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Leaders for the Future

A Symposium

K. Canavan, P. Ireland, M. Rix, R. Keogh, D. Kerr, A. Cunliffe, T. d'Arbon

Abstract

Leaders for the Future (LFF) is an innovative program initiated in 2005 by the Catholic Education Office Sydney, to ensure an ongoing supply of highly motivated and well-prepared educational leaders for the Archdiocese of Sydney. The approach that has been taken in the program is to inspire young teachers to look to the future possibility of taking on, at some stage during their professional career, a leadership role in Catholic schools. Over 240 teachers under the age of 30 participated in the program.

This symposium reports on four aspects of the program: *Context and the Concept Design, Program Development and Implementation, Responses from Participants and Evaluation of the Program.*

Given the increasing challenge of retaining young teachers in the profession, and of attracting teachers into principalship, this initiative in the Sydney Catholic School System is of considerable relevance to educators interested in the leadership of Catholic Schools during the next decade.

Leaders for the Future

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1. Context and Concept Design

The Catholic Education Office (CEO) Sydney has responsibility for 147 schools - 111 Primary and 36 Secondary. The program described in this paper – the *Leaders for the Future Program* – was a response by the Executive Director of the Catholic Education Office Sydney to a number of concerns about emerging trends in Catholic school leadership. These included:

- ◆ the shortage of suitable applicants for principalship
- ◆ the aging of the present cohort of principals
- ◆ the practice of not appointing many principals before the age of 40
- ◆ the need to stem the loss of young teachers from the profession within five years of graduation
- ◆ the need to focus the attention of future leaders on the mission of the Catholic Church in education
- ◆ the development of leadership potential in enthusiastic young teachers interested in advancement

The organisation's own research was showing that while many current experienced Catholic school leaders began in leadership at a young age (many were Principals before they had turned 30), the average age of Principals currently working in the Sydney Archdiocese in 2006 was 54. While acknowledging that there are a number of factors that explain this, including more extensive pre-service and post-graduate training for teachers, there remained a concern that the system would not be sufficiently prepared to meet the demand for school leaders in the medium and long-term, considering that many current school leaders were approaching retirement age.

The phenomenon of the declining numbers of appointable applicants has not been restricted to Catholic schools, although this was an immediate concern for CEO Sydney (d'Arbon, 2006; d'Arbon, Duignan and Duncan, 2002). Rather, it is an international phenomenon and it is recognized in an increasing volume of research on this topic (Gronn, 2003, Huber, 2006), with a recent article in *The Tablet* reporting an approaching crisis for Catholic schools in the UK (Norton, 2007). Chief amongst the symptoms of this problem in NSW is the small number of applicants for Principal positions in recent years, shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

| PRINCIPAL VACANCIES in Catholic Systemic Schools in NSW 2002-2006 | | | |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Year | Principal Vacancies | Applicants | Ratio |
| 2002 | 100 | 307 | 3.07 |
| 2003 | 71 | 227 | 3.20 |
| 2004 | 55 | 195 | 3.55 |
| 2005 | 56 | 221 | 3.95 |
| 2006 | 75 | 312 | 4.16 |

During this period, many Catholic school principalships had to be re-advertised, and those on selection panels regularly expressed disappointment at the low numbers seeking leadership positions.

Since 2001, the cohort of Catholic school Principals across the three Sydney metropolitan dioceses has aged. In 2001, some 53% of all Principals were over 50 years of age. By 2006, this number had increased to 57.5%. The number over 60 years of age increased from 7% to 12.5% in the same five-year period (Table 2).

TABLE 2

| AGE OF PRINCIPALS in Catholic systemic schools in Sydney metropolitan dioceses 2001 and 2006 | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Year | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61+ |
| 2001 | 5.0% | 18.0% | 24.0% | 27.0% | 19.0% | 7.0% |
| 2006 | 1.5% | 13.0% | 28.0% | 25.0% | 20.0% | 12.5% |

2001 N = 256 2006 N = 265

Many Catholic schools will be seeking new Principals as ageing Principals retire. Many of these school leaders were appointed at a much younger age than is now the custom. In the Archdiocese of Sydney, for example, 40 of the 148 Principals have served at least 15 years. Of these, 18 have served for more than 20 years. This experience will not readily be replaced. Currently fewer than 6% of Catholic school Principals across the whole of NSW are under the age of 41, and these are predominately in the smaller country schools (Table 3). In the greater Sydney metropolitan area, only four Catholic school Principals are under 41 years of age, compared to 13 in 2001.

