The socialisation of early career principals in Western Australia

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The Socialisation of Early Career Principals in Western Australia

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Education

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School of Education
2020
Abstract

This research aimed to investigate and understand the socialisation of early career principals in Western Australian public schools. It is widely acknowledged that school principals are critical in the successful education of students and delivering on this is seen to be the core purpose of the role. It is evident that the development of effective principals has great value. As a result, the socialisation of principals during the formative early career stage, whereby they learn the necessary knowledge, skills and understandings of the role, is important in the educational experiences of students. Due to the impact principals have on student learning, research into the socialisation of early career principals holds significance.

The Department of Education (DoE) is the largest employer of school principals in Western Australia. DoE see effective leadership as a key priority and is committed to the development of effective principals through the provision of professional learning. In the past, research (including Clarke et al., 2011; Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b) has reported that Western Australian early career principals have faced many complex challenges during their socialisation. Much of this research was conducted over 10 years ago and it is problematic that the topic of principal socialisation in Western Australia has received little attention since. My research sought to address this problem by providing a current insight and investigate the extent of which the findings from previous studies are still relevant. Furthermore, this research provided an opportunity to investigate whether DoE’s professional learning provision had addressed the challenges faced by early career principals as suggested by previous studies.

The participant cohort for this research was comprised of seven early career principals of Western Australian public schools. The participants were located in multiple regions across the state of both metropolitan and rural areas. This research used a qualitative methodology because it aimed to develop an understanding of the meanings that the participants attached to their experiences. To gain this understanding, individual semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method.
Findings from the data suggest that during the initial stages of their career, the participants felt unprepared, unqualified and isolated. Unpreparedness came from a lack of understanding of what the principalship would entail and inexperience in school management tasks. The feeling of being unqualified emerged from an increase of focus in the area of school management in comparison to other roles the participants had held prior to becoming a principal. Feelings of isolation were evident as a result of being an outsider to the school community and, for the rural participants, the geographical location. The significance of this study can be seen in the alignment between its findings and with those of previous studies. The findings also have provided a current insight into the challenges faced by early career principals and the type of support they perceive to be most beneficial. This information could be seen to be valuable to DoE and their ongoing provision of professional learning to early career principals.
Copyright and Access Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or

iii. contain any defamatory material;

Date: 28 April 2020
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In Australia, schools have a responsibility and a moral obligation to strive for a successful educational experience for all of their students. The educational success of students is seen to be the core purpose of school principals (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr, 2014; Ibarrola-García, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2019). Contemporary research has argued that school leaders play an important role in student learning (Aravena, 2016; Bush, 2018a; Helal & Coelli, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2017; Robinson, 2011; Slater et al., 2018; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). Leithwood et al. (2004) state “Of all the factors that contribute to what students learn at school, present evidence led us to the conclusion that leadership is second in strength only to classroom instruction” (p. 70). It has also been suggested that the impact of a principal extends beyond student learning. Aravena (2016) says “The effects of academic leadership are not limited to students. Administrators also directly influence staff and community members. In this way, school leadership can inspire or discourage growth and change on many levels within the education system” (p. 343). School principals are critical to the educational success of students and the power and influence which they yield must be recognised.

As to be expected of such an important role, the principalship is multifaceted and highly complex. It has been reported that the principalship continues to become more demanding, uncertain and diverse (Clarke et al., 2011; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014). For example, the role of a principal includes the tension and competition between political, managerial and instructional elements. It “also tends to be fragmented, fast-paced, and varied; it involves long hours and a relentless workload, along with demands from multiple, diverse stakeholders” (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 432). It has been suggested that contextual changes of today’s society, such as diverse student populations, provide the need for school principals to consider social justice issues in their practice (Devine, 2013; Richardson & Sauers, 2014; Szeto & Cheng, 2018). Mills et al. (2016) suggests that principals must address economic, cultural and political injustices as well as
affective and contributive aspects of justice. Given this complexity and the importance of the role, it is crucial that school principals are supported in their development.

It is widely accepted that preparation and continual professional learning play an important role in the development of effective principals (Aravena, 2016; Bush, 2018a; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Devi & Fernandes, 2019; Slater et al., 2018; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b; Zepeda et al., 2014). It is also understood that the type of support principals require is related the stage of their career stage.

School principals go through a series of career stages which present different challenges in their development. During preparation and the initial year of appointment, principals experience a ‘reality shock’ and the need to learn and adapt in their new position and environment (Liljenberg & Andersson, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). Whereas, the second to fifth years of the principalship are seen to be formative years where principals continue to learn about the role and its requirements but are at a stage where they develop more confidence and refine their practice (Earley & Weindling, 2004; Oplatka, 2012). It can be seen that the experience level and challenges of early career principals are related. For this research I have considered the first year of the principalship as the ‘initial year’ and I have used the term ‘early career’ to refer to principals in the second to fifth years of their principalship. This study is particularly concerned with early career principals because of the formative nature of this career stage. Early career principals have also had insights from at least one year of experience and they have had time to process, to some degree, the reality shock experienced in the initial year.

The experiences gained throughout the initial year and subsequent early career stage can be seen to provide valuable learnings. The process of developing knowledge, skills and understandings which are a requirement of a given role is referred to as socialisation (Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Crow, 2007; Davidson, 2017; Greenfield, 1985; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Scott & Scott, 2013). As discussed above, the preparation, challenges and support provided to principals are important elements in learning about the principalship and becoming effective in the role. Hence, these elements are important in the socialisation of principals. This understanding has been reflected in the research questions of my study.
In Western Australia, public school principals operate within the policies and directives of the state government’s Department of Education (DoE). DoE is the provider of public education in Western Australia and the largest system in the state. DoE oversee 812 public schools which account for almost 310,000 full-time students (Department of Education Western Australia, 2019f). As part of its responsibility for these schools, DoE say:

We identify and select talented school leaders to develop and put in place support and accountability mechanisms to drive school improvement. … At the system level, we support public school leaders and staff while maintaining transparent accountability, governance and funding frameworks.

(Department of Education Western Australia, 2018d, p. 4)

DoE is also a regulator of Independent schools and oversee the regulation of Catholic schools in Western Australia. DoE also provide funding to Independent and Catholic schools (Department of Education Western Australia, 2018d). Given the wide jurisdiction and commitment of DoE in developing its principals, my research is focused on Western Australian public school principals and the provision of support DoE is responsible for.

As discussed above, DoE has a responsibility and an important role in the preparation and development of principals for school improvement. DoE state that “The primary task of a school leader is to ensure that high quality teaching occurs in every classroom in the school” (Department of Education Western Australia, 2012, p. 3). This is reflected in their strategic plan where the central aim is to achieve success for all students (Department of Education Western Australia, 2015b). It states that this priority will be achieved through high quality teaching, effective leadership and strong governance and support. A conceptualisation of this can be seen in Figure 1. DoE recognise the important role that effective leadership plays in student success and it has a responsibility to develop effective principals for this purpose.
Underpinning its approach to school leadership is The Western Australian Public School Leadership Strategy (Department of Education Western Australia, 2018e). It aims to identify and foster future school leaders as well as develop current school leaders and predispose them to success. The Leadership Strategy was published in 2018 and it echoes the sentiment of a previously published Public School Leadership document (Department of Education Western Australia, 2012). The Leadership Strategy discusses several contextual shifts which school currently face. The Leadership Strategy acknowledges that the role of school leadership involves a growing complexity and expectation of transparency, a higher level of responsibility for school success, tension between teaching and learning and managerial roles and pressure in preparing students for a rapidly changing society (Department of Education Western Australia, 2018e). The Leadership Strategy is used to support DoE’s strategic direction, its aim is to “identify, develop, select and support leaders throughout each stage of their careers” (Department of Education Western Australia, 2018e, p. 4).

To support the development of its principals, DoE offer a range of professional learning programs for current and future principals (Department of Education Western Australia, 2015b). In an effort to provide efficient and effective support, DoE state that its professional learning “program design, content and delivery is research and evidence based, following adult learning principles” (Department of Education Western Australia, 2019a). Contemporary views of adult learning theory suggest that

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**Figure 1** A conceptualisation of the priorities which DoE has determined to achieve student success.

the needs of the learner are a crucial factor in adult learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Therefore, the challenges faced by early career principals, which affect their needs, are important in DoE’s professional learning provision.

Given the meaningful impact on students’ educational experiences, it is of upmost importance that school principals are effective in their role. Furthermore, leadership development becomes crucial due to the complex nature of the job. To understand about the development of effective public school principals in Western Australia, it is necessary to investigate the socialisation process of those at the early career stage. This includes their preparation for the role, the challenges of which they face and the support mechanisms which they have access to.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the past, research (including Clarke et al., 2011; Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b) has suggested that Western Australian early career principals face many complex challenges during their socialisation. To support and develop principals in becoming effective school leaders and managers, DoE provide professional learning. Given that effective principals have been said to positively contribute towards student success, it is important that DoE provide effective professional learning. DoE have claimed that their professional learning provision aligns with adult learning principles, of which addressing the learners’ needs is central. To understand about principals’ needs, it is necessary to understand the challenges which they face. Much of the research on the challenges faced by Western Australian early career principals took place over a decade ago. It is problematic that little is known as to whether the findings of these studies are still relevant and whether support provided to early career principals by DoE since this time has addressed these challenges.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The aim of this study was to provide current insights into the socialisation of early career principals in Western Australia. It sought to explore the participants’ preparational experiences and report on their perceived challenges as part of professional and organisational socialisation. Over the last decade, particularly in the
late 2000’s, research (including Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Clarke et al., 2007; Clarke et al., 2011; Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b; Wildy et al., 2007) into the challenges and preparation of early career principals in Western Australia has been conducted. My study aimed to present a summary of this research and investigate whether the experiences of my participants align with or are contrary to findings from over 10 years ago. This study also aimed to explore the support mechanisms available to early career principals and gain an insight into what they believed were the most effective forms of support to help them become effective school leaders and managers.

1.4 Research Questions

Central Research Question:

How are early career principals of Western Australian public schools socialised to become effective leaders and managers?

Guiding Research Questions:

1. How do early career principals perceive their prior experience as preparation for the role?
2. What challenges do early career principals face?
3. What support mechanisms help early career principals overcome these challenges?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Research has been conducted previously about the socialisation of Western Australian early career principals. My project has provided an opportunity to gain current insights into a topic which was well researched 10 years ago but has received little attention since. Therefore, it has been timely to investigate whether the participants of my research have had similar or different experiences to those of previous studies. I acknowledge that my participants are a selected group of DoE principals and although DoE is the largest education system or sector in Western Australia, further research into the experiences of Independent and Catholic early career principals would also be timely and relevant. Research into the socialisation of early career principals is relevant given the widely accepted notion that principals play
an important role in student outcomes which is supported by DoE. A recent change in
the provision of professional learning provided by DoE also presented a situation
where research into the socialisation experiences of early career principals is timely
and relevant. My study was an opportunity to explore the participants’ perceptions of
the changes and analyse whether they were aligned with contemporary research. In
addition, DoE claim that qualitative data are used to inform its professional learning
program design and evaluate effectiveness of these programs (Department of
Education Western Australia, 2019a). Given the qualitative methodology of this
research, my findings may contribute towards this.

1.6 Thesis Organisation

To present this research on how early career principals of Western Australian
public schools are socialised to become effective leaders and managers, this thesis is
organised into six chapters. This current chapter includes an introduction which
establishes the importance the principalship and contextualises the role within the
Western Australian public school system. This current chapter also presents the
statement of the problem and states the aims, research questions and significance of
the study.

Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature and documents which presents a
contemporary insight into the socialisation of early career principals. The literature
review has been organised into sections reflecting the key elements of principal
socialisation. The sections address the transition from classroom teacher to principal,
the challenges involved in this process, the available support for early career principals
of Western Australian public schools and what has been suggested as effective support
for early career principals. The final section in Chapter 2 establishes socialisation
theory as the theoretical framework of my research and presents the conceptual
framework which was developed as a result of the literature and document analysis
within the chapter.

Chapter 3 details the research design of the study. In this chapter, I declare
interpretivism as my chosen paradigm and outline the connection between
interpretivism and the qualitative methodology of the research. The chapter then
presents semi-structured interviews as the data collection method and shows the
relationship between this method and the qualitative methodology. An explanation of the participant recruitment methods and participant demographic requirements come thereafter. The last two sections of Chapter 3 report the processes which were undertaken to ensure the credibility of the data and that ethical standards were met.

Chapter 4 presents the findings which the data generated. It is organised to reflect the participants’ experiences of socialisation which coincides with the guiding research questions. Hence, section 4.2 and 4.3 report the findings surrounding the participants’ preparational experience and the initial shock which was faced upon appointment. Chapter 4 also introduces the three conceptual themes which arose from analysing the data. These themes of feeling unprepared, unqualified and isolated have been used to organise the findings in relation to the challenges and support mechanisms of the participants. Chapter 4 also presents findings which outline the preferential elements of professional learning according to the participants.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the research findings which draws a connection between the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and the themes presented in Chapter 4. It suggests that the findings of this research align with those of previous studies. Chapter 5 is organised to reflect the themes of feeling unprepared, unqualified and isolated. The organisation also reflects the participants’ experiences of socialisation and the guiding research questions.

Chapter 6 presents a set of recommendations which have been developed as a result of the findings from this research. It synthesises the findings in relation to the research questions and suggests that this study was timely and relevant. Chapter 6 also acknowledges and outlines the project’s limitations.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The development of effective school leaders and managers is vital in the provision of a good education. As reflected in my guiding research questions, in order to understand the socialisation of early career principals, it is necessary to investigate their preparation, the challenges they face and the required and available support they need to become more effective. This is a review of the literature and relevant
documents which has been separated into sections which reflect the topics of my guiding research questions. The topic of socialisation, which is central to my research, is discussed throughout these sections. This chapter begins with a discussion on principal preparation. Section 2.2 puts forward two frameworks of effective professional learning which have been developed through longitudinal research of the International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP). It then presents two prominent models of principal preparation used in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. Section 2.3 focuses on the challenges of early career principals. It suggests that their challenges align with a set of career stages. In section 2.4, a review of the types of support mechanisms for principals is presented followed by a discussion, in section 2.5, on what is reported as effective professional learning. Section 2.5 includes a discussion on the role of adult learning theory in effective professional learning. The last section of this chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the study and puts forward a conceptual framework as a result of the literature which has been discussed within this chapter.

### 2.2 Developing Leadership: From teacher to principal

Preparation is reported to be an important aspect in the development of effective principals. This section focuses on the transition from a teacher and other school leadership positions to the principalship. Preparation, through informal learning from pre-principal experience and formal professional learning, contributes towards socialisation through anticipatory conceptualisations of what the role is and what it entails (Brody et al., 2010; Crow, 2006, 2007; Davidson, 2017). Emphasising the importance of principal preparation, Devi and Fernandes (2019) claim that “Well prepared school leaders are critical to achieving improved instruction and increased student achievement” (p. 53). This notion is echoed by Bush (2018a) who states “Effective leadership preparation makes a difference” (P. 68) and highlights that without effective preparation, leaders often struggle to meet the requirements of the job. However, the increasing complexity, responsibilities and expectations of the principalship in addition to a rapidly changing landscape of education present a challenge in defining what a well prepared school leader is (Clarke et al., 2011; Devi & Fernandes, 2019; Riley, 2019; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Australian principals are not
exempt from this circumstance, Devi and Fernandes (2019) claim that Australian principals “are experiencing role overload, complexity and tension due to various reforms introduced in education” (p. 54). Similarly, Heffernan (2018) has stated:

Since the 1980s, the principalship has seen increased demands from a systemic level, heavier focus on policies and accountability, and more specific guidance or directives from district or regional offices ... Shifting towards the current era of the principalship, key discourses that have arisen in the 2000s and beyond have resulted in complexities within the principalship, particularly in relation to the tensions accompanying higher levels of accountability and autonomy. (p. 29)

It is evident that there is great complexity and pressure surrounding the work of a school principal. Given this, Clarke et al. (2011) assert that “it is vital that the complex circumstances they [principals] encounter in their work are reflected in processes designed to prepare them for the role” (p. 166). As a result, it is important to investigate approaches for principal preparation. This section now puts forward what research has suggested as two prominent models for principal preparation.

Research on principal preparation around the world is not scarce. Aravena (2016) reports that research has mainly focused on three elements of principal preparation:

- Recruitment;
- Effectiveness of leadership programs;
- Alignment between school context and the needs of future leaders.

Furthermore, contextual considerations must be made in each of these elements.

Given the unique contexts of education systems and schools around the world, the development of a global, standardised model for successful principal preparation is not possible. Regardless, Slater et al. (2018) put forward two frameworks for principal preparation which were developed to address the common needs of 15 countries which were involved in the ISPP. The first framework, developed by Wildy and Clarke (2008b), suggests that principal preparation should consider and develop the knowledge and understanding of people, place, system and self. The second framework, developed by Webber and Scott (2013), consists of five principles which can be used to guide principal preparation:
1. A primary perspective of principal as professional;
2. Inclusion of formal, informal and experiential components;
3. Developing the ability to form relationships and manage multiple allegiances;
4. Enable the balancing of power that comes with the principalship, in the context of the wider community, and operate within regulatory frameworks;
5. Encourage reflection on the stressors of the principalship and develop strategies for self-care and well-being. (Slater & Nelson, 2013; Webber & Scott, 2013)

These frameworks, and a lot of the research of the ISPP, have provided contemporary perspectives on principal preparation. Despite this, principal preparation varies around the world.

The major principal preparation methods mostly consist of either a formal qualification approach or an apprenticeship model. The United States adopts a formal approach to principal preparation which includes qualification through a university course, accreditation and licensure (Aravena, 2016; Devi & Fernandes, 2019). The United States’ approach is not nationally standardised and varies between states, however, a set of professional standards for school leaders exists which are used in the accreditation of preparational programs (Aravena, 2016). Standards such as these “serve an essential role in setting commonly agreed upon expectations for effective leadership and provide a conceptual framework that guides preparation, practice and policy” (Tucker et al., 2016, p. 91). However, they have come under some criticism.

English (2006) has suggested that national standards have “lowered the standards for leadership preparation” (p.462) in the United States. He claims that the implementation of the national standards has shifted school leader preparation programs away from universities which facilitate research in the field. As a consequence, “Teaching is reduced to training that is designed to be efficient within the status quo” (English, 2006, p. 468). Furthermore, Romanowski (2017) argues that professional standards are a by-product of neoliberalism which reduces “education to products and services that can be globally sold to those with adequate resources” (p.
Regardless, it can be seen that “The United States recognises the value of controlling the quality of leadership programmes” (Aravena, 2016, p. 350).

