of an assistant principal and asked to indicate on a scale whether they spent too much time on the task, just the right amount of time, not enough time, or that it was not part of their job. A short answer question invited the assistant principals to identify any other responsibilities that were not already listed.
22-27	Open-ended questions asked participants to share their thoughts regarding the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Each of the questions numbered 22-26 was directly related to one of the five specific research questions. Question 27 invited assistant principals to share anything else they wanted to share that had not been covered elsewhere in the survey.
28	This question provided respondents with the opportunity to self-nominate to participate in a one-to-one video or phone interview about their experience as an assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia.

3.4.2 Semi-structured Interview

Interviews can be described as "conversations with purpose and direction" (Mills et al., 2010, p. 495). Semi-structured interviews seek answers to predetermined questions but also allow for questioning to evolve in response to previous answers (Mills et al., 2010). The interviews are conducted flexibly with

question order or wording potentially changing to best suit the conversation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This interview style allows participants to share their unique experiences and permits the researcher to ask further probing questions to seek clarification or examples.

Assistant principals had the opportunity to self-nominate to participate in one-to-one semi-structured interviews when completing the survey. Interviews were conducted via video call, using Microsoft Teams, or by telephone. This use of technology allowed for the participation of assistant principals from a wide geographical area and permitted more flexibility in accommodating the most suitable interview times for the assistant principals. Sue and Ritter (2016) suggested that telephone interviews can be time-consuming and intrusive. To overcome this potential shortcoming, the interviews were scheduled at a time suitable to the assistant principals, and potential participants were made aware of the expected interview duration of approximately 45 minutes when they were invited to nominate to take part.

The researcher used an interview protocol (Appendix D) to guide each interview and record relevant information and question responses. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that an interview protocol should be used consistently for each interview. It should contain basic information about the interview, such as the time and date it took place, the names of the interviewer and interviewee and the location of the meeting. In addition, an introduction should be included to give the interviewer reminders of information they should communicate to the interviewee at the start of the conversation to ensure that each interview is conducted in a consistent manner. This information might include an overview of the purpose of the study, checking on interviewee consent, the general structure of the interview and an invitation for the participant to ask any questions before beginning. The opening question and content questions should each be listed on the interview protocol, with some space in between for the researcher to record answers and notes. Finally, closing instructions should be included as a prompt for the interviewer to let the participant know information such as what the next steps are and how they will be able to access the results of the research.

The interview method for this research was conducted using an eight-point process. First, assistant principals self-nominated to participate in a one-to-one semi-structured interview as part of the online survey. Second, the self-nominated assistant principals were contacted via email and asked to complete an online consent form to be interviewed (Appendix E). The online form also contained links to the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix F), the letter from the Executive Director of Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) granting permission for the research to occur (Appendix G) and the Collection Notice (Appendix H). Third, once online consent forms were completed, the assistant principals were contacted via email (Appendix I) and asked to nominate a suitable interview time using the SignUp Genius website. A range of interview times was offered, both inside and outside of work hours. Fourth, once assistant principals booked their interview time, an Outlook calendar invitation was sent to the assistant principals, along with a confirmation email which also provided the list of interview guide questions (Appendix I). Fifth, the interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams video call, and one was conducted via telephone. Sixth, the researcher used an interview protocol sheet (Appendix D) to take notes during and after the interview. Seventh, interviews were audio-recorded on the researcher's iPhone using the Just Press Record app, as well as a digital portable audio recording device. Finally, interview recordings were transcribed by Landmark Associates, and the transcriptions were provided to the assistant principals to be member-checked. The requested amendments were then made.

Most of the interview guide questions were directly linked to the research's specific research questions. There were three exceptions. The opening question sought to allow the assistant principal to share his or her personal and professional background. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that the opening question should be designed to put the interviewee at ease. The second-last question asked for any advice the assistant principal would give to teachers aspiring to become assistant principals. The final question invited the interviewee to share any other thoughts about their role that had not already been covered in the interview. A summary of how the interview guide questions related to the specific research questions can be found in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Linking of Specific Research Questions to the Interview Guide

Specific research question	Interview guide questions
1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?	2. What are the broad categories of tasks you are responsible for? 3. Do you have a written job description? If so, do you feel it accurately represents your role?
2. Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?	4. What do you see as the one most important aspect of your role and why? 5. What are the most important skills or attributes an assistant principal needs to have?
3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?	6. What are the gifts and talents you bring to your role as an assistant principal? 7. What is it about your work that motivates you to keep turning up?
4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?	8. Which aspects of the role do you find the most challenging?
5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?	9. What preparation did you have for the role of assistant principal? 10. What sort of professional learning do you engage in as an assistant principal? 11. If CEWA could do one thing to support or improve the effectiveness of assistant principals in primary schools, what would you recommend?

3.4.3 Document Search

Documents "are a rich source of data for social research" (Punch, 2014, p. 158). They may represent information the research participants interact with or are familiar with (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) which will help inform the research context.

There were two documents relevant to the research which informed the data collected and provided further context to the data collection and analysis processes.

The first document was the employment contract under which assistant principals are employed in schools in the CEWA system. The second document relevant to the research is an assistant principal role description or duty statement. This document is produced at the school level as part of the assistant principal employment contract and will generally outline the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal in that particular school. A request was made to the assistant principals being interviewed for a copy of their role description.

3.4.4 Researcher Field Notes

Field notes are the recorded observations of the researcher regarding the activities or behaviours of the research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the interviews were conducted via video or phone call, no observations could be made regarding the context of the school site. However, notes were taken by the researcher during the conversations, which added both a written record of the interviews and further information which may not be accurately reflected in the transcripts. The field notes were recorded on the interview protocol (Appendix D).

3.5 Field Testing

Field testing is an essential step in the development of a research instrument as it provides feedback on the content, format and instructions, as well as the time the instrument takes to complete (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It assists in diagnosing potential problems before the instrument is released into the field (Dillman et al., 2014). Field testing was used in this research for both the online survey and the semi-structured interviews.

The survey employed in this research was field-tested in two stages. First, input was sought from the three assistant principals working in the school where the researcher was principal, and therefore not part of the study, to check on the scope and clarity of the questions, as well as the time it took to complete. The initial feedback from these three assistant principals indicated that the survey was appropriate, clear and suitable for the research. Further field testing was conducted by another four experienced assistant principals recently employed as principals to confirm these responses. Feedback demonstrated that the survey was appropriate,

easily understood and able to be completed in the target time frame of approximately 20 minutes.

Field testing of the qualitative semi-structured interviews was conducted to ensure the guide questions were appropriate to their purpose. Two assistant principals employed in the researcher's school agreed to participate in a field test of the interview questions. At the completion of the test interviews, and using verbal feedback from the assistant principals, the researcher was satisfied that the guide questions were of sufficient quantity and quality to elicit valuable responses from the participants in line with the specific research questions.

3.6   Research Participants

The study population consisted of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. School principals were also associated with the study, but only to provide permission for their assistant principals to participate. At the time the data collection for this research was conducted, the Catholic Education system in Western Australia had 109 primary schools catering for children from Kindergarten to Year Six. Ninety-seven of these schools have an assistant principal. Through investigation of each school's website, and direct contact with the school in some cases, it was revealed that in July of 2020, there were 168 assistant principals employed in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. As the researcher was a principal in a Catholic primary school in Western Australia at the time, to avoid any issues related to a power differential, the three assistant principals working in the researcher's school were not included in the data collection. Therefore, there was potential to gather data from up to 165 participants from 96 schools.

The principals of the schools that employed one or more assistant principals were emailed (Appendix J) to seek permission for their assistant principals to participate in the research. They were provided with a Principal Information Sheet (Appendix K). Fifty-eight principals responded and provided consent via an online form (Appendix L) for 94 assistant principals to be involved. Each of those 94 assistant principals was emailed a link to the online survey and invited to participate (Appendix M). To further enhance awareness of the research, the Catholic Assistant Principal Association (CAPA) of Western Australia were contacted (Appendix N) and agreed to distribute information (Appendix O) and reminders about the research to

its members, which predominantly comprised the target population. They did so by both email and through their online message boards.

A total of 68 assistant principals completed the online survey, representing 41% of the total target population. Thirty-two of the assistant principals who completed the online survey volunteered to be interviewed. Twenty of these assistant principals eventually participated in the interview.

3.6.1 Sampling

Sampling is the process by which research participants are selected. It involves selecting participants from a specific population so that the research may be generalised back to that population as a whole (Silverman, 2013). Several sampling techniques were used in this research: self-selection, purposive and stratified. One aspect of the data gathering process used no sampling technique at all.

The online survey was the first stage of data collection. In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, no sampling techniques were used for this aspect of the research. Rather, the entire target population was invited to participate in the online survey, subject to their principals' willingness to provide consent for their assistant principal to participate.

The final question of the online survey invited assistant principals to indicate if they would be interested in participating in an interview. Self-selection sampling was used to allow survey participants to express their interest in further involvement in the study without being directly approached by the researcher (Sharma, 2017). This type of sampling resulted in a list of potential interview participants who were likely to be committed to the process and willing to provide further insight into the research topic. Thirty-two assistant principals noted they would be willing to participate in an interview. Saunders and Townsend (2016) suggested that between 15 and 60 qualitative interviews are generally considered sufficient in organisational and workplace research. This research had a target of 20 interviews to ensure that in-depth and timely data analysis of the interviews could be conducted.

Purposive sampling was used to reduce the number of interview candidates from 32 to 20. This sampling method allowed the researcher to select a range of interview participants from among the volunteers that would provide the broadest

insight and learning into the research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Silverman, 2013). A form of purposive sampling, referred to as stratified sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) or maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015), was employed because it helped to ensure there was a range of participant attributes that reflected the overall group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Characteristics such as gender, school location, length of experience as an assistant principal and school size were considered to ensure a range of assistant principal experiences in different contexts. Once the list of 20 interview participants was selected, each of those assistant principals was emailed and invited to complete an online consent form. Eighteen consent forms were received. To reach the researcher's target of interviewing 20 assistant principals, two more were added to the list, having been chosen for their demographic similarity to the two assistant principals who elected not to participate. Twenty assistant principals were interviewed, and their demographic characteristics can be viewed in Table 4.2 in Chapter 4: Presentation of Research Results.

3.7   Trustworthiness

For research to impact a field of study, it needs to demonstrate it has been conducted with rigour so that others have confidence in the conduct and results of the investigation. Methodological rigour addresses the actions the researcher can take to ensure the study is trustworthy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness is the measure by which the legitimacy of research is gauged (Silverman, 2013). Trustworthiness can be enhanced in qualitative research through "systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation and communication" (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. para. 4).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four criteria for measuring trustworthiness, or rigour (Morse, 2015), in qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Whilst there is some debate as to the most appropriate approach to ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research (Leung, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Morse, 2015), Lincoln and Guba's (1985) constructs are generally accepted as appropriate (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Each of these criteria was addressed in the current research to ensure trustworthiness, and these measures are summarised in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Measures Used to Establish Trustworthiness of the Research

Quality criterion	Measures
3.7.1 Credibility	• Using appropriate and established qualitative research methods • Researcher's background and experience • Tactics to encourage honesty of participants • Data triangulation • Member-checking • Adequate engagement in data collection
3.7.2 Dependability	• Adopting an auditing approach to data collection • Using research questions to guide the study • Collecting data in line with research questions
3.7.3 Confirmability	• In-depth methodological descriptions • Explicitly stating the researcher's biases and research limitations • Retaining research data for five years post-submission of thesis
3.7.4 Transferability	• Providing thick descriptions of research context and results • Purposive sampling

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility addresses how well research findings match reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and whether they make sense (Miles et al., 2020). Qualitative research may be considered credible when the participants' experiences and perspectives have been accurately reflected and are recognisable to them (Bryman, 2016; Erlandson et al., 1993; Miles et al., 2020). The measures taken in the present research to ensure credibility include the use of appropriate research design, features of the background and experience of the researcher, tactics to encourage the honesty of participants, data triangulation, member-checking and adequate engagement in data collection.

Several authors (Leung, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 1999; Shenton, 2004) have stressed the importance of research design in ensuring a study is credible. Factors to achieve credibility include ensuring the research question and methodology are suitable for the desired outcome, the sampling and data handling approaches are appropriate and that the results and conclusions match the sample and context. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the present study adopted established research methodology and methods to ensure the results and conclusions reflected the purpose of the research.

In qualitative research, researchers are the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). As such, their familiarity with the context of the research and their background, experience, and qualifications will impact the credibility of the research (Shenton, 2004). In the present study, the researcher has over 20 years of experience in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, nine of those in school leadership positions, including as an assistant principal for four years and five years as a principal. In those roles, the researcher worked closely with her own and other assistant principals, which means she understands the context in which assistant principals work. In her current role as a CEWA Regional Officer and School Improvement Advisor, the researcher provides support and advice to school leadership teams. In addition, the researcher has undertaken extensive tertiary-level study and is familiar with and proficient in academic processes.

A further method for ensuring the credibility of research is to use tactics that encourage the honesty of participants (Shenton, 2004). Ensuring that all participation is voluntary and providing contributors with opportunities to withdraw their participation in the research will assist in ensuring that those who take part are genuinely prepared to contribute data freely. In this research, assistant principals signed a consent form confirming their willingness to participate, which also provided information about how to withdraw their consent if they chose to discontinue. In addition, at the beginning of the semi-structured interviews, participants were advised they were free to elect not to answer questions they were not comfortable with. A further tactic described by Shenton (2004) to encourage honest participation is to emphasise the independent status of the researcher. In the present study, the only power differential was that the researcher was a principal in a Catholic primary

school in Western Australia. Therefore, to underline independence, the assistant principals in the researcher's school were not invited to participate, other than as field testers for the instruments.

Triangulation is a well-known strategy for increasing the credibility or internal validity of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Noble & Heale, 2019). It can take several forms, including the use of multiple methods of data collection (methods triangulation) and accessing numerous sources of data (triangulation of sources) (Patton, 1999). These triangulation methods are the two approaches used in this research. Qualitative data were gathered through both semi-structured interviews and an online survey. These two methods of data collection allowed for both short-answer responses in the survey from a more significant number of participants ($N =$ 68), as well as longer, more detailed conversations in interviews from a smaller number ($N = 20$), thereby improving the credibility of the study. Data were also gathered from assistant principals in a wide range of contexts, based on school size and location, as well as those with varying levels of experience. In addition, documents such as the assistant principal employment contract and role description documents were examined to provide further triangulation opportunities.

Another important method of ensuring research credibility is member-checking (Shenton, 2004). Member-checking involves the provision of data so that participants can "check, comment on, or approve the researcher's data or interpretations" (Iivari, 2018, p. 112). In the current research, participants were provided with the transcript of their semi-structured interview and were asked to confirm the accuracy of the sentiments they were trying to convey. Adjustments were then made, as required. This member-checking process ensured that the transcribed dialogue, which was later used in the data analysis process, most accurately reflected the thoughts and experiences of the participants. In addition, during the data analysis process, feedback was sought from five research participants regarding the themes and sub-themes that emerged. This second layer of member-checking indicated that the researcher's interpretation of the data was an accurate reflection of the views of the participants.

A further approach to safeguard research credibility is to ensure adequate engagement in data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To get the clearest picture

of the participant group's experience and understanding of the topic, data needs to be collected from enough sources to confirm that a level of saturation occurs. Whilst there is no exact number detailed in the literature, Saunders and Townsend (2016) suggested that between 15 and 60 qualitative interviews might be considered sufficient. Twenty interviews were conducted in the current research, and quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 68 online surveys.

3.7.2 *Dependability*

Closely related to credibility is the issue of dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is concerned with whether the study has been conducted with care and consistency (Miles et al., 2020). Whilst the nature of qualitative research means that the target phenomenon is being studied at a particular point in time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), Shenton (2004) suggested that dependability implies that if the same study were repeated with the same methods, participants and context, the results would be repeated.

To establish research dependability, the researcher needs to adopt an auditing approach to data collection (Bryman, 2016; Guba, 1981; O'Donoghue, 2019). This approach involves carefully documenting all aspects of the research so that others can examine and understand the researcher's data, methods, decisions and conclusions (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2018). In the present study, an auditing approach was applied through techniques such as collecting and recording raw data, synthesising those data, piloting the online survey and interview questions, and using interview protocols during semi-structured interviews. In addition, the methodology and methods underpinning the research were clearly outlined earlier in this chapter so the reader can comprehend the processes undertaken. Later in this chapter, the procedures for data analysis are also outlined in detail. Each of these procedures and explanations, which demonstrate an auditing approach, enhances the research's dependability.

A further method of enhancing the dependability of the research is to ensure that the design of the study clearly supports the research questions (Miles et al., 2020). The research questions guiding this study were used as the basis for designing the qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis processes. The questions included in the interview protocol can each be directly related to one

of the specific research questions (Appendix P). Similarly, the qualitative and quantitative questions in the online survey served to answer the overarching and specific research questions. As described earlier in this chapter, an instrumental case study approach was selected for the present research as it was an appropriate methodology to gain an understanding of the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their role.

3.7.3 Confirmability

A further measure to improve the trustworthiness of research is confirmability. Confirmability can be likened to objectivity, or whether the researcher has ensured that his or her values and biases have not impacted the findings (Bryman, 2016; Shenton, 2004). The researcher must make certain that the study is rooted in the participants' experiences rather than the investigator's ideas (Shenton, 2004). Some biases are bound to exist; nevertheless, it is the researcher's responsibility to remain neutral and objective (Bryman, 2016; Miles et al., 2020; Patton, 2015). The present research adopted several measures to enhance the confirmability of the study to increase the trustworthiness of the results.

Miles et al. (2020) stated that the minimum requirement to improve credibility is to explicitly state the biases the researcher holds. As the researcher has prior experience in the role of assistant principal, it was important for her to be open-minded in the data gathering process and during the interrogation and interpretation of the data. As detailed in Chapter One: The Research Defined, the researcher's motivations were explicitly stated in a personal statement (see Section 1.3). In addition, the potential for personal bias was identified as a limitation of the research in the same chapter (see Section 1.9).

Just as clarity of research design assists in ensuring credibility and dependability, it is also an important factor in confirmability. The research should include in-depth methodological descriptions so the reader can follow the process from beginning to end (Miles et al., 2020; Shenton, 2004). The methodology and methods used in the current research have been outlined earlier in this chapter. As a further safeguard for the confirmability of the present study, all data will be retained for a period of five years post-completion of the project. This retention of information

will ensure that all relevant data are available if the researcher's methods and conclusions need to be confirmed (Miles et al., 2020).

3.7.4 Transferability

The final criterion for ensuring the trustworthiness of research is transferability, also referred to as generalisability (Cohen et al., 2018). Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a research project can be applied to other studies (Bryman, 2016; Leavy, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A common understanding of transferability in qualitative research is the idea of "reader or user generalisability" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 256). This description places the responsibility of determining the transferability of the research to another situation onto the reader. The researcher's responsibility is to provide "sufficient descriptive data" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298) to allow the reader to judge whether transferability is possible. However, the reader is ultimately best placed to determine the fit for their purpose (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Shenton, 2004). There are various strategies a researcher can use to assist the reader to assess transferability, two of which have been used in the current research.

Firstly, numerous authors have explained the importance of providing thick and rich descriptions of the setting, participants, and research results (Bryman, 2016; Leavy, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2020). These descriptions give the reader the necessary information to determine transferability. In the current research, thorough explanations of the research context have been provided in Chapter One: The Research Defined, including a description of the system within which assistant principals work, that of Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Descriptions of the research participants can be found earlier in the current chapter, and their demographic information is located in Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Results. An in-depth presentation and discussion of the research results can be found in Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Results and Chapter Five: Discussion of Research Results.

Secondly, purposive sampling assists in determining the transferability of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2020; Patton, 2015). "Purposefully picking a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest" (Patton, 2015, p. 267) allows for a greater range of usefulness for readers of the study

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the current research, maximum variation sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used to select participants for semi-structured interviews from a selection of volunteers. This sampling technique resulted in contributors from a range of school sizes, locations, experience, age and qualifications, which reflected the target population of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The demographic information of interview participants can be found in Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Results.

3.8   Data Analysis

This research collected both qualitative and quantitative data, each requiring different methods of analysis. Qualitative data analysis requires constant reflection on the data in response to new information or emerging themes and ideas. An interactive cyclical process (Miles et al., 2020) was used to analyse the qualitative data collected from the online surveys and semi-structured interviews, as well as the documents and researcher field notes. This process consists of three concurrent streams: data condensation, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions. The quantitative data gathered in the online surveys were analysed using strategies such as tabulation, cross-tabulation, gap analysis and graphical representation.

A cyclical approach to qualitative data analysis is endorsed by Cohen et al. (2018), who suggested that "data analysis is subject to continual modification, addition, refinement, excision, extension and amendment" (p. 644). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) saw data analysis as a back-and-forth process, and Gibbs (2007) suggested that qualitative data analysis requires the merging of data collection and interpretation and that these processes should be carried out concurrently. Miles et al. (2020) advised researchers to begin writing and analysing early and often. Parlett and Hamilton (1976, as cited in Cohen et al., 2018) had a similar suggestion and referred to progressive focusing, whereby the researcher takes a "wide-angle lens to gather data. Then, by sifting, sorting, reviewing and reflecting on the data, the salient features of the situation emerge" (p. 648). Figure 3.2 represents the data analysis strategy used in the research. The analysis of the qualitative data gathered in this study will now be discussed. The analysis of the quantitative data will be addressed separately in section 3.8.4.

Figure 3.2

Qualitative Data Analysis Strategy – An Interactive Model
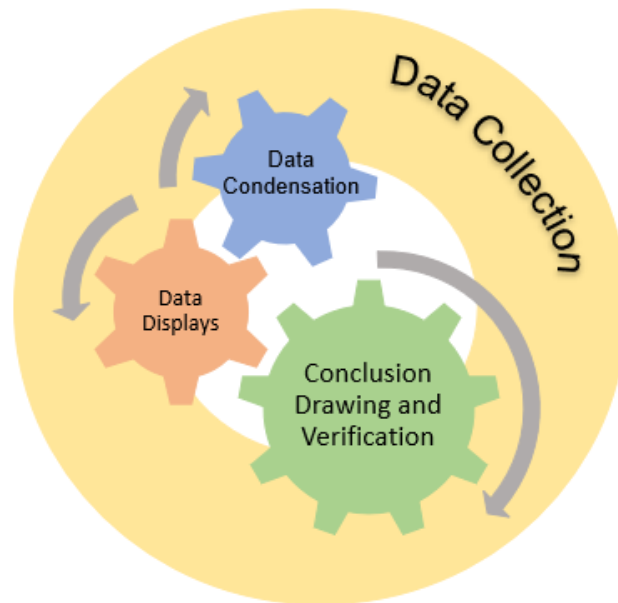
Note: Adapted from *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (p.10), by Miles et al., 2020.

3.8.1 Data Condensation

Data condensation is the first stream of an interactive model of qualitative data analysis (Miles et al., 2020). It is the process whereby all data collected are organised, simplified, focused, transformed and abstracted (Leavy, 2014; Miles et al., 2020). It is a process of "reducing or transforming large amounts of data to themes that can encapsulate the overarching meaning of the data" (Leavy, 2014, p. 464). This research collected qualitative data from 20 semi-structured interviews and 68 online surveys, as well as researcher field notes and a document search. The audio of each interview was digitally recorded and then professionally transcribed. Transcripts were member-checked by the participants to ensure accuracy, and any adjustments they requested were made. After confirmation was received from the participating assistant principals that the transcripts were correct, data analysis of those texts began. Information gathered from the document search and researcher field notes were also analysed to provide further opportunities for verification.

A process of coding was used to examine the qualitative data to identify themes and ideas for analysis. A code is a "researcher-generated construct that symbolises or translates data" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 63). Saldaña (2016) described a code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient,

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essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). Codes allow for similar units of data to be chunked together under one label to allow for further analysis (Leavy, 2014). Coding is a cyclical heuristic process of data condensation whereby the researcher, through careful reading and reflection upon the data, can identify the most meaningful material and collate related data units together to allow for more accessible analysis (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2016).

Miles et al. (2020) and Saldaña (2016) outlined two phases of coding: first cycle and second cycle. The first cycle involves the researcher assigning codes to the qualitative data units. This results in an initial filtering of the data to capture the most meaningful material and to begin to identify patterns (Miles et al., 2020). In this research, some of the first cycle coding methods used were descriptive coding, concept coding and In Vivo coding. The second cycle coding phase involves a similar process; however, instead of coding qualitative data units, the coding is carried out by sorting the first cycle codes into clusters, categories and concepts. Some initial codes may be grouped, and others may be discarded. The current research used pattern coding and focused coding as strategies in the second cycle process. Following the first and second coding cycles, major emerging themes and categories became evident. Figure 3.3 depicts the data condensation phase of the analysis process, based upon the first and second cycle coding processes outlined by Saldaña (2016) and Miles et al. (2020).

Figure 3.3

Schematic Depiction of the Process of Data Condensation
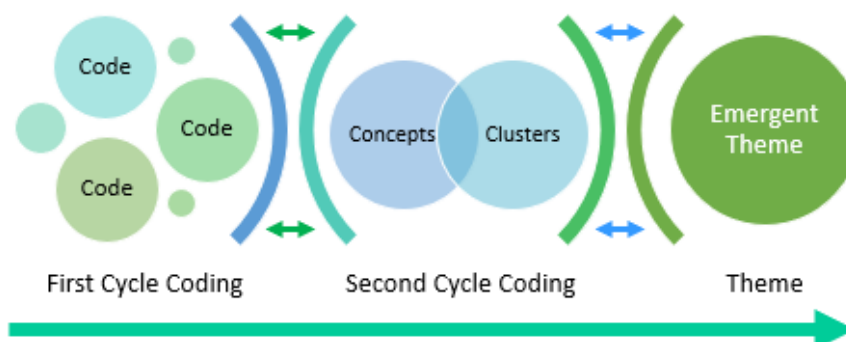
Note: Created from ideas in *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, by Miles et al., 2020 and *The Coding Manual*, by Saldana, 2016.

NVivo software was utilised to assist with the coding of the qualitative data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that using computer software to help in the analysis of qualitative data provides a logical choice over hand-coding. They cited the ability to search for specific pieces of text, the efficiency of storing data and potential savings in time spent on analysis as among the reasons for choosing computer programs to assist in qualitative data analysis. Yin (2018) and Gibbs (2007) also made a case for using data analysis software, such as NVivo, while stressing that they should be seen as a tool to assist analysis and not as the end of the analytical process. The researcher needs to identify meaningful patterns within the software outputs and ensure the codes accurately represent the recorded words. Table 3.5 provides an example of the codes and themes identified through the coding process for this research.

Table 3.5

Demonstration of the Data Reduction Process for Question 3: Which Aspects of the Role Provide Professional Fulfilment to Assistant Principals?

Quotes	First cycle coding	Second cycle coding	Theme
"introducing new teaching and learning opportunities"			
"identifying areas that we can improve"			
"making a difference in the impact of teachers, changing and challenging their practices"	Impacting teaching and learning	School improvement	Making a Difference
"believing and knowing that this is going to make a true impact on education, that's what makes me keep coming to work"	Identifying areas for improvement		
"leading curriculum initiatives"			
"implementation of whole school scope and sequences for learning areas"			

Quotes	First cycle coding	Second cycle coding	Theme
"empowering teaching staff to have agency in their work"			
"helping staff with their growth plans"			
"helping teachers to achieve personal growth and developing the ability to make a difference in children's lives"			
"the progress of students and also the growth of staff in their roles"	Staff growth and development	Developing staff	
"supporting staff through challenges and witnessing their learning and growth"	Helping and collaborating with staff		
"collaborating with passionate staff to implement worthwhile projects for our students"			
"working with staff in developing themselves as professionals"			Making a Difference
"thoroughly enjoy all things administrative"			
"completion of projects"			
"completing tasks efficiently"			
"implementation of rosters, timetables, activities and celebrations"	Contributing to the smooth running of the school	Administration and management	
"things coming together"			
"I like it when timetables and rosters come together and everyone is happy – it makes for a good basis to then sort any more detailed or difficult things"	Getting things done		
"when something that has taken so long to plan works perfectly"			

3.8.2 *Data Display*

The second stream of Miles et al.'s (2020) interactive model of data analysis is data display. Whilst qualitative research is generally associated with the use of words, visual displays are also useful. A data display is "an organised, condensed assembly of information that allows analytic reflection and action" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 8). Data displays can be beneficial during data analysis as they may help reveal interconnected ideas and are helpful when included in a published work to assist the reader in understanding complex information (Leavy, 2014; Miles et al., 2020).

There are numerous data display options available, and the choice will depend on the nature of the qualitative data and the chosen analysis methods (Miles et al., 2020). The major families of data display are matrices, networks and graphics. Matrices, also known as tables, allow for the tabulation of data for easy viewing or comparison. They allow for related variables to be addressed in one display. Networks, colloquially referred to as mind-maps, consist of nodes interconnected by lines to other nodes to indicate their interconnectedness. They are particularly useful for mapping social processes and developing theories. Graphics are anything that is not a matrix or a network. This category includes visuals such as pie charts, Venn diagrams and graphs (Miles et al., 2020). This research used several data display formats, including tables and bar graphs. An example of a qualitative data display used in this research can be found in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6

Example Qualitative Data Display Excerpt: Frequency of Responses to Questions
Regarding the Most Important Aspects of the Role of Assistant Principal

Role aspect	Number of participants who mentioned each aspect		Total number of mentions
	Survey ($N = 68$)	Interview ($N = 20$)	
Leading Learning	47.05% 32	40.00% 8	40
Supporting staff	42.64% 29	45.00% 9	38
Building relationships	36.76% 25	35.00% 7	32

Note. This table's cell contents include both the percentage of total responses and the number of responses. This table is representative only and the full version will be presented and discussed in a later chapter.

3.8.3 Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The third stream of Miles et al.'s (2020) interactive model of data analysis is drawing and verifying conclusions. It is important to note that drawing conclusions and verifying conclusions are two separate but related actions, and it is necessary for the researcher to heed both (Miles et al., 2020). Whilst separate actions, both processes are carried out simultaneously during data analysis.

In drawing conclusions, the researcher engages in the heuristic processes of deductive, inductive, abductive and retroductive reasoning (Leavy, 2014). Deduction is the process of drawing information from the evidence. The researcher is required to ensure that conclusions are based firmly on the participants' experiences rather than their own. Induction involves making inferences from the particular to the general, based upon the evidence available. The researcher needs to move from specific observations from the data to broader generalisations. Abduction is a process of surmising the most likely, most explanatory abstractions of the evidence. The researcher needs to examine the evidence and make reasonable and logical inferences from it. Retroduction involves working backwards to establish how a conclusion was reached. The researcher needs to view the larger picture to understand what is happening and how it all comes together (Leavy, 2014).

Verifying conclusions is a means of quality control of the research. Miles et al. (2020) suggested that "the meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, sturdiness and confirmability - that is, their validity" (p. 9). Yin (2018) outlined four strategies to ensure high-quality analysis occurs to assist in the verification process. First, the researcher needs to reflect and check that attention was paid to all the evidence available. Second, all plausible rival explanations should be considered. Third, analysis should address the most critical aspects of the case study and not be clouded by less important or distracting information. Fourth, the researcher needs to demonstrate familiarity with current research and understanding of the topic. Keeping these strategies in mind, as themes and ideas emerged, the researcher of this study began to make links between data sources, identify anomalies and their possible reasons, look for gaps in the data and distinguish patterns and regularities. Data condensation and data displays were repeated, considering new information. In addition, the themes emerging were compared to those found in the quantitative data, the review of literature and document search.

3.8.4 Quantitative Data Analysis

The analysis of the quantitative data from this study's online survey requires particular explanation. Each section of the survey needed different approaches to data analysis. Quantitative data gathered in the first 19 questions provided demographic and career information. These data informed the interpretation of aspects of the qualitative data and were reviewed throughout the data analysis process to determine themes and commonalities and assist in data triangulation. The bulk of the quantitative data were displayed in a table (see Table 4.2 in Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Results). However, some quantitative data were also analysed using graphical representation. An example of quantitative data display using a gap analysis graph can be found in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4

Example Quantitative Data Display: Assistant Principal Actual Versus Preferred Teaching Loads

Actual Versus Preferred Teaching Hours per Week
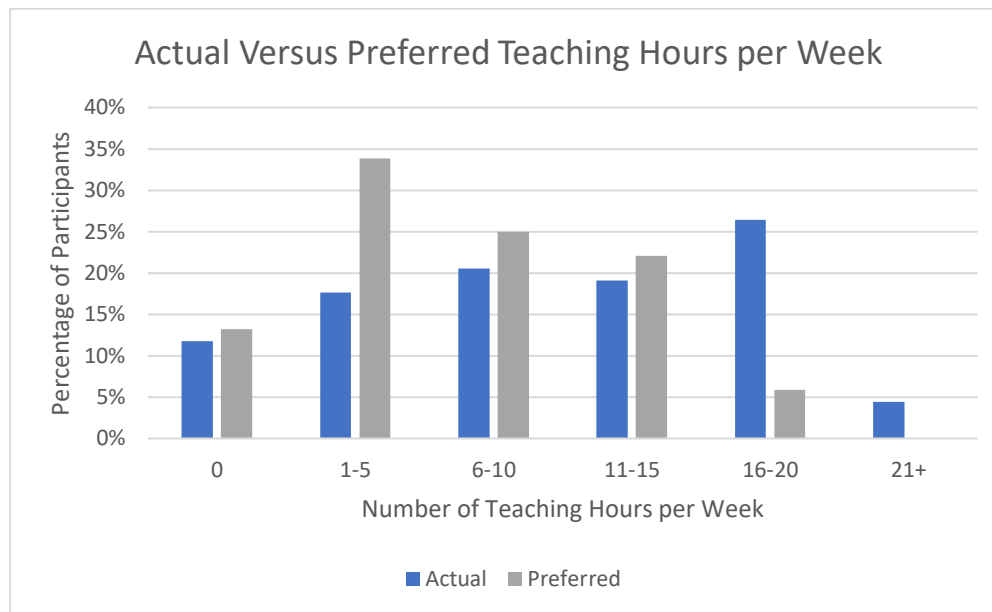
Note. This graph is representative only and will be discussed in a later chapter.

Question 20 of the survey had multiple parts that required assistant principals to identify how they felt about the time they spent on a range of tasks using a Likert scale technique. Responses to this question enabled comparison between actual and desired assistant principal responsibilities. Participants were asked to indicate whether they spent too much time, just the right amount of time, or not enough time on each of the listed tasks, or that the task was not part of their job. Given the extensive range of duties typically associated with the work of assistant principals, the list of tasks was grouped into categories to aid in the analysis of this data, and these groupings changed slightly as data analysis progressed. Both the list of duties and the categories were influenced by Harvey's (1991) study in Western Australian government primary schools, which in turn drew from the research of Wyles (1983, as cited by Harvey, 1991) in Canada. The tasks and categories were adapted to better suit the Western Australian Catholic primary school context. Researchers such as Hausman et al. (2002), Kwan and Walker (2008) and Morgan (2018) similarly used categories, also referred to as dimensions, to support their data collection and analysis in their research into assistant principals in other contexts.

The task categories identified during the data analysis process of this research can be described as follows:

- Providing support – activities that involve supporting members of the school community.
- Leading Learning – activities designed to improve the educational programs of the school.
- Leading the religious dimension – activities that enhance the religious life of the school.
- Administration and management - activities carried out to ensure the smooth operation of the school or to meet external accountability requirements.

Table 3.7 outlines the assistant principal duties included in the survey in relation to each task category.

Table 3.7

Categories of Task Analysis in Question 20 of the Survey

Task category	Tasks
Providing support	- Student wellbeing and pastoral care - Students with special needs - Student discipline and behaviour management - Supporting teachers and students in classrooms - Induction of new staff - Staff wellbeing - Mentoring and coaching of staff - Extra-curricular activities - Volunteers in the school - Parents and Friends (P & F) - Community group liaison - Individual meetings with parents - Group meetings with parents

Task category	Tasks
Leading learning	• Teaching and learning program evaluations
	• Student assessments
	• Evaluation of staff (performance appraisal)
	• Curriculum implementation and development
	• Staff professional development
	• Staff or PLC meetings
Leading the religious dimension	• Sacramental programs
	• Religious Education
	• Faith Story and Witness
	• Mass and liturgy planning
	• Parish liaison
Administration and management	• School newsletter
	• School calendars and term planners
	• Student attendance
	• Day-to-day school operations
	• Incursions and excursions
	• School timetables
	• Relief staff
	• Staff bulletins and notices
	• Equipment and supplies
	• Assemblies
	• Staff rosters (e.g., duty, staff prayer, etc.)
	• School budget
	• School improvement planning
	• Buildings and maintenance
	• Public relations and marketing
	• School policies
	• Emergency procedures

The data gathered from the Likert scale question were grouped into the task categories and analysed to determine the views of assistant principals regarding how they spent their time on each category of work. An example of how these data were displayed can be found in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8

Example Task Analysis Display Excerpt: Assistant Principal Perceptions Regarding How They Spend Their Time Providing Support

Task	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job	Total
	Providing support				
Student wellbeing and pastoral care	5.97% 4	52.24% 35	40.30% 27	1.49% 1	67
Students with special needs	10.29% 7	60.29% 41	16.18% 11	13.24% 9	68
Student discipline and behaviour management	20.59% 14	72.06% 49	7.35% 5	0.00% 0	68

Note. This table's cell contents include both the percentage of total responses and the number of responses. It should be noted that there is some deviation from a total of 68 due to non-response on some items. This table is representative only and the full version will be presented and discussed in a later chapter.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The researcher is cognisant of the ethical considerations required to ensure this research has been conducted to the highest ethical standard. Research approval was attained from the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Ethics Committee (Appendix Q) and this research adhered to their requirements in both its design and conduct. Table 3.9 outlines the process underpinning the ethical conduct of this research.

Table 3.9

A Summary of the Ethical Obligations for the Research

1.	Approval granted by the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Ethics Committee (Appendix Q).
2.	Approval granted by the Executive Director of CEWA (Appendix G).
3.	Information sheets explaining the research were provided to principals and assistant principals when invited to participate in the research (Appendices F and K).
4.	Principals completed consent forms prior to the involvement of their assistant principal(s) (Appendix L).
5.	Assistant principals provided consent to participate in the online survey through submission of the survey.
6.	Assistant principals completed consent forms prior to their involvement in the interviews (Appendix E).
7.	Interview transcripts were member-checked for accuracy and amended if requested by the participants.
8.	Participants and their individual schools are not identified.
9.	All survey records and recordings of interviews are stored electronically on the password-protected computer of the researcher and only accessed by the researcher and her supervisors.
10.	All recorded data will be destroyed five years after the final submission of the research.

3.10 Design Summary

A design summary for the research is provided in Table 3.10. The schedule of activities is presented in chronological order.

Table 3.10

Design Summary of the Research

Timeline	Activities
March 2020	• Presentation of Research Proposal
May 2020	• Low-risk ethics clearance granted by the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee • Survey developed, piloted and confirmed
June 2020	• Approval to proceed with the research granted by the Executive Director, CEWA • Letter of request sent to CAPA to seek their support in disseminating information to their members
July 2020	• CAPA email of support received • Research information sheets, participant and principal consent forms confirmed • Email sent to CAPA for distribution to their members inviting assistant principals to participate in the research • Principals of all CEWA primary schools contacted by email to seek consent for their assistant principal(s) to participate in the research • Principal consent forms collected • Survey link emailed to assistant principals who received principal consent • Online survey opened
September 2020	• Online survey closed
November 2020	• Link to the consent form sent to assistant principals who nominated to participate in interviews
December 2020	• Semi-structured interview piloted
March to June 2021	• Semi-structured interview dates scheduled, and interviews conducted • Interviews transcribed and member-checked
2021-2022	• Ongoing data analysis and writing of thesis
August 2022	• Thesis submitted for examination

3.11 Chapter Conclusion

This research sought to understand how assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia perceive their role. Chapter Three outlined the research plan, which included using qualitative and quantitative research methods to hear the voices of assistant principals through an exploratory instrumental case study approach. Explanations for the choices of theoretical framework, research methodology and methods were included, as well as a description of the research participants and the researcher's data analysis processes. Chapter Four will present the results of the research as they relate to the specific research questions.

Chapter Four – Presentation of Research Results

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the research plan for this study. It outlined the theoretical framework underpinning the research, as well as the instrumental case study methodology and the chosen research methods and data analysis procedures. This chapter aims to present the results of this case study, which explored what it means to be an assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The results are a combination of the qualitative data gathered from 20 one-to-one semi-structured interviews and the qualitative and quantitative data collected from 68 online surveys. In addition, researcher field notes and a document search are also reflected in the results. The colloquial term for assistant principal in Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) is the acronym "AP". Quotations from research participants in this chapter include AP to refer to the role, or the person in the role, of assistant principal. The pronoun "they" has been used to refer to both male and female participants to protect anonymity.

The first section of this chapter includes quantitative demographic and career characteristic information garnered from the 68 survey responses. The following five sections present the results gathered from the survey responses and 20 semi-structured interviews, organised under the five specific research questions:

1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
2. Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?
3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?
5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

An overview of the chapter is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Overview of Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Results

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Demographic data of participants

4.3 How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?

    4.3.1 Providing support

    4.3.2 Leading learning

    4.3.3 Leading the religious dimension

    4.3.4 Administration and management

    4.3.5 Summary

4.4 Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?

    4.4.1 Leading learning

    4.4.2 Supporting staff

    4.4.3 Building relationships

    4.4.4 Supporting the principal

    4.4.5 Focusing on students

    4.4.6 Most important skills

    4.4.7 Summary

4.5 Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?

    4.5.1 Working with students

    4.5.2 Making a difference

    4.5.3 Receiving support

    4.5.4 Opportunities for growth and development

    4.5.5 Community

    4.5.6 Summary

4.6 Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?

    4.6.1 The breadth of the role

    4.6.2 The challenge of time

    4.6.3 Managing relationships

    4.6.4 Personal wellbeing

    4.6.5 Summary

4.7 In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic Education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

    4.7.1 Provide targeted support and development

    4.7.2 Improve consistency across schools

    4.7.3 Increase opportunities for leadership activities

    4.7.4 Summary

4.8 Chapter conclusion

4.2 Demographic Data of Participants

Demographic data were gathered from the 68 survey participants. This information provided an overview of the features of the research contributors and the schools in which they work. These data can be found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Demographic Information of Participants

Characteristic	Survey		Interview	
	n	%	*n*	%
Gender				
Female	52	76	17	85
Male	16	24	3	15
Current age				
34 years or under	9	13	2	10
35-44 years	24	35	8	40
45-54 years	26	39	9	45
55 years or over	9	13	1	5
Highest qualification in education				
Bachelors	18	26	4	20
Graduate Certificate	6	9	1	5
Masters	44	65	15	75
Experience as an assistant principal				
1-4 years	26	38	8	40
5-9 years	23	34	9	45
10-15 years	11	16	1	5
16 years or more	8	12	2	10
Age when first appointed as an assistant principal				
34 years or under	25	37	6	30
35-44 years	31	45	11	55
45 years or older	12	18	3	15
Teaching experience before being appointed as an assistant principal				
1-4 years	1	1	1	5
5-10 years	27	40	6	30
11-16 years	24	35	6	30

Characteristic	Survey		Interview	
	n	%	*n*	%
17 years or more	16	24	7	35
Employment status				
Full-time	65	96	19	95
Part-time	3	4	1	5
Number of students enrolled in the school				
Less than 150	4	6	2	10
151-300	27	40	9	45
301-450	17	25	7	35
451 or more	20	29	2	10
Number of assistant principals working in the school				
One	19	28	4	20
Two	43	63	15	75
Three	6	9	1	5
School location				
Perth and suburbs	48	71	11	55
Regional or country	20	29	9	45
Intend to apply for principalship in the future				
Yes	32	47	10	50
No	17	25	2	10
Undecided	19	28	8	40

This demographic data revealed that the participants in this study were predominantly female and that most worked in schools in the metropolitan area. Participants were well qualified, with most holding a Master's degree and almost half indicated they intended to apply for principalship at some point in the future. Many assistant principals were at the early stage of their career as a school leader. A small number of participants indicated that they worked part-time in their role.