TABLE 3

| AGE OF PRINCIPALS in Catholic systemic schools in NSW 2006 | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| <41 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | >60 |
| 30 | 67 | 160 | 129 | 100 | 48 |
| 6% | 13% | 30% | 24% | 19% | 9% |

N = 534

In the 1960's and 1970's, many Catholic school Principals were appointed as young as thirty. Custom and practice have changed over the years, and Catholic employers have been seeking applicants with considerably more school experience than previously. This move towards older, more experienced applicants is also linked to the increasing legislative demands on Principals and the increasing complexity of the education and social environment. Many young teachers leave the profession within five years of graduation. The reasons are many and varied, but anecdotal evidence indicates that some of these are gifted teachers who may not see much opportunity for early advancement or leadership opportunities.

The CEO Sydney already conducts a substantial Catholic leadership program which provides leadership training opportunities for teachers currently working in middle management and

senior leadership roles. While this is a substantial and highly regarded program, there was nothing offered to attract or support younger teachers who aspire to leadership, and give them the confidence and the skills they might need to pursue that path. This is the group that education systems will need to draw heavily upon in the years ahead. There is also an acknowledgement that many young teachers of today have very different expectations from teachers of previous eras. The '20-somethings' are Generation Y-ers: mobile, fast-paced, impatient, technology-savvy, prepared to challenge the system or the prevailing paradigm, wanting and expecting to be rewarded quickly and unafraid of change. Many anticipated that not only will they change jobs regularly but will also change whole careers - particularly if they feel things are not moving fast enough for them and the opportunities for advancement were not there. A leadership training program for this group would need to be devised with these considerations in mind.

The decision to offer a leadership program for teachers under 30 was seen as an important development in the range of programs offered by the CEO to ensure the supply of well prepared educational leaders for the Archdiocese of Sydney. Unlike its other leadership development programs, it would be directed at the pre-promotion period of the leadership trajectory of the participants, at a time when they are said to be at their most energetic and enthusiastic (Martin, 2005).

2. Program Development and Implementation

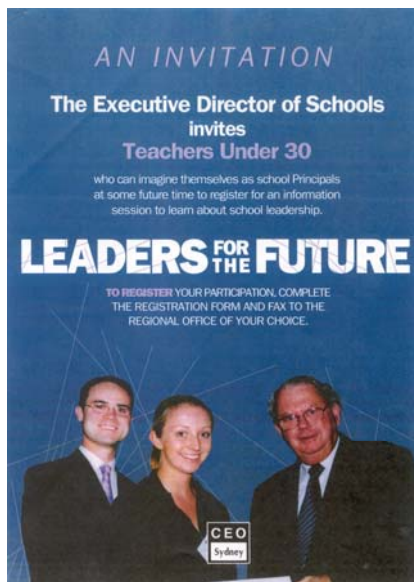
Practical Considerations

Before initial planning could take place, there were key questions that needed to be considered:

1. Who should have overall responsibility for the organisation and management of this program?
2. How should the program be structured?
3. How could it be structured so that young teachers will want to do it?
4. How would candidates for the *LFF* be selected?
5. How could the program run without causing significant disruption to schools?
6. How many sessions should there be?
7. What topics should be covered?
8. Who should be invited to present?
9. Should all presenters be from an education background, or should there be input from other community/business groups?
10. Because the Archdiocese covers such a large area, how would it be possible for all participants to attend the sessions without having to travel a great distance to get there?

Early Planning

A small '**Enabling Group**', comprised mainly of senior representatives of the organisation, was established to investigate whether there was significant interest from the under 30's teachers within the Archdiocese to take part in a leadership training program. The Executive Director led this group. The outcome was that an invitation from the Executive Director to teachers under 30 to attend an information session on leadership was sent to each school (see below). Information was also sent to school Principals with a request to promote the initiative.



Three ‘**Information Sessions**’ were arranged, one for each ‘region’ (the Archdiocese is divided into three regions, the Southern Region, the Inner Western Region and the Eastern Region, each with its own ‘network’ of schools). The sessions were arranged for November 2005.

A representative of the **Enabling Group** had responsibility for the coordination of this first stage of the program, and while a generic agenda was devised, each region took responsibility for the choice of speakers, the arranging of the venue and administrative matters. The aim of each session was to **inspire the attendees** by giving them the opportunity to listen to and speak with people who had assumed leadership responsibilities at a young age, and who were dynamic and progressive thinkers.