In the United Kingdom, the principal preparation approach also involves the completion of a formal qualification (Aravena, 2016; Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Kelly & Saunders, 2010). The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) was established in 1997 as a centralised qualification for aspiring principals which was mandatory for first time headteachers (Aravena, 2016; Bush, 2016). The NPQH can be seen as “a system of assessment, accreditation and standardisation for headteachers in England” which, similarly to the United States, is underpinned by a set of professional standards for headteachers (Aravena, 2016, p. 349). In comparison to the United States and the United Kingdom, Australia has a different approach to principal preparation. Australia uses the apprenticeship model whereby teachers typically progress through a variety of leadership roles, including deputy principal, before being appointed as a principal (Aravena, 2016; Bristol et al., 2014; Clarke et al., 2007; Devi & Fernandes, 2019; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). However, principal preparation programs do exist. In a scan around Australia, Watterson (2015) uncovered three types of preparational programs for school leaders: preparation for the principalship as the next career step, broad leadership development and programs related to but not specifically for principal preparation. While Watterson’s research was prepared for and published by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), it comprehensively included programs from every state and territory as well as government, Catholic, Independent, higher education, commercial and principal association programs. Irrespective of these offerings, in vast contrast to the strict, complicated process involved in becoming a principal in the United States and the United Kingdom, the minimum level of qualification required to be a principal in Australia is the same as that of a teacher. In a discussion of the apprenticeship model in Australia, Aravena (2016) stated:

The apprenticeship model refers to an informal, sporadic and episodic professional development for principals. This model has been taking place in Australia because of the assumption that effective teachers can be transformed into effective school leaders … [and] it is possible to observe an implicit belief that educational leaders are effective teachers. (p. 347)
Clarke et al. (2007) have said that “it might be questioned whether this ‘on the job’ approach to nurturing school leaders is sufficient in itself for acquiring the level of leadership acumen needed to deal with the circumstances that are integral to the contemporary educational environment” (p. 82). Nonetheless, Aravena (2016) suggests that as a result of the apprenticeship model of preparation “preparing principals in Australian contexts prioritises practicing leadership skills in real scenarios as part of the training process” (pp. 347-348). Furthermore, Devi and Fernandes (2019) claim that within the apprenticeship model “School leaders are mostly appointed on the basis of teaching record and experience rather than leadership potential” (p. 54). With the apprenticeship model of preparation, which relies on an on the job approach to leadership development, principal professional learning is a key in the ongoing development of principals. In an effort to systematise principal professional learning, a set of Australian national principal standards is often used to guide programs for principal preparation (Aravena, 2016). The context of this research is within Western Australia, therefore, this discussion now shifts to the Australian Professional Standard for Principals.

AITSL, which was established in 2010, is responsible for providing leadership in teaching and school leadership for the Australian State and Territory Governments. AITSL’s major focus is maximising student learning through excellence in teaching and school leadership. To do this, AITSL work with experts to provide policies and resources (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015a). One example of this is AITSL’s Australian Professional Standard for Principals which is used to express what school principals are expected to know, understand and do (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015b). This document is important because “School leaders … [must] have a clear understanding of what it means to be an effective leader” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2017, p. 2). AITSL claim that their Leadership Requirements and Professional Practices are based on contemporary research which shows that:

- Effective leaders understand their impact
- Leadership must be contextualised, learning-centred and responsive to the diverse nature of Australia’s schools
- Effective leadership is distributed and collaborative, with teams led by the principal working together to accomplish the vision and aims of the school.
- The practices and capabilities of leaders evolve as they move through their careers
- Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of core leadership practices and behaviours, with some key personal qualities and capabilities explaining the significant variation in leadership effectiveness. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015b, p. 4)

It is evident that AITSL’s Australian Professional Standard for Principals is a resource to support principals and, as previously mentioned, guide principal preparation. The implementation of these national standards is in alignment with similar initiatives in the United States and the United Kingdom. However, it has been claimed that such standards do not satisfactorily address the unique contexts schools leaders operate in. Murphy (2005) has stated that “Leadership is a complex and context-dependent activity. To attempt to envelope the concept with a definitive list of indicators is a fool’s errand” (p.174). Irrespective, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals plays a key role in the development of effective principals in Australia. By inference, it is also valuable in school success and improved student outcomes.

This chapter has had a focus on the preparation and processes involved in becoming a principal in Western Australia. The previous paragraph began to outline some contextual understandings of the system which Western Australian early career principal operate in. To give further insight into their contexts, the discussion now changes to their school environments. This is important because school context should be a consideration in the preparation of principals (Aravena, 2016; Clarke et al., 2011; Wildy & Clarke, 2008b).

Early career principals in Western Australia are often appointed to lead high need schools. These schools are commonly located in rural or remote Western Australia and they are identified by AITSL to be of low socio-educational advantage (Clarke et al., 2011; Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b; Wildy et al., 2014). AITSL calculate an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value for
most schools in Australia for “fair and reasonable comparisons among schools with similar students” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016, p. 1). To calculate the ICSEA, AITSL factor in students’ parents’ occupations and education and the school’s geographic location and proportion of Indigenous students. Whilst there is no agreed upon definition of high need schools, schools with low socio-educational advantage, such as the schools central to this study, are what I have considered as high need. In a more narrow definition, Keddie (2018) has outlined that student performance data has formed the basis of the judgement of school need in England. She argues that the needs of these schools reach beyond academic intervention and should include a focus on student wellbeing and welfare. The factors which comprise my definition suggest that high need schools require the urgent prioritisation of school leadership and management for the sake of the students’ educational outcomes which are not limited to academic attainment.

In summary, principal preparation is viewed from different perspectives around the world and consequently, multiple approaches are used. This section has presented two different frameworks for principal preparation which have been developed through research into the needs and challenges of principals around the world. An insight into the formal qualification method and apprenticeship model has been reported in addition to the approaches to principal preparation of three developed countries. This has highlighted Australia’s approach which sees the preparational stage of principal socialisation mainly comprising of experience gained through other school-based roles. None of the discussed approaches assume that principals will be fully equipped to be maximally effective upon appointment. Continual investment in leadership development is an expectation (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015b; Department of Education Western Australia, 2018e). To gain a more thorough understanding of where efforts in the development of early career principals should be placed, it is necessary to investigate what challenges they face. The next section changes the focus to provide insight into what these challenges are reported to be.
2.3 Challenges in Leadership Development

This focus of this section shifts towards the challenges which early career principals face. It is acknowledged that the preparation and challenges faced by early career principals do not exist in isolation; they are interrelated. This section begins by demonstrating this connection through a discussion on two models of career development stages which take pre-principal experiences into account. It is suggested that the challenges faced by principals are aligned with the career stages.

In their transition into leadership and throughout their career, principals are subject to a series of career stages. The perspective of developmental career progression is widely accepted in research (Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2019; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Oplatka, 2012). It suggests that different career stages exist which are characterised by “differences in work attitudes and behaviours, types of relationships, employees’ needs and aspects of work valued by the employee” (Oplatka, 2012, p. 130). Earley and Weindling (2004) devised an extensive model of leadership development which continues to inform research today. It outlines the characteristics of seven stages which principals encounter throughout their career (see Table 1). Earley and Weindling acknowledge that their model is not prescriptive and factors exist which affect the characteristics and timeframes of the individual stages. In a synthesis of research, Oplatka (2007) defined four career stages of school principals: induction, establishment, maintenance vs renewal and disenchantment. Oplatka’s model reflects similar understandings from Earley and Weindling’s model of principal career stages. Research in the career progression of principals suggests that they move through a series of developmental stages which are individually characterised.

The first three career stages depicted in Table 1 are stages where the principal adjusts to the role and begins learning the knowledge, skills and understandings which are required. This process is called socialisation (Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Crow, 2007; Davidson, 2017; Greenfield, 1985; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Scott & Scott, 2013). Sciarappa and Mason (2014) have said that the early stages of principal socialisation are categorised by five needs; “The needs include learning about the school’s culture, findings one’s voice, forming alliances and
networks, balancing custodianship and innovation, and making connections with the larger community” (p. 53). During the early stages of their career, principals experience a period of adjustment before the establishment of an occupational identity. In agreement, Dor-Haim and Oplatka (2019) claim that “Novice principals have to confront issues such as developing a sense of confidence, achieving acceptance among the teachers and learning the organisational culture” (p. 4). It can be seen that socialisation is a complex process with many elements. It is widely accepted as a process that principals undertake in the early stages of their career.

Table 1 A conceptualisation of Earley and Weindling’s (2004) model of stages of the principalship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Period of principalship</th>
<th>Stage characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0: Preparation prior to principalship</td>
<td>Prior to appointment</td>
<td>A range of formal and informal experiences develop a conceptualisation of principalship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Entry and Encounter</td>
<td>0-3 months</td>
<td>A reality shock where conceptualisation meets reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Taking Hold</td>
<td>3-12 months</td>
<td>A development of understanding on key issues and the challenging of accepted norms within their context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Reshaping</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>Feelings of confidence and competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Refinement</td>
<td>3rd-4th years</td>
<td>Refinement of previously implemented changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Consolidation</td>
<td>5-7th years</td>
<td>Feelings of consolidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Plateau</td>
<td>8th year onwards</td>
<td>Feelings that suggest most necessary changes have been made</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Socialisation can be understood as being comprised of two elements: organisational and professional socialisation (Crow, 2007; Davidson, 2017; Greenfield, 1985). Organisational socialisation begins upon appointment and continues throughout the initial year (Bush, 2016; Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2019; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Oplatka, 2012; Scott & Scott, 2013). It is the process of gaining an understanding of the requirements of a position within the given
organisation. Crow (2007) puts forward that the learning from organisational socialisation “emphasises ‘how things are done here’” (p. 52). In schools, this can involve developing an understanding of the context, staff strengths and weaknesses and developing professional relationships. Context is central to organisational socialisation, whereas, professional socialisation deals with the knowledge, values and attitudes which principals must possess to be successful. Professional socialisation can begin during the preparation for the principalship, known as the anticipatory phase and continue beyond appointment throughout the early career stage (Crow, 2007; Davidson, 2017). The career stages presented in Table 1 can be seen to be heavily related to the socialisation process. It is particularly evident in professional socialisation which sees principals learning about the job and skills they need for the role.

The notion of career stages and its connection with organisational and professional socialisation has been presented within this section. The focus now shifts to what is reported as the common challenges which arise during these processes. Crow (2007) suggests that in the anticipatory stage of professional socialisation, prospective principals develop a conceptualisation of the role. However, one major challenge of professional socialisation is realising that the principalship is not what was expected (Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Scott & Scott, 2013). Discovering the multifaceted nature of the job, the tasks they are responsible for and the complexity which comes with this often results in a ‘reality shock’ for early career principals (Liljenberg & Andersson, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). From this perspective, professional socialisation provides a significant challenge upon appointment to the role.

Developing the necessary skills for the role presents an additional challenge. It is reported that gaining basic managerial skills, of which they have limited experience in, is seen to be another major challenge of professional socialisation. As more experience is gained, early career principals develop their confidence and competence in these tasks (Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). If the challenges are too vast, it is not inconceivable to suggest resignation is a realistic possibility. This situation has been suggested to have negative impacts on the school. Principal turnover has been linked to both increased staff turnover and low
levels of student achievement. These effects are said to be more pronounced in high need schools (Boyce & Bowers, 2016).

Over the last decade, research has provided significant insights into Western Australian principalships which has included some investigations into early career principals. This literature, including Clarke et al. (2011); Gurr et al. (2014); Wildy and Clarke (2008a, 2008b), is of particular interest to my research due to the Western Australian context. The remainder of this section will investigate the reported challenges facing Western Australian early career principals and relate them to wider research.

Prior research has suggested that the major challenges faced by Western Australian early career principals can be categorised into four aspects: people, place, system and self. This notion has been discussed in the previous section as a framework for principal preparation put forward by Wildy and Clarke (2008b). The framework was developed based on their findings from research into early career principal challenges. Due to the Western Australian context, Wildy and Clarke’s (2008b) framework has been frequently referred to in the following discussion.

It is reported that the principalship holds some fundamental differences to other school-based roles. An increased proportion of focus and tasks categorised as school management presents a challenge. Early career principals feel frustrated by this as well as unprepared (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b). This discussion is elaborated on below, however, to understand what is meant by school management and school leadership, the discussion temporarily changes to leadership theory.

Leadership theory has been debated and researched for a long time. Currently, there are two major leadership theories which contemporary research put forward: instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Bush, 2018b; Gawlik, 2018). Bush (2018b) reports that managerial leadership is an alternative which has been longstanding in the past, although, it is not as commonly subscribed to now. He says that “Managerial Leadership, when practised to excess, can lead to managerialism, where adherence to bureaucratic procedures is regarded as more important than educational purposes” (p. 883). This provides an insight into what school management tasks may be described as: administrative work for compliance purposes. Based on
Bush’s statement, managerial leadership can be seen as contrary to instructional and transformational leadership which both place student learning as the ultimate objective (Gawlik, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2017; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). The central pillar of instructional and transformational leadership aligns with the notion that student learning is the core purpose of the principalship (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr, 2014; Ibarrola-García, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2019). Gawlik (2018) states that “Definitions of instructional leadership usually include tasks such as communicating a school’s mission, supervising faculty and staff, offering expertise in curriculum and teaching, succession planning, encouraging professional growth, and developing a sense of community” (pp. 540-541). The primary goal of instructional leadership is to improve teaching and learning, whereas, transformational leadership attempts to create an environment, at an organisational level, where improvements to teaching and learning can be made (Leithwood, 2017). Transformational leadership centres around the construction of a vision, which the leader promotes and gathers followers, to help strive towards (Bush, 2018b). Hallinger and Wang (2015) put forward the notion that instructional leadership has remained a consent focus of school leadership theory while other models of leadership have emerged and disappeared. It has also been asserted that “Australian principals are increasingly required to act as ‘instructional leaders’” (Heffernan & Longmuir, 2019, p. 1). This suggests that instructional leadership is central to the principalship in Australia. Bush (2018b) also claims that in three popular journals, instructional leadership is the most published about leadership theory and transformational leadership comes second. Pietsch and Tulowitzki (2017, p. 631) suggest that typical practices of instructional leadership include:

- defining the schools’ mission;
- managing curriculum and instruction;
- supervising teaching;
- monitoring student progress;
- promoting instructional climate.

Based on the understandings of school leadership theory derived from contemporary research, I have considered ‘school leadership’ to be the actions taken by a principal
which are primarily concerned with student learning and impact it. Subsequently, I have considered teaching and learning to be part of school leadership. Those actions not directly related to teaching and learning, such as compliance and administrative duties, are what I have considered to be school management.

The unpreparedness in completing school management tasks is a common challenge for early career principals (Clarke et al., 2011; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). This challenge is evident in the system element of Wildy and Clarke’s (2008b) framework where administrative duties, much of which is for system compliance, are unfamiliar and seem to supersede work in school leadership. Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) report from their study that early career principals require support in administrative tasks and it was a primary focus of the support they sought from mentors. They say that the principals’ needs come from “low managerial expertise at this [early] career stage” (p. 217). The large proportion of school management in principals’ workloads is also reported to cause frustration. This is a result of school management preventing them from enacting school leadership (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Boerema (2011) has mentioned that this frustration has been linked to one reason why principals leave their job. This notion aligns with findings which suggest that since 2011, the amount of work and a lack time to focus on teaching and learning have been the two biggest stressors for school leaders in Australia (Riley, 2019). Bush (2016) has suggested that a global movement of decentralised education systems has contributed towards an increase in school management operations of principals. Western Australia can be seen to be part of the decentralised education movement with the introduction of the Independent Public School (IPS) initiative which was launched in 2009. In 2019, DoE claimed that there are 575 IPSs which encompasses 80 per cent of students and teachers within its system (Department of Education Western Australia, 2019b). Gobby (2013) suggests that the IPS initiative is partly centralised and partly decentralised by stating:

IPS involves a mix of local responsibility and central regulation. Schools selected for the program assume the authority to make decisions related to curriculum, student support, human resources, recruitment and selection, payroll, financial management and building and facilities, while centralisation
largely remains in such areas as policy and strategic direction, performance monitoring and measurement, and curriculum. (p. 19)

Based on this, the responsibility of school management tasks for IPS principals can be seen to be a significant part of their job. Furthermore, it seems that early career principals feel unprepared to complete these school management tasks and they feel frustrated and stressed because of this.

An increased proportion of school management has been reported to have effects beyond the need to learn new skills. Literature suggests that there is a need for a perspective shift from that of a teacher or deputy principal position. Wildy and Clarke (2008a) have said that “for many [early career principals] there is considerable adjustment required in becoming a principal, a process that involves relinquishing the comfort and confidence of a familiar teaching role and embracing the discomfort and uncertainty of the new role of principal” (p. 472). This suggestion is related to professional socialisation, whereby, early career principals are finding out what the principalship entails and what is required of them. The previous discussion on Australia’s apprenticeship model of principal preparation has established that principals come from classrooms. As professionals who are accustomed to having a direct impact on teaching and learning, a perspective shift is necessary when appointed to the principalship. This is due to the increased proportion of school management responsibilities (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). Highlighting this change in perspective Heffernan (2018) has stated that “It is not uncommon for principals to find that their plans for classroom observations, curriculum leadership, or working with students can be interrupted by administrative tasks that have no immediate influence on student outcomes” (p. 36).

Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) assert that the shift from teaching to school leadership can often result in bewilderment and feelings of being unqualified in addressing certain challenges. This perspective shift can be seen as a part of professional socialisation. It includes the challenges which come with learning how to complete unfamiliar administrative tasks and the adjustment to the removal from having a direct impact on teaching and learning.

School context is seen to be another challenge faced by early career principals. The context in which Western Australian early career principals operate in is
recognised in Wildy and Clarke’s (2008b) framework in their place element. This chapter has already reported that Western Australian early career principals are often leaders of high need schools. The very nature of them being high need presents significant challenges which are urgent and immediate. These challenges come in addition to those typically faced when appointed to a new role. Gurr et al. (2014) provide an example suggesting that in schools with a high proportion of Indigenous students, the influence of Indigenous culture has a great impact on what the school leader can do. Other challenges of high need schools include: poverty, social and emotional issues, low levels of academic attainment and non-traditional family structures (Medina et al., 2014). In their research on leaders of high need schools in the United States, Medina et al. (2014) reported that the focus of principals in these schools were community responsibility and teacher/staff cohesion. It can be seen that the contexts of high need schools present specific challenges. This reiterates the claim that context is an element which should be considered in leadership development (Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b).

In addition to the challenges associated with a lack of understanding of what the role entails, the increased amount of school management and the high need context, the interpersonal and social requirements of the principalship also present challenges to be overcome. As part of their people element, Wildy and Clarke (2008b) suggest that complex communication and collaboration between multiple stakeholders is a requirement of principals. As a result, dealing with people and the development of relationships is important. In their research on the efficacy of principal preparation in Western Australia, Clarke et al. (2011) asserted that managing poorly performing staff was one of the significant challenges their participants reported. The research’s findings have suggested that principal preparation should address the management of people and relationship development. Dor-Haim and Oplatka (2019) have linked the challenge of developing relationships to feelings of isolation in the role. They state “Difficulties in building relationships with their teachers have been found to be a major reason for novice principals’ loneliness” (Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2019, p. 4). Spillane and Lee (2014) have also reported that loneliness is a challenge facing early career principals and said that it goes with feelings of isolation which have not been present in previous roles within a school. Developing this understanding is
part of the process of professional socialisation. The development of relationships and getting to know staff and the social dynamics of the school is a part of organisational socialisation.

In addition to social isolation, physical isolation can present its own set of challenges for early career principals. This chapter has previously suggested that early career principals in Western Australia are likely to be appointed to a school located in the rural or remote regions of the state. This geographical location limits access to professional learning opportunities and local networks which would be more accessible in the metropolitan regions (Aravena, 2016; Gurr et al., 2014; Heffernan & Longmuir, 2019; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). Discussing the place aspect of their framework, Wildy and Clarke (2008b) state that:

Sensitivity to context is exceptionally important for leaders located in small, isolated, rural or remote settings. These communities tend to be imbued with particular societal and cultural values, some of which may appear unusual from the urban perspective that many principals will have acquired before appointment. (p. 730)

Isolation has been reported to have been a significant challenge facing early career principals in Western Australia and globally. Isolation has been related to social, geographical and professional isolation (Aravena, 2016; Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2019; Gurr et al., 2014; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b; Wildy et al., 2014). It can be seen how the place and context are a challenge to be faced by early career principals in Western Australia. The process of organisational socialisation, which involves learning about the local values and beliefs which impact the way the school runs, can be seen to be challenging and important.

