

**Building Professional Capital through Teacher Leadership**

**Refereed paper**

**Submitted by**

**Dr Patricia O'Brien (Tricia O'Brien)**

**Fourth International Conference**

**Catholic Educational Leadership Sydney**

**29 July - 1 August 2007**

## **Abstract**

As educational visionaries explore a new imaginary for schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Beare, 2006), a crucial factor in the debate is the changing nature and function of leadership in schools. Recent research findings indicated that positional, formal leadership is still a reality in schools, whilst the concept of teachers leading in their professional practice is yet to gain rightful status.

In this paper is presented a case for building 'professional capital' through teacher leadership to develop a new imaginary for Catholic schools. Professional capital refers to the abundant resource of teachers' professional practice, teachers' professional learning and the potential of teacher leadership development. The concept is developed from key findings of doctoral research, which explored the perceptions and experiences of leadership by teachers in Catholic schools and their opportunities for leadership development. The study highlighted the integral connection between teacher leadership theory and teacher professional practice and learning. However, key findings suggested that leadership by teachers in Catholic schools is very much shaped and influenced by ways in which teacher professional practice and learning are constructed and resourced. Only when Catholic schools begin to facilitate processes that support teacher professional capital will a new 'imaginary' of teachers as leaders emerge.

## **Introduction**

Teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century holds the promise of a new imaginary for schools (Beare, 2006), But how this new imaginary unfolds and transforms schools is yet to be conceived. The rhetoric is fertile but the transformation is slow. However, there is one certainty – in order to be effective in this technology-driven society, schools will need to replace conventional teaching with ground-breaking practices in teaching and learning. Pivotal to a new imaginary for schools is the recognition of the rich resource of teachers and their capacity to transform the life of a school in their professional roles of teaching and learning.

The focus of this paper is on teachers and their capacity to build professional capital through teacher leadership. The paper emerges from a study (O'Brien, 2005), which explored the perceptions and experiences of leadership by teachers in Catholic schools and their opportunities for leadership development. Whilst the findings revealed that teachers in the sample had a well-developed sense of their personal, interpersonal and professional capacities for leadership, the findings also suggested that teachers have limited control in exercising these leadership capacities in their professional practice and learning. The purpose of this paper is to explore the rich resource of teacher professional practice, teacher professional learning and teacher leadership development in a school, in light of the study's findings, in order to establish a case for building professional capital through teacher leadership.

### **Establishing a case for building professional capital through teacher leadership**

The term, capital, has become a part of the lexicon in educational literature in recent years. The term derives from the broader spectrum of human capital theory, which broadly focuses

on the harnessing and development of an individual's qualities and capacities for the greater benefit of society, either in an economic, social or professional context (Quiggan, 1999). Human, social, intellectual and organisational forms of capital have featured prominently in educational writings (Brown & Lauder, 2000; Hargreaves, 2001; Avis, 2002; Croll, 2004) to refer to processes and the output of these processes that build capacity in people and organisations. For these writers, forms of capital provide a conceptual construct or way of thinking for communicating deep meanings about human and other resources within a school and the dynamic working of these resources in building school effectiveness.

Hargreaves (2001; 2003) elucidates the richness of the three forms of capital: intellectual, social and organisational, in building school effectiveness. For Hargreaves an effective school mobilises its capital to achieve educational outcomes. According to Hargreaves, intellectual capital refers to the rich resource of collective knowledge that is generated and experienced in a school among school members. It is the dynamic of this knowledge-creation and knowledge-generation that creates the intellectual capital in a school. Hargreaves' conception of social capital places a focus on people and their relationships, and the collaborative networking that results through trust. It is Hargreaves' assertion that a school rich in social capital will nurture its intellectual capital whilst, for Hargreaves, organisational capital encompasses how a school might organize and mobilise its intellectual and social capital to bring about school effectiveness. From this overview it is conceivable that the notion of professional capital, as developed in this paper, is inherent in Hargreaves' conceptualisation of the three forms of capital.

Whilst it is acknowledged here that an understanding of the concept of capital is borrowed heavily from Hargreaves' conceptualisation, the development of the concept, professional

capital, emerges from selected key findings of research (O'Brien, 2005), which explored the perceptions and experiences of leadership by teachers in Catholic schools and their opportunities for leadership development. The research was a small-scale qualitative inquiry conducted through four focus groups of teachers in two Catholic secondary schools in the State of Victoria. Additional data was drawn from a fifth focus group of teachers, identified in the study as an 'expert' group and comprising members of a professional coordinators' network. Although it can be argued that the findings are applicable only to the teachers who participated in the research, it can also be argued that the inquiry produced deep insights into the ways in which leadership is constructed in Catholic schools.

