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The Vision, Challenges and Reality*

Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners:
Messages for Catholic Leaders

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Introduction

In recent years a number of significant Australian initiatives in schools have focussed on a deeper understanding of the process and the role of leadership in cultivating and promoting the core work of the school - teaching and learning. Significant examples of these initiatives include IDEAS (<http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/learning/ideas/index.html>), Queensland's *New Basics* (<http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/index.html>), and New South Wales' *Quality Teaching, Quality Learning* (<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/qualityteach/index.html>).

Other initiatives are taking place in Catholic education circles involving a clarification of the Catholic identity of our schools and our work (eg Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2001). Whilst Catholic schools have been known for academic excellence and preparing students for further education, the question arises of how Catholic schools can best engage with quality teaching and learning in a way that gives full expression to their unique identity.

This paper will report on some of the research findings of the *Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners* (LTLL) Pilot Program and in particular how teachers experienced the changed approaches to leadership and the resultant ownership and commitment to the various learning projects utilized to implement the new framework for learning. LTLL was an initiative of The Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership at The Australian Catholic University in partnership with Catholic Education Offices of the Dioceses of Parramatta, Broken Bay, Newcastle and Wollongong. The purpose of the initiative was to impact on the quality of learning in selected schools through the implementation of a new framework for linking leadership and learning in Catholic schools.

The LTLL Initiative

The fundamental belief that underpins the LTLL initiative is that authentic leadership can transform learning in Catholic schools and that if educators are authentic and ethical in leadership then this will transform teaching and learning to provide unique and authentic experiences for students and teachers alike. The emphasis within the program was one of

collaboration, sharing and mutual growth for the schools involved, their Diocesan Offices, and the Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership.

The purpose of the pilot was to develop and implement with nine schools (five primary and four secondary) a professional learning program to assist schools and teachers transform their teaching and learning processes through leadership practices which emphasised sharing. Both the overarching program and the projects it supported in individual schools have been the focus of structured research, some elements of which will be treated in this paper.

The pilot program ran from mid 2005 to the end of 2006, with some participating schools continuing to work on their projects through 2007. The system level partners were particularly interested in what they saw as the program's unique capacity to address the ethical and values dimensions of the educational enterprise in the context of learning and leadership. Not least among the unique characteristics of the program was the close collaboration of academics and system and school personnel throughout the planning and implementation stages.

The program was premised on a strong view that transformative learning must be the objective of all Catholic schools and a critical element of the responsibilities of leaders in those schools.

Transformative Learning

Catholic educators should be asking the questions "How does the appropriation of academic knowledge affect the way learners choose to be more fully human? How can we assist learners to better shape the trajectory of their lives within their natural, social, cultural and religious/spiritual environments and in particular the faith life of the school?"

We need to connect the learner's' search for meaning and purpose in their lives to a variety of personal experiences in the academic curriculum. Educators enable learners to continuously transform their understanding of themselves and to *re-place* themselves within the challenges and possibilities of their lives and their future. This is what is meant by transforming learning and learners.

Starratt's (2004) challenge to educators is to infuse academic learning with a personal dimension, and thereby enrich the whole learning process. Learning which is not authentic to

the needs of the students' life world is not only inappropriate but unethical. Transformation in learning will not occur by chance. Authentic leadership will be required to bring about such change. An authentic approach to leadership, where the responsibility for leadership in schools is shared and distributed, is more likely to bring about the type of transformation in people and learning proposed in this project.

Good learning is a moral activity because it engages students in a deeper understanding of the nature and purpose of their lives and in determining how they can best contribute to the greater good of the community and society. (Hodgkinson, 1991, and Starratt, 2004) This type of learning is not just about *taking* new knowledge and skills for oneself but is more about *giving* of one's unique humanity to others and to the community. This type of learning will be best achieved by a curriculum that:

- Is intellectually challenging for all, promotes higher order critical and creative thinking, deep understanding and sustains students' active engagement in learning,
- Is inclusive and differentiated to meet the diverse learning needs of different students
- Is underpinned by pro social values that guide student learning, behaviour and their social responsibility to others
- Socially connects students and develops their social competencies and emotional literacy
- Enhances student resilience including their capability for optimistic thinking and self regulation

In Catholic schools, transformative learning must be anchored in the values and ethics of Catholicity. These values are foundational to the Gospel and the person of Jesus Christ. Unless learners and leaders in Catholic schools are learning to change themselves and their world for the better, their learning will be inauthentic and non-transformational.

Transformative learning can be closely aligned with the specific nature and identity of Catholic schools. In an increasingly secular age, Catholic schools are challenged to become clearer about the explicit nature of their Catholic identity – to name what it is that marks them as distinct from other “good” schools.

What makes a Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension, and this is to be found in:

- a) the educational climate,*
- b) the personal development of each student,*
- c) the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, and*
- d) the illumination of all knowledge in the light of faith.*

(Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, p1)

This developing understanding of identity needs to find expression not only in the traditionally “Catholic” features of the school (e.g., religious education classes, liturgies, community service, the curriculum of community), but within all the school’s curricular and co-curricular programs. In other words, transformative learning approaches have to be embedded in whole-school perspectives within a Catholic ethos. What we teach and how we teach it have to be congruent with the values and beliefs of the Catholic school.

Given the centrality of learning in the mission of the Catholic school, the core focus of leaders needs to be on its enhancement for all students. This focus challenges leaders to be more fully present to the transformative possibilities in student learning and to be more proactively responsible for inviting teachers to cultivate those deeper dimensions of learning.