Over 300 teachers accepted the invitation to attend these first sessions. Presenters ranged from current leaders in Catholic schools, through to business, community or sporting leaders. Each told their own story of what it was like to assume a leadership role at a young age, what it meant to them to be a leader and what they admired in other leaders. There was also a presentation from the Executive Director as well as opportunities for table discussion, facilitated by regional staff. When attendees were invited to indicate if they would be interested in taking part in a more comprehensive leadership course, over 90% responded that they would be. The presentations were fast-paced, interactive and the reaction from participants overwhelmingly positive.

The LFF Advisory Group

Once it was clear that teachers were interested in being involved, an **Advisory Group** was established to inform on what the content of the course would be. An invitation was extended to nine young teachers who had attended the **Information Sessions**, three from each region, to be members of the **Advisory Group** which had a particular focus of planning the launch of a 30-hour program at Darling Harbour on October 22, 2005 and determining what units would be covered in the course. The remainder of the **Advisory Group** was made of senior CEO staff and was chaired by the Executive Director.

The teacher representatives from this group played a major part in determining what units would be covered in the course. Their input into what aspiring young leaders in Catholic schools saw as important when considering notions of leadership was significant. After a brainstorming session, the suggested topics were decided upon by vote. Decisions were also made on what would be covered on the launch day and who the key presenters would be, pending their availability.

The launch took place at the Ballroom at the Darling Harbour Convention Centre Sydney on Saturday October 22 2005. Then two key note presenters were Olympic athlete and sports commentator, Belinda Gainsford-Taylor and renowned academic thinker Bruce Wilson. 265 teachers under the age of 30 commenced the program.

The LFF Executive Planning Group

The **LFF** launch was a very successful day with the overwhelming majority of participants indicating their desire to undertake the remaining units in the program. To facilitate this, an **Executive Planning Group** was formed (**EPG**), comprising key office personnel as well as a Consultant from each region. The brief of this committee was to make decisions around the specific content of each unit selected by the **Advisory Group** and to select and liaise with

presenters. **The EPG** also had responsibility for liaising with the three regional teams to ensure that all important information was communicated to course participants. This group met regularly during the course of the program to evaluate units and decide upon changes that may be required for future sessions.

Structural Components of the Program

Dates for all presentations were confirmed. The structure of the program meant that every unit was done in each region, so that there were three presentations of each unit. This structure allowed participants, who were unable to attend a presentation in their region on the nominated day, to catch it in one of the other regions. This flexibility ensured that important school or personal occasions did not mean that the participant would miss one of the units.

At each region, one member of the administrative staff was given the role of '**Regional Contact Person**' (**RCP**). This person had responsibility for all administrative duties associated with hosting a unit at the respective region, communicating to regional participants and maintaining an up-to-date database.

Apart from the launch day, all other originally planned sessions were held after school time (4.00pm – 7.00pm) to minimize the impact on schools. Two of the regions used a large community facility (local clubs) as the venue. Each venue had quality audio-visual and presentation facilities and afternoon tea was always provided on arrival. At the end of the program, two extra sessions were arranged for the school holidays. These were held on a single day (one session in the morning, one in the afternoon) and despite them being in the holiday period, they were still well attended.

Engagement in the **LFF Program** was free for all participants with the costs being met primarily by the Catholic Education Office Sydney (there was some sponsorship from the Macquarie Bank Foundation and the Catholic Superannuation Retirement Fund).

Catholic Education Office staff from the central and regional offices were given an open invitation to attend any of the sessions. Regional staff were also invited to act as facilitators at some of the group discussion sessions. A great many accepted this invitation. Members of the regional leadership teams also attended the sessions and there was exceptional support from the three Regional Directors.

When choosing speakers for each session, a decision was made to seek out presenters from a variety of fields. Some were from education, others from the corporate world, politics, clergy, social outreach organisations and the public service. The philosophy was that key leadership skills were transferable, and by being exposed to presenters from a variety of backgrounds, participants were being challenged to consider leadership not just from the perspective of an educator.

There was a strong focus on liaising closely with each selected presenter to ensure that their respective presentations met the needs of the group. A member of the **EPG** would stay in regular contact with each presenter and make suggestions for changes to unit content or style, when required. The close contact maintained with presenters ensured that the material presented was appropriate to meet the course's objectives.