Five questions shaped the research and data collection process:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of leadership in general?
2. What are teachers' perceptions and experiences of leadership in Catholic schools?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of leadership by teachers in Catholic schools?
4. What are teachers' experiences of leadership by teachers in Catholic schools?
5. What are the opportunities for leadership development for teachers in Catholic schools?

Key findings that emerged from the data were synthesised into nineteen discrete themes and related key understandings. In this paper, selected themes and key understandings drawn from data gathered in response to question two and question five, form a basis for the conceptualisation of 'professional capital'.

Findings revealed that teachers in the sample exercised leadership in a range of ways in their professional practice and professional learning, and that leadership development

occurred principally through these practices but on an informal basis. Herein lies a rich resource of professional capital in schools. However, the findings also revealed that the experience of leadership by teachers in Catholic schools is shaped by how leadership is constructed in a school and by ways in which teacher professional practice and professional learning are facilitated in a school. Therefore, in establishing a case for building professional capital through teacher leadership in a Catholic school, a key factor for deliberation here is the extent to which a school might resource and facilitate processes which support teacher leadership through teachers' professional practice, teachers' professional learning, and formal teacher leadership development..

Although the various forms of capital are applicable to any school and school system, in this discussion the concept of professional capital is explored in the particular context of a Catholic school. It is asserted here that a Catholic school has a foundational educational philosophy, which promotes an environment conducive to building professional capital through teacher leadership.

A Catholic school's educational philosophy, which reflects the broader educational mission of the Catholic church, is grounded in the nature of personhood (Groome, 1996; D. McLaughlin, 2000), the person in relationship with others (Groome) and within community (Declaration on Christian Education, 1965). Sultmann & McLaughlin (2000) asserted that a dominant feature of a Catholic school is the strength of its relational and communal dimensions. Given this foundation, a Catholic school has a capacity to mobilise growth in professional capital through providing opportunities for the holistic formation of the teacher as a professional and as one who leads in professional practice and learning. However, in considering ways in which professional capital might be mobilized through teacher

leadership, there is a need to look at leadership, in its construction and function, in a Catholic school.

### **Leadership in a Catholic school**

As in other school systems in Australia, leadership in Catholic schools has traditionally been hierarchical in structure and authoritative in nature, in which designated individuals assumed a formal position of power and authority in the school (Hoy & Miskel, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1992). A more democratic understanding of leadership emerged as schools undertook more responsibility for their governance during the school reforms of the last three decades.

Leadership was no longer seen to be definitively the role and status of the individual in formal leadership, but assumed a more collaborative and participative approach (Leithwood, Tomlinson & Genge, 1996). New approaches to leadership were conceptualised, with some of the more prominent approaches being shared leadership (Barth, 1999; Lambert, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1996); distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002) and a participative approach to leadership (Bennett, Harvey, Woods & Wise, 2003). In principle, these leadership approaches encapsulate the ideals of the educational philosophy of a Catholic school. However, in practice, the style of leadership in a Catholic school is, to a great or lesser extent, shaped and influenced by dynamic organisational and cultural factors in the school.

Various writers (Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Duncan, 1998; Grace, 1995) asserted that the organisational and cultural dimensions of a school influence leadership in a Catholic school. However, it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss these dimensions in detail. What is pertinent to this discussion is an understanding that there is a strong interrelationship between organisational and cultural factors, and leadership.

Key findings (O'Brien, 2005) revealed that cultural factors such as shared values, shared responsibility, community building and collegiality, as identified by writers (Flynn & Mok; Leithwood et al.1996), influenced leadership in a Catholic school. A strong sense of community was seen by some teachers in the sample to influence leadership that was empowering and collaborative in nature. Responses suggested that this was principally the experience of teachers who worked in a religious congregation-owned school and whose experience of leadership was one in which teachers were encouraged to participate in a shared vision, shared decision-making and collaborative practice. These findings bring legitimacy to a view in this discussion, notably, a Catholic school, which is grounded in community and encourages an empowering and collaborative leadership, has a deep capacity to nurture teacher leadership and in the process, build professional capital.

As well as the influence of its cultural environment, the organisational environment of a Catholic school has a significant influence in determining how leadership is exercised. Organisational structures, such as role systems and responsibilities, and decision-making processes, as identified by Frost and Harris (2003), were evident in the findings (O'Brien, 2005). Although leadership was both perceived and experienced by some teachers in the sample as being participative and collaborative, leadership was still strongly equated with positional leadership in which teachers, by virtue of their particular role, assumed the status of a leader. Leadership was viewed as being dependent upon an opportunity to attain a position rather than on the capacities of a person to lead in professional practice and learning. Such leadership was seen to reflect strong elements of hierarchy and power (Boles & Troen, 1996; Hoy & Miskel, 1996). The organisational structures of formal leadership were seen to exclude leadership by teachers who are not in a formal position of leadership. One concern highlighted in the findings was the extent to which leadership in a Catholic school might be

compromised by a school's increasing accountability to bureaucracy, thus resulting in managerial rather than leadership roles, and at the expense of nurturing positive leadership.

