Chapter 39
Learning for Leadership: An Evidence Based Approach for Leadership Learning in Faith-Based Schools

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Introduction

The skills required by educational leaders to effectively lead schools are not necessarily natural gifts and talents possessed by all people in the educational setting. In recent times much research and policy oriented work has been devoted to identifying the skills and attributes which leaders and aspiring leaders need to know and learn if they are to develop and maintain an effective school, and in particular if they are to contribute, through their leadership, to increased levels of student learning (Chapman 2005, 2008; Marzano et al. 2005; MacBeath et al. 2006; Robinson 2007; OECD Activity on Improving School Leadership 2007). In this chapter we argue that these lessons, derived from leadership research and from the international policy context more broadly, are necessary to the development of leaders in faith-based schools, just as they are necessary to leaders in all school systems. However, whilst in faith-based schools and school systems these generic areas of professional knowledge, skills and competencies are vital and necessary, they are not sufficient for the preparation, formation and renewal of educational leaders in faith-based schools (Chapman and Buchanan 2012; see also Buchanan 2013b). This is in accordance with the growing body of literature that has pointed to the distinctiveness of leadership in faith-based schools (Bezzina et al. 2007; Buchanan 2011; Cook 2008; Duignan 2007; Holman 2007; Miller 2007).

Leaders and aspiring leaders of faith-based schools must undergo continual renewal, growth and development in the ability to lead, develop and maintain successful schools and to promote the learning and wellbeing of students in faith-based contexts (Buchanan and Rymarz 2008). The findings of the research (Chapman and Buchanan 2009, 2012) which informs this chapter reveal many attributes that

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leaders and aspiring leaders need to know and learn that may not necessarily be achieved exclusively through traditional forms of higher education undertaken to complete postgraduate academic qualifications or forms of professional learning and development that are focussed on the development of managerial skills or competencies. Drawing upon this research we aim to articulate what leaders need to learn, to know and to do as a rigorous evidence base for informing and shaping innovative and successful initiatives and strategies for the learning of leaders in faith-based Christian schools.

Research Design: Developing an Evidence Base for Learning for Leadership in Faith-Based Schools

The research upon which we are drawing in this analysis was initiated by the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, the fourth largest education system in Australia and the third largest Catholic diocese in the world. It was an assumption underpinning this research that whilst the concepts and categories emerging from the broad body of literature on educational leadership is valuable in providing major insights and understandings relevant to the preparation, retention and renewal of school leaders in all schools and school systems, other considerations need to be brought into play to deepen and enrich the formation of effective leadership and leadership development in faith-based schools. A key concern of this study, therefore, was to identify not only the generic learning needs of leaders, but also to identify the additional elements and factors called for and appropriate for leadership in faith-based environments. After analysing the emerging concepts and categories from this research, we set out to synthesise and integrate these with existing bodies of knowledge and insights from national and international developments in leadership and leadership learning more broadly, to construct an evidence base for learning for leadership in faith-based schools. This subsequently informed the development of the learning platform for the Catholic Leadership Centre which commenced in Melbourne, Australia in 2013.

At all stages of the enquiry, the researchers worked closely with senior officers of the Catholic Education Office, in Melbourne in formulating the design of the study, identifying relevant individuals and groups for consultation; revising and refining drafts of documentation; and evaluating the progress of the project as it unfolded. The first phase of the study involved an extensive review of the national and international literature and developments relevant to leadership and leadership learning, particularly drawing upon work undertaken in association with the OECD Activity on Improving School Leadership. In addition to work undertaken in association with the OECD it included discussions with leaders in leadership and leadership learning in the United Kingdom including senior personnel at the National College of School Leadership, Nottingham; The Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge and the Centre for Leadership and Learning, the University of London. The second phase involved data gathering in the Australian context and involved 43

interviews with representatives of organizations and stakeholder groups in Catholic education and the broader Catholic community. The findings and tentative recommendations and proposals for action were presented to focus groups for further scrutiny. This process of interactive discussion and analysis between group members resulted in a clarification of key findings and recommendation and attested to their validity and plausibility (Flick 2006; Lincoln and Guba 1985). The data collected from interviews, focus groups, and insights gained from international experience were analysed in context with additional sources of knowledge gained from the international research and policy context.