Australian Catholic University took a professional interest in the program from the start and was invited to evaluate it as part of a research project on developing leadership potential in younger teachers. A decision was made by the university to give 1 unit of credit for participants of **LFF** into the Master of Educational Leadership at the university. This opportunity was taken up by many participants. Senior representatives from the university's Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership oversaw this and attended the sessions. They also conducted their own focus group meetings as part of the evaluation process (see report). All participants were also asked to evaluate each session by rating it according to a set of

criteria. To qualify for a unit of credit towards a Masters of Educational Leadership at ACU, participants had to complete a minimum of 10 units from the *LFF Program* and the mandatory assignment. An outline of the units offered in the course appears below



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM 2005 - 2006

Stage 1: Leaders for the Future



Program Outline

| UNIT | TITLE | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| | Preliminary twilight information sessions | |
| 1 | Embracing Curriculum Leadership Unlocking my Leadership Potential | Mr Bruce Wilson Ms Melinda Gainsford-Taylor |
| 3 | Leadership Styles in the Modern Organisation | Mr Geoff Nilon, Ms Zita Antonius & Mr Des Hasler |
| 4 | Relationships, Relationships, Relationships | Ms Zita Antonius |
| 5 | The Leading & Learning Equation | Ms Kate Clancy Ms Christine Harrigan Mr Andrew Frazer |
| 6 | Developing Leadership Capacity | Mr Peter Cox |
| 7 | “You Will Be My Witnesses” | Fr Gerard Kelly Fr Gerald Gleeson Sr Leonie Crotty, rsm |
| 8 | Viewpoints & Counterpoints | Ms Zita Antonius |
| 9 | Navigating the River of Change | Ms Kerry Chikarovski |
| 10 | Celebrating Being Catholic in Australia | Br Kelvin Canavan, fms |
| 11 | Leadership Style and Personality: | Mary McGuinness |
| 12&13 | Action Research Project (Optional) | |
| 14 | Strategic Leadership and Management in Catholic School: Mr John Couani | |
| 15 | How Effective is our Catholic School? | Mr Peter Turner |
| COURSE GRADUATION DINNER | | |

Accurate attendance records were maintained and, as a checking mechanism, participants at each session were provided with a dated sticker to validate their attendance. These were correlated at the end of the program to determine whether attendees qualified for the credit arrangement and for **graduation** from the program.

As mentioned earlier, two additional units were added to the program and conducted during the school holiday period. These were arranged to provide opportunities for those who needed to make up units to qualify for the unit of credit. The focus of these two sessions was on the Catholic Education Office Sydney’s recently launched key strategic leadership and development initiatives.

When all units had been completed, the three **RCPs**, under the supervision of a member of the **EPG** made determinations on who was eligible to ‘graduate’ from the LLF program. Those

deemed to have not completed the number of units needed to qualify for **graduation** (10) were given the right of appeal and each case was considered on merit.

A ceremony and dinner to acknowledge successful completion of the program was held. In total, 242 teachers completed at least 10 units of the course and were presented with certificates at a formal ceremony at a large reception facility. All members of the Catholic Education Office Sydney's Leadership Team attended, certificates were presented by each Regional Director and Bishop Anthony Fischer provided the keynote address.

Leaders for the Future Phase 2

To maintain the momentum generated by the *LFF Program*, graduates were invited to self-nominate for a **Leadership Development Group**. Those who wished to be part of this would be kept up to date with other leadership initiatives run by the Catholic Education Office Sydney as well as programs run by other providers.

Representatives from this group would also be invited to participate in various working parties and committees to inform on future leadership programs for young teachers. There would be opportunities for participants to attend conferences and contribute to policy debate.

A *Leaders for the Future Newsletter* was also commissioned. This would be circulated 4 times a year.

Other Points of Note about the Program...

- Participation in the LF Program was through self-nomination
- School Principals were kept informed about the *LFF Program* and were encouraged to discuss the issues arising out of the session with the teachers who had attended. Many did this. The program had strong support from school Principals.
- Regional Directors often invited some of their Assistant Principals to attend the sessions as part of their own leadership development.
- Participants also had the option of undertaking an **Action Research Project** in lieu of two sessions. 12 took up this opportunity.
- In keeping with university requirements and processes, those choosing to gain the unit credit into the Masters Degree had to complete a 3,000 word assignment. The cost of the marking of the assignment was covered by the CEO Sydney.
- There was a very significant increase in the number for applications for enrolment into a Masters of Educational Leadership at ACU in the year following the end of the *LFF Program*.