It is established here that organisational and cultural factors to a great or lesser extent, shape and influence leadership in a Catholic school. However, there is still much groundwork to be undertaken in Catholic schools in promoting leadership that is collaborative and participative, and distributed widely beyond formal leadership roles. A particular challenge for Catholic schools is to examine ways in which teachers can exercise and develop leadership through their professional practice and professional learning.

### **Teachers in a Catholic school**

Teachers, in general, are perceived as being highly educated and committed to the profession (Sergiovanni, 1995). Notwithstanding this assertion, teachers in Catholic schools have a dual role in exercising their professional responsibilities and a commitment to the broader educational mission of the Church (Declaration on Christian Education, 1965). *The Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977) declared that the culture and faith life of a Catholic school relies to a great extent on the integration of faith and life in the person of the teacher. However, it is acknowledged here that writers such as Duminuco (1999), Feheney (1998) and Tinsey (1998) have argued that the capacity for teachers in Catholic schools to strike the balance between their personal and professional lives can be problematic and that one cannot always assume that teachers today make a conscious commitment to the mission and values espoused in a Catholic school.

Shimabukuro (1999) identified key areas of teacher commitment that are intrinsic to teachers in Catholic schools. They include a commitment to community-building; to lifelong spiritual and religious growth; to ongoing professional development; to the formation of students' spirituality; and to students' holistic and human development. Shimabukuro spoke of a need for teachers to perceive learning as an intrinsic aspect of Catholic pedagogy and to embrace a process of lifelong learning. In light of Shimabukuro's view, it is argued here that a teacher's commitment to the educational mission of a Catholic school contributes to a positive and empowering climate for building professional capital through teacher leadership.

### **Teacher leadership**

Teacher leadership has attained its rightful place in educational literature but its application in schools as a legitimate form of leadership is yet to be fully realised.

Teacher leadership theory is grounded in a conviction that the very process of teaching is a leadership function (Ash & Persall, 2000) and that teachers leading in their professional practice contribute directly to school improvement and effectiveness (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996; Frost & Durrant, 2002, 2004; Harris, 2002; Harris & Muijs, 2002). Whilst substantial literature on the subject has emerged at the international level, in Australia, with the exception of the ongoing research by Andrews, Crowther and colleagues (Andrews, Lewis & Crowther, 2001; Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Andrews, Conway, Lewis & McMaster, 2006), the theoretical and empirical evidence is more limited. For the purpose of this discussion four key principles of teacher leadership are drawn from the literature to support a case for building professional capital in Catholic schools through

teacher leadership. These principles articulate particular characteristics of teachers' professional practice and professional learning, and provide foundational principles on which to develop a substantial argument for building professional capital through teacher leadership.

Key principles that underpin teacher leadership are:

*Teacher leadership is exercised through teachers' professional practice* - teacher leadership is exercised in teachers' professional practice in informal ways and roles both in and beyond the classroom (Ash & Persall, 2000; Barth, 1999; Silins & Mulford, 2000);

*Teacher leadership is exercised through teachers' professional learning* - teacher leadership is exercised through collaborative and mutual learning (Harris, 2002; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 2003) and is enabled when teachers have an opportunity to learn (Silins & Mulford, 2000);

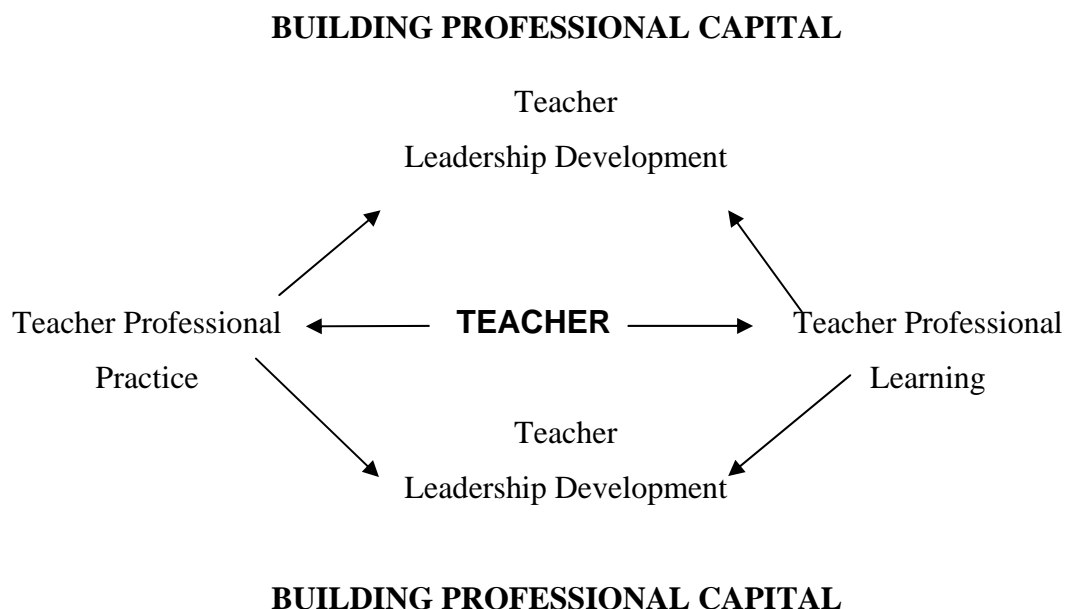
*Teacher leadership requires opportunities for teacher leadership development* - teacher leadership develops purposefully through long term planning (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996) and requires a recognition that all teachers have a capacity to become leading learners in leadership development (O'Brien, 2006); and