The Research Evidence: Dimensions of Learning for Leadership in Faith-Based Schools

From the research evidence a number of guiding principles, values, concepts and concerns emerged as being vital to the development of leadership in faith-based schools. An analysis of the responses revealed both distinct and generic dimensions of learning for leadership in faith-based schools. These dimensions of learning for leadership in faith-based schools are detailed below.

Faith, Religious and Spiritual Formation

Our evidence suggests that leaders in faith-based schools need well developed formation experiences where spiritual growth and religious understanding are in harmony and through which faith can be lived and celebrated by the leader in the school and in all other aspects of his/her life. This type of formation is beyond what is normally provided in a typical professional development program or in an academically orientated higher education course in educational leadership. A key theme is an emphasis on the leader being *committed* not only as a professional educator but in terms of his/her whole being (de Souza 2006).

Leaders need to be very committed to their own faith journey as the following comment from one of the leaders in our research suggested.

> Leaders need to have some idea of where they stand, where their spirituality is, a very firm grasp on who God is in their life, what faith is all about and how they're going to impart that to other people.

It is the experience of faith, a world view, and a preparedness to see everything that one does through the prism of faith that is distinctive in the leader of a faith-based school. If leaders do not have a clear value set or a vision of who they are, and the nature of their vision for a faith-based education, then they are not going to be able to fulfil all the expectations, roles and responsibilities of leadership in a faith-based context. This insight was echoed by many participants and is reflected in this comment shared by a representative of the regional Council of Priests.

Table 39.1 Faith, religious and spiritual formation

1. Understanding of self in relationship to God, one's self and other people
2. Being committed to the formation of the whole person
3. Being committed to faith leadership inspired by the religious tradition and values
4. Being engaged in ongoing dialogue and study of theology, religion and sacred texts
5. Being committed to nurturing a person's spirituality in the religious tradition
6. Engaged in a faith journey
7. Living the faith in relationship with God and others
8. Celebrating faith in light of the religious culture and tradition
9. Involving people in dialogue about faith, religion and spirituality
10. Supporting others in their spiritual journeys
11. Having an understanding, awareness and knowledge of different faiths and religious traditions
12. Working with diversity in the faith community

> It's the way we see the world in which we live, so that the leader, him or herself, will see something about his or her own participation in that world, but the leader will also be trying to engage others into that world view. I think it is around integration.

In Christian schools leaders need the capacity to integrate Christian leadership and educational leadership in order to develop and maintain successful schools that promote learning and wellbeing in a faith-based context (Buchanan 2013a). In regard to this particular dimension of *faith, religious and spiritual formation* in learning for leadership, the evidence from this research has highlighted the importance of the qualities, knowledge and attributes identified in Table 39.1.

It is our recommendation that in learning for leadership in faith-based schools there is a need to place emphasis on programmes and formation experiences specifically oriented towards the development of the whole person, especially in reference to their faith, religious, and spiritual formation and those responsible for the delivery of such programmes should incorporate the qualities and attributes highlighted above.

Formation in the Identity, Culture and Mission of the Church

A leader in a faith-based school needs to be able to nurture their own spirituality and the spirituality of other people, live the faith in relationship with others (Buchanan 2010). Connecting people to the commitments and culture of the Church can be among the many challenges of leadership. Working with the people we are *given* to lead and drawing the best from each person and situation requires the support of the wider Church community.

Faith-based schools have often been hierarchical in structure and the leader of the school is generally perceived to be possessing authority and power that has sometimes had the potential to make leadership a somewhat lonely and isolated experience (Stern 2009, 2013). Formation in the identity, culture and mission of the Church is vital to sustain leaders and to promote the development of a sense of commitment

Table 39.2 Formation in the identity, culture and mission of the church

1. Understanding of the history of the Church
2. Commitment to and knowledge of faith-based education in Australia and beyond
3. Commitment to Church traditions and teachings
4. Understanding of the religious identity and mission of the Church
5. Awareness of the vision of the Church as it finds expression within a contemporary context
6. Knowledge of the institutions and agencies of the Church across the community
7. Commitment to and understanding of the Church's social teachings as they apply to frameworks of equity, inclusion and family-school partnerships
8. Conversant with the laws, canons and structure of the Church as they apply to education
9. Awareness of the deep story and traditions of religious orders and congregations
10. The capacity to exercise leadership in the dimensions of faith, parish, pastoral support and ministry

and belonging to a broader tradition and entity. The following insight from a principal of a school alludes to this concern and the need for ongoing formation.