3. Reflections by the Participants

1. Below is a series of reflections from two participants in the program, Rachel Keogh and Damien Kerr.

Appropriateness of Course...

- Generically, young people want everything but don't want to do the work to achieve it, or need a kick to get started. *LFF* was this kick start.

- The program was accessible – each unit was run three times in three separate locations.
- Varied and interesting – we were treated to a range of leaders as keynote speakers from various areas, not from merely the education field
- Professional development – *LFF* was an instigating point to get people furthering their education by doing the ground work for them

Finance...

- The CEO has invested considerable financial and personnel resources into the program, showing a preparedness to address any issues concerning leadership which have arisen or may soon arise. I can see that they are interested in ensuring the quality of potential leaders.
- Funding the costs of the course and including the course as part of their Master's degree were appreciated.

Reasons for Choosing to Take Part...

- It gave us an opportunity for networking with people in similar situations to ourselves, and also with our colleagues at the CEO
- It added to study already being undertaken, especially as the program counted towards a unit for a Masters degree
- The advertising of interesting guest speakers was appealing

Personal Reflections on the Program and What it Achieved...

- It made us more aware of how people operate and why we all respond differently to the same situations, and how best to deal with this
- It increased our confidence in relating to people – especially in times of conflict and delegation. The presentation about using 'Reframing' as a tool for conflict resolution was very valuable
- It highlighted the importance of role-modelling

How Knowledge Gained has been Used in a School Setting...

- Reframing helped us articulate what we were previously attempting to do
- Improved delegation skills
- Gained a tacit, yet greater sense of confidence when dealing with staff members, especially those older and more experienced than us

Limitations...

- Participants learned some excellent theories, but in a school populations often over 1000, sometimes implementing new strategies will affect many stakeholders. The Principal of the school may be reluctant make the changes

Considerations for the Future...

- Target specific individuals – promotion by Principals is one thing, but asking/challenging individuals is much more effective
- Peer training – if we are serious about bleeding young potential leaders, peer training would be required. A situation where the candidate would be placed with their Principal or their Assistant Principal and given *on the job* training, as it were, is critical. This would give candidates a taste of what is required and expected in an executive leadership role.

Benefits

Since completing the *Leaders for the Future Program*, some clear, measurable skills have developed. These include

- Increased self-awareness as a potential young leader
- Greater consciousness of strengths and weaknesses
- More confidence in dealing with difficult situations
- A greater understanding of the importance of good clear communication in a workplace
- Knowledge of a variety of conflict resolution strategies.

The course comprehensively covered particular areas of need – such as young teachers understanding the importance of the history of Catholic schools and the changing face of Catholic education in today's society.

The structure of the course enabled young leaders to regularly interact with people at a similar stage in their career. This allowed participants to share knowledge and experiences from various school settings. Every unit delivered in the course specifically targeted the needs of young leaders and provided a solid foundation for future leadership development.

Most importantly, the course has given young leaders the vision and the ability to be pro-active in attaining formal leadership positions within schools.

4. Evaluation of the Program

A number of data sources were available including those developed specifically for the formal evaluation:

- ✚ There was an ongoing evaluation of the presenters by the participants at each session
- ✚ Participants gave open-ended responses to a perception of their own growth in leadership
- ✚ Focus group interviews were conducted specifically for the evaluation, at the mid-point and at the conclusion of the program
- ✚ Members of the **ACU Flagship Team** attended the presentations, talked with presenters, participants, organisers, and senior management
- ✚ Written evaluations were given by the participants
- ✚ Responses were sought from school Principals – many of whom had staff members participating in the program

A major part of the formal evaluation took the form of focus group interviews, one for Primary and one for Secondary teachers, held in each of the three regions at the mid-point and at the end of the program. The membership of the groups was by self-nomination and participants were reminded of dates and locations by email a week before. The process was approved through procedures of the Ethics Committee at ACU National.

Conversations in the focus groups were directed by the five questions:

1. What was good about the program?
2. Do you have any suggestions about how the program could be improved if it was offered again?
3. How have you been able to maintain your enthusiasm and motivation for the program, given other demands?
4. What were the areas of immediate relevance to you in the program?
5. What do you see as your next step in your leadership development and how soon do you plan to take that step?