While leaders of Catholic schools have been engaged for the past several years in ongoing professional as well as religious development of their leadership, with a strong emphasis on both the values base and student outcomes, perhaps these efforts have lacked integration. What is missing is a consideration and focus on the ethical dimensions of practice. By focusing explicitly on the potential of transformative teaching and learning this program aims to bring values, ethics, leadership and learning into a deeper synthesis.

Leadership for Transformation

School leadership must be centrally concerned with ethics and morality - with deciding what is significant, what is right and what is worthwhile (Duignan and Macpherson, 1992). Such

leadership elevates the actions of the leader above mere pragmatics or expediency. (Hodgkinson, 1991) The focus of authentic leadership is on "elevating leaders' moral reasoning" (Terry, 1993:46) which is central to Burns' (1978) seminal distinction between leadership that is *transactional* and that which is *transformational*. Catholic schools base their morality on the teaching of Christ, creating a "synthesis between culture and faith" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, section 14). This imparts to the schools their unique character, creating a special context for leadership and learning.

Burns (1978:20) stated that transforming leadership "occurs when one or more persons *engage* with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality [and it] ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both."

This conceptualisation is further elaborated by the model of Starratt, (2004). He argues that the 'bottom line' for educational leaders is that they help create and support the conditions that promote transformative teaching and learning in their schools. He suggests that this is through three closely inter-related ethics: presence, authenticity and responsibility. Educational leaders demonstrate the ethic of authenticity when they bring their deepest principles, beliefs, values and convictions to their work. Responsible educational leaders go beyond their obligations to minimise harm. They recognise that they are responsible for who they are and what they do (and should do) in a range of ways and to a range of other people and communities. The ethic of presence requires a level of attention and sensitivity to the signals others send out. Being present demands full engagement with people, events and things. Starratt's approach became an integral part of the model developed and adopted for this project.

Educational leaders pay close attention to the quality of teaching and students' learning. Such leaders encourage others to commit themselves to professional practices that are, by their nature, educative. They help create the conditions within which teachers and students take responsibility for the quality of their own teaching and learning. They challenge others to participate in the visionary activity of identifying in curriculum, teaching and learning what is worthwhile, what is worth doing and preferred ways of doing and acting together. The key emphasis is on leading authentic learning and creating processes and conditions that encourage everyone in the school community to be effective learning resources for each other.

When thinking about schools and students, we are in a period where theories of leadership and learning are coming closer together and are pointing to ways in which schools can better ensure the quality of their teaching and learning. A range of models of school development, theories of pedagogy and of effective learning, and some contemporary leadership perspectives, especially those on authentic and transformative leadership, suggest considerable agreement and may provide frameworks for planning and action to bring about pedagogical improvement in schools.

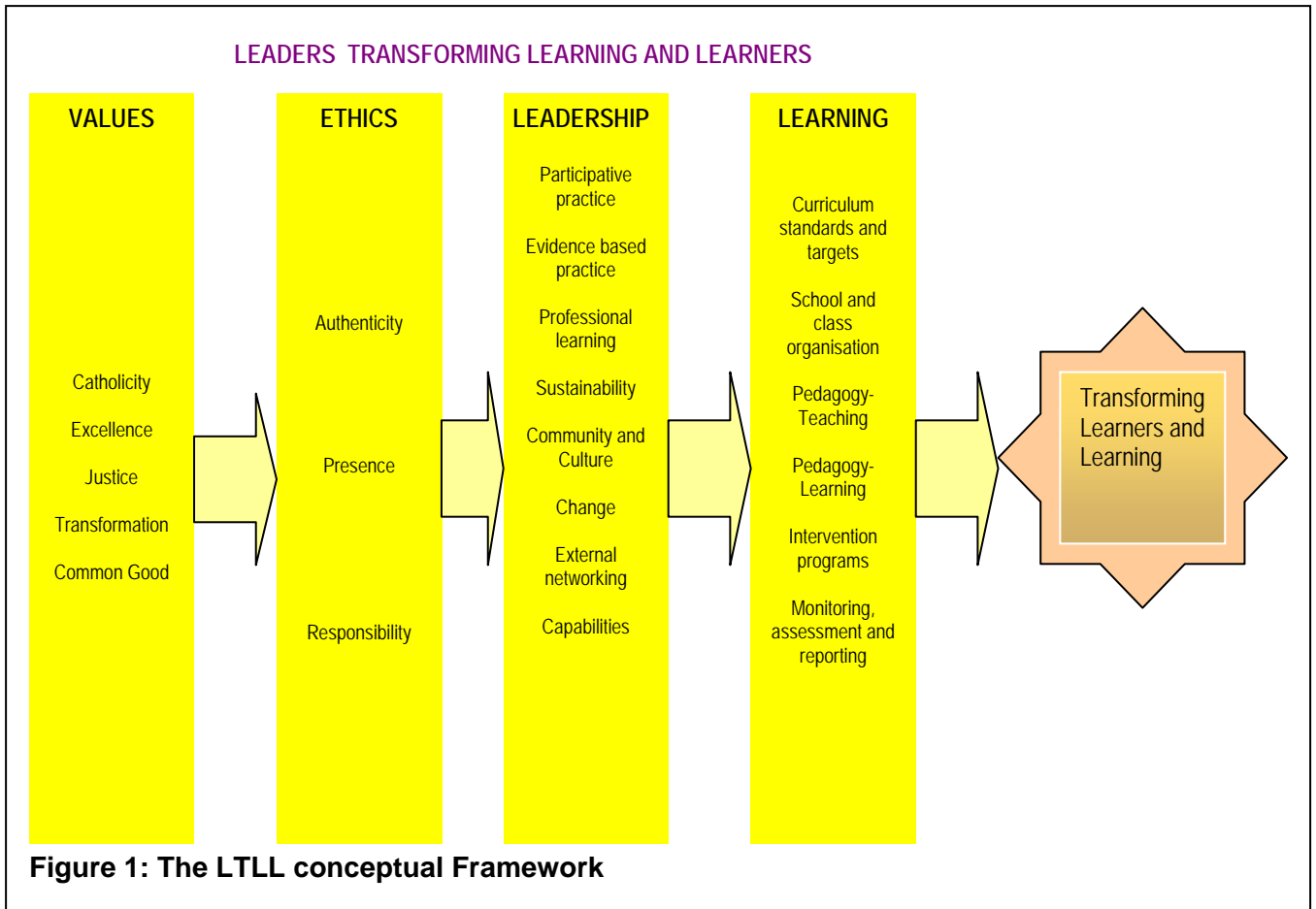
Some influential approaches to school improvement and development include those of Hill and Crevola (1998), Crowther et al (2002a & 2002b) and Cuttance (2001), to name a few. Approaches to improving teaching and learning include Newman and associates (1996), Hattie (2003), Queensland's 'New Basics' (2001), Tasmania's Essential Learnings Framework (<http://itag.education.tas.gov.au/default.htm>), the NSW Department of Education's 'Quality Teaching Quality Learning' and Marzano et al., (2005). There is considerable agreement among the approaches around such issues as the importance of the quality of the teacher, primacy of assessment for learning, whole-school approaches to planning and implementation of curriculum, and the need to link leadership and learning. The LTLL initiative set out to harness this growing consensus and to contextualise it for Catholic educational leaders.