This chapter has discussed several challenges faced by early career principals during their socialisation. As a result of these challenges, Wildy and Clarke (2008b) note the importance of resilience. It is recognised in the self aspect of their framework that dealing with the demands is a challenge in itself. In a later study, Clarke et al. (2011) reported that maintaining a work/life balance was seen to be one of the most stark challenges Western Australian early career principals were facing. Slater et al. (2018) suggest that in leadership development, support in caring for one’s self is “One of the most neglected areas” (p. 131). It is, therefore, concerning that Riley
(2019), in his research on the health and wellbeing of Australian school leaders, reports that since 2011, the ‘Department/Employer’ is the lowest source of support in this area. In addition, he states “Despite having many predictive attributes for high scores on health and wellbeing, collectively principals and deputy/assistant principals score below the general population average [and] All negative measures are higher than the general population” (Riley, 2019, p. 17). Having strategies to cope with the demands and consequent health effects is reported to be important and it is a significant challenge facing early career principals. Understanding this and developing these skills are part of professional socialisation.

The literature presented in this section has suggested that the principalship is highly complex. This complexity presents a range of challenges for early career principals. This section has discussed the challenges involved in understanding what the role is, learning how to do unfamiliar tasks, shifting perspective away from having a direct impact on teaching and learning, operating in a high need school, dealing with social and geographical isolation and coping throughout this process. These challenges do not seem to be unique to Western Australian early career principals. The literature suggests that these challenges are aligned with those of their global counterparts. The realisation of these challenges and the processes involved in overcoming them are a part of socialisation to the role. That is not to suggest that it is fully incumbent upon the principals to go through the process alone. Eller (2010) suggests that if early career principals are left to ‘figure it out on their own,’ it is likely they will fail. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the type of support mechanisms used in principal development.

2.4 Types of Support for Leadership Development

Over time, there has been a change in the terminology used when discussing professional learning. Timperley (2011a) has put forward a suggestion that the terms ‘professional development’ and ‘professional learning’ are differentiated through the aim of the program. For her, professional development alludes to altering the teaching practice to improve student success, whereas, professional learning deals with gaining knowledge which results in a challenge of assumptions, consequently allowing a transformative change in teaching practice. I have used the term ‘professional
learning,’ to mean the development of the learner to enhance their practice. For example, formal and informal mentoring experiences and online and face-to-face workshops have been considered as professional learning under my definition. In addition, due to the scope of this research, I have considered professional development and professional learning as the same.

This chapter has already discussed the role of preparation in principal socialisation. It has also suggested that early career principals often feel unprepared in various elements of the role. This is problematic given that preparation seeks to help equip early career principals with the knowledge, skills and understandings they will need upon appointment. The first support mechanism which principals can use to overcome their challenges is what is gained through their experience and preparation. If preparation does not provide the required knowledge, skills and understandings, early career principals must learn on the job. This type of approach to preparation has been suggested to have benefits (Boerema, 2011; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). However, when it comes to learning in this way, Clarke and Wildy (2013) state:

Learning on the job and sharing anecdotes with colleagues might well provide novice principals with a rich source of folk wisdom as well as a handy set of tricks of the trade. This kind of learning environment, however, cannot disguise the likelihood that preparedness to perform the principal’s role is inclined to be serendipitous. (p. 29)

They also claim that on the job learning “is no substitute for deep understanding of leadership concepts, a personal leadership philosophy or a thorough articulation of the links between theory and practice” (Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, p. 484). Furthermore, it is suggested that an on the job approach to leadership development leaves a lot up to chance (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b). Regardless, if on the job learning is required, early career principals are not equipped with all the necessary resources to help them overcome the challenges they face.

An additional support mechanism to support principals is professional learning. Professional learning is widely recognised as a key in leadership development and as a support mechanism for overcoming the challenges of the principalship (Aravena, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Slater et al., 2018; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b; Zepeda et al., 2014). Zepeda et al. (2014) have recognised the increasing complexity of
the role and report that professional learning is important in developing a principal’s skills in order to meet the demands of the job. They also report that traditional principal preparation methods have come under some criticism and been described as ineffective. They suggest that “As a result, professional development has been regarded as a remedy to the shortcomings of principal preparation and as a system of support for sitting leaders” (p. 298). It is evident that professional learning plays an important role in the socialisation of principals.

Mentoring, as a form of professional learning, is seen to be a major type of support for early career principals (Boerema, 2011; Bristol et al., 2014; Hayes, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). Mentors have been described as being senior and experienced past or current leaders, system level colleagues, network group members or instrumental people from the workplace (Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2018a; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). As a summary, Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) define mentoring as “a type of developmental relationship that shares some characteristics with other interpersonal relationships, developmental and otherwise” (p. 205). I have used this as my definition of mentoring. Subsequently, I have considered all the previously mentioned job roles as types of mentors. I have also accepted that mentoring can be formally and informally organised. Speaking of the value a mentorship can bring to the complex process of socialisation, Bristol et al. (2014) state:

Most principals learn about the principalship through informal professional networks, drawing on the knowledge and experiences of friends and family members who either held or are holding a similar position. These informal networks play a key part in role socialisation. They facilitate the shaping of role identity, construct agentic action, promote access to information and build professional capacity. (pp. 19-20)

Similarly, Sciarappa and Mason (2014) claim that mentorship is effective in overcoming the challenges presented by professional socialisation. Findings from their research “clarified the important function that mentors play in helping to demystify the role of the principal when working collaboratively and reflectively with protégés” (p. 53).

However, the relationship between protégé and mentor is seen to be pivotal in the effectiveness of the experience (Eller et al., 2014; Munson, 2017; Oplatka & Lapidot,
2018). On this point, Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) state that “the pairing process between mentors and protégés is highly critical for the success of the mentoring process, and effective mentoring requires that both sides be ready to engage in this teaching and learning activity” (p. 208). It can be seen that mentorship can take different forms and be a beneficial form of support for principals. It forms one type of professional learning which has been used to overcome some of the challenges which have been presented in the previous section. To contextualise this discussion, the remainder of this section shifts focus to DoE’s provision of professional learning.

DoE aligns itself with the literature by seeing professional learning as a mechanism to support and develop principals. In its strategic planning, DoE endorses AITSL’s Australian Professional Standards for Principals. These standards outline that principals must be “committed to their ongoing professional development” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015b, p. 16). In addition, the standards state that through “effective continuing professional learning [principals] … develop their leadership capacity” (p. 16). This suggests that AITSL, and consequently DoE, see professional learning as a tool to support principals and their effectiveness. To reinforce this, since 2015, DoE has published an annual document (Department of Education Western Australia, 2015a, 2016, 2017a, 2018b) outlining key focus points to improve progress towards its underpinning strategic plan. Each of these documents includes the priority of providing professional learning aimed at supporting the leadership development of DoE principals.

The Leadership Institute (The Institute) is a section of DoE which facilitates the provision of professional learning. The Institute was established in 2018 and its primary focus is the development of leadership within schools. Prior to the establishment of The Institute, DoE’s provision of professional learning was facilitated through the Institute for Professional Learning. In their Focus 2018 document (Department of Education Western Australia, 2017a), DoE state that the establishment of The Institute was one of their key goals, although, I have not been able to find any publicly available information explaining the abandonment of the Institute for Professional Learning. Regardless, The Institute claims to empower school leaders and their leadership teams in the aim of school improvement and teaching excellence. Furthermore, DoE see The Institute as a key component in the development of
effective leadership (Department of Education Western Australia, 2017a, 2018c). DoE’s Public School Leadership Strategy is said to be what underpins the programs and initiatives of The Institute. The Public School Leadership Strategy’s core beliefs include the following notions:

- Support for school leaders should not be ‘one size fits all’;
- Principals should have access to support provided by other principals;
- In situ support is most desirable;
- Professional and personal aspects of leadership need to be developed;
- Effective school leadership is evolutionary (Department of Education Western Australia, 2018e).

Through these core beliefs, The Institute state that they align their professional learning provision with adult learning principles (Department of Education Western Australia, 2019a).

Currently, The Institute provides a range of professional learning programs which intend to develop the knowledge and skills of principals. The programs of The Institute which are specifically aimed at school principals are organised into five categories. Each category is one key elements of DoE’s strategic plan:

- Improving school performance;
- Developing as a leader;
- Building capacity to lead highly effective teams;
- Developing a high care environment in schools;
- Enhancing system policy and process knowledge (Department of Education Western Australia, 2019d)

Appendix 1 presents the full array of professional learning opportunities accessible to school leaders through The Institute. It is evident that the programs address, to some extent at least, the four elements of Wildy and Clarke’s (2008b) principal preparation framework. Most of the programs are face-to-face and whilst the majority are a one- or two-day program, spaced and mentoring opportunities are also offered. The development of professional and personal knowledge and skills is evident
in The Institute’s offerings. This demonstrates that there is a focus on supporting principals’ professional socialisation. For example, Leading the Management of Critical incidents and Leading Classroom Observation and Feedback help build the skills and behaviours necessary for effective school leadership and management. There are also some examples of addressing the challenges associated with organisational socialisation such as Leading School Improvement in a Small School. It could also be suggested that the Newly Appointed Principal Program, which includes ongoing coaching and mentoring also may support early career principals in organisational socialisation. Appendix 2 presents an insight from 2017 into the professional learning programs provided by DoE’s previous professional learning division: The Institute for Professional Learning. A comparison between Appendices 1 and 2 shows a clear reduction of program offerings, particularly those of a one-day duration. It is also evident that there has been a significant reduction of programs addressing system policy and process.

Through The Institute, early career principals have access to professional learning which can be seen as a way to support, socialise and develop early career principals. This approach is supported by literature which suggests that professional learning plays a key role in successful school leadership and management. As an additional form of support, DoE’s leadership strategy encourages the use of a performance tool to inform them of areas of possible development. In collaboration with the Australian Council of Educational Leadership, DoE have created a ‘Principal Performance Improvement Tool’ which aims to uncover what an effective principal is and what they do (Department of Education Western Australia, 2018e; Masters, 2018). It is intended that principals use the tool for reflection purposes to gain an understanding of their level of effectiveness in the following areas:

- Leading moral purpose;
- Building productive relationships;
- Creating enabling conditions;
- Promoting improved teaching;
- Driving data-informed practice;
- Leading strategic change (Masters, 2018).
By using the tool in a reflection of one’s practice, it is intended that a principal can identify their level of effectiveness in several aspects of their role and use the information to guide their development focus.

It can be seen that there are multiple aspects, approaches to and types of support which aim to develop principals. It is also evident that DoE provide a variety of professional learning offerings to its principals. The next section presents a discussion on what type of support is effective in the development of effective school leaders and managers.

2.5 Effectively Supporting Leadership Development

Research in the field of professional learning for school leaders suggests that effective professional learning is important and often shares key elements. Links have been made which claim that school leaders who promote and participate in professional learning have a great influence on student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Helal & Coelli, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). Furthermore, effective school leaders place a high value on their own professional development and they participate in varied types of professional learning experiences such as peer observation, conferences, mentoring and networking (Stronge et al., 2008; Timperley, 2011b). Given that professional learning plays an important role in school success and leadership development, the next discusses what is reported about effective professional learning.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) conducted a three-year study in the US which examined the qualities, outcomes and contexts of a selected few high-quality programs. She discovered that many high-quality professional learning experiences for school leaders share common features:

Rather than offering an array of disparate and ever-changing, one-shot workshops, these systems organized a continuous learning program aimed at the development and implementation of specific professional practices required of instructional leaders. These programs had created their own leadership development strategies to foster a well-defined model of leadership and develop leaders’ skills to enact that model. These target practices typically included developing shared, schoolwide goals and
instructional practices; observing and providing feedback to teachers; planning professional development and other productive learning experiences for staff; using data to guide school improvement; and developing learning communities. (p. 183)

In addition, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) discussed three features which effective school leader professional learning programs utilise: a learning curriculum, leadership learning which was grounded in practice and collegial learning networks. The conditions of successful professional learning included program leaders, cross-sector collaborations and financial support. Davis et al. (2005) suggest that effective programs for developing successful principals must be set in genuine contexts and involve ongoing collaboration between schools.

The utilisation of effective principals as coaches and mentors can also be particularly beneficial for principals in the early stages of their career (Cardno & Youngs, 2013; Davis et al., 2005; Hayes, 2019; Oplatka, 2012; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Zepeda et al., 2014). Access to a mentor who aligns with the protégé’s beliefs and approach to leadership is said to be a key element of a beneficial experience. It is also reported that the development of a respectful and trusting relationship is important (Eller et al., 2014; Munson, 2017). As a result, seeking out a mentor is deemed to be more effective than having one assigned.

At the centre of effective principal professional learning are considerations for the individual learner, the learning process and context and the delivery. Merriam and Bierema (2014) suggest that these are key elements of how adults learn. Zepeda et al. (2014) agree and suggest that adult learning theory is important in principal professional learning because it is a type of adult learning. In their case study, Zepeda et al. (2014) concluded that “those who create professional development opportunities for principals should relate those experiences with the intention of covering the principles of adult learning theory” (P. 311). They suggest that the value of the principles of adult learning is such that their consideration should not be left up to chance. It is evident that adult learning theory holds great importance in effective professional learning and by consequence, leadership development.

This chapter has discussed the importance of professional learning in the development of early career principal. It has also suggested that that professional
learning can be beneficial in supporting early career principals facing the challenges encountered during the socialisation process. This section has presented the notion that there are elements of effective professional learning which are linked to adult learning theory. The Institute claim that adult learning principals underpin their provision of support. As a result, adult learning theory formed an important aspect of my research. The remainder of this section discusses adult learning theory and investigates the key principles underpinning it.

Early in the 20th century, it was thought that adults were not as good at learning as younger people. Scrutiny was put on research which concluded that adults were not good learners and subsequent research presented new ideas about child and adult learning. Prior to the 1970s, educators used psychological understandings of learning to guide their practice, however, this view evolved and research (Houle, 1972; Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1968) began to argue that adults and children learn differently (Merriam, 2001, 2017, 2018). The notion of adults and children learning differently formed the basis of much research in adult learning theory and has contributed greatly to the current understanding of adult learning.

Historically, there have been several philosophical perspectives of education which have affected the way which adult education has been viewed. Liberalism, progressivism, behaviourism and humanism have been four of these dominant philosophical views. Liberalism saw education as a way to implant knowledge, skills, values and a spiritual or religious understanding. Progressivism, however, sees the learner as the central part of the learning process. It delves deeper than wisdom and values the contribution the individual can have in developing the society of which they are a part. Behaviourism sees learning as a desirable change in behaviour. When the desirable change is observed, it is reinforced and undesired behaviour is ignored, therefore, extinguished. Humanism values the learner’s motivation and personal experiences which paint a unique learning experience for each individual. Educators who view education from the humanistic viewpoint see themselves as facilitators rather than deliverers (Johansen & McLean, 2006; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). These perspectives have played a part in the evolution of what is currently understood about adult learning theory.
The learner is central to adult learning theory. The learner’s needs, experiences, motivations and readiness to learn are some of the significant factors identified in adult learning (Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Merriam et al., 2007). Knowles (1968) introduced the concept of andragogy which is a pillar of adult learning theory (Merriam, 2001). Andragogy, the craft of helping adults learn, is based on the notion that adults and children learn in different ways. A conceptualisation of andragogy can be seen in Figure 2. Andragogy proposes that an adult’s learning experience is affected by their personal experiences, knowledge and internal motivation (Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Andragogy holds several foundational assumptions of the adult learner, who is described as:

- self-aware and can direct their own learning;
- having a bank of life experience;
- having learning needs which relate to change within social positions;
- being problem centred and wanting to apply their new knowledge;
- seeing the reason for learning as a necessity;

Andragogy, however, has come under some criticism. It has been suggested that it may simply be a set of good practices and that the principles of andragogy may not exclusively apply to adult learning. Furthermore, it has been argued that the underpinning notion that adults learn differently to children is unfounded (Darbyshire, 1993). Holton et al. (2009) have also pointed out that the field of adult learning theory is dominated by quantitative research methods yet the literature is mostly qualitative. Over time, Knowles reformed his theory of andragogy into a continuum between teacher-led and student-led learning, based on context (Merriam, 2001).
It is also argued that adults learn differently to children because adults are more mature and consequently, more self-directed. Self-directed learning (SDL), which is seen to be another pillar of adult learning, bases itself on the idea that adults take initiative in identifying their needs, articulating goals, choosing resources, implementing strategies and undertaking a process of evaluation (Knowles, 1975; Merriam, 2001, 2017, 2018). SDL is described as “learning that is widespread, that occurs as part of adults’ everyday life, and that is systematic yet does not depend on an instructor or a classroom” (Merriam, 2001, p. 8). There are three categories within SDL: the goals, the process and the learner. The goals of SDL are dependent on the philosophical position of the learner and educator. The process of SDL is to endorse the notion of transformational learning to enable adult learners to develop their ability to learn independently. The learner aspect of SDL aims to provide an educational experience which is liberating and which promotes social action. There has been
criticism of the balance of focus on different aspects within SDL. It has been suggested that SDL largely focuses on the individual and has too little focus on social action as a result of the learning (Merriam, 2001).

One of the goals of SDL and adult education is to question learners’ assumptions. Mezirow (1991) asserts that an adult education experience should aim for perspective transformation. He presents a learning model named ‘transformational learning’. Transformational learning challenges adults to critically reflect on their assumptions which underpin their knowledge (Hoggan, 2018). Keily et al. (2004) assert that transformational learning:

- Informs a learning process to guide adult educators in assisting individual adult learners to reflect critically on the validity of their presuppositions, engage in discourse with others to assess further the validity of assumptions, and derive a best tentative judgement through consensus. Therefore, finding space to engage in reflection and providing opportunities for group dialogue are essential to foster transformational learning. (p. 23)

When this process is undertaken, Mezirow (2000) claims that perspective transformation will increase the ability of adults to function as independent learners and enable adults to “realize their potential for becoming more liberated, socially responsible, and autonomous learners” (p. 30). Merriam (2017) states that transformative learning differs from andragogy and SDL, which are centred on the characteristics of the learner, by focusing on the “cognitive process of meaning making” (p. 25). She says that this is important in adult learning theory because adult learning takes into account the experiences of the learner and how they contribute to what is being learned.

Andragogy, SDL and transformative learning have significantly contributed to current perspectives of adult learning theory. Merriam and Bierema (2014) see andragogy, SDL and transformative learning as the foundations of adult learning theory and incorporate these concepts into their framework of adult learning theory. Their framework, depicted in Figure 3, distinguishes adult learning from child learning and consists of four lenses: the learner, learning process, context and educator. *The learner* is a major focus within adult learning theory and it uses the concepts of andragogy and SDL to deal with who the learner is and what motivates them. This
incorporates factors such as learner needs, timeliness and relevance of the learning and the goals, and individualised learning styles. The learning process lens aims to explain how adults learn and what is happening within them during the process. Culture is a major factor within this lens as it affects ways of learning and knowing. SDL and transformative learning are aspects embedded within the process lens which also deal with motivation and experience. Context guides the thinking and actions of everyone at all times, therefore, it also is an important aspect of adult learning theory. It is suggested that there are two dimensions of context: interactive and structural. The interactive dimension assumes that the learning takes place from the learner interacting with the environment (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Merriam et al. (2007) state:

Learning opportunities for adults are found in a variety of settings, from formal institutions to one’s home or place of employment. The importance of understanding this vast array of learning opportunities for adults is twofold. First, acknowledging prior knowledge and experiences of learners, wherever gained, is important to the practice of adult educators. Second, if more than just formal types of adult education are made visible, individual learners, even those without formal schooling, may be better able to recognize their abilities and skills as lifelong learners. (p. 51)

The above situation “requires an understanding of the relationship among the learner, the social surroundings, and the physical setting—the kind of learning that is situated in ‘real life’” (Keily et al., 2004, p. 24). Furthermore, there is a high value of experiential learning in adult learning, particularly within authentic, problem-based activities. The structural dimension of context takes into account how the learner and learning are affected by relationships of power within institutions and society. This could include gender, race, class and sexual orientation (Keily et al., 2004).