*Teacher leadership contributes to school improvement and effectiveness* – teachers contribute to school improvement and school effectiveness when they lead and influence student learning (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996; Frost & Durrant, 2002, 2004; Harris, 2002; Harris & Muijs, 2002).

These principles are considered in light of key findings of the study (O'Brien, 2005) from which this paper is developed. The principles provide a framework in which to develop a case for building professional capital in Catholic schools through teacher leadership. A principal factor driving the discussion is the extent to which a school might resource and facilitate teacher professional practice, teacher professional learning and teacher leadership development. Although reference is specifically made to research conducted on teachers in Catholic schools, the term, school, denotes not only reference to a Catholic school, but to schools in other systems.

A conceptual framework outlines the perspectives from which this paper discusses key principles of teacher leadership in building professional capital

Figure: 1.1 *A framework for building professional capital through teacher leadership*



The framework (Figure 1.1) displays the three important resources that have a capacity to build professional capital through teacher leadership in a school: teacher professional

practice, teacher professional learning and teacher leadership development. These three resources are discussed in light of key findings (O'Brien, 2005) to develop a case for building professional capital in Catholic schools through teacher leadership.

### **Building professional capital through teacher leadership in teacher professional practice**

The findings of O'Brien's (2005) research, which explored the perceptions and experiences of leadership by teachers and their opportunities for leadership development, revealed personal, interpersonal and professional capacities, which enabled teachers to exercise leadership in their professional practice. For a detailed discussion of these findings, see O'Brien (2006) in which discussion was focused on teachers leading with agency through the development of their personal, interpersonal and professional capacities. The concept of agency was drawn from Bruner's (1996) understanding of human agency, and the notion of knowing oneself and one's capacity to make a difference, as highlighted in the writings of Frost and Durrant (2004) and Frost and Harris, (2003). The premise of the discussion was leadership by teachers is shaped and influenced by a teacher's personal, interpersonal and professional agency, as displayed in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 *Leadership by teachers is shaped and influenced by a teacher's agency*

| <b>personal agency</b> | <b>Interpersonal agency</b> | <b>professional agency</b>                           |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>being authentic</b> | <b>being relational</b>     | <b>being professional in the process of teaching</b> |
| integrity              | trust                       | organisation competency                              |
| sincerity              | care                        | communication competency                             |
| moral purpose          | discernment                 | knowledge competency                                 |
| honesty                | mutual respect              |  |
| <b>being motivated</b> | <b>being empowering</b>     | <b>being professional in the process of learning</b> |
| enthusiasm             | positive interaction        | reflective practice                                  |
| initiative             | enabling                    | collaborative practice                               |
| personal vision        | encouraging                 | continuous inquiry                                   |
| agent of change        | influencing                 |  |

Figure 1.2 displays ways in which leadership is shaped and influenced by a teacher's personal, interpersonal and professional agency, as revealed in the findings of O'Brien's research (2005). The concept of teachers leading with agency in their professional practice suggests a teacher's deep capacity to be an authentic and motivated person; to develop positive and empowering relationships; to exercise key professional competencies, and to engage in ongoing professional learning activities in the process of teaching and learning. In leading with agency the teacher becomes a rich resource of professional capital in a school and is mobilised through personal, interpersonal and professional agency to enhance school effectiveness.