The LTLL conceptual model

The first task the management committee set itself was to develop a conceptual model on which to build the project – one that captured the emerging consensus in the relevant literature identified above. The major adaptations have involved spelling out the specifics of what is often referred to as a shared values base, or moral purpose without significant elaboration.

Briefly, the model in Figure 1 proposes the creation of educational communities where children experience transformative learning, which will require reflection on underpinning values which in turn will inform how we view what is ethical in our teaching and leading. These ethical approaches should in turn support leadership and learning practices that are at the core of the moral challenges to create learning communities where children are free to learn that which is

meaningful and transforming. The LTLL program was designed to support schools as they engaged in projects which reflected these priorities.



The development of the LTLL conceptual framework.

The intention of the initiators of the LTLL program was to develop a vehicle within which practitioners could engage actively with university personnel in the context of projects that were seen as significant in their own schools.

Based on the early thinking about authentic, transformative learning, an invitation was extended to the Catholic Education/Schools Offices of Parramatta, Wollongong, Broken Bay and Maitland-Newcastle to be part of shaping a different form of professional development which would be grounded in local projects and informed by emerging new understandings of the ethical basis of

learning, and the best in current understandings of how leaders can make a difference to learning.

All four dioceses accepted the invitation and a steering group was set up whose task was to make the broad conceptual framework a reality. The group included staff of ACU, CEO/CSO representatives and some school personnel.

The National Quality Schooling Framework (Cuttance et al 2003) was a significant influence on the evolution of the LTLL model. The NQSF was an interactive, web based tool to support school leaders in improving student outcomes. It drew on the fields of school and teacher effectiveness, school improvement and innovation in order to provide practical resources for schools.

The NQSF tool had 10 dimensions:

1. Beliefs and understandings
2. Curriculum, standards and targets
3. Monitoring, assessment and reporting
4. Learning
5. Teaching
6. Professional learning
7. School and class organisation
8. Intervention and special assistance
9. Home, school and community partnerships
10. Leadership and management

The NQSF reflective tool asked schools to provide evidence statements for their own practice and to identify practices about which they would like to learn more. The LTLL project made the following adaptations:

- To the original 10 NQSF dimensions a further 12 were added, which allowed a greater alignment with the context of Catholic schooling. The resultant 22 were grouped into four clusters: Values, Ethics, Leadership and Learning;
- The additional dimensions in the values and ethics clusters grew out of ongoing work in dioceses relating to the identity of Catholic schools, and of the stimulus provided by the

work of Starratt (2004) outlined previously. The literature is almost universal in its endorsement of the need for shared moral purpose (eg Fullan, 2001, Crowther et al., 2002a and b). In working with a sub-set of schools which shared a common belief base, LTLL was able to be far more explicit. The NQSF “Beliefs and Understandings” element was refined through a process of engagement with system and school personnel to better capture a holistic view of the essential values base of Catholic education. Thus, the single element of NQSF was elaborated into a set of five values (based on practitioner input) and a set of three ethics, through which these values would be expressed, using the work of Starratt (2004).

- Evidence based practice, Sustainability, Culture and community and Change management – all of which are evident in other dimensions in NQSF- were made discrete dimensions within the Leadership cluster in LTLL to give them a prominence in line with practitioner feedback. The notion of Leadership Capabilities – drawing on recent ACU research was also added to this cluster.
- Many of the original NQSF dimensions were edited to better reflect the realities of Catholic schooling and its value base. This included some modification of language, or the addition of indicators that drew specifically on the Catholic values base.
- The NQSF tool asked participants to provide evidence of the extent to which each indicator was present, but for LTLL participants were asked additionally to rate the extent to which such evidence was present.

A sample page from the LTLL tool is attached as Appendix 1. The usefulness of this tool and the framework on which it stands is one of the primary research focuses of this paper.

