

# **LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL CATHOLIC PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS**

Submitted by  
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Administration,  
Graduate Diploma Curriculum, Graduate Diploma Religious Education,  
Diploma Teaching (Primary)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Education

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September 2012

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## **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for, or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (Appendix B).

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Michael G. Harris.

## **ABSTRACT**

This research sought to explore whether leadership benefits result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. The research sought to explore potential leadership benefits for principals involved in a Catholic parish primary school partnership. The benefits were explored in terms of support for the principals and any resultant impact on their effectiveness.

The role of the principal has changed vastly over the past twenty years (Earley & Weindling, 2004) and expectations of principals are continually increasing.

These changes are even more pronounced in Catholic parish primary schools in Australia (Carlin, D'Arbon, Dorman, Duignan & Neidhart, 2003).

The changing role of the principal, particularly in the Catholic context, has led to principal burnout and difficulties with succession (D'Arbon, Duignan, Duncan & Goodwin, 2001). School partnerships, resulting from parishes merging, may provide leadership benefits to support principals.

This research explored the experiences of the principals and parish priest of three formerly separate schools in three parishes and now in the same parish. The research was, therefore, in the context of school change, associated with a parish merger. This merger led to the formation of a partnership between the principals and the parish priest. The review of the literature generated three research questions. The first research question was, 'What is the nature of the emerging partnership?' The introduction of successful change requires careful leadership. This led to the second research question, 'How did the school leaders involved lead the development of the partnership?' The focus of this study was on the leadership outcomes, consequently the third research question was, 'To what extent do leadership outcomes result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership?'

The research is important as there is a large body of research already available which indicates that many principals are finding their role almost impossible (Blackmore, Thomson, Sachs & Barty, 2005; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Fink & Earl, 2003) and calling for alternative models of leadership (Carlin et al., 2003; Lacey, 2002). However, the leadership

benefits, when three Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership, does not appear to have been researched.

The research design was interpretivist, as it sought to explore key stakeholders' perceptions of the partnership. To understand the participants' reality as they experienced and interpreted it, a constructionist epistemology was adopted. As the study sought to gain the perspectives of the participants on leadership, viewed as a relational activity, symbolic interactionism formed the theoretical perspective through which data analysis was conducted.

The research methodology was case study, as it is consistent with both the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction.

The purpose of this study was to explore whether potential leadership benefits are created when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. Consequently the participants were the parish priest and the three principals. Methods adopted included semi-structured interviews, participant reflection and textual and thematic analysis of the data.

The research identified that positive leadership outcomes can result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. In this study these outcomes included enhanced decision-making, increased confidence when implementing decisions, shared wisdom and support from trusted colleagues. It also highlighted that Catholic parish primary schools are in a unique position to maximise the benefits of such partnerships. The common bond of faith provides a ready opportunity to create a shared vision. The obvious leadership team structure of one parish priest working with two or more principals creates great potential. United by a clear vision and willing to share the leadership, the team is uniquely placed to provide the leadership required to initiate and develop a successful partnership which has the potential to provide benefits for the leaders.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This Doctorate has been a marathon, not a sprint! It has taken almost seven years to complete. I would like to thank those who have helped me complete the journey.

Thank you to Dr. Chris Branson and Dr. Annette Schneider who joined me as Associate Supervisors for some of the way.

I acknowledge my Principal Supervisor, Dr. Helga Neidhart, for her encouragement, support and attention to detail along the way.

I am particularly grateful to the participants in the study, who were so passionate about the success of their partnership.

I would also like to thank my family, especially my children Brett and Kate, and my friends and colleagues who encouraged me to ‘dig deep’ along the journey.

And finally, to my wife, Marianne, for her wonderful support from the starting gun until the finishing line. I will be forever grateful for your patience and support. Thank you!

## **Chapter One**

### **RESEARCH PROBLEM IDENTIFIED**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

I was involved in Catholic education in Melbourne for over thirty years, as a teacher and in various leadership roles. During this time, I personally experienced the growing pressures on leaders, as well as observing the mounting pressure on colleagues. There is a large body of research highlighting the growing pressure on principals, which is compounded for Catholic parish primary school principals, due to the changing context of Catholic schools. New models of leadership are called for. School partnerships may provide the necessary support for principals in these times of change.

#### **1.2 Research Problem Identified**

This research sought to explore whether leadership benefits result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. The changing role of the principal, particularly in the Catholic context, has led to principal burnout and difficulties with principal succession (Carlin, D'Arbon, Dorman, Duignan & Neidhart, 2003; Lacey, 2002; Shen & Portin, 2005; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003).

At the same time, in the Australian context, due to a shortage of priests, more parishes are merging, with the result that two or more, formerly separate schools, may find themselves in the same parish. These mergers provide the opportunity for schools to work together. The resultant arrangement may create leadership benefits. Such an alternative model of leadership may have the potential to de-intensify the work of the principal, bring about growth in leadership capacity and improve student outcomes.

The role of the primary school principal has changed vastly over the past twenty years (Earley & Weindling, 2004) and the expectations on principals are increasing. Shen and Portin (2005) highlight the impact of the changing role on the principal. They speak of a layering effect: 'As new responsibilities are added to the principal's role, time must be taken from another previously allocated responsibility in order to meet the changing demands. At

the same time, principals have not been relieved of other duties and responsibilities that have traditionally been part of their job' (Shen & Portin, 2005, p.192). This layering effect has often seen more expectations on the role without any balancing support.

This effect is even more pronounced in Catholic parish primary schools in Australia (Carlin, D'Arbon, Dorman, Duignan & Neidhart, 2003). The Church, in western society, notably Australia, is experiencing an era of great uncertainty, ambiguity and change. As a result, the expectations of the Catholic parish primary school and of the principals of those schools are increasing. Principals in Catholic schools have additional responsibilities to their counterparts in other systems in respect of faith leadership (Spry, 2004). These expectations vary considerably from parish to parish (Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association [ACPPA], 2005), however they all add to the increased complexity of principalship in the Catholic parish primary school. One of these emerging changes, school partnerships resulting from parish mergers, may however, provide support for the principals.

Currently in Australia, a research study is being conducted by Neidhart and Lamb (2010) which focuses on the role of the principal in Catholic primary schools in an Australian diocese. The research is being conducted as a result of the expectation in Church documents, and diocesan policy, for the principal to take on a growing responsibility for faith leadership. The problem is highlighted as researchers have identified the problematic nature of faith leadership (Hines, 1999; O'Hara, 2000). At the conclusion of the first stage of the study, the authors emphasised that the faith leadership dimension of the principal's role is still evolving and that the role places extra demands on principals of Catholic primary schools. They question: 'How will they cope with an increasingly demanding and challenging role?' (Neidhart & Lamb, 2010, p.20). Ranson (2006) argues that:

The new generation of Australian Catholic School leaders is recognising that (leadership) is exercised in a liminal period where the past is known, but is no longer instrumental and where the future is intuited but has yet to be realised with effective agency. (p.41)

Developing this thought, he further argues that 'leadership in liminality is a painful experience' due to the paradox of having to live with increasing ambiguity. Such a context calls for 'a particular leadership ... that breathes the spirit of paradox' (p.421). One wonders whether the next generation of leaders is ready for this challenge.

This growing pressure on principals has the inevitable effect of added stress and well-being issues (Department of Education & Training [DEET], 2004). Studies of the effect of stress indicate that people's response to stress is very individual (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974), however principals generally are found to be the type who suffer from the effects of stress (Gmelch & Chan, 1994). Several studies have identified the causes of major stress for principals (Department of Education & Training, 2004; Gmelch & Chan, 1994; Torelli & Gmelch, 1993). These stressors include a more demanding parent group, an increase in student-welfare issues, national standards and reporting requirements and an increased threat of litigation. Private life stressors can also build to manifest problems at school. Stressed principals often get into a cycle in which they are not coping, so they cannot set priorities and therefore work harder without effect, which leads to more stress.

As a result of the changing role of principals, compounded for Catholic parish primary principals, and the resultant stress, fewer teachers are interested in taking on the role of principal (Carlin et al., 2003; D'Arbon, Duignan, Duncan & Goodwin, 2001). This trend is also evident internationally (Gronn, 2003). Disincentives for senior leaders to apply for principalships have been identified, with the major disincentives being the impact on family life and recruitment problems (Carlin et al., 2003). Aspirant principals see enormous frustrations and challenges for principals. Stress level, conflict, workload, and unrealistic community expectations have been highlighted as major disincentives (Lacey, 2002).

Support for principals is required to address these issues. This support could include mentoring, coaching, professional development or additional resources. School partnerships, resulting from parishes merging, may also provide leadership support for principals. Therefore the focus of the research undertaken for this study was an exploration of the possible leadership benefits created when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership.

## **Chapter Two**

### **RESEARCH PROBLEM DEFINED**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In 2003, in Melbourne, primary school principal, Jeff Barger, committed suicide. The reports in the media detailed the overwhelming work load which kept him away from his family and friends and his resultant depression. Follow-up reports in the media linked the lack of applications for school principal positions to the Barger suicide, tangible evidence it was claimed, of the increasingly difficult task of school leadership (Waldron & Davies, 2003). While the incidence of suicide amongst principals is, thankfully, rare, these extreme cases are, in my experience, the tip of the iceberg. While the Barger suicide was not related to Catholic schools, the role of principal of a Catholic parish primary school in recent years has become increasingly difficult, almost impossible for many.

Observing fellow principals in recent years, I witnessed the growing stress and isolation which can accompany the role. My own experience at the time, however, was different. The leadership team at my school was dynamic, supportive and innovative. We were exploring various models of shared leadership. We regularly reflected on the school vision and shared professional development material. There was a high level of trust in the group and an ongoing process of interaction and negotiation as we sought ways to improve the school. Decision-making was collaborative and there was a strong sense of learning together. This helped me, as the designated leader, as I felt supported and connected. I began to wonder whether shared models of leadership, such as co-principalship or schools working in partnership, could provide support for the leaders.

At this time, in Melbourne, more parishes were merging due to the shortage of priests. This resulted in some parishes having more than one Catholic primary school in the parish (e.g. Park Orchards / Warrandyte / North Ringwood and Ivanhoe / Ivanhoe West / East Ivanhoe). These arrangements may have supported the leaders, however, they also had the potential to make the principal's role more complex. A principal could potentially be expected to take on some roles previously fulfilled by the resident parish priest, and the

strong, supportive relationship between one principal and one parish priest would be more difficult to maintain.

Thus it occurred to me that if the sharing of leadership responsibilities within my school was beneficial for me in my principal's role, then it might have similar benefits for principals who share their leadership responsibilities across their schools. The possibility was there to extend the perceived benefits of a shared approach to leadership within a single school to that of across a number of schools: that is to say, for these schools to work collaboratively. I had experienced numerous formal and informal relationships with fellow principals over the years. I found these relationships could be life-giving. I wondered about the leadership outcomes created when schools in the same parish worked together more formally. Did these arrangements/regroupings support the leaders or was it an added burden? Perhaps a partnership could be developed and some positive outcomes gained. Was it possible that these enforced partnerships were actually creating a new model of shared leadership? I became passionate to discover answers.

The fundamental issue that I wished to explore was generated by the increased complexity of school leadership. I researched the literature to examine current thinking on school leadership. I began to discover that the concept of leadership is difficult to define. Many studies have been conducted but no clear understanding as to what distinguishes leadership has resulted (Bush & Glover, 2003). Much of the literature separates leadership from management, where leadership is described as being creative, and dealing with values, vision and wisdom, while management is seen as maintaining the status quo, planning and organising (Fidler & Atton, 2004; The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted], 2003). Other recent literature suggests that there should not be any distinction between leadership and management. Leadership needs to include management. The Ofsted (2003) report emphasised the increased importance of both leadership and management skills within the current climate of increased delegation from national government and local authorities to the individual school. The report noted:

The increasing delegation of authority for managing schools to head teachers and governors, which began with the Education Reform Act 1988, has led to a greater level of challenge in the already very demanding tasks of leading and managing a school of any kind. The need for strong and inspiring leaders and for highly competent and effective managers is greater than ever before. (Ofsted, 2003, p.35)

This UK research is applicable to Australia, as Australian schools for some years have been becoming more self-managing, given lump sum budgets and told by governments to operate within them (Caldwell & Haywood 1998).

Rather than attempting to define leadership, authors tend to describe what effective leadership looks like. They identify characteristics of effective leaders such as having strong, clear, personal and educational values. Personal values, such as integrity, compassion, joy, hope and generativity (leaving things better than you find them) have been identified as characteristics of effective leaders (Sofield & Kuhn 1995). Educational values enable a leader to express beliefs about what matters most in their work environment. One of the most consistent educational values expressed by effective school leaders is a core focus on student learning, 'If you put accountability at the centre it is not going to work. You need to put learning and teaching at the centre and then some magic happens.' (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005 p.55). It is difficult for this 'magic' to happen when a principal is suffering under the stress of an increased workload, without adequate support. Principals need to be supported to enable them to focus on their key role as the instructional leader.

Effective leaders, therefore, have been shown to have strong values, they have a high level of emotional intelligence and they have a focus on developing the people around them. They successfully integrate transformational and instructional leadership and they are authentic.

Research emphasises the benefits of sharing this leadership. Much has been written about the need for leadership to be shared. Shared leadership does not appear to be an option in today's complex school environment. Increased complexity drives those in formal leadership positions toward a more shared approach. This shared approach might dilute the burgeoning demands on leaders and thereby minimise the complexity they face. Duignan and Bezzina (2006) state:

In some ways it is simply the stark realisation that no individual can possibly deal with the masses of interactions and information called on by notions of educational best practice, legislative requirements, parent and student needs and good management practice. (p.11)

Shared leadership is leadership which involves all relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process. It emphasizes teamwork, and requires administrators and teachers to share power, authority and decision-making. Shared leadership has been described as

‘listening, valuing and respecting every member of the school community’ (Edvantia, 2005, p.1). It is the process where more than one person collaborates to provide direction and exercise influence to achieve shared goals.

Many writers argue the need for some form of ‘distributed leadership’ (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004) or ‘shared leadership’ (Lambert, 2002). Distributed leadership has been described by Elmore (2000) as ‘multiple sources of guidance and direction following the contours of expertise in an organisation, made coherent through a common culture’, while Andrews and Lewis (2004) identify it as shared leadership where the leaders work with principal leaders in distinctive yet complementary ways, towards shared goals. Generally, distributed leadership is a form of shared leadership that is distributed to key stakeholders throughout the organisation.

Such a shared approach to leadership in schools is receiving strong support in the literature on educational leadership. In Australia, the work of Crowther and his colleagues on parallel leadership is also influential. Parallel leadership is defined as a ‘process whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build school capacity. It embodies three distinct qualities – mutual trust, shared purpose and allowance for individual expression’ (Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2008, p.53).

There seems therefore, to be an over-riding assumption that it is valuable to share leadership or distribute it. Principals are being encouraged to be secure enough in their own identity to freely share and distribute leadership responsibilities among teachers and other key stakeholders. In this way, it is suggested that they are more likely to create outcomes where key stakeholders willingly take responsibility for the leadership of the school community. This requires the principal to be able to form good relationships with those within and beyond the community. It is, therefore, recognised that ‘successful school partnership is an interactive, reciprocal and evolving process involving many players, which is influenced by and, in turn, influences the context in which it occurs’ (Shriberg, Shriberg & Lloyd, 2002, p.217).

Shared leadership is promoted as one of the building blocks of effective education in Queensland schools (Education Queensland, 2006) where the facilitation of shared (and parallel) leadership forms key elements of their governance base. Similarly, Spry and Duignan (2004) recommend shared leadership as the fundamental style of leadership that is



required in Queensland Catholic Education schools. It can be seen that the gospels promote shared leadership – Jesus, in the gospel of Matthew, Chapter 20, said ‘whosoever shall be chief among you, let him be your servant’. He speaks of ‘servant leadership’ in which the leader is a vulnerable servant who needs the people as much as they need him or her. This servant leadership requires relationships between the members of an organisation. Shared leadership, therefore, would seem to be a requirement in Catholic schools.

The benefits of shared leadership are highlighted by many researchers. Lambert (2006), for example, claims organisational performance can be improved by drawing synergy from a collaborative and supportive approach to leadership. This highlights the importance of tapping into the talents of all in the community. Cranston (2007) asserts that shared leadership improves the quality of decision-making in schools. With more than one person involved in leadership, better decisions tend to be made because of the greater pool of expertise. Shared leadership has also been identified as a way of easing the pressures faced by school leaders, making the role more manageable (Ingvarson et al., 2006; Cranston, Ehrich and Reugebrink, 2002).

The literature on shared leadership typically explores the leadership within one school community. I wondered if there were benefits for one school community through the adoption of a shared approach to leadership, are there similar advantages to schools that work in partnership? Before exploring this question, I researched the concept of a partnership.

There is no uniformly accepted definition of partnership in academic literature. Partnerships are variously defined as ‘cooperative arrangements ... to pool resources in pursuit of an objective’; ‘A relationship between individuals or groups that is characterised by mutual cooperation and responsibility for the achievement of a specified goal’; and ‘An association of two or more persons engaged in a business enterprise in which the profits and losses are shared proportionally’. The legal definition of a partnership is generally stated as ‘An association of two or more persons to carry on as co-owners of a business for profit’. (Revised Uniform Partnership Act. Article 101, 1994).

The definition of partnership which has been selected for the present research is similar to The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services (NCSL) definition of a Learning Network. This definition is applicable to Australia due to the cultural, economic and educational similarities of the two countries. Partnership is defined as,

‘Where a group of schools, probably with other partners, join together to plan, implement and monitor a range of activities that will enhance learning and teaching within and across schools and make a positive difference to pupil achievement’ (NCSL, 2006, p.3).

A partnership is a relationship and, ultimately, the success of any partnership will depend on the participants in the relationship. An effective partnership requires the participants to relate well and the depth and strength of the relationship will depend on the quality, maturity and skills of the participants.

In any partnership the participants are not equal. A partnership requires the participants to share power. Being partners does not mean that the participants bring the same to the relationship or that each contributes equally. Equality stresses sameness, while a partnership thrives on diversity. Partners recognise that their differences often expand and enrich their relationship. Partnerships depend on mutuality. The giving and receiving go both ways. In a mutual relationship each party brings something of value; each receives something of worth. Partnerships thrive when the partners respect this mutual exchange of gifts (Whitehead & Whitehead, 2000).