The role of the educator also forms an aspect of adult learning theory. The educational experience begins with the involvement of the educator. This involvement is an unavoidable part of adult education which greatly drives the learners’ experiences (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Figure 3 is an attempt to encapsulate what the literature says about adult learning theory and represents the theoretical position explained by Merriam and Bierema (2014).
This discussion has highlighted the foundational theories which have informed the contemporary understanding of adult learning theory. This has included the presentation of a framework for adult learning theory with four lenses which encompass the key principles of effective adult learning. This framework has played an important role in my research given that adult learning is central to socialisation and leadership development.

This chapter has explored the socialisation of early career principals. It began by presenting the different models of principal preparation and frameworks for successful principal preparation programs. It included a discussion on Australia’s apprenticeship model and gave an insight into the role of AITSL’s Australian Principal Professional Standards which DoE endorse. To develop a greater understanding of the socialisation process, this chapter has presented understandings developed through research of the challenges early career principals have faced in Western Australia and around the world. Additionally, this chapter has established that professional learning plays an important role in the socialisation and development of early career principals.

To develop effective school leaders and managers, DoE are responsible for and committed to support the development of public school principals in Western Australia. Furthermore, this chapter has made a case that effective professional learning considers the key elements of adult learning theory. The learner and their
context are central to adult learning theory. For this reason, the participants’ experiences in preparation for the principalship, the challenges they faced after appointment and the best support in overcoming these challenges have been central to understanding how Western Australian early career principals are socialised.

2.6 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The topic of my research was principal development. I was primarily concerned with how principals become effective leaders and managers. Greenfield (1985) states that “Socialization refers to the processes by which an individual learns the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to adequately perform a given social role” (p. 100). In agreement, Crow (2007) asserts that “Socialisation is the process of learning a new role” (p. 52). Because my research aimed to explore the experiences of early career principals, socialisation theory formed the theoretical framework of my study. Professional and organisational socialisation are the most common types of socialisation in the literature, therefore, it was through these lenses which I conducted my research (Brody et al., 2010; Crow, 2006; Davidson, 2017; Greenfield, 1985). As can be seen from the literature discussed in this chapter, socialisation theory has previously been used as a theoretical framework in the investigation of leadership development.

Drawing on the relevant literature and documents reviewed, Figure 4 is a visual representation of the socialisation of Western Australian early career principals in the process of leadership development. The literature suggests that professional socialisation begins during preparation for the role and continues beyond appointment into the initial year of the principalship. In addition, during this time, early career principals face the challenges which come with organisational socialisation. To develop early career principals and support them in the challenges they face, DoE are committed to and responsible for the provision of professional learning as a support mechanism. DoE claim that their professional learning is underpinned by adult learning theory and a comprehensive body of literature suggests that effective professional learning addresses the principles of adult learning theory. Central to adult learning theory is the learner’s needs, therefore, an alignment between the challenges which
early career principals face and DoE’s professional learning provision should be evident.

![Conceptual Framework](image)

Figure 4 Conceptual Framework: A visualisation of the socialisation process of early career principals in their leadership development.

Chapter 3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is organised into sections to address the study’s research design. Within this introduction, I establish the paradigm which has underpinned my research design. The next section introduces the underpinning methodology which is qualitative. Section 3.3 outlines the data collection method and the participant recruitment methods and demographic requirements. The Data Analysis section outlines the processes which took place to identify the themes from the data. Section 3.5 displays the processes which were implemented to ensure the quality of the data. Lastly, the ethical considerations of my research are reported in section 3.7 which included two approval processes and the participants’ input.

This study has investigated how early career principals in Western Australia are socialised to become effective school leaders and managers. Past research (see Clarke et al., 2007; Clarke et al., 2011; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b; Wildy et al., 2007) has provided significant findings on this topic and my research aimed to provide insight into the extent to which these findings are still relevant. To develop an understanding of the socialisation process, I sought to investigate the preparation, challenges and support mechanisms of my participants. Upon commencement of the research, I
identified the paradigm to which I aligned. The overarching epistemological standpoint which I chose was interpretivism. Interpretivism views the world as a construct of people’s interpretations and experiences through social interactions with each other and broader social structures (Ryan, 2018; Tuli, 2010). It has been reported that Interpretivism “prioritizes the understanding of human behaviour over the prediction and generalization of causes and effects” (Carminati, 2018, p. 2096). Therefore, my research seeks to evoke readers in drawing similarities and differences to their own contexts and experiences to make informed decisions about the transferability of my findings. For the reasons discussed above, interpretivism was deemed to be applicable to the research and the research questions.

3.2 Methodology

This research sought to investigate and understand how early career principals in Western Australian public schools are socialised to become effective school leaders and managers. It intended to gain an insight into the experiences and attached meanings of the participants. In alignment with interpretivism, the methodology underpinning this study was qualitative. Qualitative research is valuable in exploring people’s perceptions to make sense of their world and the meanings they attach to their experiences (Bell & Waters, 2014; Ryan, 2018; Willig, 2001). Qualitative research recognises that the world is constructed and interpreted through the experiences of people, therefore, it is necessary to engage in deep discussion with participants and value individual perspectives (Martella et al., 2013; Tuli, 2010). A qualitative approach was deemed to be appropriate to this study because I aimed to give voice to the individual participants and provide a deep understanding of the meaning they have assigned to their experiences during socialisation to the principalship. It was acknowledged that interpretation and experience are subjective and as a result, the different experiences and discussions with the participants was expected (Pring, 2004). The qualitative approach was suitable because it accepts and values the diversity in perspectives.
3.3 Method

The collection of the qualitative data for this research involved an individual, one-to-one semi-structured interview with each participant. Because I sought to understand the experiences of each participant, as early career principals, interviews were deemed to be appropriate. Interviews seek to gain an understanding of participants’ experiences through the deep interpretation of participant responses (Bell & Waters, 2014; Martella et al., 2013; Pring, 2004). Interviews require freedom in response and guidance to ensure all desired topics are discussed. Guided interviews fulfil these requirements through the use of a framework by the interviewer (Bell & Waters, 2014). Pring (2004), who agrees with this notion, states that if interviews are fully structured “there would be no scope for those interviewed to expound the full significance of their actions” (p. 39). Leavy (2014) asserts that semi-structured interviews are frequently used in qualitative research. In a comparison to fully structured interviews, she goes on to state that semi-structured interviews:

Can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee; as well, the interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset interview guide. (p. 286)

Due to the freedom enabled by semi-structured interviews, it was deemed that the use of this data collection method aligned with the epistemological paradigm and methodology of the study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the subsequent transcripts comprised the source of data for the research.

3.4 Participants

The focus of my research was the socialisation of early career principals. My research employed a purposive sampling technique to gather rich data pertaining to the participants’ specific contexts and experiences. Purposive sampling is the selection of a specific set of participants based on the important information which they can provide (Martella et al., 2013). It was deemed appropriate for the scope of my project to include a small group of participants all of whom met the criterion of being current early career principals employed by DoE. To gain an insight into the socialisation of my
participants, a group of seven Western Australian early career school principals were enlisted through a voluntary means. Recruitment of the participants initially involved approaching principal network groups and individual schools. The participants’ schools, which consisted of three primary, two K-10 and two K-12 schools, were all of below average ICSEA value and six out of seven participants were located in rural Western Australia. The participant cohort was comprised of three female and four male principals which is representative of the gender distribution of Australian principals (OECD, 2019). Early career principals were of particular interest because they are going through a formative stage in their career. In addition, it has been proposed that during the initial year, principals undergo professional socialisation and a major focus of their challenges and need for support is to transition efficiently and cope with the demands of the role (Preisler, 2015; Weindling, 1999). As a result, early career principals in their second to fifth year of appointment were of particular interest to my research. In order to gain current insights, the school leaders were required to be practising principals in the Western Australian public school system.

3.5 Data Analysis

Through this project, I sought to report on the socialisation experiences of the principals. To do this, I analysed the data and developed conceptual themes. After the interviews were conducted and the participants approved the transcripts, a process of coding began. Coding involves the analysis of participant’s response language to develop labels to categorise responses. It has been deemed to be of particular value in research which holds subjectivity to a high degree of importance as mine did (Miles et al., 2013). Coding was undertaken in two stages; the initial stage of coding was conducted quickly to develop initial impressions from the data. In alignment with my methodological positioning, I wanted the findings of my research to accurately represent my participants’ experiences rather than any preconceptions which I held. Corbin and Strauss (2015) describe this as open coding and state:

Open coding requires a brainstorming approach to analysis because, in the beginning, analysts want to open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them. Only after considering all possible meanings and
examining the context carefully is the researcher ready to put interpretive conceptual labels on the data. (p. 195)

As suggested by Huberman and Miles (2002), the second stage of coding was used to test the initial impressions and start conceptually labelling the data. Miles et al. (2013) describe this technique of data analysis as first and second cycle coding, they state that “First Cycle coding is a way to initially summarize segments of data ... [Second Cycle] is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes or constructs” (p. 86). Coding allowed for the formulation of themes and topics which emerged through data collection. These themes were used to contribute towards the understanding of participants’ experiences.

3.6 Quality of Data

The qualitative methodology of my research intended to value participants’ perspectives and subjectivity to maintain credibility. To uphold my credibility, several processes were conducted throughout the study. Firstly, reflexivity was an important process where I underwent constant reflection of my own position within the research. Reflexivity involves a critical self-evaluation by the researcher which assesses the impact of their beliefs, biases and experiences which help in assisting credibility of the study (Berger, 2015; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I acknowledged that my positionality as a qualified teacher with low-level school leadership experience did not exist independently to the processes undertaken throughout this research. As suggested by Palaganas et al. (2017), my subjectivity was seen as “a dialogue – challenging perspectives and assumptions both about the social world and of the researcher him/herself ... [which] enriches the research process and its outcomes” (p.427). To ensure that the data were of high quality and that the participants were confident that their experiences had been accurately recorded, the participants were provided with full interview transcripts which were all formally approved.

To further strengthen credibility, peer debriefing with university supervisors was used to ensure that I had accurately interpreted the data. The process of peer debriefing involved semi-regular meetings and ongoing feedback. Piloting and peer debriefing have previously been reported to be an effective strategy to ensure credibility (Bell & Waters, 2014; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This was conducted in the
form of interview question piloting, constant reviews and feedback sessions with research supervisors. All recommended feedback was implemented accordingly.

3.7 Ethics

This research first underwent ethics approval through Edith Cowan University in August 2017 (18439). Following that, I sought ethics approval through DoE which was granted in December 2017 (D17/0527197). This marked the commencement of my study. Prior to the data collection, I had no working relationship with any of the research participants. Given my positionality, I had no power relationship over them which may have influenced their participation. The participants, who were all experienced professionals, were enlisted on a voluntary basis, whereby, their input did not result in any positive or negative effects upon them. Furthermore, the participants were guaranteed and provided full anonymity and confidentiality. Prior to their involvement in the research, all participants were required and proceeded to give informed consent. It was also established that they had the choice to withdraw their participation at any stage of the process.

My concluding recommendations of this project are a direct result of its findings. The aim of the project was to investigate and understand the experiences of the participants. Since prior to the data collection phase beginning, I have not been employed by DoE nor have I had anything to gain from the provision of support by The Institute. Whilst I acknowledge my positionality within this project, the recommendations are founded in my interpretation of the participants’ experiences.

This chapter has outlined the design of my research. It stated the underpinning epistemological standpoint of interpretivism and the qualitative methodology. Section 3.3 introduced and justified the use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool and the following section discussed my use of purposive sampling in forming a participant cohort. The demographic requirements and data analysis process were also addressed. This chapter concluded by outlining the process which were undertaken to ensure the data were of high quality and the ethical requirements of the project. The next chapter reports the research’s findings.
Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the data. My research aimed to explore the socialisation of early career principals. To answer my central research question, I posed three guiding research questions which were designed to reflect three important elements of principal socialisation: principal preparation, challenges to be overcome and support mechanisms. Through analysis of the data, it was evident that the participants saw these elements as major aspects of their socialisation experiences. As a result, the organisation of this chapter reflects the ordering of the guiding research questions. Firstly, section 4.2 details the formative experiences of the participants in the lead-up to becoming principals and gives a brief insight into their school contexts. This information contextualises the participants’ experiences and provides insight into the challenges they faced upon appointment. The following section presents the participants’ initial feelings upon appointment to the role. Section 4.4 addresses the challenges which were reported by the participants. The sub-sections represent the three conceptual themes which were identified throughout the data analysis process. The themes of feeling unprepared, unqualified and isolated are organised to reflect the chronological experiences reported by the participants. Section 4.5 presents the findings concerning the support mechanisms discussed by the participants. It consists of three theme-based sub-sections which are organised in the same way as the preceding section. Lastly, Section 4.6 presents the participants’ perception of the most beneficial support and factors which they consider when choosing their professional learning.

4.2 Formative Experience

An important part of socialisation for the principalship is preparation (Bush, 2018a; Davidson, 2017; Devi & Fernandes, 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand the backgrounds of the participants as Australia’s principal preparation method is founded on school experience. The participants’ pathways in becoming a principal were similar. All participants had spent several years in the classroom as a teacher and progressed through various formal school leadership positions which
included at least two years as deputy principal. Participant 7 spoke of their journey into the principalship by stating:

I took the traditional route. I did my degree and came to WA in the early 90s and got into classroom teaching straight away. I love classroom teaching ... All up, I spent 15-16 years in the classroom but I did have a couple of stints during that time as acting deputy principal positions for about 2 of those years. I did some acting principal roles [then] ... I won my substantive principal position. (P.7.1)

Going from teacher to formal school leadership positions to principal was seen to be the typical career pathway and this progression was true of the whole participant cohort. Upon appointment, the experiences they gained through being a teacher and deputy principal served as the major form of preparation for their principalship.

In addition to their pre-principal experience, the participants’ school contexts shared various similarities. The participants’ school contexts are important to understand because of the impact they have on a principal’s work (Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b). Six of the participants’ schools were located in rural Western Australia. This included schools from the Wheatbelt, Goldfields-Esperance, Mid West and Pilbara regions. One of the schools was located in metropolitan Perth. See Figure 5 for a map of the regions of Western Australia.
An additional common factor among the participants’ schools was the below average ICSEA value. An average ICSEA value is 1000 and the range of ICSEA values of the participants’ school was between 855 and 989. The location and ICSEA value form crucial elements of the school context in which the participants conduct their day-to-day operations. Context plays an important part in the participants’ socialisation because it affects the challenges principals face and the subsequent support they require. A summary of contextual information and pre-appointment experience of each participant and their school is presented in Table 2.
Table 2 Information of the participants’ school context and the participants’ pre-principal experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>School Location</th>
<th>ICSEA (2018)</th>
<th>Deputy experience (years)</th>
<th>Acting principal experience (years)</th>
<th>Principal Experience (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Primary School (IPS)</td>
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<td>1.25</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>K-12 (IPS)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Rural</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>Rural</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
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<td>855</td>
<td>2</td>
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4.3 Initial Appointment

The data suggested that upon appointment, the participants came to a realisation that the job was not what they had expected. This misunderstanding was interesting given the considerable experience each participant had as a teacher and deputy principal. Participant 7 summarised the evident theme of surprise upon appointment through a discussion on their expected career trajectory:

You just see it as your career path. If you have a successful career in education, that’s how I saw it going. I’d teach for so long, I’d be a deputy for so long and if I got to be a principal, that’s fantastic to finish off my career. But it is very different and it is such a different job and it’s ... I don’t know how to explain it other than it is just so different from what I expected and it’s something that I’m still getting my head around. (P.7.2)

Participant 6 agreed and added that “There is not enough done prior to stepping into the role for principals to really, really have insight into the role” (P.6.1). When asked
what the possible repercussions may be from not having a good understanding of the role before appointment, Participant 7 said:

I’ve spoken to principals who say that they wish they hadn’t done it. They’re at the point where they’re [saying] ‘Well, I didn’t know that this is what it was, if I had my chance again, I’d stay in the classroom or as a deputy’. (P.7.6)

It is apparent that the principalship was not what the participants expected and initially, their professional socialisation involved a necessary adjustment of preconceptions. Furthermore, it was suggested that this may lead to principals wanting to quit their job. In addition to this aspect of professional socialisation, the participants described that they were faced with a set of challenges which emerged in three themes of feeling unprepared, unqualified and isolated. The next two sections of this chapter have been structured to reflect these themes.

4.4 Challenges

To gain an understanding of the socialisation of the participants, I sought to investigate the challenges they faced in the role. The participants all had unique experiences as early career principals. However, when discussing the challenges they faced, three common themes became evident. The data suggested that they felt unprepared, unqualified and isolated. This section contains three sub-sections which put forward the findings from the participants’ discussions concerning these themes.

4.4.1 Unprepared

According to the participants, an increase in the managerial load of the principalship came with the responsibility of being accountable for various compliance tasks. The participants reported compliance tasks as tasks which they are mandated to do or tasks to enable them to be compliant with DoE regulations. Participant 7 discussed some of the compliance tasks and the effect they have had on their everyday operations:

It becomes a job where you are enveloped in paper half of the time! You’re on the computer getting these things in and done on the due dates. There’re school reports which have to be written and submitted. And all of your online
stuff which has to be updated all of the time so the Department know what you’re doing and the public can have a look and that sort of thing. (P.7.2)

Participant 7 expressed frustration in their discussion of compliance tasks. Compliance tasks were described by Participant 4 who also expressed frustration by saying:

I don’t think that anyone really prepares you for how much bureaucracy and the many mind-numbing managerial tasks that you have to plough your way through on a daily basis. And how much time you feel is wasted doing stuff that is not directly linked to improving student outcomes. I think that was a big learning curve for me and dealing with the frustration that comes around that. On any given day, you have got a couple of surveys that you have got to do to give to the Department or you have got paperwork or reports which you have to fill out to be accountable for an accident that happened or ... there is just always some sort of arse-covering that you have got to do to be compliant. (P.4.1)

Participant 4’s comments reflected the feelings of all the participants who reported that compliance tasks were a significant proportion of their workload. They felt unprepared and frustrated by this.

Critical incident management emerged as an element exclusive to the principalship which the majority of the participants felt unprepared to deal with. Situations involving extreme violence or bullying are examples of critical incidents. The process of managing these incidents may require levels of confidentiality and coordination with external organisations. The participants noted the exclusivity of the management of critical incidents to principals. Participant 6 highlighted this by saying:

There’s a lot which goes on behind the scenes with child protection and things like that which teachers wouldn’t be aware of. Critical incident management and things like that. They might see the actual incident but they don’t know how you work with regional office and external agencies to try and address the issues so they don’t happen again. (P.6.2)

Participant 3 summed up the participants’ feelings of unpreparedness in dealing with critical incidents by stating:
The aspects of my job that I have felt under resourced or not given the correct guidance in have been along the lines of safety in schools. The work around critical incidents and violent situations. (P.3.6)

This type of work is seen to be the responsibility of the principal and it was deemed that the work surrounding these incidents was mostly left up to the principal. Consequently, the participants felt unprepared to deal with this element of their job.