> While we're leaders in our schools, we are also leaders in our community and there's a danger that you tend to become the person in an ivory tower if we don't listen to the language of faith from all walks of life. So not only do we need to have access to the best learned people in the area of faith and religion, we also need to hear about life journeys from people who have been transformed by their faith experience. And that might be as simple as meeting with colleagues from other professions.

This insight from a primary school principal highlights the need for ongoing learning and looks more broadly as to the form and shape of this learning within the Church and across the faith community, extending beyond the traditional confines of professional development programs in educational leadership and management and academic programs in traditional tertiary settings. Learning from this perspective requires opportunities to dialogue as well as listen and learn from the life journeys of people from all walks of life, people who have been transformed by their faith experience and by their identification and belonging to Church. This type of learning needs to be oriented toward guiding leaders and aspiring leaders to opportunities for ongoing formation in the identity, culture and mission of the Church.

From the evidence collected in this research in the dimension of learning for leadership that we have described as *identity, culture and mission of the Church* we would recommend study in areas such as ecclesiology, the history of the Church, and the teachings, traditions, culture and the history of the Church. In regard to formation in the identity, culture and mission of the Church the findings of this research indicated the importance of the qualities, knowledge and attributes identified in Table 39.2.

We thus recommend that in learning programmes for leaders in faith-based schools there needs to be formation experiences that enable leaders to deepen their understanding of Church history and teachings so that they can feel confident to exercise faith leadership in school, parish and pastoral contexts. It should be pointed out however, that formation in this dimension of learning for leadership should not be confined only to achieving an academic understanding of these significant areas. The planning and delivery of such opportunities must also be available for experiences that allowed one to engage personally and deeply with the Church culture and teachings.

Table 39.3 Personal formation: embodying and exemplifying personal and interpersonal qualities and skills

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1. Capacity to communicate, interact well with people and work in teams
2. Ability to model leadership and enable leadership in others
3. Capacity to lead for transformation and change
4. Ability to build personal, professional and leadership capacity in others
5. Ability to engage others in the articulation of an educational vision and provide leadership to others in bringing about its realisation
6. Ability to make wise judgements
7. Awareness of self in relationship to others
8. Commitment to 'being one's best self'
9. Able to overcome resistance and resolve conflict and build resilience
10. A commitment to life-long learning
11. Ability to manage stress and stressful situations
12. Commitment to ethical and moral decision making

Personal Formation: Embodying and Exemplifying Personal and Interpersonal Qualities and Skills

In all schools effective leadership is about relationship building but in faith-based schools, leaders must embody, exemplify and model valued personal and interpersonal qualities and skills to ensure that a school is able to portray its unique character. Concern for the formation of the whole person is paramount if the Church is to achieve its mission. Attention must be given to the personal formation of leaders of schools as well as teachers and students. This places great responsibilities on leaders of schools to be attentive to ongoing personal formation not only for their own development but for the development of the entire community. The following insight from one of the leaders in our research highlights this concern.

> A principal should be involved in this communal endeavour of bringing people to wholeness. The holistic nature of leadership exercised in-situ honouring the situation of people, honouring formation as a permanent pursuit. Ultimately a commitment to ongoing personal formation by leaders and teachers has the potential to impact on the lives of students. School leaders and teachers reveal to students what it means to be human, as a person of faith.

The personal formation of leaders and aspiring leaders will require the ability to interact positively and communicate effectively with a diverse range of people, inspiring and mobilising people towards a common goal and building a sense of teamwork among the school community, so that people can commit to a shared vision that enables them to confidently embrace change.