Working effectively in a partnership requires specific skills and attributes of the participants. A partnership is a relationship and a life-giving relationship requires the participants to communicate well. A partnership does not require the intimacy of close friends, but it does require that the participants share their vision, explain their ideas and communicate thoughts and feelings about matters of common concern. This requires a level of maturity in the participants, as the starting point must be self-knowledge (Whitehead & Whitehead, 2000). Partners need to know their own ideas, needs and feelings and be able to express these in ways that fit the situation. For effective self-disclosure, participants need to have the confidence that what they have to say is worthwhile and the flexibility to determine the best way of saying it. Participants also require skills of listening and empathy. To listen well is to listen actively, alert to the full meaning. Listening well helps participants understand the other person from within that person’s frame of reference.

The focus of this study was to explore whether leadership benefits are created for principals when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. This particular focus was intentional, as a partnership between schools could be explored from a number of perspectives. The focus on the leadership benefits for the principals was chosen for this study,

rather than the more obvious focus on student outcomes as the impetus for the research was to explore whether school partnerships provide support for school leaders. The links between school leadership and student outcomes is presumed and well-researched (Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Marks & Printy, 2003). It has been identified that the more leaders focus their influence, their learning and their relationships with teachers on their core business of teaching and learning, the greater their likely influence on student outcomes (Robinson, 2007). Partnerships may provide outcomes which will support school principals to focus their influence more in this direction.

## **2.2 The Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore whether school partnerships resulting from parish mergers led to leadership benefits for the principals. To understand the research purpose, some background on the structure and operation of the Catholic Education system in Australia is necessary.

The governance or administration of Catholic schools in Australia conforms to Canon Law. Governance refers to the exercise of authority or control and to the final decision-making authority of the owners (Leavey, 2000).

In Canon Law, Australian Catholic schools operate under the jurisdiction of an ecclesiastical Public Juridic Person. A Bishop or Archbishop is the canonical administrator of a diocese, and parish priests are the canonical administrators of the parishes and the works of the parishes (National Catholic Education Commission [NCEC], 2002).

At the local level then, the parish priest has the responsibility for the parish school. Traditionally, each parish had its own parish school. In this model, one parish priest could build a strong relationship with the principal of the parish primary school. This created the potential for deep collaboration and support for both leaders. In more recent times, however, a diminution in the number of parish priests available resulted in the merger of a number of parishes and a resultant impact on the primary schools involved. While some schools closed, the majority continued operating, however, they were called to adapt to a new reality. Rather than one school working with one parish priest, a priest would become responsible for two or more schools. Clearly, this had an impact on the workload of the priest; however, it also resulted in major changes for the principals of the schools. The principals were required to

adapt to the new reality of being in partnership with one or more primary schools. This research sought to explore whether there were benefits for the school leaders working in such partnerships.

## **2.3 Significance of the Research**

This research has significance for principals of all Catholic parish primary schools. The diminution in the number of available parish priests is unlikely to cease in the foreseeable future. While some dioceses have sought to address the decline by recruiting priests from overseas, there is no guarantee of the success of this strategy. In a short space of time, any principal of a Catholic parish primary school could wake to the reality of working in a partnership. Without notice, a principal could be informed by diocesan authorities that a retiring parish priest would not be replaced. This could result in a principal being required to either work with the parish priest of a neighbouring parish, or ‘share’ his/her parish priest with a neighbouring school. These new arrangements have the potential to add increased pressures on a principal.

There is a large body of research already available which indicates that many principals are already finding their role almost impossible. Many reports claim that the role of the principal has changed and continues to do so. (DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Williams & Portin, 1996). The role of principal is seen as akin to a Chief Executive Officer in the private sector and this role is becoming more complex (Cranston, 1999; Gronn, 2003). The principal is required to be a negotiator, legal expert, fundraiser, and entrepreneur, as well as educational leader (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003). There are many more demands on a principal than there were twenty years ago. They include implementing occupational health and safety regulations, legal responsibilities and meeting quality assurance demands (Blackmore, Thomson, Sachs & Barty, 2005). Principals report that their role has changed from being the ‘leading professional’ to being the ‘business manager’ (Earley & Weindling, 2004). Principals are also de-motivated by over-bearing bureaucracy, excessive paper-work and constant change (Earley, Evans, Collarbone, Gold & Halpin, 2002). While these findings are from international studies, the situation in Australia is similar. Despite the general desire of school leaders to demonstrate educational leadership which is visionary, authentic, ethical, strategic, people-centred and motivational, principals report that demands relating to legal and regulatory compliance issues dominate their day to day practices (Duignan, 2006).

Principals are focusing on the management of compliance issues at the expense of shared educational leadership (Marks, 2002-03). The job, as historically constituted, can be seen as almost impossible. Without effective leadership, schools flounder. I wondered if school partnerships might provide outcomes which could provide support for the leaders.

This is also a timely study as, with the shortfall in the number of priests available and the relatively small numbers studying for the priesthood in Australia, more parish mergers are likely in the future. In 1969 there were 546 men training for the priesthood in Australia. By 1991 that figure had dropped to 172 and it has remained around that level since then (National Council of Priests of Australia, 2009). The average age of diocesan priests on appointment (that is, not including retired priests) rose from 44 in 1977 to 60 by 2001 (Dixon, 2005). The number of priests in Australia was above 3800 from 1968 until the early 1980s. There was a decline in numbers of around eighteen percent between 1971 and 2007. Since 2007 the figure has dropped by a further three percent. In 2007 there were 1996 diocesan priests including 424 who were retired. In 2009 the number of diocesan priests had dropped to 1948 and the number who were retired had increased to 495. The 2007-08 Official Directory of the Catholic Church of Australia listed 1333 parishes. The 2009-10 Directory listed 1315. (Refer to Tables 2.1-2.4.)

**Table 2.1**

<b>Number of Men Training for the Priesthood</b>	
<b>1969</b>	<b>1991</b>
546	172

**Table 2.2**

<b>Age of Priests on Appointment</b>	
<b>1977</b>	<b>2001</b>
44	60

**Table 2.3**

<b>Number of Priests in Australia</b>		
<b>1971</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2009</b>
3895	1996 (including 424 retired)	1948 (including 495 retired)

**Table 2.4**

<b>Number of Parishes in Australia</b>	
<b>2007/8</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
1333	1315

These figures paint a clear picture: there are fewer available priests and more parishes are merging. These mergers may provide outcomes which support the leaders of Catholic parish primary schools.

## **2.4 Summary**

The role of principal of a Catholic parish primary school, in recent years, has become increasingly difficult. Noting the increase in parish mergers, I wondered if these enforced partnerships were actually creating a new model of shared leadership which could support principals.

Before exploring the concept of shared leadership, I explored current thinking on effective leadership. I discovered that effective educational leadership integrates transformational and instructional leadership, however a stronger focus on instructional leadership has more effect on student outcomes. Research highlighted that effective educational leaders also possess particular values and character traits. The growing emphasis on the importance of these desired personal character traits adds further complexity to the leader's role.

Research emphasised the benefits of sharing leadership. A shared approach has the potential to make the role of the principal more manageable and to improve student

outcomes. Sharing leadership, therefore, is both a 'means and an end'. I wondered that, if there were benefits for one school community by adopting a shared leadership approach, would there be similar advantages to a number of schools working in partnership? I then explored definitions of 'partnership'. In this context it is a group of schools working together to plan, implement and monitor a range of activities that will enhance learning within and across a number of schools. This research, therefore, sought to explore whether there were benefits for school leaders sharing the leadership across a number of schools.

I was aware that research needs to be underpinned by relevant literature. A literature review was undertaken to assist me to understand and appreciate the research problem more fully.

## **Chapter Three**

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The focus of this research was to explore the possible leadership benefits resulting from Catholic parish primary schools working in partnership. The previous chapter explained my impetus for researching this topic, defined the key concepts of 'leadership' and 'partnership' and highlighted the significance of the research. The current chapter outlines the conceptual framework of the research and reviews the current literature in the areas of: the changing role of the Catholic primary school principal; the changing purpose of Catholic schools; effective leadership of Catholic primary schools; principles of effective school partnerships; the potential impact of school partnerships and the Catholic Church's support for partnerships.

The literature reviewed identifies that the changing and expanding role of schools has redefined the work of the principals far beyond the core function of instructional leadership. Societal and governance pressures have added to this layering effect. The research reveals that for many years the principal's role was becoming more complex. West-Burnham (1997) claimed that it was almost impossible. This complexity has continued to increase over the years.

Exploration of the relevant literature relating to the purpose of Catholic schools points to a further complexity of the problem for leaders of Catholic schools. Research suggests that there is a plurality of views about the purpose of Catholic schools (Flynn & Mok, 2002; McLaughlin, Begg, Pollard & Wilkinson, 2005; McLaughlin, 2005; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education [SCCE], 1988) and proposes that there is a need to re-examine the purpose of Catholic schools. This re-examination has the potential to create doubt and confusion, which can add further stress for principals of Catholic schools.

A review of the literature on the changing context of Catholic parish primary schools in Australia also reveals many major changes which influence Catholic schools and consequently the leadership of Catholic schools (Australian Catholic Primary Principals'



Association [ACPPA], 2005). The 'Principals in Parishes' Report (ACPPA, 2005) suggests that schools in the twenty-first century are more complex than ever before, and the Catholic context adds to this complexity. Some principals of Catholic parish primary schools were taking on administrative activities on behalf of the parish, liturgical activities and other roles formerly associated with parish priests. The changing clientele, the clash of values, the marginalisation of the poor and the decline in the participation of adults and students in worshipping communities are indicated in the report. This review contributes to the research as it further highlights the challenges for leaders in Catholic education. This 'new evangelisation' which is now demanded of Catholic schools is often beyond the experience and expertise of many principals. The literature review identifies the impact on school leadership and contributes significantly by emphasising the need for education authorities to re-think the leadership of Catholic parish primary schools (Spry, 2004).

Investigation of pertinent literature (Bush & Glover, 2003; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999) relating to effective leadership suggests that, while the concept of leadership is difficult to define, understanding the characteristics and values of effective leaders is well researched (Earley et al., 2002; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005).

Research indicates that the emerging model of effective school leadership is one of shared leadership (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Lambert, 2002; Senge, 2000). The research highlights the importance of authentic, ethical leadership and of the responsibility for Catholic parish primary school principals to lead their faith communities (ACPPA, 2005).

The benefits of partnerships were examined in the literature review. Partnerships are claimed to create benefits for the students, the teachers (Earl, Katz, Elgie, Jaasar & Foster, 2006) and for the decision-making and effectiveness of educational institutions (Lieberman, 2005).

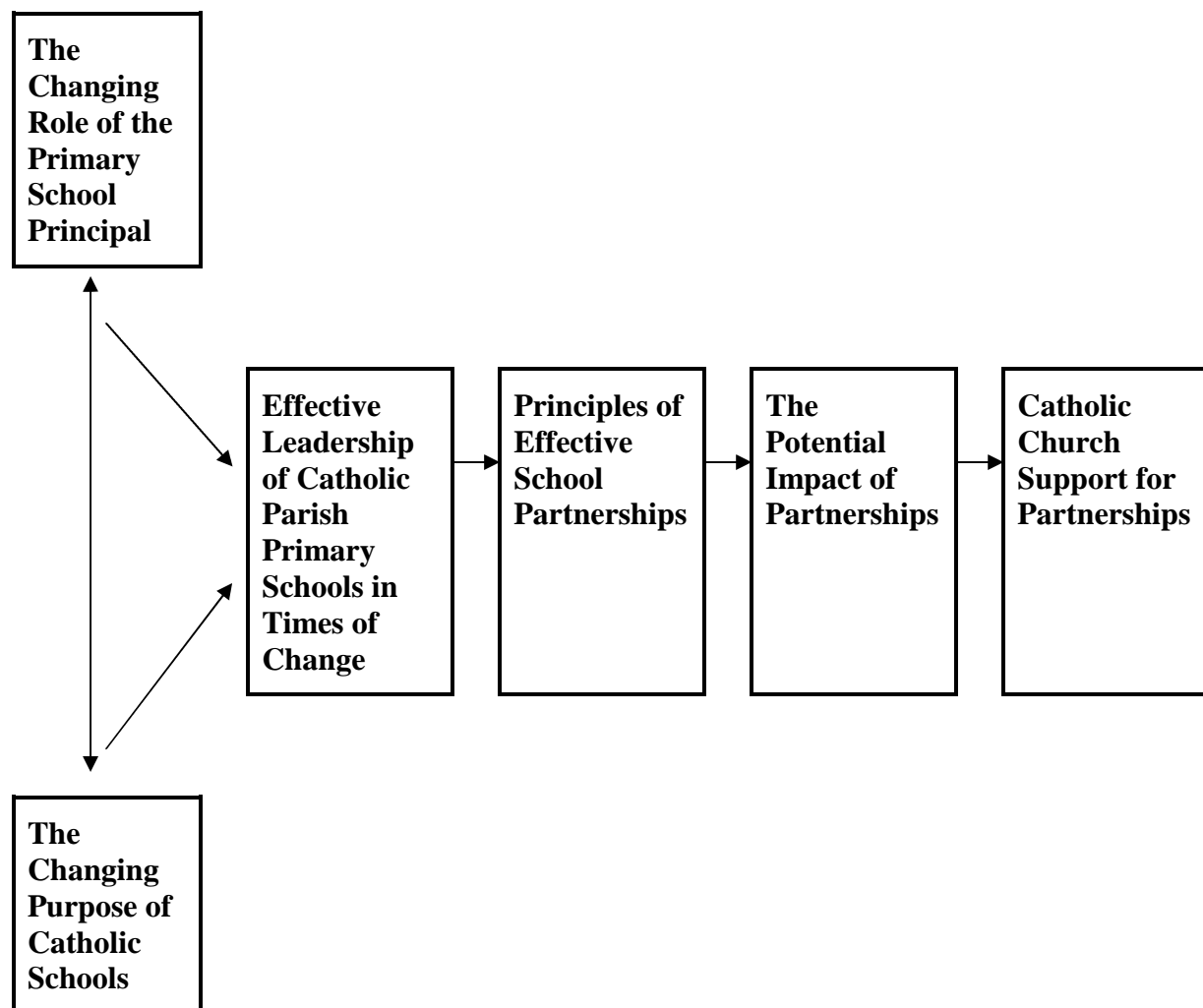
Exploration of the literature relating to the characteristics of effective partnership suggests a number of consistent elements. Effective partnerships have a clear vision and goals, are results-driven, have principled leadership and the participants work in a collaborative climate (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2007).

It was hoped that the review of the literature would further contribute to the research, as the benefits of partnerships and the characteristics of effective partnerships were used for reflection during the case study.

## 3.2 Conceptual Framework

Figure 3.1 illustrates the conceptual framework for the research, arising from the literature review. The literature reviewed is presented in six inter-connected areas. Firstly, the changing role of the principal was explored with a focus on societal influences, external pressures and the challenge to the instructional leadership role of the principal. The research is embedded in the Catholic context and thus a re-examination of the purposes of Catholic schools and the changing context of Catholic parish primary schools needed to be explored.

An exploration was then undertaken into the requirements for effective leadership of Catholic parish primary schools in times of change. The principles of effective school partnerships were explored with an emphasis on the potential outcomes of partnerships. The Catholic Church's support for partnerships was the final area reviewed.



**Figure 3.1: The Conceptual Framework**

### **3.3 The Changing Role of the Primary School Principal**

Over the past twenty years there have been major societal and education reforms, which have had an impact on the role of all schools and principals. Principals report that their role is changing dramatically and rapidly (Gronn, 2003; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003).

Changing family structures and the fragmentation of communities have impacted on schools and, consequently, on the role of the principal (Reich, 2001). Increased numbers of children living in single parent families, many of whom suffer economic hardship and stress related to work or unemployment, also affect children coming to school (D'Orsa, 2002) with a resultant effect on school leadership. As a result, principals are now required to place greater emphasis on student welfare issues than ever before.

As already indicated, the changing and expanding role of schools has redefined the work of the principals far beyond the core functions of leading learning and teaching (Rallis & Goldring, 2000; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003; Whitaker, 2003). The principal is now required to be negotiator, legal expert, fundraiser, diplomat, entrepreneur, public relations expert, politician, moral watchdog, resource manager, scholar and educational leader (Copland, 2001).

In 1997, John West-Burnham argued that:

There has been a tendency to express leadership as 'super-management' ... the model of headship is one of omnicompetence: the skilled classroom practitioner plus curriculum leader, plus technical expert, plus all the manifestations associated with being the figurehead. It is no wonder that so many head teachers seek early retirement or suffer a range of work-related illnesses. The job as historically constituted is almost impossible. (p.78)

Fifteen years later, the role has become even more 'impossible' as demands on principals have continued to increase.

This increased workload has dramatically impacted on school leaders. In 2007 the English National Association of Head Teachers released the results of a large on-line survey (French & Daniels, 2007, p.12) in which over three thousand head, deputy and assistant head teachers participated. Almost fifty per cent of principals reported working between forty-nine and fifty-nine hours per week and a further forty per cent reported working a sixty hour week. The authors state:

The report makes it clear that school leaders have long, increasingly unsocial, working hours. This reflects their attempts to deal with the expanding number and range of duties placed upon them (notably the extension of services outside of the school day), increasing their working hours to match an expanding workload.

This report is supported by other studies of head teachers' work in England. (Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, 2007), Wales (Estyn, 2007) and Ireland (Irish Primary Principals Network 2004). Similar figures are also seen in North America. For example, a 2005 survey of Canadian principals (Blouin, 2005) reports that only thirty-seven percent were happy with the impact of the job on their family life. A 2003 survey in Victoria, Australia, suggests that principals were working an average of sixty hours per week (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2004) and a 2007 survey conducted by the Australian Education Union (AEU) reports increasing workloads for both teachers and principals.

An NCSL work diary-based study in 2007 of thirty-four principals examined the workload and the type of work principals undertook (Bristow et al., 2007). Once again, the workload was large – the majority working between forty and sixty-five hours. The study also found that principals spent thirty-nine per cent of their time on management (staff, budget, health and safety, buildings, behavioural issues, assessment and examination) and administration (emails and mail, newsletters, playground duties, teacher replacement). A further seventeen per cent of time was spent with external stakeholders. Seventeen per cent of their time was devoted to staff meetings and with administration staff and a further seventeen per cent on professional development, such as mentoring. Only seven per cent of their time was devoted to strategic leadership.

An Australian research report of an ARC Discovery Project (Blackmore, Thomson, Sachs & Barty, 2005, p.11) states:

There are many more demands on a principal than there were 20 years ago (e.g., community relations, student welfare, occupational health and safety, legal responsibility, quality assurance).

Principals are at school early and late to be accessible to parents and often work till 11 pm and at weekends to manage their workload.