4.3 How Do Assistant Principals Define the Breadth of Their Role?

This first research question explored how assistant principals describe the scope of tasks for which they are responsible. Assistant principals referred to their range of responsibilities as: "anything and everything", "complex", "evolving", "diverse", "all-encompassing", "multi-faceted", "ever-changing" and requiring a "great

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deal of agility". One assistant principal described their role as "the 'dog's body', the 'go-to' person, the 'jack-of-all-trades'". Numerous interview participants laughed when asked to describe the tasks associated with their work due to the number of responsibilities being "too numerous to mention". The data gathered to answer this research question will be presented in four themes: providing support, leading learning, leading the religious dimension and administration and management. Quantitative data from the survey relevant to each of these themes will be presented first in the form of tabulated descriptive statistics. Qualitative data derived from the one-to-one interviews and open-ended survey questions will follow these tables.

4.3.1 Providing Support

There was unanimous consensus among the participants that providing support to school community members was part of the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. All 20 interview participants and all 68 survey participants referred to supporting others in some way, with differing emphasis on who received the assistance. Table 4.3 presents the quantitative data regarding assistant principal participation in a range of activities that would be considered as providing support.

Table 4.3

Assistant Principal Perceptions Regarding How They Spend Their Time in Providing Support

	Providing support				
Task	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job	Total
Student wellbeing and pastoral care	5.97% 4	52.24% 35	40.30% 27	1.49% 1	67
Students with special needs	10.29% 7	60.29% 41	16.18% 11	13.24% 9	68
Student discipline and behaviour management	20.59% 14	72.06% 49	7.35% 5	0.00% 0	68

Providing support					
Task	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job	Total
Supporting teachers and students in classrooms	2.99% 2	34.33% 23	61.19% 41	1.49% 1	67
Induction of new staff	0.00% 0	55.88% 38	41.18% 28	2.94% 2	68
Staff wellbeing	4.41% 3	47.06% 32	47.06% 32	1.47% 1	68
Mentoring and coaching of staff	1.47% 1	30.88% 21	66.18% 45	1.47% 1	68
Extra-curricular activities	7.69% 5	67.69% 44	18.46% 12	6.15% 4	65
Volunteers in the school	4.41% 3	54.41% 37	10.29% 7	30.88% 21	68
Parents and Friends (P & F)	4.41% 3	76.47% 52	7.35% 5	11.76% 8	68
Community group liaison	2.94% 2	45.59% 31	25.53% 16	27.94% 19	68
Individual meetings with parents	13.24% 9	79.41% 54	5.88% 4	1.47% 1	68
Group meetings with parents	4.41% 3	79.41% 54	8.82% 6	7.35% 5	68

Note. This table's cell contents include both the percentage of total responses and the number of responses. It should be noted that there is some deviation from a total of 68 due to non-response on some items.

All 68 participants identified student discipline and behaviour management as part of their work, with 20% (*n* = 14) indicating they spend too much time on this responsibility. All but one assistant principal identified that they spent time supporting

teachers and students in classrooms, with 61% (*n* = 41) wanting to spend more time doing this. Similarly, just one participant was not involved in the mentoring and coaching of staff, and of those that were, 66% (*n* = 45) would like to increase the time they spend providing this support. Almost all assistant principals identified student wellbeing and pastoral care, individual and group meetings with parents, staff wellbeing, and induction of new staff as components of their role. The theme of providing support will now be presented in four sub-themes: supporting the principal, supporting staff, supporting students and supporting parents.

4.3.1.1 Supporting the Principal. Providing support to the principal was a response from a third of the interview participants when asked about the breadth of their role. One participant felt that their job was "to support the principal in any way I can [and to] ease the workload, where possible, of the principal". Several assistant principals spoke of how the principal shapes their role, and their purpose was to implement the principal's plans and vision for the school. For example, one participant noted that "I need to be supportive of the journey the principal's on, and … loyal to that". Other participants indicated that their job was "assisting the principal in running an effective and successful school" and to "work collaboratively with the principal to ensure we provide an outstanding education for all students". Helping the principal keep the school running smoothly was mentioned by several assistant principals, with one participant noting that their role was to "assist the principal in coordinating, planning and organising the day-to-day running of the school as well as the long-term goals for the school". One assistant principal viewed their role as being a critical friend to the principal, observing: "I see the AP role as not always agreeing with the principal. Your role is there to add another voice".

4.3.1.2 Supporting Staff. Providing support to staff members was another frequent response from assistant principals regarding the breadth of their role, with all but one participant identifying it as part of their work. One participant described their role as a "one-stop-shop for staff who need to offload, brainstorm or chase up strategies and ideas". An interviewee spoke of "checking in on staff to see that they're doing okay and if they have any areas in which I can help". The support may involve providing pastoral care and encouraging staff wellbeing to "make sure everyone feels valued in a safe and happy environment". Many assistant principals also saw their role as supporting staff to "improve teaching" and to "support teachers

with their pedagogy". This help may look like: "going in and helping teachers if they needed help with implementing [specific maths program]". Another area of support included ensuring the assistant principal is "keeping up to date with current practices [so they can] lead professional development" for staff. Other areas participants identified as aspects of their support of staff included: "induction of new staff", "mentoring", "faith development", "supporting teachers with their discipline" of students, being a "mediator" when disputes arise, assistance with "personal issues" and "providing advice".

4.3.1.3 Supporting Students. The provision of behavioural, academic or pastoral support to students was an aspect of the role identified by all participants as part of their work. One assistant principal noted that they "get all the behaviour problems and things, so [I work] with those kids to try and get them to go back to class and do the right thing". Behavioural support may involve assisting students to self-regulate or engage in restorative practice as a result of their behavioural choices. Numerous other participants listed "student behaviour" as part of their role. Several research participants explained that they provide academic support to students, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. Some assistant principals are the "learning support coordinator" or manage "students with disabilities" as part of their work. These roles may include tasks such as: "managing the [education assistant] and support timetables, managing teachers that do the learning support [and] making sure that the students that need support in the classrooms get equitable and enough support to support their needs". Several assistant principals indicated that they provided face-to-face academic support to students who needed extra assistance. Additionally, all but one survey respondent noted that they engage in pastoral care and wellbeing support of students.

4.3.1.4 Supporting Parents. Eight interviewees identified supporting parents as part of their role, and all but one survey participant indicated they provide support to parents through individual and group meetings. One participant described an aspect of their work as: "to support families and be a 'go to' for them". Another assistant principal felt they acted like a "counsellor" to parents, especially when their child exhibited behavioural challenges. One participant noted that part of their role in supporting parents included "meetings and emails and [providing] support resources and information nights and open nights".

4.3.2 Leading Learning

Many research participants saw leading learning as an aspect of their role. Table 4.4 provides an overview of the quantitative data related to some of the tasks associated with leading learning.

Table 4.4

Assistant Principal Perceptions Regarding How They Spend Their Time on Leading Learning

Task	Leading learning				
	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job	Total
Teaching and learning program evaluations	2.94% 2	36.76% 25	50.00% 34	10.29% 7	68
Student assessments	2.99% 2	46.27% 31	41.79% 28	8.96% 6	67
Evaluation of staff (performance appraisal)	1.47% 1	39.71% 27	50.00% 34	8.82% 6	68
Curriculum implementation and development	7.46% 5	43.28% 29	44.78% 30	4.48% 3	67
Staff professional development	1.47% 1	63.24% 43	33.82% 23	1.47% 1	68
Staff or PLC meetings	7.35% 5	77.94% 53	13.24% 9	1.47% 1	68

Note. This table's cell contents include both the percentage of total responses and the number of responses. It should be noted that there is some deviation from a total of 68 due to non-response on some items.

The majority of participants indicated they were responsible for tasks such as leading staff and Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, staff professional development and curriculum implementation and development. Most assistant principals were also involved in student assessments, evaluation of staff

and teaching and learning program evaluations. Half of the respondents noted that they would like to spend more time evaluating staff and teaching and learning programs. The data relating to leading learning can be grouped into three sub-themes which will now be presented: providing professional learning, curriculum development and teaching.

4.3.2.1 Providing Professional Learning. The provision of professional learning was an almost universal aspect of the work of assistant principals in this study. Numerous assistant principals indicated they were tasked with "leading professional learning" for their staff. This leadership may involve "coordinating PLCs and cluster meetings", as well as "organising staff meetings and the content of those staff meetings". One assistant principal noted they were "in charge of running PLCs and making sure the school ticks along nicely in terms of teacher development". Another participant spoke of their role in "interpreting and tuning into [professional learning]. I'm [the provider of professional learning] for my staff a lot of time, and given my background, that's kind of bread and butter for me".

4.3.2.2 Curriculum Development. The development of curriculum was identified as a component of the work of assistant principals by 95% ($n = 64$) of survey respondents and several qualitative responses. Numerous participants stated that they "help with curriculum", "support with curriculum", or "lead curriculum". One participant noted: "I have curriculum responsibilities in terms of leading curriculum, ensuring that our staff are upskilled in those areas". Several assistant principals mentioned the role of data collection and analysis in their work on curriculum development. For example, "I do all the things you'd expect related to curriculum. Tasks I do include data analysis, [writing] curriculum plans, all of those types of things". Another respondent stated: "I organise assessments, and the collection of data, and analysis of data and run through those with staff".

4.3.2.3 Teaching. Teaching is another component of the role of assistant principal. Eighty-eight percent ($n = 60$) of survey participants have a teaching load. The number of hours they spend teaching each week ranges from one hour to more than 21 hours. Twelve percent ($n = 8$) of assistant principals indicated they do not have any teaching responsibilities. Half of the interview participants revealed that they see their teaching role as an important aspect of their work. For example, one

participant explained that "first of all, I'm a classroom teacher, and I always make a point to mention that", and another wrote, "I'd define my role as one of an exemplary educator in the classroom". A third participant saw teaching as a "critical component of leadership in my view". Figure 4.1 summarises the number of hours survey participants spend teaching each week.

Figure 4.1

Number of Hours Assistant Principals Spend Teaching each Week
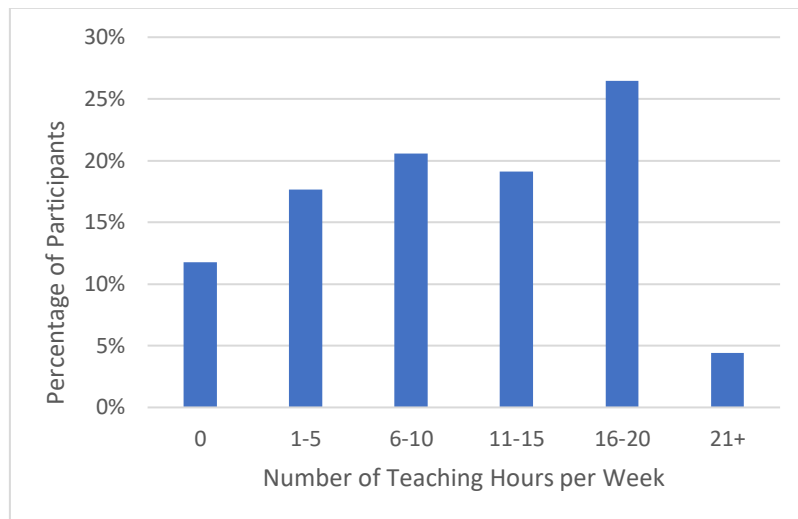
4.3.3 Leading the Religious Dimension

Most research participants indicated that their role included some aspect of leading the religious dimension of their school community. Table 4.5 provides an overview of assistant principals' perceptions of the time they spend on tasks related to leading in this area.

Table 4.5

Assistant Principal Perceptions Regarding How They Spend Their Time on Leading the Religious Dimension

	Leading the religious dimension				
Task	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job	Total
Sacramental programs	19.12% 13	63.24% 43	4.41% 3	13.24% 9	68
Religious Education	2.94% 2	72.06% 49	14.71% 10	10.29% 7	68
Faith Story and Witness	1.47% 1	69.12% 47	14.71% 10	14.71% 10	68
Mass and liturgy planning	17.65% 12	58.82% 40	7.35% 5	16.18% 11	68
Parish liaison	7.35% 5	67.65% 46	13.24% 9	11.76% 8	68

Note. This table's cell contents include both the percentage of total responses and the number of responses.

Ninety percent (*n* = 61) of survey participants engaged in tasks related to leading the religious dimension of the school, such as sacramental programs, Mass and liturgy planning and acted as a liaison with the parish. Most assistant principals are satisfied with how they spend their time in this area. The qualitative data concerning the leadership of the religious dimension of the school can be grouped into three sub-themes: coordinating religious events, overseeing the Religious Education curriculum and staff faith and knowledge development.

4.3.3.1 Coordinating Religious Events. The coordination of religious events in the school and parish is one of the aspects of the role of assistant principal, with 87% (*n* = 59) of survey respondents indicating it was part of their role. One participant described this responsibility as: "helping teachers prepare masses,

liaising with the parish, preparing children for their sacraments, and leading parent meetings". Another assistant principal similarly explained that they were responsible for organising "any whole-school Masses … [and for] class Masses, I liaise with the teachers about what they need to do". A further participant included arranging "family parish Masses and liturgies at school" as part of their role. Sacramental preparation was mentioned by numerous participants, as was "liaising with the parish priest". One assistant principal stated that their role is: "implementing strategies to promote Religious Education and the Rites and Rituals of the Catholic Church".

4.3.3.2 Overseeing the Religious Education Curriculum. Almost 90% ($n =$ 61) of survey participants and numerous interviewees identified responsibilities in overseeing the Religious Education curriculum in their schools. That is, they are tasked with "ensuring that the RE curriculum is being covered correctly" and "helping teachers with RE curriculum and programming". Another assistant principal spoke of "ensuring that our curriculum and ethos promote Gospel values that create a great school and community for our students, their families and our staff". One assistant principal noted that they "ensure that the classrooms all have their prayer focuses". Another similarly explained that they help "teachers in the classrooms with their prayer tables, making sure that they were in prominent positions and that they [display] the correct [liturgical] colours and seasons".

4.3.3.3 Staff Faith and Knowledge Development. The development of staff religious knowledge, including the encouragement of staff faith formation, was identified as an additional component of the role of assistant principal by 55% ($n =$ 11) of interviewees. Several participants explained their responsibility in ensuring staff meet and maintain their CEWA accreditation requirements, which allow staff to work in Catholic schools. For example, one assistant principal was tasked with "organising accreditation renewal and sometimes actually running those [professional learning activities], so being a presenter, ensuring that all staff have got their accreditation and assisting them in the steps that they need to take". Other participants explained that "keeping records of teachers' accreditation", "organising professional learning around the religious education and faith area" and ensuring that "our faith culture is prominent in our school" were aspects of their role. Supporting "teachers with their personal faith journeys" and "making sure we were

implementing staff prayer" were described, as was "making sure that our Evangelisation Plan is a living document and that it's brought up and talked about".

4.3.4 Administration and Management

Numerous research participants commented on their role in providing order to the school environment through administration and management, with many commenting on the large amount of this type of work involved. For example, some participants described the role as "very admin heavy", as being "largely administrator and part leader", and "largely administration and management of the school environment". Table 4.6 provides data related to administration and management tasks undertaken by research participants.

Table 4.6

Assistant Principal Perceptions Regarding How They Spend Their Time on Administration and Management

	Administration and management				
Task	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job	Total
School newsletter	7.35% 5	69.12% 47	8.82% 6	14.71% 10	68
School calendars and term planners	19.12% 13	70.59% 48	5.88% 4	4.41% 3	68
Student attendance	4.41% 3	50.00% 34	7.35% 5	38.24% 26	68
Day-to-day school operations	14.93% 10	68.66% 46	14.93% 10	1.49% 1	67
Incursions and excursions	0.00% 0	75.00% 51	4.41% 3	20.59% 14	68
School timetables	29.41% 20	60.29% 41	2.94% 2	7.35% 5	68

Administration and management					
Task	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job	Total
Relief staff	29.41% 20	58.82% 40	0.00% 0	11.76% 8	68
Staff bulletins and notices	11.76% 8	83.82% 57	2.94% 2	1.47% 1	68
Equipment and supplies	2.99% 2	65.67% 44	8.96% 6	22.39% 15	67
Assemblies	4.41% 3	83.82% 57	4.41% 3	7.35% 5	68
Staff rosters (e.g. duty, staff prayer, etc.)	29.41% 20	66.18% 45	1.47% 1	2.94% 2	68
School budget	1.47% 1	25.00% 17	35.29% 24	38.24% 26	68
School improvement planning	2.94% 2	57.35% 39	38.24% 26	1.47% 1	68
Buildings and maintenance	4.55% 3	30.30% 20	13.64% 9	51.52% 34	66
Public relations and marketing	10.29% 7	38.24% 26	35.29% 24	16.8% 11	68
School policies	13.43% 9	65.67% 44	19.40% 13	1.49% 1	67
Emergency procedures	5.88% 4	67.65% 46	10.29% 7	16.18% 11	68

Note. This table's cell contents include both the percentage of total responses and the number of responses. It should be noted that there is some deviation from a total of 68 due to non-response on some items.

The data revealed that all assistant principals engaged in a range of responsibilities falling within the domain of administration and management. These tasks included the school newsletter, incursions and excursions, equipment and supplies and emergency procedures. All but a few participants undertook tasks such as school policies, school improvement planning, staff bulletins and notices and staff rosters. The tasks with the lowest level of assistant principal engagement were the school budget and managing student attendance. The data relating to the administration and management aspects of the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia will be presented in three sub-themes: day-to-day operations, forward planning and compliance tasks.

4.3.4.1 Day-to-Day Operations. All but one assistant principal indicated they undertook responsibilities aimed at the day-to-day operations of the school, such as rosters, timetables, booking relief teachers, newsletters and ordering resources. Several participants spoke of their role in managing the school's day-to-day operations to ensure it ran smoothly. Specific comments from assistant principals included that they: "assist in the running of the school", "ensure the school continues to keep flowing", and "oversee the smooth running of the school". The specific tasks listed by participants included "doing the rosters, duty rosters, and … some of the timetables", "booking relief staff", "all of the timetables, schedules, calendars", "the newsletter … Facebook page and [attendance and reporting software]", as well as "ordering resources".

4.3.4.2 Forward Planning. In addition to these day-to-day operational responsibilities, participants identified forward planning and event organisation as part of their administration and management role. These tasks included "taking on coordinating of different special events throughout the year", like "Sorry Day and NAIDOC". Other forward planning tasks named were: "looking ahead to [the] big picture" and "organising forward planning documents such as the [school improvement plan] and the strategic plan", as well as the "school curriculum plan and so forth". Some assistant principals also identified "doing admin or helping the principal with [human resource tasks]". One participant specified that they are in charge of applying for "funding, so anything like [various grants], any of those types of fundings, I do".

4.3.4.3 Compliance Tasks. A further area of administration and management identified in the data is "helping with compliance". Assistant principals listed requirements such as: "all your national required assessments, like all your NAPLAN and so forth", "policies and policy writing", "Working with Children checks", working with new grads to "gain full membership of teachers' registration", "coordinating the principal review", "bushfire plan and evacuation safety plans" and "all the admin for [semester] report writing". Regarding "school audit requirements", one assistant principal noted that "one of my foci is being able to make sure that we have the structures in place to ensure that we adhere to all of the components of the audit".

4.3.5 Summary

The qualitative and quantitative data revealed the significant breadth of the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, which was described within four themes: providing support, leading learning, leading the religious dimension of the school and administration and management. Table 4.7 provides a summary of these themes and sub-themes.

Table 4.7

Summary of the Themes and Sub-themes Regarding the Breadth of the Role of Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia

Theme	Sub-Themes
Providing support	Supporting the principal
	Supporting staff
	Supporting students
	Supporting parents
Leading learning	Providing professional learning
	Curriculum development
	Teaching
Leading the religious dimension	Coordinating religious events
	Overseeing the Religious Education curriculum
	Staff faith and knowledge development
Administration and management	Day-to-day operations
	Forward planning
	Compliance tasks

4.4 Which Aspects of Their Role Do Assistant Principals Think Are the Most Important?

The previous research question explored how assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia defined the breadth of their role. This second question explored the aspects of the role assistant principals consider the most important. Survey respondents were asked to name the most significant responsibilities of their role. The most frequent responses in the survey described tasks associated with leading learning, with 47% ($n = 32$) of survey respondents identifying this type of activity as one of the most critical parts of their work. This result was closely followed by supporting staff ($n = 29$), focusing on students ($n = 25$), building relationships (n=25) and supporting the principal ($n = 23$). Other responses included providing an orderly environment ($n = 14$), leading the religious dimension of the school ($n = 9$), building community ($n = 7$), supporting parents ($n =$

6), setting an example to others ($n = 5$) and teaching ($n = 2$). The interview participants cited a similar range of tasks they felt were the most important, but with slight differences in emphasis, with some responsibilities, such as providing an orderly environment and teaching, not being mentioned at all. Table 4.8 provides data regarding the number of mentions by research participants for each of the 11 aspects of the role they felt was most important.

Table 4.8

Frequency of Responses to Questions Regarding the Most Important Aspects of the Role of Assistant Principal

Role aspect	Number of participants who mentioned each aspect		Total number of mentions
	Survey ($N = 68$)	Interview ($N = 20$)	
Leading Learning	47.05% 32	40.00% 8	40
Supporting staff	42.64% 29	45.00% 9	38
Building relationships	36.76% 25	35.00% 7	32
Supporting the principal	33.82% 23	35.00% 7	30
Focusing on students	36.76% 25	20.00% 4	29
Providing an orderly environment	20.58% 14	0.00% 0	14
Leading the religious dimension	13.23% 9	10.00% 2	11
Building community	10.29% 7	0.00% 0	7
Supporting parents	8.82% 6	5.00% 1	7
Setting an example to others	7.35% 5	0.00% 0	5
Teaching	2.94% 2	0.00% 0	2

Note. This table's cell contents include both the percentage of total responses and the number of responses.

The five most frequent responses will now be explored: leading learning, supporting staff, building relationships, supporting the principal and focusing on students.

4.4.1 Leading Learning

Participants identified leading learning as the most valuable aspect of the role. Assistant principals noted some of the crucial elements of their role as: "being an instructional leader", "providing momentum for school improvement", "making sure that we are sticking to the [school improvement] plan and on track with timelines", and "supporting the implementation of protocols and pedagogies that promote student learning". Data related to leading learning will be outlined in two sub-themes: building staff capacity and overseeing curriculum.

4.4.1.1 Building Staff Capacity. Assistant principals saw "building staff capacity" as an essential part of their work in leading learning. This focus on improving skills included "helping staff examine their own philosophy and strategies", "collaborating with staff to ensure best practice for our students", and the "implementation of best practice in teaching and learning". One participant saw "providing a balance of support and accountability" as important and noted this balance could be achieved by "mentoring staff" to understand what best practice is because "you can't make someone accountable if they've no idea what they're doing". Another research participant spoke of "challenging people to achieve high standards". This aspect of the role included "supporting teachers as much as possible to do the most effective job they can" and, as another participant put it: "providing opportunities [for teachers] to engage and demonstrate their gifts". "Supporting & giving feedback as they try new things" was also identified as important, as was "organising professional learning".

4.4.1.2 Overseeing Curriculum. Numerous participants saw overseeing curriculum as a critical component of their work. Assistant principals spoke of looking at the "big picture [and being responsible for] driving curriculum and change", "leading curriculum initiatives and school improvement", and about curriculum being "our core business". Several participants noted the necessity of monitoring how the curriculum is being delivered in classrooms: they saw a crucial part of their role as "monitoring the delivery of the curriculum in all learning areas" and "overseeing how the teaching and learning best leads to increased [student learning] outcomes".

Similarly, another assistant principal noted the importance of "staying on top of the learning programs and their effectiveness in regard to student progress and achievement". One participant acknowledged that part of the role of overseeing curriculum involved implementing change and that "change is difficult [for staff], and [I] want to put those procedures and policies into place to be able to support the changes that we're trying to make".

4.4.2 Supporting Staff

Providing support to staff was the second most cited important aspect of the role of assistant principal. One participant noted that they "still understand where teachers are coming from" and so can "understand what support they need". Another assistant principal saw their support of staff as allowing teachers "to do their job … to make their job easier". Three sub-themes emerged from the data concerning supporting staff: pastoral care of staff, acting as a problem-solver and acting as an intermediary between the staff and principal or between staff and parents.

4.4.2.1 Pastoral Care of Staff. One participant felt they "would like to spend more time on staff wellbeing as I feel the positive mindset of staff will directly affect the mindset of students and the wider community leading to better learning outcomes". Others spoke of their role as being "to take the pressure off the teachers", "be someone to turn to for help or advice, show guidance and care", "being there for staff", "listening, understanding and supporting staff", and "being accessible". Several assistant principals noted the importance of "caring for the wellbeing of graduate teachers or staff new to the school".

4.4.2.2 Acting as a Problem-Solver. Assistant principals mentioned the importance of being a "problem-solver" and "helping staff solve problems with students and parents. It's being that support person for [staff]". Others described the importance of their role in "holding things together", "being the person everyone is going to come to for help", and having "that ability to jump into the many different hats very quickly". Another participant said an important part of their role is to "point [staff] in the right direction when they meet challenges".

4.4.2.3 Acting as an Intermediary. Several participants spoke of the importance of their role as a "conduit", "direct link", or "middleman between the principal and the teachers", or as "being a voice for the teachers". One assistant

principal described being "a safe place or a safe haven for a teacher to say, 'this is what I'm feeling'". Similarly, some assistant principals saw a vital aspect of their role as being a "buffer" or "diffuser" when "there is a problem coming up with a student or a problem with a parent [and we can help by being] the next step up for them getting some support". One interviewee suggested that "before [a problem] heads up to the principal, we put our head around enough of what's going on and then push things back down, so it doesn't sort of go straight to the top".

4.4.3 Building Relationships

Building relationships was the third aspect of the role of assistant principal most mentioned by interviewees and survey respondents. One participant felt that "relationships are everything", and another noted that "if you don't have [relationships], then your job is merely transactional". Numerous assistant principals expressed the idea that it is essential to "build relationships with all stakeholders: staff, students, parents, parish and the wider community", and others pointed out that the relationship with the principal was also vital. One assistant principal expressed the importance of positive relationships with all stakeholders as that "will impact their experience at our school". The data relating to building relationships will be presented in two themes: forming connections and building trust.

4.4.3.1 Forming Connections. Several participants highlighted the importance of developing genuine connections with people in the school community. These connections could be achieved by creating a "tight-knit school community" and "making those really good connections with the kids". One assistant principal in a regional school explained that they saw an essential aspect of their work as: "being able to connect with kids, with parents, with teachers, with the principal, with community members and to promote the [school's] vision and the Christ-centred school we are". The same participant noted that connection could be achieved by "little things, little chats in the hallway or connecting with kids one-on-one, or it can be big things like the soccer festival, or bigger stuff we do out in the community". They also described the importance of connections with the community as being an "extension of the school". Another participant saw their faith as an important aspect of how they form connections with school community members: "I probably link this back to my faith … [and] servant leadership. That's relational. It's authentic. It's leading like Jesus, and I'm always aspiring to improve my servant leadership".

Another interviewee commented: "servant leadership and looking at Jesus as an inspiration … has a strong emphasis on the relational. In this role, you [need to] establish strong, authentic relationships with all stakeholders, not just the staff".

4.4.3.2 Building Trust. Research participants expressed the essentiality of building trusting relationships with staff to ensure quality education. For example:

When you've got [relationships] working well, it opens the door to everything else. If [staff] don't trust me, if I don't have a good relationship, even if I'm asking them to do the most amazing, most research-backed thing in the world, if they don't trust me, they're not going to want to do it, and you're not going to see any evolution or change or pedagogical improvements.

Similarly, one assistant principal expressed that building trusting relationships with staff, parents and students allows for honest conversations and improved learning outcomes:

The key to good academic outcomes for students is always relationships, so therefore, if it's good for students, it's good for teachers and good for parents because we're all sort of working on the same page with trying to get the best for the child. If you've got good relationships, you can have the difficult conversations as well as all the positive stuff.

Another participant suggested that trusting relationships are necessary to "be successful, [otherwise] you're not going to be considered genuine in your role". The same assistant principal went on to say: "When the stakeholders see that you're invested in your leadership in that servant model, to give and not to be in a position of power, but in a position of servitude, I find that the response is very, very positive". Building trust between the principal and assistant principal is also important: "If my principal and I don't have that open and trustworthy relationship, then I might not share things that are clearly impacting [the school] that she might need to be aware of, or she might not say, hey, you really do need to look at addressing [this aspect of your work]". A similar opinion was shared by another participant who said: "You've got to have your relationship with your principal and be on the same page as the principal".

4.4.4 Supporting the Principal

Participants identified supporting the principal as the fourth most crucial aspect of the role of assistant principal. One survey participant noted that their role is

"extremely important as a support to the principal to make the school 'work' on so many levels." An assistant principal working in a large school with multiple assistant principals explained that "we're the people that put the fires out, whereas, in smaller schools, it's straight to the principal". An interview participant highlighted the importance of their role in supporting the principal, saying: "The buck stops with the principal, but the assistant principal slows it down". The data for supporting the principal will be presented in two themes: providing contextual support and forming a united leadership team.

4.4.4.1 Providing Contextual Support. When asked about the most important aspect of their role, numerous participants made comments such as: "The most important aspect of my job is to support the principal in the day-to-day management of the school", "assisting the principal in all aspects of school life" and "supporting the principal with all aspects of running the school". Several participants noted the need for support based on the school or situational context, with one stating they help "the principal in the day-to-day running of the school, whatever that looks like on any particular day". Another assistant principal saw the importance of their role as: "working with the principal in leading the staff and student community. In that capacity, obviously, there's a lot of range because … it deals with curriculum, pastoral [care], and everything else". One participant provided a further example of adapting the support of the principal to the situational context: "My most important role is to support the principal and the teachers. There are times when you need to do both, and there are times when you need to support the principal more".

4.4.4.2 Forming a United Leadership Team. The importance of creating and presenting a united leadership team to the staff and school was mentioned by several research participants as an aspect of supporting the principal. For example, one assistant principal noted that it is crucial "that the leadership team is on the same page and is seen to be on the same page". Another participant felt that a united approach is essential, even when they had different opinions to the principal:

> We are called assistant principals, so I think our job — we may not always agree with the principal — but I think our role is to support and be a united front. I think that's probably, for me, the most important part because if your leadership team looks like they're united and they're running kind of on the same page, then your staff will feel a lot more comfortable and happy.

Whether you agree or disagree, I think you need to come across as supporting.

Another participant commented something similar: "I think the role of the AP is interesting because you are assisting the principal, you're making sure that you're on the same page as what the principal is, so that you're delivering the same message to the staff."

4.4.5 Focusing on Students

Focusing on students was the fifth most frequently mentioned vital aspect of the role of assistant principal. Twenty-five survey respondents stated that supporting students was the most important aspect of their role, with the majority of these participants simply stating, "supporting students" or "providing support to students", with no elaboration. For this reason, no sub-themes were identified for this theme; however, the number of responses indicated it is seen by many to be an essential aspect of the role of assistant principal.

Several assistant principals expressed the importance of "putting the needs of our students first". A survey participant stated that "the most important aspect is we're here for the kids. It's the voice of the kid". An interviewee said:

I think as educators, our primary focus is always on the children, but when you're in leadership, it's a much, much bigger picture. You can't just be focused on your class, or you can't just be focused on little Johnny in the playground, because there's 220 little Johnnies [in the school].

The importance of getting to know each student so that the appropriate support can be given was reflected by one participant: "knowing the students beyond just their names; having a grasp on each year level cohort pastorally and academically allows you to support the kids and their teachers". Research participants stated support of students included: "ensuring strong pastoral care", "student wellbeing", making sure "students feel safe at school", and "behaviour management", including "keeping the peace between students". Providing "support programs" and "listening to and supporting … students" were further comments from participants.

4.4.6 Most Important Skills

Interview participants were asked what they believed were the most important skills needed by assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia.

Data regarding the most crucial skills were also gathered from an interview question regarding the advice participants would give teachers aspiring to become an assistant principal. These data are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

The Frequency of Responses Regarding the Most Important Skills Needed by Assistant Principals in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia

Skill	Number of mentions
Organisation	25
Time management	23
Flexibility and agility	22
Authenticity	17
Communication	14
Active listening	13
Interpersonal skills	12
Problem-solving	11
Having a disposition toward learning	11
Exemplary teaching	8
Empathy	7
Seeing the big picture and the details	7
Decisive decision making	6
Emotional intelligence	5
Collaboration	4
Resilience	2
Patience	2
Dependability	1

4.4.7 Summary

The data revealed 11 aspects of the role of assistant principal which participants saw as the most important. The five most frequent responses were leading learning, supporting staff, building relationships, supporting the principal and supporting students. In addition, interview participants identified a range of essential

skills required to complete the role successfully. Table 4.10 provides a summary of these themes and sub-themes.

Table 4.10

Summary of the Themes and Sub-themes Regarding the Most Important Aspects of the Role of Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia

Theme	Sub-Themes
Leading Learning	Building staff capacity
	Overseeing curriculum
Supporting Staff	Pastoral care of staff
	Acting as a problem-solver
	Acting as an intermediary
Building Relationships	Forming connections
	Building trust
Supporting the Principal	Providing contextual support
	Forming a united leadership team
Focusing on Students	
Most Important Skills	

4.5 Which Aspects of the Role Provide Professional Fulfilment to Assistant Principals?

The first two research questions explored the breadth of the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia and the aspects of the role participants identified as most important. The third research question explored the parts of the role that provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals. Quantitative survey data focused on four factors relevant to this research question. These factors were: participant motivations for becoming an assistant principal; levels of job satisfaction; whether, if they were beginning their career again, they would become an assistant principal; and their career plans for the next three to five years. These data will now be outlined.

Survey participants were asked to identify their motivations for becoming an assistant principal. They were presented with seven options, including "other", and could choose all applicable responses. The most frequent responses were "encouraged by others" ($n = 44$) and "wanted professional growth opportunities" ($n = 41$). Table 4.11 presents the quantitative data from this survey question.

Table 4.11

Participant Motivations for Becoming an Assistant Principal

Motivations	Number of responses	Percentage of participants
Encouraged by others	44	64.71%
Wanted professional growth opportunities	41	60.29%
It seemed like the next logical step	20	29.41%
Wanted a career path to principalship	17	25.00%
Other	9	13.23%
Wanted a larger income	7	10.29%
Prefer administration to teaching	4	5.88%

The explanations from the nine assistant principals who chose "other" as one of their responses were as follows: ready for leadership ($n = 4$), wanted to have a larger impact than as a teacher ($n = 3$), "wanted to lead Religious Education" ($n = 1$), and "to meet the needs of the school" ($n = 1$).

Research participants were also asked to specify, on a scale of seven options, how much of the time they felt satisfied with their job. Almost 90% of respondents ($n = 61$) showed a sense of satisfaction for at least "a good deal of the time". Figure 4.2 presents the results of this question.

Figure 4.2

How Much of the Time Participants Feel Satisfied With Their Job
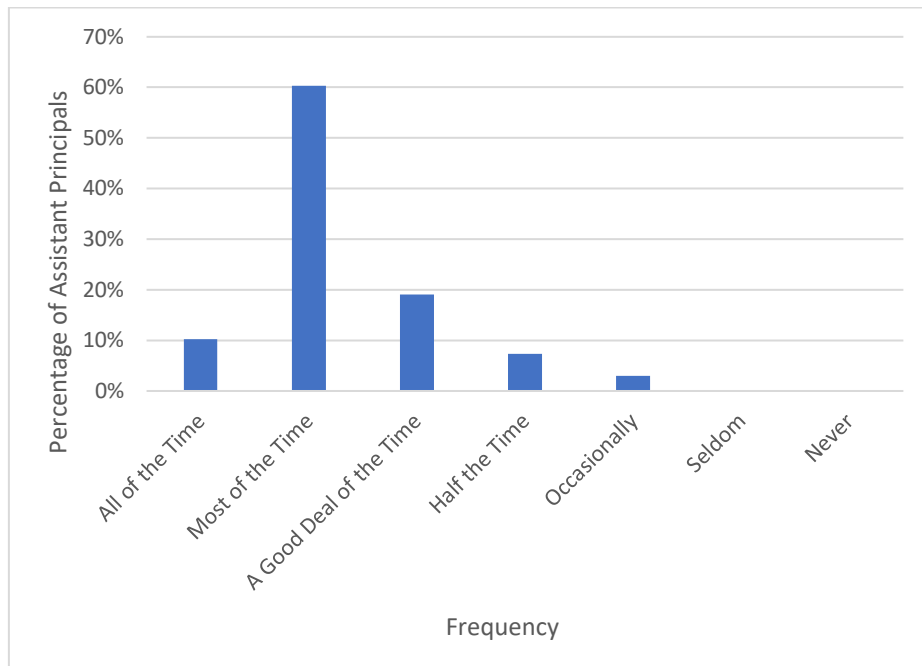
A further survey question asked participants to specify the likelihood of becoming an assistant principal again if they were to restart their careers. Ninety-one percent of respondents ($n = 62$) revealed they probably, or certainly, would make the same career choice. Figure 4.3 presents this quantitative data.

Figure 4.3

Likelihood of Participants Choosing the Same Career Path Again
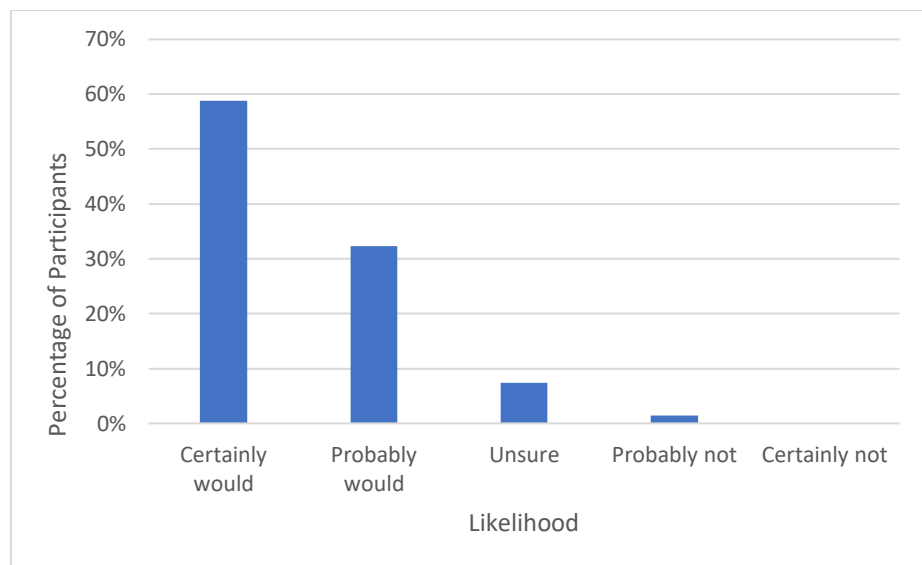
One survey question asked the research participants to indicate their intended career path in the next three to five years from a choice of seven options, including "other". Sixty-eight percent (*n* = 46) of assistant principals planned to stay in the role, either in their current school or a new school. Thirty-one percent (*n* = 21) of assistant principals indicated they planned to apply for principalship in this time period. One respondent chose "other" and explained: "not sure – at different times, each of these options is appealing". No survey participants revealed plans to return to full-time teaching, find a new career, or retire.

The qualitative data for this research question were collected from open-ended survey questions and semi-structured interviews. These data could be assembled into five themes: working with students, making a difference, receiving support, opportunities for growth and development, and community.

4.5.1 Working with Students

Half of the interview participants identified that they saw working with students as a fulfilling aspect of their work. Some of the survey responses to a question regarding which aspects of their work assistant principals found most rewarding included: "my daily interactions with all students of all ages", "I love being with the kids", "the biggest thing for me is the students" and "the kids bring so many rewards". The data related to working with students will be presented in two sub-themes: having a positive impact on students and having a teaching role.

4.5.1.1 Having a Positive Impact on Students. There was a sense of gratitude, pride and satisfaction among participants regarding the positive impact they have on the lives of their students. One assistant principal explained that the "biggest thing for me is the students and making a difference, knowing that we're having a positive influence on not just their cognitive ability but their social-emotional lives as well". An interviewee expressed that they like "creating an environment where children thrive, where they're really being at their best, where they walk in the school gates with a smile on their dial, they're happy to be at school, and they want to learn". Another participant highlighted the value of supporting students over completing administrative tasks, saying:

> I guess the main thing that [motivates me is] being able to impact kids' lives
> for the better, educationally and spiritually. Being able to see them grow and

their family grow. Yeah, it's beautiful. We get bogged down so much in the paperwork, but at the end, it's just great to impact the kids' lives.

This impact on students' lives, even when it might be challenging to go to work, was expressed by another interviewee as: "I get up in the morning like, 'Oh, do I really want to do this?' Then when you're there, you're there with the kids, you're there helping the staff and so on, then, yeah, that's what keeps me going". One participant mentioned the satisfaction they get from ensuring students are prepared for the future:

Twenty-first-century learning is being able to create those opportunities for students … that's all part of having that higher-level understanding of what our children are going to need. I love being part of that because I think it's so optimistic. It's so hopeful.

Another interviewee found it rewarding "seeing students grow, whether it's in confidence or whether it's academically, especially those students whom we know may not be getting everything they need in different areas of their life". Similarly, one participant expressed that: "I love watching kids learn a new thing. That just blows my mind." The same assistant principal went on to say: "having the opportunity to have an impact on a community … through the decisions and the work that I do as part of a leadership team is massively inspiring, like it makes me want to do what I do".

4.5.1.2 Having a Teaching Role. Several participants identified their teaching role as providing professional fulfilment. Some simply said, "I love that I still get to teach", and "my teaching days are still my favourite days". An interviewee explained that the most rewarding part of their work is: "probably number one, the kids. I love teaching. I'm really passionate about it. The kids bring so many rewards". Other assistant principals also identified teaching as something they really enjoy whilst acknowledging the difficulties involved. For example, one said, "I find it hard to have a teaching load, but I also enjoy the teaching load". This sentiment was echoed by an interviewee who stated:

As much as it's hard to still have a teaching role, I think it's important to still have a teaching role. It's the kids that give you that drive and that passion. That's why you're in this job. You're in this job to make the kids' education better.

One participant expressed their thoughts about teaching as such: "I think teaching is incredibly noble. I always feel as though I am doing good work, contributing my own talents and gifts where it matters: with our children".

4.5.2 Making a Difference

Sixteen of the 20 interview participants and numerous survey respondents expressed ideas related to "making a difference" in the lives of school community members as an aspect of their work that provided professional fulfilment. One participant explained that the most rewarding part of their work is "knowing that you are improving the lives of some of our most vulnerable children". Another assistant principal stated: "I genuinely love what I do. I love making a difference. Whether that's a difference to the teachers or making a difference to the students". The data relating to the theme of making a difference will be presented in three sub-themes: school improvement, developing staff and administration and management.

4.5.2.1 School Improvement. Participants identified numerous school improvement activities as providing professional fulfilment. For example, survey respondents identified "introducing new teaching and learning opportunities that staff find effective and see results with", "identifying areas that we can improve and implementing whole school improvement", "being part of bringing about positive change in teaching and learning" and "driving positive change" as being rewarding aspects of their work. One interviewee expressed that they are motivated by "making a difference in the impact of teachers, changing and challenging their practices". The same assistant principal continued: "[I am] never giving up on that, even though I may have resistance from staff … believing and knowing that this is going to make a true impact on education, that's what makes me keep coming to work". Several participants identified being able to visit classrooms as a satisfying part of their role: "having the chance to visit all classrooms" and "having the chance to observe classrooms and teaching to see the exciting things happening in our classes". Curriculum development was another rewarding aspect of the participants' work, with two assistant principals seeing "leading curriculum initiatives" and the "implementation of whole-school scope and sequences for learning areas" as positive experiences.