In regard to personal formation oriented towards embodying and exemplifying personal and interpersonal qualities and skills the findings of this research indicated the importance of the qualities, knowledge and attributes identified in Table 39.3.

We thus recommend that formation programmes for the development of personal and interpersonal qualities and skills as outlined in Table 39.3 stem from Christian faith-based contexts so that leaders can learn to witness to the faith in all aspects of their leadership role as well as their own being.

Professional Formation

The dimensions of leadership highlighted above are of particular importance in faith-based schools but other areas of professional formation are also of vital importance. Our evidence suggests the special importance of learning for leaders in the areas of Promoting Quality Teaching and Learning; Goal Setting and Accountability; Management of Resources; the Creation and Fostering of Community. Each of these key areas of concern are explored in the discussion which follows.

Promoting Quality Teaching and Learning

Leaders have a responsibility to promote teacher's professional learning through mentoring, coaching and providing opportunities for them to engage in decision making. Leaders need to be actively engaged in the learning of their staff. Associated with this, leaders should also understand the advantages of distributive leadership and encourage staff to become involved in decision making. In so doing teachers have the opportunity to become engaged with leadership throughout their professional careers. As one principal comments:

> The thing that will most shape you is the experience of working with people who see it as their role to mentor you and to develop you and who give you opportunities and coach you through it. You also have to have a predisposition to learn too and so therefore you have to also be reading or engaging in professional learning.

Promoting teaching and learning will require leaders to have the knowledge and skills to promote teachers' professional learning and capacity; promote teachers' professional behaviour; foster team building; provide mentoring for staff; exercise and foster curriculum leadership; be abreast with knowledge of the latest issues and developments in learning and teaching; be knowledgeable about issues impacting on student engagement and wellbeing and committed to improvements in student learning experiences and the achievement of outcomes.

Goal Setting and Accountability

Leaders also need to develop a multi-faceted approach to goal setting and an evidence based approach to accountability. At the very core of education must be a concern for leaders to deliver quality learning outcomes for all children in all domains, academic, physical, cultural and in a faith-based school that includes the faith dimension as well. As one leader comments:

> Unless you produce outcomes you don't get students. It is important that principals be informed that their school, that their performance will be judged by the performance of their students, and that the principal's obligation will include a focus on improving the academic performance across the whole school and that this is to be demonstrated by all teachers.

In this area of professional responsibility leaders will need to develop the skills necessary for establishing goals and expectations; ensuring a supportive learning environment; ensuring coherence and alignment; maintaining whole school focus; linking vision to achievable plans; understanding the principles of teacher evaluation and appraisal; promoting school improvement and other strategic initiatives; establishing sustainable and achievable goals and growth and using accountability mechanisms and requirements to bring about positive school reform.

Strategic Management of Resources

Leaders also need to effectively manage resources as an essential aspect of improving quality learning impacts and outcomes. A leader's ability to manage the resources in their school is a critical part of delivering quality learning outcomes for students. As a primary principal comments:

> You have to understand the economics of running a school, how to bring a community together but at the same time how to support what the community does financially. You have to be somewhat of an architect in matching what's the best way to learn with the best environment in which to do so.

In an evidence based learning environment leaders also need the capacity to be able to analyse, interpret and implement information about student results. They need to be able to read the data that they're working with, whether it is student performance data, financial data or school improvement data.

Among the various strategic management competencies required of leaders are skills in: financial management; knowledge management; facility management; technology management; industrial relations; managing data and applying it for improvement; legal issues; occupational health and safety; management of human resources; and knowledge of branding, marketing, public relations and relations with the media; understanding of current and future trends and their relationship to resource needs; knowledge of systems analysis and the capacity to undertake risk management.

Creation and Fostering of Community

Leaders in faith-based schools have a responsibility to engage with a broad range of community members in a values-driven, faith-based approach to improving the learning of young people (Buchanan 2013b). In order to achieve this, leaders need to be informed about national agendas and priorities and understand their implications for the school and for its community and for students within it. In addition, leaders need to learn ways of collaborating with a wide range of partners and school stakeholders, including: parish priests, parents and carers, system personnel and representatives of the Archdiocese, religious congregations, commonwealth, state and local

government representatives, community groups, governance bodies, professional bodies and associations. Within the school they need to be able to develop collaborative relationships amongst students, staff and the broader community. They need to be able to promote connections and networks among a range of schools and enter into collaborative arrangements with social justice organisations, and the broad range of service agencies, and social support groups within the community.