A principal needs to understand how to be supportive of families (that is,, not just deal with issues in the classroom) and be skilled in dealing with social/emotional problems that affect staff and students.

Principals are expected to have expertise in many areas unrelated to educational leadership (e.g., finance, pest control, air conditioning).

The principal's role has clearly changed from head teacher to manager. Principals begin their career as teachers – a carer's role. When they move to principalship the increasing management requirements of the role, it seems, would often be better addressed by a manager, rather than a head teacher (Department of Education and Training [DEET], 2004).

Boris-Schacter & Langer (2006) conducted long-term research from 1998-2004 with over two hundred principals from all regions of the United States. They were exploring why principalship was unattractive and why principals were leaving their positions. They divide the answers into three categories:

1. Work versus Personal Lives.
2. Management versus Instructional Leadership.
3. Societal Expectations versus Individual Priorities.

The researchers argue that there must be a balance in each of the areas.

An Australian study (D'Arbon et. al., 2002) into planning for future leadership of schools identifies several negative perceptions of principalship:

Both men and women in primary and secondary indicated that the impact of principalship on personal and family life ranked first in importance. All, except females in secondary schools, ranked 'an unsupportive external environment' as the second strongest perception. This referred to a lack of support from, for example, the community, the central office, as well as more critical parents and the media. (p.476)

The appeal of school leadership to prospective leaders in the UK was a key focus of research commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills (Earley et al., 2002). The report findings indicate that leaders in schools were de-motivated by over-bearing bureaucracy and excessive paperwork and also by constant change in the education system.

In a UK study by Earley and Weindling (2004) principals were particularly concerned about the pressures associated with government intervention and interference. This type of pressure is very real to principals in Melbourne Catholic Schools with the requirement from the Australian Federal Government and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria for schools to report to parents the achievements of students in all curriculum areas using an A-E

grading (Catholic Education Commission of Victoria [CECV], 2006) with a non-negotiable timeline. Further pressures on principals will be increased by the implementation of a national curriculum. The Foundation (Prep to Year 10) Australian Curriculum for English, Mathematics, Science and History was released in December 2010 and all state and territory governments have committed to working towards full implementation of all curriculum areas by 2013. Further pressure for principals will continue from the introduction of mandated annual reports to the school community and the implementation of the My School Website, which publicly ranks schools through league tables.

Across the Western world there is a proliferation of, and an increased demand for, strategic plans. Schools are required to produce statistical data, indicators, targets and benchmarks that purportedly represent the reality of school life. Principals must deal with these plans, even if they suspect that they are undeliverable and/or hopelessly idealistic and unrealistic (Perry, 2006; Perry & McWilliam, 2007). Principals often find themselves presenting to their schools as sure about things they hold to be unimportant and confident about dubious government policy. No matter how uncertain principals feel on the inside, they must appear to be in control (Thompson, 2009).

A number of studies have been conducted on the role of the principal which identify the barriers to principals serving as instructional leaders (e.g. Finke & Resnick, 2001; Hallinger, 2003). Numerous factors, which distract from instructional leadership, are identified, for example, constant interruption, lack of planning time, fragmentation of activities and compliance with external regulations.

Studies suggest that the problem for existing and potential principals is the way in which expectations, the role and the actual work in specific contexts, affect the quality of life, family relationships, well-being and health of principals (Cranston, 2007; Kruger et al., 2001, 2005).

Expectations on principals continue to increase. There is a growing expectation that those in leadership positions are able to nurture positive interpersonal relationships, hold a commitment to leadership succession and develop a responsibility for the system as well as their own school (NCSL, 2004). Effective leaders are also called to be passionate, enthusiastic and optimistic (Earley, Evans, Collarbone, Gold & Halpin, 2002). They are required to build leadership capacity and to maintain a strong focus on improving student

outcomes (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005). Effective leaders are expected to help their teachers grow. They must also place high emphasis on their own professional development (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001; Patterson, West, Lawthom & Nickell, 1997). Effective school leaders must hold strong educational beliefs such as that every child can succeed. They must have the goal of developing the whole child and should demonstrate a deep commitment to learning and a responsibility to develop others. High performing leaders are also expected to possess high emotional intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). As such they are required to be empathic, self-motivated, self-aware, self-regulated and they need to possess well refined social skills.

Societal and education reforms have impacted on the role of the principal in recent years. The role has changed vastly and become more complex. There have been concerns about the increasingly challenging work-load principals face. Increased government intervention, a growing demand for strategic plans and concerns about the recruitment of future principals, have led to further pressures. While the demands on all principals are increasing, the changing Catholic context adds further demands and complexity for principals of Catholic parish primary schools.

### **3.4 The Changing Purpose of Catholic Schools**

The leadership of an organisation is always linked with the organisation's purpose, and so, in order to conceptualise this study of leadership in Catholic schools, attention needs to be given to the articulation of this purpose, in order to understand the context in which Catholic parish primary school principals work.

When Catholic schools were first established in Australia, their purpose was clear – to educate the poor (McLaughlin, 2000). Since those early times, there continued to be relative consensus about the purposes of Australian Catholic education. This is no longer the case. The stakeholders in Australian Catholic education now often hold differing beliefs and views from each other. These beliefs range from a belief that the purpose of Catholic schools is for the formation and nurturing of the human person, to a belief that the schools should foster the growth and development of good Catholics, to a belief that Catholic schools should provide a good education based on gospel values.

Over recent years, the Catholic Church has issued a variety of statements relating to the purpose of Catholic schools. In 1977 it released the *Catholic School* document and in 1998 it issued *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*. Authoritative writers, such as Grace (2002) emphasise the different messages given:

Whereas the *Catholic School* document of 1977 was marked by an optimistic spirit which seemed to reflect the new thinking arising from the Second Vatican Council, the latest publication from the Vatican, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1998) presents the international challenges to Catholic school leaders in more sombre terms. Challenges are seen to arise from loss of faith, moral relativism, consumer materialism, growing polarisation of rich and poor and a general breakdown of the quality of community and of family life. (p.10)

He contends that the 1977 document was relatively clear on the purpose of Catholic schooling, that is, to provide education in faith, to have a preferential option for the poor, to develop solidarity and community and to educate students for the common good of society. He identifies that the 1998 document, however, warned Catholic school leaders that the distinctive purpose of Catholic Education was becoming more difficult due to the changing world. The purpose of the Catholic school, according to the 1998 document, was to be a place of integral education with Christ as the foundation (pars.8-10), to establish ecclesial and cultural identity (pars.11-14), to base its mission on love (pars.18-20), to perform service to society (pars.16-17) and to generate an inclusive community (par.15). Grace concludes that the 'mission integrity' (Grace 2002 p.8) that is, remaining true to the purpose of the Catholic school, has remained strong in the past due to the vocational commitment and spiritual leadership of its school leaders. He believes it will become increasingly difficult for these leaders when the purpose of Catholic schooling continues to be in dispute.

The Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (SCCE) is the congregation of the Roman Curia which has authority over all schools and educational institutes depending on ecclesiastical authorities. In 1988, The SCCE emphasised that Catholic schools existed fundamentally for the formation and nurturing of the human person (SCCE 1988, #12). In doing so, the Congregation stressed humanity's inherent dignity and pivotal relationship with Christ (SCCE, 1988, #16, 45, 53). The primary purpose of Catholic schools as emphasised by the SCCE was, therefore, the formation of the religious, spiritual and human dimensions of the person through the integration of the person's culture, faith and life (SCCE, 1988, # 37).



Catholic schools in Australia operate on principles determined by the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC). This is a body set up by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education. The NCEC states that 'Schools have distinctive goals and features which derive from a core of philosophical and theological truths which are central to their character and mission' (NCEC, 2002, Preamble). These theological truths are grounded in Catholic beliefs about the nature of personhood: the person is made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27); is created to live in relationship with God and with others and is called to embrace the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (Groome, 2002). The purpose of Catholic schools, as seen from this perspective, is to help develop the person's relationship with God and with others.

In 2007, the Bishops of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, in their pastoral letter, 'Catholic Schools at a Crossroad', challenged all those involved in Catholic education to dedicate themselves to ensuring that Catholic schools in the 21st century are truly Catholic in their identity and life. The Bishops called on schools to be: centres of 'the new evangelisation', to enable students to achieve high levels of Catholic religious literacy and practice and to be led and staffed by people who will contribute to these goals (Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007). This seems to be a challenge to 'get back to basics', to be truly 'Catholic'. The Bishops re-define the purpose of Catholic Schools. The purpose, from this perspective, is to strengthen the identity of Catholic Schools, and hence strengthen the Catholic Church.

Redefining the identity of Catholic schools is a high priority for all dioceses in Australia. Currently, in Victoria, for example, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) has entered into a research project with the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium, entitled, 'The CECV Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (2006)'. The goal is to enhance the Catholic identity of schools in Victoria. The project explores such fundamental questions such as: 'What is the distinctive nature of Catholic schools?' 'How is it measured?' 'What type of Catholic schools are we?' 'What type of Catholic schools do we want to become?' Asking these questions has implications for those who work in schools and those who choose Catholic education. The project seeks to identify and measure attitudes to religion and the participants' understanding of the purpose of the Catholic school within the institutional Church. The project is ongoing, however, in a progress report in August 2010, the authors reported that about one third of students no longer support their Catholic school's

identity. They also reported that at least forty percent of the student population would be happy to embrace a dialogical, recontextualising Catholic identity approach. These students are waiting for their schools to enter with them into this adventure. However, no more than ten percent of the adults are ready to fully engage in this process of recontextualisation. In summary, the report states, ‘... a more hermeneutical, recontextualising approach will continue to grow in importance, and will ask Catholics to engage in “real” dialogue with pluralised culture – if Catholic education is to maintain its current scope and relevance’ (Pollefeyt, 2010 p.10). Hopefully, there will be some positive outcomes; however, the findings are likely to lead to further discussion and debate about the purpose of Catholic education.

It would appear from the work of the CECV and the Bishops of NSW and ACT, that there are critics of the current direction of Catholic schools. In response to the decline in attendance and participation in the Catholic Church in Australia, the Church is looking to its schools. There seems to be a belief that these schools, in recent years, have failed to ‘pass on the faith’. The belief, therefore, seems to be that there is a need to strengthen the identity of Catholic schools, make them more ‘Catholic’ and this then will lead to a revitalisation of the Catholic Church in Australia.

Other views about the purpose of Catholic schools abound. Highly authoritative sources, such as Archbishop Miller of Vancouver, who was previously Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, contends that Catholic schools should build up the community of believers, evangelise culture and serve the common good of society (Miller, 2005). Their goal should be to foster the growth of good Catholic human beings who love God and neighbour and thus ‘fulfill their destiny of becoming saints’ (Miller, 2005, p.5). Miller is a highly respected authority. His views appear to differ strongly from those of Church authorities who are seeking to strengthen the Catholic identity of schools. This creates a dilemma for the Catholic primary school principal.

Religious commentators have also been strong in promoting what they believe should be the purpose of Catholic schools. McLaughlin (2000), for example, calls for school leaders to generate new understandings of the purpose of Catholic schools in the light of the changes to the Church and contemporary theology. He claims that the original reason for establishing Catholic schools in Australia reflected an insular theology, whereas in today’s pluralistic Australia, an agreed description of the purposes of a Catholic school is more difficult to

formulate. He proposes three core goals of authentic contemporary Australian Catholic school education. He claims that Catholic schools should aspire to:

- (1) provide an integral quality education;
- (2) nurture the human community; and
- (3) liberate people from forms of oppression. (McLaughlin, 2005)

He believes that the pursuit of an integral quality education requires Catholic schools to focus on the humanity of individuals and communities. To nurture the human community, schools need to focus on team learning and develop structures to promote horizontal and vertical communication. Transformational leadership (Bass, 1999) and an emphasis on building leadership capacity (Lambert, 2002) would be hallmarks of effective leadership of these schools. Leadership in Catholic schools needs to be relational, ethical, authentic and life-giving (Duignan, 2007). Catholic schools could liberate people from forms of oppression by exercising leadership that is practised as stewardship. The measure for successful school leadership would be the extent to which all in the school community experienced the common decency, concern, fairness, care, graciousness and compassion of a very human Jesus Christ in the school's daily conduct (McLaughlin, 2005).

Other authors comment on the purpose of Catholic education. Groome (2002) outlines five distinguishing characteristics of Catholic education:

1. **Positive Christian Anthropology:** People are sacred beings, loved and forgiven by God. The purpose of Catholic schools is to teach this view to their students by word and action.
2. **Sacramentality:** The Catholic school should be a place where students and adults encounter the presence of Jesus throughout the day. Schools should teach their students to develop this awareness and should focus on teaching prayer, scriptures, the sacraments and the rituals of the Church.
3. **Community:** We are called to live in community. The school should provide a rich experience of living in a faith-filled community.
4. **Faith and Reason:** The purpose of Catholic schooling is to fully develop the student intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually.
5. **Tradition:** The faith of the Catholic Church should be authentically handed on and be evident in the entire life of the school.

**Table 3.1 Summary of The Changing Purpose of Catholic Schools**

<b><i>Catholic School (1977)</i></b>	<p>Provide education in faith.</p> <p>Develop preferential option for the poor.</p> <p>Develop solidarity and community.</p> <p>Educate students for the common good of society.</p>
<b><i>Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (1998)</i></b>	<p>Be a place of integral education with Christ as the foundation.</p> <p>Establish ecclesial and cultural identity.</p> <p>Mission based on love.</p> <p>Perform service to society.</p> <p>Generate an inclusive community.</p>
<b>SCCE (1988)</b>	<p>Formation of religious, spiritual and human dimensions through the integration of culture, faith and life.</p>
<b>NCEC (2002)</b>	<p>Develop relationship with God and others.</p>
<b>Bishops of NSW and the ACT (2007)</b>	<p>Be centres of new evangelisation.</p> <p>Develop high levels of Catholic religious literacy and practice.</p>
<b>Miller (2005)</b>	<p>Build the community of believers.</p> <p>Evangelise culture.</p> <p>Serve the common good of society.</p> <p>Foster the growth of good Catholic human beings.</p>
<b>McLaughlin (2000)</b>	<p>Provide integral quality education.</p> <p>Nurture community.</p> <p>Liberate people from forms of oppression.</p>

Many principals also hold private concerns about the current direction of the Church. I often saw principals, who were passionate about their faith, being called upon to lead a faith community in a direction with which they privately disagreed. This led to principals trying to ‘make the best of a bad situation’, which often resulted in disillusionment and stress. In some cases, a parish was presided over by a dominant priest who had a particular point of view on the purpose of the Catholic primary school which differed markedly from that of the principal and the majority of the school community. This created feelings of isolation and vulnerability for the principal as the parish priest is the employer in the local Victorian Catholic primary

school. In other cases there was often little or no direction from the parish priest. The effect was often that the Catholic schools worked in a vacuum and the principals did not fully espouse Catholic doctrines and teachings. Catholic school communities settled for being good academic institutions. It was often difficult to distinguish between a 'good' government school and a 'good' Catholic school.

Most Catholic teachers are not regularly involved in the Catholic sacraments and many have private reservations about the direction of the Catholic Church (McLaughlin, Begg, Pollard & Wilkinson, 2005). Attempts by the Church to redefine the purpose of Catholic education, such as to strengthen the Catholic identity of schools are often largely ignored. Many Australian Catholic teachers are now emphasising a Christology on the basis of personal understanding and life experience, which does not necessarily match the official Christology as taught by the Church authorities (McLaughlin, 2005). These changes have a major impact on the leadership required in Catholic schools. Principals, as leaders of their faith community, often have a challenging task in leading fragmented, disillusioned and confused school communities.

Most parents with children in Australian Catholic primary schools have little connection with the Church. Many feel alienated from the regular worshipping community, but still in some way identify themselves as 'Catholic' and choose to send their children to Catholic schools. Rymarz identifies the changing clientele of Catholic schools. He states that:

a sizeable number remain affiliated but many of these are content with a low level of involvement and are committed to their own personal belief systems. Another group has never moved towards the heart of the tradition. (Rymarz, 2004, p.6)

Some eight years later, the situation has changed further.

For many of these parents, the purpose of Catholic education is to provide 'good' education within a culture which is based on gospel values and prepares the children for the sacraments. Other parents assume that by paying fees at a Catholic school their children are receiving a better education than those at a government school. These parents expect a 'good' education for their children and they often merely tolerate the religious dimension of the Catholic school.

The resultant confusion and lack of clarity about the purpose of Catholic schools can create a great deal of complexity for the principal. Church authorities, authoritative sources and religious commentators are proposing differing views. Those who live and work in school communities are left to synthesise these views and to make meaning of their purpose. This places extra demands on the principals of Catholic parish primary schools. This was the environment in which the three schools in the current research operated. I wondered if, due to this partnership, these principals were better placed to cope with these demands. This led to a sub-question, ‘How did the partnership support the principals in their role as leaders of faith?’

The role of the principal of a primary school has become more complex, at times, almost impossible. The literature review highlights that this complexity is compounded for the principal of a Catholic parish primary school. The very reason Catholic schools or Catholic education systems exist is in question. If the leadership of an organisation is always linked to its purpose, and this purpose is so confused, how is a principal to lead a Catholic parish primary school effectively during these times?

### **3.5 Effective Leadership of Catholic Parish Primary Schools in Times of Rapid and Sustained Change**

There can be no doubt that we live in times of rapid and sustained change. This change may not even seem to proceed in a predictable, linear, manner. The rate of change for many people may seem to quicken as time goes by. This perception has been described as, ‘The Law of Accelerating Returns’ (Kurzweil, 1999). The rate of change may seem to increase exponentially. To illustrate the point, in a 2001 essay Kurzweil wrote, ‘An analysis of the history of technology shows that technological change is exponential, contrary to the common sense “intuitive linear” view. So we won’t experience one hundred years of progress in the twenty-first century, it will be more like 20,000 years of progress (at today’s rate)’(p.2). This is the context in which we all live. It becomes the task of school principals to lead their communities during these times of exponential change. The task of leading a school during times of rapid change is further compounded for principals of Catholic parish primary schools as they are also called to be leaders of their faith community. In reviewing the literature on effective leadership, I explored the two leadership roles of a Catholic parish primary school principal – faith leader and educational leader. I discovered that there were many challenges in both areas.