Aspects of social and intellectual capital, as defined by Hargreaves (2001), are embedded in the notion of teachers leading with agency. In Hargreaves' conception, the capacity of a teacher to develop positive and empowering relationships contributes to a school's social capital. In building relationships an authentic leader will exercise trust, care, discernment and mutual respect, all of which are important dispositions in building quality relationships and

networks within a school community. Hargreaves (2001) emphasised that the level of trust was vital to building collaborative networks

According to Hargreaves, the resource of intellectual capital broadly encompasses the knowledge that is created and change that is generated at many levels within a school through the competencies and expertise of key stakeholders. It is argued here that teachers who lead with professional agency exercise high professional standards in organisational, knowledge and communication competencies and, in Hargreaves' terms, contribute directly to the intellectual capital of a school. Although aspects of human, social and intellectual capital are embedded in the concept of teachers leading with agency, the term, professional capital, was conceived in this paper to highlight the professional capacities of teachers but at the same time, recognising the integral connection between teachers' personal, interpersonal and professional agency. Teachers who lead with personal, interpersonal and professional agency build professional capital through exercising leadership in their professional practice, professional learning and in undertaking opportunities for teacher leadership development.

Building professional capital through teachers' professional practice can assume a number of contexts. Professional practice refers broadly to the integration of a teacher's knowledge, pedagogical strategies and learning theory into a teachers' professional practice.

Key findings of O'Brien's (2005) research highlighted particular realities for teachers in exercising leadership in their professional practice. Findings revealed that teachers perceived they developed leadership through a range of informal roles in their classroom teaching practice, classroom management, the role of a homeroom teacher, and extra-curricula activities. Such activities contribute to the learning and holistic formation of students and

draw upon a teacher's personal, interpersonal and professional agency. It is argued here that in, and through, the process of leading students in their learning, teachers are a rich resource of professional capital. However, the findings revealed that teachers do not always have autonomy in their teaching. Further, some teachers lacked a sense of professional identity, and so lacked the power and confidence to be a leader in their professional practice. It appeared, from these findings that teachers, in some instances, did not feel empowered as professionals to exercise leadership in their professional practice. Unless teachers are empowered to be autonomous in their teaching and take initiative in leading students in their learning, then professional capital through teachers leadership in teachers' professional practice will not be fully realised.

In addition to teachers' professional practice, professional learning is considered here as a conduit for building professional capital through teacher leadership

### **Building professional capital through teacher leadership in teacher professional learning**

A wide reading of the literature (Day, 1999; Downes, et al. 2001; Fullan, 2003) informs an understanding of professional learning in this discussion as an ongoing learning process through which teachers acquire new understandings and competencies to apply in their professional practice. Professional learning provides a framework, in terms of direction and strategies, for teachers to develop, as individual and collaborative learners, to explore new knowledge of subject matter and new pedagogies that will help to transform their teaching and ultimately contribute to greater school effectiveness. Hence, ongoing professional learning is an essential feature of the professional life of a teacher. However, the extent to

which professional learning might be a conduit for building professional capital in teachers requires some insight into professional learning as a process.

It is argued here that professional learning is a medium for building teacher agency through teachers learning and leading in their professional practice. Fullan (2003) established an integral connection between the capacity of teachers to lead, and learning. This view is also articulated in the British research and writings of Frost and Durrant (2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004), Frost and Harris (2003) and Harris and Muijs (2002) in which emphasis is given to the connection between leading and the professional learning of teachers. Teachers, as both individual and collaborative learners, are the source of learning and leading in a school. In view of this integral connection, the question to be addressed here is, how might the professional learning of teachers, at both an individual and collaborative level, develop leadership in teachers and, in the process, build professional capital?

#### *The teacher as an individual learner*

Although there has been a significant shift from the individual to collaborative networking and participation by teachers in recent years (M. McLaughlin, 1997; Day, 1999), it is asserted here that the teacher is, first and foremost, an individual learner who, by nature of the teaching profession, is required to acquire a range of understandings and competencies, demonstrate these in pedagogical practice, and constantly review, renew and attain new understandings and competencies. In Hargreaves' (2001) terms, the acquisition of knowledge competency, and the processes that translate this knowledge to others, is about building intellectual capital in a school. However, in this discussion a case is developed for building professional capital, of which the intellectual capacities exercised by a teacher contribute to

building teacher expertise and ultimately professional capital in a school. A brief discussion is given to the teacher as a reflective practitioner and the teacher as a researcher of learning, as professional learning processes to assist the teacher in building expertise as an individual learner.