4.5.2.2 Developing Staff. Many assistant principals identified developing staff as an aspect of their work that provided professional fulfilment. Some survey respondents stated the following in response to a question about what they found most rewarding about their role: "empowering teaching staff to have agency in their work", "being able to make my staff's work as enjoyable and easy as possible to ensure that they love coming to work and feel supported in every way", "helping staff with their growth plans", and "working with staff in developing themselves as professionals". Several participants highlighted their enjoyment of developing staff for the benefit of students. One assistant principal explained that they found "the most rewarding aspect of [their] work [is] helping teachers to achieve personal growth and developing their ability to make a difference in children's lives". Another participant said they enjoyed seeing "the progress of the students and also growth of staff in their roles". Other responses from participants regarding the rewarding aspects of their work included "collaborating with passionate staff to implement worthwhile projects for our students", "working with staff to mentor, guide and encourage their development", and "supporting staff through challenges and witnessing their learning and growth".

4.5.2.3 Administration and Management. Numerous interview and survey respondents noted that they felt a sense of accomplishment in their contribution to the school through administration and management. For example, one participant noted they "thoroughly enjoy all things administrative", and others listed "completion of projects", "completing tasks efficiently" and "implementation of rosters, timetables, activities and celebrations" as rewarding aspects of their work. A sense of pride in "things coming together" was evident in other responses. For example, "running something [such as a] sports carnival and it all comes together and runs smoothly" and "I like it when timetables and rosters come together, and everyone is happy - it makes for a good basis to then sort any more detailed or difficult things". Another participant felt accomplished "when something that has taken so long to plan for works perfectly … [it is] reaffirming that I have fantastic organisational skills because you definitely need them in this job".

4.5.3 Receiving Support

Almost half of the interview participants felt that receiving support in their work contributed positively to their professional fulfilment. As one assistant principal

observed, they "really enjoy the job and feel supported". The data collected in the area of receiving support will be presented in three sub-themes: support from leadership team colleagues, support from collegial networks and working in a Catholic environment.

4.5.3.1 Support from Leadership Team Colleagues. Multiple participants identified the support they receive from their principal and other leadership team members as having a positive impact on their work. One assistant principal said: "I especially cherish the relationship I have with my principal and the other assistant principal at my school". Another participant expressed: "I am fortunate to work in a place and with a leadership team who are supportive and empowering". "I would not work anywhere else!" was a statement from one assistant principal who also said, "I love working as an AP at my school. I feel very supported by our principal". Several interviewees noted the support they received from fellow leadership team members to develop their leadership skills. For example, one participant said: "I feel very grateful for my current position working with people who inspire me and encourage me in my role. It has not always been my experience and has given me the confidence to continue to develop my leadership skills". Similarly, another assistant principal explained:

> I like the fact that our leadership team is harmonious. It's nice coming to work
> when you know that you are listened to and that your opinion is strongly
> valued, and you're able to do some of these tasks that are possibly principal
> tasks, but you're trusted with and given the chance to have a go.

One assistant principal identified receiving support without judgement as a positive experience: "I think that [the leadership team] all support each other and [understand that] nobody is perfect. We all support each other if things go wrong. There's no judgement … It's just a very, very supportive team". The opportunity to contribute to and learn from the leadership team was mentioned by one participant: "that's something I'm really loving at my school … I feel like it's just a really great balance between learning from the team but also contributing myself".

4.5.3.2 Support from Collegial Networks. Numerous participants described the value they place on the support they receive from their collegial networks. One interviewee highlighted the importance of this support, saying they "enjoy and appreciate all opportunities to connect with other APs in our system. We missed this

in 2020 due to COVID-19, and for those of us new to leadership, these [connections] are pivotal professional development and networking opportunities". Another participant noted the importance of collegial support, explaining: "When you're an AP …you're the middleman. You're not the principal, and you're no longer one of the teachers, so it's lovely [being able to] hang out with people who really can appreciate being that middle person". A similar sentiment was expressed by another participant who said: "APs are there for each other. They know the situation that everybody's in, and they'll help each other out as much as they possibly can, which is great. You've got that collegiality there. You're definitely not on your own". The support from other assistant principals in the Catholic Assistant Principal Association (CAPA) Teams channel (an online communication space) was noted by multiple participants. For example, one assistant principal stated that "there's a huge amount of support that APs have for each other through the CAPA Teams channel", and another participant noted, "there's no stupid question … [CAPA Teams channel members] will get back to you as soon as possible with as much assistance and support as you possibly need". Several assistant principals spoke of their regional or local collegial networks. One participant from a large regional location, with numerous Catholic primary schools, explained that "we are quite close together, so we can rely on each other … we're part of a really lovely network, and we can leverage each other's wisdom, and that's beautiful".

    4.5.3.3 Working in a Catholic Environment. Participants identified the support they receive from working in a Catholic environment as contributing to their professional fulfilment. One participant spoke of the "special and unique bond that you create in the Catholic system" and that they "have worked in the government system [of schools] and it just feels different". Another assistant principal said:

> I enjoy working in a Catholic school. It's lovely. I love working somewhere where you can express your faith. If I had a choice … I would much prefer to work at a Catholic school because … you can talk about the Gospel values. Instead of having to have all these other mental wellness-type programs that schools have, we can link it all to our faith. I like that.

A further participant explained that "at the heart of it, when you walk into a Catholic school, every person is working towards a single shared vision; supporting students to be the best they can be, academically and spiritually". Other responses from

participants regarding aspects of their role they found rewarding included that they enjoy "being a part of all the sacraments", "helping plan the sacraments", "working with the parish", "being able to celebrate Easter and Christmas, and things like that within the school" and "that being an AP in a CEWA school has been an enriching experience".

4.5.4 *Opportunities for Growth and Development*

Research participants identified opportunities for growth and development as aspects of the role of assistant principal that provide professional fulfilment. Several participants expressed that they enjoy being "challenged" and "professionally stimulated". Sixty percent (*n* = 41) of survey respondents indicated that one of their motivations for becoming an assistant principal was professional growth opportunities. The data relating to opportunities for growth and development will be presented in three sub-themes: professional learning opportunities, leadership opportunities and role variety.

4.5.4.1 Professional Learning Opportunities. Participants identified opportunities for professional learning as a positive aspect of their role. For example, one assistant principal explained that they had "learnt an enormous amount in [their] first years in the role [and that they] really value the learning opportunities and leadership courses available to [them] through our system". One interviewee similarly noted that "professionally, I think I've found the learning that is afforded for leaders at school to be rewarding", and another explained that they "thoroughly love [their] job and [are] enjoying the professional learning and growth that comes from the opportunities [they are] afforded in a growing school". Some assistant principals spoke of their interest in engaging in professional learning aimed at developing their skills and knowledge for school improvement. For example, one participant noted that the professional learning they undertook was "just anything that's going to be of benefit to the school and to my interests and my future growth [and that] is where I want to engage". The role of the principal in supporting the professional development of assistant principals was also highlighted. For example, encouragement to attend school board meetings, having the chance to undertake work usually done by the principal, and engaging in reflective conversations with the principal were identified as ways principals support assistant principals in their growth and development.

4.5.4.2 Leadership Opportunities. Some participants identified that they gained professional fulfilment from the leadership opportunities they were afforded. For example, one assistant principal explained that they enjoy "being a real leader and not just managing events or sitting in the office". The contrast between being a teacher and an assistant principal was identified by several participants, with one stating: "I do enjoy being part of the decisions, having a bit more of a say than if you're just a teacher. I do enjoy that". Similarly, another interviewee described their experience as:

> I was tired of being in a classroom all day, every day. I wanted to work at the next level up, so I wanted to work not just with the kids but with the people too, the parents as well as the staff, to create better environments for the kids; that's what helps me get up and go each day.

An additional participant said they were "born to be a leader in a school. It's my thing. I was a good teacher, and I loved it, and it was a vocation … and then it was, nah, I'm here for bigger things than this". Similarly, one assistant principal explained: "I needed the challenge. While I love teaching … I actually realised something was missing. I'm more satisfied now than I was teaching in the classroom five days a week".

4.5.4.3 Role Variety. Numerous interviewees identified role variety as a further positive aspect of the role. One participant put it like this: "Each day is a new day in a school. No day is ever the same. I guess that's what I love about my job the most, that each day has its own challenges and its own rewards". When asked what motivated them to turn up to work each day, an interviewee responded:

> I just love the fact that it's never the same day, it's never the same hour twice, so there's never that boredom of, 'Oh great, I've got to do this again today.'
> It's always 'I don't know what I'm coming into', and that's exciting.

Two other participants shared similar thoughts regarding motivating factors: "I would say probably the challenge, and I think that the broad nature of the jobs and the tasks that I'm involved in it. One day is definitely never the same as the next" and "I do enjoy the challenge of every day being different and being available to problem solve".

4.5.5 Community

Some participants identified belonging to the school community as providing professional fulfilment. One assistant principal explained, "personally, I'd say the relationships and camaraderie I've formed with the community has been incredibly rewarding. I've been really thankful for the support I've received". This theme will be presented in two sub-themes: relationships and building community.

4.5.5.1 Relationships. Numerous participants mentioned their relationships with members of the school community as a rewarding aspect of their role. Survey responses in this regard included: "relationship building", "the relationships that I have with all staff, students and parents", and "building positive relationships based on a shared goal of improvement". Other participants wrote, "developing rapport and fostering relationships with students and parents across the campus", "engagement with staff, students and parents and being of assistance", and "working with staff, students, families and parish". One interview participant spoke of the motivating effect of relationships for them: "I want to go to work. I want to go there. I want to see the people. I want to see the parents. It's a small school, so I know all the children". Relationships with fellow staff members were another fulfilling aspect of the role for some assistant principals. One identified "the people I work with" as the most rewarding part of their work and went on to say, "we're quite a close-knit staff, and we know each other well. I think we're quite welcoming of new people, new staff, and things like that".

4.5.5.2 Building Community. Several participants spoke of the fulfilment they get from their role in building community within the school. One interviewee related, "I really love being part of a community. I love feeling like I belong in the community and that I'm a cog, one more cog in the community." Other responses included: "I really love being part of a small community and feeling like I am contributing and part of the community, building the community", "I also enjoy the community-building aspect of my role in developing rapport and fostering relationships with students and parents across the campus" and "building a community of caring and pride in what we are achieving together as a team".

4.5.6 Summary

Quantitative data collected from the online survey included participant motivations for becoming an assistant principal, levels of job satisfaction, whether, if they were beginning their career again, they would become an assistant principal and their career plans for the next three to five years. Qualitative data collected from the survey and semi-structured interviews revealed five themes: working with students, making a difference, receiving support, opportunities for growth and development, and community. Table 4.12 provides a summary of these themes and their sub-themes.

Table 4.12

Summary of the Themes and Sub-themes Regarding the Aspects of the Role of Assistant Principal That May Provide Professional Fulfilment

Theme	Sub-Themes
Working with Students	Having a positive impact on students
	Having a teaching role
Making a Difference	School Improvement
	Developing staff
	Administration and management
Receiving Support	Support from leadership team colleagues
	Support from collegial networks
	Working in a Catholic environment
Opportunities for Growth and Development	Professional learning opportunities
	Leadership opportunities
	Role variety
Community	Relationships
	Building community

4.6 Which Aspects of the Role Do Assistant Principals Find Challenging?

The previous research question explored the aspects of the role that provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. In contrast to these positive aspects, participants indicated several

challenges for assistant principals. These challenges will now be presented in four themes: the breadth of the role, the challenge of time, managing relationships and personal wellbeing.

4.6.1 The Breadth of the Role

Participants identified the breadth of the role as a challenge of their work. As outlined in Section 4.3, assistant principals are responsible for a diverse and abundant list of administrative and leadership tasks, as well as also frequently having a teaching role. This scope of responsibilities leads some assistant principals to "feel like a lot of the time, it's just survival. It's just scraping through, and things get missed." Another participant, commenting about the endless list of tasks to accomplish, lamented: "You can never go home and just go, right, nailed it, done." Two factors were identified from the data that contribute to the challenge assistant principals face regarding the breadth of their role: lack of role clarity and the principals' influence on the role.

4.6.1.1 Lack of Role Clarity. The CEWA employment contract for assistant principals states: "The Duties and Responsibilities of the Employee are as per the agreed job description form on commencement of this Contract, as amended from time to time with the agreement of both parties" (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-d, p. 4). Despite this contractual statement, of the 20 assistant principals interviewed, only seven reported that they had a written job description to guide their work. Several of those with a job description stated that it was not current and did not accurately reflect the scope of their responsibilities. Four job descriptions provided by participants were reviewed as part of this study's document search. Two descriptions provided details about the responsibilities of the assistant principal, divided into categories, such as "curriculum", "administration" and "Religious Education/pastoral". The other two documents contained statements such as "support the principal" and "assist in the day-to-day management of the school" without providing detailed information. Those without an up-to-date job description suggested that they "knew" or were "expected to know" where their responsibilities lay. The absence of a job description document, and the resultant lack of role clarity, led some assistant principals to express frustration: "It's just more. It's always more. We need to do more. We need to do more. We need to do more" and "sometimes I feel it is like someone juggling multiple balls at once, frantically running from one to

another preventing them from dropping, all with a smile on my face". Whilst lack of role clarity can result in an ever-expanding list of responsibilities and difficulty focusing on the most important tasks, some assistant principals pointed out that creating an accurate job description for assistant principals may actually be impossible. One assistant principal, who does have a document that outlines their role in the school, commented that:

> Even when you read it, there is still so much scope in that. It's not black and white. It's very much open to interpretation. It still allows enough vagueness. It's a step in the right direction, but I don't think we'll ever have that clear clarity that we need as an AP.

4.6.1.2 The Principal's Influence on the Role. Participants identified the principal's role in defining the scope of their work as a further challenge. Some assistant principals described conversations with their principal and leadership team to allocate responsibilities, often based on each team member's strengths, interests, and experiences. However, other assistant principals, without the benefit of such conversations, felt they were "doing the jobs the principal doesn't want to do." Several assistant principals commented along the lines of:

> At the moment, it really is up to the principals, the whole world of AP. They get to decide what the AP does, how much time they have, and all of that. I think that's obviously what contributes to the inequity or the disparity of the role across the system because it really comes down to what the principal believes and what the principal wants to happen.

One assistant principal explicitly questioned whether the principal should have quite so much influence on the role:

> Should your AP role depend on your principal? Should it be you have a good principal, therefore you get a good workload, or you have a demanding principal, therefore you are acting as the principal, you're just not getting paid as the principal?

This participant went on to ask: "Does there need to be some checks and balances in the system like that?"

4.6.2 The Challenge of Time

Considering the significant breadth of the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, it was not surprising that a further theme

identified as a challenge for assistant principals was an inadequate amount of time to complete all the tasks required of them. The challenge of time was mentioned by 90% ($n = 18$) of assistant principals interviewed and 56% ($n = 38$) of the short answer responses in the online survey. Figure 4.4 provides a visual representation, using a word cloud, of the 30 most used words within the coded data on the theme of challenges for assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The word "time" was used more than twice as frequently as the next most common term.

Figure 4.4

Word Cloud Representing the Frequency of Coded Words on the Topic of Challenges of the Role of Assistant Principal

Time was an issue for both assistant principals with a teaching load and those with no teaching responsibilities. Time was also problematic regardless of school size or the length of experience in an assistant principal role. Lack of time impacted the assistant principals' abilities to carry out what they consider to be the most important aspects of their role, such as providing support to teachers and supporting the principal in running the school. For example, one assistant principal commented:

> It's quite disjointed between what I think is the most important aspect and what I actually do. I think the most important aspect of my role is to support teachers. I find it very difficult to get into classrooms and actually work with the teachers and the students.

Similarly, some assistant principals expressed frustration about needing to take a lot of time to complete "all the day-to-day jobs, dealing with student behaviour and often

parent behaviour. This takes away from the core task of supporting the principal in school improvement." The main factors impacting time pressures for assistant principals were found to be teaching load, administrative tasks and working in a small or regional school. Each of these factors will now be discussed.

4.6.2.1 Teaching Load. Information was gathered from the 20 assistant principals interviewed regarding the time they were allocated to administrative and teaching responsibilities each week. Table 4.13 provides a summary of those data. The administration time referred to in this table indicates the proportion of time the assistant principal is assigned to attend to their non-teaching tasks. The class teaching load is the proportion of time the assistant principal is a teacher in a year, or grade, level classroom. The specialist teaching load includes teaching specific learning areas to a range of year levels. For example, a specialist teacher might teach science to all Year One to Year Six classes each week.

Table 4.13

Summary of Time Allocated to Teaching and Administration Responsibilities for Interview Participants Ordered by the Number of Students Enrolled in the School

School location	Number of students enrolled	Number of assistant principals at the school	Admin Time FTE	Class teaching load FTE	Specialist teaching load FTE
Regional	101-150	1	0.6	0.4	
Regional	101-150	2	0.4	0.6	
Regional	151-200	1	0.5	0.3	0.2
Regional	151-200	1	0.8		0.2
Regional	151-200	2	0.4		0.6
Metro	151-200	2	0.4	0.6	
*Regional	151-200	2	0.3	0.5	
Metro	201-250	2	0.2	0.8	
Metro	201-250	2	0.4	0.6	
Metro	201-250	2	0.4	0.6	
Regional	201-250	2	0.6	0.4	
Metro	301-350	2	0.4	0.6	
Metro	351-400	2	1.0		
Metro	401-450	2	0.4		0.6
Metro	401-450	2	0.4		0.6
Metro	401-450	2	1.0		
Regional	401-450	2	1.0		
Metro	401-450	1	1.0		
Metro	451-500	2	0.5	0.5	
Metro	551+	3	1.0		

Note. An FTE (full-time equivalent) of 1.0 is five full days. 0.2 FTE equates to one day per week.

* This assistant principal works part-time (0.8 FTE)

Eighty-eight percent (*n* = 60) of assistant principals who participated in the survey had a teaching load. Fifty-six percent (*n* = 38) felt their teaching load was too high. As shown in Figure 4.5, assistant principals generally prefer to reduce their teaching load.

Figure 4.5

Actual Versus Preferred Teaching Loads for Assistant Principals in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia (Hours per Week)
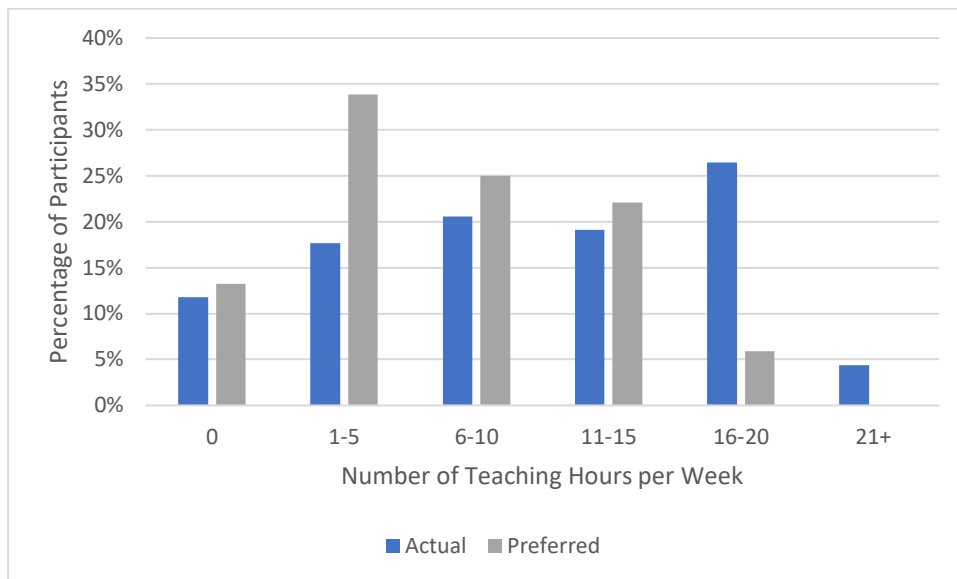
The teaching load assigned to the assistant principal, and its associated time commitment, can impact the assistant principal's self-efficacy. One assistant principal, who had a significant teaching load, noted, "I've just had to learn to not beat myself up about it over the years, but you can feel like you're not doing one thing particularly well". Many other assistant principals expressed similar feelings of being torn between teaching and administrative responsibilities and frustration at not being able to give due attention to both roles. One noted that it was challenging to manage "time constraints with a teaching load [and] to balance what takes priority between administrative tasks and teaching. It can sometimes be a matter of doing two roles satisfactorily as opposed to doing one role well". Another assistant principal expressed it as: "Today I was a really good teacher, but I wasn't a good AP, or today I was a good AP, but not a good teacher". One participant argued that without a teaching load they would "have more time for that professional development stuff. More time for a measured and effective approach, rather than this chaotic running around the school fixing [things]."

The number of hours spent teaching is not the only aspect of their teaching load that challenged assistant principals' use of time. The type of teaching role also had an impact. Numerous assistant principals pointed out that teaching a year-level class, even for only part of the week, involves many more responsibilities than

teaching a specialist class. They highlighted that classroom teachers are involved in "[end-of-semester] report-writing", "meetings with parents", planning of "assemblies", "class liturgies and Masses", and are "the main point of contact for parents" of the children in their class. One assistant principal became very emotional during the interview and explained: "It's just a bit raw because I don't like letting anyone down, but at the same time, if you have a teaching load that is classroom-facing, it's all the additional stuff that comes with that". Another assistant principal expressed that "the biggest challenge is the juggle of being a classroom teacher and an assistant principal. Both roles are extremely important, and the time needed to be able to do both well can be exhausting." One assistant principal expressed their frustration at having a large classroom teaching load by noting: "I'm doing something that I realise is two full-time jobs. That's why I'm constantly feeling like I'm skimming."

Assistant principals who were also classroom teachers felt extra stress and guilt in the interruptions their students experienced because of their role as assistant principal. As one participant noted:

All of a sudden, you're called [to assist someone], and your number one priority then becomes looking after the school or looking after students other than the ones you have in front of you in your class. There's that conflict all the time.

Another assistant principal observed: "Parents can quite easily say, 'well, why would I want to have an AP [teaching] my child's class if they're never there?'"

In contrast, assistant principals who have a specialist teaching role expressed that, whilst still challenging, this role is less draining on their time compared to those with classroom teaching responsibilities. Numerous assistant principals expressed thoughts similar to this: "If we moved to a specialist role, it would free us up from all that prep that you need to do like assemblies and [classroom set up]" and "[I would prefer] a specialist role because you don't have the behaviour management, you don't have the parents". In addition to a reduced list of responsibilities compared to classroom teaching, assistant principals who work as specialist teachers tend to be more flexible in their use of time. Participant comments included: "I think dealing with a specialist role is much easier because if things come into play, and you have to pull away from it, you can always make that up", "it's a lot easier in some ways to teach a specialist subject because, if I'm not there, it's not a huge drama" and

"specialist teacher classes start at 9.00 a.m. [and] when you're [organising] relief [teachers], you get an extra half hour to run around and organise duties and find the relief notes".

A further frustration for participants regarding teaching load is a lack of consistency among their peers in other schools within the system. As shown in Table 4.13, there is a wide range of expectations regarding time spent teaching. For example, assistant principals in schools with student enrolments of between 201 and 250 students had teaching loads ranging from 0.4 FTE to 0.8 FTE. This discrepancy means one assistant principal can have twice the teaching hours of another in a similar-sized school. One participant suggested there is a need for:

> really clearly articulating what the role of the assistant principal is, and just to make it equitable across the system, because every school is different, but [when] you're talking to people in different roles, I do realise how very lucky I am not to have the pressure of a teaching [load].

Another assistant principal stated that there needs to be a: "consistent number of teaching hours across all schools for the position rather than being on an individual school basis".

Whilst teaching load has been identified as a challenge for many assistant principals, the survey data revealed that 10% ($n = 7$) would prefer to increase their teaching hours. For example, of the eight assistant principals who had no teaching responsibilities at all, only four indicated they wanted to keep it that way. The other four revealed a preference to teach between one and five hours each week, and one wanted to teach for between 11 and 15 hours each week. Similarly, 34% ($n = 23$) of assistant principals were satisfied with the number of hours they spent teaching. This information aligns with the previously noted result that some assistant principals see maintaining teaching responsibilities as an important aspect of their role. Table 4.14 provides a summary of assistant principals' desired changes to their teaching loads.

Table 4.14

Assistant Principal Desired Change to Teaching Load

Current Teaching Load per Week	Reduce Teaching Load	Maintain Teaching Load	Increase Teaching Load	Total
Zero	-	4	4	8
1-5 hours	4	6	2	12
6-10 hours	7	6	1	14
11-15 hours	10	3	0	13
16-20 hours	14	4	0	18
21 or more hours	3	0	0	3
Total	38	23	7	68

Note. Cell data refers to the number of assistant principals.

4.6.2.2 Administrative Tasks. Another factor impacting assistant principal time is the need to complete administrative tasks at the expense of leadership activities, with numerous data sources identifying administration as a challenge. For example, one participant noted that "this year I feel like I've managed a lot of events and organised a lot of things, but not really had leadership of anything". Another interviewee expressed that "I might go around and fix problems around the school, but I'm not really taking staff on a journey to improve". A special mention was made by numerous participants of compliance and accountability tasks: "There's so much compliance that takes up so much time and energy. I hate it." Some assistant principals found that these types of tasks were just "ticking boxes" and had "little relevance to making a difference to students, families and community wellbeing and growth." Several experienced assistant principals observed that they had noticed that compliance requirements had increased significantly over the years. One assistant principal, who had been out of the role for more than five years, commented that they had noticed that the compliance responsibilities had increased significantly since they last worked as an assistant principal. Another assistant principal noted that as accountability demands on schools increased, "principals don't want to put too much more onto teachers, so they put it onto the APs."

4.6.2.3 Working in a Small or Regional School. A further area contributing to the challenge of time for assistant principals was working in a small school, especially when only one assistant principal was employed. Several assistant principals in larger metropolitan schools, without any prompting, expressed empathy for those in smaller schools: "There is a distinct advantage in being an AP in a larger school because there are more around to help. I feel terribly, terribly sorry for APs in smaller schools". Another said: "I'm fine here, and a lot of the other APs in the bigger schools are fine. It's those smaller school APs that really struggle". Regardless of the size of the school, the assistant principal often has the same number of tasks that need to be done but with fewer people to spread the load. One interviewee noted:

> In general, the roles that an AP does are the same no matter [if they work in a] two-stream, three-stream, single-stream school. The roles and the jobs that are done are generally the same.

Several assistant principals in small schools expressed that "it is not a one-person job" and that "it's harder because there's a certain amount of work and there are less people to do it". An assistant principal who moved from a smaller school with one assistant principal to a bigger one with a larger leadership team expressed their previous experience as "unrelenting" and "crushing" due to the workload and having no peer assistant principal with whom to share it.

Working in a small or regional school will often mean that attending professional learning is more difficult and potentially time-consuming. Those working in regional areas will often require extra time away from school due to travel requirements. One assistant principal explained that it is: "a six-hour return trip by car to attend professional learning". The implication is that they would be away from school for up to three days to attend a one-day seminar. Another assistant principal working as the only assistant principal in a small school expressed that they would sometimes prefer not to participate in professional learning due to the disruption to the school and the need to catch up on the work that accumulated while away:

> It does put a lot of strain on the school, especially if it's a teaching day, and I say, "Well, I'd rather not," because my partner teacher has to be available. Then you have to pay it back, and then you lose more time and then you still have work piled up on your desk and in your email to do when you get back.

Even with the increased use of online webinars, assistant principals in schools with only one assistant principal still find it challenging to find time to access them. One assistant principal expressed it like this:

> Okay, I'm going to shut the door today because I'm going to be on a Teams meeting, but it's never going to really happen, because [other staff] know you're there. You have to go and help because you just can't ignore them and there is nobody else to do it.

4.6.3 Managing Relationships

In the course of their work in the school environment, assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia interact and form professional relationships with a range of people. Each of these relationships requires careful management to ensure the assistant principal can carry out their work effectively. As revealed in Section 4.4, assistant principals identified building relationships as one of the most important aspects of the role. One of the challenges identified by assistant principals in this study was managing some of these relationships, particularly those with the principal, staff and parents.

4.6.3.1 Relationship with the Principal. Several assistant principals noted that the relationship between the principal and assistant principal is crucial because: "that relationship sets the tone for the school, and it really sort of filters down to staff". Almost half of the interviewees noted that the relationship with the principal was a considerable challenge. Contributing to the challenge were the assistant principals' negative perceptions of some principals' personal qualities. These qualities include: "not sticking to his word", "never communicates", "doesn't plan and is very last minute", "a bully", and "disrespectful". Numerous participants expressed frustration at the lack of teamwork and respect from the principal. As outlined in Section 4.3, assistant principals see part of their role as supporting the principal. However, when the relationship is strained, they find it very difficult to provide that assistance:

> The biggest challenge I have found is having a principal who shows you no respect, stunts your growth and doesn't allow you to make any decisions or lead any new initiatives. It was absolutely awful and made my life a living hell.

Some assistant principals noted that they felt excluded from decisions and did not get the opportunity to have a voice. As one participant explained: "He didn't disclose

things that were happening. I didn't even know what was going on half the time. I was finding out at staff meetings with the rest of the teachers." Assistant principals' frustration was considerable when this lack of communication occurred because it is difficult to know how to "sell" the principals' decisions to staff when the assistant principal has had no part in the decision-making process: "We're the ones who are putting the fires out afterwards".

Many assistant principals felt they needed some autonomy to succeed in their role, and the relationship with the principal directly impacted that autonomy. Assistant principals spoke of their frustration and disappointment at being micro-managed by their principal. One assistant principal stated: "The principal needs to allow you to use your own professional judgement. Working with a principal who controls aspects of what is actually my role is very difficult." Another explained that they are "not given any scope to do my job …I have to be a bystander as the school circles the drain. Too much time is spent talking in circles. Nowhere near enough time is spent on running a high functioning environment". A third assistant principal questioned where they are supposed to access help when the relationship with the principal is conflicted:

> When you have a challenging relationship with a principal that you work for, I would imagine most APs want to do the best that they can for their principal, but when that's impossible due to circumstances, then who do you go to for support?

4.6.3.2 Relationships with Staff. Managing relationships with staff members, particularly teachers, was identified as a challenge for 60% ($n = 12$) of interview participants. Finding the balance between supporting staff in their work and, at the same time, improving their teaching practice is difficult. One interviewee explained: "in the current school, the most challenging thing is changing mindsets of staff. We're doing a lot of stuff on school improvement and changing our practice because historically, our data has not been great". The same assistant principal went on to say they are trying to: "change the mindset of staff from saying, 'we've always done it this way,' to, 'let's try something new.'" A second assistant principal put the challenge of relationships with staff like this:

> Not that I don't speak to people and don't care, but it's not my job to care what [staff] think of me; it's my job to do this for the school and to support the principal in doing what she needs to do.

Some assistant principals spoke about being the "middleman" in the school. They are neither teacher nor principal, but they are often "trying to maintain a level of harmony as assistant principal, maintaining relationships with staff and the principal and ensuring fair outcomes for all."

4.6.3.3 Relationships with Parents. Numerous qualitative data sources mentioned the challenge of maintaining positive relationships with parents. In particular, many assistant principals felt that the demands and expectations placed upon them by some parents were unreasonable and that it was difficult to keep those parents happy. One participant commented: "Parents are a lot more demanding than what they ever used to be. I think schools let them get away with it. I think we are trying too much to please people." Another assistant principal said: "Unreasonable parents are one of the most challenging things. Some parents are demanding to staff. I actually think it has to change". Numerous assistant principals spoke of a small proportion of parents who are negative and never likely to be pleased. They described them as "unrelenting" and "energy-sapping". Several participants also spoke of needing to deal with parents with mental health issues and the challenge of managing that.

4.6.4 *Personal Wellbeing*

Personal wellbeing was the fourth theme to emerge from the data concerning challenges experienced by assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Half of the interviewees and a quarter of survey participants expressed concern for aspects of their wellbeing. Wellbeing was identified as being impacted by the previously discussed challenges: the breadth of the role and managing relationships. Additionally, the challenge of time, specifically the difficulty in balancing their work-life and their home-life, was seen as detrimental to participants' wellbeing. Assistant principals also identified a lack of recognition for the role they play in the running of the school as impacting their mental health. The four sub-themes regarding the personal wellbeing of assistant principals will now be discussed: the breadth of the role, balancing work-life and home-life, managing relationships and lack of recognition.

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4.6.4.1 The Breadth of the Role. The breadth of the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia impacts the energy levels of some assistant principals. One participant put it very simply: "Some weeks it's hard to turn up because I'm so bloody tired". Another said: "Balancing all the different roles that I do is really hard and keeping my energy levels up [is difficult]. I'm constantly tired." Several participants spoke about the need to be aware of, and to avoid, burnout. For example, "APs need to be reminded to ensure they balance their life between work and rest to avoid burnout, mental fatigue and illness as the role has become very demanding." The demands of the job result in some assistant principals feeling like they are being "pulled in a thousand directions all the time". They are not able to give attention to what they are trying to focus on because "if you're giving attention to one part of your job, then something else isn't getting attention." This internal battle can lead to feelings of frustration and self-imposed disappointment in their job performance: "I get emotional when I think about it, because you don't want to not meet a need, but there's all kinds of needs that you don't meet." One assistant principal highlighted the need to further support those in the role who are in danger of burnout:

> I would love to know how to get out of that burnout when you are in that space, because there isn't really anywhere to get help to be able to get out of that, because I don't want to stop being an AP.

Another assistant principal suggested that the role needs to be reconceptualised to ensure the wellbeing of assistant principals is considered: "If we're serious about wellbeing and doing a job really well, we need to seriously think about what the role is. What it looks like, and how it's done". A third assistant principal made a similar comment regarding the need to reimagine the role: "I do sometimes get the sense that we're all deluding ourselves into making something okay that's not okay".

4.6.4.2 Balancing Work-Life and Home-Life. Numerous assistant principals spoke about difficulties maintaining a healthy balance between their work-life and home-life due to the time they needed to complete work tasks. One assistant principal became very emotional when sharing their experiences of the role and revealed they were actively applying for jobs outside of schools due to the pressure of balancing the demands of work with responsibilities at home. This assistant principal said: "The work that can't be avoided, that has to be done in service of the

most wonderful kids you could possibly imagine, is impinging on my family, my wellbeing". Some assistant principals found it "difficult to switch off and not be an AP at home" or finding "a work/life balance because, for a lot of us, school can be all-consuming, and so it's hard to look after other areas of your life that you should." Another participant found it difficult to know where to draw the line: "getting that balance between, this has to be done, but I need to go home and have a rest. It will still be there tomorrow, and I can't stay up until 11:00 pm, getting stuff done, because it'll never be done". When participants were asked what advice they would give to teachers aspiring to the role of assistant principal, several suggested that aspirants pay attention to the balance between their work-life and their home-life from the start. As one participant suggested: "I would advise them to be quite clear early on and come up with some rules for themselves in terms of their school commitment and their home life. Come up with a healthy balance in that sense."

Data from the survey indicated that 29% ($n = 19$) of the 65 full-time assistant principals spent between 50 and 59 hours per week at school, and 5% ($n = 3$) spent 60 or more hours there. The majority, 68% ($n = 44$), was at school between 40 and 49 hours each week. No full-time assistant principal spent less than 40 hours at school each week. As shown in Figure 4.6, all survey participants completed some school-related work at home.

Figure 4.6

Number of Hours per Week Assistant Principals Spent Completing Work at Home
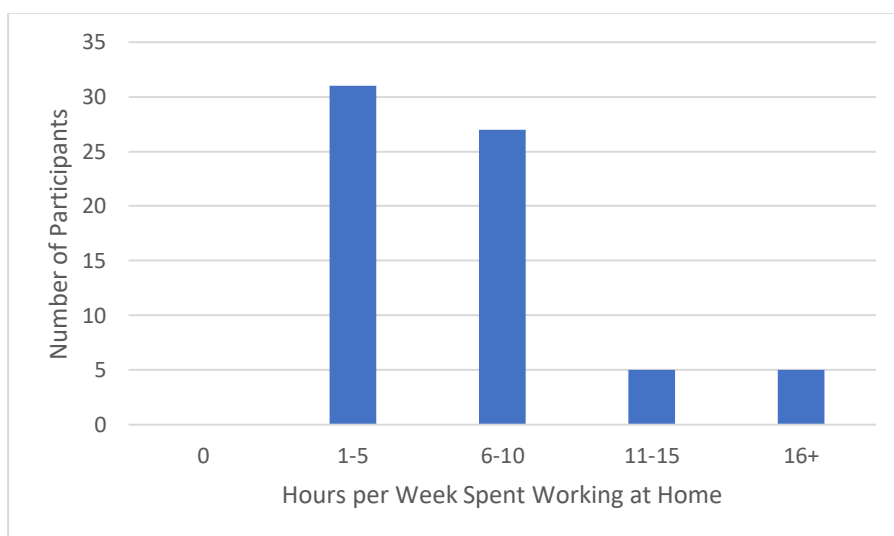
Analysis of the data relating to the number of hours spent at work and the number of hours spent completing school-related work at home revealed little

correlation. Some of the participating full-time assistant principals manage to spend 40 to 49 hours at work each week while spending just one to five hours completing school-related work at home. However, a small number of assistant principals are working long hours both at school and at home. For example, two of the three assistant principals who spend 60 or more hours at school each week also spend 16 hours or more completing school-related work at home. Likewise, three assistant principals work at home for 16 hours or more after spending 50 to 59 hours at work. A summary of the data can be found in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15

Correlation Between Hours Spent at School and Hours Spent Working at Home for Full-Time Assistant Principals

Hours spent at school each week	Hours spent working at home outside of school hours each week			
	1-5 hours	6-10 hours	11-15 hours	16 hours or more
40-49 hours	20	19	4	0
50-59 hours	8	8	0	3
60 hours or more	1	0	0	2

Note. Cell data refers to the number of full-time assistant principals.

4.6.4.3 Managing Relationships. Assistant principals highlighted the challenge of managing relationships with members of the school community as a further issue negatively impacting their personal wellbeing. Whilst recognising that having supportive relationships with school community members is one of the most important aspects of the role, numerous assistant principals expressed the personal toll relationship management takes on them. As one assistant principal observed: "I try to be supportive of others' problems while trying not to take on everyone else's burdens, but often I feel like a counsellor for staff, parents and students." Another assistant principal expressed a similar thought regarding the drain on their personal resources when they said they frequently hear from staff: "Do you have a minute? Do you have a minute?". This person commented that this situation: "is 100% how I spend my time which is fine, but I leave every single one of those conversations with a to-do list."

Some assistant principals spoke of the burden of leadership and how it can impact relationships with staff. One participant remarked: "It can be difficult being the one to make the tough calls as not everyone is going to understand or be happy about it". Another expressed that assistant principals just need to "accept that you are unable to please everyone." Similarly, numerous assistant principals spoke of being caught as the "middleman" between the principal and staff and the toll that managing both of these relationships has on their wellbeing. For example, one assistant principal stated: "Being the middleman between the principal and staff can be exhausting sometimes. I need to keep both of them happy, but it's really hard". Another assistant principal spoke of the difficulty in having a principal that staff did not particularly like and how they are "tarred with the same brush" when staff have a conflict with the principal due to their position as assistant principal, which can be "demoralising".

4.6.4.4 Lack of Recognition. A further aspect impacting the wellbeing of some assistant principals is the feeling that the job is thankless and that assistant principals possibly do not get the recognition they deserve. One assistant principal said: "I think if you have a great principal, they see the light of their APs, and that's amazing, but that's not the case in every school. I think we kind of deserve a little bit of a pat on the back." Another interview participant suggested that: "Assistant principals are often the forgotten ones; the principal and teachers are often the 'face' of success." This statement was supported by another assistant principal who said that she does not do the job "to be thanked", but it would be nice sometimes to be recognised while "kind of just plodding away behind the scenes."

4.6.5 Summary

The data revealed that the challenges assistant principals encounter can be described within four themes: the breadth of the role, the challenge of time, managing relationships and personal wellbeing. Table 4.16 provides a summary of these themes and sub-themes.

Table 4.16

Summary of the Themes and Sub-themes Regarding the Challenges Encountered by Assistant Principals in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia

Theme	Sub-Themes
The breadth of the role	Lack of role clarity
	The principals' influence on the role
The challenge of time	Teaching load
	Administrative tasks
	Working in a small or regional school
Managing relationships	Relationship with the principal
	Relationships with staff
	Relationships with parents
Personal wellbeing	The breadth of the role
	Balancing work-life and home-life
	Managing relationships
	Lack of recognition

4.7 In What Ways Do Assistant Principals Believe the Catholic Education System of Western Australia Can Support Them in Fulfilling Their Role?

The previous research questions addressed how assistant principals define the breadth of their role, what they consider to be the most important aspects of their work, which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment and the challenges of their work. This final research question explored what assistant principals felt CEWA could do to support their work. The data for this research question will be presented in three themes: provide targeted support and development, improve consistency across schools and increase opportunities for leadership activities.

4.7.1 Provide Targeted Support and Development

Research participants identified the provision of targeted support and development as something CEWA could do to support their role. The data relating to this theme will be presented in four sub-themes: professional support, wellbeing support, targeted professional learning and preparation for the role.

4.7.1.1 Professional Support. Numerous participants expressed the need for CEWA to provide targeted professional support for assistant principals. One interviewee expressed: "I think [CEWA is] missing that support and growth and development of APs". Another interview participant said that "principals have a lot of support through the [School Improvement Advisors (SIA)]. The SIA job really is to support the principal, but APs don't have that equivalent". A survey respondent simply stated that "a CEWA representative for APs" is needed. Several participants suggested that this type of representation is necessary, especially when the relationship with the principal is strained. For example, one participant commented: "The issue I see is who do APs turn to for support and advice when the problem is the principal? Due to the power differential of our roles, it is career suicide to be honest or upfront". Similarly, another participant asked, "when you have a challenging relationship with a principal that you work for … then who do you go to for support?". Even when the relationship with the principal is good, one assistant principal felt that it was important to have someone from outside the school as a support "because sometimes the principal – they're so busy as it is – that's another job for them".

Some participants saw a CEWA support person for assistant principals as someone who could assist their development and career goals. One interviewee expressed that the support person should be:

> someone that works in that leadership space [and should get] an idea of where you're at … If I wanted to see what my [career] options were, and they would work with me and help me set some new career goals or help me be able to improve in the work that I do now.

Similarly, another participant wanted a support person to "see what their aspirations are … mentor them to support them to learn more in their role, or … to become a principal". Various participants noted that targeted support from CEWA might look like a "one-on-one interview", "regularly checking in on [assistant principals]", "touching base", and that it could be "voluntary, not compulsory".

4.7.1.2 Wellbeing Support. Numerous participants felt that CEWA should do more to support the wellbeing of assistant principals. One interviewee said, "I think there needs to be a bit more pastoral support in the wellbeing space for APs". Another participant suggested that CEWA should be "working on assistant principal

wellbeing and researching this more as this has been done at a principal level only". Several assistant principals felt that CEWA needs to invest money in improving the wellbeing of assistant principals. One participant pointed out that some companies provide employees with money for health and wellbeing activities: "every year each employee is given $300 to spend on a gym membership … or anything that constitutes health and wellbeing". The same assistant principal acknowledged that this is not the whole answer, saying, "look, it doesn't solve all the mental wellbeing problems. It shows that they're willing to put money into something". Another interviewee expressed that "until money is actively put into it, I don't know if there'll be any improvement [to wellbeing]". One assistant principal felt that there was no clear wellbeing strategy in place for assistant principals in the CEWA system, saying: "I just don't feel like there's a strategy. I feel like everyone's floundering … People need to have the strategies to cope with [the stresses of the role], but maybe more money needs to be put into it".