Budgeting and dealing with financial tasks were also discussed by six participants as another thing they felt unprepared for. It was reported that part of being a principal involves making important budgeting decisions. This included allocation of resources and being responsible for financial compliance tasks such as financial reports for transparency and accountability. Participant 4 discussed the immediate feeling of unpreparedness and urgency in the upskilling they went through:

I don’t think that you come in expecting to know everything. If you get into the job you have generally demonstrated to some extent that you have got some form of initiative. But, in terms of not knowing something important ... that was the finance side of things. That role is absolutely exclusive to the principals and the MCS [Manager Corporate Service]. Deputies do not really have much to do with that process in many schools. I came in and had to learn that from scratch. It is quite a complex system. It was definitely something that I had to learn quickly and try to understand how it works. (P.4.2)

Participant 3 agreed about the exclusivity of these tasks and additionally highlighted how the traditional pathway to principalship left them unprepared:

It would be safe to say that the majority of people who come into principal roles are teachers. I think that is a good thing because that’s the business of the school. Firstly, me coming into the principal role I felt really inadequately prepared to deal with the business side of the job. That’s more to do with my lack of knowledge of finance and my lack of knowledge to do with system-based structures and budgets and those things. (P.3.1)

These discussions demonstrate that the lack of exposure to finance and budgeting tasks prior to the principalship left the participants feeling unprepared. This was suggested to originate from the exclusivity of these tasks and lack of relevance to teaching and learning which their previous positions were mainly concerned with.
The unpreparedness in school management led to a realisation of ultimate responsibility. This presented another challenge for the participants. It was the management of critical incidents which triggered several participants to discuss their shock in realisation of ultimate responsibility, although, it was evident that this challenge extended far beyond administrative work. Participant 6 believed that school responsibility for deputy principals and principals were vastly different. They said: “I think that is the biggest shift from a deputy to a principal leadership position. It is the acknowledgement that you are responsible, you are the end of the line” (P.6.2). Participant 4 used the same phrase in expressing the immense pressure of responsibility they felt as school principal:

At the end of the day, you’re the end of the line. If the school is failing or a teacher has done the wrong thing or if a kid has set the school on fire, you are essentially the end of the line for being accountable to all of that. If a kid is so troubled that they have burnt the school down, what has the school done in the past to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of its students to prevent such a thing from happening? Should we have provided extra counselling for that kid? Something that you think is completely removed from a school’s responsibility generally is traced back to the school’s and principal’s responsibility. We are the punching bags for all of the world’s problems and also, we are the proposed solution. (P.4.2)

Being unprepared in the administrative aspects of principalship was demonstrated to be part of an associated challenge of assuming ultimate responsibility.

This sub-section has discussed the unpreparedness as one of the major challenges faced by the participants. It has demonstrated that school management tasks including the management of critical incidents and finance related work was the source of their feeling of unpreparedness. Assuming ultimate responsibility for these tasks was also established as an associated challenge.

4.4.2 Unqualified

This sub-section continues to report on the challenges faced by the participants but changes focus to their reported feelings of being unqualified.
Having spent many years in classrooms, where teaching and learning happens directly, the participants were all of the same belief that teaching and learning was their core purpose. Participant 3 discussed the how managerial work indirectly relates to their core purpose by saying:

I’ve always considered my role, number one, to be a leader of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning, to me, is the number one aspect of what schools are about. All of my decisions around finance, resourcing and student welfare ... I want to link that to what we are doing in leading teaching and learning at the school. (P.3.3)

In the same vein, Participant 7 simply said ”Teaching and learning is ... when it all boils down, that is what it is all about” (P.7.1). There was a consensus among all of the participants that their core purpose was teaching and learning. The participants expressed that, as teachers, this is what they had been qualified to do and their previous roles had given them experience to feel comfortable in this area. However, a shift in everyday work as a principal provided a significant challenge.

The participants expressed that one of the unexpected elements of their new position was the increased proportion of managerial tasks. This came at the detriment of time spent focusing on teaching and learning and it left them feeling unqualified. Classroom teachers are at the forefront of teaching and learning and deputy principals also operate quite closely with teaching and learning programs. However, the increased managerial role of the principal sees them indirectly operating with teaching and learning. Participant 6 detailed their struggle with balancing the workload between school leadership and school management in the following interview excerpt:

Teaching and learning is in the space of ‘leadership’. Sometimes the management side of things can take you away from that task. It’s about making sure that I am an instructional leader and that there is time to be in classrooms and balance that. (P.6.6)

When asked if that was challenging, Participant 6 indicated:

Massively. Especially in my first year of principalship – that awareness that I cannot be in classrooms as much as I was as a deputy but making sure that I build the people that can be in there. I still make sure that I do a lot of informal walk-throughs so I still have my finger on the pulse around what is
Participant 2 also discussed the challenge of shifting their perspective away from that of a teacher. They stated “[I had to] start aligning my thinking to being a CEO, not being a teacher” and went on to say “the reality is that we [principals] are all teachers, we all have a teaching degree. I don’t have any different degree or training compared to anybody else” (P.2.3). It can be seen that the necessary shift in thinking as reported by Participant 2 left them feeling unqualified on the basis that their qualifications were to be a teacher not a principal. Participant 1’s comments closely reflected this notion of not being qualified. They said “we’re trained to be teachers, we’re not trained to be principals” (P.1.6). The expertise and experience which the participants had built in their journey to the principalship did not closely align with the every-day tasks of the role. This left the participants feeling unqualified.

In their discussions, the participants clearly suggested that the principalship is multi-faceted and somewhat removed from their experience as a teacher which provided a challenge. While battling with the unfamiliar management aspects of the principalship, the participants found it challenging to maintain an equal focus on teaching and learning. The principals presented a clear picture of their role consisting of two aspects: leadership and management. They identified that their core purpose, teaching and learning, is part of ‘leadership’ yet much of their day-to-day tasks can be categorised as ‘management’. Participant 4 discussed the challenge they faced in balancing the aspects of their role and said:

There is an absolute tension between managing the school, almost like you’re running a business, to the visionary … school improvement and making it better for the benefit of the kids and their families. They are very different roles which are always competing. (P.4.1)

Participant 1 went a step further and described the effect of the competition between management and school leadership:

We fork so much into management a lot of the time and leadership goes by the wayside. We invest a lot in management … you’ve got to submit reports, tick boxes and meet all of the compliance stuff and make sure that everyone
is safe and doing their jobs ... All of this stuff is the stuff that takes you away from sitting down, actually looking at strategic plans and asking, ‘What can I do as a leader in this school to make sure we stay on track in the long-term?’.

(P.1.5)

Ensuring that school management did not supersede school leadership was an evident challenge for the participants. This was made particularly important due to their core purpose being heavily related to school leadership.

This sub-section has presented the findings which suggest that the participants felt unqualified. As new principals, the participants were faced with the challenge of an increase in managerial roles which they felt inexperienced in and unqualified to do. This came at the same time as having to ensure that they did not neglect their core purpose of teaching and learning.

4.4.3 Isolated

Section 4.4 has put forward the findings from the data which suggests that the participants felt unprepared and unqualified. This sub-section presents the third theme of isolation. The isolation came from a lack of insight of their context and geographical location.

The participants expressed that an unfamiliarity of their local context led to feelings of isolation. All six rural participants faced relocation to a new area on appointment and the metropolitan participant transferred to a significantly different school context. Due to this, the participants cited not having a deep understanding of their school’s context which left them feeling isolated and as a result, unprepared to enact appropriate school leadership. All of the participants discussed their organisation socialisation which included learning about the dynamics between school and community and student behaviour. Participant 3 recalled a formal DoE review happening less than 6 months into their principalship which rapidly brought on their need for organisational socialisation. They said:

I came in and the school was not very well prepared for that review. I had to learn very quickly how to get the school ready for that process. In doing that, it enabled me to learn very quickly about every aspect of the school and while it was very time consuming and draining to go through it, I came out of it in
very clear understanding of what the school is about and how it operates. It was a fantastic process. (P.3.2)

Participant 3’s organisational socialisation, which was urgently brought on by the impending review, was said to have taken a lot of effort and time but was beneficial. Participant 6 detailed how a significant change in school context presented a challenging situation upon appointment. In reflection, they said:

I don’t think I appreciated the time it took me to get back into a school and learn the context deeply and the community dynamics which impact the school. If I had just come from my previous job and applied the same leadership approaches that I was using there, I probably wouldn’t have been as successful here. I had to spend time adapting my practice to my context. I had a good background in schools like my current one when I worked up north. Every school is different but I learnt to deal with families from low socioeconomic areas and things like that. Being at my previous school, I think that I became a bit desensitised to those types of issues. I moved from an environment with overly invested parents and community members to an environment where I am really, really trying to engage people in education. (P.6.2)

Being an outsider to the school isolated the participants and left them unprepared to enact school leadership in their given contexts. The participants also indicated that this isolation provided a challenge in developing relationships.

Every participant indicated that building relationships with and engaging the community were key aspects of their roles. Five participants reported that developing these kinds of relationships was seen to be a key challenge. When discussing relationship building as a principal, Participant 2 expressed their feeling of isolation by saying “[As a principal,] You get dark listed and the dynamics significantly change and no one tells you that” (P.2.7). Reiterating the importance of relationship building, the participants repeatedly suggested that it was a key to being successful and yet it was challenging due to being the boss and being an outsider to the community. After discussing the important processes of organisational socialisation as an early career principal, Participant 3 discussed what they thought would be the most important piece of support for early career principals:
Getting staff on the same page, how to lead the building of really effective relationships in your school. How do you go about building trust? I think new principals, coming into schools, quite often are looked at quite sceptically by staff. So, in order to deal with that, what are the methods which you are going to put in place to build trust that you are there to support them and the school? (P.3.6)

Participant 3 saw the building of relationships as a key element in their work and thought that it should be reflected in the support early career principals are provided with.

Through the experience of feeling isolated as an outsider to the community, the participants suggested that developing relationships was a key part of the role, a significant challenge and something which they felt they needed support in. In addition to relationship building, developing a link between the school and community was also seen to be a priority. This was also reported as being a major challenge of the role. When asked what they did as a principal, developing community links was one of the first things they mentioned. They were also of the opinion that being the principal of a rural school made this element of their principalship more important. In a discussion of their greatest challenges, Participant 7 said:

It’s challenging to get the school to run as smooth as possible and to have the whole school community and wider community on board. And building those partnerships and that culture where the school culture becomes ingrained and the community know about it as well. (P.7.3)

Developing a link between school and community was deemed to be an important aspect of the principalship and something which provided a great challenge.

Participant 6 was of the same opinion and said that teaching and learning is a substantial part of their role as well as “community engagement ... because of our demographic, being culturally responsive is another big area” (P.6.1). Participant 6, who had previously worked as an associate principal in a school of high educational advantage, believed that the stark difference in context of their new school meant they had to invest time and effort in cultural awareness and integration. Being an outsider to their new school community left the participants in a position where they felt isolated. The elements of organisational socialisation which emerged from the
interviews were the development of relationships and understanding of the new context. They believed that this was important and challenging.

Exclusive tasks and responsibilities of school principals were deemed to be isolating which was challenging for the participants. The shift away from direct impact on teaching and learning and an increase in managerial tasks left the principals feeling isolated in their role. Participant 6 highlighted the isolation of school principals by discussing their prior perspective of the principalship by saying “there was a level of unawareness when I was an associate principal about exactly what my principal did” (P.6.1). Having felt isolation as a principal, Participant 3 found the need to be highly consultative and have regular meetings with their staff to avoid it. They stated:

You could quite easily be isolated in the role with everything which you need to do. If you don’t consult and keep bringing people with you, it can result in you getting bogged down individually. (P.3.3)

The nature of the role, responsibilities and day-to-day tasks of a principal provided a situation which the participants found isolating within their workplace.

A major element to the theme of isolation which the participants reported came from their geographic location. As previously mentioned in this chapter, six out of seven participants’ schools were located in rural Western Australia. This factor of isolation was brought up by those participants mainly due to the effect which it had on access to professional learning. Participant 7 discussed how their rural location affected their own and their staff’s professional learning opportunities:

Professional learning, if it is off site, they’re [staff] off site for two to three days. And you’re budgeting things as well. It costs you a lot to send people with flights and accommodation, we also don’t have access to relief teachers either. (P.7.5)

Participant 1 seconded that notion and said “I would certainly be going to a lot more [professional learning] but when you factor in the cost of travel and accommodation it is quite an expense” (P.1.5). It was evident that the participants’ physical location had an impact on the isolation they felt. This section has also shown that an unfamiliarity of school context and being the boss also resulted in feelings of isolation.
4.5 Supports

The previous section of this chapter presented the findings in relation to the participants’ challenges. In a change of focus, this section reports on the support mechanisms accessed by the participants. It has been organised into three sections which reflect the three themes of feeling unprepared, unqualified and isolated.

The participants revealed a range of PL providers which they utilise, however, the majority of professional learning which the participants undertook was provided through DoE. DoE provide principals with professional learning opportunities through the Leadership Institute which offers opportunities for aspiring, new, accomplished and expert principals. When asked where they go for professional learning Participant 3 simply stated:

The Institute for Professional Learning [now known as the Leadership Institute] which is linked to the Education Department ... PL which has been recommended and suggested to me through my district director have all been provided through the Education Department. (P.3.5)

DoE, through The Institute, were said to have been the main professional learning provider of the participants. This suggests that DoE play an important role in the socialisation and development of early career principals in Western Australia. Given this, it was necessary to explore the participants’ experiences in DoE’s provision of professional learning.

4.5.1 Unprepared

This sub-section presents the support mechanisms used by the participants in overcoming the challenge of feeling unprepared. It highlights a set of mandatory online modules and a reliance on their colleagues.

Unpreparedness lead to the need for on the job learning to address the challenges the participants reportedly faced. Three principals outlined that they used their ability to learn on the job as a support mechanism to overcome the challenges they experienced. Speaking of the difference between their preconception of the role and the eventual reality, Participant 3 said “In many ways you apply for positions and you apply for what you think needs to be done in that role. When you get in that role, it is all learning on the job” (P.3.1). Participant 5 also believed that learning on the job...
was a large part of socialisation. In an effort to reduce the amount of on the job learning for early career principals, Participant 5 discussed principal preparation. They stated that “[DoE] should provide opportunities to formally train them [aspiring principals]. I don’t know what or how but I think they should” (P.5.7). Participant 5 was critical of the lack of preparation they had for their principalship. Three other participants cited a necessity for on the job learning which came from their perceived unpreparedness for the role. Their capacity to learn and adapt on the job acted as a support mechanism to overcome the challenges they encountered.

Having felt unprepared in certain compliance aspects of the principalship, the participants suggested that their professional learning needs changed with experience. The participants discussed how their role and daily operations changed as a principal and how learning to follow processes and procedures affected their learning needs. Participant 3 was asked if their learning needs had changed over time and they responded by saying “Yeah, I would say they have. There’s certain aspects that I felt that I needed to do initially that I wouldn’t feel like I’d have to do now” (P.3.4). Participant 2 elaborated and discussed a common theme which was the need of support in compliance tasks at initial stages of principalship. They said:

If I reflected back to my first 1.5 years as a principal, then most of my professional learning was compliance training ... Now, down the track, it is more directed by me and me seeking out how to fill a gap that I have identified. (P.2.6)

This was reaffirmed by Participant 4 who said “Your first year is all about just learning the routines and the expectations that the Department [DoE] have of you such as what policies, surveys and reports you have to do – the compliance side of things” (P.4.3). Participants 5 and 6 both discussed their need for support in compliance tasks and cited that to overcome the challenge of unpreparedness, they individually sought help from DoE’s Finance Department at the beginning stages of their initial year of principalship. It was apparent that upon appointment, support in compliance tasks was deemed to be valuable because the participants felt unprepared in this area.

As a form of professional learning, DoE provided a set of online modules for early career principals. These modules were described as mandatory and mainly school management focused. Five of the participants recalled the set of modules suggesting
they covered important content, yet, their effectiveness was questioned. Participant 5 stated that by completing the modules “I picked up the regulatory stuff. All the regulations of what you should and should not be doing. That was good” (P.5.3). Participant 7 agreed and stated they “found the modules very valuable to do” (P.7.4). Conversely, Participants 2 and 6 were not as enthusiastic about the modules. Participant 2 thought that they were important but “not helpful at all” (P.2.5) and when Participant 6 was asked about the online modules’ effectiveness, they stated that they did not complete all of them. Participant 6 said:

I have made them a very low priority because I really feel like it is a compliance thing. It’s a one-shot learning opportunity, you sit down, do the module for an hour and the expectation is that you are going to manage risks at a whole school level. So, I would actively seek other professional learning outside of that if I wanted to build my knowledge of risk and financial management. (P.6.4)

The content within the online modules was overall deemed to be important in preparing the new principals for tasks that they were accountable for. Some of the participants viewed the online modules as beneficial whilst others did not believe they were worth the time spent doing them.

To help overcome their inexperience and unpreparedness in budgeting and finance and to supplement the mandated online modules, the participants relied heavily on support provided through their school’s Manager Corporate Service (MCS). Each of the participant’s schools had an MCS which was reported to be an administrative role with a particular speciality in the management of finance and budgets. The participants elaborated on how they were able to overcome the challenge of being unprepared in budgeting and financing. Participant 7 expressed a reliance in the finance aspect of the job by saying:

I’m lucky that I’ve got a fantastic Manager of Corporate Services ... She does the nuts and bolts of it all and I oversee and meet with her and that sort of thing. I would struggle if I went into a school with not such a competent MCS where I’d have to do that sort of stuff. (P.7.5)

Participant 3 also spoke highly of the support provided by their MCS, “Of everything which I know about finance ... 90% [has come] from my MCS” (P.3.2). Similarly,
Participant 4 implied their unpreparedness in finance and reliance on their Manager Corporate Service by saying:

I rely on my MCS quite a bit and put a lot of trust into her and that she is not robbing the school blind. I wouldn’t have had the skills to necessarily identify that early in my career as a principal. (P.4.2)

The participants demonstrated a high level of dependence on their MCS to ensure particular compliance responsibilities were met as well as support in developing themselves in the area of finance. This and the online modules previously mentioned in this subsection, helped the participants overcome the challenge of feeling unprepared.

4.5.2 Unqualified

As established in the sub-section section 4.4.2, feeling unqualified within their role was a challenge for the participants. This sub-section presents the support mechanisms which helped the participants address this challenge.

Postgraduate university study emerged as a major form of professional learning which the participants regarded as a highly valuable experience. Four of the participants had undergone postgraduate study directly involved with their work as a principal. Three of these participants had completed a master’s degree, focused on educational leadership, which was reported to focus on topics such as change management and instructional leadership. When asked about the professional learning opportunities which were available when they initially became a principal, Participant 3’s master’s study was the first thing they identified, saying:

I shifted my master’s study. I was focusing on literacy but I changed focus to Master of Education (Educational Leadership) through coursework. Because I was on a mad drive to learn as much as I could as quickly as possible to ensure there wasn’t something that I was not doing. (P.2.5)

Participant 6 also recounted the value of their master’s study and the opportunities which were provided through this experience. They discussed a study tour component which focused on school leadership:

It was brilliant. We were exposed to a range of learning opportunities over there including school visits to primary and secondary schools, meeting with
Ofsted, going to different universities and partner colleges. It was a very planned week-long experience. (P.6.4)

As professional learning, the principals chose to engage in postgraduate study focused on school leadership. This study was deemed to be beneficial in their development because of the focus on school leadership.

An additional support mechanism identified by the participants to help in their transition to principalship was their Regional Executive Director. Regional Executive Directors act as the participants’ direct line managers with responsibilities for tasks such as performance management, recommending appropriate professional learning opportunities as well as being responsible for school support services (Department of Education Western Australia, 2018a, 2019c). Participant 5 was full of praise for the support they had received from their Regional Executive Director in their first 12 months as principal. When asked about the amount of contact which they had with their Regional Executive Director, they said:

Oh yeah. Mine is a good one. I have had two lots of performance management in the 12 months. He visits, he goes through – I produce evidence of what we have been doing and talk about why we are doing it, how it has come about and that sort of stuff. He gave me feedback on that and then any recommendations which he might have. For example, there is some sort of opportunity coming up for school leaders and he asked me recently if I would be interested in putting my name forward. (P.5.5)

The support provided through the Regional Executive Director was also commented on by Participant 2 who gave insight into the support they were provided as a new principal. Upon the identification of a particular school need, Participant 2 shared their thoughts:

I don’t really know what to do, therefore, it is a current need for my professional learning and that is where I took up the growth coaching. I went back to my Regional Executive Director and they identified a principal of another school which was doing some good things in this area and I was able to bring those back to my context. (P.2.6)

In contrast, Participant 6 felt let down by the support provided by their Regional Executive Director. Participant 6 bluntly stated: “I am not formally line managed. No
one asks for my leadership action plan. Apart from at a system level, some level of financial audit. There’s no one really that invested in my tracking as a principal” (P.6.8). Given that the participants felt unqualified in their new role, there was a need for support in transition. Four out of seven participants positively discussed that they felt that the Regional Executive Director was able to facilitate the individualised support which they required. This support and the engagement with a relevant postgraduate degree were suggested as support mechanisms when faced with the feeling of being unqualified.