The program was evaluated under the following headings:

- ✚ Robust nature of the concept, design and structure of the program
- ✚ Quality of presenters
- ✚ Satisfaction of participants
- ✚ Satisfaction of stakeholders
- ✚ What the participants plan to do as a result of the program
- ✚ Overall organisation of the program

Evaluation and Reflection

The *Leaders for the Future Program* has been a significant ground-breaking attempt to address the issue of the long term supply of committed educational leaders for the Catholic school system in Sydney.

The group attending was, in many respects, found to be representative of the target group in Catholic education. There was a preponderance of Primary to Secondary participants (2:1) with a greater proportion of females compared with males (5.3:1) in both primary (10.5:1) and secondary (2.3:1), figures that echo the teacher population statistics in the Archdiocese.

The program was directed to teachers aged 30 years and under, although the overall number included a small group, (eight percent) just over 30 years. Of the 30 years and under group, 51 percent were aged 26 years or younger. Some 52 percent of the respondents had five years or less teaching experience. The greater majority of the respondents held four-year teaching qualifications (e.g. BEd) (72 percent) and the remainder held various combinations of three or four year undergraduate degrees with a subsequent teaching qualifications (e.g. DipEd).

One interesting fact was that over one-third of respondents (32 percent) had already embarked on further studies at various levels – Graduate Certificates, Diplomas, or Masters level – with five percent already having completed a Masters degree. More than two-thirds (70 percent) indicated that they would use the Certificate from this course to take advantage of the opportunity to gain one unit of credit in a Masters program at ACU National.

Since the completion of the program, two *LFF* participants, both Primary females, have been appointed as Assistant Principals for 2007 – some of the youngest for many years.

Quantitative data gathered throughout the project by the project team were reported in the presentation at the Graduation Dinner in October 2006. The responses by the participants to the surveys throughout the program are very encouraging and testify to the value of the program. Ninety percent of the young leaders indicated their intention of applying for a leadership position at an appropriate time (item 4). Ninety-one percent of the young leaders now have a better understanding of what is expected of leaders in Catholic education and 89 percent are more confident about their future in Catholic education. The confidence of the participants in their own leadership abilities had improved, while the insights gained had already been used at school and outside school.

The responses by school Principals indicated that they perceived this new program very positively. Principals have seen some early outcomes, with 75 percent indicating that their teachers have already demonstrated new leadership skills (item 3). Seventy percent of Principals perceived the course participants to be now more committed to their vocation in Catholic education.

Given the objectives of the *LFF* program, the response of Principals was encouraging, as was the 89 percent agreement with the item: 'My teacher(s) will be encouraged to take up invitations to follow-up activities in 2007-2008'.

Retaining the enthusiasm for and interest in leadership in these young leaders was considered important. Towards the end of the program all participants were invited to join an ongoing **Advisory Group** that would work with the Catholic Education Office in seeking further development opportunities during the next two years. As of January 2007, 91 graduates had nominated to be part of this **Leadership Development Group**. The three Regional Directors have accepted responsibility for this ongoing development. In addition, a quarterly *LFF Newsletter* is being launched in March 2007, and as well as advising of professional development opportunities, will contain contributions from *LFF* graduates.

"The development of the next generation of leaders for Catholic schools is clearly a responsibility of the present generation. The *LFF* initiative is one way of exercising this responsibility". (Graduation Program, October 2006)

LFF was designed with no specific leadership task or role in mind. **The program set out to raise the level of awareness in the general concept of leadership.** It is underpinned by the beliefs that everyone should be given the opportunity to aspire to having a leadership role in their organisation, that every leader has a story to tell, experiences to share and wisdom to pass on, so that aspiring leaders would be encouraged and supported to 'launch out into the deep' on their leadership journey.

The focus group responses supported the quantitative data. Participants responded positively to the program. They said they were made to feel special, that the CEO appreciated and responded to them and they appreciated the opportunity to be helped to see the broader picture, and to make connections.

Some specific features were commented on appreciatively. They enjoyed being able to network with like-minded colleagues with similar backgrounds and of their own age. They also enjoyed sharing experiences with others in their age group, either at the same venue each time, or by venturing to the two alternative ones. The flexibility of the three venues on different dates and occasionally different days of the week was another feature that was helpful to participants.

They also valued particularly the attendance of Consultants at each session. One commented: "The presence of the Regional Consultants [at the sessions] was important. We felt we are valued." This comment was repeated on a number of occasions.