The LTLL professional development program

It was decided that the basis for the professional development program would be a project chosen by each of the nine participant schools so that discourse would build on experience rather than attempting to align practice in schools with a conceptual framework that was still untested. The dimensions of the focussed research activities were also agreed among the stakeholders. Thus, the nature of both the professional development interventions and the way in which these would be studied were collaboratively agreed by all stakeholders before the program itself began.

The resultant professional development program had a series of nested structures:

1. At the broadest level, there was a series of plenary sessions within which the conceptual framework would be elaborated and during which participants would be assisted in planning the ways in which this might inform their plans. Each plenary day had a similar outline which facilitated this.
2. At diocesan level, schools were supported by diocesan personnel through advice and by structured experiences for local sharing. In addition, participant schools received additional resourcing – the amount of which varied from diocese to diocese.
3. At school level, the school steering group (which was made up normally of principal, another formal curriculum leader and 1 or 2 other staff) provided opportunities for the wider staff to work with the emerging ideas in their particular projects.

The eighteen month program for the plenary sessions is outlined in Appendix 2.

The program of each day of the plenary gatherings had a general pattern which allowed for sharing among schools, input and new perspectives, opportunities to consider the implications of this input both on a single school basis and across schools and finally the chance to modify action plans. It was an iterative program that moved from practice to research and theory and back again in a series of cycles across an 18 month period. The input from key speakers was intended not to act as an explication of the model, but as a catalyst to further questioning and refined practice.

The period of direct engagement among schools, systems and the University concluded in October 2006 with a full day conference at which each school presented its project.

The research methodology

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the impact of a conceptual model for the linking of leadership and learning in Catholic schools. The project was conducted over an eighteen month period from June 2005-December 2006.

The participants in this research project were nine schools, directly represented by thirty three (33) Catholic school educators from four Catholic Dioceses in New South Wales. The Schools had been nominated for involvement in the Project by their Catholic Education Offices following the calling for expressions of interest and the application of selection criteria to interested schools and staff. The educators were in teams of three or four from five Primary and four Secondary Schools in four Catholic Dioceses of New South Wales.

The research used mixed and triangulated methods of data gathering and analysis. At the early stages of the research data were gathered using a school self portrait, participant observations at induction and development seminars and collection and analysis of project documents and electronic communications through a dedicated website. Upon the development of individual school plans, questionnaires and interviews, focus groups and analysis of documents, reports and plans were employed. This paper focuses on the data gathered from the final stage of the research - focus group interviews conducted after the concluding conference. The study utilized a qualitative methodology. The research was conducted in the natural settings of the participant's school and every effort was made to represent the teachers 'in their terms.' In order to ensure objectivity, interviews were conducted by research assistants who had had no role in the project to that date. Data was collected using a tape recorder and participants were identified only by number. The interview questions are included as Appendix 3.

After the focus group interviews had been completed, all information was collected, transcribed and carefully analyzed for themes and sub-themes. These themes are reported below. The method of reporting shows the frequency of occurrence of the various sub-themes. Quotes from individual participants are utilized to highlight the meaning and significance of the theme. Quotations and references are reported here using the school as the unit of analysis. Individual participants were not identified in this report.

In the analysis, the themes and sub-themes were drawn from across all eight questions rather than isolating analysis within individual questions. This paper reports on the major emergent themes which related to the usefulness of the conceptual model and collaboration.

Theme One: The Usefulness of framework

Because the conceptual framework was the foundation for the structure of the LTLL project, it was a major focus of the research activity. The researchers had an underlying concern to determine whether the model stood up to the test of practical application. An analysis of the transcripts of interviews in the nine settings yielded the following sub-themes related to the conceptual model.

Table 1: Sub-themes relating to the conceptual model for LTLL

Sub-Theme	No. of schools
Alignment between the project and the model was difficult in the early stages – particularly where the project was decided first	9
The model focused us on issues of identity, authenticity and transformation	8
The values/ethics components were of particular significance	7
The model aligned well with our experience of reality	6
Teachers opened up to change	6
Issues with the wording of some elements of the tool	5
The use of the model enabled/provoked change/transformation in teachers as well as students	4
The use of the model changed understandings of leadership	4
The process of using the model affirmed collaborative leadership practice	3

In the context of the open questions used in the interviews, six of the nine projects expressed the view that the model aligned well with their experience, and there was no critical comment about consonance with lived experience. In fact, the alignment was so clear to one respondent in School D that they said:

When I first saw the model, I was surprised, and I think I might even have made the comment to the people around me, along the lines – isn't this what we already do?

Most schools commented on three particular qualities of the model which made it useful for them:

1. it allowed them to step back from the day to day and to reflect on what they were currently doing;

2. it provided a framework for looking forward;
3. and it refocussed them on the essential values and ethics that they felt should characterise Catholic education.

Reflection on current or past practice

Eight schools specifically mentioned the fact that the model was of assistance in reflection on current or past practice. One participant in School C said that::

... as a participant I've become more reflective in my teaching practices, but It's good to step back and observe the learning taking place and the transforming of the children.

Another respondent in School H drew attention to the collegial dimension of reflection:

... another thing I thought that was good about it as a reflective tool was it made people sit and think, and reflect and dialogue with one another on what really does work, and what doesn't work, our evidence for it and evaluation of it all. It's been very, very positive in that it's allowed people who otherwise in the business of their day often don't get the chance to really reflect and think, to articulate what we do well and where we're at.

Participants expressed appreciation of the fact that the provided both structure and opportunity for reflection, and in particular with colleagues – opportunities which were seen as generally unusual.

A framework for looking forward

This reflective element which has been aided by the model is not restricted to the past or the present. It has also opened up new ways of envisioning the future, of seeing possible ways ahead. In four schools the model was actually seen as a stimulus to transformation. One participant from School B indicated that:

... we were able to then go back and actually use that more as a framework for where we wanted to go.