There is an abundance of literature that supports the concept of the teacher as a reflective practitioner (Bolam & McMahon, 2004; Groundwater-Smith, Cusworth and Dobbins, 1998, Schon, 1996). Schon's notion of "reflecting 'in' and 'on' action" (Schon, cited in Day, 1999, p.26) provides a transparent view of reflective practice. Day delineates between the two processes by asserting that one occurs in the active engagement of teaching activities while the other provides a structure for critical reflection on the activities. Findings of O'Brien's (2005) research revealed that teachers in the sample placed a high value on reflective practice and engaged in critical reflection but it was usually in informal ways in dialogue with other teachers, or in particular settings such as faculty meetings, rather than through a formal reflective process organized by the school for the individual. However, these teachers did perceive that reflective practice, in the experience of reflective conversation with colleagues and in providing honest feedback, gave teachers an opportunity to identify their strengths and improve on their weaknesses in their pedagogical practice. It was seen as a valuable tool for teachers to lead in their learning.

The concept of teachers leading in their learning through undertaking research in their teaching practice is gaining wider recognition in schools. Much of the focus has been on forms of action-research, based on the principle of research inquiry to examine existing practices and implement new practices (Dick, 1999; Eames, 1995). More recently, the focus in schools has shifted to incorporate the practice of evidence-based research. The Catholic

system in Victoria has embraced this approach (Angelico, 2005). The collection and interpretation of empirical evidence in teaching and learning, ideally, leads to more effective planning and teaching, and helps to build among teachers a professional culture of deep learning. Although teachers in the sample of O'Brien's research (2005) placed a high value on reflective practice as a professional learning process, it was not in their experience to use a research-inquiry approach as a professional learning tool in their teaching practice.

Schools generally have yet to provide formal processes for teacher reflective practice, and to embrace the notion of the teacher as a researcher in learning. Until schools encourage a culture of deep learning in teachers and promote the practice of teachers leading through learning, they will miss a vital opportunity for cultivating a professional learning culture and importantly, an opportunity for building professional capital. However, it was apparent, from O'Brien's findings (2005), that teachers exercise leadership when they create their own opportunities for professional learning through their collaborative networking with colleagues.

#### *The teacher as a collaborative learner*

In recent years there has been a greater focus on the formation of professional learning communities, teacher networks and teams in schools to engage teachers in collaborative learning. Such bodies or groups are grounded in the mutual interest of teachers helping each other to move towards higher levels of professional practice (Boles & Troen, 1996). A broader network of professional learning beyond the school occurs through electronic networks, and the vast range of teaching bodies and professional associations, at the national, state and school levels in Australia.

The essence and value of collaborative learning is the engagement of teachers in professional dialogue and reflection with colleagues in the sharing and transformation of knowledge and skills (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Findings (O'Brien, 2005) indicated that teachers perceive themselves as collaborative learners more so than as individual learners, and that the process of working collaboratively facilitated leadership in teachers through teachers trusting, encouraging and supporting each other, learning from each other and sharing the learning. In Hargreaves' (2001) concept of social capital, the trust that is exercised in the networks of people builds social capital in a school. In acknowledging Hargreaves' understanding, it is asserted here that collaborative learning empowers teachers to lead and influence the professional learning of others, and in doing so, builds professional capital in a school.

It was apparent from the findings that collaborative learning for teachers in the sample, occurred principally through informal situations rather than through formal processes. Informal mentoring among teachers was acknowledged as a positive professional learning experience for teachers. The concept of mentoring is closely related to reflective practice (Smylie, 1997) and needs to be viewed as a two way process. According to Wollman-Bonilla (1997), the mentor for another teacher expands his or her own professional horizons and effective practice as well as enriching the person being mentored. The enabling and empowering experiences of mentoring help to build professional relationships based on trust, a key factor of Hargreaves' notion of social capital.

The teacher as a collaborative learner complements the function of the teacher as an individual learner. Both approaches challenge a teacher to engage in professional learning as

a leading learner. In this capacity both individual and collaborative professional learning experiences are significant in developing leadership in teachers, and simultaneously, in developing a culture of deep professional learning, the sum of which builds professional capital in a school.

It is evident from the discussion to this point, that teacher professional practice and teacher professional learning are a medium through which teachers exercise leadership and in the process, build professional capital. However, as O'Brien's (2005) findings indicated, teachers develop leadership principally through experiences and informal activities that occur in their everyday professional practice and learning, rather than through formal processes constructed by the school. Although the concept of teacher leadership is embedded in educational theory, teacher leadership is yet to be widely accepted as a formal, legitimate practice in schools. Only when a school develops appropriate structures and processes, which formally support teacher leadership development in teacher professional practice and teacher professional learning, will a school's professional capital be fully realised.

### **Building professional capital through teacher leadership development**

As the discussion has already asserted, findings of O'Brien's (2005) research revealed that there were few formal processes designed essentially to promote leadership in teachers in the schools concerned, in particular, there were no specifically designed leadership development programs. Rather, leadership development for teachers occurred principally through the everyday experiences in teachers' professional practice and professional learning. Teachers in the sample placed a high value on learning to lead through those experiences, planned or situational, which are a central part of a teacher's practice.