4.7.1.3 Targeted Professional Learning. Numerous participants identified the need for CEWA to provide professional learning specifically targeted at assistant principals. One interviewee expressed that these targeted learning opportunities would be helpful as they would provide opportunities to have "those conversations that you can really only have with other APs". Participants said they would like to learn about topics relevant to their work, such as the "running of finances in a school", "administration tasks", "human resources", "assertiveness training", "policies", "the law", "conflict resolution", "coaching", "mediation" and "ongoing faith formation". Developing an understanding of what assistant principals do in other schools was identified by several participants as an important aspect of targeted professional learning. One interviewee suggested that having "opportunities to 'shadow' an assistant principal in another school to share and develop ideas" would be a valuable experience. Another participant expressed they would like CEWA to "support APs to have the opportunity to see how other schools operate". They explained this was needed "because at times we get too caught up on how we do things and need to be open to learning from others".

Several participants identified the CEWA Aspiring Principal Program, a leadership development program aimed at preparing assistant principals for principalship, as a source of professional learning they wished they could access.

These assistant principals expressed frustration at the minimal number of participants accepted each year. One participant said that "for CEWA to have the biggest impact on helping assistant principals, [they should] give them all access to the Aspiring Principal Program". Another interviewee explained that by having a "greater understanding of the principal's role, they would have a greater capacity to support [their principal]". One assistant principal pointed out that the Aspiring Principal Program wasn't suitable for everyone as "some people are happy and eager to be a career AP" and that CEWA should "continue to build people's skill set and enable them to carry out their role".

Some participants suggested that CEWA create a leadership program specifically for new assistant principals. One interviewee suggested that the program might take the form of "setting up an official mentoring program … it could just be one day in Semester One and one day in Semester Two where you connect up with someone". Another participant said that "CEWA needs to introduce a beginning assistant principal program like the beginning principal program, where APs come together … on certain days and have a program set up where they can navigate potential issues or challenges". The same participant went on to say, "I feel that would be very effective for beginning assistant principals, especially given the nature of the job [and] the scope of the potential duties that we do".

Several participants felt that professional learning targeted at assistant principals should not be left entirely up to CAPA to provide: "It's great having CAPA run PD [professional development] and network days, but it would also be great if CEWA ran days similar throughout the year to support the professional development of APs". Other ideas for targeted professional learning for assistant principals included "allowing assistant principals to have the same access to study and international PD, or interstate PD as principals do", "a better mentoring system to support APs in all stages of their careers" and "time when principals and APs attend meetings or PD together".

4.7.1.4 Preparation for the Role. Several participants expressed a need for better preparation before being appointed as an assistant principal. One interviewee stated a need for "more preparation for what the role is", and another said that they want "CEWA to recognise that there's a big gap in what they can be doing to better

prepare APs." Interview participants were asked to describe the preparation they had for the role of assistant principal. The majority said things such as "none", "nothing at all", "not much", "very little", "I just winged it", and "nothing - I wasn't mentally prepared, and I wasn't prepared". Several interviewees spoke of "learning from others", "modelling yourself on other APs", and "it's all been learning on the job". An assistant principal suggested that "shadowing an AP" would have been helpful preparation. Minor leadership roles in schools helped some interviewees prepare for the role of assistant principal. For example, several participants cited acting as coordinator in the areas of "literacy", "learning support", or "early years" as being helpful in their preparation. Some interviewees spoke of completing one of the CEWA leadership programs. One assistant principal found that "the [CEWA] Emerging Leaders' course was probably the best preparation: being around like-minded people and having that vision for bigger things". Another participant disagreed, saying, "I don't think [the leadership course] really prepared me". One participant felt so strongly about the need for adequate role preparation that they thought CEWA should "make it compulsory to attend leadership preparation courses before applying for AP positions".

4.7.2 Improve Consistency Across Schools

Many participants expressed that they would like to see CEWA provide more "consistency across the system". This theme will be presented in three sub-themes: clearer role description, consistent appraisal processes and fairer appointment processes.

4.7.2.1 Clearer Role Description. Numerous participants identified the need for a "clearer role description" for assistant principals to improve consistency across schools. One interviewee said there is a need for "something that actually articulates what the role of the assistant principal is from a system level. Obviously, there still needs to be scope in there for that to look different in a different school". Survey participants highlighted their desire for CEWA to promote consistency, writing: "consistency across schools in regard to expectations and workload", "consistent job description so that you know what is expected of you when completing your duties", "make the position much more consistent across schools so that the roles and expectations are fair" and "have a list of roles and responsibilities that is shared across all schools".

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Some participants felt that consistency of the role across the system might result in leadership development opportunities. One assistant principal said, "I know there are some assistant principals where the principals won't give them … leadership responsibilities … There are some assistant principals that don't get to do and be involved in the amount of things that others are". Another participant alluded to the same idea, saying, "it actually needs to be a bit more consistent across all schools so that you can develop your leadership skills". An interviewee similarly noted that:

> Currently, depending on where you work, [the role] looks different. It's usually run by an understanding of how the principal thinks it should be. If the system is going to continue talking about distributive leadership … do we need to make it all fair and square and say, 'Okay. This is what an AP does now, and this is their role' because there are some principals who don't like that distributive leadership.

Several participants identified the need for guidelines for teaching loads to be included in assistant principal role descriptions. Survey responses on this topic included: "provide guidelines for [teaching] time that is consistent", "consistent number of teaching hours across all schools for the position rather than being on an individual school basis", and "I think [CEWA should] actually stipulate a certain amount of time that must be directed to the administrative role away from teaching".

4.7.2.2 Consistent Appraisal Processes. Numerous participants identified assistant principal appraisal processes as needing to be made more consistent across the system. One interviewee explained that "every principal has their own way of completing an AP appraisal, with some being really in-depth and others being only perfunctory. There is no consistency at all". Other survey response suggestions for CEWA included: "a streamlined review process across CEWA so that when APs go for principalships, the data is valid", "that all reviews are streamlined, so expectations are the same wherever you work", "put in place a system-wide AP review process" and "adopt and support a consistent review process".

4.7.2.3 Fairer Appointment Processes. Participants identified the need for fairer processes to guide the appointment of assistant principals. One participant suggested that they wanted to see CEWA "make appointments equitable, transparent, based upon performance, not on self-promotion". Another participant

explained, "the [assistant principals with] really strong personalities who have the connections, are a part of that 'club' and that know the right people … will end up with career progression". One interviewee spoke about the difficulties in getting a job as an assistant principal: "There's so much in-house promotion, so people don't know if it's a real job [that is being advertised]". The same participant further explained: "I know some APs find it really hard to get opportunities because they might have the experience, but someone with no experience is getting the job over them because the principal knows them or because they're in that school".

Some female participants identified gender equity as an area in which CEWA could further support consistency across schools. One assistant principal felt that CEWA needs to "remove the systemic barriers to women: men seem to automatically move into leadership roles unfairly". Another participant similarly explained that they "would like the opportunity for a fair and equal playing field for promotion. I certainly feel that it is a man's world in that men … certainly get fast-tracked far quicker than women". Data from the survey revealed relevant information in this regard. All 16 male survey respondents had been appointed as an assistant principal by the age of 40. In comparison, only 46% ($n = 24$) of female respondents were an assistant principal by the same age. Likewise, male assistant principals had less teaching experience on appointment when compared to females. All male survey respondents were appointed with 16 or fewer years of experience, whereas 31% ($n = 16$) of females were not appointed until they had at least 17 years of teaching experience. Tables 4.7 and 4.8 represent these data.

Figure 4.7

Age of Survey Participants When First Appointed to the Role of Assistant Principal by Gender
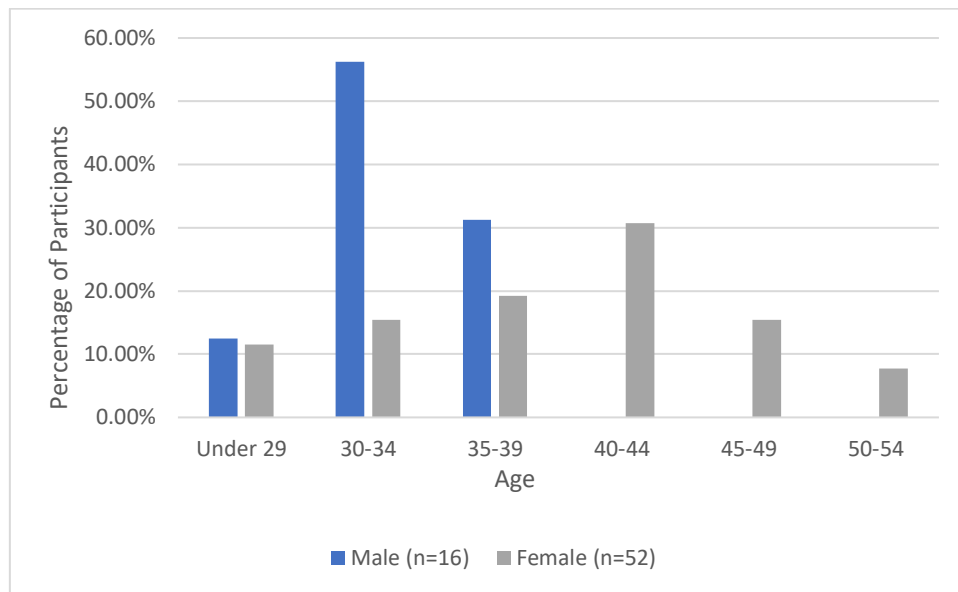
Figure 4.8

Number of Years of Teaching Experience When First Appointed to the Role of Assistant Principal by Gender
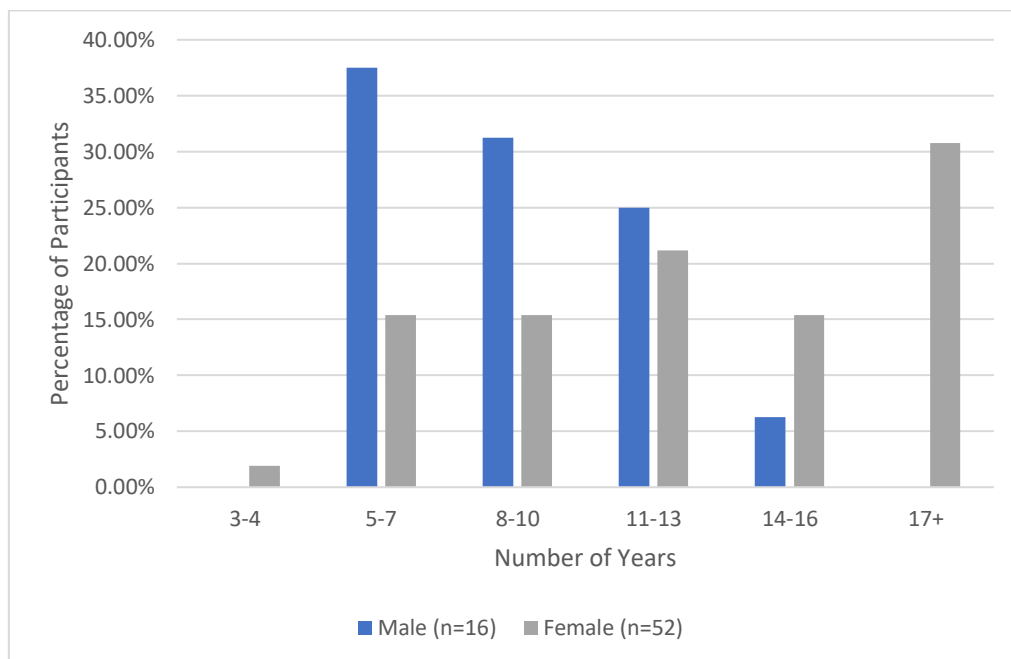
4.7.3 *Increase Opportunities for Leadership Activities*

Research participants identified increased opportunities to engage in leadership activities as a way CEWA could further support assistant principals in their work. The data for this theme will be presented in three sub-themes: reduce or modify teaching loads, reduce compliance tasks and raise the status of assistant principals.

4.7.3.1 Reduce or Modify Teaching Loads. Many participants suggested that CEWA should create the conditions for schools to reduce or modify the teaching loads of assistant principals to "give them more time to do their job". Survey responses related to a reduction in teaching load included: "not put APs in the classroom", "reduce classroom teaching load", "less classroom teaching time", "allow more admin time and less class load", and "more admin time and less teaching time". One participant identified that CEWA should "make it more affordable [for schools] to have APs with a smaller teaching load". Along with a reduction in teaching load, other participants believed CEWA should consider modifying the type of assistant principals' teaching roles. For example, one assistant principal pointed out that their "complaint isn't about being in a teaching role: it is the type of role". This view was supported by other participants, with one suggesting that CEWA should "establish a rule that assistant principals are not to be classroom teachers. They should take on the role as a specialist teacher or learning support teacher". This view was supported by another participant who wanted CEWA to "support [principals] with the understanding that maybe a specialist role and AP role is better suited together, rather than a classroom role and AP role".

Participants suggested that a reduction or modification in teaching load would result in more time for assistant principals to engage in leadership activities. A survey respondent wrote: "If schools were supported in having the assistant principal out [of the classroom] to support the principal more, that would help everyone". Other participants responded that CEWA should "encourage principals to remove APs from a teaching role so they can better assist the principal and be available to take on more of a leadership role within the school" and that CEWA should "be true to shared leadership model and provide more funding so APs can be released from a classroom role". Similarly, an interviewee stated that "a model where APs have less teaching … ties in with the whole collaborative leadership model". A survey

respondent wrote that CEWA should "provide the necessary funding to allow assistant principals to be non-teaching. This would allow a greater focus on student and teacher improvement and best practice in regard to curriculum, student wellbeing and teacher wellbeing".

4.7.3.2 Reduce Compliance Tasks. Numerous participants wanted to see CEWA reduce the compliance aspect of their role to focus more on leadership activities. One survey participant simply said, "less paperwork and more leadership". Others wrote, "remove some of the compliance … that could be done at a system level" and "create system-wide policies and documents so that each school does not have to spend additional time creating things from scratch". Similarly, further comments included: "providing templates and proformas across all CEWA schools, so we aren't constantly reinventing the wheel" and "school improvement compliance processes need to be streamlined, and responsibility shared more evenly across the [CEWA] office and schools and not just 'required' of schools all the time". One assistant principal identified that "as soon as [CEWA remove some of the compliance requirements], you are creating space for us to have more time for pedagogical things, which is why we're in the business of education in the first place". One assistant principal acknowledged that CEWA has begun to reduce the compliance tasks required of schools, saying "I think [CEWA] have already started with the government side of things".

4.7.3.3 Raise the Status of Assistant Principals. Some participants felt that CEWA should raise the status of assistant principals within the system. For example, survey respondents wrote suggestions for CEWA such as: "elevate the status of APs as we really do support the principal as well as manage the day-to-day tasks", "see them as just as valuable to the school as the principal", "give them the recognition they deserve" and "raise the profile of the importance of the assistant principal in a school … some principals are hugely supportive of their assistant principal, whereas some might not be". One participant wanted to see more "opportunities for APs to be heard at a systemic level".

4.7.4 Summary

Research participants identified numerous ways they believed CEWA could best support them in fulfilling their role. Three themes emerged from these ideas:

targeted support and development, improved consistency across schools and increased opportunities for leadership. Table 4.17 provides a summary of these themes and sub-themes.

Table 4.17

Summary of the Themes and Sub-themes Regarding How Assistant Principals Believe CEWA Can Support Them in Fulfilling Their Role.

Theme	Sub-Themes
Targeted support and development	Professional support
	Wellbeing support
	Targeted professional learning
	Preparation for the role
Consistency across schools	Clearer role description
	Consistent appraisal processes
	Fairer appointment processes
Increased opportunities for leadership activities	Reduce or modify teaching loads
	Reduce compliance tasks
	Raise the status of assistant principals

4.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the results from an exploratory instrumental case study involving 68 online survey respondents and 20 semi-structured interview participants. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their role. The data were presented under the following five specific research questions.

1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
2. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals think are the most important?
3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?

5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

The next chapter will provide an analysis and interpretation of the results alongside the relevant literature.

Chapter Five – Discussion of Research Results

5.1   Introduction

This research aimed to explore the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. It sought insight into the various aspects of the role and an understanding of the role perceptions of the research participants. The previous chapter presented the results of this study. These results were a combination of the qualitative data from 20 semi-structured one-to-one interviews and the qualitative and quantitative data collected from 68 online surveys. In addition, a document search and researcher field notes provided further information.

This chapter aims to discuss the results of the research and is organised around the five specific research questions that directed the focus of this study:

1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
2. Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?
3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?
5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

The chapter discusses the results of the research in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two: Review of Literature. Specifically, the literature related to comparative perspectives of the role of assistant principal, leadership models that enhance the role of assistant principal and leadership of Catholic schools will be considered. An overview of the chapter is provided in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Overview of Chapter Five: Discussion of Research Results

5.1   Introduction

5.2   How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?

5.2.1 Providing support

5.2.2 Leading learning

5.2.3 Leading the religious dimension

5.2.4 Administration and management

5.2.5 Summary

5.3   Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?

5.3.1 Leading learning

5.3.2 Supporting staff

5.3.3 Building relationships

5.3.4 Supporting the principal

5.3.5 Focusing on students

5.3.6 Most important skills

5.3.7 Summary

5.4   Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?

5.4.1 Working with students

5.4.2 Making a difference

5.4.3 Receiving support

5.4.4 Opportunities for growth and development

5.4.5 Community

5.4.6 Summary

5.5   Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?

5.5.1 The breadth of the role

5.5.2 The challenge of time

5.5.3 Managing relationships

5.5.4 Personal wellbeing

5.5.5 Summary

5.6   In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic Education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

5.6.1 Provide targeted support and development

5.6.2 Improve consistency across schools

5.6.3 Increase opportunities for leadership activities

5.6.4 Summary

5.7   Chapter conclusion

5.2   How Do Assistant Principals Define the Breadth of Their Role?

This section discusses the perspectives of the research participants on the breadth of their role. Multiple assistant principals in this study used descriptors to explain the scope of tasks they undertake. For example, "anything and everything", "complex", "evolving", "diverse", "all-encompassing", "ever-changing", being "the 'dog's body'", the "'go-to' person", and the "'jack-of-all-trades'" were all used to express the multi-faceted and complex nature of their work. These descriptors are in line with other research which used similar metaphors, such as "fire-fighter" (Shore & Walshaw, 2018), "counsellor", "jack-of-all-trades" (Garawski, 1978), "daily operations manager" (Porter, 1996) and "caretaker" (Koru, 1993) to describe the work of assistant principals. Four themes were identified within this broad scope of work: providing support, leading learning, leading the religious dimension and administration and management. These themes will now be discussed.

5.2.1   Providing Support

Assistant principals articulated that supporting others in the school community is a significant responsibility of their role. All 20 interviewees and all 68 online survey participants stipulated that providing support to others was part of their work. Harvey (1991, 1994a) noted that assistant principals carry out tasks to support the principal, teachers, and students and that the work of assistant principals is largely in response to the needs of the school community members. Four stakeholders were specified as being supported by the assistant principal: the principal, staff, students and parents. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.2.1.1 Supporting the Principal. It is not surprising that assistant principals in this study viewed an aspect of their role as supporting the principal in their work. The role of assistant principal originated from the need to provide support to the principal (Glanz, 1994b), and assistant principals carry out work as designated by the principal (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Kwan, 2019; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). Supporting the principal is a frequent theme in the literature regarding the work of assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2017; Ho et al., 2021a). Some assistant principals noted that their responsibilities in supporting the principal included ensuring the school operates smoothly and efficiently. This responsibility for the smooth operation of the school is a pervasive theme in the literature on the role of assistant principals

and speaks to the well-entrenched transactional leadership demands on them (Greenfield, 1985a; Harvey, 1994b; Searby et al., 2016; Weller & Weller, 2002).

The need to support the principal in working towards the long-term goals and vision of the school was also included in responses from several assistant principals. No assistant principals spoke explicitly of participating in the vision-creating process; rather, they saw themselves as supporting the vision created by the principal. Ho et al. (2021a) and Shaked (2020) found similar results in their studies. They identified that assistant principals saw their role as ensuring that the school's programs were aligned with the strategic direction for the school as determined by the principal. This idea is also reflected by Hartzell (1993), who suggested that first-level leaders, such as principals, are responsible for stimulating change and improvement. On the other hand, second-level leaders, such as assistant principals, are tasked with maintaining the stability of the school.

Several participants noted that an aspect of their work was supporting the principal in collegial rather than practical ways. For example, one interviewee expressed that "I need to be supportive of the journey the principal's on, and … loyal to that". Another assistant principal described their role as a critical friend to the principal to support their decision-making. Several researchers have reflected similarly collegial relationships as a way for assistant principals to support principals. For example, Ho et al. (2020) found that assistant principals support the principal as an individual, taking into account the principal's "peculiar idiosyncrasies, philosophies and leadership styles" (p. 151). In research into servant leadership, Striepe and O'Donoghue (2014) noted that having an assistant principal who listens and is honest with the principal builds teamwork. Wong (2009) suggested that a principal should see their assistant principal as a partner in their work.

5.2.1.2 Supporting Staff. All but one survey participant ($n = 67$) identified supporting staff as part of their responsibilities, and numerous interviewees spoke of their work in this area. One interview participant described being a "one-stop-shop" where staff could access whatever support they needed. This idea of being a central hub of support points to the well-documented breadth of the role of assistant principal in the literature (Harvey, 1991; Kwan, 2009; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993; Sun, 2012). Due to their broad responsibilities, assistant principals are responsible for, or

at least familiar with, many operational, social and pedagogical aspects of the school, which ideally places them as a "one-stop-shop".

The data regarding supporting staff revealed that this support included both pastoral and pedagogical support. Participants commented that the pastoral support of staff included regular check-ins to ensure their wellbeing and to provide advice for personal issues. There is limited evidence in the literature that pastoral support of staff is an aspect of the role of assistant principal (Shore & Walshaw, 2018; Alexander, 1992, as cited in Webb & Vulliamy, 1995). However, pastoral support of staff is not frequently referenced in research that has quantified lists of the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals. A further aspect of pastoral care that participants noted was the support of staff in their faith development. Support in personal faith formation has been identified in the literature as an aspect of the work of the REC (Doherty, 2010; Rymarz, 2022), a role often assigned to assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Pedagogical support included spending time in classrooms with teachers and providing advice about curriculum and instruction. The provision of pedagogical support by assistant principals is documented in the literature due to the increased focus on instructional leadership over recent decades (Barnett et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2021a; Kwan, 2009; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). The researcher's field notes indicated that participants seemed to view their pedagogical support of staff through a lens of staff development and growth rather than the more negative or punitive connotation of evaluation.

The pastoral and pedagogical support of staff reflects both servant and transformational leadership. Servant leadership prioritises the formation of supportive connections with staff so they can improve their performance as a result of increased levels of trust and genuine concern for their wellbeing (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014). Similarly, a transformational leader acts as a coach and mentor to develop followers and includes a genuine concern for the needs and feelings of followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

5.2.1.3 Supporting Students. All survey participants ($N = 68$) and many interviewees identified support for students as part of the scope of their work, which reflects Barnett et al.'s (2012) suggestion that one of the two main roles of a modern

assistant principal is managing the needs of students. The qualitative and quantitative data indicated that assistant principal support of students falls within three categories: behavioural, academic, and pastoral. All survey respondents noted they engage in supporting students with behavioural issues. Numerous responses within the qualitative data also demonstrated that behavioural support was an aspect of the work of assistant principals. This support may involve assisting the student to self-regulate or engage in restorative practice as a result of their behavioural choices. The literature regarding the role of assistant principals is rich in references to their responsibilities in discipline and behaviour management (Barnett et al., 2012; Harvey, 1991; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Sun, 2012), so it is not surprising that assistant principals in this study also viewed it as an aspect of their work. However, it appears that student discipline is considerably less of a focus for participants, when compared to the work of assistant principals in other research, particularly from North America, where it ranks first in their list of responsibilities (Glanz, 1994a; Sun, 2012; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021). Almost 80% ($n = 54$) of survey respondents indicated they spend just the right amount of time or would like to spend more time on supporting students with behaviour issues, suggesting it does not currently take up a large amount of their day. This result seems to be consistent with research in another Australian study which found that assistant principals were not as involved in student discipline as the researchers had anticipated (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017).

The qualitative and quantitative data from assistant principals revealed that the provision of academic support to students might be either direct or indirect. Several assistant principals provide face-to-face learning support to those that need extra assistance. However, this direct academic support does not seem to be reflected elsewhere in the literature on the work of assistant principals. The indirect academic support of students, which assistant principals identified in this study, included managing the timetables of support staff so they are appropriately assigned to support students. Additionally, indirect support involved providing teachers with the support they require to meet the needs of children with special needs. Timetabling and personnel management are often cited in the literature as part of the work of assistant principals (Harvey, 1991; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). However, it appears that these activities are not necessarily aimed at providing academic support to students but rather simply ensuring the school's smooth running.

Student wellbeing and pastoral care did not feature in the qualitative data gathered in relation to support provided to students; however, all but one survey respondent (*n* = 66) identified these responsibilities as an aspect of the assistant principal's work. Pastoral care and wellbeing received some mentions in the literature reviewed for this research. For example, a study by Shore and Walshaw (2018) found the pastoral care of students to be an aspect of the work of assistant principals and De Nobile and Ridden (2014) observed that student pastoral care and wellbeing are part of the role of middle leaders, including assistant principals. Additionally, Sun (2012) and Marshall and Hooley (2006) identified counselling students as a duty of assistant principals.

5.2.1.4 Supporting Parents. Several interview participants noted that supporting parents was part of the role of assistant principal. All but one survey participant (*n* = 67) indicated that they provide support to parents through individual meetings or the facilitation of group meetings, such as information and open nights. Meetings seem to be the most common form of support for parents by assistant principals found in the literature. For example, Marshall and Hooley (2006) identified meeting with parents as part of the role of assistant principal and Sun (2012) found parent conferences to be a standard component of the work of assistant principals. Besides meetings, qualitative data also revealed that assistant principals might support parents by being the "go-to" person to contact the school or as an advisor, mainly when their child exhibits behavioural challenges. Marshall (1993) suggested that assistant principals may spend time teaching parents parenting skills. The Mandate (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009) acknowledges parents as the first educators of their children and Catholic schools are called to provide support to parents in fulfilling this responsibility (National Catholic Education Commission, 2018). Therefore, as leaders of Catholic schools, it would be expected that assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia provide support to parents. Additionally, Striepe and O'Donoghue (2014) recognised an aspect of servant leadership as meeting the needs of parents and engaging them in their child's education.

5.2.2 Leading Learning

All but one assistant principal (*n* = 67) in this study indicated in the survey that they engage in activities related to leading learning within the school. Given that the

core business of schools is teaching and learning and that assistant principals hold senior leadership positions in schools, this result is not unexpected. While there is evidence that assistant principals engage in instructional leadership practices, there is limited research into the role of assistant principals in instructional leadership (Searby et al., 2016; Shaked, 2020). Three sub-themes were identified from the data regarding leading learning: providing professional learning, curriculum development and teaching. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.2.2.1 Providing Professional Learning. Quantitative and qualitative data collected in this research indicated that providing staff with professional learning is an almost universal aspect of the work of assistant principals in this study. This result is consistent with research by Bendikson et al. (2012), who noted that assistant principals often take on the bulk of responsibility for delivering professional development activities. Several other studies (Calabrese, 1991; Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan, 2009; Shore & Walshaw, 2018; Sun, 2012) have also found the provision of staff training to be a responsibility of assistant principals. The need for teachers to be provided with high-quality learning to improve instructional practices is a regularly cited element of instructional leadership (Hattie & Zierer, 2019; Robinson & Gray, 2019; Sharratt, 2019; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). The role of assistant principals in this study in delivering professional learning suggests alignment with assistant principals in other school systems and engagement with instructional leadership practices.

5.2.2.2 Curriculum Development. Ninety-five percent ($n = 64$) of survey participants indicated that curriculum development and implementation are part of their role. These data are consistent with the literature, which suggests that curriculum-related activities may form part of the work of assistant principals (Calabrese, 1991; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Sun, 2012). Forty-four percent ($n = 30$) of survey participants suggested that they would like to increase the amount of time they spend on curriculum development. This result is similar to that of Sun (2012), who noted a discrepancy between what assistant principals thought they should do and what they actually do concerning curriculum. She found that whilst assistant principals engage in curriculum tasks, they would prefer to spend more time doing so. Several authors have noted the role of curriculum development in instructional leadership and improving student learning outcomes (Bendikson et al., 2012;

Calabrese, 1991; Robinson et al., 2008). The engagement of assistant principals in this study in curriculum development and implementation adds further evidence to their engagement in instructional leadership practices.

5.2.2.3 Teaching. Eighty-eight percent (*n* = 60) of survey respondents indicated they have a teaching load. In the United States, where much of the research into the work of assistant principals originates, assistant principals generally do not have teaching responsibilities (Melton et al., 2012). As a result, teaching duties for assistant principals are rarely mentioned in the literature. However, the limited literature available notes that assistant principals in some school systems elsewhere in the world are assigned teaching responsibilities. For example, assistant principals in public schools in Western Australia usually have a teaching role (Anderson et al., 2009), as do assistant principals in the United Kingdom (Guihen, 2019; Melton et al., 2012). Likewise, assistant principals in China spend around half their time teaching (Melton et al., 2012), and assistant principals in South Africa may have teaching responsibilities (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020).

Many participants asserted that they view their teaching responsibilities as a core aspect of their leadership role. These assistant principals saw teaching as an opportunity to demonstrate good pedagogical practice to others. This result is similar to that of Guihen (2019), who found that assistant principals in a study in the United Kingdom saw teaching as a means of establishing pedagogical credibility with other staff and to maintain a child-centred focus in their work. Similarly, Webb and Vulliamy (1995) identified that assistant principals viewed their classroom teaching role as central to their work and that they are able to influence curriculum and pass on ideas they have tried in their classroom to other teachers. The same researchers also suggested that principals view the teaching role of assistant principals as a method of translating the principal's vision into classroom practice. Serving as a role model to other teachers is consistent with an instructional leadership approach. Principals, as instructional leaders, are expected to be deeply involved in curriculum and instruction to have the most significant effect on student achievement (Cuban, 2004; Hallinger, 2005). As assistant principals can share the work of principals in instructional leadership (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017), those immersed in classrooms may benefit from a first-hand understanding of the practice and effect of the pedagogical, curricula and assessment approaches enacted in the school.

Additionally, Marks and Printy (2003) viewed shared instructional leadership as "the active collaboration of principal and teachers on curriculum, instruction and assessment" (p. 371). Assistant principals with teaching responsibilities would be well placed to share this leadership approach.

5.2.3 *Leading the Religious Dimension*

Ninety percent (*n* = 61) of survey participants identified aspects of leadership of the religious dimension of the school as part of their work. Research into the responsibilities of assistant principals in Catholic schools appears to be limited. Therefore, rather than focusing on the literature pertaining to the duties and responsibilities of assistant principals, which does not include aspects of religious leadership, this discussion will draw comparisons with what is known about the role of REC and the leadership of Catholic schools. The REC role is often delegated to an assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The data regarding leading the religious dimension of the school revealed three sub-themes: coordinating religious events, overseeing the Religious Education curriculum and staff faith and knowledge development. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.2.3.1 Coordinating Religious Events. Approximately 87% (*n* = 59) of survey participants indicated that they have responsibility for coordinating religious events, such as Masses, liturgies and sacraments. These results are consistent with the literature regarding the role of the REC, which includes the responsibility for the coordination of religious activities in the school (Doherty, 2010). Eighty-eight percent (*n* = 60) of survey participants are responsible for liaising with the parish and priest. Working with the parish priest is noted in the literature as an aspect of the work of the REC (Buchanan, 2015; Doherty, 2010). Whilst the research on transactional leadership is not contextualised to Catholic schools, the activity of coordinating religious events would fall within the practice of transactional leadership. However, Doherty (2010) asserted that the role of REC should not be seen as simply a coordinator role. The work of assistant principals in this study in coordinating religious events is also reflective of the work of leaders of Catholic schools in developing and promoting the Catholic identity of the school. The provision of prayer and liturgical experiences is an expectation of Catholic schools (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c; Ciriello, 1994, as cited in Spesia, 2016). In addition, the

Australian Bishops Conference (2021a) emphasised the relationship between school and parish and their cooperation in celebrating liturgy, sacrament and prayer.

5.2.3.2 Overseeing the Religious Education Curriculum. Almost 90% (*n* = 61) of survey participants indicated their involvement in overseeing the Religious Education program within the school. This involvement included supporting teachers with programming and ensuring the curriculum was being covered correctly. These activities are consistent with the role of the REC, which entails a responsibility for supporting the Church's mission by working with teachers to ensure the Religious Education curriculum is delivered appropriately (Crotty, 2007; Doherty, 2010). The importance of this work is underlined by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (2021a), which states that the delivery of the religious curriculum of a Catholic school should be given priority. The work of the assistant principal in overseeing the Religious Education curriculum in the school demonstrates instructional leadership. Instructional leadership aims to improve student learning outcomes (Hattie & Zierer, 2019; Robinson & Gray, 2019; Timperley, 2011) and enhance classroom practice (Sharratt, 2019). Given the priority placed on Religious Education in Catholic schools (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2021a), improving student outcomes and classroom practice are equally applicable to Religious Education and other curriculum areas. Doherty (2010) and Dowling (2011) suggested that leaders of Religious Education require the same leadership skills in pedagogy and curriculum as leaders in other areas of the school.

5.2.3.3 Staff Faith and Knowledge Development. Qualitative data collected in this research revealed that participants viewed staff faith and knowledge development as part of their role. This work falls into two categories: practical support and personal support. Practical support included ensuring staff maintain their accreditation to work or teach in Catholic schools. Accreditation is a requirement of Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) and involves professional learning in the role of Catholic education in the mission of the Church (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-b). Research participants noted that they assist staff in the steps they need to take to gain accreditation and keep track of the accreditation status of each staff member. This practical work involves transactional leadership behaviours. Additionally, assistant principals are responsible for organising or presenting professional learning in faith formation and knowledge. Leading or

facilitating professional learning is an aspect of the role of the assistant principal (Shore & Walshaw, 2018; Sun, 2012).

Participants believed the personal aspect of leading staff faith formation and knowledge development was focused on encouraging and supporting staff with their personal faith journeys. This support includes ensuring staff have regular opportunities to engage in prayer and, as one participant put it, making sure the school's Evangelisation Plan is a "living document and that it's brought up and talked about". The existing literature regarding the role of REC reflects these activities. For example, Doherty (2010) noted that RECs provide faith formation through personal conversations focused on faith and Religious Education. In addition, Crotty (2005) and Fleming (2001) suggested that the REC may be the most visible religious identity in the school. The school's Catholic identity is also enhanced through the work of assistant principals in developing staff faith formation. Miller (2006) asserted that Catholic school leaders and teachers should serve as authentic witnesses of their faith. There is also evidence of servant leadership in the work of research participants in supporting staff in their faith formation. Greenleaf (1977) saw servant leadership as rooted in the desire to help and nurture others. While Shore and Walshaw's (2018) research was not specific to Catholic schools, their conclusion that assistant principals engage in the pastoral care of staff would be consistent with the work of assistant principals in Catholic schools in supporting staff personal faith formation. Both the practical and personal support of staff faith formation and knowledge development are consistent with the literature on the leadership of Catholic schools, the work of RECs and transactional and servant leadership.

5.2.4 *Administration and Management*

Participants noted that they engage in an extensive list of responsibilities that fall within the domain of administration and management. The role of assistant principal was created to handle administrative tasks to reduce the principal's workload (Glanz, 1994b; Norton, 2015). Administrative tasks aimed at maintaining the stability and smooth operation of the school have been consistently evident in the literature on the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals since the 1970s (Austin & Brown, 1970; Harvey, 1991; Melton et al., 2012; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021; Weller & Weller, 2002). It is not surprising, therefore, that assistant principals in this study have identified this area as part of their work. Three sub-themes

emerged from the data related to administration and management: day-to-day operations, forward planning and compliance tasks. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.2.4.1 Day-to-Day Operations. The qualitative and quantitative data indicated that the majority of assistant principals in this study were involved in myriad administrative tasks aimed at keeping the school operating smoothly on a day-to-day basis. These tasks include rosters, timetables, booking relief teachers, newsletters, managing the school attendance software, updating the school's Facebook page and ordering resources. This list of responsibilities is similar to a meta-analysis by Scoggins and Bishop (1993) into the role of assistant principals. They identified the 20 most common duties of the assistant principal, with the vast majority of these responsibilities falling under the umbrella of day-to-day school operations. Likewise, other researchers (Melton et al., 2012; Sun, 2012; Weller & Weller, 2002) have also found that assistant principals engage in a mosaic of organisational tasks that maintain school stability and support the principal, teachers and students. The kinds of day-to-day administration and management activities that participants engage in are reflected in the literature.

Several participants mentioned that the goal of managing the day-to-day running of the school was to ensure its smooth operation and "flow". Administration and management are aspects of transactional leadership, in particular, active management-by-exception (Bass, 1985). Management tasks lead to the facilitation of the work of others within the organisation (Leithwood & Duke, 2004). Robinson and Gray (2019) and Leithwood (2012) each suggested that school leaders should view the provision of an orderly environment, achieved through management, as a way to move the school towards its goals. The smooth running of the school is facilitated by the work of assistant principals in their management of the school's day-to-day operations as they exercise transactional leadership. Creating a safe and orderly environment and its link to improved student outcomes is well documented in the literature (Bendikson et al., 2012; Kleine-Kracht, 1993; Leithwood, 2017; Robinson & Gray, 2019).

5.2.4.2 Forward Planning. Many assistant principals in this study conveyed that they are involved in forward planning activities. These tasks included planning

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future events, assisting with future staffing arrangements and sourcing funding. These types of activities are consistent with the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals in the literature regarding public relations (Hausman et al., 2002), teacher selection (Kwan, 2009; Sun & Shoho, 2017), event planning (De Nobile & Ridden, 2014), resource management and grant proposals (Kwan, 2009; Weller & Weller, 2002). Approximately 98% (*n* = 67) of survey participants and several interviewees indicated their involvement in organising forward planning documents that supported the school in moving toward its strategic plan. The creation of these documents is consistent with research by Ho et al. (2021a) and Shaked (2020), as previously noted in this chapter, who found that assistant principals generally have responsibility for creating and enacting school plans aligned to the vision set by the principal.

5.2.4.3 Compliance Tasks. Assistant principals identified responsibility for compliance tasks as an aspect of their role. These tasks are generally aimed at satisfying system and governmental expectations and requirements. For example, writing and updating school policies, ensuring staff have their Working with Children and teacher registration approvals, administering student semester reports, coordinating participation in national testing and ensuring the school has appropriate bushfire and evacuation plans were all cited by participants as part of their role. Several studies have confirmed that tasks aimed at satisfying external accountabilities are within the scope of work of assistant principals (Harvey, 1994a; Kwan & Walker, 2012). In fact, the pressure of external accountabilities has increased the demands on principals, and these tasks are often delegated to assistant principals (Kwan & Walker, 2012; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). Completing compliance tasks is another example of the transactional leadership of assistant principals.

5.2.5 *Summary*

This discussion provided an overview of the diverse scope of tasks undertaken by assistant principals, as viewed by the research participants. These tasks were classified under four themes: providing support to the principal, staff, students and parents; leading learning through the provision of professional learning to staff, curriculum development and teaching in classrooms; leading the religious dimension of the school by coordinating religious events, overseeing the Religious

Education curriculum and supporting staff in faith and knowledge development; and administration and management including the day-to-day operations of the school, forward planning and compliance tasks.

Much of the work of the assistant principals in this study is reflected in the literature regarding the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals in other school systems. The exception is the role of assistant principals in religious leadership tasks. There appears to be very little research into the work of assistant principals in Catholic schools, so the literature regarding the work of the REC was used to draw comparisons to the tasks specific to the leadership of Catholic schools. The work of the research participants has been shown to draw upon several leadership models. Transactional leadership was evident within much of the participants' work as assistant principals are responsible for many of the administrative and organisational tasks in the school. Transformational leadership was apparent, especially in the participants' role in developing supportive relationships with school community members. Research participants also provided evidence that they engage in instructional leadership tasks in both Religious Education and other curriculum areas. Finally, servant leadership was demonstrated through the provision of support to others, the participants' role in developing relationships with members of the school community and their support of the faith development of staff. Assistant principals were also involved in the enaction of the priorities of leading a Catholic school. This work included building and maintaining the Catholic identity of the school and addressing the dual responsibilities of Catholic school leadership in both education and in fulfilling the religious mission of the Church. Whilst assistant principals are responsible for a wide range of tasks and leadership responsibilities, the significance they attach to each one will vary. The following section of this chapter will discuss the aspects of the role that assistant principals think are the most important.

5.3 Which Aspects of Their Role Do Assistant Principals Think Are the Most Important?

The level of importance assistant principals assign to aspects of their work can be inferred from research into role conflict. Role conflict manifests through a misalignment between the types of tasks assistant principals spend their time on (actual tasks) compared to the activities they believe they should be involved in

(preferred tasks) (Cranston et al., 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Several researchers have conducted studies that asked assistant principals to rank activities they spend the most time on and then rank the actions they believe they should be spending their time on (Glanz, 1994a; Harvey, 1991; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Sun, 2012). These lists are then compared to determine where assistant principals experience role conflict and provide insight into the aspects of their work they place the highest value on. Participants in this study identified the responsibilities of their role they felt were most important. These activities could be grouped into five sub-themes and are listed here in order according to the number of mentions by research participants: leading learning, supporting staff, building relationships, supporting the principal and focusing on students. In addition, assistant principals suggested the most important skills they felt were required in their work. These tasks and skills will now be discussed.

5.3.1 Leading Learning

Assistant principals in this study recognised their responsibilities in leading learning as the most valuable aspect of their work. This result is consistent with literature which reflects that assistant principals desire to have more opportunities for leadership in this area (Barnett et al., 2012; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017). Sun (2012) found that assistant principals ranked instructional leadership as the most valuable task, and Ho et al. (2021a) noted that assistant principals see leading instruction as their "core business" (p. 11). Participants in this research used phrases such as "providing momentum for school improvement" and "being an instructional leader" in their responses regarding the most important aspects of their role. The data indicated that assistant principals understand the purpose of instructional leadership to drive student learning and feel they can, and should, contribute in this regard. The data relating to leading learning identified the sub-themes of building staff capacity and overseeing curriculum, which will now be discussed.

5.3.1.1 Building Staff Capacity. Assistant principals viewed building staff capacity as an important element of their work in leading learning within the school. This support centred on activities that ensure staff have the knowledge and skills to deliver the curriculum in the most effective ways. Examples of this support included providing professional learning, mentoring staff in best practices and challenging staff to achieve high standards. Quantitative data revealed the value assistant

principals place on building staff capacity. Sixty-six percent ($n = 45$) of survey respondents would like to increase their time spent on mentoring and coaching staff, and 61% ($n = 41$) want to spend more time supporting teachers and students in classrooms. The literature reflects the views of the assistant principals in this study regarding the value of building staff capacity. Kwan and Walker (2012) found role conflict in leader and teacher growth and development. This category within their research included tasks such as matching professional learning opportunities with school development needs, mentoring teachers and planning development programs for teachers. Assistant principals saw this part of their work as particularly worthwhile and would prefer more opportunities to engage in it (Kwan & Walker, 2012). The evaluation of staff performance is another aspect of building staff capacity, and half of the survey respondents indicated they would like to spend more time on this task. These data are consistent with Sun's (2012) research, which identified the evaluation of teachers as the second-ranked task that assistant principals wanted to spend time on. Sun and Shoho (2017) found that assistant principals rated observing classroom teaching as the most important task of an assistant principal, followed by supervising and reviewing teachers' performance.