Another respondent (from School F) described the framework as “a completely different way” of looking at what they were doing, one that “works” and which they would like to adapt for any initiative they might take on in the future. In fact, in six of the nine interviews there were

observations made that the experience of LTLL opened teachers up to change. School G described “teachers demonstrating a desire to change as a result of the project”. School E put it this way:

.. people have been reluctant in terms of change and innovation and I believe this project has really presented us with a structure and also a philosophy in terms of moving forward and converting and moving a lot of staff ...

This preparedness to move forward or to embrace change is often linked with the element of collaboration which is discussed in detail below.

Essential values and ethics

It would appear from the comments in seven of the nine responses that a critical factor that underpinned the usefulness and impact of the framework was the foundational status it gives to values and ethics. A participant in School A commented that the model “highlighted the values and ethics that underpin ... authentic leadership”. The particular suitability of the framework for Catholic schools is highlighted by these comments from Schools E and F:

... the model clearly points out what we're here for in Catholic education.

.. the model for me has really emphasised ... the moral nature of teaching, and I think ... Catholics can grab hold of the model very easily and use it [as a] framework for their work.

In a school system which is built on an espoused value and belief system, opportunities to tease this out and to make it explicit are seen as valuable.

While the conceptual framework *per se* stood up well to the critique of practitioners and was seen by them as being a valid representation of their experience, and a useful tool for reflection, there were two significant learnings regarding the *implementation* of the model.

The first was that seven out of nine school based projects had been selected prior to exposure to the model, and five projects reported that they found it difficult to apply the model after they had already chosen their focus. Interestingly, (and incorrectly) many schools assumed that most

other schools had chosen their project after the input on the model. The retrospective application of the model to a project that was already under way yielded comments like the one from School C in which the model was described as initially being like “a nuisance ... like a fly buzzing around your ear”. In all cases, however, schools were able to work past this point with very positive outcomes. School C again described their initial feelings as being like “a cargo cult in teaching” - expecting things to be handed over to them with little effort on their part. They summed their experience up in the following words:

This model requires us to engage in some intellectual processing, something as teachers we don't often take the time to do, and I think that was the most valuable part of the project.

The length and complexity of the reflective tool was also criticised by some participants. This was not one of the major elements raised in the interviews, but is one of which the researchers were aware as the program evolved. It seemed to have two dimensions – the size of the tool and the language used.

With respect to the size of the tool, if attempted all at one sitting (which was never the intention) it can appear to be an unreasonable expectation. One participant (from School F) shifted perceptions on this during the life of the program on this matter:

.. It (the reflective tool) is very confronting sometimes and very, very thick. So much to get through. So what we did was to break it down or just draw out a few questions and that worked a lot better than when we first gave the completed tool. ... and I thought that one of my recommendations would have been to cut down the size of the tool, but then I decided against that when I was reflecting, because its nice to have it all there and the prompts ... it's still important to have all the prompts ...but as a whole staff .. I would recommend that you just pull out .. a few that you would find most useful for your staff.

Thus, despite the apparent demands made by the tool, this participant felt that it was worth persevering with. This aligns well with the high levels of overall satisfaction with the experience. The issue of the language was picked up by a minority (three) of the participating schools, and was expressed quite eloquently by one of the School A respondents, who said “if we could have had it explained to us right from the go in plain English terms, maybe it would have been a bit easier for us to get a full grasp of what was expected of us.”

The feedback from participants on the model shows that despite some challenges in the initial application, it was well aligned with experience, a useful prompt to reflection and action and particularly supportive of the foundational values of Catholic education.

Theme 2: Collaboration

Responses to interview questions revealed high levels of attention to collaboration within the project. The frequency of the sub themes which were identified is reported in Table 2 below. However; close analysis revealed that there were significant variations in perspective among respondents as to the nature and the purpose of collaboration within the project. To aid analysis the sub-themes have been grouped under three headings. The first focused on the experience of collaborative leadership in the project. The second stressed the importance of collegial relationships, sharing and peer dialogue for professional learning in the project while the third drew attention to the challenge of change and overcoming staff resistance to achieve ownership of the projects.

Table 2: Sub-themes relating to the collaboration

Sub-Theme	No of schools
The value of shared leadership/ownership, gaining and maintaining commitment	8
The importance of shared professional learning and dialogue	7
Challenge of involving the whole staff	7
Maintaining staff harmony when threatened by change	7
Awareness that all can contribute to leadership	5
Breaking down silos among department and year levels	4
Teachers and their work being exposed to colleagues	4
There is a need for clear direction from formal leaders	3
There was value in sharing across school settings	3
The process of using the model affirmed collaborative leadership practice	3
People are interested in leadership in different ways	2

Leadership and collaboration

The issue of shared and distributive leadership was the most frequently mentioned element in this theme, being referred to by eight of the nine participating teams. This sharing in the leadership process was seen to express itself at all levels within the project and was seen as the essential element in the ownership of the project across the school community. The issue of how leadership was distributed, shared and expressed within the project covered the nature and approach of the principal, the responsibilities and roles within the project team, how other staff became engaged and committed to the project and how CEO staff collaborated with, and networked and supported the project team. Many of the observations are consistent with the some of the current literature on leadership especially the work of Crowther et al. (2002a and b) and Lambert (2002) on shared leadership and Duignan and Bezzina (2006), Gronn (2002), Harris(2004), MacBeath (2005) and Timperley (2005) on distributed leadership in schools. On the issue of the importance of staff members other than the project team owning the project through feelings of empowerment and control, School G commented:

I think it's the ownership idea that everybody, all the staff members, all have something significant to offer as leaders, not just as teachers, but as teacher/leaders (School G)

And again from a participant who did not hold a formal leadership role in the school:

I think that the need and importance of distributed leadership not only in teaching but empowering leaders to be learners and as just a classroom teacher, it's been a really good experience for me to be involved in stepping up and leading in some areas outside of just teaching the students. (School E)

In reference to the principal's role as leader, the same school commented on the importance of the attitude and approach of the Principal, an observation reflected in many comments from the teams. These learnings may not be surprising as they were supported by the policy of the Project development that the Principal had to be a member of the team for the school to gain selection. What was important were the observations about the nature of that leadership, that it had to be collaborative and shared, or the project would not work.