A significant factor to emerge in the findings (O'Brien, 2005) was the direct impact of formal leadership structures, in the schools concerned, on the professional role of teachers. Teachers in the sample strongly perceived that opportunities for formal leadership development in a school occurred principally through the experience of a formal position of leadership. Hence, teachers in a formal position of leadership had priority over teachers who were not in a formal position of leadership. Bush and Glover (2004) assert that this factor might well be a reality for teachers in many schools. A challenge for schools currently is to examine ways in which formal leadership development programs can be incorporated into teachers' professional practice and professional learning processes in order to promote teacher leadership development and build a school's professional capital.

A lack of empirical literature pertaining specifically to teacher leadership development in schools in Australia suggests that the concept has yet to be widely embraced by schools and school systems in this country. Much of the educational literature on leadership development at the international level pertains to formal leadership (Bush & Glover, 2004). However, research projects, for example, teacher-led development work undertaken by Frost and Durrant (2002; 2004) in Britain and the ongoing research of the *Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievement in School* (IDEAS) project by Andrews and colleagues (Andrews, Lewis & Crowther, 2001; Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Andrews, Conway, Lewis & McMaster, 2006) in Australia, bring a much needed focus to teacher leadership development. Foundational to these projects is a recognition that leadership is integrated with teachers' professional practice and learning, and that teacher leadership is integral to an effective school. Such projects, which engage teachers in ongoing leadership development, are focused

on building teachers' professional capacities to lead, and in this sense, build professional capital in a school.

Research on leadership development in Catholic schools in Australia has focused predominantly on formal leadership development and leadership succession. However, studies undertaken by d'Arbon et al. (2001) and Carlin et al. (2003), which focused on leadership succession, made recommendations concerning the benefit of implementing structured programs to support leadership development in Catholic schools. Spry, Duignan and Skelly (2004) reinforced the benefits of leadership development in their framework developed for Catholic schools in Queensland. The framework incorporated a multi-dimensional understanding of leadership couched in the vision and mission of Catholic education, and which encouraged the development of key dimensions of leadership. It is acknowledged here that the framework provides an excellent prototype for Catholic schools to utilize for teacher leadership development. O'Brien's (2006) framework for teacher leadership development focuses specifically on developing a teacher's personal, interpersonal and professional agency so that teachers might assume some responsibility for their leadership development. The framework is designed for use by teachers at an individual level and at a collegial level, whilst it has implications for use by the school in providing programs that promote leadership development in teachers. Formal leadership development processes and programs have an enormous capacity to transform the teacher into a leading learner who, in turn, plays a central role in transforming the lives of students, and ultimately, the life of a school.

### **Building professional capital for school effectiveness**

An effective school will utilise the rich potential of its resources and create the appropriate organizational structures and cultural environment in which these resources can be used effectively. Fullan (2004) asserted that school leaders have a responsibility to develop leaders within their school and referred to the process as building a system's capacity.

The particular resource of teacher leadership has enormous potential for transforming the life of a school (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996; Frost & Durrant, 2002; Harris, 2002; Harris & Muijs, 2002). However, although teachers might create their own opportunities for building professional capital through exercising leadership in their professional practice and professional learning, a more systematic approach is required of a school in order to effectively enable and develop teacher leadership. A systematic focus on developing leadership in teachers in their professional practice and professional learning will contribute to improving a school's capacity to effect and enhance student learning.

In light of the discussion set out in this paper, the framework as displayed in Figure 1.1 is further developed in Figure 1.3 to provide a more detailed conception of what is possible for building professional capital through teacher leadership in a school. Key recommendations based on factors displayed in the framework are outlined for schools to consider so that teacher leadership development might become a central and active feature in building professional capital in a school.

Figure 1.3: *A framework for an effective school: building professional capital through teacher leadership*