In 1990, Pope John Paul II challenged faith leaders. In his Encyclical on the Church's Mission he said: 'I sense that the moment has come to commit all the Church's energies to a new evangelisation' (Redemptoris Missio, 1990, #3). He called the Church to preach the Gospel anew in Christian communities which were being affected by cultural change and secularisation. In 2001 he again challenged leaders of faith:

The present generation of Christians is called and sent now to accomplish a new evangelisation among the peoples of Oceania, a fresh proclamation of the enduring truth evoked by the symbol of the Southern Cross. This call to mission poses great challenges, but it also opens new horizons, full of hope and even a sense of adventure. (Ecclesia in Oceania, 2001, #8 and #13)

This 'sense of adventure' can be lost on principals as they struggle with the demands of educational leadership while trying to understand the meaning and implications of 'new evangelisation'.

A research project commissioned by the Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association (ACPPA) in 2005 confirms the challenge. It identifies that the role of the Catholic parish primary school principal is becoming increasingly demanding and complex due to the demands of faith leadership:

Faith leadership focuses on sharing the Catholic faith with the intention of influencing and enriching the lives of students, staff and other members of the school community. This dimension of leadership provides educational opportunities for members of the school community to encounter the Catholic faith, to experience its gift and to enhance life decisions in response to it. Guided by faith, hope and love, faith leaders support a community of life and worship through which to recognise, to accept and to cooperate with the mysterious action of God in our lives. (Spry, 2004, p.23)

More than 'supporting' a community, the parish primary school principal is called upon to lead the community. This responsibility for faith leadership places extra demands on principals. They require added 'capabilities'. These capabilities have been identified as 'mission capabilities' by Spry (2004):

Mission capabilities encompass: committing to a personal journey of faith; giving witness to Gospel values, particularly social justice; developing scriptural and theological understanding; acting as an agent of evangelisation; cultivating the school's Catholic identity; and engaging Catholic school renewal. (Spry, 2004, p.26)

Principals of Catholic parish primary schools therefore, as well as being effective educational leaders, are required to commit to developing their own personal faith life and be leaders for evangelisation and renewal. Further to these requirements, the ACPPA research identifies the changing extra demands being made on some principals of Catholic parish primary schools. Principals were being required to take on extra administrative work on behalf of the parish, to lead liturgical activities, to take an active part in parish life and in some cases, to take on housekeeping for the parish priest!

In 2005 the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) brought together leaders in Catholic schools in Australia, including Directors and Heads of Religious Education from diocesan offices, members of the NCEC as well as State and Territory Catholic Education Commissions and academics. The purpose of the forum was to investigate the practices and issues surrounding faith leadership in Australian Catholic schools and school systems. A report emanating from the forum recognises the demands of faith leadership in Catholic schools. Faith leaders were being called to lead in a context of ‘changes in church and parish life and organisation, increasing diversity in school communities, and intensified accountability and compliance arrangements’ (NCEC, 2005, p.2).

A difficulty for principals of Catholic parish primary schools in their role as leaders of faith arises from the lack of an adequate theology of ministry in Catholic schools. It is recognised that there is an ‘uneven and partial development of a clear theology of ministry in the Catholic educational context’ (Davison, 2006, p.36). Researchers also describe the challenge of faith leadership in the context of socio-cultural change. As McEvoy (2006) explains, ‘leaders are charged with maintaining the charisms and nurturing the essential Catholic nature and purposes of the school in the midst of a complex, ever-changing secular and often antagonistic culture’ (p.268). For McEvoy this context means that the traditional understanding of Catholicism as a single faith no longer fits the contemporary schools which are likely to be multicultural and multi-faith organisations.

Furthermore, principals are contemporary people and they may come to the task of faith leadership somewhat suspicious of religion, as they may have experienced its ‘narrow, prescriptive, dogmatic, restrictive, closed, exclusive’ side (Mitroff & Denton, 1999, p.40). The perceived ongoing failure of the Catholic Church to respond appropriately to child abuse and same sex marriages may create further doubt and uncertainty for leaders of faith.



The principal of a Catholic primary school is, therefore, being called to be a leader of faith in times of uncertainty and change. Ranson (2006) identifies this as a 'liminal' time. Faith leadership is required to be 'exercised in a liminal period where the past is known, but is no longer instrumental and where the future is intuited but has yet to be realised with effective agency' (p.41). He further argues that leadership in liminality is a painful experience due to the need to live with increasing ambiguity. Principals are being called to demonstrate a 'particular leadership ... that breathes the spirit of paradox' (p.421).

The attributes required of effective leaders when dealing with complexity and uncertainty in times of change have been identified by Duignan (2002). He claims that effective leaders need to be critically reflective, intuitively connected, ethically responsible, spiritually courageous and intellectually capable (Duignan, 2002).

There is no doubt that the principal's responsibility for faith leadership can be problematic. A recent study by Neidhart and Lamb (2010) identifies the source of the problem, 'We do not have a clear understanding of *what* faith leadership is or *how* to go about faith leadership in the context of the Catholic primary school' (p.1).

The role of the principal of a Catholic parish primary school as faith leader is, therefore, complex and ambiguous. Adding to this complexity is dissent over the principal's role as educational leader. While leadership and its effects are well researched, the concept itself remains elusive. Much of the literature distinguishes between management and leadership. Leadership is generally described in terms of being formative, proactive and creative and deals with values and vision, whereas management is seen more as maintaining the status quo, planning, organising, deploying resources and making things happen (Fidler & Atton, 2004). As Leithwood et al., (1999) state: '... there is no final word on what is good leadership. We are simply trying to hit a moving target, maybe even get a little ahead of it' (p.51). Rather than defining effective leadership, current thinking is to describe it.

According to Earley et al., (2002, p.76) outstanding leaders must:

- Be problem-solvers and solution driven leaders.
- Be highly visible (that is, be seen around the school).
- Develop a senior management or leadership team which is seen as strong and effective by the rest of staff.

- Develop a culture of clear and high expectations of performance.
- Emphasise a strong commitment to continuous professional development.
- Negotiate change effectively and adapt changes to fit the school's values and ethos.
- Maintain a central involvement in instructional leadership in their schools.

This creates a challenge for many school principals. The demands of the role are highly diverse, requiring a broad set of skills. People-skills are required to develop teams and to support and challenge people through change. Being 'highly visible' and available to students, parents and staff requires commitment and a high degree of social skills to develop relationships. Developing a culture of high expectations with a strong commitment to continuous professional learning while focusing on instructional leadership, requires the principal to be a highly skilled practitioner while challenging staff to continue to be the same. The effective principal, therefore, is required to continually maintain the correct focus on either the task or the people. Too much focus on the task without a focus on the people, or vice versa, has seen the downfall of many principals. The principal's role needs to be multi-dimensional.

Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) suggest that the vision and practices of successful principals are underpinned by a number of core personal values. These include respect, fairness, equality, caring for the well-being of others, integrity and honesty. These core values are often part of a strong religious or humanitarian ethic, which emphasises the moral purpose of leadership (Bell & Harrison, 1996; Duignan, 2002). Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2005) also identify the educational beliefs held by successful principals. These include that: every child is important; every child can succeed; every child has unrealised potential; all members of the school community need to be supported; schools should focus on what is in the best interests of the children; and principals can and should bring about change. Successful principals are effective because they communicate clear visions and values which are shared. They empower staff by developing climates of trust and collaboration. They set high standards for themselves and others. They seek support from various influential groups and they 'keep ahead of the game' (Day et al., 2001, p.94) through ensuring they are aware of future trends. Above all, they remain focused on the growth of their students and staff and continue to be passionate, enthusiastic and committed to learning.

The literature reviewed also identifies that effective leaders promote the understanding that leadership is a shared responsibility and it is the professional work of everyone in the school (Ainscow & West, 2006; Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Lambert, 2002; Reeves, 2004). Wise leaders will seek the involvement of all those involved in the leadership of the school. Hallinger (2003) and Marks and Printy (2003) also view principals, who share leadership with others, as less likely to suffer burnout than principals who attempt the complexities of leadership alone.

An emerging model of effective school leadership as expounded by NCSL and others (Hallinger and Heck, 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000) is a combination of transformational and instructional leadership (e.g. NCSL, 2001) or 'learning-centred leadership' (Southworth, 2003, p.18). Transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers engage with each other in ways which raise one another to higher levels, thus having a transforming effect on both. Instructional leadership highlights the importance of principals focusing on the behaviours of staff as they engage in activities directly affecting the quality of learning and teaching to improve student outcomes (Robinson, 2007). Transformational leadership emphasises building vision (Hallinger, 2003, establishing commitments to agreed goals (Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin & Collarbone, 2003), providing opportunities for intellectual growth (Campbell, Gold & Lunt, 2003), setting high expectations and offering support (Bass, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1999). Transformational leadership can tap the depths of human potential and produce levels of performance that are beyond expectations (Hart, 2000).

As this model emerges, questions are being raised about transformational leadership. The questions arise from reflection on the primary purpose of leadership. Is leadership about achieving objectives or is it to serve and meet the needs of others? Greenleaf (1996) introduced the concept of 'servant leadership'. In his opinion, leadership must primarily meet the needs of others, rather than those of the self, and on an understanding of the role of the leader as a servant. He claims that self-interest should not motivate servant leadership; rather, it should ascend to a higher plane of motivation. Servant leaders develop people, helping them to strive and flourish. Leaders provide vision, gain credibility and trust from followers and influence others. This requires the leader to develop strong relationships within and beyond the organisation. Servant leadership clearly aligns with the Catholic ethos of serving others. It requires a leader to possess a high level of emotional intelligence and social and

personal skills in order to meet the demands of relating to the diverse needs of a school community.

Leaders are also increasingly being called upon to comply with ethical and moral standards in their relationships. The literature reveals that educational leadership must now have a moral purpose (Fullan, 2003) and leaders must exercise moral judgment. (Campbell, 1996; Starratt, 2003). To this end, Starratt (2004) argues that such a moral purpose in leadership ‘...invites others to transform each day into something special, something wonderful, something unforgettable, something that enables their human spirit to soar and, giddy with the joy of the moment, know who they are’ (p. 145).

People want leaders with ethical codes that are deep, innate, and instinctive so that they will not lose direction in the face of uncertainty or external pressure (Badaracco, 2006). There is now a clear expectation that leaders will always act justly, rightly and promote good rather than harm (Evers, 1992). As Branson (2010) states:

Today, perhaps more so than ever before, people want their leaders to act ethically whereby they will not produce harm but, rather, will show the virtues of doing good, of honouring others, of taking positive stands, and of behaving in ways that clearly show that their own self-interests are not the driving motivation behind their leadership. (p.4)

Today’s leaders are expected to demonstrate moral judgment by being accountable to those they serve (Eraut, 1993). Developing trust and maintaining moral standards are now also considered to be the required hallmarks of proper educational leadership.

In the light of these growing expectations, Starratt (2004) posits that effective leadership now involves the cultivation of virtues that generate authentic approaches to leadership. The authentic leader, who leads ‘from the heart and soul as well as from the head and hands’ (Duignan, 2002, p.183) is required. Authentic leaders earn the allegiance of others by building trusting relationships and by being credible in their words and deeds. Authentic leadership demands personal integrity, trusting relationships and a commitment to ethical conduct. Authentic leaders are centrally concerned with ethics and morality and in deciding what is right and what is worthwhile (SOLR Project, 2003). Begley (2003) proposes that such authentic leadership describes:

... a genuine kind of leadership – a hopeful, open-ended, visionary and creative response to social circumstances, as opposed to the more traditional

dualistic portrayal of management and leadership practices characteristic of now obsolete and superseded research literature on effective [leadership] practices. (p.1)

Begley's image of authentic leadership calls for 'a form of leadership that acknowledges and accommodates in an integrative way, the legitimate needs of individuals, groups, organisations, communities and cultures – not just the organisational perspectives that are the usual preoccupation of much of the leadership literature.'

Duignan (2003) proposes that:

The starting point for the formation of a capable authentic leader is personal transformation leading to a deeper understanding of personal values and a passionate conviction about one's capability to make a difference in the lives of all who are connected with them. (p.22)

This emphasis on the role of personal values in influencing one's leadership behaviour appears to be a key criterion for distinguishing authentic leadership. The understanding and nourishing of these values comes from personal reflection. Schutloffel (1999) highlights the importance of reflective practice for the development of authenticity in leaders. She described reflective practice as a form of contemplation that can '... synthesise a principal's beliefs about educational theory and practice and the values that underpin the principal's world and faith view' (p.23). She also recently stated that, 'Contemplative practice builds Catholic identity within the school community' (Schutloffel, 2010, p.19). So, reflective practice can enhance the development of authentic leaders while building the Catholic identity of a school community. It is clearly a critical skill for effective leaders of Catholic parish primary schools. I wondered if school partnerships could provide further opportunities for such reflection.

Competing agendas also add to the complexity of educational leadership. Economic rationalism, data driven school improvement and the call for holistic education each bring their own demands. A principal can easily feel he/she is suffering 'death by a thousand cuts' in trying to meet the demands of Church authorities, government authorities, educational consultants, staff, parents and students.

The literature reviewed highlights that effective leaders share the leadership. The features of effective shared leadership that emerge are: a shared vision, diverse participation in leadership, collaborative relationships, joint responsibility, open conversations and a focus

on student outcomes (Duignan, 2007; Dinham, Aubusson and Brady, 2006; Andrew & Crowther, 2002). Successful shared leadership relies on a supportive school culture and the personalities of school leaders. Spry and Duignan (2004) advocate that new mindsets, attitudes and practices are needed for a culture of shared leadership to exist. Similarly, Ingvarson, Anderson, Gronn and Jackson (2006) contend that specific coordinating skills and relational capabilities are needed for school leaders to effectively share leadership through schools. Principals are required to be team players, good communicators and to be comfortable living with ambiguity. They also need to be confident with sharing power, authority and decision-making (Education Queensland, 2006).

It seems intuitive that wise leaders share leadership; however an examination of the benefits is worthwhile. Kelly (2002) in her paper for NCSL, 'Sharing Leadership in Primary Schools', undertook case studies of seven successful primary schools. She explores the reasons principals want their schools to be involved in shared or collaborative leadership. The principals specify that they wanted their teams to:

... gain a shared understanding of values; provide a frame of reference for the whole school; enable whole school improvement to happen more quickly; focus on the needs of the learners; be more fluid and responsive in policy-making and practice; share strengths and mediate weaknesses and to give power to the 'we' factor. (p.43)

Sharing the leadership may allow leaders more time to build relationships within the school. It may also enable leaders to be released from less important tasks such as administration and occupational health and safety demands, so that they can focus on their instructional leadership role.

Sharing leadership also reduces the expertise drain if someone leaves and middle managers are in a position to take on whole school roles. Sharing leadership also provides increased leadership development and less overloaded roles, and the principal gains an insight into more areas in the school (Kelly, 2002). It is claimed, therefore, that shared leadership, by building leadership capacity (Lambert, 1998) and developing learning schools (MacBeath, 2000), has the potential to gain the benefits outlined by Kelly (2002).

The literature reviewed highlights the complexity of effective leadership of a Catholic parish primary school. Faith leadership is difficult and there is a plurality of views on effective educational leadership. Emerging themes throughout the literature, however,

highlight that effective leadership is distributed, transformational, moral and authentic. This type of leadership influences leadership practices: leadership is delegated and shared. The questions could be asked, ‘Who shares? What is shared?’ The principal can share with staff. Two principals can share the same role (co-principals). But I wondered about the sharing of leadership across a number of schools? Did school partnerships have something to offer? And if they did, how should leaders implement the introduction of a partnership? This led me to the research question, ‘How did the school leaders involved lead the development of the partnership?’

My review of the literature highlights that the role of the Catholic parish primary school principal has changed dramatically in recent years. The demands are increasing exponentially. Perhaps school partnerships could provide positive leadership outcomes. Any such partnership, however, to be successful, would need to be based on sound principles.

### **3.6 Principles of Effective School Partnerships**

Putting a group of people together does not guarantee a partnership will develop. Partnerships do not just happen. A group can be mandated to form by an external body or a dynamic leader can initiate and drive a group. The group may achieve some gains in the short term, however, forming and sustaining a partnership requires effort from the participants. To be sustainable, a partnership needs to be effective. The characteristics of effective partnerships have been researched and consistent themes emerge. Katzenbach & Smith (2003) for example, summarise the consistent characteristics of successful teams as having:

1. A clear, elevating goal.
2. A results-driven structure.
3. Competent members.
4. Unified commitment.
5. A collaborative climate.
6. Standards of excellence.
7. External support and recognition.
8. Principled leadership.

Their first point is the critical one. A successful, sustainable partnership requires a clear, elevating goal. This is also identified by Hill (2007). He reports on the findings of a survey of one hundred and thirty partnerships in the UK. The major factor which was seen as essential in operating a successful partnership was the need for a clear focus and a defined purpose. A vision is required. This vision will result in long-term and short-term goals, which may change over time. For example, due to external pressures, or circumstances, a group may form. The initial goal may well flow from the new reality in which the members find themselves, that is, 'We are in a new group, let's explore the benefits of working together.' This goal may drive the partnership for a short time. This may lead to the group initiating some joint activities, which, if successful and valuable, may lead to further ventures.

Moss Kanter (1994) studied collaborations between businesses in thirty-seven companies from eleven countries. She identifies what she called the eight 'I's' that create successful 'We's' in business partnerships. The I's are a description of principles that an organisation needs to follow, or learn, in order to be an effective partner:

1. **Individual excellence:** All partners need to be strong and have something to contribute to the relationship.
2. **Importance:** The relationship must fit major strategic objectives of the partners.
3. **Interdependence:** The partners need to have complementary assets and skills.
4. **Investment:** The partners need to show tangible signs of long-term commitment by devoting resources to the relationship.
5. **Information:** The partners need to share information to make the relationship work.
6. **Integration:** The partners must build broad connections between many people at many organisational levels.
7. **Institutionalisation:** The relationship should be given a formal status with clear responsibilities and decision-making processes.
8. **Integrity:** The partners must behave towards each other in ways that enhance mutual trust.

Her second point, the need for the relationship to fit major strategic objectives of the partners, highlights the critical importance of the need for the partnership to be seen as worthwhile. Those involved in the partnership must see the effort as being worth it. 'I'm



getting something out of this' or 'My school is getting something out of this,' or 'My students/teachers/parents are getting something out of this', or even, 'The Church/world is getting something out of this'. Participants will put in an effort, and suffer some costs, if they can see the partnership benefits someone. My experience in education taught me that members of staff were usually very generous. Teaching is a caring vocation. The staff was often willing to make an effort if they could see the effort was valuable for someone, even if not for themselves.

A results-driven structure, as highlighted by Katzenbach & Smith (2003), within a partnership will enable the value of the partnership to be measured. While some benefits may be difficult to quantify, for example, the level of support, others will be measurable, such as an improvement in student outcomes or the implementation of a new program.