5.3.1.2 Overseeing Curriculum. Numerous participants saw overseeing curriculum as a critical component of their work, with one assistant principal viewing it as their "core business". Assistant principals noted tasks such as evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning programs, monitoring how the curriculum is being delivered in classrooms and ensuring that the curriculum improves student outcomes as important. Quantitative data revealed that half of the participants ($n = 34$) would like to spend more time evaluating teaching and learning programs, and 45% ($n = 30$) would like to increase their involvement in curriculum implementation and development. Kwan and Walker (2012) observed role conflict in the category of teaching, learning and curriculum, indicating their participants viewed overseeing curriculum as valuable. Role conflict was also evident in Sun's (2012) research which identified curriculum development as ranking sixth out of 25 responsibilities in what assistant principals think is important and fifteenth in what they actually do.

Educational leadership literature reflects the view of assistant principals in this study that overseeing curriculum is an important part of their work. Various aspects of curriculum are included in the literature on how school leaders can impact

improving student outcomes. For example, the school leadership behaviours associated with curriculum include: the design and implementation of curriculum (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005); being knowledgeable about curriculum (Cuban, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005); and assessing the impact of the delivery of curriculum on student learning (Robinson & Gray, 2019). The views of assistant principals in this study regarding the importance of overseeing curriculum are not surprising, given the emphasis it receives in the literature.

5.3.2 Supporting Staff

Assistant principals in this study believed it was important to support staff. The previous section discussed building staff capacity as a significant role of the assistant principal. However, that support was directly aimed at improving teaching and learning. Supporting staff in the current section focuses on the care and assistance assistant principals provide in ways that might be considered more personal or contextual. There appears to be very little research into how assistant principals view the importance of the support they provide to staff in these ways. Three sub-themes were identified in the data: pastoral care of staff, acting as a problem-solver and acting as an intermediary. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.3.2.1 Pastoral Care of Staff. Assistant principals in this study noted that the pastoral care of staff was a crucial component of their work. Respondents noted that they "wanted to take the pressure off teachers", be "listening, understanding and supportive of staff", and "be someone to turn to for help and advice, show guidance and care". Several assistant principals spoke of the value of caring for new staff in the school, including graduate teachers. Forty-seven percent ($n = 32$) of survey respondents expressed that they want to spend more time working on staff wellbeing. The literature reviewed in this study does not appear to include any references to how assistant principals view the importance of their role in the pastoral care of staff. The research on role conflict in pastoral support is usually related to students (Sun, 2012), not staff. As noted earlier in this chapter, there is evidence in the literature that pastoral support of staff is an aspect of the role of assistant principal (Shore & Walshaw, 2018; Alexander, 1992, as cited in Webb & Vulliamy, 1995); however, it is unclear what priority is placed upon it by assistant principals in other school systems.

Leadership models may provide insight into why assistant principals considered the pastoral care of staff to be an essential aspect of their role. From a servant leadership perspective, pastoral care is important. Servant leadership prioritises the needs and growth of others (Greenleaf, 1977; Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014). Greenleaf (1977) suggested that leaders reflect on whether their actions cause members of the community to "become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servant leaders?" (p. 13). Servant leaders support staff by ensuring they feel valued and fulfilled, providing conditions conducive to the enhancement of wellbeing, getting to know them, and understanding their needs (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014). From the perspective of an integrated leadership model, Leithwood (2017) suggested that part of the role of successful leaders is to provide support and individual consideration to staff members and maintain a safe and healthy school environment. Transformational leadership shares some of the same approaches as servant leadership and Leithwood's integrated model. However, transformational leadership generally puts the organisation's needs first (van Dierendonck, 2011). Assistant principals in this study appeared to view their pastoral care responsibilities as meeting the needs of the individuals rather than the school.

5.3.2.2 Acting as a Problem-Solver. Participants believed that acting as a problem-solver was an essential aspect of the role of assistant principal in their support of staff. In particular, participants indicated that this support might involve being the person staff go to for help or assisting staff with challenging students or parents. There appears to be limited literature outlining the views of assistant principals regarding the value they place on the support they provide to staff through problem-solving. One study (Read, 2012) noted that assistant principals identified problem-solving as one of the top-five ideal attributes of an assistant principal, so there is some evidence that concurs with the participants' views in the current study. Whilst not confirming the importance of problem-solving, some literature has noted it as part of the work of assistant principals. Harvey (1991) found that problem-solving is an aspect of the work of assistant principals but that there is a danger of staff becoming too reliant on assistant principals to solve problems. Marshall (1993) noted that assistant principals enjoy the satisfaction of being able to solve problems and that assistant principals have a broad knowledge of what is happening in the school,

so they can address problems quickly. Mercer (2016) suggested that assistant principals are most likely to be called upon to help resolve issues as they hold a front-line leadership position and interact with a wide range of school community members. Leithwood (2017) viewed problem-solving expertise as one of the essential personal leadership resources for school leaders.

The role of assistant principal as a transactional leader, as noted earlier in this chapter, may be a factor in the high regard they place on their problem-solving activities. The management and administration tasks of transactional leadership aim to ensure the smooth running of the school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). The work of assistant principals in transactional leadership is often through management-by-exception in its active form, which sees them anticipating problems and taking steps to prevent them. However, when problems occur, management-by-exception in its passive form sees them intervening to solve the issue (Bass, 1985). Assistant principals may view problem-solving as an important activity because it contributes to the smooth operation of the school. Additionally, servant leadership focuses on meeting the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1977), so assistant principals may see problem-solving as a way to satisfy needs and serve their community.

5.3.2.3 Acting as an Intermediary. Assistant principals in this study expressed that a significant component of their role in supporting staff was to serve as a "conduit", "middleman", or "direct link" between staff and the principal and as a "voice" of teachers. They also described their role as a "buffer" or "diffuser" when problems arose with parents or students. In the literature reviewed for this study, there did not appear to be any references to the view of assistant principals regarding the importance of their intermediary role.

One study indicated the perspective of principals regarding the intermediary role of assistant principals. Ho et al. (2021a) noted that principals think it is important for assistant principals to serve in an intermediary role between principals and staff, although this perspective seems to be more to serve the principal's interests rather than the needs of the staff. Principals in Ho et al.'s research acknowledged that assistant principals are much more in touch with the work of teachers, which ideally placed them to act as a conduit. This idea mirrors Mercer (2016) and De Nobile and Ridden (2014), who suggested that assistant principals usually work closely with

teachers and are often recently experienced as teachers. Consequently, they are trusted as understanding the needs and challenges of the classroom teacher. One of the participants in the current study reflected this view, explaining that they can support teachers due to their understanding of their work.

The literature contains other references to assistant principals being viewed as intermediaries. Kwan and Walker (2012) noted that assistant principals serve as a professional and psychological bridge between the principal and teachers. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2009) found that assistant principals used 'bridge' and 'go-between' to describe their work as conduits. Other researchers have asserted that assistant principals provide a crucial line of communication between teachers and the principal (Cantwell, 1993; Ho et al., 2020). Whilst there is evidence in the literature that assistant principals serve as an intermediary in their support of staff, there appears to be little research regarding the importance assistant principals assign to this aspect of their work.

5.3.3 Building Relationships

Assistant principals in this study identified building relationships with members of the school community as an important aspect of their role. These relationships could be with students, parents, staff, the principal and the parish. One participant highlighted the essential nature of positive relationships saying, "relationships are everything". Another assistant principal pointed out that "if you don't have [relationships], then your job is merely transactional". These sentiments reflect the view of Shore and Walshaw (2018), who saw the work of assistant principals as being relationship-focused which allows them to carry out their role successfully. Similarly, Militello et al. (2015) noted that the responsibilities of assistant principals have been shifting over recent decades to incorporate relationship-building. Catholic school leaders are called to create a positive school climate underpinned by healthy relationships built on Christian values (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014). The data relating to building relationships revealed the sub-themes of forming connections and building trust, which will now be discussed.

5.3.3.1 Forming Connections. Assistant principals expressed the importance of forming connections with school community members to build relationships. The aims of these connections, in the words of the research participants, were to create a

"tight-knit school community", to make "really good connections with the kids", and to "promote [the school's] vision and the Christ-centred school we are". There is some insight in the literature about the value assistant principals place on forming connections with others. Participants in Busch et al.'s (2012) study identified the need for assistant principals to develop rapport and build relationships that are professional, fair and provide support. Interpersonal relationships were noted as the most significant dimension of the role of assistant principal by participants in Shore and Walshaw's (2018) study.

The value of school leaders developing connections and relationships with school community members is well-documented in the literature. For example, Leithwood (2017) included "build relationships and develop people" (p. 35) as one of the domains of practice in his integrated leadership model and highlighted the importance of relationships with staff, students and parents. Robinson and Gray (2019) noted that school leaders need to ensure they build relationships with staff to assist in enacting the goals and vision of the school. This idea is reflected by Ho et al. (2021a), who found that assistant principals need to form positive relationships to enact change. One assistant principal in this study saw connections with parents and the wider community as being "an extension of the school". Leithwood (2012) argued that good connections demonstrate confident and attentive leadership, create an environment where parents are respected and welcomed and assist staff in understanding the diversity of family backgrounds. Similarly, Marshall and Hooley (2006) viewed relationships with school community members as social capital that assists in enabling their support and involvement in the school.

Assistant principals in this study highlighted the link between servant leadership and forming meaningful connections. One interviewee explained that they look "at Jesus as an inspiration [as he] had a strong emphasis on the relational". Participants in Busch et al.'s (2012) study also identified the benefit of forming relationships from a servant perspective. Servant leaders focus on the people in their community and create the conditions for safe and strong relationships (van Dierendonck, 2011). These relationships are maintained by getting to know people and forming connections to assess and meet their needs (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014). Transformational leadership is also relationship-based. Transformational leaders focus on developing trusting relationships to inspire and motivate others

(Burns, 1979). The quality of the relationships with each member of their organisation is the most critical aspect of transformational leadership (Branson et al., 2019), and influence is exercised through reciprocal relationships rather than positional authority (Printy et al., 2009).

5.3.3.2 Building Trust. Assistant principals in this study highlighted the importance of trust in building relationships. They saw it as a way to "open the door to everything else" and be "considered genuine" in their role. Assistant principals in other school systems share the view of participants regarding the significance of trust. In a study by Busch et al. (2012), participants saw trust as an essential attribute of their work and viewed it as being based on authenticity, empathy, understanding and loyalty. In addition, trust and loyalty were identified by assistant principals as vital to the work of a team and that a high-trust team works like a "well-oiled machine" (Shore & Walshaw, 2018, p. 316).

The importance of trust in the work of assistant principals is indicated in the literature on school leadership. Trust involves a leader acting in a way that not only engenders trust in their leadership but also demonstrates their trust in other school community members (Gurr, 2017). Leithwood (2017) asserted that the relationships built within schools need to be based on trust, and Browning (2014) identified trust as essential to the social context of schools as it improves cooperation. Gurr (2017) noted that if there is trust in the school leadership, decisions are more readily accepted by those in the school community. School leaders have a role in building trust among staff, students and parents, so that those relationships are productive (Leithwood, 2021). The work of assistant principals, as school leaders, involves forming and maintaining trusting relationships that improve cooperation between members of the school community.

Literature on leadership models references the value of trust in the work of school leaders. Distributed, transformational, and servant leadership all emphasise forming trusting relationships. Distributed leadership relies on mutual trust to be effective and requires that this trust is authentic so that leadership is genuinely distributed and not just a delegation of tasks (Harris, 2013). Transformational leadership relies on followers placing trust in the leader and having confidence in the leader's vision and values (Silins, 1994). Transformational leaders promote a culture

of caring and trust among staff (Mulford & Silins, 2003) so that relational power is shared, leading to higher levels of performance (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003). Servant leadership is based upon leaders getting to know others in the organisation and forming meaningful relationships with them to understand the needs and potential of those individuals (Liden et al., 2008). Greenleaf (1977) suggested that those who practise servant leadership are most likely to be trusted and that trust is both a precursor and a result of servant leadership.

5.3.4 Supporting the Principal

The role assistant principals play in supporting the principal was identified by participants as an important aspect of their role. As noted earlier in this chapter, the role of the assistant principal was created to provide support to the principal (Glanz, 1994b), and assistant principals carry out work as designated by the principal (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Kwan, 2019; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). The key role of the assistant principal in supporting the principal was exemplified by one interviewee who said: "the buck stops with the principal, but the assistant principal slows it down". Effectively, all of the work undertaken by assistant principals aims to support the principal in their responsibilities in operating the school. Therefore, the themes of leading learning, supporting staff, building relationships and focusing on students, as outlined in this section of the chapter, are also considered by assistant principals to be important ways they support the principal. This section, however, specifies two particular aspects of support that will now be discussed: providing contextual support and forming a united leadership team.

5.3.4.1 Providing Contextual Support. Assistant principals in this study identified providing contextual support to the principal as an essential aspect of their role. Participants explained that their work in supporting the principal depends on the school's context and that the circumstances they need to respond to may change daily. The literature reviewed for this study did not reveal how assistant principals view the importance of contextual support for the principal. However, the impact of context on the work of assistant principals is reflected in research into the role of assistant principal. For example, Harvey (1994a) found that the needs of the school community members determine the work of the assistant principal. Watson (2005) suggested that certain assistant principals might hold a position that could be

considered a "niche assistant headship" (p. 25) due to their specialised knowledge of something that has been identified as necessary for the context of the school.

The literature on school leadership reflects the view of assistant principals in this study that providing contextual support is a vital aspect of their work. Hallinger (2018) outlined six types of school contexts that impact the work of school leaders: institutional, community, cultural, economic, political and school improvement. Similarly, Braun et al. (2011) explained the four contexts that need to be considered by school leaders: situated contexts, such as the location of the school; professional contexts, such as values and teacher experience; material contexts, such as budget and resources; and external contexts which would include legal responsibilities and system demands. Leithwood et al. (2020) also asserted that school leaders need to be responsive to context.

5.3.4.2 Forming a United Leadership Team. Forming a united leadership team in support of the principal was identified by assistant principals as important in this study. Participants spoke of ensuring that members of the school community viewed the leadership team as being "on the same page", even when they did not always agree behind closed doors. In addition, participants expressed that the decisions and communications from individual team members should align with the vision set by the principal. This view is reflected in the literature. Shore and Walshaw (2018) and Ho et al. (2021b) found that assistant principals thought it was essential that all leadership team members accept collective responsibility for decisions, even if they disagreed. Debate, discussion and disagreement may occur among the leadership team while the decision is being made, but a united front needs to be evident once the decision is communicated to stakeholders. Collective responsibility for the decision assists staff to have confidence in the leadership team (Shore & Walshaw, 2018).

The literature on school leadership identifies the need for a united leadership team. Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggested that a collaborative team approach to school leadership multiplies the principal's effectiveness to benefit the school and its students. A collegial partnership between principal and assistant principal is mutually beneficial (Cohen & Schechter, 2019c; Hartzell et al., 1995; Hunt, 2011; Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Marshall, 1993) and benefits the entire school (Calabrese & Tucker-

Ladd, 1991; Marshall, 1993; Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991). Shore and Walshaw (2018) noted that in a united leadership team, assistant principals play a supporting role to the principal by taking responsibility for various tasks for which they are responsible, therefore lightening the load of the principal. The importance of a team approach between the principal and assistant principal is also noted by Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991), who identified that the relationship between the two leaders needs to be based on collaboration, trust and mutual support. The same researchers also asserted that when the leadership team is united and collaborative, the assistant principals' leadership and expertise are more valued by the staff.

The literature on leadership models also reflects the views of participants that forming a united leadership team is necessary. Striepe and O'Donoghue (2014) noted that servant leaders establish teamwork, particularly in leadership teams. A united team working together allows the school to operate effectively and supports the principal in their work. Several researchers support this view from a distributed leadership perspective. For example, Spillane (2006) suggested that when two or more people, such as the principal and assistant principal, form a close working relationship and build trust in one another, the strengths and weaknesses of individuals are balanced within the relationship. Gronn (2003) described this process as "intuitive working relationships" (p. 43). Distributed leadership has been shown to serve and extend the principal's leadership (Pont et al., 2008; Silins, 1994).

5.3.5 *Focusing on Students*

The assistant principals in this study identified the importance of focusing on students as part of their work. No specific themes were evident in the data, as many of the responses in the survey were more general in nature, such as "supporting students" or "providing support to students", with no elaboration. The more detailed responses were wide-ranging and included references to academic, behavioural and pastoral support and the necessity of putting the needs of students first. Forty percent ($n = 27$) of survey respondents indicated they would like to spend more time on student wellbeing and pastoral care, and 61% ($n = 41$) of participants would like to increase time in classrooms supporting teachers and students.

There is evidence in the literature regarding the view of assistant principals on the necessity of maintaining a focus on students. In their research, Busch et al.

(2012) noted that assistant principals saw the need to put students first. A study by Guihen (2019) identified that assistant principals with teaching loads saw this aspect of their work as important as it helped them "maintain a child-centred perspective that prioritises young people and their learning above all else" (p. 545). Sun (2012) found that while assistant principals would like to spend less time counselling students and on student discipline, they still considered both of these tasks to be valuable, ranking them ninth and third in the tasks they wanted to spend time on, respectively, in a list of 25 responsibilities.

The importance assigned to focusing on students in this study reflects the context of Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. Eighty-eight percent ($n = $ 60) of participants have teaching responsibilities. They are, therefore, well-entrenched in providing support directly to students. In the context of CEWA, schools are considered to be "Christ-centred and student-focused" (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-c) communities, so the value placed on supporting students is consistent with the goals of Catholic schooling in Western Australia. Additionally, servant leaders focus on meeting students' educational and personal development needs (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014).

5.3.6 Most Important Skills

Research participants listed a range of skills they felt were most critical to their role as assistant principal. The ten most frequently mentioned skills were: organisation, time management, flexibility and agility, authenticity, communication, active listening, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, having a learning disposition and exemplary teaching skills. Several researchers have composed lists of essential skills required by assistant principals, using input from those in the role. Table 5.2 indicates where the ten most important skills identified by assistant principals in the current study appear in the literature where researchers have composed lists of essential skills.

Table 5.2

Comparison of the Top Ten Most Important Skills Identified by Study Participants to the Literature

Skill	Barnett et al. (2012)	Busch et al. (2012)	Read (2012)	Cranston (2007)	Weller & Weller (2002)
Organisation	✓	✓		✓	
Time management		✓		✓	✓
Flexibility and agility	✓	✓		✓	✓
Authenticity					
Communication	✓	✓	✓		✓
Active listening		✓	✓		
Interpersonal skills	✓	✓		✓	✓
Problem-solving			✓		
Learning disposition					
Exemplary teaching					

The first two skills noted by participants were organisation and time management. Literature reflects the view of the assistant principals in this study that organisation and time management are critical competencies for their role (Barnett et al., 2012; Busch et al., 2012; Cranston, 2007; Weller & Weller, 2002). As discussed earlier in this chapter, assistant principals are responsible for many day-to-day, forward planning and compliance tasks, and this aspect of their work helps to ensure the smooth operation of the school. Therefore, it is not surprising that assistant principals viewed the transactional leadership tasks of organisation and time management as important skills.

Assistant principals in this study identified flexibility and agility as necessary competencies for their work, and the literature reflects this opinion (Barnett et al., 2012; Busch et al., 2012; Cranston, 2007; Weller & Weller, 2002). Cranston (2007) saw skills in managing change and uncertainty as necessary, and Busch et al. (2012) viewed it as important for assistant principals to develop flexible attitudes and behaviours. Barnett et al. (2012) suggested that flexibility helps assistant principals

cope with the demands of the job. The need for school leaders to be flexible and agile is also reflected in the literature on school leadership. For example, Fullan (2022) explained that successful leaders adapt to the context in which they work and that leaders need to adjust their approach in response to new information. The significance of the school context and the need for school leaders to respond to it was also highlighted by Leithwood et al. (2020).

Participants acknowledged authenticity as a valuable skill for assistant principals; however, the literature does not appear to identify authenticity as important for the work of assistant principals. This absence may be due to authenticity not necessarily being considered a skill in its own right but rather the result of the enaction of other skills. For example, Busch et al. (2012) found that assistant principals in their study saw virtue and trust as important personal attributes for assistant principals and that these traits exemplified authenticity. Authenticity has links to servant leadership, with van Dierendonck (2011) suggesting that authenticity is one of the key characteristics of servant leadership. Authenticity is reflected in skills associated with servant leadership, such as humility, role modelling, mutual support, honesty, openness, truthfulness, visibility and admitting mistakes (Nsiah & Walker, 2013).

The next three most important skills noted by assistant principals are communication, active listening and interpersonal skills, which could be grouped as interrelated competencies. These skills are well represented in the literature as necessary to the assistant principal's role. As assistant principals interact with a range of people as part of their work, communication skills are essential (Barnett et al., 2012). Busch (2012) suggested that assistant principals need to be open-minded and actively listen to the concerns of the school community and the advice provided to them by mentors. In a study by Cranston (2007), all assistant principals identified interpersonal skills as important to their work.

Participants noted problem-solving as a valuable skill. Assistant principals in Read's (2012) research also viewed problem-solving as an important competency. As noted earlier in this chapter, the literature reflects the view that problem-solving is an aspect of the work of assistant principals (Harvey, 1991; Marshall, 1993; Mercer, 2016), with Leithwood (2017) identifying it as one of the essential personal

leadership resources required of school leaders. The value placed on problem-solving by assistant principals may reflect transactional leadership practices to ensure the smooth operation of the school.

Having a disposition towards learning was identified as an important skill by assistant principals in this study; however, this view was not evident among assistant principals in the literature reviewed for this research. Nevertheless, the need to have a learning disposition is cited in the literature on school leadership. Leithwood et al. (2008) suggested that the most effective school leaders are ready to learn from others. Successful leaders can listen and ask questions to learn more about the school context and participate as a learner in school improvement (Fullan, 2022). Servant leadership also provides support for assistant principals valuing a learning disposition. Servant leaders demonstrate humility and understand that they do not have all the answers. They need to be open to learning, willingly acknowledging their mistakes and how they have learned from them (Nsiah & Walker, 2013).

Participants expressed that having exemplary teaching skills was valuable in their work. There does not appear to be any support for this result in the literature, which is likely to be a reflection of assistant principals in much of the research not having teaching responsibilities (Melton et al., 2012). Assistant principals in this study view teaching as an opportunity to demonstrate good practice to other teachers, contributing to their authenticity.

There are several skills listed in the literature that assistant principals consider important to their work but were not identified by the participants. These skills included the capacity to delegate (Cranston, 2007; Read, 2012), being able to chair meetings (Read, 2012; Weller & Weller, 2002), being inspiring (Cranston, 2007; Read, 2012) and being able to develop a supportive network (Barnett et al., 2012; Cranston, 2007). In addition, curriculum development and instructional leadership skills were listed as necessary for the work of assistant principals in the literature (Barnett et al., 2012; Weller & Weller, 2002). While they did not list them as particular skills when asked, participants in the current study identified leading learning as a critical aspect of their role, indicating they do see curriculum and instructional leadership skills as important.

5.3.7 Summary

This discussion provided insight into the five themes that emerged from the data regarding the aspects of the role assistant principals considered to be most important: leading learning through building staff capacity and overseeing curriculum; supporting staff pastorally and by acting as a problem-solver and an intermediary; building relationships by forming connections and building trust; supporting the principal by providing contextual support and forming a united leadership team; and focusing on students. In addition, participants identified the most essential skills required of assistant principals to carry out their role successfully.

In most cases, there was evidence in the literature that assistant principals in other studies shared some of the same views as the participants of this study regarding the value they place on various aspects of their role. The exceptions are in the areas of the pastoral care of staff and acting as an intermediary, which did not seem to appear in the literature reviewed for this study regarding what assistant principals feel is important. Additionally, the skills of being an exemplary teacher, having a disposition towards learning and being an authentic leader are not apparent in the literature in regard to the most important skills required of assistant principals.

The aspects of the role that assistant principals consider the most important draw on several leadership models. The value of instructional leadership was highlighted in the focus on leading learning. Distributed leadership was present in building trusting relationships and in the formation of a united leadership team. Transformational leadership was evident in the pastoral care of staff and building relationships. Problem-solving draws on transactional leadership, and servant leadership influences almost all aspects of the role assistant principals view as beneficial. This discussion revealed what participants believed to be the most important aspects of the role of assistant principal. However, the tasks considered most critical may or may not provide fulfilment to those in the role. The next section of this chapter will discuss the aspects of the role that provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals.

5.4 Which Aspects of the Role Provide Professional Fulfilment to Assistant Principals?

This section discusses those aspects of the role that participants revealed as providing professional fulfilment. Assistant principals in this study are generally satisfied with their job. Almost 90% ($n = 61$) of survey participants indicated a sense of role satisfaction for 'at least a good deal of the time'. Ninety-one percent ($n = 62$) responded affirmatively when asked if they would choose to become an assistant principal again. High levels of job satisfaction among assistant principals are consistent with the results of other studies (Cranston, 2006; Harvey, 1991; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). Riley et al. (2021) identified the job satisfaction of assistant principals as being above the general population and just below that of principals. The aspects of the role that participants indicated as providing professional fulfilment emerged within five themes: working with students, making a difference, receiving support, opportunities for growth and development and community. These five themes will now be discussed.

5.4.1 Working with Students

Assistant principals in this study identified working with students as an aspect of their role that provided them with professional fulfilment. This result correlates with the result discussed previously in this chapter that assistant principals in this study feel it is important to focus on students. The literature on assistant principals reflects the view that working with students contributes to job satisfaction (Glanz, 1994a; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). Two sub-themes emerged from the data related to the professional fulfilment participants derived from working with students: having a positive impact on students and having a teaching role.

5.4.1.1 Having a Positive Impact on Students. Assistant principals in this study identified the positive impact they have on students as an aspect of their role that provides professional fulfilment. Participants expressed gratitude and pride in positively influencing student learning and social-emotional growth. These views are mirrored in the literature. Marshall (1993) found that the ability to impact and shape students' lives is a rewarding aspect of the work of assistant principals. Glanz (1994a) observed that assistant principals get satisfaction from seeing students succeed, and Shore and Walshaw (2018) found that the participants in their study derived satisfaction from seeing students grow and develop, knowing they were a

positive influence on students. Several researchers (d'Arbon et al., 2002; James & Whiting, 1998; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) have found that assistant principals may place such high value on their interactions with students and the impact they have on them that they are reluctant to apply for principal positions. A promotion would result in them taking a step further away from close and regular contact with students. The literature is reflective of the view of assistant principals in this study that they gain professional fulfilment as a result of having a positive impact on students.

5.4.1.2 Having a Teaching Role. Participants indicated that their teaching role provides them with professional fulfilment and satisfaction. Whilst numerous assistant principals acknowledged difficulties in having a teaching load, which will be discussed later in this chapter, teaching was still viewed as rewarding, enjoyable and as a way to contribute their talents and gifts for the benefit of the students. There is limited research regarding how assistant principals derive professional fulfilment from teaching. This lack of literature, as noted previously, is likely because the majority of research into the role of assistant principal originates from the United States, where most assistant principals do not teach (Melton et al., 2012).

In an Australian study, Leaf and Odhiambo (2017) found that assistant principals value their time teaching in classrooms, and it provides them with satisfaction. Several participants in their study indicated they actively worked to ensure they did not miss their classroom teaching time due to the professional fulfilment gained from it. Similarly, Guihen (2019) found that assistant principals in the United Kingdom described their teaching responsibilities as one of the most enjoyable and satisfying aspects of their role, although it can be difficult to balance teaching with their other responsibilities. In contrast, a study by Harvey (1991) in Western Australian public schools indicated somewhat different results. He found that assistant principals expressed high dissatisfaction with their classroom teaching responsibilities. However, this result seemed to be predominantly due to the time involved in teaching, resulting in less time to perform their other duties. Most assistant principals in Harvey's study spent between 50% and 75% of their time each day teaching. They identified their ideal teaching load as being 50%, with some preferring no teaching at all. Whilst teaching was a source of dissatisfaction for participants in the current study, it appears to be related to time pressures rather than working with students. The professional fulfilment a teaching role provides to

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assistant principals has some mentions in the limited literature on this topic. The amount of teaching and how the time involved impacts the other responsibilities of assistant principals may affect the level of satisfaction gained from this task. The challenge of a teaching role for assistant principals will be explored later in this chapter.

5.4.2 Making a Difference

Participants identified their ability to make a difference to staff, students and the wider school community as a fulfilling aspect of their work. Shore and Walshaw (2018) noted a desire to make a difference and being able to influence others as significant sources of job satisfaction for assistant principals. The data from this study relating to the professional fulfilment gained from making a difference revealed three sub-themes: school improvement, developing staff and administration and management. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.4.2.1 School Improvement. Assistant principals in this study expressed that the ability to positively impact school improvement was a fulfilling aspect of their work. Participants explained that making a difference in the school's learning program included identifying areas for improvement, driving positive change, assessing the impact of teaching, and leadership of curriculum initiatives. As explained earlier in this chapter, assistant principals viewed leading learning as the most important aspect of their work. Harvey (1991) suggested that assistant principals get the most satisfaction from undertaking work they feel is important, so it is understandable that participants saw school improvement as a source of professional fulfilment.

The results of this study are consistent with other research. Drake (1995, as cited in Hausman et al., 2002) found that assistant principals who were primarily engaged in improving educational programs felt their professional needs were being fulfilled. Beycioglu et al. (2012) identified that the feeling of bringing improvement to the school was a significant source of job satisfaction. This result fell within the 'sense of efficacy' aspect in Kwan Yu-Kwong and Walker's (2010) facets of assistant principal job satisfaction, which indicated that assistant principals were confident in their ability to carry out work in school improvement. Shore and Walshaw (2018)

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noted that the opportunity to facilitate and support learning initiatives provided high levels of job satisfaction

5.4.2.2 Developing Staff. Research participants indicated that working with staff to develop their teaching skills and personal growth was a source of professional fulfilment. One participant put it this way: "The most rewarding aspect of my work is helping teachers to achieve personal growth and developing their ability to make a difference in children's lives". Other participants expressed that they wanted to ensure that teachers loved coming to work each day and that they felt supported. These data correlate with the previously discussed views of participants that building staff capacity and the pastoral care of staff are important aspects of the work of assistant principals.

The literature reflects participants' views that developing staff is a fulfilling aspect of their work. Marshall (1993) found that assistant principals felt a sense of accomplishment from the support they give to staff, particularly in their role in encouraging and shaping teachers, which improved their teaching skills. Marshall (1993) also found that the pastoral care of staff is a rewarding aspect of the work of assistant principals. In a study by Shore and Walshaw (2018), assistant principals identified supporting teachers as the most significant source of job satisfaction, rating it twice as highly as working with students. The same research also found that facilitating professional development, promoting teacher practice and managing change processes were sources of significant professional fulfilment. Hausman et al. (2002) suggested that assistant principals find satisfaction in working with teachers on developing their curriculum knowledge.

5.4.2.3 Administration and Management. Participants expressed feelings of fulfilment and accomplishment when talking about their administration and management duties. The ability to carry out transactional tasks to ensure the smooth operation of the school was a source of pride and enjoyment for participants. There are indications in the literature that confirm this view is shared by other assistant principals. The ability to maintain a stable environment was identified as a source of satisfaction by Marshall (1993). Shore and Walshaw (2018) proposed that satisfaction results from getting things right and performing management tasks accurately and efficiently. Harvey (1991) suggested that the sense of satisfaction

from administration and management tasks may come from a source of power, control and visibility.

Notwithstanding the above studies, the literature is somewhat mixed regarding the professional fulfilment provided to assistant principals from administration and management tasks. For example, Harvey (1991) found that, while some aspects of administration are a source of satisfaction for assistant principals, the majority of tasks associated with administration and management create a sense of dissatisfaction. Shore and Walshaw (2018) found that assistant principals experienced tension between management and leadership tasks, resulting in dissatisfaction with administrative activities. However, the same study also found that many participants expressed positive views of their administration and management role due to the satisfaction and self-worth they derived from "getting things right" (Shore & Walshaw, 2018, p. 322).

The mixed results within the literature, and in some cases within the same studies, seem to be related to the time spent on administration and management. It appears that assistant principals would prefer to be spending time on instructional leadership and staff development (Harvey, 1991; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) but are waylaid by their responsibilities in ensuring the smooth operation of the school. However, when they carry out transactional tasks and see the positive impact on the school, they gain satisfaction and professional fulfilment (Shore & Walshaw, 2018). The results of the current study also reflect this view. As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants expressed that leading learning and supporting staff are the most critical aspects of their role. They also identified organisation and time management as the two most important skills of an assistant principal. These results indicate that assistant principals in this study understand that administration and management are necessary for their work; however, they prefer to lead learning and support staff. The results of this study and other research with similar results reveal that it is possible to both be dissatisfied by the time spent on transactional tasks and gain professional fulfilment from undertaking them successfully.

5.4.3 Receiving Support

As discussed earlier in this chapter, providing support to others is a significant and important aspect of the role of assistant principal. However, assistant principals also benefit from receiving support and participants expressed that receiving support from others was a source of professional fulfilment. Cranston (2007) suggested that the ability to build supportive connections is one of the most critical skills required of assistant principals. The data relating to receiving support revealed three sub-themes: support from leadership team colleagues, support from collegial networks and working in a Catholic environment. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.4.3.1 Support from Leadership Team Colleagues. Assistant principals in this study identified support from colleagues in the leadership team as a source of professional fulfilment that contributes to their enjoyment of their work. Participants spoke of relationships with the principal and other leadership team members, such as other assistant principals, that are psychologically safe and harmonious. One assistant principal said: "I love working as an AP at my school. I feel very supported by our principal … I would not want to work anywhere else!" Another participant described their gratitude for "working with people who inspire me and encourage me in my role". Assistant principals indicated that these supportive relationships provide professional growth, instil confidence, and allow the assistant principal to feel trusted and that their opinions and ideas are valued.

The impact of a supportive leadership team on the professional fulfilment of assistant principals is well represented in the literature. Riley, See, et al. (2021) and Cansoy et al. (2021) posited that the professional and personal support of colleagues on the leadership team are significant sources of support for assistant principals. Shore and Walshaw's (2018) study found the leadership team to be the most important professional support and source of motivation for an assistant principal. Palmer (1997, as cited in Shore & Walshaw, 2018) suggested that a supportive leadership team provides some protection for assistant principals from "the stress, loneliness and high administrative workload associated with the role" (p. 324). Cranston (2006, 2007) found that the job satisfaction of assistant principals is related to how well the leadership team is developed and that the attitudes and skills of the principal and assistant principal, interpersonal relationships and the school

culture all impact this team development. Beycioglu et al. (2012) agreed with other researchers that assistant principals experienced job satisfaction through positive working relationships with other leadership team members. They suggested that this satisfaction falls within the 'sense of synchrony' lens of Kwan Yu-Kwong and Walker's (2010) facets of assistant principal job satisfaction. A few researchers have recognised that other assistant principals on the leadership team are a valuable source of support for assistant principals as they share the experience of the role and context (Armstrong, 2015; Hartzell et al., 1995).

The development of a psychologically safe leadership team positively impacts assistant principal job satisfaction. Armstrong (2015) found that assistant principals felt supported when they could take risks and make mistakes and that this support aided the assistant principal's sense of safety and security. When the leadership team shares trust and loyalty, the individuals' strengths, experience, and expertise within the group can be utilised to form a team made up of complementary skills and attitudes (Shore & Walshaw, 2018). Strong interpersonal connections enhance the leadership team's effectiveness and result in feelings of attachment and belonging (Shore & Walshaw, 2018). The absence of a strong collegial culture in the leadership team exacerbates feelings of loneliness in the assistant principal (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017; Marshall, 1993).

5.4.3.2 Support from Collegial Networks. Participants identified connections with collegial networks as a source of support and professional fulfilment. They expressed their appreciation for interacting with and getting support from others who appreciate and understand the challenges of the role of assistant principal and can provide help and advice. The literature contains references to the value of collegial networks as a source of support for school leaders. For example, Hayes and Burkett (2020) found that networks provide a safe space to ask for help from others who understand the role. Participants spoke of the value of the Catholic Assistant Principal Association (CAPA) as a collegial support system. Several researchers have suggested that professional associations, such as CAPA, are important sources of support and professional growth for assistant principals (Marshall, 1993; Mercer, 2016). Marshall and Hooley (2006) proposed that conferences organised by professional associations are a valuable source of learning for assistant principals.

One assistant principal expressed that they appreciated connecting with others in the same role because the position of assistant principal is the middleman: not a teacher, not the principal. The literature (Armstrong, 2015; Dor-Haim, 2021) suggests that assistant principals might experience loneliness in their work due to their separation from the teaching group, resulting in a sense of not belonging. Riley et al. (2021) asserted that professional support networks for school leaders are essential to their occupational health, safety and wellbeing. Collegial networks of assistant principals provide support and access to others with a similar experience. Participants noted the use of online communications, such as the CAPA Teams channel, as a beneficial source of collegial support. The advantages of the use of technology in networking were highlighted by Leithwood (2019), who found that collegial networks that used technology to connect their members allowed for more extensive networks and increased sharing of ideas.

5.4.3.3 Working in a Catholic Environment. Assistant principals in this study described working in a Catholic environment as a source of fulfilment and support. Participants spoke of being able to express and live their faith through their work. One assistant principal communicated that they found working in a Catholic school fulfilling because "every person is working towards a single shared vision; support students to be the best they can be, academically and spiritually". The research on the work of assistant principals in Catholic schools is limited, so there does not seem to be any indication in the literature reviewed for this study as to whether assistant principals in other Catholic schools find professional fulfilment working in a Catholic environment. However, a study regarding Catholic school teachers' motivation and job satisfaction may provide some insight. Convey (2014) found that teachers working in Catholic schools identified working in a Catholic environment and opportunities to share their faith and values are motivating factors. In addition, the school's religious philosophy was a contributor to teacher job satisfaction. It is possible that these results may also apply to assistant principals in Catholic schools.

The literature reviewed for this study did not reveal how working in a Catholic environment impacted the professional fulfilment of assistant principals. Participants' sentiments, however, that they find support and fulfilment working in a Catholic environment are closely aligned with the literature on the leadership of Catholic

schools. Catholic school leaders are required to have both professional and spiritual competencies to carry out their role (Belmonte & Cranston, 2007; Neidhart & Lamb, 2013). Miller (2006) asserted that Catholic school leaders are responsible for creating an environment where they serve as authentic witnesses of their faith. In research involving Catholic school principals, Neidhart and Lamb (2013) found that principals saw their personal faith as an integral aspect of their leadership.

5.4.4 Opportunities for Growth and Development

Participants identified opportunities for growth and development as a source of professional fulfilment. Sixty percent ($n = 41$) of survey participants indicated that one of their motivations for becoming an assistant principal was professional growth opportunities. Shore and Walshaw (2018) saw the opportunity to experience personal and professional growth as a contributing factor to assistant principals' professional fulfilment. The data regarding the professional fulfilment derived from opportunities for growth and development revealed three sub-themes: professional learning opportunities, leadership opportunities and role variety. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.4.4.1 Professional Learning Opportunities. Participants highlighted the value of the professional learning available to them and saw these opportunities as a fulfilling aspect of their work. This learning resulted from leadership courses and on-the-job learning and growth. There are some references in the literature to the professional fulfilment assistant principals derive from professional learning opportunities. For example, Kwan (2011) identified that assistant principals who engaged in professional learning activities, such as seminars, conferences, and workshops, and who sought out opportunities to engage in professional sharing with colleagues found their job more satisfying. Harvey (1991, 1994a) suggested that a lack of professional development opportunities negatively impacts assistant principal job satisfaction. Numerous authors have highlighted the importance of targeted professional development for assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2017; Oliver, 2005; Petrides et al., 2014).

In addition to professional learning opportunities external to the school, assistant principals find opportunities for professional growth from carrying out their work within the school. Interviewees expressed that they enjoyed feeling

"challenged" and "professionally stimulated" in their work. Participants indicated that the principal is instrumental in providing them with these opportunities. They spoke of being encouraged to attend school board meetings, being able to undertake work that usually falls within the principal's scope of work and engaging in reflective discussions with the principal as ways the principal supported their professional growth. These observations are reflected in the literature, which suggests that principals have an important role in providing learning aimed at the growth of the assistant principal within the school context (Barnett et al., 2012; Guihen, 2019; Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Oliver, 2005). To emphasise the vital role that principals play in developing assistant principals, Barnett et al. (2017) suggested that principals should be evaluated each year on how they develop the leadership skills of the assistant principals they work with.

5.4.4.2 Leadership Opportunities. Assistant principals identified the leadership opportunities they are afforded in their role as a source of professional fulfilment. Participants expressed that they enjoyed having an influence on the school and being part of decision-making at a higher level than as a teacher. One participant explained that they enjoy "being a real leader and not just managing events or sitting in the office". These views are mirrored by Shore and Walshaw (2018), who found that a significant factor in assistant principals' attraction to the role was "the ability to influence others and help shape the school" (p. 315).

The literature reflects the view of assistant principals in this study that leadership opportunities provide professional fulfilment, particularly in instructional leadership. Kaplan and Owings (1999) suggested that the chance to engage in shared instructional leadership offers assistant principals professional satisfaction and enrichment. They posited that when assistant principals are provided with opportunities for instructional leadership, they can engage in leadership activities rather than the purely administrative function of responding to daily events. Professional fulfilment from instructional leadership opportunities is also evidenced in other research. For example, as noted earlier in this chapter, assistant principals who are primarily involved in improving educational programs felt their professional needs were being fulfilled (Drake, 1995, as cited in Hausman et al., 2002). Shore and Walshaw (2018) recognised leadership of the improvement of teaching and learning as a contributor to assistant job satisfaction. Armstrong (2010) suggested

that assistant principals need more opportunities to engage in leadership activities rather than management tasks if assistant principals are to be fully utilised to improve schools.

The principal plays a key role in providing assistant principals with leadership opportunities to enhance their professional fulfilment. Participants indicated varying degrees of support from the principal in this regard. Some assistant principals indicated that leadership is the core of their work and that they "shared responsibility" with the principal, whilst others found themselves with fewer opportunities to lead, with their time being taken up by predominantly administrative and teaching responsibilities. The duty of the principal to provide leadership opportunities for assistant principals was highlighted by Marshall and Hooley (2006), who stated that "principals need to recognise their responsibility to provide their professional colleagues with opportunities for satisfying work, adequate support, advanced training and effective resources" (p. 21). Assistant principals in Cansoy's (2021) study valued the support of the principal in both personal ways, such as encouragement and morale, and in receiving assistance in the technical aspects of the work. Ho et al. (2021a) suggested that the principal can both enable and disable the leadership of the assistant principal, depending upon the principal's willingness to share leadership. A principal who adopts a distributed leadership approach actively facilitates and supports the leadership of others who have the capacity to lead (Harris, 2013), including the assistant principal. A principal who is a servant leader will provide opportunities for assistant principals to develop their professional skills (Striepe & O'Donoghue, 2014) and will prioritise their growth and development (Greenleaf, 1977). Additionally, the servant leadership-aligned principle of subsidiarity (Boone & Makhani, 2012) is demonstrated by principals when they allow and empower others, including assistant principals, to make decisions appropriate to their level of authority (Rebore & Walmsley, 2009). The results of this study indicate that not all assistant principals are provided with leadership opportunities by their principal. The impact of the principal on the role of assistant principal, including the degree to which they are able to exercise leadership, will be discussed later in this chapter as a challenge of the role.

5.4.4.3 Role Variety. Assistant principals in this study described their enjoyment of the variety of work they experience in their role. For example, one

participant stated that they are motivated because "each day is a new day in a school. No day is ever the same". Another interviewee explained that what they love about their job the most is that "each day has its own challenges and its own rewards". These sentiments are reflected by Shore and Walshaw (2018), who found that assistant principals identified a diversity of leadership tasks as part of their initial attraction to the job and this diversity of tasks provided them with the chance to test their professional capabilities. Kwan Yu-Kwong and Walker (2010) observed that assistant principals with more varied opportunities have more confidence and more commitment to their work.