They noted that the CEO was recognising the value of beginning teachers who have not been in the classroom very long and inviting them onto committees where they are doing 'all this wonderful new work'.

One participant noted: "The whole course has not only boosted my confidence but I feel that the CEO has more confidence in us." While another commented: "The Darling Harbour launch made it feel special".

Regional Consultants reported that on their recent visits to schools, young teachers who had participated in *LFF* were now coming up to greet them and discuss issues and share ideas with them as colleagues, rather than as ‘supervisors’.

The high completion rate of 87 percent confirms the relevance and attraction of the program. Focus group respondents commented on some factors that enabled them to maintain their enthusiasm. They appreciated the regularity of the sessions – ‘but not too much’ (i.e. not too frequent). The quality of the sessions and the anticipation of a regular meeting with colleagues and sharing experiences in a stimulating atmosphere was an incentive to continue their participation and complete requirements for the award of the Certificate.

The fact that each session was self-contained and there was no preliminary or post-session reading or processing, other than what they felt a personal need to do, was noted. The four-week period between sessions was also seen by the participants as an important opportunity for self-reflection and application.

The concept of *LFF* can thus be seen as innovative, timely, attractive and rewarding to the participants, and satisfying to the stakeholders. It has also received positive comment from external observers (Petty, 2006).

Its robust nature was demonstrated by the continuing enthusiasm of the participants and project staff, the regular positive results from the monitoring of its progress, the high completion rate and satisfaction expressed by the participants and the fact that no major modifications were made to the program throughout its year-long operation.

The concept of leadership itself as a notional concept was offered rather than a program to prepare the participants for specific leadership roles. It involved a sharing of the life journeys or skills of significant and identified leaders from a variety of fields. A number of these persons had been appointed or had held leadership positions from a very early age.

This approach and the actual content of the session were appreciated as being of immediate relevance. Focus group respondents commented that the presentations were a “creative resource” and pointed to insights and awareness they had experienced and personal responses that they made as a result of their involvement in the program. They appreciated the concrete skills such as conflict resolution, negotiation and reframing, that they learned from the sessions and they reported using these insights to see leaders in their own school as role models, to observe them in action and to support them, as well as applying the skills in their current roles.

Some typical comments included:

- ✚ “This session impacted on my attitude in regards to improving my communication skills as a leader, including reframing, to improve relationships and resolve conflicts.”
- ✚ “This was a fabulous session. The reframing was well explained and I now know the importance of the skill, and that it is vital.”
- ✚ “Re-examining my teaching practice in terms of the Learning Framework. I will try some of the given teaching strategies and reflect upon their success.”
- ✚ “Many relevant points. Definitely challenged us to think about not only why we are here but what we want to do and think critically about how to get there.”
- ✚ “Made me reflect on why I became a Catholic teacher and the impact which I have on young children. A very special and essential session.”

- ✚ “Very useful content, skills and tips that will assist me in all areas of my life including my leadership development.”
- ✚ “Enjoy what you do and be passionate about it. Try to make it the ‘best day ever’. Good to know both strengths and weaknesses, work on weaknesses, helps people to improve.”
- ✚ “Interesting to see how the history of Catholic schools has impacted on Catholic schools today and also how it will impact on future leaders.”
- ✚ “It (Myers Briggs) is a good way to know how to interact with others when certain features are dominant and/or weak. It is also interesting to know about my own strengths and weaknesses.”

One participant enthusiastically reported, “If all these topics are important for leadership, I want to know everything.”

There were interesting reports by the participants of the flow-on from the program to their schools. In a number of cases participants noted the support from their Principal - they felt welcome to discuss professional and leadership issues and in several cases to borrow and discuss books and literature from their Principal’s professional library. Other participants had spoken at staff meetings about the program or had been encouraged to take a lead in staff discussions. Principals had reported that teachers in their school in the program have spoken to other staff about the program.

Participants recognised that the course had made them more personally confident and they were taking on additional roles in the schools to enhance their leadership experience:

- ✚ “My goals are eventually to take on a more formal role and to use the skills that I think I have - not only classroom skills, but also outside the classroom, such as dealing with parents.”
- ✚ “In rethinking opportunities to share and exchange, get feedback from what we are working on.”
- ✚ “It has made me feel more confident in going out and trying something new, like a Reading Recovery position coming up at our school – even though I have only had a couple of years in the classroom.”
- ✚ “I feel like I might be more valued to do those things even if I don’t have the prescribed amount of experience. “
- ✚ “I feel like the whole CEO is more behind us.”