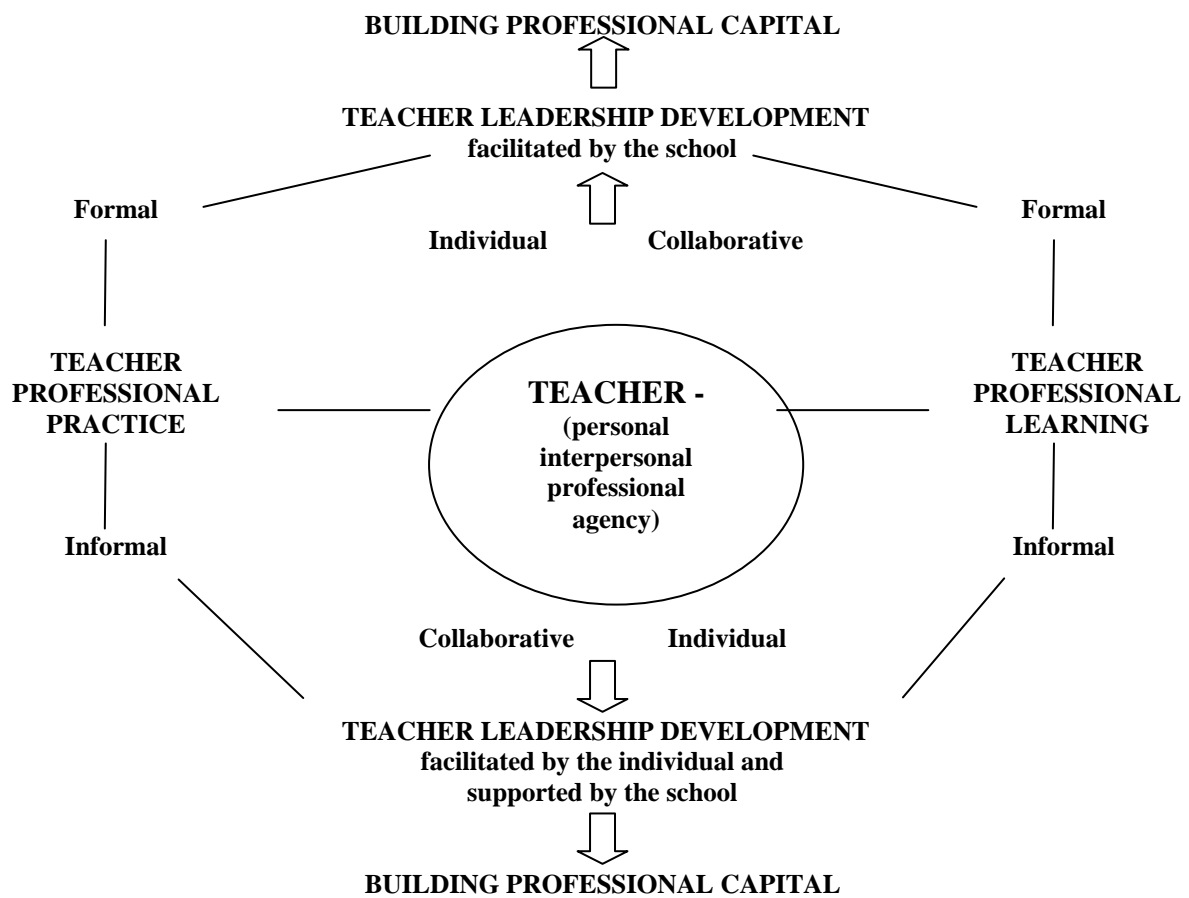


Figure 1.3 displays a framework for building professional capital through teacher leadership in an effective school. Professional capital is the rich resource of teachers' personal, interpersonal and professional agency at work through teachers' professional practice, teacher's professional learning and teacher leadership development. Teacher leadership occurs through both teacher-directed experiences, formal and informal, at an individual and collaborative level, and school-facilitated formal programs and informal activities, which are organised for teacher participation at both an individual and collaborative level.

The framework highlights a complementary structure in which a teacher assumes some responsibility for leadership development through activities in his or her professional practice and learning, whilst the school assumes a major responsibility for developing an organisational infrastructure, which facilitates teachers' leadership development through teacher professional practice and teacher professional learning. In light of this framework it is recommended that an effective school will:

- promote the principle and practice of distributed leadership beyond formal leadership roles;
- uphold the principle that all teachers have a capacity for leadership development;
- create a culture which values and supports the development of teachers' personal, interpersonal and professional agency in teacher professional practice and professional learning;
- create an organizational infrastructure which support teachers to assume some responsibility for teacher leadership development at an individual level through such processes as teacher self-reflection; teacher professional profiles and the development of teacher leadership portfolios, and which
- resource and facilitate processes which enable teachers to participate in formal leadership development in their professional practice and learning, such as reflective practice; research development, mentoring or coaching programs and teacher leadership forums.

## **Conclusion**

It is argued in this paper that building professional capital through teacher leadership is a desired approach for an effective school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As schools adapt their organisational systems to meet the demands of a technology-driven society, teachers will play a leading role in transforming schools into centres and networks of learning. How well teachers are prepared for this role will be dependent upon the leadership opportunities provided for teachers by the schools in which they work. Only when schools create an organisational and cultural environment in which leadership is distributed beyond formal leadership, and processes are created to support teacher leadership development through teacher professional practice and teacher professional learning, will a new imaginary of teachers as leaders emerge. The challenge for Catholic systems and schools is to move beyond the rhetoric and embrace the notion of building professional capital through the rich resource of teachers' professional practice, teachers' professional learning and teacher leadership development.

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