4.4.3 Isolated

To support their feelings of isolation, the data suggested that the participants accessed mentoring opportunities. This sub-section presents the findings that formal and informal mentors were used for this purpose.

Having a formal mentor was seen to be a beneficial support mechanism for the participants in combating isolation in the role, although, there were reported inconsistencies surrounding DoE’s provision of a mentor. There were two types of formal mentors which the participants recalled, some participants were offered mentorship whilst one had to approach DoE and the perceived effectiveness of the mentors was also varied. Participants 1 and 2 mentioned an experience with DoE’s Principal Advisory Team and Participants 3 and 7 brought up mentoring through DoE’s Principal Consultants. When asked about their experience with a mentor from the Principal Advisory Team, Participant 2 said “I was offered a PAT [Principal Advisory Team]: a mentor. That was fantastic. I’m not sure if that has continued or not but that was a really good support” (P.2.4). On the contrary, Participant 1 said that they came across the Principal Advisory Team mentorship initiative “by accident when a colleague mentioned about it and for some reason she had been told and I hadn’t. I actually had to seek that out myself” (P.1.3). Participant 1’s recount of that experience was: “I had a couple of phone conversations with them and they visited the school once ... it was only two or three conversations. It was not sustained” (P.1.3). Both participants who engaged in mentorship through DoE’s Principal Consultants spoke glowingly of that experience. Participant 7 said:
What I did get [as a new principal], which was probably invaluable was a Principal Consultant mentor ... I was assigned a Principal Consultant for my first year and a half ... He’d come and sit down and just have a general chat about how you were going and any support he could give. They were invaluable. That was confidential as far as my school Regional Executive Director was concerned ... I could vent about things and say ‘Look, I’ve got no idea about this,’ which sometimes you can’t do with your Regional Executive Director or the people above ... That was great and probably the best support that I got. (P.7.4)

Those who received ongoing mentorship reported it to be a beneficial form of support. Having a mentor who the participants did not have a direct reporting relationship with provided a means of overcoming the isolation which the principals perceived.

Local principal networks were described as unofficial mentors and were seen to be, by all participants, an invaluable support mechanism. Through constant communication, network meetings and the development of collegial relationships with other principals in their local region, the participants were able to access support from experienced principals who were familiar with their local context. A lack of any discussion surrounding any form of support provided to the participants in developing contextual understandings is noteworthy. Particularly given the previously discussed challenges which come with organisational socialisation. In a discussion on strategies in overcoming problems they faced, Participant 3 praised the value of their local principal network. They said:

The other thing too is my principals network association. Once a term, we get together and talk about our issues and things which are going on. I was able to use experienced principals to ask about my financial concerns. The network is very big on providing opportunities to bounce ideas off each other and providing connection. There would not be an issue that would happen in school which I would not be able to call someone instantaneously for advice if I did not have the answer to. (P.3.3)

Participant 3 demonstrated the trust they have in their network of principals and how such support can mitigate potential isolation as a principal. Participant 4 reiterated the beneficial support they received through their network of principals by stating:
I class them as mentors because they gave me their assistance and support whenever I needed it and they still do. Even now I will ring them up and ask their opinions about certain things and they willingly help out with good intent. I think that is key as to why I have done well because I have had really good relationships with other principals. (P.4.4)

The participants’ local network of principals was consistently deemed to be one of the most valuable forms of support. This support enabled the principals to develop professional relationships which eased feelings of isolation.

4.6 Professional Learning for Early Career Principals

To understand about their socialisation, the previous section focused on the support which the participants accessed to overcome the challenges which arose from feelings of being unprepared, unqualified and isolated. This section provides insights into what the participants believed should be the focus of professional learning for early career principals. Additionally, this section highlights what the participants deemed to be preferential factors in professional learning.

A combination of support in the areas of school leadership and school management were what the participants thought the focus of professional learning for early career principals should be. As previously discussed, the participants felt unqualified with the increase in the managerial responsibilities of the job and unprepared to complete various compliance tasks. As a result, the participants suggested that a combination of support in both areas was required. Participant 1 described a combination of support in school leadership and school management as managing workload balance. When asked what they believed the focus of professional learning for early-career principals should be, Participant 1 said:

Managing the balance of work, leadership and management ... I think that it is important that beginning principals need professional learning to have a mixture of work balance and leadership and management. (P.1.5-1.6)

Participant 5 detailed particular aspects of both leadership and management which they believed should be a focus. They said:

Student-centred funding – how to structure your budget, how to use the money which you are given by the Department in your one-line budget to
best affect the school. Then I think that you need to focus on how to lead and manage change in your school. (P.5.6)

In alignment with the challenges perceived by the participants, there was an overwhelming suggestion that the focus of professional learning should be on school leadership and school management.

The participants also expressed an agreeance in the preferred factors which they consider when choosing a professional learning opportunity and what they deemed to be the most effective delivery method. The participants reported that a recommendation from their Regional Executive Director, a mentor or a principal colleague influenced their uptake of a professional learning opportunity. The major aspect of effective professional learning, agreed upon by five participants, was that it needed to be sustained beyond one interaction. Furthermore, the majority of the participants were of the opinion that a coaching or mentoring aspect to the professional learning was important for professional learning effectiveness. Participant 1 stated that effective professional learning is “spread over time and often if there is that coaching [element included]” (P.1.4). When talking about professional learning in their school, Participant 6 stated “we don’t do anything like one-shot workshops” (P.6.4). In alignment with the value which the participants put on their local principal network, the opportunity to collaborate and network with others was also suggested as a key aspect of effective professional learning by four of the participants. The participants see value in professional learning which meets their needs and is recommended by colleagues. Additionally, the elements of effective professional learning, according to the participants, were sustained interaction over a period of time, involving coaching/mentoring and networking or collaborative opportunities.

This chapter has presented the findings of the research. It has established that the principals did not fully understand the role which they had successfully applied for and that they faced various challenges throughout their socialisation. I categorised the challenges into the themes of feeling unprepared, unqualified and isolated. This section has also shown the support mechanisms which the participants accessed to overcome the challenges they faced. In addition, the participants’ views on the type of professional learning early career principals need. The next chapter discusses these findings and relates them to the literature.
Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

My Central Research Question asked: How are early career principals of Western Australian public schools socialised to become effective leaders and managers? This chapter focuses on the answers to the research questions which have come about through the analysis of the data presented in the Findings chapter. This chapter re-examines the themes which have emerged out of the data in response to the guiding research questions and demonstrates an alignment with the literature presented in the Literature Review. As the findings chapter displays, although each participant had a unique experience, it is clear that there were shared feelings of being unprepared, unqualified and isolated. Furthermore, these findings align with what research has suggested were the experiences of early career principals from over 10 years ago. This chapter is organised to reflect the themes which were developed through the data analysis process which have been presented in the Findings chapter. These themes are closely aligned with the participants’ experiences of principal socialisation and the guiding research questions. As a reflection of the beginning of the participants’ socialisation, section 5.2 analyses the participants’ responses in relation to Guiding Research Question 1 which asks about the preparation for the principalship. Given the importance of context in principal preparation, section 5.2 also provides an insight into the context that Western Australian early career principals are often appointed to. Sections 5.3-5.7 discuss the participants’ socialisation through the challenges which they reportedly faced as early career principals. These sections draw specific focus to the three themes which emerged from the data: the feeling of being unprepared, unqualified and isolated. The data discussed in sections 5.3-5.7 help answer Guiding Research Question 2. Sections 5.8-5.10 discuss support that the participants had access to and the role of adult learning theory in the provision of effective professional learning. The support which the participants experienced was reported to be an important part of their socialisation in overcoming the challenges they faced. The findings discussed in Sections 5.8-5.10 help to answer Guiding Research Question 3.
5.2 Becoming Appointed: Preparation and context.

The participants indicated that their experience working in schools prior to becoming a principal acted as preparation for the principalship. This section provides an insight into the alignment between the participants’ perception of their preparational experience and what literature suggests is the underpinning assumption of Australia’s apprenticeship model of principal preparation. The findings discussed in this section relate to Guiding Research Question 1 which asked: How do early career principals perceive their prior experience as preparation for the role?

Adequately prepared principals are enabled to use their professional and preparational experience to overcome challenges of the role. Beyond the qualification necessary to be a teacher in Australia, there is no mandatory minimum qualification required for the principalship. Whilst four of my participants had voluntarily engaged with postgraduate study, all of the participants became principals after spending years as teachers and in other leadership roles in schools. Literature has widely reported on the apprentice model of Australian principal preparation which assumes that experience gained through teaching and deputy principal roles is sufficient preparation for the principalship (Aravena, 2016; Bristol et al., 2014; Devi & Fernandes, 2019; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). Participant 2 spoke of the apprentice model of preparation by saying:

We have to remember that the required skillset of a teacher is vastly different to the skillset require to be a principal. A highly effective teacher does not make a highly effective principal. They could be but it is not a given. (P.2.7)

It can be seen that Participant 2 believed there were additional skills which needed to be learnt beyond those developed as a teacher. In a similar vein, Aravena (2016) has highlighted that Australia’s apprentice model of principal preparation is underpinned by the assumption that effective teachers can become effective leaders and managers. Participants 1 and 2, who had both completed postgraduate study in areas relevant to their principalships, showed discontent in the assumption that classroom and other school leadership roles, such as deputy principal, provide adequate preparation for the principalship. Participant 2 stated “The reality is that we [principals] are all teachers, we all have a teaching degree. I don’t have any different degree or training compared
to anyone else ... [in other jobs within a school] there is very little accountability” (P.2.3). A disconnect between the qualifications and work of teachers and what the principalship entails was evident in the data set. The participants suggested that their principal preparation did not adequately bridge this gap. Literature suggests that Australian principals are primarily sourced from the classroom and agreed with the participants that there is an assumption that good teachers will make good leaders. Furthermore, there was acknowledgement from both sources that this type of preparation is not fully adequate in preparing early career principals to be effective in school leadership and management.

It is widely recognised that early career principals in Western Australia are often appointed to high need schools. In addition, it is common that these schools are located in rural or remote locations and have a below average ICSEA value (Clarke et al., 2011; Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b; Wildy et al., 2014). One of the four elements involved in calculating ACARA’s ICSEA value is geographical location where remoteness is linked to lower socio-educational advantage (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). The participants of my study, who were not deliberately sought out because of their school’s context, reaffirm the notion that early career principals in Western Australian often face the challenge of leading high need schools. All of the participants’ schools were of a below average ICSEA value and six of the seven participants worked in rural schools. Additionally, each school had below average student attendance and many of the schools were scoring below average expectancy on national standardised assessments. As an additional challenge, none of the participants were local to the area prior to appointment which suggests that a relocation was necessary upon appointment. Being an outsider considerably increases the probability of not knowing important understandings such as norms and values of the community (Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). Given the likelihood of early career principals’ work in high need schools, I suggest, in alignment with Wildy and Clarke (2008b) and Gurr et al. (2014), principal preparation and professional learning should consider the contextual factors of rural and remote schools with low ICSEA values and high needs. Specific details of these contextual factors are discussed later in this chapter.
The nature of a high need school intensifies the necessity for its leader’s effectiveness in school leadership and management. ACARA state that family background factors and school factors, which are used to calculate ICSEA values, contribute to student outcomes and educational advantage which affect expected educational attainment (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). For example, a low ICSEA value reduces expectancy levels of student outcomes. Furthermore, there is a common agreement that effective school leadership has a positive impact on student outcomes, therefore, there is an urgency for principals of high need schools to perform efficiently and effectively (Aravena, 2016; Devi & Fernandes, 2019; Garcia-Garduno et al., 2011; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). Gurr et al. (2014) acknowledge the challenging context of a high need school and the importance of its principal. Given the pressure created by the nature of a high need school, Gurr et al. (2014) have posed the question: “Should a high-need school be a first appointment as principal?” (p. 89). Regardless, given that early career principals are often leading high need schools, there is a need for them to be well-prepared and well-supported to enact leadership and management in the aim of school improvement. If this is not achieved, student learning may be at risk.

5.3 Walking in the Door: Discovering the realities of the principalship.

The participants discussed various challenges they faced during their socialisations. From the analysis of these discussions, three interrelated themes of being unprepared, unqualified and isolated emerged and this section addresses those themes. Specifically, this section highlights the theme of unpreparedness which the participants experienced as part of their professional socialisation. It also reports an alignment with the literature which suggests this has been a longstanding challenge for early career principals in Western Australia and globally. This section discusses the data which helps respond to Guiding Research Question 2: What challenges do early career principals face?

On first appointment, it is evident from the data that early career principals are faced with a role which differs from what they had expected. My participants experienced a shock in what the principalship entails when they commenced the role. Through experience, the participants explained that they soon came to realise that the
role differed to their pre-appointment expectations. As a result, they had to undertake a process which saw them develop an understanding of what it is to be a principal. This process is known as professional socialisation (Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Scott & Scott, 2013). The Literature Review presented the notion that principals progress through a series of career stages. It suggested that during the early stages of their career, principals undergo a process of socialisation, whereby, they develop an understanding of what the job entails and what is required of them (Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Scott & Scott, 2013). Liljenberg and Andersson (2019) and Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) describe the professional socialisation of early career principals as a ‘reality shock’ which sees them start to develop an understanding of the many aspects and tasks comprising the principalship. This suggested process of socialisation was true for my participants. Their preparation did not give them enough insight into what the role entailed to avoid the reality shock upon appointment.

There are risks attached to a person applying for a job which they do not fully understand. Participant 7 summed up the worst-case scenario from an applicant’s perspective by recounting times when other principals had disclosed that they wished they never took on the role. The risk from an organisational perspective may include the need to readvertise and reappoint which extends the time spent without a long-term leader. Boyce and Bowers (2016), in their research focused on principal retention, suggest that principal turnover can have an adverse effect on student outcomes. They suggest that principal turnover can increase turnover of teachers and impact school climate through decreased morale and respect from staff and an increase of fear and detachment among students and parents (Boyce & Bowers, 2016). It can be seen that an increased awareness of what the principalship is, prior to appointment, may reduce the risk of principal turnover and the effects it has been reported to have on student achievement.

The reality shock which my participants reported is common among early career principals (Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2016; Clarke et al., 2007; Spillane et al., 2015; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). The participants suggested that the major challenges throughout their professional socialisation included a shift in perspective and a realisation of the multitude of tasks for which they were responsible. Literature
substantiates these claims and adds that understanding expected behaviours and responsibilities also presents significant challenges (Liljenberg & Andersson, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Professional socialisation is viewed as a normal process for early career principals, although, the minimisation of disruption accompanying professional socialisation would be advantageous. It is important to recognise that the challenges of socialisation must be overcome before or simultaneous to the operations the principal were employed to do; lead and manage the school. Therefore, a slow professional socialisation process may delay or inhibit school improvement which ultimately impacts student learning. Conversely, an efficient professional socialisation may enable early career principals to prioritise and fast-track school improvement. According to the principals in this study, professional socialisation can last anywhere up to one year. This is problematic if professional socialisation prevents or inhibits the principal from enacting school leadership or management. This issue is compounded given the high need schools Western Australian early career principals are often appointed to. I align with the notion put forth by Devi and Fernandes (2019) that “Well prepared school leaders are critical to achieving improved instruction and increased student achievement” (p. 53) and prior to walking through the door of the principalship, early career principals require adequate preparation to provide a smooth transition into the role.

5.4 Sitting Down at the Desk: Learning how to tick the administrative boxes.

Continuing the discussion on the theme of unpreparedness, this section focuses on the evident challenge of completing unfamiliar school management tasks. It reports that being unprepared in this area is a common feeling of early career principals. This section also suggests that the participants were appreciative of DoE’s provision of professional learning in this area, although, there may be a risk in over-catering for this need.

After appointment, the next challenge was reported to be confrontation with a seemingly endless list of unfamiliar administrative duties. The participants’ experiences, as reported in the interviews, align with the literature; early career principals feel unprepared to complete the administrative aspects of the principalship. Furthermore, the amount of administrative work in their day-to-day operations
provides a significant source of frustration (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). As a result of the participants’ unpreparedness, support in administrative tasks was most highly sought after. Wildy and Clarke (2008a) reported that it is common for early career principals to desire support in administrative work which has since been reiterated by others including Oplatka and Lapidot (2018). Interestingly, the participants of this study suggest that the sheer volume of administrative work came as a surprise. The participants indicated two aspects of this surprise. Firstly, whilst the participants were not unfamiliar with the compliance tasks such as business plans and school reports, being the one person solely responsible for them was part of the unexpectedness. The pressure of this responsibility was reported by the participants to result in feelings of anxiousness. This is important given that the wellbeing of Australian principals is reported to be below that of the general population (Riley, 2019). Secondly, the administrative work was seen to be a step away from having a direct impact on teaching and learning. Having been teachers and deputy principals prior to taking up their principalship, the participants were accustomed to being in and around classrooms regularly. Being removed from that, through the increase of administrative duties, contributed to the unexpected proportion of managerial work required of them.

Being and feeling unprepared to meet job requirements is problematic for early career principals. Although Spillane and Lee (2014) suggest that it is quite typical for early career principals to feel unprepared, there is still a risk that they may develop self-doubt in their ability to meet the demands of the job. In addition, time which could be spent leading the school and focusing on the needs of students and teachers may be used learning how to complete administrative tasks. The participants described administrative tasks as “ticking the boxes” (P.1.5, P.7.2), however, the participants did acknowledge the importance of these tasks. In Participant 1’s words: “We invest a lot in management still because ... [you have got to] make sure that everyone is safe and doing their jobs” (P.1.5). Nonetheless, it could be argued that the best time to develop the knowledge and understanding to complete administrative tasks is during principal preparation. Prior to the principalship, if aspirant leaders underwent a preparation process which equipped them with the necessary knowledge and skills to complete the administrative requirements, it may alleviate the evident feeling of unpreparedness.
and subsequent anxiousness. It could also be suggested that this approach to principal preparation would provide a more comprehensive insight into what the principalship really entails which may contribute to efficiency in professional socialisation. If this were to occur, principals could dedicate more time to duties directly related to the students in their high need schools.

The participants reported a major focus of DoE’s early career principal professional learning was centred around administrative, compliance tasks. It was also discussed that this was seen to be beneficial due to their feelings of unpreparedness in this area. Having a significant proportion of early career principal professional learning dedicated to administrative tasks may meet their needs, although, it may also convey an undesirable message. Early career principals are said to be in a formative stage of their career (Earley & Weindling, 2004). A large focus on administration in the professional learning provided to early career principals may overstate its importance in comparison to and at the detriment of school leadership. Participant 4 summed this up by stating that there is a need to make “new principals aware that their sole purpose is not to sit behind a desk and look important. It is to improve student outcomes” (P.4.6). A preparational process for the principalship, which includes developing administrative competencies, may benefit the reported challenges associated with professional socialisation. In addition, it may provide the opportunity, once appointed as principal, to invest in support directly related to teaching and learning. It may also help early career principals develop a better understanding about the nature of what the principalship entails.