As discussed earlier, there are aspects of the work of assistant principals, such as administration and management and teaching in classrooms, that they find both fulfilling and challenging. The variety of tasks assistant principals undertake is another example of this dichotomy. The breadth of the role of assistant principal will be discussed later in this chapter as a challenge of their work, yet it is the breadth of the role that allows the role variety participants characterised as providing fulfilment. The challenge of role breadth is complicated by a lack of a clear role description for assistant principals (Anderson et al., 2009; Harvey, 1994a; Weller & Weller, 2002). However, several researchers have pointed out that the lack of a clear role description may provide assistant principals with some autonomy in their work, thereby increasing role satisfaction. For example, Ho et al. (2021b) suggested that role ambiguity can empower assistant principals as it allows them to shape their work to a certain degree. Marshall (1993) similarly found that assistant principals with good and trusting relationships with their principals are afforded autonomy in their work and are, therefore, more satisfied. As the principal decides the work of assistant principals (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Kwan, 2019; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019), those with positive relationships with their principal may be afforded more flexibility in the variety of tasks they undertake and derive satisfaction from that variety. In the current study, assistant principals indicated that a positive relationship with their principal resulted in autonomy in the scope of their work due to the trust the principal has in them.

5.4.5 Community

Participants noted the professional fulfilment they received from being a member of the school community. For example, when speaking about the most

rewarding aspects of their role, one assistant principal said: "I'd say the relationships and camaraderie I've formed with the community has been incredibly rewarding. I've been really thankful for the support I've received". Data related to the professional fulfilment derived from community revealed the sub-themes of relationships and building community, which will now be discussed.

5.4.5.1 Relationships. The data from this study indicated that relationships are an integral part of the work of assistant principals. As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants identified an important aspect of their work is building relationships with school community members and that they receive professional fulfilment from supportive relationships with the principal and other leadership team members. As an aspect of community, relationships with the broader school community, including staff, students and parents, were recognised as a source of satisfaction for assistant principals. One interviewee said, "I want to go to work. I want to go there. I want to see the people. I want to see the parents. It's a small school, so I know all the children", and another stated, "we're a close-knit staff, and we know each other well".

There is some reflection in the literature regarding the value of relationships in providing professional fulfilment to assistant principals. Shore and Walshaw (2018) found that developing positive relationships with members of the school community provided assistant principals with satisfaction and that these relationships provided a sense of attachment and belonging and enhanced the psychological appeal of the role. Moreover, d'Arbon et al. (2002) found that the potential distancing of relationships with students was a disincentive for assistant principals to apply for principalship. These researchers found the same was true of the relationships of assistant principals with staff members, with assistant principals not wanting to forfeit the close relationships they have with staff by moving further up the leadership hierarchy. The professional fulfilment assistant principals derive from their relationships with the principal, leadership team members, students and staff are all represented in the literature; however, fulfilment from relationships with parents is less evident.

5.4.5.2 Building Community. Participants spoke of contributing to the building of the school community as a fulfilling aspect of their role. One assistant

principal said they enjoy "building a community of caring and pride in what we are achieving together as a team", and another noted they love the feeling of being "a cog, one more cog in the community". There appears to be limited literature regarding the views of assistant principals finding fulfilment in building community. Marshall (1993) noted that assistant principals are often visible members of the school and broader community and that some enjoy this visibility, and some do not. Drake (1995, as cited by Hausman et al., 2002) identified that assistant principals found community relations and social management activities to be less satisfying than the leadership of the educational program. The notion of community is inherently linked to Catholic schools, which may explain why assistant principals in this study found it to be a source of fulfilment. As Catholic school leaders, assistant principals are tasked with building a community based on faith, focusing on teamwork, cooperation and communication (Miller, 2006).

5.4.6 Summary

The discussion of the aspects of the role that participants felt provided them with professional fulfilment was categorised under five themes. Participants appreciated working with students, particularly having a positive impact and being able to teach them. They enjoyed making a difference through school improvement, staff development, and administration and management. They valued receiving support from leadership team colleagues, collegial networks and from working in a Catholic environment. Participants liked having opportunities for growth and development, including professional learning within and outside the school, leadership opportunities and the learning they gained from the variety of tasks they undertake as part of their role. They acknowledged the value of community, particularly the relationships they have with members of the school community and their role in building community.

In general, the views of assistant principals in this study regarding what they found professional fulfilling are reflected in the literature, with three exceptions. First, the satisfaction assistant principals derive from building community within the school does not appear to be referenced in the literature reviewed for this study. Literature on the work of leaders of Catholic schools indicates that an inherent aspect of their work is building a faith community, which may explain why participants saw community building as a fulfilling part of their work. Second, there appear to be no

references in the literature regarding the professional fulfilment assistant principals derive from their relationships with parents. Third, the fulfilment assistant principals in this study gained from working in a Catholic environment was also missing in the literature. Research indicated that teachers find fulfilment in working in a Catholic environment, which may also apply to assistant principals.

The influential role of the principal on the work of assistant principals was discussed in this section, particularly in the areas of providing them with support, professional learning, leadership opportunities and role variety. This influence may be beneficial or detrimental to the professional fulfilment of assistant principals. Other than the impact of the principal on the work-life of assistant principals, there are several areas of their role that assistant principals in this study highlighted as both rewarding and challenging. These areas were teaching, administration and management and the variety of roles for which they are responsible. These responsibilities of the role of assistant principal, along with other challenging aspects, will now be discussed.

5.5   Which Aspects of the Role Do Assistant Principals Find Challenging?

This section discusses the aspects of the role that assistant principals find challenging. As outlined in the previous section of this chapter, in general, assistant principals are satisfied with their work; however, they find certain facets of their role frustrating, difficult or even overwhelming. Four themes emerged from the data related to the aspects of the role that assistant principals found challenging: the breadth of the role, the challenge of time, managing relationships and personal wellbeing. These four themes will now be discussed.

5.5.1   The Breadth of the Role

The majority of participants believed the breadth of the role of assistant principal was a challenge. Assistant principals in this study indicated that they undertake a broad range of tasks, including providing support to school community members, leading learning, leading the religious dimension of the school, and ensuring the school's smooth operation through administration management. The broad scope of responsibilities led one participant to express that they "feel like a lot of the time, it's just survival. It's just scraping through, and things get missed." Another participant lamented that "you can never go home and just go, right, nailed

it, done." The data related to the challenges associated with the breadth of the role revealed two sub-themes, lack of role clarity and the principal's influence on the role, which will now be discussed.

5.5.1.1 Lack of Role Clarity. Earlier in this chapter, it was noted that participants found the variety of tasks undertaken by assistant principals was identified as professionally rewarding. Moreover, Ho et al. (2021b) suggested that a lack of a role description allows assistant principals to shape their role. However, participants expressed that the lack of clarity around their role and responsibilities was a challenge for them in their work. Most participants did not have a written role description, despite their contract of employment stating that one would be provided. Several of those who did have one suggested that it was outdated or did not reflect their actual role. A review of four job description documents provided by participants revealed that two provided detail, and the other two were more generic in nature. The absence of a role description and the resultant lack of role clarity was frustrating for multiple participants who saw their responsibilities expanding, with more and more being expected of them due to the lack of boundaries around their work. Numerous authors (Harvey, 1991; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Morgan, 2018) have identified a lack of role clarity as a challenge for assistant principals. As there is no universally accepted role description for assistant principals (Anderson et al., 2009; Harvey, 1994a; Weller & Weller, 2002) and their work is decided by the principal (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Kwan, 2019; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019), the workload of assistant principals can change and increase with each newly imposed external requirement, internal change, or whim of the principal (Armstrong, 2010; Harvey, 1994b).

The assistant principals in this study who did not have an accurate and updated role description expressed that they "knew" or were "expected to know" where their responsibilities lay. This view reflects the socialisation process typical in the transition of new assistant principals to the role (Armstrong, 2010). Socialisation can impart the organisation's norms, values and attitudes and the knowledge and skills needed to perform the role (Greenfield, 1984, as cited in Greenfield, 1985b). Assistant principals understand how to perform their role based on their experiences and observations of other school leaders; hence they are expected to "know" what they are responsible for. The custodial form of socialisation dominates the transition

into assistant principalship (Armstrong, 2009; Cantwell, 1993; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This process promotes the maintenance of the status quo, meaning that assistant principals may find it challenging to redefine or get clarity around their role.

Participants identified the continual expansion of their work as a challenge. One participant exclaimed: "It's just more. It's always more. We need to do more. We need to do more. We need to do more". Another noted they were "juggling multiple balls at once" and attempting to keep them all in the air. These feelings are well reflected in the literature. For example, Mulford (2008) suggested that school leaders never feel like their work is finished. Other researchers (Barnett et al., 2012; Leithwood & Azah, 2014) have found that assistant principals find it challenging to manage excessive workloads and multiple tasks simultaneously. Gronn (2003) suggested that the work of school leaders is "greedy work" (p. 14) and that heightened demands and expectations characterise this work. The lack of clarity around the role of assistant principal leads to work intensification, where the demands of the role are greater than the time available to perform the role (Cansoy et al., 2021).

Lack of role clarity impacts the ability of assistant principals to engage in the work they feel is most important (Cranston et al., 2004). Participants identified leading learning as the most crucial aspect of their role and that instructional leadership provided them with professional fulfilment. However, the lack of parameters around the work of assistant principals may mean that assistant principals cannot engage in instructional leadership to the extent they would like. The literature is mixed regarding the extent to which lack of role clarity impacts the instructional leadership of assistant principals. For example, Celikten (2001) suggested that the absence of a role description and the need to perform a wide range of duties inhibits the instructional leadership activities of assistant principals. In contrast, Leaf and Odhiambo (2017) found that even without a job description, assistant principals were able to engage in instructional leadership if they had a "collegial, power sharing relationship with their principals" (p. 41). The survey data revealed that participants wanted to spend more time on instructional leadership tasks. It may be that the breadth of the role of assistant principal and their ever-expanding tasks mean that assistant principals cannot fully engage in instructional leadership. The breadth of their work could be at the expense of deep engagement

and the development of specialised skills and knowledge in the areas assistant principals believe are important.

5.5.1.2 The Principal's Influence on the Role. Participants expressed that the principal's influence on their role can be a challenge in their work. Harvey (1994a) noted that assistant principals want to define their role in conjunction with the principal. For some participants, principals and assistant principals worked collaboratively to allocate their responsibilities based on each individual's strengths, interests and experiences. This collaborative approach is consistent with the results of research by Lim and Pollock (2019). However, other assistant principals in this study did not have a positive experience in determining their work and were left "doing the jobs the principal doesn't want to do". Melton et al. (2012) noted that assistant principals in the United Kingdom have the opportunity to reach an agreement regarding their responsibilities in collaboration with the principal; however, in the United States, the duties of assistant principals are assigned by the principal with little discussion.

Participants expressed some resentment toward the principal's power over their work and how they spent their time. The literature reflects that the scope of the work of an assistant principal is primarily determined by the principal (Jansen & du Plessis, 2020; Kwan, 2019; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). The power the principal has in defining the work of assistant principals was highlighted by Ho et al. (2021a), who suggested that the principal has the power to enable or disable the leadership of the assistant principal. There are numerous mentions in the literature regarding the challenge encountered by assistant principals due to the principal's influence on their role. For example, Celikten (2001) and Leaf and Odhiambo (2017) found that the principal determines the assistant principal's engagement in instructional leadership. Micromanagement and interference from the principal were identified as a challenge by Shore and Walshaw (2018). The need for the principal to allow the assistant principal to carry out their work independently was expressed by Marshall (1993), who said, "the best thing the principal does for an assistant [principal] is to define the job and then let [them] do it without petty interference" (p. 16). It may be that socialisation plays a part in how the principal shapes the work of assistant principals. Their own experience as an assistant principal could influence how they view the role and prevent its reimagination.

5.5.2 The Challenge of Time

Time was identified as a challenge by 90% (*n* = 18) of the assistant principals interviewed and 56% (*n* = 38) of the short answer responses in the online survey. Time was problematic regardless of school size, length of experience as an assistant principal, or whether or not they had teaching responsibilities. Assistant principals viewed lack of time as impacting their ability to carry out the aspects of the role they regarded as most important. The data relating to the challenge of time revealed three sub-themes: teaching load, administrative tasks and working in a small or regional school. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.5.2.1 Teaching Load. Participants expressed that time spent teaching was a significant challenge of their role. Eighty-eight percent (*n* = 60) of survey respondents indicated they had a teaching load, and 56% (*n* = 38) felt their teaching load was too time-consuming. Whilst many assistant principals viewed teaching as a source of fulfilment, numerous assistant principals voiced frustration with being torn between teaching and their other responsibilities. For example, one interviewee stated: "Today I was a really good teacher, but I wasn't a good AP, or today I was a good AP, but not a good teacher". Another similarly said, "I've just had to learn to not beat myself up about it over the years, but you can feel like you're not doing one thing particularly well". Other assistant principals saw the time dedicated to teaching as a barrier to their leadership and administrative functions.

Some assistant principals viewed the difficult balance between teaching and non-teaching activities as detrimental to the students' learning due to frequent interruptions and difficulty in executing both aspects of the role to a high standard. The challenge of being able to carry out both teaching and non-teaching responsibilities to a high standard is reflected in the research. For example, Guihen (2019) found that assistant principals in the United Kingdom experience guilt that teaching cannot always be their priority and that their lessons are not always to the standard they would like them to be. Similarly, Webb and Vulliamy (1995) found that assistant principals expressed concerns that they could not give adequate attention to both the teaching and leadership aspects of their role. Doherty (2010), writing about the role of the REC, often assigned to assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, suggested that teaching responsibilities contribute to

stress and diminish the role. Harvey (1994b) posited that teaching and administration are incompatible responsibilities.

The type of teaching role may impact the work of assistant principals in balancing their teaching and leadership duties. Several interviewees expressed a preference for having a specialist teaching role that does not involve prime responsibility for a class and the associated duties such as preparation of assemblies, Masses, semester reports and frequent contact with parents. Participants indicated that a specialist teaching role allows for more flexibility with their time so that they can attend to urgent matters without impacting the education of students in their class. This view reflects that of Harvey (1991, 1994b), who recommended that assistant principals negotiate a teaching load that does not include primary responsibility for a class as their teaching is frequently disrupted by the need to provide immediate responses to non-teaching issues. Frequent interruptions were also identified as having a detrimental effect on classroom responsibilities by Webb and Vulliamy (1995).

Several participants suggested that assistant principals should not have teaching responsibilities or at least very minimal teaching time. There are some suggestions in the literature that assistant principals should have no teaching responsibilities. For example, Melton et al. (2012) supported the removal of assistant principal teaching responsibilities, so they could use that time to undertake leadership training and development. Harvey (1991) also posited that having no teaching responsibilities may be ideal for assistant principals due to the work overload teaching induces. Furthermore, whilst Webb and Vulliamy (1995) found that assistant principals in the United Kingdom were generally satisfied with their teaching roles, a minority felt that assistant principals should not have teaching responsibilities due to the managerial and staff development work they need to do.

Many assistant principals in this study view teaching as a core aspect of their work and from which they derive professional fulfilment. Additionally, being an exemplary teacher was noted as one of the most important skills for an assistant principal as it allows them to demonstrate good pedagogical practice to teachers and enables them to maintain a child-centred focus. Despite these positive views of teaching, almost three-quarters of participants indicated they would like to teach for

less than ten hours per week. It seems that the challenge of a teaching role on the time of an assistant principal is significant, despite their view of its value.

5.5.2.2 Administrative Tasks. The time spent on administrative tasks was seen as a challenge by participants. Assistant principals described the tension they felt between leadership and management and that they would rather be engaging in tasks they consider to be leading. One participant explained that they managed events but did "not really have leadership of anything", and another expressed they fixed problems but did not have the opportunity to take "staff on a journey to improve". The literature reflects participants' views that administrative tasks are time-consuming. Ho et al. (2021b) observed that assistant principals could be overwhelmed by administrative duties, and Cansoy et al. (2021) found that paperwork and administration contributed to assistant principals having difficulty managing their time. Leithwood and Azah (2014) identified the negative impact on the workload of school leaders of needing to allocate time to school improvement whilst also ensuring the smooth operation of the school. Barnett et al. (2012) suggested that assistant principals have two role categories, managing student needs and instructional leadership; however, most of their time is spent dealing with student-related administrative tasks (Glanz, 2004; Hausman et al., 2002). Numerous researchers have supported the evolution of the role of assistant principal to be less engaged in administration and more focused on leadership (Armstrong, 2010; Barnett et al., 2012; Cranston et al., 2004; Jayne, 1996). Harvey (1994b) asserted that, due to the preoccupation with administrative responsibilities, assistant principals "have been a wasted educational resource" (p. 17).

One aspect of administration that received particular mention as a challenge for participants was school and system compliance tasks. Participants felt that these tasks were just "ticking boxes" and had "little relevance to making a difference to students, families and community wellbeing and growth." As discussed earlier in this chapter, assistant principals find professional fulfilment in the successful completion of administrative tasks; however, that satisfaction stems from ensuring the smooth operation of the school. It seems that participants do not view compliance tasks as contributing to this purpose. Assistant principals in this study expressed that the number of compliance tasks has been growing over time and that it is increasing their workload. One participant noted that "principals don't want to put too much

more onto teachers, so they put it onto the APs." This observation is similar to that of Rintoul and Bishop (2019), who found that as management tasks are increasingly required of principals, these responsibilities may be delegated to assistant principals, increasing their workload.

5.5.2.3 Working in a Small or Regional School. Participants expressed that assistant principals who work in small schools often have additional challenges. Data from survey participants showed that 57% of schools with less than 200 students have one assistant principal. Interview participants also noted that there is more likely to be only one assistant principal in schools with fewer students, so the same workload is carried out by one person instead of multiple people, which places more demands on their time. This fact was also highlighted by participants working in large schools who commented that they are empathetic to assistant principals in small schools. One assistant principal, who had earlier worked in a small school, described their previous work as "unrelenting" and "crushing" due to the time involved in managing the large workload with nobody to share it. The literature reflects these views. For example, Lim and Pollock (2019) and Tahir et al. (2019) found that assistant principals in smaller schools generally had a wider range of duties and that the size of the school impacts the role of the assistant principal in that context. Similarly, Shore and Walshaw (2018) identified that assistant principals in larger schools, where there are others to whom work can be delegated, have a more positive view of administrative tasks. Whereas assistant principals in smaller schools, who do not have the same levels of support, find administrative tasks more challenging and time-consuming.

Whilst acknowledging a similar view to Shore and Walshaw (2018), Jansen and du Plessis (2020) suggested that even though tasks may be delegated to other staff in large schools, the assistant principal still remains accountable for the portfolios under which those tasks fall. Cansoy et al. (2021) noted that the workload of assistant principals grows as the size of the school increases; however, the participants in their study also indicated they were experiencing high student-to-staff ratios, which may mean they had less scope to delegate tasks. The effect of school size was also noted by Kwan (2019) in relation to novice assistant principals. She found that the larger the school, the more difficult the transition. In contrast to

Cansoy et al.'s finding, Kwan noted that this challenge was evident regardless of the number of assistant principals with whom to share their work.

Assistant principals in this study also described the challenges of working in a regional school. Forty percent (*n* = 8) of survey respondents from regional or country schools indicated they were the only assistant principal. Not only are regional schools often small with just one assistant principal, but their distance from the capital city presents challenges in accessing professional learning and collegial networking opportunities, as travel time needs to be accounted for when attending these activities. Participants in regional schools expressed that it was too much effort and hassle to be away from school for days at a time and that they would have too much work to catch up on when they returned to school. There appears to be little research into the role of assistant principal in regional schools. Whilst not explicitly addressing non-metropolitan contexts, Celikten (2001) noted that assistant principals rarely have time to attend professional learning activities and that this inhibits their ability to engage in instructional leadership. After adding in travel time, it is understandable that assistant principals in regional schools would find accessing professional learning even more problematic than those in metropolitan areas.

There are two challenges for assistant principals identified in the literature related to working in non-metropolitan schools that participants of this study did not mention. Firstly, Harvey and Sheridan (1993) noted that schools in regional areas tend to have a higher proportion of graduate teachers than schools in metropolitan areas. Graduate teachers place extra demands on the time of assistant principals as they require elevated levels of professional support. Secondly, Rymarz (2022) explained that schools outside the metropolitan area tend to have a higher proportion of other-than-Catholic students, which can challenge Catholic school leaders who are tasked with promoting and developing the school's Catholic Identity. Catholic Education Western Australia school enrolment data shows that regional schools have 52.9% other-than-Catholic students (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2022b). Participants evidently did not see the large numbers of graduate teachers and non-Catholic students as particularly challenging in their contexts.

5.5.3 *Managing Relationships*

Participants expressed that having positive relationships with school community members was an essential aspect of their work and one that provides professional fulfilment. However, managing less positive relationships was identified as a challenge for participants. The data relating to the challenge of managing relationships included relationships with the principal, staff and parents. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.5.3.1 Relationship with the Principal. Almost half of the interview participants noted that managing their relationship with the principal was a challenging aspect of their work. As previously discussed, the principal plays a significant role in shaping the role of assistant principal. Participants noted that a positive relationship between the two leaders was a source of professional fulfilment, and supporting the principal was found to be an important aspect of assistant principals' work. However, several issues stemming from a poor relationship with the principal were viewed by participants as challenging. Some of these issues included principals who are not interested in working as a team, lack of respect for the assistant principal, poor communication and the absence of autonomy and trust. The literature reflects the view of assistant principals that the relationship with the principal can be challenging. For example, numerous researchers (Baker et al., 2018; Cranston, 2007; Gonzales, 2019; Harvey, 1991; Marshall, 1985; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) have highlighted the potential for conflict and distrust between the principal and assistant principal. In contrast and seemingly as an outlier result, Tahir et al. (2019) found that the relationship of assistant principals with their principal was not a source of stress for the assistant principal.

Several assistant principals identified the lack of communication by the principal as an impediment to the development of a positive relationship between the two leaders. Cantwell (1993) and Marshall (1993) reflected the view that a lack of clear and open communication could hinder the development of an effective leadership team. When the principal does not communicate a clear vision, assistant principals, who often have the role of enacting the processes to achieve the vision, are left trying to figure out the principal's intentions and can become frustrated when they are not evident (Ho et al., 2021a). This claim reflects the view of one participant in this study who explained the difficulty they experienced when the principal did not

include them in decision-making, and they were then expected to "sell" the principal's decisions without being privy to the reasoning behind them.

Participants expressed that a further contributor to a poor relationship with the principal is a lack of trust. A few assistant principals viewed micromanagement by the principal as a problem, and others felt that their professional judgement was not valued, and they were therefore disempowered. These views are reflected by Harvey (1991). He found that a problematic relationship with the principal was often the result of the principal's lack of recognition of the assistant principal's competence, resulting in the principal being reluctant to delegate leadership responsibilities to them. Lack of trust by assistant principals in the ability of the principal to lead the school is a further contributor to a challenging relationship between the two leaders. One participant voiced frustration because they believed the principal was not successfully leading the school, and they were not allowed scope within their role to address the problems. Dor-Haim (2021) identified a similar problem with assistant principals feeling unable to address issues resulting from the poor leadership practices of the principal. Similarly, Ho et al. (2021a) found that assistant principals are constrained by the principal's approach to the values and culture of the school, even if the assistant principal believes a different approach would be more beneficial.

The literature highlights the importance of a positive relationship between the principal and assistant principal. Several researchers have noted that a positive relationship between these school leaders can be mutually beneficial (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Cohen & Schechter, 2019c; Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991; Wong, 2009). Wang, Pollock, et al. (2021) suggested that principals who are supportive, include the assistant principal in their decision-making, delegate responsibilities and release control are able to establish positive working relationships with their assistant principal. Marshall (1992) recommended that principals be trained in creating collaborative teams so that assistant principals are involved in satisfying work. Cohen and Schechter (2019c) found that the assistant principal's sense of stability and security is dependent on their relationship with the principal. It may be that the same socialisation processes that impact how assistant principals experience and understand their role also play a part in how principals interact with their assistant principals. Principals who have had positive role models may be better equipped to develop positive relationships with their assistant principals.

5.5.3.2 Relationships with Staff. Participants noted the challenge of managing relationships with staff members, especially teachers. They commented that finding the balance between supporting teachers and challenging them to improve their performance could be difficult. The literature reflects these views. For example, Shore and Walshaw (2018) and Barnett et al. (2012) found that assistant principals identified dealing with disaffected staff who are unwilling to change or abide by school directives as particularly challenging. Similarly, Cansoy et al. (2021) noted that assistant principals find it challenging to motivate some teachers to complete the tasks required of them and that this can increase the workload of the assistant principal. Wang, Pollock, et al. (2021) found that dealing with resistant teachers, those with mental health issues and managing teacher underperformance were all factors that negatively impacted the work of assistant principals.

Numerous assistant principals in this study spoke of being the "middleman" between the staff and the principal and that it can be a challenge to maintain positive relationships with both. Previously, participants identified acting as an intermediary between the staff and the principal as an important part of their work; however, acting as a conduit may leave assistant principals feeling they are being pulled in different directions and unable to keep everyone happy. The literature reflects this view. Several researchers (Dor-Haim, 2021; Hartzell et al., 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Ho et al., 2021b; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) have noted the difficulties in being an intermediary. Kwan (2019) indicated that assistant principals are in the position of both leading and being led, and Ho et al. (2021b) suggested that they experience role conflict as a result. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2009) proposed that the hierarchical position held by assistant principals may result in confusion about whose priorities take precedence; are they a support for the principal or an advocate for teachers? One interviewee answered this question when they stated that "it's not my job to care what [staff] think of me; it's my job to …. support the principal in doing what she needs to do". Whilst this assistant principal appears to be focused solely on supporting the principal, other participants felt more conflicted and were more concerned with maintaining harmonious relationships with all parties.

5.5.3.3 Relationships with Parents. Participants expressed that relationships with parents can be a challenging aspect of their role. Whilst assistant principals in this study viewed relationships with parents as an important part of their

work and that positive relationships with parents can provide professional fulfilment, they also identified that parents could have unreasonable expectations of the school. Participants described these parents as "demanding", "energy-sapping", and "unrelenting". Several authors (Barnett et al., 2012; Rintoul, 2010; Shore & Walshaw, 2018; Tahir et al., 2019) have noted dealing with disgruntled parents as a challenge in the work of assistant principals. Cansoy et al. (2021) suggested that unrealistic demands from parents contribute to work intensification for assistant principals due to the time they consume and that principals will often delegate dealing with parent complaints to assistant principals. Celikten (2001) found that dealing with parents who had either very high expectations of the school, or very low expectations and therefore did not provide support to the school, had a negative impact on the ability of the assistant principal to engage in instructional leadership. Leithwood and Azah (2014) and Wang, Pollock, et al. (2021) suggested that the effort to foster parent engagement was a contributor to the workload of school leaders.

5.5.4 Personal Wellbeing

Participants recognised managing their personal wellbeing as a challenge in their role. Wang, Pollock, et al. (2021) found there is less priority on the wellbeing of school leaders than that of students and teachers. Wellbeing is correlated to the level of job satisfaction experienced by an individual (Judge & Locke, 1993; Sironi, 2019) and can be defined as "ongoing positive thoughts and behaviours that engage and fulfil and make us content" (Parker et al., 2021, p. 99). Research participants reported strong levels of satisfaction in their work; however, a number of significant negative impacts on their wellbeing were expressed. Four themes were identified within the challenge of managing personal wellbeing: the breadth of the role, balancing work-life and home-life, managing relationships and lack of recognition for their work. Each of these themes will now be discussed.

5.5.4.1 The Breadth of the Role. Participants found the breadth of the role as a challenge impacting their wellbeing. Several assistant principals noted the danger of burnout due to the expansive demands of the job. Others spoke of experiencing exhaustion, mental fatigue, and illness due to needing to balance the different aspects of their responsibilities. The impact of the breadth of the work undertaken by assistant principals on their wellbeing is well reflected in the literature. The quantity of work and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning were identified as the

most significant sources of stress for assistant principals in Australia (Riley, See, et al., 2021) and New Zealand (Riley, Rahimi, et al., 2021). In Japan, where 30% of assistant principals exhibit depressive symptoms, quantitative workload, or incongruence between the number of tasks required and the amount of time to complete them, and lack of job control were seen as predictors of job stress (Nitta et al., 2019). Similarly, Celik (2013) found that role ambiguity and task overload lead to emotional and mental fatigue and low functionality. The literature on work intensification (Cansoy et al., 2021; Lim & Pollock, 2019; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021) suggests that large amounts of administrative work and being responsible for many tasks negatively impact the wellbeing of assistant principals, including their psychological and physical health.

Participants also noted the internal battle they experienced in trying to do the job to the best of their ability but being pulled in different directions, unable to focus on tasks they have been assigned or that they feel are important. They expressed that this conflict can lead to feelings of frustration and disappointment in their job performance. These sentiments reflect the literature (Anderson et al., 2009; Armstrong, 2015; Harvey, 1994a) regarding the work of assistant principals as being mainly in response to the needs of others. Numerous researchers (Cohen & Schechter, 2019b; Craft et al., 2016; Guihen, 2019; Harvey, 1994b; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) have highlighted the reactionary nature of the work of assistant principals and the struggle they experience, particularly when management tasks need to take priority over leadership activities due to their urgent nature.

Assistant principals in this study remarked that the current model of assistant principalship is unsustainable and needs to be reconceptualised. One interviewee commented upon the impact of the breadth of the role on their wellbeing, saying that "we are deluding ourselves into making something okay that's not okay". As discussed earlier in this chapter, the challenge of the breadth of the work of assistant principals is exacerbated by the absence of a clear definition of the role, with more and more responsibilities being added. Several researchers have posited that the role of assistant principals needs to be reimagined to protect the wellbeing of those in the role. For example, Celik (2013) suggested that better articulation of assistant principals' role, mission, authority, and responsibilities may reduce their chance of

burnout. Oleszewski et al. (2012) posited that an unclear job description could impact assistant principals' emotional wellbeing and job performance.

5.5.4.2 Balancing Work-Life and Home-Life. Participants viewed the difficulty in finding a healthy balance between their work-life and their home-life as negatively impacting their wellbeing. Many noted they found it difficult to "switch off", that their work is "all-consuming", and that "it'll never be done". The view of assistant principals that it is difficult to balance the demands of their work with their personal lives is reflected in the literature. An Australian longitudinal study into the health and wellbeing of school leaders found that assistant principals reported feelings of conflict between their work and family demands at double the rate of the general population (Riley, See, et al., 2021). Lim and Pollock (2019) identified that assistant principals find that the demands of their work take away time from their personal lives, and Guihen (2019) found that excessive work hours negatively impacted the relationships of assistant principals with their families.

At the core of the difficulty in balancing their work-life and home-life is the amount of time assistant principals spend at school or working at home after hours. While their employment contract states that assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia may need to work outside of school hours (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-d), the amount of time is not specified. All survey participants indicated they completed work at home, with some committing more than 16 hours each week. In addition to completing work at home, participants identified working long hours at school. All full-time participants worked at school for at least 40 hours each week. The majority (68%) of full-time survey respondents ($n =$ 44) spent between 40 and 49 hours at school each week, and 29% ($n =$ 19) were at school for between 50 and 59 hours weekly. Whilst an average number of working hours could not be determined in the current study due to collecting data in bands, rather than discrete numbers, it appears that the total time most participants spend working each week, both at school and at home, may be similar to the results of other research. For example, a study in the Australian state of New South Wales found that assistant principals worked an average of 58 hours per week (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018). Those in Ontario worked for 54.5 hours (Pollock et al., 2017, as cited in Lim & Pollock, 2019) and assistant principals in Maine in the United States worked an average of 55 hours per week (Hausman et al., 2002). Half of the

assistant principals in a study in New Zealand worked between 50 and 59 hours per week, and a quarter worked 60 hours or more (Cranston, 2007). Whilst acknowledging that the time spent working may be similar to assistant principals in other contexts, the current workload of many assistant principals does not reflect a healthy and well-balanced approach to their wellbeing, as evidenced by the qualitative data collected in this study. It raises questions about the sustainability of their work, given the ever-increasing demands on school leadership. Excessive work hours may impact the longevity of assistant principals in their role, as well as being a disincentive for teachers to apply for assistant principal positions.

The breadth of the work of assistant principals and the lack of role clarity contribute to the need to spend a significant number of hours working. Additionally, the work of assistant principals is usually in response to the needs of others, which results in their planned work being delayed while they respond to the immediate needs of the school community. The intensification of the work of school leaders increases the amount of time assistant principals need to spend completing their tasks (Lim & Pollock, 2019; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021), which results in some of their work spilling into their home-life. Gronn (2003) suggested that the work of assistant principals is "greedy work" (p. 14), characterised by increased demands and expectations. He cautioned that greedy work is addictive and can increase emotional attachment to the work. This emotional attachment may exacerbate the risk of burnout. Parker et al. (2021) suggested that those who view their job as a 'calling' are most susceptible to burnout because they give too much of themselves to their work. The results of the current study may reflect the notions of 'greedy work' and assistant principals viewing their work as a 'calling'. Participants indicated high levels of job satisfaction but also worked long hours and acknowledged that their work impacted their wellbeing. Whilst one assistant principal indicated in an interview that their inability to balance their work-life and home-life had led them to seek work in another field, most assistant principals in this study would choose the same career path again.

5.5.4.3 Managing Relationships. Participants expressed that the strain of managing their relationships with school community members, particularly with staff and the principal, was a challenge that impacted their wellbeing. As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants identified providing support and building relationships

with staff and the principal as important aspects of their work; however, these relationships can stress the assistant principal. Assistant principals in this study described the drain on their personal resources, taking on the burdens of others, other people making demands on their time and that these factors result in increased work pressure. These feelings are reflected in the literature. For example, Riley, See et al. (2021) found two factors that had a significant impact on assistant principals' wellbeing compared to the general population. These were the stress and demands of hiding emotions, including downplaying real emotions and acting out emotions they did not feel. They also recognised the emotional demands placed on assistant principals in dealing with other people's emotions and being placed in emotionally challenging situations as having a very large effect size compared to the wellbeing of the general population. Similarly, Parker et al. (2021) suggested that those in 'people professions' that are emotionally taxing and require high levels of care for others are at risk of burnout. Dor-Haim (2021) identified that one of the main causes of loneliness for assistant principals is their relationship with others in the school community. This view was reflected by Shore and Walshaw (2018), who found that tense relationships with school staff can impact the wellbeing of assistant principals.

Assistant principals in this study noted the challenge to their wellbeing of being the "middleman" and trying to keep everyone happy. Cohen and Schechter (2019b) determined that the role of assistant principal, as neither teacher nor principal, negatively impacts their emotional wellbeing, especially during the transition period from teacher to leader. Maintaining a positive relationship with the principal has a significant impact on the wellbeing of assistant principals. Webb and Vulliamy (1995) suggested that the job satisfaction and wellbeing of assistant principals are largely reliant on their relationship with the principal. Nitta et al. (2019) similarly identified that a poor relationship with the principal was a predictor of stress for assistant principals and Dor-Haim (2021) found that a tense relationship with the principal resulted in assistant principal loneliness.

5.5.4.4 Lack of Recognition. Assistant principals in this study identified a lack of recognition for their work as impacting their job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Participants indicated that they felt the job was "thankless" and that assistant principals are "forgotten", with the principal and teachers being the "face of success" in the community. Whilst participants indicated they did not do the job to be thanked,

they would appreciate a "pat on the back" from time to time. The literature reflects similar sentiments. For example, Harvey (1991) found that assistant principals are disappointed with the lack of recognition they receive and feel forgotten. He posited that this lack of recognition contributes to a diminished sense of professional identity, impacting self-esteem and job satisfaction. Dor-Haim (2021) suggested that assistant principals are invisible leaders and that they experience loneliness due to an absence of practical and emotional support from principals and other staff. He proposed that due to the complex and largely undefined nature of the work of assistant principals, it is difficult for others to understand and appreciate their work and to therefore give them the recognition they desire. Shore and Walshaw (2018) explained that assistant principals who work in schools with cultures that promote teamwork and shared responsibility experience heightened levels of job satisfaction and self-efficacy, partly from the positive affirmation of their work which is inherent in such a culture.

5.5.5 Summary

The discussion of results highlighted four aspects of the role which assistant principals found challenging. First, assistant principals noted that the breadth of the role of assistant principal presented challenges to their work, especially due to a lack of role clarity and the principal's potentially negative influence on the role. Second, the time available to carry out their tasks was identified as challenging, particularly as a result of assistant principals' teaching load, administrative tasks, and challenges associated with working in a small or regional school. Third, participants expressed that managing relationships with the principal, staff and parents was a demanding aspect of their work. Fourth, challenges to the personal wellbeing of assistant principals were described as being a result of the breadth of their work, trying to balance their work-life and their home-life, managing relationships and the lack of recognition for their work.

The literature reflected the views of research participants. The challenges experienced by assistant principals in this study seem to be consistent with those in other studies. Questions have been raised about the sustainability of the role of assistant principal in its current form, both by participants and in the literature. The influence of the principal on the work of assistant principals has been a common thread in this discussion about the challenges of their role. The principal determines

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the work of the assistant principal, including their teaching load, and their relationship with the assistant principal is a key determinant in their wellbeing. These results add another dimension to the discussion regarding the positive influence of the principal on the professional fulfilment of assistant principals. A further factor influencing the role of assistant principals in this study is that they work within the Catholic education system of Western Australia. Participants were asked to identify ways the system could support them in fulfilling their role. These ideas will now be discussed.

5.6 In What Ways Do Assistant Principals Believe the Catholic Education System of Western Australia Can Support Them in Fulfilling Their Role?

This section discusses the views of research participants regarding how the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in carrying out their work. Three themes emerged from the data: providing targeted support and development, improving consistency across schools, and increasing opportunities for leadership activities. Each of these themes will now be discussed.

5.6.1 Provide Targeted Support and Development

Participants identified the provision of support and development targeted explicitly at assistant principals as a way the Catholic education system of Western Australia could support them in their role. Participants indicated that whilst the system has support and development programs aimed at those in leadership positions, a more targeted and tailored approach would be beneficial to assistant principals. Four sub-themes were identified from the data: professional support, wellbeing support, targeted professional learning and preparation for the role. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.6.1.1 Professional Support. Assistant principals voiced a desire to have system-level support for their professional and career development. The most frequently mentioned form of support was to have a person they could go to for advice and guidance from a perspective external to the school. Several participants expressed that this type of support was necessary, especially when there was conflict with the principal or because the principal was very busy. Participants pointed out that principals receive this system-level support from CEWA's School Improvement Advisors, but there is no equivalent for assistant principals. There are reflections in the literature of similar ideas. Harvey (1991) suggested that assistant

principals should have opportunities for career counselling and planning to improve their job satisfaction. More recently, Hayes and Burkett (2020) found that assistant principals sought system-level opportunities to be mentored in their career development.

5.6.1.2 Wellbeing Support. Assistant principals find managing their wellbeing to be a challenge due to the stresses of the role. They have also expressed concern regarding the perceived lack of wellbeing assistance from the Catholic education system of Western Australia and that they would like to feel better supported in this area. Participants felt that the system's wellbeing focus is on principals, not assistant principals, and they believe that the system needs to invest money and thought into addressing this issue. There appears to be little discussion in the literature regarding how school systems can support the wellbeing of assistant principals. From an occupational health and safety perspective, it is clear that employers, including CEWA, are responsible for minimising the risk of physical and psychological harm to their employees (Parker et al., 2021). This risk-minimisation may include health and wellbeing programs, reasonable work hours and conditions, and the development of a supportive work culture (Parker et al., 2021). Riley, See et al. (2021) suggested that school leaders need to be provided with professional learning to enhance their ability to cope with the emotional demands of their work. Armstrong (2014) highlighted the importance of monitoring and assessing the duties and responsibilities of assistant principals, especially those new to the role, and providing wellness programs that focus on maintaining life balance. Given the challenges many participants found in balancing their work-life and home-life due to the long hours of work, it seems that support in managing this aspect of the role would be well placed.

5.6.1.3 Targeted Professional Learning. Participants indicated they would like to see the system provide professional learning explicitly targeted at the needs of assistant principals. They noted that their professional association (CAPA) currently arranges professional learning events for them several times a year. However, they believed that CEWA should also be offering similar opportunities. There are many suggestions in the literature (Barnett et al., 2017; Harvey, 1991; Hayes & Burkett, 2020; Oliver, 2005; Petrides et al., 2014) for professional learning targeted at assistant principals. Nonetheless, various authors (Marshall, 1993; Petrides et al.,

2014; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019) have noted the scarcity of such targeted learning opportunities. When compared to professional development opportunities for teachers and principals, assistant principals have less access to professional learning specific to their responsibilities (Barnett et al., 2012; Harvey, 1991; Hunt, 2011; Jayne, 1996; Marshall, 1993; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019; Searby et al., 2016), a fact made evident in this study.

Participants suggested several professional learning topics they felt would be particularly useful to them in their work as assistant principals. These topics included: school finances, administration tasks, human resources, assertiveness, policies, the law, conflict resolution, coaching, mediation, and ongoing faith formation. These professional learning preferences are similar to those identified in the literature that assistant principals would like further training in. These areas included: finance and budgeting (Hausman et al., 2002; Oliver, 2005), student discipline (Hausman et al., 2002; Oliver, 2005), facilities management (Hausman et al., 2002), educational law (Calabrese, 1991; Oliver, 2005), conflict resolution (Barnett et al., 2012; Oliver, 2005) and public relations (Oliver, 2005)

Participants felt that professional learning opportunities targeted at assistant principals would allow them to learn more about the specifics of their work and to have conversations "that you can really only have with other APs". Similar ideas are reflected in the literature. For example, Cohen and Schechter (2019b) suggested that assistant principals would benefit from connecting with other assistant principals, so they can share their unique experiences and learn from others in the role. Barnett et al. (2017) noted the value of the professional support assistant principals could gain from the peers they meet at professional learning programs. In addition to formal professional learning, participants expressed a desire to learn from other assistant principals through school immersion. In particular, the opportunity to shadow other assistant principals was identified as something the CEWA system could do to enhance the professional learning of assistant principals. Several researchers (Cranston et al., 2004; Harvey, 1991) have noted the value of shadowing experiences and having opportunities to learn from other contexts. Other literature (Armstrong, 2014; Barnett et al., 2017; Searby et al., 2016) also points to the value of being mentored by assistant principals and principals of other schools.

Participants noted the CEWA Aspiring Principal Program as the only system-level professional learning program targeted at assistant principals. There were mixed reviews regarding access to this program. Several assistant principals expressed that, as the only targeted professional learning provided by CEWA for assistant principals, this program provides valuable professional learning and should be open to all assistant principals, whether they want to be a principal or not. Hayes and Burkett's (2020) study of an aspiring principal program in Texas had a similar result. Some of their participants joined that program due to the lack of other targeted professional learning for assistant principals. Several participants in the current study suggested that the CEWA Aspiring Principal Program was unsuitable for assistant principals who are happy to remain in their current role. Survey data revealed that a quarter of the assistant principals in this study ($n = 17$) do not intend to apply for principalship, and a further 28% ($n = 19$) are undecided. Participants suggested that the system needs to consider the professional learning needs of those that do not wish to become a principal. Several researchers (Barnett et al., 2017; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Marshall, 1993) have emphasised the need to provide professional learning opportunities targeted at the responsibilities assistant principals are currently engaged in.

Various assistant principals suggested that CEWA should develop a leadership development program designed for assistant principals new to the role. The system already has a beginning principal program, and participants indicated that a similar approach for new assistant principals would be beneficial to "help them navigate potential issues and challenges". Cohen and Schechter (2019a) highlighted the need for specially developed induction programs. They noted that school systems generally have structured support programs for new principals and novice teachers; however, the preparation and development of assistant principals are left to the principal. The same authors suggested that structured initiation processes need to be developed to address the emotional and professional aspects of transitioning to the role. Cranston et al. (2004) also identified induction programs for assistant principals new to the role as a desirable professional learning approach.