I think it needs to have a principal involved. It needs to be an ultimate thing and the principal needs to own it and the principal needs to be an equal member of the team. (School B)

Some schools identified the development of shared and distributive leadership as natural processes given the nature of the project coupled with the approach of the formal leadership. However; within these observations was the realization that in the early; and especially at the time of submission and the gaining of commitment to participate, formal leadership has a more direct and visionary reality.

An interesting observation as to the evolutionary nature of the leadership in the project and the crucial role of formal leadership at the start of the project is shown in the following comment:

Without leadership as the driving force, the project would never have been started, which sounds like a simplistic statement, but it's not. The idea (for the project) came from the school leader, it came from the existing principal at the time. It didn't come from staff, it didn't come about as recommendations of staff, it came about from somebody who had the overview of the school and a very clear and recent overview as a result of school review and recommendations made through that review. So I think that leadership was crucial at that point because the initial conception of the project came from that point. (School D)

This theme is repeated in the comments from the team at School B:

What sort of emerged to me was the sense of ownership, staff for this group in particular and then perhaps on to the subject co-ordinators and then on to the general staff, had to be ownership for what was taking place. So once you own it, in the sense you start leading that learning rather than a sense of being passed down from on high and there's no ownership. So therefore in a sense there's no linkage with what we are doing. What is the purpose, what are we trying to get at here, but I think there was a flow-down from the sense people could see what we were doing, what the importance was, they could see the relevance to their students and I think as that ownership came on you know there was a lot of positive feedback about that, people kept saying, this is good, we don't get the opportunity to do this, and I think all that came together for people to sort of own it and I think that was the key thing for me.

Another school identified a team member not the principal or the team as the driving force behind the success of the project.

I think one good thing too is that we had (X) who is really very good at process and actually was I think the driver of the whole project and he sort of kept us on track. (School H)

The awareness; and in some cases the surprise, of the possibility and importance of shared leadership as a philosophical base for the project, can be detected in the responses from the five school teams who mentioned this theme. Clearly the concept of teachers being leaders may

be strong in the literature Crowther et al (2002) and Gross (2004), but it still appeared as unusual to some teachers in the project.

Well, the linkage jumped out at me very strongly on the first visit to ACU and the entire day talked about leadership and learning but never the word principal, I don't think was mentioned all day and I took away a great sense of enthusiasm about the theme that I picked up through the day that we are all leaders, and we all have a responsibility to lead in the whole process of learning. (School B)

This observation and perspective is consistent with the research and findings of Duignan and Bezzina (2006) and raises questions as to the real status of teacher leadership in Catholic schools.

Collegial Sharing and Professional Learning.

Seven schools referred to the importance of participants sharing their professional learning within the project and the essential role of open and supportive dialogue in this process. This sharing occurred within the project team between the team and the other staff at the school and with other schools in the project via the internet site and seminars at the University:

So I guess that was the components that I saw was learning and shared leadership and that sharing the leadership led to greater responsibility and for all teachers because they were part and it helped develop their own learning. I mean when you've got to stand up and talk to a staff about something suddenly you have to really make sure you've been doing the right thing and that your learning has progressed and again it makes you stop, go back and reflect and look at what have you done, what have you changed and why have you done it.(School G)

This theme of collaboration and sharing in responsibility for the operation of the project leading to professional learning supports much of the findings of Crowther and others (2002) in their work on teachers as leaders and is highlighted in the following typical comment:

I think the second thing is just this concept around professional learning and the importance of professional dialogue and opportunities for staff to be able to talk about just what we mean when we talk about student learning. What are the factors involved, what are the key components, what are the things that positively influence it, what are the things that negatively influence it? (School D)

This observation points to the importance of schools creating vehicles for teachers to engage each other around significant and challenging educational issues. There is then a requirement to resource them to have the time to learn from these experiences (Slater, 2005). Participants

consistently remarked how significant they found the experience of simply being involved with their peers in professional dialogue which they felt was significant and that could make a difference. A response from School G seemed to link these three elements of leading, sharing and learning in a rather unique way.

Well I think the further we got into it, the more it became apparent that the more ownership everybody has, and the more you become a leader, the better the quality of learning. And the more we learned, the better all of us became at articulating what we wanted to achieve, sharing what we were learning and it was almost a natural progression around what took place.