5.5 Standing Before Their Staff: Balancing school leadership with school management.

This section maintains focus on the challenges which the participants faced during their socialisation. However, this section ends the discussion on unpreparedness and moves towards the second theme of feeling unqualified. It reports a necessary perspective shift perceived by the participants’ as a result of moving into a role with a greater proportion of school management and an indirect impact on teaching and learning. In addition, this section demonstrates a link between
the experiences of my participants and the literature which suggests that this challenge is common among early career principals.

In describing their role, the participants agreed that the principalship is multifaceted and highly complex. There was also a common consensus among the participants that their role is comprised of two elements: school leadership and school management. These notions have been widely reported in contemporary literature (Boerema, 2011; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). The data suggests that the participants were challenged in balancing the tension between school leadership and management.

The participants were in agreement that the core purpose of a school principalship is teaching and learning which was suggested to be directly related to student outcomes. The participants’ view on the core purpose of their job reflects recent literature’s suggestion that a successful principalship is ultimately concerned with the educational outcomes of students (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr, 2014; Ibarrola-García, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2019). The participants also concurred with the notion, which was presented in the Literature Review, that instructional leadership is centrally concerned with student learning (Gawlik, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2017; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Participant 5 reinforced the sustained prevalence of instructional leadership and its primary focus on teaching and learning. In a discussion about what they do as a principal, Participant 5 stated “Instructional leadership is a big thing” (P.5.1). When asked whether they were suggesting that teaching and learning was at the centre of instructional leadership, Participant 5 said “That’s dead right, that is all it’s aimed at” (P.5.1). The data suggests that the participants see themselves as instructional leaders whereby student learning is at the centre of their professional decisions and actions. DoE’s Strategic Plan aligns with the notion that principals are enablers of teaching and learning. Similar to the model of instructional leadership, DoE suggests that effective school leadership, including the work of the principal, is critical in the educational outcomes of their students. DoE’s strategic plans demonstrate its perspective that high quality teaching is the conduit between effective leadership and student success (Department of Education Western Australia, 2015b). The alignment between the participant data and literature on core purpose and leadership theory
suggests that this thesis’ working definition of school leadership aligned with the
participants’ perceptions.

The participants reported a perceived decrease in school leadership duties and
an increase in school management as compared to their previously held school jobs.
The data from the interviews suggests that the participants found this shift in
operations challenging. Furthermore, it was reported in the Literature Review that
principals of decentralised schools face increased school management tasks. In
decentralised systems, some of the management functions which school principals are
responsible for include site management, complete budget management, resource
allocation and staffing (Bush, 2016). The participants in my research, three of whom
were Independent Public Schools principals, agreed and reported additional
managerial responsibilities mainly comprising of compliance tasks not directly related
to teaching and learning such as school reports, critical incident management and
surveys. As a result, my established definition of school management, derived from the
literature, can be seen as what was perceived by the participants.

School leadership and school management were described by the participants
as two competing elements of their roles. The participants spoke of their surprise and
consequent struggle in adjusting to a role further removed from teaching and learning
than they were qualified for and accustomed to. They perceived that the increased
responsibility and operation in school management as a principal felt far removed to
their experience as teachers and deputy principals. The participants reported that, in
their experience, teachers and deputy principals are almost exclusively teaching and
learning focused and their work is directly related to improving student outcomes. This
is widely agreed upon in literature (see Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a),
and concisely put by Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) who state “One of the major needs of
new principals is to move from teaching to educational leadership and realize the
meaning of their new role, a very difficult task leading to a sense of helplessness and
confusion” (p. 212). Reiterating the literature, on becoming a principal, the
participants indicated that they had to undergo a perspective shift which saw them
becoming an enabler of teaching and learning rather than being directly involved in it.
Stepping away from a role which has a direct impact on teaching and learning, which
they were accustomed to, was challenging for the early career principals of this study and left them feeling unqualified for the new role.

The increased proportion of school management was seen to come at the cost of school leadership. Data from the interviews suggests that the participants experienced a conflict between school management and school leadership in the form of extensive administrative tasks superseding the school leadership. The participants reported that this felt like a moral dilemma due to their belief of teaching and learning being their core purpose. Literature such as Boerema (2011); Spillane and Lee (2014); Wildy and Clarke (2008a) report the conflict early career principals endure between school leadership and management is common. Riley (2019) reports that a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning is one of the two biggest sources of stress for Australian principals. Furthermore, Riley reports that since 2015, there has been an upward trend in this source of stress. Grissom et al. (2015) suggest that time management skills can contribute towards reduced stress levels and increased job performance. In addition, when principals can manage their time effectively, Grissom et al. (2013) and Grissom et al. (2015) suggest that principals devote more time to school leadership responsibilities which contribute to student outcomes. As a result, I suggest that principal preparation which familiarises early career principals with school management tasks and develops time management skills may support them in their reported tension between school leadership and school management.

As mentioned previously, the participants reported that DoE’s early career principal professional learning has been mainly school management focused with support central to compliance tasks. Lingam and Lingam (2016) put forward the notion that “the traditional model of leadership development that focuses primarily on management skills fails to consider other dimensions of leadership that directly affect the core business of learning and teaching” (p. 121). Given this, it could be suggested that a professional learning offering too heavily focused on school management may contribute to, or do little to help alleviate, the tension and high level of stress which my participants reported between balancing school leadership and school management.
5.6 Developing a Contextual Understanding: Being the outsider in a new school and community.

With a central focus on the challenges faced by early career principals, the preceding three sections have discussed the feeling of being unprepared and unqualified as themes which have emerged from the data. This section continues the discussion of challenges faced by early career principals, although, it shifts focus to the third theme of isolation. This section discusses isolation as a result of going through organisational socialisation as an outsider to the school and community.

Whilst a new leadership role provides challenges in itself, operating in a completely new school and community is something additional which early career principals find challenging. The participants reported that the appointment of their first principalship required them to relocate to the new school. In their discussions they did not discuss any specific mechanisms which were offered to familiarise them with their new context. Wildy and Clarke (2008a) have previously discussed the importance of familiarity of context for Western Australian early career principals and the likelihood of being appointed in an unfamiliar setting. Ten years on, this remains true of the participants in this study. It was evident from the interviews that in the participants’ work, efforts and challenges that developing a detailed understanding of the school environment was crucial in implementing what they considered appropriate school leadership. This is all part of organisational socialisation (Bristol et al., 2014; Bush, 2016). As an outsider to the school and community, the participants identified five important elements involved in their organisational socialisation: student and staff culture, developing community relationships, identifying areas of high need and developing personal relationships. Time needs to be invested in each of these elements to give the principal the ability to make informed decisions when going about their practice (Bristol et al., 2014; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a).

Participant 6’s discussion detailing the perceived need to align their leadership style to their new school context reaffirms this notion.

Developing relationships was seen to be an important aspect of the principalship and also provided a challenge. The majority of the participants reported that being an outsider resulted in the challenge of developing relationships with the
staff and the local community. In a discussion about why they felt challenged by the management of people, Participant 1 said:

I find the whole PR [public relations] stuff ... it does not really come naturally with me. I find that really awkward just to make social conversation. Just to pop around to classes and chat with parents. If I have a purpose to be there, and a role, that’s completely different – I’m more than happy to go around and talk to people but for me, to fabricate that feels false. (P.1.2)

It is clear that Participant 1 felt that interacting with people was something which challenged them individually. In contrast, Participant 2 said that they were “Very good at building relationships” (P.2.2) yet they lost all of their relationships as soon as they were appointed to a leadership role. It was the dynamics of being the boss and an outsider to the school community which were identified by the participants as the main barriers in developing these relationships. Participant 2 described the change in dynamic as being “dark listed” (P.2.7). Wildy and Clarke (2008a) describe it as being “treated differently” (p. 483) and they say that the high visibility of leading in a small community make challenges such as this even more difficult. Managing relationships with multiple stakeholders was also seen to be challenging. It has been discussed that the fostering of relationships with diverse stakeholders is a key part of the principalship (Spillane & Lee, 2014). In stressing the importance of relationships between the principal and the community, Wildy and Clarke (2008a) state “the success of the novice teaching principal may well be shaped by his/her ability to interact with different stakeholders in the community” (P.481). Contrary to the findings of Clarke and Wildy (2004) and Wildy and Clarke (2008a) regarding the challenge of community relations, working with conservative communities was not discussed by the participants. However, it was evident that the participants’ confidence in public relations differed but many of the participants reported they were challenged in this area. Support in dealing with this challenge could be seen as beneficial.

Given the importance placed upon contextual understanding as reported by the participants of this study and literature, taking organisational socialisation into account in the preparation for the principalship may be of benefit to early career principals. It may provide the new principal with information which is useful in enacting school leadership and management without too much delay.
It could be suggested that the most efficient way to bypass the necessity of a new principal developing a contextual understanding is to appoint a ‘non-outsider’. This approach could be achieved through a long-term succession plan where a deputy principal steps into the principal position. In this situation, they may come to the role more prepared with the required understanding of school and community dynamics. Whilst this may facilitate a smooth transition, it would be naive not to acknowledge that this process is often unattainable given staff transiency and other issues in low ICSEA and rural or remote schools (Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). A more achievable proposition, a handover, was suggested by Participant 6: “The handover is nothing. I had a 20-minute conversation with the previous principal on the phone and that was it ... that handover process should be far more extensive” (P.6.6). In lieu of experience at the school they were appointed to, Participant 6 displayed frustration in the lack of insight into contextual understanding of their new school. Participant 2 also demonstrated a similar frustration when recounting the restricted access they had to formal reviews of their new school. A lack of insight into important contextual factors frustrated the participants and affected their organisational socialisation. This is important given that a previous study focusing on Western Australian early career principals (Wildy & Clarke, 2008a) also reported that their participants felt unprepared to deal with the context to which they were appointed. In a further discussion on the handover process, Participant 6 stated “The only requirement now is that you do a financial handover. It is pretty much just a file with the latest printout of the budget. ‘Here’s your financial file,’ and that’s it” (P.6.11). This perspective is supported by Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) who indicate that the needs of the early career principals in their study were derived from an ineffective handover. They said:

Their succession process lacked sufficient time with the former principals to learn about school structure and culture. They simply had to learn almost everything about their new school and job unaided, possibly with the informal support of lead teachers, assistant principals, and other school members. (p. 217)

A comprehensive handover is seen to be of great value to early career principals. One which addresses contextual aspects such as school culture and social dynamics would enable the conditions for an efficient organisational socialisation. This may reduce the
challenges which the participants identified which could prevent an efficient and effective implementation of school leadership and management.

5.7 Looking Around for Help: The difficulty in accessing the required support.

Continuing the discussion on the theme of isolation, this section focuses on the challenge presented by working in a geographically isolated area. It highlights that access to professional learning, which has been established to be important in leadership development, is limited and more difficult as a result of the isolation.

Being an outsider is not the only isolating factor early career principals face, geographic location can isolate principals from professional support. After the early career principals began developing an understanding of their new role, the data suggested that the principals sought help from those around them because it was the most accessible form of support.

In the interviews, the participants discussed multiple self-identified needs which included: improving competency in administrative tasks, developing school improvement plans and seeking personal feedback. Their rural location isolated the principals from formal professional learning in these areas. The participants reported that they turned to their local principal network for support. Overwhelmingly, this was seen as the most beneficial form of support by the participants which also eased their evident feelings of isolation. Bristol et al. (2014) suggest that reliance upon these local relationships is commonplace for early career principals and it helps solidify professional identity and leadership capacity.

Financing metropolitan-based professional learning inhibited the participants’ engagement in professional learning. The data suggests that the expensive cost of travel and accommodation away from their rural location were the major preventative factors in accessing DoE’s professional learning offerings in Perth. The participants reported that a one-day professional learning session often turned into two days of travel and two nights of accommodation in addition to three days of relief teacher costs; if one was available. Participant 1 stated “I am always quite reluctant on me spending money for my own professional learning. I feel guilty about that, so I don’t. If I lived in Perth, I could access more” (P.1.5). This situation is unfavourable for the principal, school and students, given the importance of professional learning in
principal development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Oplatka, 2012; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). For example, the positive relationship between effective leadership and improved student learning outcomes is jeopardised if an early career principal does not invest in their own development to become more knowledgeable and skilled. Furthermore, AITSL’s Australian Principal Professional Standards (2015b) states that principals “are committed to their own ongoing professional development ... in order to manage the complexity of the role and the range of learning capabilities and actions required of the role” (p. 16). Just as other studies have shown before (Gurr et al., 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a; Wildy et al., 2014), my participants reported that their rural locations isolated them from accessing professional learning opportunities. This could be seen as problematic because of the considerable challenges which the data suggests these early career principals faced.

The setting which most early career principals operate in provides unique challenges and in addition, it also reduces access to support to overcome these challenges. A priority for early career principals’ development should be accessibility to the support they need. In 2019, technology exists which enables easier remote access to professional learning far more so than previous decades. Although local principal networks were reported to have been an effective form of support, DoE has a responsibility greater than reliance on this. In trying to deliver on this responsibility, DoE do provide mentorship opportunities, which are discussed in the last section of this chapter, and alternatives to face-to-face professional learning which may help participants’ concern.

5.8 Drawing Upon Experience: Does the traditional career pathway provide adequate preparation?

The previous five sections have discussed the three themes which emerged from the data in relation to the challenges which the participants faced. This and the remainder of this chapter addresses DoE’s professional learning and other support mechanisms. Support was seen to be an important part of their experiences during socialisation. The knowledge, skills and understandings developed through preparation were the first available resources of the participants in overcoming the challenges they faced. This section discusses the extent to which the participants’ preparation
equipped them to face some school management tasks and it also reports the need to learn and adapt in real time as a result of unpreparedness. The data discussed in Sections 5.8-5.10 provide insight which helps answer Guiding Research Question 3 which asked: What support mechanisms help early career principals overcome the challenges they face?

All of the participants became principals through the apprenticeship model with little formal training preparing them for the position. The participants suggested that their experience as teachers and deputy principals did have value. For example, it was suggested that exposure to some school management tasks were somewhat beneficial in preparation for the principalship. Participant 7 discussed how they drew on their experience as a teacher and deputy principal by stating:

> As a teacher, you’re sort of involved in those things at a planning stage level, not in preparing it and putting it into its final form. Even as a deputy, you’re involved a little bit more and you might take sections of it. I had prepared in that way but to be the last chain in the link, to have it all done, it was a bit of a challenge to start with and I’m becoming much more comfortable with it now ... it was a ‘learn as you go’ job. (P.7.2-7.3)

The notion of learning ‘on the job’ was common throughout the interviews but the participants expressed that they also felt unprepared and unqualified. The participants indicated that these feelings were eased through experience in the role which involved on the job learning. There was no distinguishable timeframe suggested by the participants, although, in their third year of principalship, Participant 7 said “I’m still learning as I go” (P.7.6). The participants did not feel it was unachievable to learn the requirements of the principalship on the job, although, it was suggested that it can take years to learn some elements of the principalship before feeling comfortable.

Wildy and Clarke (2008b) suggest that “Leaving such development to chance, to occur on the job, without preparation, is a risky business” (p. 732). I agree and suggest that it is not unreasonable to suggest that learning on the job leaves a lot up to chance and may not be efficient. An investment in principal preparation which aims to reduce the required amount of on the job learning which the participants expressed could be seen as beneficial. This may give early career principals a more comprehensive set of knowledge and skills which can be drawn upon when appointed to the principalship.
The participants of this study reported feeling unprepared and unqualified but it was not suggested that an effective teacher cannot become an effective principal. Unpreparedness of Western Australian principals has been previously reported on by Wildy and Clarke (2008a). Since then, others, such as Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) and Spillane and Lee (2014), have claimed that it is not uncommon for early career principals to feel unprepared and unqualified. This should not be ignored and should be acted on. The data from this research suggests that additional principal preparation which has a balanced provision of both school leadership and management skills could be beneficial in reducing their feelings of being unqualified and unprepared. Additionally, participants who had undergone postgraduate study reported its great value. Based on this insight from the interviews, it may be advantageous to formally qualify early career principals or aspirant principals in school leadership through a higher degree of study. This model has been implemented in England where the National Professional Qualification for Headship is a mandatory qualification process for aspiring and current headteachers. Canada and the United States also have a formal qualification process which involves university study and certification (Aravena, 2016; Bristol et al., 2014). Aravena (2016) states that “In the United States, academic leadership training is a key element in the success of students’ performance, teachers’ career satisfaction and administration efficiency nationwide” (p. 351) and the approach is an effort to achieve equality and national standardisation. Based on these international principal preparation models and the participants’ view that postgraduate or further qualifications are valuable, I suggest that a collaborative effort between the state government, DoE and universities to promote and facilitate this type of principal preparation may be beneficial.

5.9 Asking for Advice: Mentorship as a valuable form of professional support.

The previous section initiated the discussion on support by reporting on the unpreparedness that their preparation left them feeling. This section discusses mentorship as the most accessed and effective form of professional learning indicated by the participants, which aligns with the literature. This section also highlights that DoE’s provision of a mentor was inconsistent among the participants.
It is widely recognised that professional learning is a vital aspect of leadership development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a). As can be seen in its current strategic plan (Department of Education Western Australia, 2015b), DoE are committed to the provision of professional support for all principals. The data from this study shows that all of the participants had received and were grateful for DoE’s support, although, they also indicated that they felt unprepared, unqualified and isolated. This chapter has also suggested that the experiences of the participants from this study align with those from other studies in the Western Australian and Australian context. I suggest that DoE continue to make every effort to ensure all early career principals are adequately prepared and supported. I also suggest that DoE strive to support early career principals in their challenges of being unprepared, unqualified and isolated given the findings of this study and of those before it.

Mentorship was identified by the participants as the most valuable form of professional learning. Being supported by a mentor, experienced colleague or peer, such as a Master Corporate Services or Regional Executive Director, was specified as the most valuable support mechanism. The data suggested that being able to ask questions and seek guidance was what the participants found most useful. They reported that asking questions and seeking guidance addressed their feelings of being unprepared and unqualified. This notion has been widely supported in literature (Hayes, 2019; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). The data also suggested that access to a mentor seemed to alleviate the participants’ feelings of being isolated. Given literature’s demonstrated importance of mentorship for early career principals, it was surprising to discover that the mentorship experience of the participants differed significantly.

The interview data indicated that DoE’s provision of mentors was inconsistent for each of the early career principals. Each participant reported that they had a mentor but they discussed different mentor recruitment processes and a variety of mentor types. The reported forms of mentorship were both formal (provided by DoE) and informal (independently sourced). Of the four participants who reported having a formal mentor, three stated that they had been assigned the mentor, whereas, one participant recalled having to initiate the process. The three participants who did not
discuss a formal mentor suggested that they formed mentor relationships with other local principals or experienced principals they knew personally. The participants reaffirmed their perspective of high value in mentorship by agreeing that mentorship should be mandatory but through self-selection. This may provide a conundrum for DoE. If DoE was to assign early career principals with a mentor, it may compromise the elements of an effective mentor relationship. Eller et al. (2014) and Munson (2017) report that there should be a caring relationship between a protégé and mentor which involves the development of trust and respect. Munson (2017) recommends that a protégé should seek out a mentor who aligns with their own perspectives and aspirations. Given this, the assigning of a mentor may inhibit the natural development of a relationship which literature suggests is conducive to an effective mentorship. The participants concurred with this notion by discussing the importance of similarity in leadership practices as an example of what they thought a good mentor relationship could include. If DoE were to leave the process of mentor recruitment up to the principals themselves, it would assume that early career principals have purposefully planned their transition into the principalship and developed available mentor connections. It would also assume that early career principals also have adequate judgement to choose an effective mentor. In this circumstance, it could be suggested that not all principals would be guaranteed the support they need. As an example, the participants’ isolated circumstance may inhibit opportunities for communication on a need’s basis. Whether all early career principals are assigned a mentor or DoE facilitate a process for participants to self-select their own mentor, I suggest that it is not desirable to have early career principals potentially missing out on having a mentor.