A number of respondents indicated that, as a result of the project, they felt more confident in their ability to take on more formalised leadership activities and positions. They also recognised the value of and necessity to move to other schools as well as to seek out opportunities to gain more experience and develop skills that would be useful in future leadership roles.

Focus groups elicited some features that these participants believed could be improved. These suggestions are noted here:

- Even more variety of speakers – perhaps someone from the entertainment industry.
- Keep the Action Research option – more guidelines would be a help.
- Include similar topics in undergraduate degrees
- Encourage more than one person from the school to attend to provide mutual support.

The positive evaluation of *LFF* at the conclusion of the first cycle provides a solid platform on which to base future similar activities directed at stimulating the interest of young teachers in taking on leadership positions in future years.

The focus group respondents were asked to respond to the question: “What do you see as your next step in your leadership development and how soon do you plan to take that step?”

The responses indicated that they recognised the value of and necessity to move to other schools as well as to seeking out opportunities to gain more experience and develop skills that would be useful in future leadership roles.

Several respondents indicated that they had a specific plan for the future. “I have a plan, [to take on more responsibility] in two years, maybe three...” A number indicated they felt they were “already on the way” to taking on a leadership role in a Catholic school. To facilitate their progress, they had changed schools to take on other responsibilities and/or to gain wider experience, or had taken on additional duties with a greater level of responsibility - not necessarily a promotion or formal position - in the same school.

- “I am taking on a little bit more responsibility around the school and becoming more aware.”
- “I took a step down to gain more experience that I wouldn’t have got at that school. It was either that or be a Year Co-ordinator again, and I’d already done that. I wanted to try something new.”

There was recognition of the need for additional qualifications and professional post-initial qualifications.

The number of participants who had already commenced or completed postgraduate study was an interesting feature of this group. Though there were no readily available comparable statistics for other young teachers in other systems of education, the matter of the ongoing studies may be taken as an indication of the level of interest and degree of sophistication of this group of aspiring leaders. The range of studies was also interesting – TESOL, Gifted and Talented Education, Language and Literacy, and RE.

6. Conclusion

The success of the *Leaders for the Future Program* is evident; however, this does not guarantee that the problem of leadership succession has been solved. Given the evolving nature of schools and society, issues arising with the arrival of Generation Y, and those concerns identified by the Executive Director which gave rise to *LFF* in the first place, there remain many challenges ahead.

LFF is not a quick-fix solution to the problem of the long term recruitment of Principals and school leaders. It is a program with long-term goals and the benefits may not be evident for many years; however, there are initial indicators that participants in *LFF* are growing in confidence and willing to assume greater responsibility in their schools at the formal and informal levels. It is also costly in financial and resource terms.

LFF has the advantage of encouraging the participants to ‘put their foot on the promotion ladder’ leading to leadership of schools, and that progression will be assisted by a suite of professional development programs run by the CEO to encourage, support and prepare them for future leadership. It is with these ideas in mind that we would make several recommendations:

Recommendations for the Future:

1. That *LFF* should be repeated at least every five years. The present model is robust and the five-year period is proposed to reach the group of future participants with

about five years of teaching experience, the group from which most of the present cohort was recruited

2. That each year, a survey of a sample of the 2006 cohort be conducted to gain a measure of the leadership aspirations of the group and the ongoing effectiveness of the program
3. That as part of the ongoing formation of the 2006 graduates of *LFF*, the next stage of their leadership formation be reviewed in the light of the experiences and outcomes in *LFF*
4. That future programs of a similar nature to *LFF* address the issue of teachers who may have taken leave from the classroom to raise families and who may not have been in a position to experience the opportunities provided by participation in *LFF*.

About the Presenters...

- Kelvin Canavan:** Executive Director, Catholic Education Office, Sydney
- Peter Ireland:** Assistant to the Executive Director, Catholic Education Office Sydney
- Mark Rix:** University/Schools Liaison Officer, Catholic Education Office, Sydney
- Rachel Keogh:** Participant in the Program
- Damien Kerr:** Participant in the Program
- Annette Cunliffe:** Head of School of Educational Leadership, Australian Catholic University
- Tony d'Arbon:** Deputy Director, Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership, Australian Catholic University

(N.B *The Leaders for the Future Program* has been described in some detail in the November 2006 issue of *Perspectives in Education Leadership* (Canavan. 2006a)

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