Members of several schools talked about the benefits of sharing with other schools. This related to the Diocesan teams, giving papers to groups of schools from their diocese; but most importantly, their experienced of sharing with the other schools of the project through the website and through the Seminars held at the University:

I think the other thing too that I'm looking forward too also is when we meet back together and we hear other schools we've gone along this journey with and to really see their projects unfold and where they've come to and so on. But I think those days that we spend and we chat and we share within groups with some of the other schools has been really uplifting. I know I've often come away from there, been full of ideas, full of enthusiasm, full of renewed commitment to this. I think that those days have been great in that regard.(School H)

And again in respect to the close relationship with the other school from the Diocese:

Yes that's right but I would say that it was a tension but it had good results too because it was great to have that connection at that level with the other school that was involved, with (School B)

... to get some of their feedback and to hear parts of their journey and to feel that you weren't doing it completely alone (School G)

Seven of the schools involved found the involvement of the whole staff in the project as an area of tension and challenge. However they also identified the significance of gaining the involvement and commitment of non project team teachers for the success of the project. They pointed to different strategies, but emphasized the need for the process to be designed to engage staff and to support and acknowledge their involvement. In some cases the impact on the whole staff surprised the project teams, as expressed by School D.

Yes, I think we set out to, we thought the greatest impact of the project would be on the students and what's actually happened is the greatest impact's been on the staff, which is not the aim but that's the result.

This networking, sharing and encouragement of other schools and groups and individuals in the project highlighted the complexity of the view participants had of the role of leadership in the project.

Change, resistance and ownership

The same seven schools as mentioned above also pointed to the tension caused by the prospect and reality of change caused by the project. They also pointed to the importance of collaborative support as a strategy to help with the natural tension: and sometimes fear, of change.

So certainly tensions in terms of people's reservations, people's resistance to change, people feeling disempowered because of a change in their status as being the one person, for instance to being a member of a team . So those sorts of issues have been the main issues I think which to a large extent have been resolved.... mainly because we have been able to work on events and on programs together which have sort of crystallised some of those relationships and have exhibited people's strengths as well so that perhaps in some case a grudging respect started to develop. There has been quite a lot of support but there also was from some more traditional areas amongst staff resistance to that so that I think would be the case with any change in any organisation but I do think that it's moving positively.(School D)

Other schools talked about their fears and tensions about engaging staff in a project that required change and their surprise at the reaction of staff to the change when they are involved in a collaborative and shared model.

We were prepared and very aware of the possibility of staff response to change being too quick and we have really tried to make sure that what we were doing wasn't too much, too quick, too big and I think that's helped with regards to your pleasant surprise (School B)

Five schools reported on the tension created through the experience of resistance to efforts towards collaboration. While similar to the observations regarding the issue of change and the involvement of staff who were not members of the Project team, the statements also point to a general fear of the unknown and a need for security and control of processes among teachers.

I think it's putting the teacher in the environment and I also think a big part of that is that they learn that they don't have to know everything. So as soon as they drop that fear of not knowing and the kids may be outshining them, they then take control and run with it (School H).

The sub theme of teachers opening up to collegial involvement may have its source in the nature of traditional school structures and teacher work, but more than half the schools mentioned the challenge of teachers becoming comfortable with open sharing of their classroom and their teaching with other teachers. This challenge to the norm of autonomy and the physical isolation of teachers' work was seen as a major hurdle to overcome, if the goals of whole school change and improvement were to be met.

Our relationships have gone to another level because prior to this project, to ask a teacher to go into a classroom would have, well the project almost didn't go ahead. I mean that was our initial obstacle, that the first day we talked about it, we knew what it was going to involve. We were fairly sure everybody was comfortable and the first day it was about to go ahead, the teacher that was going to visited was just in such a lather of anxiety and I was thinking, we're going to pull the plug because we can't not be present to the extreme anxiety that this teacher's going through and not go ahead with it. (School G)

The fact that these visits did go ahead and are now a part of this school's operation is a major feature of the project in that school. However; the same school identified this as an on going development with some teachers more comfortable than others in opening up to visits and dialogue with peers on professional issues. However; collaborative sharing and dialogue were seen as the sources for the development of trust required to break down such barriers to sharing.

The discussion of the themes and sub-themes discussed above hold clear messages for leaders in Catholic schools

Lessons for leaders

It is still too early to be able to identify with confidence any patterns of specific effects on student outcomes from the LTLL project, although there were encouraging signs in school presentations and interview data, which will be reported at another time.

These initial findings from the LTLL pilot do contain some valuable insights for leaders at both school and system level, however.

The conceptual model was seen as useful. It delivered a capacity for reflection on the past and present and for shaping the future. It was valued because it was able to make explicit the key domains in building towards improved learning outcomes – and in particular, it gave the same amount of attention to the shared moral purposes of learning (Fullan, 2001; Crowther et al., 2002a and b) as to the more concrete behaviours of leadership and learning. No claims can be made that the conceptual model is the best available, but it is clear from the results reported here that having such a framework was valued highly by participants. Leaders who systematically open such dimensions of the school up to structured dialogue and reflection are building a strong foundation for action.

Schools responded very favourably to highlighting the ethical dimension of the educative process. This challenges leaders in Catholic education to go beyond traditional formulations which have become emptied of meaning over time, and to deal with values and ethics in a manner that is just as systematic and explicit as the other domains of educative action.

The structures of the LTLL pilot engaged participants in learning and decision making at school level, and in sharing between and among schools at diocesan and whole of project level. Ideas and insights gathered in one's "own backyard" were able to be tested in dialogue with fellow professionals whose experiences gave rise to different perspectives. The positive comments about this aspect of the project indicate that the structures of LTLL allowed participants to both experience and reflect upon shared leadership in their own schools, and to garner the benefits of sharing beyond the boundaries of their own school communities. School and system leaders can learn from this the benefits of a common language and conceptual model, and a shared enterprise across different schools and different projects allowing deep engagement to take place.