5.6.1.4 Preparation for the Role. Assistant principals in this study articulated the need for CEWA to provide opportunities for better preparation for the role. Almost all interviewees explained that they received no preparation before taking on an

assistant principal position. Whilst a few assistant principals felt that minor school-based leadership roles such as literacy or learning support coordinator helped in their preparation, most participants expressed that they ended up "learning from others", "modelling … other APs", and "learning on the job" once they were actually in the role. The lack of role preparation for teachers moving into the role of assistant principal is reflected in the literature (Hausman et al., 2002; Melton et al., 2012; Searby et al., 2016). Armstrong (2015) found that assistant principals new to assistant principalship did not have adequate preparation for their frontline position between teachers and the principal, for the difference between their teaching and administrative duties or for the change in workload. Hartzell et al. (1994) suggested that a reason for this lack of role awareness is that, by its nature, much of the work of assistant principals is hidden from the view of teachers, so new assistant principals are not prepared for all that the role entails. As a consequence of this hidden work, assistant principals in several studies (Armstrong, 2015; Wang, Pollock, et al., 2021) identified that their expectation of the role was different from reality, which can lead to disillusionment. School systems that effectively prepare aspiring assistant principals for the role's physical, cognitive and social-emotional challenges will have greater success in retaining and attracting assistant principals (Armstrong, 2014), which has advantages for the system, school and individual.

5.6.2 *Improve Consistency Across Schools*

Participants suggested several areas where they felt there was inconsistency across the CEWA system that should be addressed. Assistant principals noted that their experiences at different schools and their conversations with other assistant principals indicated that some issues do not appear to be handled consistently or fairly across the system. Three issues were raised: the need for a clearer role description, more consistent appraisal processes and fairer appointment processes. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.6.2.1 Clearer Role Description. Participants identified a desire for CEWA to develop a clear role description to give them clarity around the expectations and workload of their role. There is no system-level role description for assistant principals. Assistant principals recognised that the principal determines their work, and each principal's differing beliefs and attitudes mean that there is a disparity between the tasks assistant principals undertake in each school, a view reflected in

the literature (Harvey, 1991; Ho et al., 2021a; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). The literature (Harvey, 1991; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Morgan, 2018; Oleszewski et al., 2012) contains many references to the need for improved role clarity for assistant principals. Cranston et al. (2004) noted that systemic position descriptions for assistant principals tend to suggest the desired role rather than the work assistant principals actually spend their time on. The same authors posited that education systems need to work towards better alignment of the system's expectations of the role whilst also allowing for considerations of the school's context.

Participants also spoke of the need for leadership responsibilities to be incorporated into their role description. They implied that certain principals need to be encouraged or required to allow them leadership opportunities, as some are reluctant to do so. The influence of the principal on the leadership opportunities for assistant principals is well documented in the literature. For example, several researchers (Celikten, 2001; Cranston, 2007; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017) found that the principal determines opportunities for assistant principals to engage in instructional leadership. Ho et al. (2021a) suggested that the principal has the power to enable or disable the leadership of the assistant principal. Leaf and Odhiambo (2017) proposed that role statements for assistant principals may not be necessary as long as there is a "collegial, power sharing relationship with their principals" (p. 41). Numerous participants believed that certain principals in the CEWA system might be stifling leadership opportunities for assistant principals. Furthermore, this study has shown that not all assistant principals have the positive and supportive relationship with their principal described by Leaf and Odhiambo above. Incorporating an explicit leadership focus into a system-level assistant principal role description could ensure that leadership opportunities for assistant principals are prioritised without needing to rely on the principal's goodwill.

Survey data exposed the considerable variation between schools as to the time assistant principals spent teaching in classrooms. Several participants indicated that this issue should be addressed as part of developing a system-wide role description for assistant principals. For example, an interviewee stated that there needs to be a "consistent number of teaching hours across all schools for the position rather than being on an individual school basis". Another participant

suggested that an agreed and consistent amount of time to complete administrative duties away from the classroom was needed. Several researchers have noted the disparity in the teaching load of assistant principals within school systems. For example, Anderson et al. (2009) found that some assistant principals in public schools in Western Australia had very heavy teaching responsibilities, while others had none at all. In a study in the United Kingdom, three-quarters of assistant principals had teaching responsibilities, and a quarter had none (Mortimore et al., 1988, as cited in Webb & Vulliamy, 1995). It seems that inconsistent approaches to teaching loads are common in several school systems.

5.6.2.2 Consistent Appraisal Processes. Participants voiced a need for a consistent performance appraisal process for assistant principals across the CEWA system. One assistant principal suggested that "performance expectations should be the same wherever you work". Another noted that "every principal has their own way of completing an AP appraisal, with some being really in-depth and others being only perfunctory". There appears to be limited research on the assistant principal appraisal process, which could be considered surprising but may be a symptom of the difficulty in clarifying the role. In a study of the performance appraisal systems for teachers, Timperley (1998) identified that principals develop systems that prioritise outcomes they believe are important rather than to satisfy the requirements of external authorities. If this prioritisation is also the case in CEWA schools, it may be a contributing factor to the lack of a consistent approach to assistant principal appraisals across schools.

The CEWA employment contract for assistant principals provides minimal information regarding performance appraisal expectations. It states that "The Employer shall undertake a formal performance review in accordance with a structure and process determined by the Employer, in consultation with the relevant professional association" (Catholic Education Western Australia, n.d.-d, p. 5). No time frames are indicated, leaving it open to interpretation as to how frequently assistant principals should be reviewed. Whilst the contract explains that the review process should be decided in consultation with the professional association, it appears that this process is not the reality in practice, as participants have noted the lack of consistency between schools. Part of the issue of providing a consistent approach to performance reviews may be the breadth of the role and the principal's

influence on the components of the role, meaning that the work of assistant principals in each school can vary significantly. A clearer role description may assist in more consistent appraisal processes, as it would allow for all assistant principals to be measured against the same, or at least similar, criteria.

5.6.2.3 Fairer Appointment Processes. Certain participants perceived that appointment processes for assistant principal positions is not always fair. One assistant principal noted that "the [assistant principals with] really strong personalities who have the connections, are a part of that 'club' and that know the right people … will end up with career progression". These sentiments are reflective of the literature regarding sponsored career mobility. Rosenbaum (1984, as cited in Wayne et al., 1999) described this concept as individuals receiving high levels of support and guidance from their supervisors to gain promotions. This extended support may lead to additional advantages for the subordinate, such as early career advancement. Marshall and Hooley (2006) noted the role of sponsored mobility in assistant principal career progression, stating that it "offers informal support, training and an affective bond that assures the protégé the visibility, advice, and career direction needed to build a successful administrative career" (p. 64). Armstrong (2010) also noted that aspirant assistant principals often needed to rely on being well connected and seen as conforming to the system's leadership culture to be given opportunities for promotion. A similar notion was highlighted by Marshall and Hooley (2006). They noted that sponsors generally choose to support those similar to them, such as being the same gender, race and having similar family backgrounds. A study in New South Wales found that many principals are implicitly biased when selecting assistant principals and that the process is not necessarily based on merit (Steed et al., 2021). Armstrong (2019) noted that female candidates for assistant principalship were given less direct career support when compared to males.

Female participants voiced gender as a further perceived unfair aspect of assistant principal appointment processes. They expressed dismay that males are more quickly and easily promoted to assistant principal. One female interviewee stated they "would like the opportunity for a fair and equal playing field for promotion. I certainly feel that it is a man's world in that men … certainly get fast-tracked far quicker than women". The survey data supports this perception. All 16 male participants were appointed to assistant principalship by the age of 40 and with less

teaching experience than many females. In contrast, only 46% (*n* = 24) of the female participants were assistant principals by the age of 40. These results are in line with research by Hausman (2002) and Hoff and Mitchell (2008), who found that female assistant principals had more teaching experience than males before being appointed to an assistant principal role.

Catholic Education Western Australia payroll data reveal that 90% of primary school teachers, 73% of assistant principals and 48% of principals are female (E. Thomson, personal communication, June 24, 2022). The notion of sponsored career mobility may be a contributing factor in the smaller percentage of women in assistant principal positions compared to the female teaching population, especially considering the small pool of male teachers from which to draw leaders. With 52% of principals being male, assuming they have a preference for sponsoring those similar to them (Marshall & Hooley, 2006), the small number of male teachers in the system may be more likely to be encouraged and mentored into leadership by male principals at a younger age and with less teaching experience. However, there may be other explanations for the delay in the appointment of female teachers to assistant principal roles and which the CEWA system may have the power to address. For example, several studies (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Marshall, 1985) identified that women are more likely to wait until their children are grown before pursuing an assistant principal position due to needing to balance their work with the needs of their families. The lack of role clarity for assistant principals, which results in long hours of work for many, is likely to be contributing to the challenge females encounter in balancing their work-life and their home-life. A redefinition of the role of assistant principal may support more women in finding that balance. A second factor impacting females applying for assistant principal roles is their self-efficacy. Hoff and Mitchell (2008) identified that females are much less likely to apply for school leadership positions if they do not hold all of the desired qualifications and experience for the job, whereas males do not see that issue as a barrier. As a potential solution to the issue of gender disparity, Marshall and Hooley (2006) asserted that school systems need to actively send the message that they welcome females into school leadership positions and then follow this up with actually appointing women.

5.6.3 *Increase Opportunities for Leadership Activities*

Research participants expressed that they would like more time to engage in leadership activities. The literature (Celikten, 2001; Cranston, 2007; Melton et al., 2012) regularly notes that assistant principals would like more opportunities to lead rather than manage. Participants spoke of several barriers that limit their leadership and which they believe the Catholic Education system of Western Australia should address. Three sub-themes emerged from the data: reduce or modify teaching loads, reduce compliance tasks and raise the status of assistant principals. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed.

5.6.3.1 Reduce or Modify Teaching Loads. Participants suggested that the Catholic education system of Western Australia should mandate a maximum teaching load for assistant principals. Alternatively, and perhaps additionally, CEWA should ensure that assistant principals are engaged in support or specialist teaching roles where they do not have prime responsibility for a class of students. Participants believed this teaching reduction or modification would allow them more time to manage their administrative workload and engage in more leadership activities, particularly instructional leadership. Glasson (2014) identified large teaching loads as a barrier to leadership development due to the amount of time it consumes. Ho et al. (2021a) noted that assistant principals in Singapore do not have any teaching responsibilities, enabling them more time and opportunity for leadership.

The limited literature on the teaching role of assistant principals has some references to the value of reducing or modifying teaching loads. Harvey's (1991, 1994b) study in Western Australia public schools recommended that assistant principals should negotiate teaching responsibilities with their principal that do not include prime responsibility for a classroom. In literature specific to Catholic schools, Doherty (2010) expressed that those holding the Religious Education Coordinator role, often an assistant principal, would benefit from having no teaching responsibilities, enabling them to focus on their religious leadership tasks. The teaching load of assistant principals appears to be a complex issue. This study has identified that assistant principals see teaching as both an area of professional fulfilment and a challenge that negatively impacts their wellbeing and job satisfaction. Participants seek a more balanced approach that allows them to enjoy their work as teachers and further enhance their work as leaders.

5.6.3.2 Reduce Compliance Tasks. Numerous participants indicated that CEWA could support them in their role by reducing the number of compliance tasks schools needed to complete or by developing system-level strategies to address them. They felt that more centralised approaches would save them time, allowing more opportunities for leadership activities. Higher accountability requirements from government and school systems have increased the demands on principals, and these tasks are often delegated to assistant principals (Kwan & Walker, 2012; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). The literature reviewed for this study does not seem to address a reduction in compliance tasks specifically; however, there are many references (Armstrong, 2010; Barnett et al., 2012; Cranston et al., 2004; Jayne, 1996) that attest the benefit of reducing assistant principal's administrative duties so that they can engage in leadership activities. Assistant principals in this study do not view compliance tasks as contributing to the smooth running of the school or as enhancing teaching and learning programs. It is understandable that they would like to see more of these tasks simplified with system-level support or dealt with at the system level completely so that assistant principals can engage in activities they think are more important, such as instructional leadership.

5.6.3.3 Raise the Status of Assistant Principals. Various participants felt that the Catholic education system of Western Australia should do more to raise the status of assistant principals as leaders. They felt that their work was undervalued, and they were not recognised for their contributions. As previously discussed, participants identified that the lack of recognition for their work negatively impacted their job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Several aspects of the literature are relevant to the status of assistant principals, namely the hierarchical structure of school leadership and the promotion of a collaborative leadership culture.

The hierarchical aspect of school leadership may contribute to assistant principals feeling their status needs to be improved. Several scholars have suggested that titles such as 'assistant', 'deputy' or 'vice' principal have contributed to the subordinate understanding of the role, and this subservient phrasing may have caused the position to be undervalued in educational leadership (Cranston et al., 2004; Hartzell et al., 1995). Hausman et al. (2002) posited that assistant principals would like to be seen as an associate to the principal rather than an assistant. Cranston et al. (2004) shared this view and asserted that a shift to the title of

'associate principal' could lead to a model of shared responsibility with the principal and raise the status of the assistant principal. Hartzell (1993) described the school leadership hierarchy as being on two levels. Principals are first-level leaders and, therefore, responsible for stimulating change and improvement. On the other hand, assistant principals are second-level leaders and are responsible for maintaining the stability of the school. Cranston et al. (2004) summarised this idea by describing the principal as a leader and the assistant principal as a manager. The hierarchical position of assistant principals may limit their leadership. Shaked (2020) suggested that the position of assistant principal as second-in-charge limits their ability to engage in instructional leadership due to a lack of authority and power. Similarly, Ho et al. (2020) found that whilst assistant principals can lead effectively from their hierarchical position, their power and authority depend on the principal.

Although the second-level nature of assistant principals in the school's hierarchy is unlikely to change, the Catholic education system of Western Australia may possibly influence the way principals and assistant principals work together so that assistant principals feel more valued and empowered. Petrides et al. (2014) suggested that school systems that create collaborative cultures among school leaders, both principals and assistant principals, engender an atmosphere of mutual respect. This culture results in an increased value being placed on the role of the assistant principal and a raising of their status as leaders. Principals have an important role to play in the creation of a collaborative leadership culture. Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) suggested that the principal plays a key role in raising the status of assistant principals. They asserted that a principal who makes it clear that they work collaboratively with the assistant principal sends the message that the assistant principal is a valuable leader in the school. Leaf and Odhiambo (2017) contended that assistant principals need to be viewed as leaders of learning. This view necessitates a distributed leadership approach, where the principal actively shares authority and power with the assistant principal. The Catholic education system of Western Australia may be able to raise the status of assistant principals by working with principals to ensure they understand the benefits of distributed leadership and in developing a collaborative leadership approach in their schools.

5.6.4 Summary

This discussion identified three areas in which assistant principals in this study felt the Catholic education system of Western Australia could support them in fulfilling their role. First, participants wanted more targeted support and development, including professional support, wellbeing support, targeted professional learning and preparation for the role. Second, assistant principals suggested they would like to see a more uniform approach towards assistant principals in the CEWA system, specifically a clearer role description, more consistent appraisal processes and fairer appointment processes. Third, participants expressed a desire for the system to create the conditions that would provide them with more leadership opportunities, including reducing or modifying their teaching loads, reducing compliance tasks, and raising the status of assistant principals, so they are viewed as valuable and influential leaders.

Participants shared numerous ways they believe the CEWA system might be able to further support them in their work. There appears to be limited literature regarding how systems support the work of assistant principals. However, literature regarding the work of assistant principals provides insight into the types of support assistant principals feel are important and which reflect the views of assistant principals in this study. There are numerous references in the literature that support targeted professional learning, role preparation and a clearer role description. Additionally, there are some references in the literature to the value of providing assistant principals with professional support, such as career counselling, wellbeing support, fairer appointment processes, reducing or modifying teaching loads and improving the status of assistant principals. There is less literature on the performance appraisal of assistant principals and the reduction of compliance tasks, although a reduction in administrative tasks, in general, is present in the literature.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of the results of this study introduced in Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Results. The relevant literature outlined in Chapter Two: Review of Literature was used to analyse and reflect upon the results. This chapter was organised around the five specific research questions that directed the focus of this study:

1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?

2. Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?

3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?

4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?

5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

This chapter provided a foundation for the following chapter, which will present the review and conclusions of the study.

Chapter Six – Review and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This research explored the perspectives of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia concerning their role. Specifically, it sought to understand the various aspects of the work of assistant principals and which responsibilities they felt were most important, their perceptions regarding the rewards and challenges of their role and how Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) might best support their work. This research attempted to enhance the understanding of the day-to-day activities of assistant principals, their motivations for their work and the impact their role had on their professional fulfilment. This final chapter provides a summary of the answers to the specific research questions that guided this study and suggests considerations that might be taken up at systemic and school levels, as well as at a personal level for those working in the role. An overview of Chapter Six is presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Overview of Chapter Six: Review and Conclusions

6.1	Introduction
6.2	Design of the research
6.3	Research questions answered
6.4	Broader research themes
6.5	Framework: The leadership of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia
6.6	Knowledge added to the field of study
6.7	Research implications
6.8	Recommendations for the role of assistant principal
6.9	Further research
6.10	Benefits and limitations of the research
6.11	Conclusion
6.12	Personal impact statement

6.2   Design of the Research

The theoretical framework underpinning this research was predominantly qualitative in nature. It drew from a constructivist epistemology and utilised interpretivism through a symbolic interactionist lens as its theoretical perspective. The methodology employed for this study was an exploratory instrumental case study. It was exploratory as the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia had not previously been studied in terms of their role. It was instrumental because it allowed the opportunity to garner a broad and in-depth understanding of their work. Data collection included an online survey employing both quantitative and qualitative questions to gather demographic and career data, as well as the thoughts and ideas of participants regarding their role. Semi-structured one-to-one interviews were carried out to delve deeper into participants' perceptions. A document search and researcher field notes also informed the results of this study. Five specific research questions guided the research design:

1. How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?
2. Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?
3. Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?
4. Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?
5. In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?

An interactive model for data management and analysis (Miles et al., 2020) was used for data condensation, data display and to draw and verify conclusions.

6.3   Research Questions Answered

This study provided an understanding of the work of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia in response to the five specific research questions. A summary of the results of each question will now be presented.

6.3.1   How Do Assistant Principals Define the Breadth of Their Role?

The study identified that the work of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia could be categorised into four themes. First, all

participants saw an aspect of their work as supporting school community members. This support included both practical and pastoral assistance for the principal, staff, students and parents. Second, assistant principals viewed leading learning as a component of their role. Specific activities related to leading learning were providing professional learning to staff, developing and implementing curriculum and undertaking teaching responsibilities. Third, leading the religious dimension of the school was identified as part of the participants' work. This leadership included coordinating religious events, such as Masses and liturgies, overseeing the Religious Education curriculum and the faith and knowledge development of staff. The fourth component of assistant principals' work was administration and management. This work involved organising the school's day-to-day operations, forward planning and completing compliance tasks.

6.3.2 Which Aspects of Their Role Do Assistant Principals Think Are the Most Important?

Assistant principals in this study identified a range of role aspects they thought were the most important. The five most frequently mentioned aspects were discussed in this thesis. Participants believed leading learning was the most important aspect of their work. This part of their role centred on building staff capacity to improve the teaching and learning program and overseeing the curriculum to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. Assistant principals viewed supporting staff as another essential part of their work. This support included pastoral care, acting as a problem-solver to assist staff when they face challenges and serving as an intermediary between the principal and staff, often as a buffer or diffuser, but also to transmit information. Building relationships was identified as a further crucial aspect of the role of assistant principal. Participants felt that building connections and trust were important so that positive relationships could be formed. Assistant principals noted that supporting the principal was another essential aspect of their work. This support was contextual, depending upon the needs of the principal and the school and also involved forming a united leadership team in support of the principal. Finally, participants identified that focusing on students to provide them with academic, behavioural and pastoral support was important. This study also revealed the skills assistant principals believed were most essential to their role. These skills included organisation, time management, flexibility and agility.

6.3.3   Which Aspects of the Role Provide Professional Fulfilment to Assistant Principals?

Most assistant principals in this study indicated high levels of job satisfaction. The sources of job satisfaction and professional fulfilment were categorised into four themes. First, assistant principals expressed that working with students was an aspect of the role they enjoyed. This enjoyment was sourced from having a positive impact on students' learning and social-emotional growth and from having a teaching role. Second, participants identified that making a difference was a source of professional fulfilment. Impacting school improvement, developing staff and ensuring the smooth running of the school through administration and management were sources of satisfaction in this regard. Third, assistant principals found that receiving support from their colleagues on the leadership team and their collegial networks, as well as working in a Catholic environment provided them with professional fulfilment. Fourth, assistant principals cited opportunities for growth and development, such as professional learning, leadership activities and undertaking a variety of tasks as providing satisfaction in their work.

6.3.4   Which Aspects of the Role Do Assistant Principals Find Challenging?

This study identified four significant areas of challenge for assistant principals. First, the breadth of the role and the resultant lack of role clarity were frustrating and overwhelming for many participants who felt they were increasingly expected to do more and more. The principal's influence on the role exacerbated this challenge as principals are primarily responsible for determining the work of assistant principals, which may contribute to a large workload when their role is not clearly defined. Second, having enough time to complete their tasks was a significant difficulty for participants in this study. Their teaching load was a prime factor in this regard, as assistant principals are often torn between giving adequate attention to both their teaching and leadership responsibilities. Additionally, administrative tasks were identified as taking up much of the time of assistant principals. Participants in small or regional schools noted additional time-related challenges, such as requiring more time away from school to travel to professional learning or having nobody else in the school with whom to share their workload. Third, participants expressed that managing relationships with the principal, staff and parents could be a challenging aspect of their work as they attempt to meet the needs of those in the school

community. Fourth, assistant principals found that maintaining their personal wellbeing was a challenge. They experienced stress in trying to complete their broad range of responsibilities in a timely manner and balance their work-life and their home-life. Participants also identified the stress of managing relationships with school community members and feeling they were not being recognised for the contribution they make in their work as being detrimental to their wellbeing.

6.3.5 In What Ways Do Assistant Principals Believe the Catholic Education System of Western Australia Can Support Them in Fulfilling Their Role?

Participants in this study identified three ways CEWA could support them in fulfilling their role. The first was for CEWA to provide them with targeted support and development. At the time of this study, there was just one CEWA leadership program aimed at assistant principals, and it was for those aspiring to principalship. Participants identified a need for other professional learning aimed at their current scope of work as well as programs to support those new to the role and teachers preparing for assistant principalship. In addition, assistant principals saw a need for someone at CEWA level to provide them with professional and career advice and that more wellbeing support is required. The second possible area of support from CEWA is to improve consistency across schools in the understanding of the role of assistant principal and the opportunities they are provided. Whilst recognising that schools have differing contexts, assistant principals wanted a clearer and fairer job description so that their work is more uniform across schools. Participants also identified more consistent appraisal processes and more equitable employment approaches as actions that would be helpful. The third area identified as an avenue of support from CEWA was to provide the conditions for assistant principals to have more leadership opportunities. Participants indicated they would appreciate a reduction or modification in their teaching loads, a decrease in the requirement to complete compliance tasks, and for the status of assistant principals to be elevated so they are seen as genuine and important school leaders.

6.4 Broader Research Themes

In addition to the answers to the specific research questions, this study also revealed four broader themes affecting the work of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The first theme related to the principal's impact on the role of assistant principal. The principal determines the scope of the work of

assistant principals, or alternatively, they fail to provide role clarity, leading to an ever-expanding list of responsibilities. The principal decides the teaching load of the assistant principal and, therefore, the assistant principal's ability to have time to engage in leadership activities. The principal is a critical determinant in the professional fulfilment and wellbeing of the assistant principal and can influence their career through the provision, or lack of provision, of sponsorship for further career opportunities and mentoring and coaching. A positive relationship with the principal provides the assistant principal with high levels of support and professional fulfilment. A less-than-positive relationship can result in frustration and disappointment as the assistant principal attempts to define their role and support the members of the school community, possibly with minimal support from the principal. The impact of the principal on the work of assistant principals cannot be ignored.

The challenge of managing and distributing their time effectively was a second theme in the results of this study. There are several significant areas of the work of assistant principals that provide them with both reward and challenge, with the challenge predominantly due to the amount of time needed to complete the activities. For example, participants enjoyed teaching but expressed a desire to reduce or modify their teaching loads so they had adequate time to give their students the attention they deserved, knowing they also had enough time to address their other responsibilities. In addition, assistant principals expressed satisfaction and pride in the administration and management duties that resulted in the smooth operation of the school but felt that these tasks could sometimes dominate their work. Participants enjoyed engaging in a variety of tasks but also felt frustrated that a lack of role clarity resulted in their list of tasks expanding, demanding more time to complete them. As a result, difficulty managing their time negatively impacts the wellbeing of assistant principals. They experienced heightened levels of stress and frustration in trying to fulfil their responsibilities to a high standard whilst attempting to balance their work-life and home-life.

The wellbeing of assistant principals was a third underlying theme in this study. This theme is closely related to the pressures of time management, with participants expressing that the workload and conditions of the role of assistant principal were unsustainable and needed to be addressed. Drawing on the view of

Marshall and Hooley (2006), Rintoul and Bishop (2019) suggested that the assistant principal is "an empty vessel waiting to be filled with a multitude of tasks" (p. 17). The feedback from the respondents in this study suggested that perhaps for many assistant principals, the vessel is close to overflowing and has already spilled over for some. There is a limit to the expansion of the work that can be expected of assistant principals, and many assistant principals in this study suggested it had been reached. Attention must turn to redefining assistant principals' roles and responsibilities so that their expertise, experience and qualifications can be best utilised whilst allowing them to maintain their health and wellbeing.

The fourth broad theme evident in this study was that assistant principals engage in and with a range of leadership models in their role. Their work ensuring the school's smooth administrative operation draws on transactional leadership. This was an area assistant principals felt they should spend less time on. Instructional leadership was evident in their work in overseeing curriculum, providing professional learning to staff and building staff capacity. Assistant principals indicated they would like to increase the time they were able to spend on instructional leadership. Many assistant principals enjoyed the benefits of distributed leadership and were provided with opportunities to take responsibility for leading aspects of the school's operations. Servant leadership was evident through the assistant principals' focus on supporting and developing those around them. Whilst participants drew on various leadership models in their work, the extent to which assistant principals in this study engaged in transformational leadership is unclear. Whilst some aspects of transformational leadership were practised, such as focusing on relationships, assistant principals did not seem to engage in creating a vision, an essential element of transformational leadership. Instead, they operationalise the principal's vision into school improvement and curriculum plans.

6.5 Framework: The Leadership of Assistant Principals in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia

As a result of this study, the researcher proposes a framework for understanding the leadership of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. This framework is an integrated model of leadership which draws on several leadership approaches and recognises the work of assistant principals as

leaders of Catholic schools. The framework is presented in Figure 6.1 and will be explained below.

Figure 6.1

The Leadership of Assistant Principals in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia
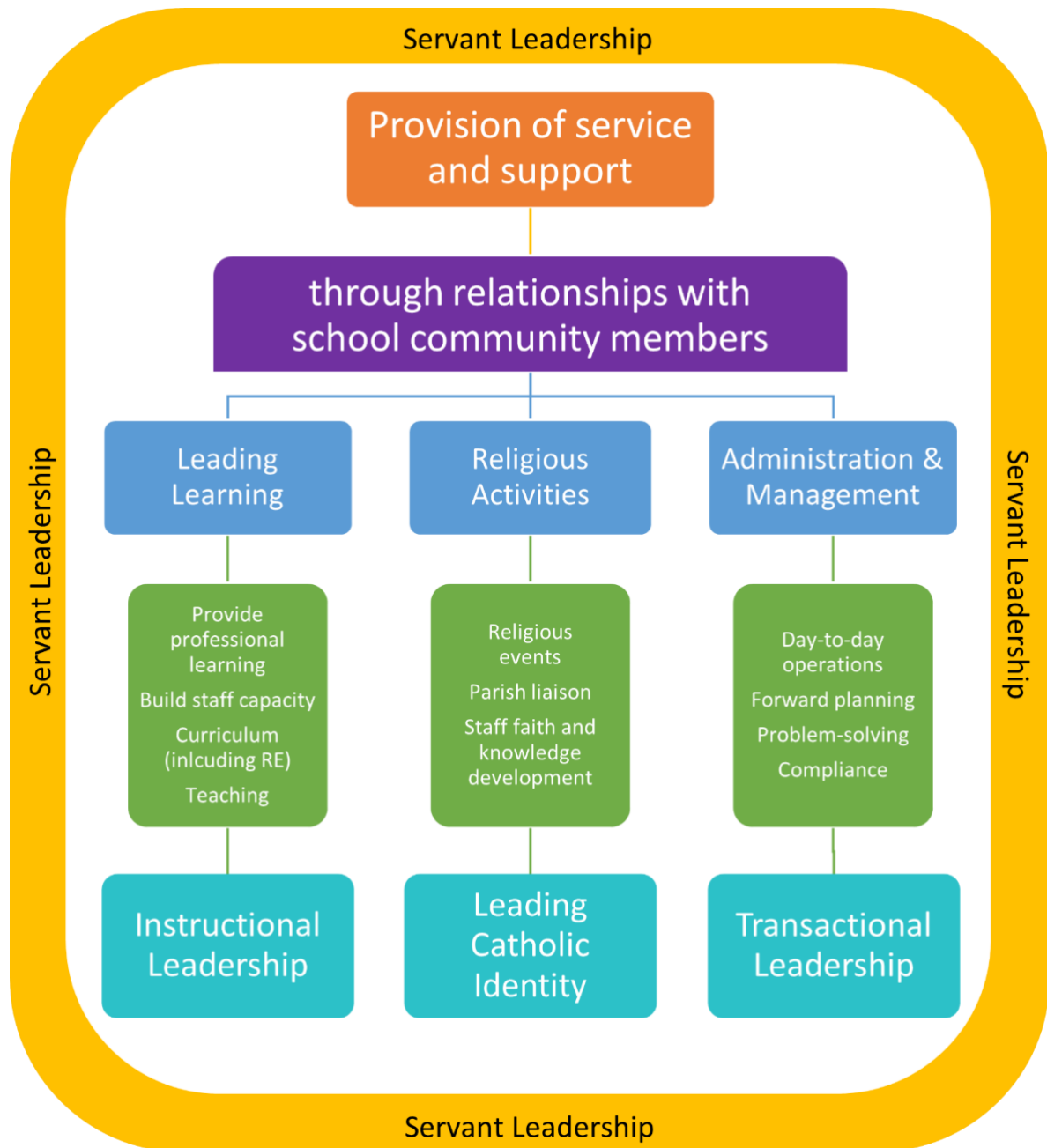
The work of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia is enveloped within and underpinned by servant leadership. This foundation stems from the desire of assistant principals to help and nurture others and is a source of intrinsic motivation and direction. Whilst a number of leadership models

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could be identified in the results, the predominant model was that of servant leadership, which is reflected in the framework. Their work primarily focuses on providing service and support to the school community. They enact this support through the development and maintenance of relationships with the principal, their peers on the leadership team, staff, students, parents and the parish. The work of assistant principals falls within three broad categories. First, they lead learning, which includes the provision of professional learning, building staff capacity, overseeing the curriculum in all learning areas, including Religious Education and teaching. These activities in leading demonstrate an instructional leadership approach. Second, assistant principals provide service and support through religious activities, including organising religious events, liaising with the parish and facilitating the faith and knowledge development of staff. These religious activities contribute to the Catholic identity of the school. Third, assistant principals engage in tasks associated with administration and management. These activities include the day-to-day operations of the school, forward planning, problem-solving and the completion of compliance requirements and draw on a transactional leadership approach.

Catholic Education Western Australia documents provide context to this model. Links can be made to the Quality Catholic Education (QCE) framework, which outlines the responsibilities of Catholic schools in enacting the school system's vision. The QCE is organised around four pillars embedded in CEWA's Strategic Directions (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2019): Catholic Identity, Education, Community and Stewardship. The work of assistant principals in the religious leadership of the school is linked to the pillar of Catholic Identity. The relational focus of assistant principals contributes to the pillar of Community. Links to the pillar of Education are evident as assistant principals engage in tasks associated with instructional leadership. Finally, the work assistant principals undertake in the transactional leadership responsibilities of administration and management falls within the pillar of Stewardship. The close alignment of the leadership of assistant principals in this study with the QCE framework indicates their contribution to the system's vision and strategic directions.

6.6   Knowledge Added to the Field of Study

This study is the first known empirical research into the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their

role. It reflects the view of Marshall and Hooley (2006) that the work of assistant principals is similar across international contexts. Nevertheless, this research has highlighted some differences that provide new knowledge to the overall understanding of the role of assistant principal. It should be noted, however, that this study is highly contextualised, and it is therefore recommended that these additions to the understanding of the work of assistant principals be subjected to further investigation. Table 6.2 provides a summary of this study's contribution to the knowledge of the work of assistant principals. Each aspect will be explained below.

Table 6.2

Summary of Knowledge Added to the Field of Study

New Knowledge

- An overall understanding of the work of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools

- Insight into the religious leadership of assistant principals

- The importance placed by assistant principals on the pastoral care of staff

- The importance placed by assistant principals on their role as an intermediary

- The importance of being an exemplary teacher, having a disposition toward learning and being authentic

- The fulfilment assistant principals gain from working in a Catholic school

- The fulfilment assistant principals gain from their relationships with parents

- The fulfilment assistant principals gain from working to build school community

Further Knowledge

- Further evidence that assistant principals engage in instructional leadership

- Further perspectives of the impact of teaching responsibilities on assistant principals

- Further insight into the effect of the role of assistant principal on the wellbeing of those in the position

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The most significant contribution this study has made to the understanding of the work of assistant principals is providing insight into their leadership of Catholic primary schools. As one of the very few studies into the work of assistant principals in Catholic schools internationally, this research has provided an understanding of

their religious leadership. It revealed that assistant principals in Catholic primary schools engage in a range of activities aimed at promoting the Catholic identity of the school, supporting the delivery of the Religious Education program and enhancing the faith and knowledge development of staff. This study has also highlighted that the work of assistant principals in Catholic schools is largely similar to those in non-religious schools regarding their duties in administration, instructional leadership and student and staff management. It has provided insight into the dual responsibilities of leading a Catholic school to provide both educational and religious leadership from the perspective of assistant principals.

A further contribution to knowledge regarding the work of assistant principals lies in what they believe are the most important aspects of their work. The importance assigned to two components of their role does not seem to be reflected in the literature. First, assistant principals believe their work in the pastoral care of staff is of high importance. They saw their work in pastoral care as supporting the wellbeing of staff, providing them with guidance and helping them manage their workload. Second, this study identified that assistant principals place importance on their role as an intermediary. Whilst the literature contains some references to the work of assistant principals as an intermediary between the staff and principal (Anderson et al., 2009; Kwan & Walker, 2012), the high value placed on this aspect of their role as expressed by the participants in this study does not appear to be reflected in the literature.

Participants in this study identified three skills they believe to be important in their work that do not appear to be evident in other research. First, assistant principals expressed that those in their role need to be exemplary teachers, allowing them to provide an example of good practice to other staff. Second, participants identified having a disposition toward learning as an essential skill for assistant principals due to the complexity of the role. Third, participants identified authenticity as an important attribute of assistant principals so that others see them as genuine and trustworthy.

This study also contributed to understanding the sources of professional fulfilment for assistant principals, three of which do not appear to be present in the literature. First, participants expressed that they receive fulfilment from working in a

Catholic environment. Whilst there is evidence that teachers find working in a Catholic school fulfilling, there does not appear to be research regarding the views of assistant principals in this regard. Second, participants identified that they gain professional fulfilment from their relationships with parents in the school community. Third, assistant principals in this study expressed that they gained satisfaction from working to build community within the school.

In addition to these new perspectives on the role of assistant principal, this study also presented additional data in three particular areas. First, it provided further evidence that assistant principals engage in instructional leadership. Research into the role of assistant principals as instructional leaders is lacking (Searby et al., 2016; Shaked, 2020). This study provided some additional insight into the types of instructional leadership tasks undertaken by assistant principals. Second, this study provided further perspectives regarding the teaching responsibilities of assistant principals. As much of the literature regarding assistant principals is from school systems where they do not have teaching responsibilities, the literature is limited in this regard. This study has provided additional insights into the value assistant principals place on their teaching role, but also the challenges it presents them in managing their time. Third, insight has been gained regarding the effect of the role of assistant principal on the wellbeing of those in the role and the need for systems to address this issue.

6.7   Research Implications

The results of this research have implications for school system leaders, principals, the Catholic Assistant Principals' Association of Western Australia (CAPA) and assistant principals. This study may influence the future decisions of school system leaders, including leaders of CEWA, regarding the purpose of the role of assistant principal, the professional learning they are offered and the sources of support that need to be provided. It is in the best interests of school systems to ensure that assistant principals can effectively contribute their expertise and experience for the benefit of the students within its system of schools.

This study has implications for principals. The role they play in the work-life of assistant principals has been highlighted throughout this study. Whilst many assistant principals have a positive work experience, others do not, with both

scenarios often due to the influence of the principal on their work. Therefore, principals must consider their responsibilities in providing fulfilling and reasonable work for their assistant principals. This study demonstrates that assistant principals see their support of the principal as an important aspect of their work. They are keen to form a united leadership team and eager to engage in leadership activities to support the principal. Principals should actively foster teamwork and provide their assistant principals with leadership opportunities.

As the professional organisation of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, CAPA may want to use this research to advocate for the modification of some of the responsibilities and work conditions of assistant principals, such as teaching loads. The workload of assistant principals is a concern to many in the role, and CAPA may be able to use its collective influence to drive system improvement in this regard. Additionally, CAPA would serve as a source of knowledge regarding the professional learning needs of assistant principals appropriate to their career stage and should collaborate with CEWA to ensure relevant professional learning is provided.

Finally, this study has implications for assistant principals. It provides a broad view of the assistant principalship, which will give insight into the commonalities and differences in experiences across the school system. Harvey (1994b) suggested that assistant principals should take responsibility for advancing their own interests to improve and empower their role. Whilst assistant principals may use CAPA to express their views, it is also important that they have open and honest conversations with their principals to negotiate a role that meets their professional and personal needs.

6.8 Recommendations for the Role of Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia

This research has revealed that the work of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia is broad and complex. It has also highlighted some equity and wellbeing issues across the system regarding the role. An identified challenge for participants in this study is that CEWA does not have a management system aimed at recruiting, training, appraising and retaining assistant principals. This fact has been highlighted in the identification of lack of professional learning

opportunities, the absence of consistent appraisal approaches, the perception of unfair appointment processes and a lack of a clear role description. Several of the recommendations of this study address these issues in the hope CEWA can develop a more systematic approach to the development of assistant principals. Focus should be placed on ensuring the conditions of the work of assistant principals and the opportunities they are provided allow them to have productive, fulfilling careers while meeting the needs of the school community. The eight recommendations below are made with this focus in mind. Collaboration and partnership between CEWA and the professional associations of assistant principals and principals will be instrumental in the adoption of any and all of these recommendations.

The first recommendation is that assistant principals are provided with some role clarity. Two sources of role clarity are required. First, in collaboration with CAPA, CEWA should articulate the expectations of the work of assistant principals in a role mission statement. This statement should be broad and define the purpose of the assistant principal's role, their leadership responsibilities and the desired outcomes of their work. Second, considering the system-level role mission statement, principals and assistant principals should jointly define the role of assistant principal at the school level. This school-level document would allow for consideration of the strengths, interests and skills of the assistant principal in light of the school's needs. This role description should be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the school, principal and assistant principal and safeguards should be put in place to monitor the reasonableness of the workload.

The second recommendation is that principals are afforded support and professional development to provide reasonable and fulfilling work for assistant principals. This study has highlighted the important role the principal plays in determining the work of assistant principals. Glasson (2014) suggested that some principals may not have the knowledge or inclination to provide assistant principals with leadership experiences. The differing experiences of assistant principals in this study regarding the leadership opportunities afforded to them by the principal support this view. Some principals may need help in understanding that they have the power to enable or disable the leadership of assistant principals (Ho et al., 2021a) and that they should see their assistant principal as a partner in their leadership, including providing them with professional growth and shared leadership

opportunities (Kaplan & Owings, 1999). As described in the previous recommendation, a system-level role mission statement may also serve to articulate the expectation that principals provide their assistant principals with leadership opportunities.

The third recommendation is to define a maximum teaching load for assistant principals. This study revealed a significant disparity in the time spent teaching each week across the system and the frustration of assistant principals regarding this issue. Aside from being an equity issue, assistant principals expressed that their teaching load could significantly impact the time they had to attend to their other responsibilities. Additionally, interruptions related to fulfilling their leadership role could negatively impact the quality of their teaching. A maximum teaching load of the equivalent of two and a half days per week (0.5 FTE) may be appropriate. Further, assistant principals should be relieved of having the majority of responsibility for a classroom and instead be assigned to teaching roles that include specialist or support teaching. The nature of specialist or support roles means there are fewer classroom-related responsibilities such as organising Masses, assemblies, excursions and being the primary point of contact for the class's parents. The designation of a maximum teaching load and the move to non-classroom teaching roles should allow assistant principals more time to engage in their wider responsibilities and to give due attention to their teaching.

The fourth recommendation is that opportunities should be identified at the school level to reduce the administrative load of assistant principals. Given the challenges assistant principals experience in managing their time due to their broad range of responsibilities, there may be scope to delegate some administrative tasks to other staff members. The types of tasks that could be delegated may depend upon the capacity of the staff available, so this may be different in each school, but some examples might include the organisation of incursions, monitoring the registration requirements of teachers, creating staff rosters and the management of relief staff. A reduction in administrative tasks should allow more time for assistant principals to engage in leadership activities more suited to their qualifications and experience. Celikten (2001) suggested that delegation of some tasks traditionally assigned to assistant principals should allow them more time for leadership. The sharing of administrative tasks with other staff is a successful strategy in Singapore

and has resulted in assistant principals in that country experiencing less conflict between their management and leadership responsibilities (Ho et al., 2021b).

The fifth recommendation is to implement targeted professional learning for assistant principals appropriate to their career stage. Specifically, professional development should be targeted at aspiring, novice and experienced assistant principals. This research confirmed the literature which indicated that many assistant principals feel unprepared for the role when they are first appointed (Armstrong, 2015; Searby et al., 2016). A preparation program for teachers intending to become assistant principals may address this issue and provide them with opportunities to form a realistic understanding of the responsibilities and challenges inherent in their potential future work. A preparation program should include opportunities to shadow experienced assistant principals so they can gain insight into some of the less conspicuous work of assistant principals, which may not be evident to teachers. The second targeted professional learning opportunity should be for new assistant principals. CEWA currently has programs for early career teachers and new principals. A one or two-year cohort-based program specifically targeted at beginning assistant principals would fill this gap in transition support. This program could provide learning in managing relationships with school community members, managing their health and wellbeing, understanding system policies and working with external stakeholders, such as the parish. A beginning assistant principal program would also provide opportunities to develop a collegial network of others at the same career stage and in the same role, which may provide support beyond the program's timeframe. Targeted professional learning opportunities should also be provided to experienced assistant principals who may be ready to take on higher-level tasks. Feedback from CAPA should be sought to determine the types of professional learning assistant principals may need, but some examples may include learning in finance, educational law and human resource management. The literature indicates that the professional needs of teachers and principals are well-catered for, but there is a gap in the learning provided to assistant principals (Rintoul & Bishop, 2019; Searby et al., 2016). Implementing targeted professional learning to aspiring, novice and experienced assistant principals would fill this gap.

The sixth recommendation is that CEWA appoints a leadership consultant with a focus on the needs of assistant principals. This consultant would have three

prime purposes. First, they would be responsible for designing, sourcing and delivering the targeted professional learning proposed in the previous recommendation. Second, the consultant would provide professional and career support, including coaching or mentoring, to assistant principals who request it, focusing on leadership development. Third, the role would provide assistant principals with an avenue of support and guidance in navigating their relationship with the principal, when required. The appointment of such a consultant would assist in filling the gap identified in this study of a lack of system-level support for assistant principals.