One of the most beneficial aspects of mentorship was seen to be access to feedback. The feeling of being unqualified and unprepared left the participants questioning if what they were doing was correct or optimally effective. When discussing this notion, Participant 1 and 2 both referenced the phrase “You don’t know what you don’t know” (P.1.5, P.2.4). The data suggests that an experienced mentor was able to alleviate the ‘you don’t know what you don’t know’ notion by providing insight into areas of possible development and give feedback on leadership practice. Given the suggested benefit of an experienced mentor, it is interesting that participants identified self-selection as the major method of choosing professional
learning. It is possible that self-selection came after mentor discussions, although, given the ‘you don’t know what you don’t know’ notion, if early career principals are choosing which support they need through independent self-selection, there is a major risk that they are not getting the support they actually need or which would be most beneficial. Without a mentor, early career principals may have their development jeopardised which could have school-wide repercussions. Therefore, DoE has an important role in helping principals access mentorship opportunities.

5.10 Developing Through the Most Beneficial Support: Professional learning which aligns to adult learning theory.

This section maintains the focus on the support mechanisms of the participants during their socialisation. It reports the participants’ perception of effective professional learning and establishes an alignment between the participant data and the literature’s suggestion that adult learning theory is central to effective professional learning. It additionally suggests that recent changes in DoE’s professional learning provision have been perceived as beneficial.

This chapter has established that there are many challenges to be faced by early career principals and professional learning is important in addressing these challenges and supporting their development. Based on the participants’ insights, it is evident that the professional learning which they found most helpful was in alignment with adult learning principles. My research has used Merriam and Bierema’s (2014) framework of adult learning theory which conceptualises four lenses in an adult learning process; the educator, the learner, the learning process and the context. Merriam and Bierema suggest that effective adult learning takes all four lenses into consideration. The participants’ data suggests that their most effective form of support, mentorship, aligns with Merriam and Bierema’s framework of adult learning. The mentor themselves played an important role. It was their experience which they were able to reflect upon to provide helpful insights, guidance and advice which assisted the participants’ face the challenges they faced and develop their leadership. This can be seen to align with the educator lens of Merriam and Bierema’s framework. The provision of support through the mentorship was directed by the participant. As the literature review reported, SDL is one of the foundational theories of adult learning
theory. The self-directed nature of the support saw it directly addressing the participants’ needs which was seen to be timely and relevant. The mentorship addressed the learner lens in this way. The early career principals’ processes of learning and development involved overcoming challenges through reflection of their ongoing experiences. Through this, transformative learning took place which enabled the development of the participants. The participants’ own context was where the learning and development took place which enables self-directed, relevant learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). It can be seen that mentorship, which the participants found most effective and valuable can be seen to align with adult learning theory. This notion is reaffirmed by Zepeda et al. (2014) who suggested that “The principles of adult learning and engagement need to be widely manifested and job embedded within the very activities and learning opportunities for leaders across their career stage in leadership positions” (p. 312). As a result, I suggest that The Institute’s intention of basing their professional learning on adult learning principals (Department of Education Western Australia, 2019a) is beneficial when seeking to support early career principals. The participants also suggested that they were more likely to participate in a professional learning opportunity which aligned with adult learning theory. Regarding the educator, the participants reported a preference in professional learning delivery from a credible source. A professional learning experience which met their self-identified learning needs was also important to the participants which aligns with the learner lens. The participants expressed a desire for Merriam and Bierema’s (2014) process and context lenses to be addressed through ongoing professional learning which ideally involved collaboration and access to additional support in their local context. As a result of the data discussed within this chapter, I suggest that adult learning theory is a key element of effective professional learning for early career principals which also influences the uptake of potential participants. Given DoE’s commitment in supporting effective school leadership, I also suggest that this insight is worth noting for DoE in its continual planning of professional learning.

Since the establishment of The Leadership Institute, DoE have made changes in their professional learning provision which seem to be align with the principles of adult learning theory. In 2018, DoE established The Institute which took over DoE’s provision of professional learning from the Institute for Professional Learning (Department of
As highlighted in the Literature Review, since the establishment of The Institute, it is evident that DoE significantly refined their suite of professional learning with many fewer opportunities offered. A reduction in the amount of ‘System Policy and Process’ professional learning opportunities is evident. Another noticeable change is the increased amount of professional learning which is spread over a period of time. The increase of ongoing professional learning can be seen as a shift towards greater alignment between DoE’s professional learning, adult learning theory and research on effective professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Timperley, 2011a; Zepeda et al., 2014). Interestingly, a newly appointed principal program has been implemented which includes face-to-face sessions in addition to mentoring. Mentoring can be seen as an effective form of support through Merriam and Bierema’s (2014) lenses of adult learning theory. It seems that the establishment of The Institute has coincided with changes to DoE’s professional learning offerings which align with adult learning theory. The participants of my research noticed these changes and reported an improvement in quality. This insight suggests that recent changes in DoE’s professional learning provision has been perceived as beneficial.

This chapter has discussed the findings of my research and suggested that they align with those of previous research. It has also discussed the conceptual themes of feeling unprepared, unqualified and isolated. In addition, this chapter has highlighted that the participants were of the belief that the principles of adult learning are evident in what they deem effective professional learning. The following chapter provides a conclusion of the research by summarising the project and its intentions. It also presents a set of recommendations which have been developed as a result of the findings and outlines the limitations of the study. Lastly, Chapter 6 presents my concluding comments.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

I conducted this study with an aim of providing current insights into the socialisation of early career principals in Western Australia’s public school system. In order to do this, I
sought to develop a deep understanding of the experiences and consequent interpretations of those on the ground: the principals themselves. Interpretivism sees the world through people’s experiences and their experiential interpretation, therefore, it was my epistemological standpoint for this project (Ryan, 2018; Tuli, 2010). The methodology which underpinned my research was qualitative due to its alignment with interpretivism. Qualitative research accepts that people construct their world through the interpretations and meanings they attach to their experiences (Bell & Waters, 2014; Ryan, 2018; Willig, 2001). Hence, engaging with people in deep discussions about their experiences is a requirement to understand their constructed world (Martella et al., 2013; Tuli, 2010). My paradigm and methodology led me to the use of semi-structured interviews as the data gathering method of this study. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research and they give freedom to the interviewee to focus on topics they see as most important. Through this research design, I have discussed findings which have been conceptualised from the voices of early career principals in Western Australia. The findings from my research have aligned with those of previous studies (see Clarke et al., 2007; Clarke et al., 2011; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, 2008b; Wildy et al., 2007) and as a result, I have developed a set of recommendations. Prior to presenting my recommendations in section 6.3, I acknowledge that my research has limitations and these are discussed in section 6.2. Lastly, section 6.4 provides my concluding remarks of this research.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

This is a government sanctioned study of DoE which is the largest education system in the state. DoE has the most schools in the state and employs the most teachers and principals. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my study only investigated the experiences of Western Australian principals. It would be beneficial to expand this research across other areas of the country. I also recognise that the Catholic Education system and the Independent sector operate in Western Australia. Although it is a much smaller sample size, it would be valuable to compare the experience of early career principals from Catholic and Independent schools to the findings of this study. Likewise, DoE was reported to be the main provider of professional learning for the participants, although, I recognise that other organisations exist which offer support
for principals. Lastly, my study largely focused on DoE’s provision of professional learning and I suggest that it would be beneficial for future research to include the investigation into other providers of professional learning.

6.3 Recommendations

My findings are based on the three themes which emerged from the data that suggest that the participants felt unprepared, unqualified and isolated. Due to the significance placed on the learner in adult learning theory, I suggest that preparation and professional learning should consider the learner’s individual context and subsequent needs. Given that it is widely agreed that early career principals in Western Australia are often appointed to high need schools, this should be taken into account and addressed in principal preparation and early career principal professional learning programs. It is evident that The Institute have individual programs which seem to address this, however, I suggest that it should be evident in all actions aimed at developing effective principals.

The first theme, unpreparedness, is founded in the challenges which the participants faced on appointment due to their preparational experiences prior to appointment. The first major aspect of the participants’ unpreparedness was a misalignment between what they though the job would be and how it turned out. The other major aspect was the unpreparedness to complete school management tasks. I suggest that a more thorough, formal preparation, which addresses these issues, for aspirant principals would be beneficial. The United Kingdom and the United States have implemented slightly different versions of this. Due to the findings of my research and the alignment with what has been reported in the literature, I believe that it would be beneficial to increase the minimum qualification requirements to become a principal. I echo the sentiment of Wildy and Clarke (2008a) who state “Given the strong connection between the quality of school leadership and school improvement, it might well be argued that preparing principals to perform their role successfully is not a process that should be left to chance” (p. 470). There are opportunities for DoE to work with universities and other agencies to help implement a formal qualification for principals. Based on the participants’ responses, this type of preparation may have enabled the conditions for a more efficient professional socialisation process.
I also believe, based on the data, that the preparation of principals has importance in addressing the participants’ evident feelings of being unqualified. Maintaining a balance between school leadership and school management was the underlying challenge in the participants’ feeling of being unqualified. Firstly, I suggest that a preparational experience which reiterates the connection between school management tasks and the core purpose of the principalship may reduce the feelings of being unqualified. Also, I recommend that principal preparation should include the development of time management skills to reduce the likelihood of principals becoming overwhelmed and feeling encumbered by school management.

Furthermore, additional professional learning post-appointment may be beneficial in supporting early career principals in addressing this challenge. I also suggest that preparation and professional learning programs are not heavily skewed to either school leadership or school management to reinforce the importance and development in both areas.

Isolation was reported to have come from being an outsider to the school and community as well as geographic location. Having a focus on strategies to face these challenges of organisational socialisation may ease feelings of isolation. This might include support and development in the establishment of relationships within the school and wider community. The Institute’s offerings (see Appendix 1) can be seen to relate to these challenges in program offerings such as ‘Verbal Judo for Leaders’. I recommend that topics such as this continue to be a focus of The Institute. The consequences of being an outsider also included a lack of knowledge and understanding of the school context. To alleviate this challenge, I suggest that a long-term succession plan is advocated by DoE. It is not always possible or appropriate to appoint a pre-existing member of staff to a vacant principal position, however, I suggest that a mandated handover process which thoroughly considers the elements of organisational socialisation should be implemented and overseen by DoE.

The geographical location of six of my participants’ schools left them feeling isolated due to the lack of access to professional learning opportunities. Given that these principals are in a formative stage of their career and in high need schools, I recommend that DoE’s provision of professional learning must be accessible to rural and remote early career principals. I suggest that the innovative use of technology, of
which is readily available today, is incorporated into professional learning program
design to allow for equality of access for those principals not located in the
metropolitan area. Furthermore, the provision of a mentor who makes regular visits to
the workplaces of their protégés could be seen to be greatly valuable.

My recommendations above align with the notion that professional
development is a key aspect in the development of effective school leaders and
managers. However, my findings also suggest, in alignment with the literature, that
adult learning theory was central to the support which my participants found most
beneficial. Mentorship, which addressed the principles of adult learning, was reported
to be the most valued source of professional learning which the participants received.
Therefore, I suggest that DoE should prioritise the access to an experienced mentor for
every early career principal it is responsible for. I recommend that DoE supports and
encourages informal mentorships and supplements that with the provision of a formal
DoE mentor. I suggest that The Institute’s ‘Newly Appointed Principal Program’ could
be beneficial initiative for early career principals.

The establishment of The Institute was received positively by my participants
and its claim of using adult learning principles in their professional learning provision
aligns with contemporary research into effective professional learning. As a result, I
see the establishment of The Institute to be a positive initiative and I recommend that
it maintains a priority of keeping adult learning theory central to their professional
learning provision. In addition, it is concerning that the challenges of early career
principals in Western Australia, as reported in research over 10 years ago, are
consistent with the findings of my research. Consequently, I recommend that further
research on this topic is conducted and these findings are strongly considered in the
ongoing provision of support for early career principals in Western Australia.

The following list summarises the recommendations discussed above. I suggest
that:

- The Institute continue to make the commitment to consider the
  contexts of early career principals, which are often high need schools, in
  their provision of support.
- The preparation of aspiring principals should include a formal
  qualification process such as a postgraduate degree.
• Principal preparation should evenly focus on school leadership and school management and highlight the connection between them.
• The development of relationships should be a focus of principal preparation and ongoing principal professional learning.
• An internal principal succession plan is most desirable.
• A comprehensive handover process is mandated.
• Extensive efforts are made to ensure that early career principals from rural and remote regions have access to the support they require.
• DoE actively ensure that every early career principal has access to a formal mentor who provides regular face-to-face and remote communication. DoE should also strongly recommend and promote forming informal mentorship relationships as a support mechanism.
• The Institute continue to use adult learning theory to underpin their professional learning provision.
• The findings of this study, which are aligned with those of previous studies, are considered by DoE in its provision of support for early career principals.

6.4 Concluding Comments

Research of the late 2000’s provided insight into the preparation and challenges of early career principals in Western Australia. Since then, few studies have been conducted to map the current landscape. My research sought to fill that gap by investigating how Western Australian early career principals are socialised to become effective school leaders and managers. In doing so, my research asked the following guiding research questions:

1. How do early career principals perceive their prior experience as preparation for the role?
2. What challenges do early career principals face?
3. What support mechanisms help early career principals overcome these challenges?

The findings from my study closely align with those of the previous decade. Three themes emerged from my data which were that the participant perceived challenges
of being: unprepared, unqualified and isolated. The participants felt that preparation for the principalship did not adequately prepare them to fully understand what the role entailed or provide them with the skills to confidently complete school management duties which they were accountable for. In addition, a perceived increased in focus on school management, at the cost of school leadership, resulted in the participants reporting feelings of being unqualified. As a result of feeling unprepared and unqualified, professional socialisation was a major challenge. Being an outsider in a new school and community left the participants feeling isolated as did the geographic location of all except one participant. This perceived isolation left the principals with the necessary and challenging processes of organisational socialisation and seeking access to professional learning. These challenges reported by my participants are consistent with findings from other studies within and beyond Australia. An additional finding from my research was that mentorship was seen to be the most effective form of support in facing the challenges during socialisation. The reasoning behind this finding seemed to align with what adult learning theory suggests are key principles of adult learning. Mentorship and the benefits of adult learning theory in professional learning for principals has also been reported in contemporary literature.

The longstanding view of the importance of the principalship, due to its impact on student learning, has been maintained in current times. Therefore, research into the development of effective school leadership and management, such as mine, is important and relevant. My research has also been timely, due to the lack of contemporary research investigating the current situation of early career principal socialisation in Western Australia. Furthermore, this research was timely as a result of the recent establishment of The Institute which brought significant changes in DoE’s professional learning provision. My research has been able to provide insight into the perception of this change from its cohort which was positive.

The alignment between the findings of this research and those of the past demonstrates the significance of this project. The findings have contributed to the field of principal socialisation in Western Australia and could be used to inform future research and by DoE as data to inform their ongoing commitment to develop effective school principals.
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## Appendix 1

Principal Professional Learning Provided by the Leadership Institute

(Department of Education Western Australia, 2019d, 2019e)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Delivery Mode</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving school performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading School Improvement</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>4-day spaced program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading School Improvement in a Small School</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 x 2-day spaced sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading School Improvement in a Special Education Need Context</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 x 2-day &amp; 2 x 1-day spaced sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading School Improvement: Making It Happen Master Class</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Leadership: Learning Leadership for School</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement and Innovation</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>5-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Culture Standards Framework: Leading a Culturally Responsive School</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-day program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing as a leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Leaders</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>10 x 2-hour weekly sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Certificate of Education Business Leadership</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>4 x units, 2x 2-day sessions per unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with Impact: First Impressions Count</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2-hour workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Writing and Interview Skills for School Leaders</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching on Demand</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>On demand</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building capability to lead highly effective teams</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 x 1-day spaced sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing Effective Teams</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 online module, 1 workshop (face-to-face or online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coaching: Positive Conversations About Teaching Practice</td>
<td>Online and Face-to-face</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Leadership Coaching</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a high care environment in schools</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Judo for Individuals</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Judo for Leaders</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health in the Workplace</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing system policy and process knowledge</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-day workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading the Management of Critical Incidents</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-hour video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email and Workflow Mastery</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>1-hour video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncategorised</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Coaching: Leading the Impact Cycle</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Classroom Observation and Feedback</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading a Culture of Whole School Self-Assessment</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-day program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch: Newly Appointed Principal Program</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 x 2-day workshops in addition to coaching and mentoring support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Principal Professional Learning Provided by the Institute for Professional Learning

(Department of Education Western Australia, 2017b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Delivery Mode</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newly Appointed Leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Public Schools Bridging Program: changing places, changing</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>views</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Eligibility Modules</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>12 components, one hour each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Principals</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing leadership capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing Effective Professional Learning</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation Skills</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Certificate of Educational Business Leadership</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing High Trust Relationships: Developing Self and Others with the</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiSC® Management Profile</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Leadership Coaching</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Title</td>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Rounds: a network approach to improving teaching and learning</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>1 day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading a Coaching Culture for Learning</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading a Culture of Classroom Observation and Feedback</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading for Impact: an advanced leadership program for Independent Public School principals</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>4 days (non-consecutive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Reflective Practice</td>
<td>Face-to-face &amp; online</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifestyle Planning for Baby Boomers</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring in Schools</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Board for Education: IPS Board Governance Training</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coaching: positive conversations about teaching practice</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days (non-consecutive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution Focus Master Class: an advanced coaching skills program</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-Centred Funding Model and One Line Budget Training</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Wellbeing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Optimal Wellbeing in Leadership and Schools</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a Wellbeing: a focus on individual wellbeing</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing a Culture of Wellbeing</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course</td>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Duration</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health in the Workplace</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Judo for Individuals</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Judo for Leaders</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership bus tours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empowered Leadership Bus Tour</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading ICT Bus Tour</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading school improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading School Improvement: the unrelenting focus on learning</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>4 days (non-consecutive)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading School Improvement in a Small School Context</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>3 days (non-consecutive)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading School Improvement for Secondary Team Leaders</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>3 days (non-consecutive)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindful Leaders Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindful Leaders Program Preview</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
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<td>Mindful Leaders Program</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>9 days (non-consecutive)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching on demand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultancy in planning professional learning for your school</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Name</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institute on the road</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support for principals</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Funded places</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cranlana Programme</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>6 days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate Certificate in Business (Public Sector Management Program)</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>3-4 days over 15 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate Certificate of Educational Business Leadership</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>4 units over 4 semesters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership WA Rising Leadership Program</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>11 days over 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership WA Signature Leadership Program</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>23 days over 10 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Anika Foundation Youth Depression Awareness Scholarship for Western Australia</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 2017 Experienced Principals Program</td>
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<td>10 days over 1 year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women in Leadership – Rising Leaders</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhancing knowledge in system policy and process</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branding and Marketing your School</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branding and Marketing: an introduction to social media</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branding and Marketing: enhancing your presence in social media</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deter, Detect, Protect - Working with Children Check</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Great Start for Grads  
Online  
45 minutes

Human Resources Management  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Implementation and Consolidation of the National Quality Standard  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Introduction to SOE Support Fundamentals  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Introduction to Student-Centred Funding and the School Resourcing System  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Job Design and Classification  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Performance Management for Principals and School Administrators  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Records Management in Schools  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Recruitment  
Face-to-face  
1 day

School Corporate Services Staff - Using Your Competency Framework  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Supporting Teachers Transitioning to Full Registration: role of the principal  
Online  
30 minutes

Teaching gifted and talented students  
Face-to-face  
1 day

Using Data to Lead School Improvement  
Face-to-face  
2 days