Once the value of the partnership is established, the sustainability of the partnership will be dependent on the other factors that Katzenbach & Smith (2003) and Moss Kanter (1994) identify. The need for competent members who have individual excellence will clearly contribute to the success of the partnership, as will the level of collaboration and sharing of information. To work in collaboration with others, competence is needed in both technical and personal skills. This is required in order to maintain the team, while achieving the task.

The literature reviewed identifies that the members of a successful partnership feel a strong identification with and commitment to their team. Larson and La Fasto (1989) claim 'Group spirit and teamwork come about as a result of identification with a team. In that identification there is a relinquishing of the self – not a denial of the self, but a voluntary redefinition of the self to include membership in the team as an important aspect of the self' (p.76). This is as true today as it was over twenty years ago.

Successful teams foster a collaborative climate, characterised by trust, which allows open, direct and problem-centred discussion and decision-making (Hitchcock & Willard, 1995). Clear roles, responsibilities and lines of communication help to develop this climate. Diversity of opinions, complementarity of skills and a team atmosphere that encourages healthy, constructive and respectful debate are also identified as the hallmarks of an effective team (Egberts, 2010).

A partnership is more likely to be sustainable if external support is provided and the partnership is recognised and given a formal status. If the participants build connections between those at all levels the partnership will also be enhanced.

Leaders play a critical role in the success of partnerships. The behaviours of effective team leaders are identified consistently in the extensive literature on management and leadership. Effective leaders establish a vision, create change and unleash talent (Jones, 2004; Zepeda, 2003). Principled, authentic leadership characterised by integrity, will have a positive impact on the function of a partnership.

Teams function best when there are clear standards that everyone can use to evaluate the team's success. Standards of excellence may come from four sources: within the individual, from the team, from the consequences of success and failure and from sources outside the team (Larson and La Fasto, 1989).

Successful teams see themselves as working in a way that is compatible with the organisation's philosophy and values. They receive support from their supervisors and the members are given recognition and rewards for their successes.

The NCSL, in the UK, developed the Networked Learning Communities Program (NLC) which provided further insights into the principles of effective school partnerships. The program was probably the largest program in the world to date for learning networks. It was launched in September 2002. Over 134 school networks took part, involving 25,000 staff and over 500,000 students. An extensive evaluation of the networks indicated that networks develop when a group of people see the need to bring people together. The evaluators, Kerr, Aiston, White, Holland & Grayson (2003) also identify eight core attributes of effective networks:

1. High levels of trust and strong relationships
2. Strong co-ordination, facilitation and leadership
3. Good communication
4. Structural balance – network processes and structures need to be balanced. Too heavy a structure can drain initiative, too light a structure creates confusion.

5. Diversity and dynamism need to be encouraged – one of the powerful capacities of networks is that they can bring together disparate people and ideas.
6. Decentralisation and democracy need to be fostered – decentralisation allows participants to address local interests while still operating within a collaborative environment.
7. Sufficient time and resources need to be allocated.
8. Monitoring and evaluation – processes such as reflection and inquiry are crucial within networks.

The evaluation of the NLC program also emphasises that:

Leading networks is about brokering resources and people, creating ‘public spaces’ for people to learn and work together, building structures that encourage collaboration as a norm, and being entrepreneurial about what might be an important tool, proposal, or idea to be developed by the group. (Lieberman, 2005, p.3)

These findings from the evaluation of the NLC program reinforce the research of Katzenbach & Smith (2003) and Moss Kanter (1994). Structures need to be in place to ensure the effective evaluation and ongoing development of a partnership and adequate resources are required.

The evaluation of the NLC program also emphasises that collaboration, commitment and trust must be established. This is about building strong relationships within the group. The ultimate success of a partnership depends on the relationships between the participants. When partners respect and like each other, when they relate well, a dynamic, sustainable partnership is likely to result.

Partnerships can vary in their effectiveness. They can be supportive and life-giving, ineffective or even have a negative impact. A selection of literature highlights the essential qualities of effective partnerships. They are summarised in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.2 Qualities of Effective Partnerships**

<b>Katzenbach &amp; Smith (2003)</b>	<b>Moss Kanter (1994)</b>	<b>Kerr, Aiston, White, Holland &amp; Grayson (2003)</b>
A clear, elevating goal	Importance. The relationship fits major strategic objectives of the partners	
A results-driven structure	Institutionalisation. The relationship is given a formal status with clear responsibilities and decision-making processes	Structural Balance – network processes and structures need to be balanced. Too heavy a structure can drain initiative, too light a structure creates confusion
Competent members	Individual excellence. Both partners are strong and have something to contribute to the relationship	Diversity and Dynamism need to be encouraged – one of the powerful capacities of networks is that they can bring together disparate people and ideas
Unified commitment	Interdependence. The partners have complementary assets and skills	High levels of trust and strong relationships
A collaborative climate	Integration. The partners build broad connections between many people at many organisational levels	Decentralisation and Democracy need to be fostered – decentralisation allows participants to address local interests while still operating within a collaborative environment
Standards of excellence		Monitoring and Evaluation – processes such as reflection and inquiry are crucial within networks
External support and recognition	Investment. The partners show tangible signs of long-term commitment by devoting resources to the relationship	Sufficient Time and Resources need to be allocated
Principled leadership	Integrity. The partners behave towards each other in ways that enhance mutual trust	Strong Co-ordination, Facilitation and Leadership
	Information. Partners share information required to make the relationship work	Good Communication

This review of the literature of the principles of effective school partnerships led to the question, ‘What was the nature of the emerging partnership?’ This research sought to

explore the nature of the partnership and the qualities and characteristics of the three schools working in partnership. The qualities of the partnership, as experienced by the research participants, were later cross-referenced with Table 3.1.

### **3.7 The Potential Impact of Partnerships**

Partnerships between Catholic parish primary schools have the potential to create an alternative model of leadership which may address some of the concerns currently facing school leaders. Such partnerships are becoming more common in Australia as parishes join together due to the shortage of priests and changing parish structures. This will frequently involve two or more schools in the same parish, working with one parish priest. Such an arrangement may present opportunities, which could potentially provide support for school leaders and others.

Schools working in partnership may provide benefits for all those in the school community. The ‘total’ is frequently more than the ‘sum of the parts’. The UK government, supported by school leaders, identified that schools working together can accelerate school improvement. UK initiatives such as Excellence in Cities (EiC), the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG), federations and partnering of successful schools with weaker ones are based on the principle that:

Schools working together can achieve more for pupils, parents and communities than schools working in isolation. (DCSFS, 2010)

The UK government has been prepared to back its belief with funds, investing hundreds of millions of pounds in school-to-school improvement initiatives.

Analysis undertaken by researchers at the University of Manchester (2006) identifies four ways in which schools working together contribute to and support school improvement (Hill, 2007). Their findings indicate that school collaboration assists with: solving immediate problems, raising expectations, addressing vulnerable groups of learners and widening opportunities. Hill (2007) also suggests:

Partnerships build knowledge, add capacity, support efficiency, widen curriculum choice, promote the broader welfare of students and support school improvement. (p.29)

One of the outcomes of schools working in partnership is that teachers across the schools will then often work together. Teamwork between teachers striving to improve pedagogical practice can promote the improvement of learning and teaching (Newman & Wehlage, 1995 and Earl et al., 2006). Teachers can improve their teaching practice when they work with colleagues to gain further opinions, share ideas that work with students and help sustain new practices (Darling-Hammond, 1993). When teachers work together, the opportunity is available for them to grow professionally. It is possible that reflective practitioners, who support and challenge one another, will continue to improve their practice (Schlechty, 1990). Enhanced morale and improved performance can also result from the collegiality arising from membership of a professional group that focuses on improving practice and developing common goals (Rallis & Goldring, 2000).

Successful collaboration between teachers can also benefit students through improved student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). Collaborations can enable the successful accommodation of an increasingly diverse student population whereby specialist programs can be offered to support students' academic and cultural needs (Johnson, Pugach & Devlin, 1990). Collaboration among teachers can lead to a sense of seeing students in new ways. Instead of thinking of students as 'yours' and 'mine', they become 'ours' (Keller & Cravedi-Cheng, 1995, pp.84-85).

Partnerships have the potential to impact throughout a school, affecting its leaders, staff and students. Evaluating the impact of networks in the UK, Rudd et al., (2004) concludes:

The work impacted in a variety of forms, such as staff becoming more aware and reflective about their practice, and learners working in more positive learning environments. In a majority of schools these kinds of developments were also reported to be reflected in improved academic achievements. (p.43)

A review of seventeen different UK networks working in a mixture of inner city and complex and challenging circumstances led to the following conclusion:

The pupil impact evidence in the case studies, and the broader reviews, supports the argument that well-led and appropriately structured collaboration between schools facing complex and challenging circumstances, helped their leaders to balance short-term pressures and improve pupil attainment with long-term desires to improve the educational experiences of their pupils and the engagement of their communities. (Hadfield & Jopling, 2007, p.3)

This is an interesting perspective as it identified that the improvements were achieved through supporting the leaders.

The evidence that networks can support and improve a leader's professional development is spread across the research on networks, from the evaluation of the Network Learning Program in the UK (Sammons et al., 2007) to the National Writing Project in the US (Lieberman & Wood, 2004). Working with others in a network has also been shown to provide greater opportunities for individual and collective reflection on practice (Deloitte & Touche, 2000) and tends to increase engagement with more challenging and interactive forms of professional learning (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996). Further research provides evidence that networks enhance morale and reduce professional isolation (Hopkins, 2000; Toole & Louis, 2002; Sliwka, 2003).

Working in partnership is an interactive process that can enable both individuals and teams with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to problems. The outcomes produced are often different from those that any individual team member would produce independently (NIACE, 2007). The total benefit can be more than the sum of the parts.

The research reported in this section has been mainly from the UK as I have been unable to source any Australian research. The UK findings are, however, generally applicable to the Australian context. The Australian system of education and teaching is essentially similar to the UK. Both systems are broadly divided into five main areas: preschool, primary, secondary, university, and career and vocational training. The Australian educational system is based on a curriculum framework that all schools follow. This framework is similar to the national curriculum in the UK. An important difference is, however, that the UK government has made a substantial investment in recent years into developing educational leadership, particularly through the establishment of the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (formerly NCSL) in Nottingham.

The literature reviewed highlights that positive outcomes may result from school partnerships. The literature, however, does not reveal any studies similar to the case-study. This study sought to explore whether leadership outcomes resulted from this particular partnership. Further, the study was in the context of the Catholic parish primary school system. This led to the research question, 'To what extent do leadership outcomes result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership?'

Catholic parish primary school principals work within the context of the Catholic Church. Whether or not a Catholic school principal in Australia can lead and innovate depends to a large extent on the direct support of the local parish priest and on the wider support of the Catholic Church system authorities. It was important therefore, to ask the question – Does the Catholic Church, and its theology, support partnerships?

### **3.8 How Does the Catholic Church Support the Concept of Partnership?**

At the very heart of Christian faith is the call to move beyond one's self – the call to live in relationship with others, the call to be partners in God's work.

The call to live in relationship, to work in partnership, permeates the Bible; beginning with the portrait of creation in the Old Testament. Creation is revealed as an enjoyment too rich to be private. More delightful than simply work, it is a joy to be shared. Creation is portrayed as not the achievement of a solitary God, but the fruit of partners at play. God saw that creation was good and He wanted to share it with humankind. Adam and Eve were created in 'God's image'. This divine image therefore includes mutuality, the desire for relationships. Christians sense within their Creator the promise of partnership.

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity also emphasises the partnership within God – the call to relationship.

The call to work in partnership, or relationship, is also at the very heart of the gospel. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son. Jesus called his followers to love one another. John 17:20-23 contains a compelling passage that can be seen to call all Christians to work in partnership. Jesus prays:

I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one, Father, may they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.

Jesus prayed for unity among people. The unity he prayed for was modelled after the interrelationship within the Godhead or Trinity. This relationship that he prayed for would



have a purpose. It would be viewed as a model in the context of a divided world. The relationship, the unity, was intended to provide a testimony so that the world would believe that the Father sent the Son. It was a call to oneness to create a believable platform upon which the gospel could be preached. It was a call to partnership.

In the early days of the church, Paul struggled to form a partnership with the leaders of the Christian community in Jerusalem. Following his dramatic conversion he began preaching the Good News on his own. 'I did not stop to discuss this with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were already apostles before me' (Gal 1:16-17). He simply began boldly preaching. Before long, his behaviour attracted the attention of the apostles in Jerusalem. Paul was called to Jerusalem to explain his unorthodox approach. Amid conflict and controversy the early church agreed to a compromise: Paul would preach to the Gentiles and Peter would preach to the Jews (Gal 2:7). Paul concludes the meeting: 'So James, Peter and John, these leaders, these pillars, shook hands with Barnabas and me as a sign of partnership' (Gal 2:9 JB).

Paul's work with the early church required him to build and unite the Christian community; to encourage people and communities to work in partnership. He makes frequent use of the metaphor of the body in the description of the church:

Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because of all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. In the one Spirit, we were all baptized, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink. (1 Cor 12:12-14)

Paul called Christians to work together, for each person to use his or her talents and work in relationship with others. This is the call to become the 'Body of Christ'.

The Catholic Church, therefore, from its earliest days has called its followers to work in partnership. This call has continued throughout the ages.

On October 28, 1965, the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, promulgated the Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*. In this document the distinguishing characteristics of a Catholic school are described. The document states:

The Catholic school pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school. What makes the Catholic

school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love.

The Council, therefore, is emphasising the central role of developing the community within the work of the Catholic school that is, the central role of developing and supporting relationships.

More than twenty years later, in 1988, the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education published 'The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School', to help those involved in Catholic education to reflect on and renew their commitment to the call from Vatican II. This document further highlights the importance of collaboration and partnerships:

The more the members of the educational community develop a real willingness to collaborate among themselves, the more fruitful their work will be. Vs 39.

Partnerships between a Catholic school and the families of the students must continue and be strengthened: not simply to be able to deal with academic problems that may arise, but rather so that the educational goals of the school can be achieved. Vs 42.

As well as highlighting the importance of partnerships in the effective operation of the school, the Congregation also emphasises that 'it is not a question of convenience (to work in partnership), but partnerships in a Catholic school are based on faith' Vs 42. The Congregation brings us back to the reason for the existence of Catholic schools – they are faith schools and this faith is based on relationships; a relationship with God and relationships with others.

It seems, therefore, that the Catholic Church not only supports partnerships, the call to be Christian can be seen as a call to live in relationship. Thus throughout the ages, the Church has called on Christians to move beyond themselves, to live and work in community – to live in partnership.

### **3.9 Research Questions**

The Catholic Church therefore, supports partnerships and educational research identifies the potential of school partnerships. The nature of partnerships, however, can vary widely. The first research question, therefore, sought to explore the nature of the partnership.

Partnerships can exist in name only, or be dynamic, strong, vibrant relationships. Some authors have sought to classify different types of relationships. Harmon (2000), for example, describes a typology of institutional linkage agreements taken from a study in the field of higher education. This was helpful as it identifies different types of partnerships. The author places these along a continuum:

1. **Voluntary co-operation agreement:** this can be enacted by a simple exchange of letters between institutional heads or may involve formal, legal agreements.
2. **Formalised Consortium:** usually organised to provide common services to participating institutions
3. **Federation:** the responsibility is shared between participating institutions and a new overarching body
4. **Institutional merger:** the merging of two or more separate organisations into a single entity, with unified management controlled (Harmon, 2000, p.345).

A more detailed continuum of collaborations was drawn up as part of an inquiry into the future of small primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (Morgan & O'Slatara, 2005). This continuum has five levels:

*Level 1: Association.* Informal exchanges/discussions take place between principals and teachers in different schools to discuss issues of common concern.

*Level 2: Co-operation.* Principals and teachers meet and collaborate on management issues, joint policy documents and schemes of work.

*Level 3: Partnership.* Schools undertake activities such as exchange of teachers with specific expertise, shared delegation, shared resources. Opportunities are provided for students to work on joint activities.

*Level 4: Confederation.* A formal structure with a joint committee is formed from the boards of management from each school with responsibility for cluster co-ordination and making recommendations to encourage co-operation. The schools maintain their individual status. Recommendations may include: recommending joint staffing; agreeing job descriptions for new staff in partner schools; interviewing and appointing staff to be used jointly; recommending a portion of budget to be shared by the cluster schools.

*Level 5: Federation.* This occurs when a new school is created with a single board of management from a number of existing schools. These schools continue to function, catering for their respective catchment areas in their existing premises. A number of schools are organised as one school and

decisions are taken for the federation, rather than for the individual schools (Morgan & O’Slatara, 2005 p.33).

A further typology was drawn up by the Department for Education and Skills (UK). It distinguishes the characteristics of various forms of federations:

	<b>Hard Governance Federation</b>	<b>Soft Governance Federation</b>	<b>Soft Federation</b>	<b>Informal, Loose Collaboration</b>
Governing Body	Single governing body shared by all schools	Each school has its own governing body but the Federation has joint governance committee with delegated power.	Each school has its own governing body but the partnership has a joint governance committee without delegated powers.	Each school has its own governing body and the group of schools meets informally on an ad-hoc basis.
Common Goals	All schools share common goals through service-level agreement. (SLA) and protocol.	All schools share common goals through service-level agreement. (SLA) and protocol: joint committee can make joint decisions in some areas.	All schools share common goals through protocol: joint committee can make joint recommendations but it is up to the individual governing body to authorise plans.	All schools share common goals and can work together on ad-hoc issues and informal agreements.
Shared Staff	Common management and appointments are agreed. Sometimes a single head teacher works across a group of schools.	Common management positions and appointments but need to have protocols to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Common management positions and appointments but need to have protocols to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Unlikely to have common management positions but if they exist need to be agreed in a protocol/contract.

*Source: Department for Education and Skills 2006.*

Given the differences possible in a partnership or collaboration, the first research question sought to explore the nature of the relationship between the three partnered schools. The first research question therefore, was ‘What was the nature of the emerging partnership?’ This was explored in terms of the partnership continuum and the typology. It was important to identify the nature of the partnership in order to provide a context for the findings. Identifying the nature of the partnership could also assist readers to reflect on their own experience, whilst also providing ideas for possible future direction.