The analysis of the interviews pointed to a variety of understandings and beliefs about leadership in education. A more difficult area to categorise was the differentiation of the responses to the meaning and character of leadership across the nine schools. The perceptions of shared and distributive leadership, teacher leadership, strong formal leadership and team leadership varied according to stage, purpose and the process of each school project. The

gaining of ownership and commitment, the giving of direction, the removal of resistance, the encouragement and nurturing of learning across the whole school community all incorporated elements of collaborative philosophy and practice.

At the same time there were strong voices speaking for more directive approaches to leadership. This represents an apparent contradiction to the current wisdom of the literature as to the universal appropriateness of shared leadership in Catholic schools. The lesson for leaders here is that, while accepting the philosophy of shared leadership, this may manifest itself in different ways according to factors such as the people concerned – their needs, interests and abilities, the focus for leadership and the stage of change of the particular initiative. Leaders need to be comfortable with the fact that while the overall approach to leadership ought be collaborative, not every decision needs to be so.

As the first formal report on the LTLL pilot initiative, this paper has demonstrated the usefulness of having a conceptual model which links elements of values, beliefs, leadership and learning. Moreover, the particular model used in the LTLL was recognized as aligning well with the experience of practitioners, and was valued as providing focus and structure as a basis for reflection and action. This sample of Catholic schools was particularly appreciative of the way in which the value and ethical dimensions of their work – and in particular the linkage to leading and learning - were made explicit. The importance of collaboration as an element of leadership was endorsed by the sample schools. An analysis of interview comments reveals that practices of shared leadership need to be nuanced according to participants and contextual factors.

The LTLL pilot project has revealed an enthusiasm among participants for working closely with the fundamental concerns of Catholic education in a way that is well founded in the research and reflects accurately their unique values stance. It shows signs of contributing to the development of understandings and processes which can empower school staffs to engage with one another in ways that can contribute to the provision of learning for both staff and students which is genuinely transformative.

The use of a shared conceptual framework was seen by participants as giving a coherence between the philosophy of sharing and the practices by which this is given expression in leadership in schools. This finding echoes the thoughts of Duignan (2006, p.110) who said:

For contemporary educational leaders to develop and foster the growth of shared leadership in their schools, they need to develop collaborative and shared mental models and meanings that bind them together as a learning community. The key emphasis is on learning together, sharing and creating processes and conditions that encourage everyone in the school community to learn, grow and be creative together.

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Appendix 1: Sample page from LTLL Tool

<i>Embedding Values & Identity: 2 – Equity</i>			
<p>The document <i>The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium</i> makes it clear that Catholic schools should have “a special attention to those who are weakest” (n15), and are “at the service of society” (n16). Our vision statement treats this explicitly, speaking of the need to be inviting, inclusive and just.</p> <p>To be inviting, inclusive and just is to ensure that we work to promote the common good in our schools, the system as a whole, and the wider society.</p> <p>Effective Catholic Schools will:</p>			
	Indicator	Our Evidence <i>Record here in point form the visible signs that this indicator is present in your school</i>	Rating <i>Scale of 0-10 (0 being not developed and 10 being well developed)</i>
1	Embrace the diversity of people and cultures.		
2	Promote collaborative practice.		
3	Reach out particularly to those who are poor, marginalised and most in need.		
4	Ensure that administrative and educational practices address the issues of access and equity.		
5	Take a public stance on issues of injustice and inequality.		
6	Ensure equitable distribution of resources.		

Total of Ratings	
MEAN SCORE FOR EQUITY (Total/6)	

Appendix 2: Outline of the LTLL plenary program

Date	Focus	Summary
June 2005	Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of LTLL • Refining understanding of school project • Introduction to conceptual model • Initial application of the model • Sharing with other schools • Between session task – application of the “Learning” element of the model.
July 2005	Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School share learning from application of the model to learning • Input from visiting scholar: Steve Gross from Temple University – responding to school use of the tool with a focus on student engagement • Schools refine action plans in light of input • Sharing with other schools • Between session task : Complete the Leadership dimension of the tool.
December 2005	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing among schools • Issues arising from the leadership dimension of the model by Assoc. Professor Charles Burford • Interactive processes for learning in school communities • Revision of action plans • Sharing with other schools
February 2006	Transforming Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of focus questions • Input by Dr Toni Noble (Focus on learning and wellbeing) • Refining of action plans and sharing with other schools
March 2006	Values and Ethics (I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured reflection on impact of ethical issues in LTLL • Input from Father Gerry Gleeson and Professor Patrick Duignan on ethical dimensions of leadership in Catholic schools • Interactive plenary • School group discussions
June 2006	Values and Ethics (II)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools share progress reports • Input: Professor Paul Begley – values in leading for learning • Interactive groups and plenary with Prof Begley

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for culminating conference
October 2006	Culminating Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keynote lecture: Professor Patrick Duignan • Three workshop sessions during which each school provided a report of their initiative • Plenary and close.

Appendix 3: Final Interview Questions:

1. How did participants interpret the Project's Conceptual Model in their attempt to create transforming learning in their schools?
2. What did participants learn about the linkage of leadership and learning as a result of the experiences in the Pilot Project?
3. What elements of the Pilot Project had an impact on the practice of teaching and learning in their school and why?
4. What tensions and dilemmas did individuals and /or teams experience through their involvement in this pilot Project?
5. How has their involvement impacted on the understanding of teaching and learning processes in their school?
6. Recommendations would the team make for the usage of the Project with other Schools in the future?
7. What were the most important experiences and findings regarding leadership for the improvement of teaching and learning, of Catholic Education Office staff involved in the Project?
8. What impact did the Conceptual Model for Authentic Leadership for Transformational Learning for Catholic Schools have on the participants in the Pilot Project and how should these experiences influence the development and future use of the Model?