The seventh recommendation is that the position of assistant principal is renamed 'associate principal'. This name change may better articulate the ideal working relationship between the principal and assistant principal as partners in the leadership of the school. Researchers such as Hausman et al. (2002) and Cranston et al. (2004) have suggested that the role of the assistant principal should be seen as an associate to the principal rather than an assistant. Marshall and Hooley (2006) proposed that such a change in name would more accurately communicate the leadership status of assistant principals. The title 'assistant principal' was initially adopted when the purpose of the position was primarily administrative (Glanz, 1994b). As the modern assistant principal shares the work of the principal in instructional leadership (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017) and the principal's responsibilities are becoming too big for one person (Cansoy et al., 2021; Jansen & du Plessis, 2020), a change in nomenclature may be appropriate.

The eighth recommendation is to mandate a system-wide appraisal process for assistant principals across CEWA schools. The assistant principal contract of employment provides no guidance regarding the form or frequency of appraisal processes, other than stating that they will occur. Since the data collection for this study occurred, CEWA has developed an appraisal tool for assistant principals. However, its use is optional and decided by the principal. Therefore, it is timely for CEWA and CAPA to work together to evaluate the use of the appraisal tool, to make any adjustments needed to best serve the development of assistant principals and for the use of the tool to be mandated at least every three years. If a system-level role mission statement for assistant principals is adopted, it would be important to ensure alignment with appraisal processes. A consistent approach across the

system will address the equity issue identified by participants in this study due to the varying approaches currently in place.

6.9 Further Research

The exploratory nature of this study provides the basis for further research into the work of assistant principals. One such area of research may be an investigation of the factors that impact teachers' motivations to pursue, or not pursue, assistant principalship. The results of such research could provide an external perspective regarding the aspects of the role that may be seen as incentives or disincentives to apply. This sort of study may also serve to improve the work-life of assistant principals as insights from those outside the role may highlight issues that are not evident from within.

The current study identified gender disparity in the promotion of teachers to the assistant principalship, which may warrant further investigation. Females make up 90% of the teaching workforce in CEWA primary schools, but just 73% of the number of assistant principals. Further research into the barriers for female teachers to seek an assistant principal role, or the possible advantages provided to males, may be beneficial in ensuring that the number of male and female assistant principals is more consistent with the gender proportions of the teaching workforce.

Given the important influence of the principal on the role of assistant principal, it may be beneficial to investigate the attitudes and beliefs of principals towards the assistant principalship. For example, learning about their views regarding the purpose of the role, how they determine the work of the assistant principal and what they see the principal's role to be in the development of assistant principals may provide insight into how to better equip principals to develop collaborative and effective leadership teams. Related to this suggested research would be a study into how effective leadership teams of primary schools work together and what makes their partnership most successful and professionally fulfilling for all members of the team.

In this study, most assistant principals identified religious leadership as an aspect of their work; however, only 13% of survey respondents and 10% of those interviewed mentioned it when asked about the most important aspects of their work. It may be beneficial to investigate this component of their role to better understand

the views of assistant principals regarding their religious leadership responsibilities and whether they are consistent with other Catholic school systems. Another area of potential research for Catholic schools would be servant leadership. This study has revealed that assistant principals embed their work in a servant leadership approach. Further exploration of how school leaders enact servant leadership in Catholic schools may benefit Catholic school systems.

Whilst not a direct focus of this study, the data revealed a concerning issue for the CEWA system. Only 47% of assistant principals indicated they intend to apply for principalship. A further 28% were undecided. Whilst these data are relatively consistent with research in other school systems (Shore & Walshaw, 2018), it is an issue that needs to be considered by CEWA to ensure there are sufficient quality applicants to fill future principal vacancies. Further research in this regard may provide insights into the factors that both encourage and discourage principal applications and how the minds of those 28% of undecided assistant principals might be swayed towards principalship.

Closely related to the issue of limited numbers of principal aspirants is the role assistant principalship has in preparing for a principal role. Harvey (1994a) suggested that the assistant principal role should be preparation to become a principal; however, the literature is consistent in asserting that the role of assistant principal does not adequately prepare them for principalship (Kwan, 2009; Mertz, 2006). Therefore, research into how assistant principals' work may best be designed to ensure that those in the role feel prepared to take on principalship, if that is what they desire, would be beneficial.

6.10 Benefits and Limitations of the Research

The benefits of this research lie in both its outcomes and its design. The results of this study have provided an understanding of the work of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The listed recommendations may assist in improving the role of assistant principal, including the scope of their responsibilities, their wellbeing and professional fulfilment. The results have also highlighted the contribution assistant principals make to their schools and the school system. The benefit of this research design was that it allowed the perspectives of assistant principals to be collected in their own words.

An exploration of their perspectives provided a collective understanding of the work of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia from the viewpoint of those in the role.

Two factors may have limited this study, as outlined in Chapter One: The Research Defined. First, this research explored the work of assistant principals in one school system in one geographic location: Catholic primary schools in Western Australia. The results may not be easily generalised to other contexts, either within Australia or internationally. To ameliorate this issue, this research used purposive sampling techniques to select interview participants. This process ensured that assistant principals from various school sizes and locations and those with a range of years of experience were included in the data collection. The inclusion of participants from a range of contexts and backgrounds assists in the transferability of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2020). In addition, the provision in this study of rich descriptions of the setting, participants and research results helps the reader to determine the transferability of the study (Miles et al., 2020). Second, there was potential for bias in this study. The researcher was employed as a principal in a Catholic primary school in Western Australia for most of the period during which this research was conducted. With over 20 years of experience in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, including four as an assistant principal and five as a principal, the researcher needed to remain mindful that her personal experiences did not impact the study's conduct, results, or interpretation of results. To mitigate the potential for bias, the researcher examined and recorded her motivations toward the topic to consciously avoid bias. In addition, the researcher employed member-checking processes to ensure that the themes and sub-themes identified in the study were genuinely reflective of the views of the study participants.

6.11 Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia regarding their role. The research aimed to develop an understanding of the work of assistant principals, what they saw as the most important aspects of their role and what they viewed as challenging or professionally fulfilling. Additionally, participants were invited to identify ways that the Catholic education system of Western Australia could best support them in their work.

The study has found that assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia engage in a broad range of tasks and draw on several leadership models. Their work is enacted primarily through relationships with members of the school community. Assistant principals see a significant aspect of their work as providing service and support to meet the needs of the school and its members. They play an essential role in the smooth operation of the school, engage in instructional leadership and enhance the school's Catholic identity. Assistant principals are generally satisfied with their jobs but have concerns about their wellbeing and the sustainability of the role in its current form due to its large workload and the long hours required. Contributing to this concern is the lack of role clarity in their work, which can result in the demands placed on them expanding without adequate time to attend to their increasing responsibilities. Teaching and excessive administrative tasks are some of the most problematic aspects of the role due to the time these activities consume. Assistant principals would like more time and opportunities to engage in leadership activities, especially instructional leadership, and for their status as school leaders to be enhanced. Principals significantly impact the work and professional fulfilment of assistant principals and greatly influence their leadership opportunities. Sources of pride for assistant principals are ensuring the school is operationally sound and that they are having a positive impact on the students and staff.

This study has highlighted the vital leadership role assistant principals have in schools. Armstrong (2015) and Harvey (1991) suggested that the voices of assistant principals need to be heard. Who better to speak for assistant principals than those in the role? This research has given voice to assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia, and they have provided valuable insight into their work.

6.12 Addendum

This research is already having an impact. The researcher presented the results of the study and its recommendations to senior CEWA leaders. As a direct result, plans are underway to design and implement a professional learning program targeted specifically at assistant principals in 2023. This initiative will be the first professional learning program specifically addressing the needs of assistant principals in the CEWA system, other than the Aspiring Principals Program, and is an encouraging sign of the future impact this research may have.

6.13 Personal Impact Statement

This research began as a means of satisfying my curiosity about the work of assistant principals. I was interested in understanding their work because of my own experience working as and with assistant principals. While my personal experience in the role was generally positive and rewarding, it was not without difficulties. I understood that assistant principals in schools across the CEWA system were experiencing similar rewards and challenges but that there was also a disparity in experience and inequality of opportunity due to the contexts in which we worked. What began as a curiosity has led to the completion of this research. The curiosity to understand the role of assistant principal has been satiated, but more questions about how to enhance the role have emerged, which I hope to have the opportunity to explore in the future. This research has elevated my respect and admiration for the contribution assistant principals make to schools, and I hope to positively impact their role, both because of this study and in my current work in CEWA senior leadership.

My current work involves providing school improvement advice to principals and school leadership teams. Undertaking this research has led to the development of many skills which I have been able to draw upon in my work. It has enhanced my skills in critical reflection, the synthesis of data, identifying core issues when differing viewpoints are presented and gathering qualitative data, especially through questioning. I look forward to continuing my work with school leadership teams, using my newly developed skills, and highlighting assistant principals' key role in contributing to the leadership and improvement of schools.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Permission to Use Australian Map Graphic in Thesis

Re: Map use request

Marek Brys <████████████████████>

Thu 29/07/2021 11:21 PM

To: Lisa Gallin <████████████████>

Cc: alyssa.m@worldatlas.com <a███████████████>

Just cite us to worldatlas.com and your are more than welcome to use the map

On Thu, Jul 29, 2021 at 4:40 AM Lisa Gallin <████████████████> wrote:

Hello Alyssa,

I wish to request permission to use your States of Australia map found here in my PhD thesis. I am researching the role of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia and require an attractive map that shows the states of Australia. Yours is perfect for my needs.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin
PhD Student

Appendix B
Permission to Use CEWA Diocese Map in Thesis

RE: Permission Request

John Nelson (Catholic Education Office of WA - Leederville) <JOHN.Nelson@cewa.edu.au>
Fri 15/07/2022 9:59 AM

To: Lisa Gallin (Catholic Education Office of WA - Leederville) <Lisa.Gallin@cewa.edu.au>

Hi Lisa
No problem here – feel free to use.
Regards
John

John Nelson
Senior Research & Policy Consultant

t. 08 63805313
e. JOHN.Nelson@cewa.edu.au
a. 50 Ruislip St, West Leederville WA 6007
postal. PO Box 198, Leederville WA 6903

BE COVIDSAFE   www.cewa.edu.au

Simone Warden (Catholic Education Office of WA - Leederville)

To: Lisa Gallin (Catholic Education Office of WA - Leederville)
Cc: John Nelson (Catholic Education Office of WA - Leederville)

Sun 10/07/2022 8:21 PM

Hi Lisa,
What an amazing undertaking. I am in awe!!
This information is publicly available so from my perspective, there is no reason that you would not be able to include.
However, I am copying John Nelson as I am not familiar with any requirements from a research perspective.
Best of luck with your thesis soon to be Dr Gallin!
Kind regards
Simone

Simone Warden
Head of Marketing and Communications

t. 08 6228 6694
e. Simone.Warden@cewa.edu.au
a. 50 Ruislip St, West Leederville WA 6007
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Lisa Gallin (Catholic Education Office of WA - Leederville)

To: Simone Warden (Catholic Education Office of WA - Leederville)

Fri 8/07/2022 1:50 PM

Hi Simone,

I am in the process of completing a PhD through the University of Notre Dame, investigating the role of assistant principals. Could I please have permission to use the graphic found on page 4 of the *Building a Brighter Future* document for inclusion in my thesis? It will be included in the section providing contextual information about the CEWA system to the reader.

Lisa Gallin
Geraldton Regional Officer

e. Lisa.Gallin@cewa.edu.au
a. 15 Bayly St, Geraldton WA 6531

postal. PO Box 360, Geraldton WA 6531

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Appendix C
Online Survey Questions

What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

Information and Consent

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. It has the overall aim of developing an understanding of the role of assistant principal in CEWA primary schools.

- Questions 1-19 seek to gather basic demographic and career characteristic data.
- Questions 20-21 seek to determine how you feel about the time you spend on a variety of tasks.
- Questions 22-27 ask you to share your thoughts regarding the role of APs in CEWA schools. You may write as much or as little as you want.
- Question 28 provides you with an opportunity to self-nominate to participate in a one-on-one video or phone interview about your experience as an AP in CEWA schools. It would be greatly appreciated if you would consider this to allow for a deeper understanding of the role and how APs could be best supported and developed.

For your information, you will find the Participant Information Sheet here and the CEWA approval to conduct this research here.

Completion of this survey will imply your consent to participate in this part of the research. If you have any questions, please contact lisa.gallin1@my.nd.edu.au (please note the 1 in the email address) or call her on ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

* 1. With which gender do you identify?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Prefer not to say

* 2. What is your age?

○ 29 or under   ○ 45-49

○ 30-34   ○ 50-54

○ 35-39   ○ 55-59

○ 40-44   ○ 60 or over

* 3. What is your highest completed qualification in education?

○ Diploma   ○ Masters

○ Bachelors   ○ Doctorate

○ Graduate Certificate

* 4. How many years in total, including the 2020 school year, have you been an assistant principal (either acting, temporary or permanent)?

○ 1-2 years   ○ 10-15 years

○ 3-4 years   ○ 16-19 years

○ 5-9 years   ○ 20 or more years

* 5. At what age were you first appointed as an assistant principal?

○ 29 or under   ○ 45-49

○ 30-34   ○ 50-54

○ 35-39   ○ 55-59

○ 40-44   ○ 60 or over

* 6. How many full-time equivalent years of teaching experience did you have when you were first appointed as an assistant principal?

- ( ) Less than 1 year
- ( ) 1-2 years
- ( ) 3-4 years
- ( ) 5-7 years
- ( ) 8-10 years
- ( ) 11-13 years
- ( ) 14-16 years
- ( ) 17 years or more

* 7. What is your employment status?

- ( ) Full-time
- ( ) Part-time

* 8. How many K-6 students are enrolled in your school?

- ( ) 100 or less
- ( ) 101-150
- ( ) 151-200
- ( ) 201-250
- ( ) 251-300
- ( ) 301-350
- ( ) 351-400
- ( ) 401-450
- ( ) 451-500
- ( ) 501-550
- ( ) 551 or more

* 9. How many assistant principals are currently working in your school?

- ( ) 1
- ( ) 2
- ( ) 3

* 10. Which of the following best describes your school location?

- ( ) Perth and suburbs
- ( ) Regional or country

* 11. In the average week, how many hours per week do you estimate you are at school?

- ( ) Less than 40 hours
- ( ) 40-49 hours
- ( ) 50-59 hours
- ( ) 60 or more

* 12. In the average week, how many hours per week do you estimate you spend completing school work at home?

- ( ) Zero
- ( ) 1-5 hours
- ( ) 6-10 hours
- ( ) 11-15 hours
- ( ) 16 hours or more

* 13. If you were starting your career again, would you become an assistant principal?

( ) Certainly would

( ) Probably would

( ) Unsure

( ) Probably not

( ) Certainly not

* 14. What is your desired career path in the next 3-5 years?

( ) Remain in present position in current school   ( ) Apply for principalships

( ) Look for an assistant principal role in another school   ( ) Seek a change in career to one outside of teaching

( ) Return to full-time or part-time teaching   ( ) Retirement

( ) Other (please specify)

[   ]

* 15. Do you intend to apply for a principalship at some point in the future?

( ) Yes

( ) No

( ) Undecided

* 16. What were your main motivations for becoming an assistant principal (you can select more than one)?

[ ] Wanted a larger income

[ ] Wanted a career path to principalship

[ ] Prefer administration to teaching

[ ] It seemed like the next logical step

[ ] Encouraged by others

[ ] Wanted professional growth opportunities

[ ] Other (please specify)

[   ]

* 17. Approximately how many hours per week are you scheduled to teach in class?

( ) Zero   ( ) 11-15 hours

( ) 1-5 hours   ( ) 16-20 hours

( ) 6-10 hours   ( ) 21 or more hours

* 18. In the ideal world, how many hours per week would you *like* to be scheduled to teach in class?

○ Zero   ○ 11-15 hours

○ 1-5 hours   ○ 16-20 hours

○ 6-10 hours   ○ 21 or more hours

* 19. Which of the following reflects how much of the time you feel satisfied with your job?

○ All of the time

○ Most of the time

○ A good deal of the time

○ About half the time

○ Occasionally

○ Seldom

○ Never

* 20. For each of the following task categories, please indicate how you feel regarding the amount of time you spend on them.

	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job
School improvement planning	○	○	○	○
School policies	○	○	○	○
School budget	○	○	○	○
Public relations and marketing	○	○	○	○
Evaluation of staff (performance appraisal)	○	○	○	○
Staff professional development	○	○	○	○
Mentoring and coaching of staff	○	○	○	○
Induction of new staff	○	○	○	○
Staff wellbeing	○	○	○	○
Staff or PLC meetings	○	○	○	○
Teaching and learning programme evaluations	○	○	○	○
Student assessments	○	○	○	○
Curriculum implementation and development	○	○	○	○
Supporting teachers and students in classrooms	○	○	○	○
School timetables	○	○	○	○
Staff rosters (eg. duty, staff prayer, etc)	○	○	○	○
Student attendance	○	○	○	○
Relief staff	○	○	○	○

	I spend too much time on this	I spend just the right amount of time on this	I would like to spend more time on this	This is not part of my job
Staff bulletins and notices	○	○	○	○
Emergency procedures	○	○	○	○
Equipment and supplies	○	○	○	○
School calendars and term planners	○	○	○	○
Day to day school operations	○	○	○	○
Incursions and excursions	○	○	○	○
Assemblies	○	○	○	○
Buildings and maintenance	○	○	○	○
Student well-being and pastoral care	○	○	○	○
Student discipline and behaviour management	○	○	○	○
Extra-curricular activities	○	○	○	○
Students with special needs	○	○	○	○
Volunteers in the school	○	○	○	○
Parents and Friends (P & F)	○	○	○	○
Parish liaison	○	○	○	○
Community group liaison	○	○	○	○
School newsletter	○	○	○	○
Individual meetings with parents	○	○	○	○
Group meetings with parents	○	○	○	○
Sacramental programmes	○	○	○	○
Religious Education	○	○	○	○
Faith Story and Witness	○	○	○	○
Mass and liturgy planning	○	○	○	○

21. Are there any other tasks, not mentioned above, that you would like to comment on?

22. How would you define your role as an assistant principal?

23. What do you think are the most important aspects of your job as an assistant principal?

24. Which aspects of your work as an assistant principal do you find the most rewarding, personally or professionally?

25. What are some of the challenges you face as an assistant principal?

26. If CEWA could do one or two things to support or improve the effectiveness of assistant principals in primary schools, what would you recommend?

27. Is there anything else you would like to share about being an assistant principal in CEWA primary schools?

28. If you would like to express your interest in participating in a 30-45 minute phone or video interview to answer further questions about your experience as an assistant principal, please provide your contact details below. Alternatively, you can email the researcher at lisa.gallin1@my.nd.edu.au.

Name	
School	
Email Address	
Phone Number	

Appendix D
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Guide Questions for CEWA Assistant Principal Interview

Interviewee: _____ AP Number: _____ Date/Time: _____

Years as AP: _____ Location: _____ School Size: _____

- *Thank you for providing your consent and putting aside some time to participate in this interview. I really do appreciate it and hope that you find it a positive experience.*
- *As you know, the purpose of my research is to gain an understanding of the role of APs in CEWA schools and how APs feel about their role.*
- *To my knowledge, APs in our system have not been researched before, so this is an opportunity to really delve into what the role entails and get feedback from those in the job.*
- *What we discuss will be kept confidential. Your name and other identifying information will not be included in my thesis. I may use some direct quotes from what you tell me, or rephrase and combine and contrast ideas from different APs. Again, no names or identifying information will be included.*
- *This interview will be audio (not video) recorded on both my iPhone and a digital recorder.*
- *I may take some notes while we talk.*
- *If I ask you any questions that you don't want to answer, that's perfectly ok. Just let me know.*
- *Do you have any questions for me before we begin?*
- *Check demographic information above.*

1. Can you tell me about yourself and your professional background?

2. What are the broad categories of tasks you are responsible for?

3. Do you have a written job description? If so, do you feel it accurately represents your role?

4. What do you see as the one most important aspect of your role and why?

5. What are the most important skills or attributes an assistant principal needs to have?

6. What are the gifts and talents you bring to your role as an assistant principal?

7. What is it about your work that motivates you to keep turning up?

8. Which aspects of your role do you find the most challenging?

9. What preparation did you have for the role of assistant principal?

10. What sort of professional learning do you engage in as an assistant principal?

11. If CEWA could do one thing to support or improve the effectiveness of assistant principals in primary schools, what would you recommend?

12. What one piece of advice would you give to teachers aspiring to the role of assistant principal?

13. Do you have anything you would like to say about your role as an assistant principal, that has not already been covered during this interview?

- *Thank you for so much for your time. I really do appreciate what you have shared.*
- *Do you have any questions for me?*
- *In a few weeks, once the transcription is completed, I will email you a copy for you to check. You can then request any changes you would like to be made.*
- *Once my thesis has been accepted and passed, you will receive a summary of my findings. This will hopefully be early-2023.*

Appendix E
Interview Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

You are invited to participate in an interview as part of the above research. You can find the approval letter from Dr Debra Sayce for the conduct of this research here and the Collection Notice here. Please read the Participant Information Sheet found here and the following statements. Submission of this form indicates your consent to be contacted by the researcher to arrange a suitable time to be interviewed.

- I agree to take part in this research project.
- I have read the Information Sheet provided and been given a full explanation of the purpose of this research project and what is involved.
- I understand that my interview will be audio-recorded.
- I understand that the audio-recording will be transcribed and I will receive a copy of the transcription and be allowed to request amendments, as required.
- The researcher has answered all my questions.
- I understand that I do not have to answer specific questions if I do not want to and may withdraw from participating in the project at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential, will be de-identified at collection and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.
- I agree that any research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not disclosed.

1. Please enter your details below.

Name

School

Email Address

Phone Number

Done

Powered by
SurveyMonkey
See how easy it is to create a survey.

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The research project will investigate the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia and how assistant principals perceive the rewards and challenges of their role. It is hoped this research will result in a comprehensive understanding of this senior school leadership position and provide a collective voice which may inform future professional learning and development opportunities.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Lisa Gallin and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Notre Dame Australia, under the supervision of Associate Professor Shane Lavery and Professor Michael O'Neill.

What will I be asked to do?

You are asked to participate in an online survey and/or an individual interview via video (eg Zoom or Teams) about your views and experiences in your role as an assistant principal. You may choose to participate in just the survey, or in the survey and interview.

The survey should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete.

The interview will take between 30 and 45 minutes and will be audio-recorded using a digital recording device. The interview will take place at a mutually convenient time at a venue of the participant's choice.

The interview will be transcribed and a copy of the transcription provided to you for confirmation. You will be able to request that amendments and corrections be made.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

We do not anticipate any risk to you in participating in this research project. However, if you find that questions asked bring up difficult feelings, you are encouraged to access your Employee Assistance Program for support.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This project will provide you with an anonymous voice to share your experiences as an assistant principal, including the rewards and challenges you encounter and give you an opportunity to share your opinions. Your experiences will be combined with those of other participants to provide a collective understanding of the role of assistant principals in Catholic schools in Western Australia.

What if I change my mind?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation at any time without giving a reason and with no negative consequences. This can

be done by contacting me. However, the survey data gathered from you cannot be deleted from the project, as this information will be contributed anonymously and therefore unable to be identified as specific to the individual participant.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

Information gathered about you will be held in strict confidence and all data will be de-identified. This confidence will only be broken if required by law.

The audio-recording from the interview will be transcribed and stored on a password protected computer and the audio-recordings will be deleted at the completion of the study. Only the researchers will have access to this information during the project.

Once the study is completed, the data collected from you will be stored securely in the School of Education at The University of Notre Dame Australia for at least a period of five years. The results of the study will be published as a thesis, in journal articles and conference papers.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Once we have analysed the information from this study we will email you a summary of our findings. You can expect to receive this feedback by the end of 2022.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact Lisa Gallin at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or lisa.gallin1@my.nd.edu.au. Alternatively, you can contact Shane Lavery at 9443 0173 or shane.lavery@nd.edu.au. We are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

What if I have a concern or complaint?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame Australia (reference number 2020-062F). If you have a concern or complaint regarding the ethical conduct of this research project and would like to speak to an independent person, please contact Notre Dame's Research Ethics Officer at (+61 8) 9433 0943 or research@nd.edu.au. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

How do I sign up to participate?

If you are happy to participate, your principal will need to complete an online Principal Consent form to indicate their support of your participation in the research, as it may involve discussion of matters related to your school. The form can be found here: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Once this online consent form has been completed, a link to the survey will be emailed to you. Your consent to participate will be implied by your submission of the survey. At the end of the survey, you will have the option to nominate to participate in a semi-structured interview. If you choose this option, you will be contacted when this part of the process commences.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Gallin (PhD Candidate)

Associate Professor Shane Lavery (Principal Supervisor) and

Professor Michael O'Neill (Co-Supervisor)

Appendix G

Research Approval From the Executive Director of CEWA

6 June 2020

CATHOLIC EDUCATION
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Mrs Lisa Gallin
Principal

Dear Mrs Gallin

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL IN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA? AN EXPLORATORY INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY - CEWA REFERENCE RP2020/15

Thank you for your completed application received 5 May 2020, whereby this project seeks to use an exploratory instrumental case study to understand the experience of assistant principals in Catholic schools.

I give in principle support for the selected Catholic schools in Western Australia to participate in this valuable study. However, consistent with Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) policy, participation in your research project will be the decision of the individual principal and staff members. A copy of this letter must be provided to principals when requesting their participation in the research.
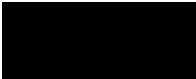
The condition of CEWA approval is that as your research project is being conducted for longer than one year, a completion of annual reports as well as a final report are to be forwarded to CEWA.

Responsibility for quality control of ethics and methodology of the proposed research resides with the institution supervising the research. CEWA notes that the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee has granted permission for the duration of this research project (Reference Number: 2020-062F).

Any changes to the proposed methodology will need to be submitted for CEWA approval prior to implementation. The focus and outcomes of your research project are of interest to CEWA. It is therefore a condition of approval that the research findings of this study are forwarded to CEWA.

Due to COVID-19 requirements site visits to schools have been ceased until further notice. It is possible these restrictions may be lifted later in the year. To determine the current status of these requirements please contact John Nelson at john.nelson@cewa.edu.au or (08) 6380 5313.

I wish you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Debra Sayce
Executive Director

Catholic Education Western Australia Limited | (08) 6380 5200 | www.cewa.edu.au
50 Ruislip Street Leederville WA 6007 | PO Box 198 Leederville WA 6903 | ABN: 47 634 504 135

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COLLECTION NOTICE

What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

This notice is required as a formal disclosure to participants involved in research where images or sound recordings will be involved as part of the research methodology.

As part of the research, recordings of assistant principals' voices will occur.

The voice recordings will be taken by a digital recording device.

The recordings will be stored on password protected computers and accessible only to the researcher, her supervisors and a third party transcription service. After a period of 5 years they will be destroyed by deletion of the digital files.

The recordings will not be passed on to any other party, unless required by law, in accordance with the CEWA Child Protection Policy, or for the purposes of transcription by a third party.

The recordings will be used only for the purpose of collecting data for the research project.

Appendix I

Template Emails to Interview Participants

First Email – Assistant Principal Consent Form

Dear [Assistant Principal],

Thank you for completing the survey which is part of my PhD research into the role of APs in CEWA primary schools. Thank you also for volunteering to partake in an interview. If you are still happy to participate, could you please complete the consent form found <u>here</u>?

Once I receive that, I will be in touch again to schedule a suitable interview time.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin

Second Email – Interview Scheduling

Dear [Assistant Principal],

Thank you for completing the online Consent Form regarding being interviewed as part of my research into the role of CEWA APs. Hopefully, you are still keen to be involved in an interview via Teams.

To arrange a mutually suitable time for our video chat, please go to <u>this link</u> which lists the available days and times over the next two weeks. Please choose your preferred timeslot using the following instructions:

1. Tick the box beside the "Sign Up" spot you would like to book.
2. Click on "Submit and Sign Up" at the bottom of the screen.
3. Enter your name and email address.
4. Click on "Sign up Now".

I will then send you a calendar invite to confirm, along with a list of the questions I'll be asking you. If none of the suggested times suit you, please choose the "other" option to indicate this and I will send you another list of potential times in the next few weeks.

If you no longer want to be involved, please let me know by return email so I don't send you any follow-up reminders.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin

Third Email – Reminder (if needed) to Schedule an Interview

Dear [Assistant Principal],

I am just following up on the email I sent to you recently regarding scheduling a time for you to participate in an interview for my post-graduate research into the role of AP in CEWA schools. If you are still happy to participate, could you please see if any of the times currently available are suitable? If none of those times suit, please choose the "other" option and I'll send you more time slots in a few weeks.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin

Fourth Email – Interview Confirmation and Provision of Questions

Dear [Assistant Principal],

I would like to confirm that our chat regarding the role of CEWA APs has been scheduled for [date] at [time].

Please find below the list of questions I will be asking you to guide our conversation. There may be other follow-up questions along the way too. Please don't feel like you need to prepare any answers, but you may want to think about them in general terms before we speak.

1. Can you tell me about yourself and your professional background?
2. What are the broad categories of tasks you are responsible for?
3. Do you have a written job description? If so, do you feel it accurately represents your role?
4. What do you see as the one most important aspect of your role and why?
5. What are the most important skills or attributes an assistant principal needs to have?
6. What are the gifts and talents you bring to your role as an assistant principal?
7. What is it about your work that motivates you to keep turning up?
8. Which aspects of your role do you find the most challenging?
9. What preparation did you have for the role of assistant principal?
10. What sort of professional learning do you engage in as an assistant principal?
11. If CEWA could do one thing to support or improve the effectiveness of assistant principals in primary schools, what would you recommend?
12. What one piece of advice would you give to teachers aspiring to the role of assistant principal?
13. Do you have anything you would like to say about your role as an assistant principal, that hasn't already been covered during this interview?

I am very much looking forward to chatting with you soon! Please let me know if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin

Fifth Email – Provision of Transcript

Dear [Assistant Principal],

Thank you again for participating in my research into the role of assistant principals in the CEWA system. It was great being able to chat with you about your role. Please find attached a transcript of our conversation. If you would like to, please read it through and let me know if there is anything you would like amended. If I don't hear back from you by [date in two weeks time], I'll assume you are happy with it.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin

Appendix J

Template Email to Principals Requesting Their Support

Dear [Principal],

I hope your term has begun well!

I am undertaking a post-graduate research project through the University of Notre Dame entitled *What Does it Mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study.* Basically, I am trying to gain an understanding of the complex work of APs in our system. I would love for your AP to be involved! If you are happy for him/her to participate, could you please complete the online form found here? There is a link on that page to give you more information about the project. If I get your completed form, I will then contact your AP to ask if they would like to complete a survey and/or be interviewed.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin

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PRINCIPAL INFORMATION SHEET REGARDING THEIR ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL'S PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

Your assistant principal is invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The research project will investigate the role of assistant principal in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia and how assistant principals perceive the rewards and challenges of their role. It is hoped this research will result in a comprehensive understanding of this senior school leadership position and provide a collective voice which may inform future professional learning and development opportunities.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Lisa Gallin and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Notre Dame Australia, under the supervision of Associate Professor Shane Lavery and Professor Michael O'Neill.

What will your assistant principal be asked to do?

Your assistant principal is asked to participate in an online survey and/or an individual interview via video (eg Zoom or Teams) about their views and experiences in their role as an assistant principal. He or she may choose to participate in just the survey, or in the survey and interview.

The survey should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete.

The interview will take between 30 and 45 minutes and will be audio-recorded using a digital recording device. The interview will take place at a mutually convenient time at a venue of the participant's choice.

The interview will be transcribed and a copy of the transcription provided to your assistant principal for confirmation. They will be able to request that amendments and corrections be made.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

We do not anticipate any risk to your assistant principal in participating in this research project. However, if they find that questions asked bring up difficult feelings, they are encouraged to access their Employee Assistance Program for support.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This project will provide assistant principals with an anonymous voice to share their experiences as an assistant principal, including the rewards and challenges they encounter and give them an opportunity to share their opinions. Your assistant principal's experiences will be combined with those of other participants to provide a collective understanding of the role of assistant principal in Catholic schools in Western Australia.

Principal Information Sheet   Page **1** of **2**

What if my assistant principal changes their mind about participating?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if your assistant principal agrees to participate (and you also agree), they are free to withdraw from further participation at any time without giving a reason and with no negative consequences. This can be done by contacting me. However, the survey data gathered from your assistant principal cannot be deleted from the project, as this information will be contributed anonymously and therefore unable to be identified as specific to the individual participant.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

Information gathered about your assistant principal and school will be held in strict confidence and will be de-identified. This confidence will only be broken if required by law.

The audio-recording from the interview will be transcribed and stored on a password protected computer and the audio-recordings will be deleted at the completion of the study. Only the researchers will have access to this information during the project.

Once the study is completed, the data collected from your assistant principal will be stored securely in the School of Education at The University of Notre Dame Australia for at least a period of five years. The results of the study will be published as a thesis, in journal articles and conference papers.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Once we have analysed the information from this study we will email you a summary of our findings. You can expect to receive this feedback by the end of 2022.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact Lisa Gallin at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ or lisa.gallin1@my.nd.edu.au. Alternatively, you can contact Shane Lavery at 9443 0173 or shane.lavery@nd.edu.au. We are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

What if I have a concern or complaint?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame Australia (reference number 2020-062F). If you have a concern or complaint regarding the ethical conduct of this research project and would like to speak to an independent person, please contact Notre Dame's Research Ethics Officer at (+61 8) 9433 0943 or research@nd.edu.au. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

How do I sign up to participate?

If you are happy for your assistant principal to participate in the research please complete the online Principal Consent form found here: ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Gallin (PhD Candidate)

Associate Professor Shane Lavery (Principal Supervisor) and

Professor Michael O'Neill (Co-Supervisor)

Principal Information Sheet

Appendix L
Online Principal Consent Form

Principal Consent Form

What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

Your assistant principal has been invited to participate in the above research project. You can find the approval letter from Dr Debra Sayce for the conduct of this research here. Please read the Principal Information Sheet found here and the following statements. If you are happy for your assistant principal to participate in this research, please complete the form below. Submission of this form indicates your consent for your assistant principal to participate. The contact details of the researcher are included in the Principal Information Sheet, so please do not hesitate to contact her to ask any questions you might have.

• I agree that my assistant principal may take part in this research project.
• I have read the Information Sheet provided and been given a full explanation of the purpose of this research project and what is involved.
• I understand that my assistant principal may participate in an online survey.
• I understand that my assistant principal may be interviewed and that the interview will be audio-recorded.
• I understand that, if they participate in an interview, the audio-recording will be transcribed and my assistant principal will receive a copy of the transcription and be allowed to request amendments, as required.
• The researcher has answered any questions I had and has explained possible risks that may arise as a result of the interview and how these risks will be managed.
• I understand that my assistant principal does not have to answer specific questions if they do not want to and may withdraw from participating in the project at any time without prejudice.
• I understand that all information provided by my assistant principal is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.
• I agree that any research data gathered for the study may be published provided my assistant principal's name, school name, or other identifying information are not disclosed.

1. What is your name?

2. What is your school's name?

3. What is your assistant principal's name? If you have more than one, you can add all names below (please also include their email address if it doesn't follow the usual CEWA format).

AP 1

AP 2

AP 3

Appendix M

Email to Potential Participants With a Link to the Survey

Dear [Assistant Principal],

I hope your term is going well so far!

You may have seen an email from CAPA recently regarding my research project looking at the role of APs in CEWA schools. I have also been contacting principals to let them know about the project and [principal] has said [she/he] is happy for you to participate, if you would like to.

If you would like to complete the survey, you can find it here:

███████████████████████████████████

APs who have completed it so far have taken an average of 18 minutes, so it shouldn't take up too much of your time. If you would like to participate in an interview, you can nominate for that at the end of the survey, or if you would prefer to skip the survey and just be interviewed, you can just let me know.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin

Appendix N

Letter to CAPA Requesting Their Support of the Research

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Ms Rosemary Paperella
President, Catholic Assistant Principals' Association (CAPA)
PO Box 1002
West Leederville WA 6901

June 18th, 2020

Dear Rosemary and CAPA Committee,

What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study

My name is Lisa Gallin and I am writing to you to request your support in conducting a research project that aims to understand the perceptions of assistant principals (APs) in CEWA primary schools about their role. The outcomes of the research should provide an overview of the current role of the assistant principal and enable insight into how assistant principals feel about their role and how they might best be supported. The project forms the basis of my Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Notre Dame Australia which is being conducted under the supervision of Associate Professor Shane Lavery and Professor Michael O'Neill from the School of Education.

What does participation in the research project involve?
I would like to invite all assistant principals in CEWA K-6 schools to take part in the project and I seek your support in making assistant principals aware of the project. Once the data collection process begins, I will provide you with information to distribute to your members. Maximum participation across the CEWA system should provide the most accurate data and result in a comprehensive understanding of APs' perception of their role.

The data collection will be in two parts, as outlined below.
1. An online survey which I will invite all K-6 APs to complete. This survey will be in three parts and should take around 20 minutes to complete:
    a. Quantitative data about demographic and career characteristics which will provide an overall picture of who is in the role.
    b. Likert scales will be used to gather information regarding assistant principals' perceptions of how they spend their time. This information should provide insight into APs' satisfaction regarding actual versus preferred tasks.
    c. Five open-ended questions to allow the APs to provide insights into how they feel.
2. Semi-structured interviews, which APs will be able to nominate to participate in at the end of the online survey. Participants will be asked a range of questions to delve deeper into their feelings about their role. These interviews will be conducted by phone or video. I would like to involve APs from a broad range of geographical locations, so using technology will make participation easily accessible and allow for scheduling at the most convenient time. I hope to interview between 20 and 25 volunteers.

To what extent is participation voluntary, and what are the implications of withdrawing that participation?
Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If any member of a participant group decides to participate and then withdraws this decision to participate for any reason, this can be done at any time by contacting me. However, survey data cannot be deleted from the project, as it is collected anonymously and it would not be possible to identify their responses in order to delete them. There will be no consequences relating to any decision by an individual or any school regarding participation, other than those already described in this letter. Decisions made will not affect the relationship with the research team or the University of Notre Dame Australia.

Submission of their responses to the online survey will imply the assistant principal's consent to participate. However, their principal will first need to sign a consent form to indicate their support of their assistant principal's participation in the survey and/or interview. This is because the participant may want to discuss matters that relate to their school. All participants will be provided with an information form about the project.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?
All collected data will be de-identified. The data are then stored securely on password-protected computers and can only be accessed by my supervisors and me. The data will be stored for a period of 5 years, after which they will be destroyed. This will be achieved by the deletion of all digital files and the shredding of paper records containing raw participant responses.

The identity of participants and their school will not be disclosed at any time, except in circumstances that require reporting under the Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) *Child Protection Policy*, or where the research team is legally required to disclose that information. Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all other times.

The data will be used only for this project and will not be used in any extended or future research without first obtaining explicit written consent from participants.

Consistent with Catholic Education Western Australia policy, a summary of the research findings will be made available to CEWA and to the Catholic Primary Principals' Association and CAPA. You can expect this to be available by the end of 2022.

Is this research approved?
The research has been approved by the Higher Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of Notre Dame Australia and has met the policy requirements of Catholic Education Western Australia as indicated in the attached letter.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?
If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study with a member of the research team, please contact me on the number provided below or Associate Professor Shane Lavery (94330173 or shane.lavery@nd.edu.au). If you wish to speak with an independent person about the conduct of the project, please contact the University of Notre Dame's Research Office by emailing research@nd.edu.au or calling 9433 0943.

How do I indicate my willingness for CAPA to be involved?
If you have had all questions about the project answered to your satisfaction, and are willing to assist by distributing the relevant information to your members, please email me at the address below. If I receive your support, information for assistant principals will be emailed to you when data collection begins, which should be in the first few weeks of Term 3, 2020.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin
PhD Candidate
University of Notre Dame Australia
Phone ███████████
Email lisa.gallin1@my.nd.edu.au

Appendix O

Information Forwarded by CAPA to Their Members on Behalf of the Researcher

Dear Assistant Principals,

All assistant principals in CEWA K-6 primary schools are invited to participate in a research project aimed at better understanding the role of assistant principal. This research project forms the basis of my Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Notre Dame Australia.

The assistant principal role is a vital senior leadership position in CEWA primary schools and a clear understanding of the scope of your tasks, as well as your perceptions of the rewards and challenges of the position, should provide valuable information. It is hoped that this information will inform future professional learning and initiatives that will provide you with further support in your role.

The project consists of two parts and you may choose to complete one, or both:

a) An <u>online survey</u> which asks for basic demographic and career data, as well as your perceptions of how you spend your time on a range of listed tasks. You will also have the opportunity to respond to some open-ended questions to provide insights into how you feel about your role as assistant principal. The survey should take around 20 minutes to complete.

b) <u>One-to-one interviews</u> will allow us to delve a little deeper into how you perceive your role, what you find the most challenging and rewarding and how you believe the CEWA system can further support you. These interviews will be conducted by phone, or video chat and will take between 30 and 45 minutes.

If you are interested in participating, please follow this process:

1. Read the attached *Participant Information Sheet*.
2. Let your principal know you would like to participate in the research and provide him or her with <u>this link</u>. It will take them to the Principal Consent form where they will find further information and can give their permission for you to participate in the research.
3. Once your principal completes that form, I will email you the link to the online survey. Your submission of this anonymous survey will imply your consent to participate.
4. If you nominate at the end of the survey to participate in an optional one-to-one interview, I will be in contact with you when this process begins later this year.

Please find attached the following documents (combined as one pdf):

- *Participant Information Sheet* – This will provide you with information about the project.
- *CEWA Research Approval Letter* – This is for your information, as verification that this research has been approved.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Lisa Gallin

Interview Question Links to Specific Research Questions

Overarching Research Question: What are the perceptions of assistant principals in Catholic primary schools in Western Australia about their role?

Lead in Questions:

1. Can you tell me about yourself and your professional background?

Research Question 1: *How do assistant principals define the breadth of their role?*

2. What are the broad categories of tasks you are responsible for?
3. Do you have a written job description? If so, do you feel it accurately represents your role?

Research Question 2: *Which aspects of their role do assistant principals think are the most important?*

4. What do you see as the one most important aspect of your role and why?
5. What are the most important skills or attributes an assistant principal needs to have?

Research Question 3: *Which aspects of the role provide professional fulfilment to assistant principals?*

6. What are the gifts and talents you bring to your role as an assistant principal?
7. What is it about your work that motivates you to keep turning up?

Research Question 4: *Which aspects of the role do assistant principals find challenging?*

8. Which aspects of your role do you find the most challenging?

Research Question 5: *In what ways do assistant principals believe the Catholic education system of Western Australia can support them in fulfilling their role?*

9. What preparation did you have for the role of assistant principal?
10. What sort of professional learning do you engage in as an assistant principal?
11. If CEWA could do one thing to support or improve the effectiveness of assistant principals in primary schools, what would you recommend?

Closing Questions

12. What one piece of advice would you give to teachers aspiring to the role of assistant principal?
13. Do you have anything you would like to say about your role as an assistant principal, that hasn't already been covered during this interview?

Appendix Q

University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee Approval

4 May 2020

A/Prof Shane Lavery & Ms Lisa Gallin
School of Education
The University of Notre Dame Australia
Fremantle Campus

Dear Shane and Lisa,

Reference Number: 2020-062F

Project Title: "What does it mean to be an Assistant Principal in Catholic Primary Schools in Western Australia? An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study."

Your response to the conditions imposed by a sub-committee of the University of Notre Dame Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has been reviewed in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007, updated 2018). I am pleased to advise that ethics approval has been granted for this proposed study.

Other researchers identified as working on this project are:

Name	School/Centre	Role
Prof Michael O'Neill	School of Education	Co-Supervisor

All research projects are approved subject to standard conditions of approval.
Please read the attached document for details of these conditions.

On behalf of the Human Research Ethics Committee, I wish you well with your study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Natalie Giles
Research Ethics Officer
Research Office

cc: A/Prof Dianne Chambers, SRC Chair, School of Education