Successful change requires effective leadership (Fullan, 2001). Major change is often particularly hard to achieve in schools. Schools often find it difficult to divert attention away from the day-to-day 'busyness' to undertake major change (Grey, 2005). It is human nature to resist change, unless the implementers are involved in its creation (Synnot & Fitzgerald, 2007). Practitioners are often comfortable with the way things are, they are familiar with the way things work, they have established routines and organisational cultures which operate to maintain the status quo. While creators of change are usually optimistic about the positive effects it will usher in, for practitioners the opposite can be the case. People can feel threatened by change because they are usually being asked to give up or lose something – their identity, their feelings of comfort and security, long held values, beliefs, relationships, territory or ways of working. Change necessitates moving from the familiar to the unknown (Bridges & Mitchell 2002). Change demands some break from the past. New effort and thinking are required and extra time may be needed to implement a new pursuit. It is easier to remain the same and hence, during initial phases of change, morale and output commonly suffer (Scott & Jaffe 2004).

Leadership in times of change requires moral purpose, strong relationships, emotional intelligence and resilience (Fullan, 2001). The introduction of new ideas can be problematic. This led to the second research question, 'How did the school leaders involved lead the development of the partnership?' and 'why' did they lead it?

In the UK, many schools across the country have developed partnerships. These partnerships were developed for many reasons, but primarily to raise and maintain academic standards by extending the influence of the best leaders, to secure greater operational efficiencies by working in partnership and to build sustainability of leadership, particularly in small schools. Manchester University's report for the NCSL *The Impact of Federations on Student Outcomes* (2009b) concludes that federations can have a positive impact on student outcomes. Another report for NCSL *Emerging Patterns of School Leadership 2: A Deeper Understanding* (October 2009a) found that strong formal procedures and systems established through partnerships can add strength to a group of schools, have a positive impact on student outcomes and make long-term developments more sustainable when they support systematic joint working rather than relying on individuals who may change over time. The DCSF paper *Securing Our Future: Using Our Resources Well* (November 2009) recognises that partnerships can present opportunities and cost savings. These savings can result from

achieving economies of scale, for example by aggregating purchasing, making a broader curriculum more cost effective and saving on planning and administrative time. The research findings located through the literature review, therefore, highlight some advantages of schools working in partnership; however, the purpose of this research was to explore whether leadership benefits were created when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. The focus on leadership outcomes was chosen as the impetus for the research to explore whether school partnerships provide support for the school leaders. Consequently the third specific question was, ‘To what extent do leadership outcomes result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership?’

### **3.10 Summary**

Expectations on principals continue to increase due to societal and educational changes. These changes are occurring at an increasingly rapid rate (Gronn, 2003; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003). As a result, the role of the principal has changed vastly. These changes are more pronounced in Catholic parish primary schools. At this time in history, the purpose of Catholic schools seems less certain than in the past. Catholic school principals are being called upon to focus more on being leaders of their faith community as well as to provide effective educational leadership. The literature reviewed highlights the stresses associated with the role of the principal and its impact on the person as well as on the future of the education system. The problem underpinning this study was the increasing dissonance between the expectations being placed on principals and the limitation of the traditional model of one principal leading a school. It was believed that one way to address this problem may be to identify whether there were any leadership benefits in a shared model of leadership such as a school partnership. I sought to explore if leadership, shared across a number of schools by principals in partnership, could provide support for school leaders.

The literature reviewed, therefore, led to the development of the following questions:

1. What was the nature of the emerging partnership?
2. How did the school leaders involved lead the development of the partnership?
3. To what extent do leadership outcomes result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership?

The following sub-question was also raised:

How did the partnership support the principals in their roles as leaders of faith?

To address these questions, a suitable research framework was required. This framework will be described in Chapter Four.

## Chapter Four

# RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.1 Introduction

In this research, I adopted an interpretive orientation to explore key stakeholders' perceptions of the partnership. To understand the participants' reality as they experienced and interpreted it, a constructionist epistemology was used. The study sought to gain the perspectives of the participants on leadership, which is viewed as a relational activity, and so symbolic interactionism was chosen as the theoretical perspective through which data analysis was conducted. The research methodology used was case study, as this is consistent with both the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction. Table 4.1 outlines the elements of the research design.

**Table 4.1 The Research Design**

Theoretical Framework	Interpretive
Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Symbolic Interactionism
Research Methodology	Case study

### 4.2 Theoretical Framework

This research project is based on an interpretive design. Interpretive research accepts that concepts of reality are constructs of the human mind. These concepts vary from one person to another, and descriptions of human actions are based on social meanings (Bassey, 1999). Furthermore, a cycle emerges with this orientation which is:

A very general mode of the development of all human knowledge, namely ... development through dialectic procedures (so that) the knowledge of the whole is continuously corrected and deepened by the increase in our knowledge of the components. (Kocklemans, 1975, p.85)



The epistemological stance on interpretive approaches is that knowledge of reality is gained only through social construction such as language. In an interpretive research project, there are no predefined dependent and independent variables, rather a focus on the complexity of the situation as it emerges.

Interpretivists maintain that we use constructs such as culture, social context and language to build our view of the world and that social reality is shaped through social interactions (Weber, 2004). Social knowledge is not something which exists independently or externally to us and is waiting to be discovered. Interpretivists say that you cannot have unmediated access to reality (Watson, 2003). Thus interpretive researchers are concerned with people's beliefs, feelings and interpretations and how they make sense of their world through meaning.

Educational research is research about human beings and the world of social human interaction is complex. Comprehensive understanding of social phenomena is possible only by taking into account multiple possibilities of meaning and by acknowledging the complexity of the interactions therein (Clark & Betina, 2001). This research is based on the understanding that individuals and groups construct understandings, meanings and knowledge as well as values, attitudes and beliefs (Punch, 2005). Consequently, this research enacts a constructionist epistemology (Kincheloe, 2008).

### **4.3 Epistemology**

Any piece of research is grounded in a set of underlying assumptions about what constitutes knowledge and which research methods are appropriate (Lavery, 2003). Gough (2002) contends that the most important assumptions refer to the epistemology that underpins the research because it clearly defines the 'nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)' (p.5). Epistemology is defined as 'a theory of knowledge that specifies how researchers can know what they know' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p.171).

Epistemology provides a basis for decisions about 'how' and 'what' the researcher can know and is closely linked to the researcher's own worldview since '... people tend to adhere to the methodology that is most consonant with their socialised worldview ... we are

attracted to and shape research problems that match our personal view of seeing and understanding the world' (Glesne, 1999, p.8).

For the current research, I adopted the epistemological underpinning of constructionism (Kincheloe, 2008). The foundational premise of constructionism is the belief that human beings construct knowledge and meaning as they interact with the world which they are interpreting (Peters, 2000). The epistemological view is that the phenomena of the social and cultural world and their meanings are not objective, but are created in human social interactions, that is, they are socially constructed.

By adopting an epistemology of constructionism, I was more able to understand the participants' reality as they experienced and interpreted it (Sarantakos, 2005).

Constructionist research allows for the emergence of new meanings and knowledge while seeking to understand the current meanings or constructions (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). Constructionism also allows for the co-existence of multiple understandings or meanings (Kincheloe, 2008).

It is recognised that engagement with a research project over time may itself exert an influence on the participants' constructions of meaning. Constructionism's relativism assumes '... multiple and somewhat conflicting social realities that are the products of human intellects, but that may change as their constructors become more informed and sophisticated' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.11).

In order to understand each person's meaning, constructionists emphasise processes such as narrative, language and cultural processes as 'primary factors in meaning-making and in understanding their own constructions and knowledge base' (Rodwell, 1998, p.20). The multifaceted nature of constructionism therefore, was useful for the purpose of this study into the leadership implications of the developing partnership between Catholic parish primary schools. The emerging model of effective leadership as expounded by NCSL and others (Hallinger & Heck, 2003) as a combination of transformational and instructional leadership, and the current emphasis on distributed leadership and building leadership capacity, demand a leadership that is relational. This form of leadership was best examined with the epistemological underpinning of constructionism.

## 4.4 Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance that lies behind the chosen methodology (Broido, 2002). It provides a context for the methodologies and processes and grounds its logic and criteria. This theoretical perspective is our view of the human world, and social life within that world, wherein such assumptions are grounded.

Perspectives create a lens through which people are able to make sense of the world (Evans, 2001). They are sets of assumptions or beliefs that generate a conceptual framework for understanding phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and within the field of interpretivist research, there are many perspectives, for example phenomenology and hermeneutics, each with its own particular emphasis. This study was underpinned by symbolic interactionism because it is concerned with how people define reality and how they react accordingly (Horn, 1998; Bazeley, 2004).

Symbolic interactionism is based on the belief that people react to situations as they perceive them. It is a theoretical approach that seeks to understand human behaviour. It involves the study of individuals in society and what impacts on their own subjective insights and feelings. It contends that a person's perspective is what a person interprets as reality (Fidishun, 2001). Thus, 'symbolic interactionism holds that people's actions towards other people are based on the meanings that are given to them' (Kincheloe, 2008).

Symbolic interactionism is based on three key assumptions:

- that human beings individually and collectively act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them;
- that meaning arises in the process of interaction among individuals;
- that these meanings are assigned and modified through an interpretative process which is ever-changing, dependent on redefinitions, relocations and realignments. (Blumer, 1969)

An important element of this concept is that the researcher can also take the role of a participant being studied (Kincheloe, 2008). This is an interaction. This interaction is symbolic because the researcher's understanding of the participants' feelings, beliefs and perceptions comes via discussion and involvement from 'significant symbols – that is, language and other symbolic tools' (Crotty, 1998, p.75).

This research, which explored the emerging partnership among three Catholic parish primary schools, sought to understand the insights of the key stakeholders in the schools. As it sought to gain the perspectives of the participants, symbolic interactionism was judged to be the most appropriate approach to adopt, as symbolic interactionism refers to those basic social interactions which exist in relational leadership whereby ‘... we enter into the perceptions, attitudes and values of a community, becoming persons in the process’ (Crotty, 1998, p.8). Symbolic interactionism, therefore, provided a suitable theoretical perspective for an exploration of the emerging partnership between Catholic parish primary schools and how the leadership impacted on those directly involved.

## **4.5 Research Methodology**

Methodology refers to the theory and analysis of how an inquiry proceeds (Metz, 2000). It involves examination of the principles and procedures associated with a particular approach that in turn guides the use of a particular method (Schwandt, 2000). Methodology provides a rationale on which to base the use of a particular research method. The choice of an appropriate methodology matches the unique character and purpose of the study. The chosen methodology for a study must assist the researcher to complete an in-depth investigation of the experiences of those involved in the research as well as identify the patterns emerging from the data analysis.

The interpretive perspective offers several methodological approaches to the research design. The methodology chosen must take into account the depth and complexity of the phenomenon to be investigated and identify the methods to be used (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The research methodology adopted in this research study was case study. Case study methodology features richly descriptive and varied sources of data about a phenomenon. This data can be interpreted to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and the meaning (Merriam, 1998). Case study methodology is consistent with both the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism as it aims to construct meaning of complex social interactions, in this case, those involved in the partnership.

Case studies provide a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analysing information and reporting findings. Case study has been described as being particularly

appropriate for an individual researcher on the grounds that it allows a focused approach to an issue within a condensed time frame with limited resources (Mende, 2005). A case study may be described as an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2009).

Case study, because of its extensive description and analyses of phenomena, aims to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena and of the meaning which those involved in the study give to their experiences (Merriam, 2002). Furthermore, it seeks to understand the inter-relationships between the parts and patterns within cases and thus how they form a whole (Merriam, 1998).

The strategic value of case study lies in its ability to draw attention to what can be learned from a single case (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 2005). Therefore it is necessary to delimit the object of the study, the case, as a single entity around which there are natural boundaries (Merriam, 2002). Stake (2005) identifies three types of case studies around these natural boundaries – intrinsic, instrumental and collective. Intrinsic case study refers to the idea that the case itself is of interest; the researcher focuses on what can be discovered about the particular case. Instrumental case study refers to the idea that a case can facilitate an understanding of something else. Collective case study is an instrumental case study extended to a number of cases; the researcher is focused on moving towards a better understanding about a general phenomenon. This particular study is an instrumental case study (Stake, 2000, p.437) as the case study was mainly examined to provide insight into an issue. In this sense, the case is of secondary interest. The learning gained from the case shed new insight on the issue under investigation.

Case studies are commonly used within research, however, the design has a number of limitations. Case study research has often been criticised on the grounds that its findings are not generalisable, especially by comparison with those made through quantitative research (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). This research study aimed to demonstrate the characteristics of the case so that they will allow the readers to extract their own learning for transferability.

A further criticism is that case study is subjective and dependent on bias, particularly to that of the researcher (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The researcher has outlined his background context and the perspective he brought to the research and further issues relating to trustworthiness have been identified.

A further criticism is that case study produces a vast amount of information which is difficult to analyse effectively and it is time consuming. The focus was maintained throughout this research by containing the volume of data through retaining the focus on the research questions of the study.

Yin (2009) highlighted the skills required of the case study researcher, which guided the study. The researcher:

1. Should be adaptive and flexible, in order that newly encountered situations can be seen as opportunities, not threats.
2. Should be responsive to contradictory evidence and thus be unbiased.
3. Should be able to ask good questions, be a good listener and be able to interpret answers. (p.56)

I sought to develop and utilise these skills throughout the research by putting aside my biases and actively listening to the participants. The interviews were conducted as semi-formal interviews, that is, guiding questions were used, however the conversations flowed naturally. During the interviews I attempted not to talk or direct too much, rather I listened attentively and encouraged the participants to clarify their own thoughts. There was minimal power differential between the participants and the researcher as, being a principal myself, I was a peer with the three principals and the parish priest was very open. Newly encountered situations were viewed as opportunities to further explore the topic, rather than as threats.

Case study offers a means of investigating complex social settings consisting of multiple variables of importance in understanding a phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, case study can result in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its reader's experience. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence case study plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base (Merriam, 1998). Because of its strengths, case study was a particularly appealing design for this research.

## **4.6 Participants**

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants for this research (Creswell, 2005). Purposive sampling is valuable when a population is unique, and when it is the lived experience of a specific group which is being examined (Flick, 1998; Strauss, 2003).

Participant selection was guided by the boundaries of the case study, that is, three schools which in the past were separate but now belong to one parish due to a merger of parishes. Given that the purpose of this study was to explore the development of the partnership among three Catholic parish primary schools, with a focus on the leadership, the participants were the senior and middle level managers, that is, the parish priest and the three principals.

## **4.7 Data Collecting Strategies**

The research design guides the procedures for data collection and its analysis. The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism enabled me to adopt a multi-stage approach to the research (Blumer, 1969). Data was gathered from individual interviews with the parish priest and the three principals. Each stage of the exploration aimed to sharpen the inquiry so that the direction of the research and the developments to the partnership remained ‘grounded in the empirical life under study’ (Blumer, 1969). Responses to questions identified at the completion of each stage directed the following stage. Detailed descriptions of what was happening and the development of further questions was the product of each stage (Charon, 2001).

Individual interviews were used in this study. These appeared to be the most effective means of realising the aims of the research. This initial preference was supported strongly, even in the early stages of the research, by the congruence between the epistemological and methodological considerations. Within the conceptual framework, the possibilities and structure provided by interviews were seen as justifiable. The individual interviews facilitated in-depth exploration of the key questions and sub-question of the study. Follow-up interviews were organised to gain further information as well as to critique perspectives raised and enrich emerging findings.

**Table 4.2 The Data Collection Process**

<b>Participant(s)</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Data Collection Activity</b>
Parish Priest	1	Interviews
Principal of each School	3	Interviews

## **4.8 The Interview**

The individual interview was the research method as it has been identified as the most widely applied technique for conducting systematic social enquiry in all forms of qualitative research (Merriam, 2002; Silverman, 1997).

The interview is described as ‘... the main road to multiple realities’ (Stake, 1994, p.64). Interviews are a necessary source of case study data (Merriam, 1998) because they provide the researcher with important insights into the phenomenon being studied from the perspective of the participants. The interview is valuable in qualitative research as ‘it is prepared and executed in a systematic way. It is controlled by the researcher to avoid bias and distortion and it is related to a specific research question and to a specific purpose’ (Sarantakos, 1998, p.177). Furthermore, the interview has been described as ‘a purposeful conversation, usually between two people, but sometimes involving more, that is directed by one in order to get information from the other’ (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.93). It is usually quite simple to encourage people to be interviewed, as most people are pleased to accept the opportunity to be listened to, as they believe their opinion will be valued by the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

There are three main types of interviews. These are the unstructured (Brown & Dowling, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003); semi-structured (Brown & Dowling, 1998) and the structured (Brown & Dowling, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The unstructured or informal interview uses open-ended questions and is flexible and exploratory. This method is suitable when the interviewer does not know enough about the phenomenon being investigated to ask suitable questions (Merriam, 2002).



The structured interview uses carefully formulated questions which are devised before the interview and are asked in a pre-determined order with answers being given rather than responses discussed. The approach does not allow the researcher to explore participants' perspectives. Instead the researcher gets reactions to the participants' preconceived notions of the world. While this type of interview has purpose and structure, it is not the best method for use when adopting an interpretivist paradigm (Merriam, 2002).

Interviewing in qualitative research generally adopts a semi-structured style which allows participants to reveal their perceptions of the concept under study (Merriam, 2002). This type of interviewing resonates with the basic principle of hermeneutics which emphasises the importance of acknowledging the research context and its influence on interpretation of data. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview is consistent with symbolic interactionism assumptions which view the world as subject to multiple interpretations since it is the interpretation of behaviour which is the focus for those involved in symbolic interactionist research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Therefore, the semi-structured interview was selected as the most appropriate strategy of research data gathering. The topic was explored by using questions with fixed and unfixed wording to elicit information from the participants (Minichiello, Aroni, Hays, 2008).

This type of interview usually involves the use of an interview guide or schedule to focus the dialogue on specific topics. The interviewer has the freedom to change the structure, format and order of the questions to best meet the goals of the research. It is characterised by free and open discussion which is guided rather than led by, and restricted by, the interviewer (Coughlan & Brannic, 2001).

A range of topics is addressed within an interview schedule which enables the interviewer to probe, explore and ask questions that will illuminate the topic, whilst keeping the interview focused. The schedule is designed as a set of unambiguous questions which serve a purpose and are easy to answer. The flexibility inherent in a schedule allows individual perspectives to surface within a particular context, while allowing comparisons with the response of other participants. The interviewees generally feel more at ease and a trust is developed due to the rapport developed. Semi-structured interviews also allow for greater depth of response than is the case with other methods of data collection (Cohen & Manion, 2000).