These networks, internal and external to the school, require the ability to negotiate and deal with a wide range of interests; the capacity to exercise wise political judgement; knowledge of the political environment within which schools operate and an understanding of the variety of governance bodies and arrangements that are a part of education provision. This in turn requires the ability to think innovatively about collaboration; be an advocate on behalf of the school and education more broadly; understanding the context of schooling and the conceptions of society and community that influence schooling. Most importantly the leader must be committed to working with families and the community in the interests of improving education for young people.

Implications for the Design of Leadership Learning Experiences for Leaders in Faith-Based Schools

To develop, support and retain effective leaders it is vital that their morale, commitment and sense of professional value and personal worth are maintained and their creativity and enthusiasm are promoted. Leaders are subject to the effect of a complex array of factors that have the potential to impact negatively on their vision for education, their performance and continuing survival in leadership roles. Leaders must be given support to face the challenges of their responsibilities and to renew and reinvigorate their professional performance and personal belief and commitment.

Across the world there is widespread agreement that there is a need for a fundamental rethinking of the content, structure, delivery and assessment of leadership learning. To date there have been many studies designed to identify characteristics of effective leadership learning programmes but very little specific attention to learning for leadership in faith-based schools. We hope that our research has begun to address this deficiency.

We argue that vital to leadership learning for faith-based schools is the interplay of a number of elements that are necessary for leadership learning in any school setting: personal formation; study of the relevant theoretical disciplines and the substantive domains of professional knowledge and competence; critically reflective practice; engagement in field-based learning activities and peer supported networks. But in regard to faith-based schools, we argue leadership learning involves more than this.

A review of the literature reveals a range of practices are available for the development of leaders and those with future leadership capacity. These include: mentoring and networking (Buchanan 2013c); coaching; internship; shadowing; special assignments and targeted learning experiences; formal university award

bearing study; and engagement in programmes organized by learning institutes and academies. A carefully conceived and comprehensive programme of leadership learning should involve the incorporation of many of these strategies in a portfolio of leadership experiences shaped in accord with a personal learning development plans.

Leaders of faith-based schools would be well served by accessing as many as possible of the range of learning experiences available to leaders in all types of schools. But in addition, there needs to be those experiences in leadership learning that integrate it with faith formation and development. As one participant in our study commented:

> A lot of people have a real commitment to the Church but not a great understanding of the theological tradition of the Church or the really fundamental theological principles on which everything else is built. It is important to try and engage people in such a way as to lead them into that kind of understanding.

Strategies for linking leadership learning with faith formation might include: studies in religion and theology; opportunities for guided reading; opportunities for reflection and spiritual direction; retreat experiences with other leaders to dialogue on issues associated with faith and religion; opportunities to engage with internationally acclaimed theologians and religious educators; and opportunities to be immersed in key aspects of the identity and mission of the Church in the global context.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter we have argued that the ongoing learning required for leadership in faith schools needs to be conceived as occurring not only when but beyond the traditional knowledge and professionally based training programs offered through professional development activities or traditional institutions for higher education. The distinct dimension of learning for leadership in faith-based schools requires more than a commitment to academic studies; it requires a commitment by each individual to the ongoing formation of the whole person. This endeavour should aim to be achieved through shared insights from people from diverse social, cultural and professional backgrounds, engaged in both formal and experiential learning that embraces opportunities for shared insights into the mission, traditions and commitments of the Church. Present and aspiring leaders will flourish from opportunities to engage more deeply with their faith and to become more conversant with their Church's identity, culture and mission, finding expression in their leadership role in the school and community as well as within their own personal lives. Learning in traditional academic institutions and managerially oriented professional development programs would be necessary but not sufficient to fulfil the needs for the holistic formation of leaders and aspiring leaders necessary to exercise leadership in a faith-based context.

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