The purpose of the research determines the questions asked (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and their content, sequence and wording are in the hands of the researcher (Kerlinger, 1986). Having the freedom to select the content, sequence and wording of the questions enabled the researcher to ensure the interviews were undertaken in a flexible manner. Interviewees were informed that pseudonyms would be used when the data was reported and that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time. The pseudonyms given were: the parish priest was identified as Fr. P, the three principals were identified as Principals 1, 2 or 3 and the parish was referred to as Jay.

The interviews were audio-taped. The interviewees earlier gave their consent: 'There is no substitute for a full tape recording of an interview' (Powney & Watts, 1987, p.124). Audio-taping allows the researcher to have a full record of the interview and enables a more relaxed interview to occur as note-taking can be distracting. Multiple replays, an awareness of verbal mannerisms and the noting of emotive changes in tone are also possible with audio-taping. Following transcription the interview data was edited to draw out the main phenomena that might be included in the narrative and to clarify aspects that needed further exploration.

## **4.9 Analysis of the Data**

Analysis means taking something apart and examining first impressions as well as final compilations (Stake, 1995). Through data analysis the researcher searches for convergent themes and opinions as well as exploring divergent findings. The researcher seeks explanations for the findings, being able to interpret the findings because of his or her familiarity with the data.

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process which seeks to develop a depth of interpretation based on exploring the data from several points and at different stages of the research. The analysis is ongoing. Analysis and collection should be simultaneous and ongoing (Keeves & Sowden, 1997; Merriam, 2002). It is an inductive process of identifying themes that are generated from the data. It requires a cyclical approach of developing, testing and changing propositions by the process of systematically searching and arranging the data to increase the researcher's understanding of the data and to enable the researcher to present the findings to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The researcher constantly monitors, reviews,

interprets and tests data in order to draw conclusions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Data analysis begins from the time the first piece of data is gathered.

Data analysis can be described, therefore, as a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation (Merriam, 1998). The analysis of data should be consistent and compatible with the underlying philosophy of the research. The interpretivist orientations of hermeneutic phenomenology and symbolic interactionism which underpin this study are congruent with the qualitative data analysis adopted in this study, as the approach assumes that data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity (Merriam, 2002; Wengraf, 2001).

It has been acknowledged by Keeves and Sowden (1997) that there is no recognised structure to qualitative data analysis, when compared to the standardised instruments tested in the quantitative scientific world. Unlike statistical analysis, there are few fixed formulas to guide data analysis in qualitative research (Yin, 2009). The ultimate aim is to treat the evidence fairly, produce substantiated conclusions and dismiss alternative interpretations.

Yin, however, proposes four key principles of effective data analysis which guided the analysis in this research:

1. Analysis should show that it relied upon all the relevant evidence.
2. Analysis should take account of all major rival interpretations.
3. Analysis should address the most significant aspect(s) of the study.
4. The researcher should be able to bring one's own prior expert knowledge to the study. (Yin, 2009)

There are many approaches available to researchers to utilise, analyse and interpret data. The approach selected for use in this study is the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through this approach the researcher simultaneously codes and analyses data with the purpose to build propositions which are later refined, discarded, or further developed, depending on the data which is progressively collected (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

The advantage of the constant comparative method is that it provides a systematic approach to the collection, organising and analysis of data from the empirical world being examined:

The basic strategy of the method is to do just what the name implies – constantly compare. The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories. Comparisons are constantly made until a theory can be formulated. (Merriam, 1998, p.159)

The constant comparative method allows for the reduction of a wide range of initial responses down to core themes. The continuing process of data analysis through the refinement of large bodies of data into manageable and meaningful elements for further research leads to the discovery of conclusions.

The stages of the data analysis and how they were used in the study are now considered in greater detail.

**Stage One:** During the process of data collection, transcripts of interviews, observations and field notes were read in order to acquire a sense of the whole. Significant statements and phrases were extracted from each transcript.

**Stage Two:** The meaning of each significant statement was expressed. Care was taken to ensure that the derived meanings were faithful to the original data. This process was repeated a minimum of three times for each transcript and the aggregated, formulated meanings were organised into clusters of themes. The clusters were referred back to the original data for validation.

**Stage Three:** A description of the topic was formulated from the results of the analysis of the data so far. The strategies of coding, writing memos, summarising and diagramming (Dilthey, 2003) were used in order to organise the analysis. As significant themes were extracted, memos were written to record changing ideas about the data that emerged. The themes were returned to the participants for validation. As a result of this ongoing data analysis, attempts were continued to formulate an exhaustive description of each theme in terms that were as unequivocal as possible. This enabled me to note areas needing further development. This resulted in the collapsing of six themes into four core themes, systematically relating them to other themes, validating those themes and filling in themes that needed further development or refinement (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

**Stage Four:** I returned the analysed data to each participant for validation. The reinterpretation of emerging themes gradually allowed me to clarify the relationships within

the data. This was important to the process of data analysis which is underpinned by hermeneutic phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Discussion of the findings began through these relationships. Through this process of data analysis an in-depth interpretation of the emerging themes of the developing partnership between the schools participating in this study emerged.

#### **4.10 Trustworthiness**

Data does not speak for itself. There is always an interpreter or translator (Ratcliffe, 1983) and therefore there is an inherent danger that the researcher may misunderstand the meanings that the participant intended (Brown, 1983). There was, therefore, a need for internal validation to ensure the integrity of the work and ensure the research findings match reality.

Qualitative researchers must ensure that the views and voices of all participants in the research are expressed truthfully (Wiersma, 1995) so that the study is fair and balanced (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Research is credible when those involved in the inquiry perceive the findings to be truthful. There can be influences on participants which may create distortions in data.

There can also be concerns about the credibility of the data collected from semi-structured interviews. The data may be distorted by the researcher's selective attentiveness (McKay & Oliver, 1997). This may occur when evidence which is helpful to a researcher may be given more attention than that which challenges a developing argument.

In all these instances, the data produced for the study may be compromised. Consequently, an attempt must be made to ensure that the voices and views of all participants are expressed accurately in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Various approaches were adopted in this research to verify the findings.

Data was gathered from various sources, in order to establish different points of view. The data sources were interviews with the parish priest and principals and examination of documents.

Member checking (Merriam, 2002) was used. I submitted transcripts and emerging themes back to the participants for verification. These were subsequently verified by the participants.

I employed an audit trail to verify the credibility of the information collected. This required regular discussions with my university supervisors during the study to check the reliability and validity of the processes used to analyse and produce the data (Ballinger, 2006).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of an 'inquiry audit' (p.317) to 'examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency' (Hoepfl, 1997, p.13). In this study, the inquiry audit entailed following the general rules for data collection including stating the research questions and adhering to the protocols for interviews and focus group activities as well as developing an evidence database which allowed me to organise the data into themes whilst facilitating the analysis of the data from various sources (Yin, 2009).

#### **4.11 Ethical Issues**

I acknowledge that 'something of a contract exists between researcher and researched, a disclosing and protective covenant, usually informal, but best not silent – a moral obligation' (Orbeisenhauer & Wynden, 2000, p.94). This moral obligation was addressed by adherence to ethical considerations. Important ethical considerations included informed consent and disclosure of the role of the researcher as well as data storage, privacy and confidentiality.

Ethics clearance was sought and the research was conducted within the standard ethical considerations of educational research (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993) as expressed in the policies of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval to conduct the study was sought from the Director of Catholic Education in Brisbane and the principals of the primary schools involved in the research. See Appendix A.

All participants were provided with an Information Letter which included a full written description of the purpose and nature of the study, its processes and their requirements for involvement. They were assured that their involvement was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. All participants were asked to sign a form indicating that

they had received sufficient information regarding the study prior to interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). Each of the interviewees was allocated a pseudonym for anonymity. Each of the schools was also identified with a pseudonym. Protection of all confidentiality was outlined to the participants in a letter. Storage and security of all data was in accordance with the rules of the Australian Catholic University. Data access was restricted to those authorised by myself.

#### **4.12 Limitations and Delimitations**

This study explored whether leadership outcomes are created when three Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. It is acknowledged that the qualitative nature of this study means that its findings can only be applicable for the group under study at a point in time. This study was limited by time and the context in which it was conducted.

The study employed an interpretive approach to gain an understanding of the perspectives of each participant as it was constructed by them within their context. In undertaking this approach, it was accepted that concepts of reality are constructs of the human mind and they can vary from one person to another because human actions are based on social meanings (Koshy, 2005).

The focus of this study was on whether leadership outcomes are created when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. This was a deliberate focus, as a partnership among schools could be explored from a number of perspectives. The focus on possible leadership outcomes rather than the more obvious focus on student outcomes was chosen, as the impetus for the research was to explore whether school partnerships provide support for school leaders. The links between improved school leadership and improved student outcomes is well-researched (Ross & Gray, 2006; Marks & Printy, 2003). The participants chosen were the leaders and middle-managers of the schools. This is a delimitation.

It is also important to note that the involvement of priests in Catholic parish primary schools varies throughout Australia. For example, Victoria is the only state in which parish priests are the employers of primary school principals, with the exception of the Lismore diocese in New South Wales. In all other states, it is usual for the Bishop of the diocese, or a diocesan education body with delegated authority from the Bishop, to be the employer

(Casey, 2001). As a further example, a research study conducted for the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (2006), identified that there is considerable diversity in the involvement of parish priests within the Archdiocese of Victoria. For example, in the Ballarat diocese, priests take part in the selection of teaching staff. The study further identifies, however, that the Sale diocese reflects ‘... an overall pattern of delegation of day-to-day administration and financial matters, and moderate priestly involvement in promoting the Catholic identity and ethos of the school’ (p.5). It is important to note, therefore, that another delimitation of this research is the diversity in involvement of priests across Australia. While the Brisbane and Melbourne experiences are similar, this is not the case in all states of Australia.

A further delimitation is the focus on three schools, that is, one partnership. Exploring a range of partnerships was seen as being outside the scope of this study. While it would be interesting to explore how different schools operate in a partnership, the delimitation of this study was to explore the leadership outcomes created in one particular partnership.

### 4.13 Overview of the Research Design

An interpretive orientation was adopted to explore the developing partnership between the schools. A constructionist epistemology was used to understand the participants’ reality. Symbolic interactionism formed the theoretical perspective through which the data analysis was conducted and case study was the methodology employed. Table 4.4 summarises the research design.

**Table 4.3 Summary of the Data Collection and Analysis Process**

Data Collection			Data Analysis	
Date	Participants	Strategy	Date	Strategy
October 2006		Ethics clearance		
November 2007		Defence proposal		



**Table 4.3 Summary of the Data Collection and Analysis Process (continued)**

Data Collection			Data Analysis	
Date	Participants	Strategy	Date	Strategy
December 2009	Parish priest and principals of partnered schools	Semi-structured interviews	January 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typing transcripts of interviews</li> <li>• Tentative interpretations</li> <li>• Synthesis of text for participants</li> <li>• Editing text</li> <li>• Tentative interpretations</li> <li>• Synthesis of text</li> </ul>
April 2010	Parish priest and principals of partnered schools	Semi-structured interviews	May 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typing transcripts of interviews</li> <li>• Tentative interpretations</li> <li>• Synthesis of text for participants</li> <li>• Editing text</li> <li>• Tentative interpretations</li> <li>• Synthesis of text</li> </ul>

## **Chapter Five**

# **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore whether leadership benefits are created when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. Underpinning the study was a constructionist epistemology and a symbolic interactionist perspective which focused on the behaviours and meanings the participants attached to the concepts of the partnership and their leadership.

### **5.2 Design of Research**

The methodology used was case study which is consistent with both the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Through the methodology of case study, I sought to construct meaning from the complex social interactions of those involved in the partnership.

The three schools chosen were separate schools in the past, but they now belong to one parish due to a merger of the parishes. The participants were the senior and middle level managers, that is, the parish priest and the three principals.

Initial interviews were conducted with follow-up interviews five months later. Following the interviews, the data was analysed using the constant comparative method and the analysed data was returned to the participants for verification. The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyse the data collected in the conduct of this research.

### **5.3 Presentation of Findings**

The findings are presented in four sections which parallel the research questions as summarised in Table 5.1

**Table 5.1 Structure of the Presentation of Findings**

SECTION	REFERENCE	QUESTION
Section 1	5.3.1	What was the nature of the emerging partnership?
Section 2	5.3.2	How did the school leaders involved lead the development of the partnership?
Section 3	5.3.3	To what extent do leadership outcomes result when Catholic Parish Primary Schools work in partnership?
Section 4	5.3.4	How did the partnership support the principals in their role as faith leaders?

### **5.3.1 What was the nature of the emerging partnership?**

Through researching the nature of the partnership, I was able to explore the characteristics of this particular partnership and to identify its success and effectiveness. The answers to the research questions shed light on an understanding of school partnerships and potential benefits for principals.

The partnership began in 2006 when seven, rather historic, parishes in the Brisbane Diocese were combined into one parish. All the parishes originally had schools, but because of demographic reasons, only three parish primary schools remained. From October 2006, instead of these three schools being part of a small parish with their own priests and their own convents and their own identity, they found themselves in a new, larger parish with a newly appointed parish priest.

Shortly after the appointment of the new parish priest, the seven parishes were amalgamated and one parish was created with one bank account, one parish office, one parish newsletter, one finance board and one pastoral council. The three schools found themselves caught up in this process, as well as trying to work out how they connected with each other.

Within the first six months, the existing principals, all male, accepted other appointments and they were replaced by three female principals. This created a unique situation, in which three newly appointed principals were to work with a newly appointed parish priest in a newly formed parish. While this was a unique situation, it provided a model with much to teach about the outcomes of school partnerships. These unique arrangements

avoided some potential difficulties of newly formed partnerships such as, addressing past histories, loss of identity and establishing an equitable powerbase between the participants.

The priest and principals established a leadership group, which was pivotal in the development of the partnership. In a relatively short space of time, they developed good relationships.

All participants believed that the partnership was successful largely as a result of the good relationships among the principals and the parish priest. The parish priest stated, 'Schools and parishes need to work out what sort of relationship they want. Once they've worked that out, then that relationship falls into place. We wanted the connections and we wanted the mutual support and this model evolved out of that.'

Some important elements of the relationship were identified by Principal 3:

... being honest, being direct, keeping confidentiality, having a willingness to work with others, a willingness to look outside the square, a willingness to be able to add value. We respect each other.

These relationships were obviously critical to the success of the partnership. The importance of good relationships to the effectiveness of networks was highlighted by the NCSL (2006) evaluation of the Networked Learning Communities Program in the UK. This evaluation emphasised that partnerships must establish strong relationships characterised by collaboration, commitment and trust. When partners respect and like each other, when they relate well, an effective sustainable partnership is likely to result. The participants in this case study demonstrated their mutual respect and support for one another throughout the interviews.

Further comments from the parish priest indicated other elements of the good relationships within the leadership group. He said, 'I am very lucky to have three colleagues who are articulate, professional and not afraid to move forward'. He spoke of the 'generosity of the principals'. He referred to them as 'the girls' and he claimed that 'they gang up on me!'. He believed that:

Our schools are a major part of the mission of the parish. They're central to the life of our parish and just as much as I support the principals in their often thankless roles, with all the extra hours and extra pressures, I know that I have their support and that they will support any decisions that I have to make.

The principals clearly supported the parish priest – as evidenced by the comment of Principal 2:

We have a fabulous leader in Fr. P and we are committed to the partnership not only working, but also, being of value to all of us and to the community.

She also stated:

I live and worship in the Jay parish, so Fr. P is my pastor, more so than being my work-related parish priest, he's also my boss as well. We work together in a good working relationship.

The parish priest, in turn, was understanding, highly appreciative and supportive of the efforts of the three principals. He stated, 'I don't envy their jobs' and 'There's no glory in being a school principal these days'.

One principal had previously worked with one of the others as deputy principal at her school and the four participants all related well.

Commenting on the relationships, Principal 2 said, 'It really depends on personalities ... we just get on well because we have that common purpose. I think it is because of the commitment of those involved, the drive to succeed and the relationship of those involved'.

Principal 1 stated, 'We are not all trying to beat each other ....'

The parish priest also reflected on the dynamics of the leadership group. He said: 'There is a good feel to the dynamics of the four of us and then with the APRE's on top of that as well'.

An important activity to build relationships, in the early days of the partnership, was the 'Bus Trip'. This was mentioned in the interviews by each of the principals. On a pupil-free day, a bus was organised for all the staffs to tour the three schools. There was an element of 'fun' introduced to the trip. It was described by Principal 3:

... right at the beginning of the first year we went on a bus tour. We all dressed up in fancy dress – we dressed up as tourists – just to try and break through. We had a breakfast together, then we got on a bus, a big bus that catered for all of us and we went around the whole parish to see just how big it was.

Principal 1 also commented, ‘... the road trip last year. That was a good thing. It was very valuable to actually see that there was a place outside your own little box’.

This relationship was also referred to in a joint, written proposal to the local Catholic Education Office. The proposal was to form one combined School Council. Giving the background to the proposal, the document stated:

A considered and strategic alliance between the schools began to develop in 2007, which has led to the current situation where there is a strong, connected relationship across the schools. This relationship, led by the principals and parish priest, connects at multiple levels and is made evident with staff, students and parents. Regular communication and co-operation across the schools is a key feature of their current relationship and co-operation exists in regards to multiple facets of school life.

This statement highlights, therefore, that the good relationships extended beyond the four participants. It connected at ‘multiple levels’ and in regards to ‘multiple facets’ of school life. While the extent of the relationship beyond the four participants was not explored in this research, it is interesting to note that there were strong relationships across the schools at various levels. The four leaders initiated and supported these relationships. The fact that they are referred to in this document, which was written by the leaders, signifies their desire to foster good relationships between all members of the school community. This was further evidence of the desire of the leaders to build good relationships, and their skill in creating good links between members of the community.

An understanding of how these strong relationships developed was not explored. Perhaps it was as simple as ‘luck’ – four people came together and ‘clicked’. Perhaps it was that the parish priest, who had the ‘luxury’ of selecting the three principals chose people he believed he could work with and thought would relate well. Partners cannot be mandated to relate well, but when they do, some exciting initiatives may take place. This was the experience of the participants in this case study. They related well and respected each other. As a result, they developed a successful partnership with a high degree of trust.

During the interviews, two principals commented particularly on the level of trust in the leadership group. Principal 1 commented, ‘Basically what’s happened is that we developed trust in each other and that trust has grown over the past months’. Principal 2 added, ‘I think that we are all generally nice people and we trust and value and respect each other.’

Principal 3 also emphasised the high level of trust, 'I think first of all you really have to have that trust in each other.' She also added, 'The successful parish with multiple schools depends on relationships, trusting, confidentiality and all working from the same page.'

This high level of trust was critical to the success of the partnership. The importance of trust in a partnership is well supported by the literature. Katzenbach & Smith (2003) referred to it as the need for a collaborative climate, Moss Kanter (1994) highlighted the importance of partners sharing information to make the relationship work, which requires trust and Kerr et al., (2003) directly stated that high levels of trust and strong relationships are core attributes of effective networks.

This trust contributed to the group being confident, creative and open to new ideas. The parish priest emphasised the importance of the group being open to new ideas stating:

If you don't have the right people with the right sort of openness to change or looking at the big stuff then it can end up a dreadful mess and power play and all that sort of stuff, which so often happens.

Principal 3 also emphasised that the group was open to new ideas:

We don't have set in our minds that this is the be-all and end-all of how it is going to be. But we are open that there may be a better or a smarter way of doing this.

There was a strong desire within the leadership group for each school to maintain its own identity. All participants commented on this. Principal 1 stated:

... we have each got our own identity, our own culture, we all come from different charisms yet we are connected both tangibly and intangibly as schools within the Jay Catholic parish community. And we just continue to look at ways that we can extend the partnership on all levels – the students, the parents, the staff coming together. You know, we are keeping in mind the broader vision and mission in Catholic Ed but we are very conscious that we want to keep our own identities that create this culture.

In the view of Principal 2:

We've got three different schools but we each have our own identity, and culture and charism. Yet we want to come together under the one umbrella of Jay Catholic Community.

It is still evolving but we've come up with a little mantra, 'Three unique schools – one parish'.

This was reinforced by Principal 3:

I think it is important to keep your own identity, for example, your founding charism, while still finding similar things to connect with the other schools.

The parish priest also commented on the identity of the schools:

While we've got a Jay parish, we've got three distinct schools within that parish, so that we are not trying to make this one school, we've got three viable entities with three very rich histories. But they come under an umbrella now called Jay.

And again:

Each of them is a unique identity. What we don't want is everyone to think that the three schools are exactly the same. They each have their own history and their own charism and their own particular strengths and work areas.

The importance of this issue was also highlighted in the written proposal to the local Catholic Education Office:

Each school has developed a unique charism, mission, vision and identity and maintains these steadfastly whilst able to connect into the overall vision of the parish. Each school has developed independent ways of working under carefully considered, strategic plans though we share these plans across the parish and across the schools. Whilst the three schools will continue to engage in renewal, self-improvement and strategic planning processes that are unique to their communities, some aspects of shared visioning and strategic planning and policy formation will be viewed and prepared through the lens of the Jay parish.

It was revealing that all participants commented on the importance of each school maintaining its own identity. Clearly, this was an issue which had been discussed in the leadership group. The resultant statement, 'Three unique schools – one parish' was quoted verbatim by more than one participant. The statement reinforced the importance of each school whilst also emphasising the importance of the partnership. This attitude should be viewed as an essential characteristic of the partnership. It will be important for the schools to continue to articulate and reinforce this message. Larson & La Fasto (1989) claimed that group spirit and team work come about as a result of identification with a team. In that identification there is a relinquishing of the self, '... not a denial of the self, but a voluntary redefinition of the self to include membership in the team as an important aspect of the self' (p.76). It will be critical, therefore, for the team members in the partnership to maintain a



strong sense of their own identity as well as a strong sense of the identity of the team. It will be important also for the partnered schools to continue to reflect on, and reinforce, their own identity and that of the partnership.

Openness to new ideas is important in a developing partnership. The development of a partnership does not follow a linear path. There is no set formula. The leadership team goes through a fluid process of evaluate, plan, implement and evaluate again. This requires the leadership team to be creative to introduce new ideas and to be reflective in order to evaluate the implementation of those ideas. Openness to new ideas is critical. Leaders need to be able to initiate their own ideas and be open to the suggestions of others. The parish priest commented that the partnership is evolving, 'I am writing the script as I go'. The partnership could not have developed without the confidence to attempt new ideas. When partners feel threatened, they will not be creative; rather, they will be defensive. In the case study, the partners trusted and respected each other. This enabled them to be creative.

Being open to new ideas can also be referred to as 'risk taking'. This was highlighted in the literature as an important behaviour of effective leaders (Earley et al., 2002). The individual leader is more likely to take risks when he/she feels secure, confident and well supported. This applies equally to individuals and to leadership groups. The participants in the leadership group in the case study revealed themselves to be individually and collectively confident and thus, willing to take risks. Individually, the participants felt well supported. This led to confidence within the leadership group. This confidence translated into an openness to new ideas and a willingness to take risks.

The three principals commented that they wanted the partnership to add value to their school communities. As Principal 3 said, 'We are committed to the partnership not only working, but also, being of value to all of us and to the community' and '... ultimately we are trying to add value to what is already happening.'

The schools sought to add value to their communities by working together in a variety of ways (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3). The staffs of the three schools were involved in shared professional development and the development of networks across the schools. This included a Year 6/7 Teachers' Network and an Early Years Teachers' Network. The financial secretaries also met and the Assistant Principals, Religious Education (APREs) communicated with each other. The Curriculum Support Teachers worked together and Level

Teachers planned across the three schools. The sacramental program, was parish-based, which ensured the Year 4 teachers and the APREs worked together. There was also some sharing of staff across the schools with the Visual Arts Teacher, Learning Support Teacher, Environmental Gardening Teacher and Groundsman being shared.

**Table 5.2 Combined Staff Activities**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Shared Professional Development e.g. Religious Education</li> <li>2. Sharing of Staff members e.g. Visual Arts, Learning Support</li> <li>3. Teachers' Networks e.g. Early Years, Year 6/7</li> <li>4. Sacramental Program including planning and implementation</li> <li>5. Informal meetings of Level Teachers from the schools for planning and support</li> <li>6. Curriculum Support Teachers worked together</li> <li>7. Planning in Levels across the schools</li> <li>8. Consistency of Teacher Judgment Day (Moderation)</li> </ol>
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Collaboration between the staff impacted positively on the students (see Table 5.3). The students were involved in combined cultural and sporting days and the After School Care (Vacation Care) program rotated among the three schools. The younger students participated in a combined disco and a joint Under Eights Day. The older students also experienced a combined Year 7 Disco, as well as a Year 6/7 Annual Dance. The Year 7s from two schools attended an annual Sydney/Canberra camp together and the Year 7s from two schools combined for some classes. The Year 7s also attended Japanese lessons at one school and the students combined for a transition to secondary school program, which was planned collaboratively.

**Table 5.3 Combined Student Activities**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parish-based Sacramental Program, including combined Day of Reflection</li> <li>2. Schools combined for some classes e.g. Japanese</li> <li>3. Combined cultural, sporting and woodwork days</li> <li>4. Transition Program to prepare the students for Secondary School</li> <li>5. Combined Sydney/Canberra trip</li> <li>6. ASC (vacation care) rotated between the three schools</li> <li>7. Combined discos</li> </ol>
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The principals were passionate about making a positive difference in the lives of the people in their school communities. Principal 1 highlighted an issue that will be critical to the ultimate sustainability of their partnership. The partnership must ultimately benefit the children – ‘the reason we all exist’.

Principal 1 spoke of the benefits to the students:

The children are benefiting from the success and that’s the reason we all exist – it’s for the children, that’s our core business. If the kids at the end of the day are benefiting, then I would see we have been successful. Transition Day is an example.

The schools developed some common policies. The initial policy development addressed urgent matters, such as developing a unified approach to enrolments and school fees. The Enrolment Policy was the first to be developed, to ensure parents enrolled their children in the correct school and to avoid competition for enrolments across the three schools. There was also a common School Fee and Levy Policy. The three principals presented policies to the Parish Pastoral Board and school budgets were ratified by the Parish Finance Council.

The Parents and Friends Executives from the three schools also met together and the parish priest and principals hosted an annual dinner for the combined Parents and Friends Executive.

There was some sharing of resources, including the students’ use of a woodwork shop which was organised by the parish priest.

There was a strong desire amongst the participants to establish one combined School Council for the three schools. Following some initial apprehension from the local Catholic Education Office, the combined School Council was formed. The resolution of this issue was important for the group and may have helped the participants form a stronger bond.

The successful implementation of these activities was critical to the success of the partnership. These activities were tangible signs of the partnership at work. They were the ‘results’ of the partnership. Katzenbach & Smith’s (2003) research into effective partnerships highlighted that a results-driven culture was an important characteristic of a successful partnership. In the current research, the partners needed to see value for their effort and these tangible results were critical to the success of the partnership. It was important for the schools

to have some early successes. Following the formation of the partnership, those in the community would have expected changes. It was important for the leaders to get some early 'runs on the board', to set the direction for their future. The choice of activities initiated was important. The leadership group was involved in much prior discussion, however, the activities initiated would send the strongest messages to the school and parish communities about the vision for the partnership and the priorities of the leaders.

The participants spoke positively about the implementation of these activities. This indicated that the leaders believed the activities were successful. It does not appear, however, that any structured, formal evaluation, seeking input from all stakeholders, was undertaken. Kerr et al., (2003) examined the core attributes of effective networks. Monitoring and evaluating were identified as important. Processes such as reflection and inquiry are crucial within networks. Formal processes for monitoring and evaluating did not appear to have been undertaken by the leadership group at this stage. This was understandable. The partnership was still forming and the leadership group was initiating many high priority activities. It will be critical, however, in due time, for the leadership group to introduce processes for reflection and inquiry to ensure that this results-driven culture is maintained.

There was a belief among the principals that the schools were being seen as 'leading schools' within the Brisbane Archdiocese. Principal 3 reflected on a recent Principals' Cluster Meeting. New ideas were being presented and she noted that:

... a number of things that they brought up we had already gone through. The three of us, as the Jay, kept on coming in and saying we've done that, we're doing that, we're part of that, to the extent that they got sick of us saying we've done that and we're doing that.

These comments are reflected in a further characteristic of effective partnerships as described by Katzenbach & Smith (2003). Effective partnerships have external support and recognition. The emphasis on the schools being seen as 'leading schools' was highlighted by only one principal, however, it is reasonable to imagine, that the other two principals would also value the external recognition. The partnership was externally recognised by the local Catholic Education Office (CEO). The area supervisor supported the partnered schools as the CEO sought to introduce a new concept to the Catholic system – one School Council for three schools. The parish priest also played a role in providing external recognition for the

principals. While he was a member of the leadership group, he was also the employer of the principals. His continued support from within and from outside the group was critical.

Good communication was a key feature of the partnership. Regular early morning meetings on Thursdays were regarded by the participants as critical. The agenda for these meetings included policy development and the development of ideas for forthcoming events. All participants commented positively on the value and importance of these meetings. For example, Principal 3 believed that:

... just being able to sit and talk about things and some of the things that are happening at each of the schools. We are either informing each other of things that are going on or Fr. P would say all right if I do this, that may help alleviate that.

Principal 1 stated:

I think the fact that we meet with Fr. P each Thursday, that obviously is a big thing and his nature is very bubbly and energetic. You have got three principals who are all on board and believe in it.

Good communication will be important for the continued success of a partnership. This is well supported in the literature. For example, Katzenbach & Smith (2003) emphasised the need for successful teams to establish a collaborative climate and Kerr et al., (2003) identified good communication as a core attribute of effective networks. Structures are required to ensure regular opportunities for communication. Moss Kanter (1994) highlighted the importance of institutionalisation in the operation of a partnership, that is, the relationship needs to develop structures which lead to the development of clear lines of communication within and beyond the leadership group. Regular opportunities to discuss a range of issues addressing short term and long term goals will continue to be important for the sustainability of the partnership.

The literature highlighted that one of the powerful capacities of partnerships is that they can bring together disparate people and ideas. This diversity and dynamism should be encouraged (Kerr et al., 2003). In the case study, the participants displayed individual excellence and strength of character. This combination of characteristics in team members has the potential to be divisive. This was not the case here. All the participants commented that there was no conflict in the group, only the occasional disagreement. The participants displayed high levels of co-operation and respect. Differences of opinion appear to have been

listened to and respected. All the participants emphasised that there was no conflict in the leadership group.

Despite all the positives, there were also some difficulties and challenges with the partnership. The parish priest and one principal commented on the heavy workload associated with the formation of the parish. The parish priest also spoke of the 'juggernaut ride' accompanying the introduction of many changes. One principal commented on some difficulty in maintaining the enthusiasm of staff for the partnership and transporting students between the schools. Activities worked well when parents provided transport. These were relatively minor difficulties which could be expected with the introduction of any major initiative.

Clearly this partnership was successful and it provided leadership benefits for the principals. All participants spoke with enthusiasm about their involvement. The partnership provided support for the schools and their leaders. It was characterised by good communication, a high level of trust and openness to new ideas. This led to the development of a number of combined activities including the sharing of staff and resources and the development of common policies. The participants valued the mutual support within the group and they expressed a desire for the schools to maintain their own identity under the umbrella of the new parish structure. They also emphasised the importance of a common vision and strong commitment. The question may well be asked as to the role of the leaders in developing this partnership.

### **5.3.2 How did the school leaders involved lead the development of the partnership?**

The introduction of an initiative such as a school partnership has the potential to be problematic. Competing agendas, power plays, lack of enthusiasm, loss of identity, past histories and a lack of understanding of the purpose of the partnership may need to be addressed. Strong, visionary leadership is required. This type of leadership is essential to ensure a partnership continues to develop. Without this type of leadership, a partnership may well flounder. Leaders need to maintain the vision and to drive the partnership, particularly in the early days (Hill, 2007).

A partnership is more likely to be sustained when those who are directly affected by it can sense that there are benefits for the costs involved. These benefits may take time to become apparent. Leaders need to support each other particularly in those early days and to

maintain their focus on driving the partnership forward when others cannot see the long-term benefits. This requires strong, visionary leadership.

In the case study, such leadership was provided particularly by the parish priest. He stated, 'I have been the instigator, because as parish priest you are in a leadership role and leadership means leading.'

The parish priest was a confident, strong leader. It was refreshing to hear him state simply, 'leadership means leading.' He was showing the self-confidence which proved to be characteristic of the strong leadership provided by the leadership group. He demonstrated this strong leadership throughout the interviews. For example, he stated:

I want it (the partnership) to work.

I am fulfilling my role as pastor.

I know what's going on.

I think it is a common sense way of working.

I lead by example.

I am not a good delegator.

I will try to finance things.

These comments reinforce the notion of the parish priest as a strong, passionate, strategic leader. Importantly, however, he also related well. He was able to bring others along on the journey with him. He saw the need for strong leadership and he communicated this to the principals.

The principals were aware of this need for strong leadership, particularly in the early days of the partnership. They had taken the decision that this type of leadership was required. As Principal 1 stated, 'it's definitely "top down" at the moment. The three of us believe in this approach and we are committed to it.'

The three principals also demonstrated self-confidence and self-awareness. They had the language to articulate their own leadership strengths and those of others. All participants used descriptors such as 'relational' and 'strategic' when discussing leadership styles. These

terms are from the Brisbane Catholic Education Office Leadership Framework. This common language was a likely unifying factor for the leaders which had the potential to further contribute to their individual and collective confidence. The importance of this self-knowledge to the success of a partnership was highlighted in the literature by Whitehead & Whitehead (2000). They identified that partners should know their own ideas, their needs and feelings and be able to express these in ways to fit the situation. This requires a level of maturity in the participants as the starting point must be self-knowledge. The four participants demonstrated this maturity.

Earley et al., (2002) emphasised that outstanding school leaders develop a senior management or leadership team which is seen as strong and effective by the rest of the staff. This strength is demonstrated when leaders make decisions and follow them through in the face of challenges. The parish priest and principals in the case study combined to form a strong leadership group. The participants referred to issues which were able to be addressed because of the strength of the group. Issues such as addressing the competition for enrolments and the uncertainty of the role of one school's Parents and Friends Executive were highlighted. The parish priest commented that he was able to address any 'challenge' raised by parents because he was informed by the principals. This indicated the strong leadership emanating from the group. Strong leadership was required to set clear directions for the partnership.

Competing agendas from different groups within the school and parish was an issue during the formation of the new partnership. The parish priest referred to this issue when he described the formation stage of the partnership as a 'juggernaut ride' and he stated that he wanted the leadership to be strong in order to avoid 'power plays'. Strong, visionary leadership ensured that the partnership continued to develop through these challenges.

The parish priest was well supported in his leadership by the principals. Principal 3, in particular, was also a strong driver. She stated, for example, 'I decided that if we were going to have weekly meetings, why not make it a regular time that we were all going to get to without impinging on school time.' She added, 'And so the first new policy I wanted to do was an enrolment policy'. '... and they have all come over to what I put forward ...' (re school fees). She had support from the other principals. Principal 1, referring to this principal, said, 'She's leading edge, that girl!' Principal 3 played a critical role in the success of the leadership group. She related well to the parish priest and the other principals and she was



well respected. She provided a strong link between the parish priest and the principals. She was able to initiate her own ideas and develop those of others. It appeared that the other two principals appreciated the leadership role she played and their leadership styles were complementary.

The principals were appreciative of the parish priest. Principal 2 had reflected on his leadership style by describing him as:

... energetic, supportive. He always follows up on things. He is very faith based. He is a fair person. He always gets things done. He is compassionate and empathetic. He always makes himself available. He is creative in tackling hard issues and tasks. He is fun to have around. He is visionary. He is collegial. He is consultative and a great role model for the community.

She also stated, '... he is so passionate about what he does and he is just so supportive of the schools and the principals and I think he would be an extremely hard man to replace.'

This principal was able to appreciate the value of the parish priest's supportive leadership by reflecting on her past experience of an unsuccessful partnership:

I need to say there that none of this can happen without the support and leadership of Fr. P, our parish priest. I have worked in a parish school before this one where there were two schools in the parish. We tried very hard to do what we are doing here, and it failed because the parish priest really couldn't combine the schools. He sort of favoured one school over the other. We tried having principal meetings but he would just talk about the business of one school and forget the other school. So in the end it was a waste of time.

Principal 3 spoke of the mutual support between the parish priest and the principals in these terms:

... he does like to take care of us as principals as well and to make sure that we are not being overloaded with stuff. He will listen at any time. And the same I suppose from us. We need to take care of him as well to make sure that he is not overloaded as far as schools go.

These comments again highlight the strength of the relationships within the leadership group. The leaders demonstrated high levels of empathy and communication which are characteristic of mature relationships. This contributed to the strength of the leadership.

The principals and parish priest demonstrated a high degree of mutual respect, support and recognition. The parish priest stated:

... and just as much as I support the principals in their often thankless roles, with all the extra hours and extra pressures, I know that I have their support and that they will support any decisions that I have to make.

And:

Well the girls will put you straight pretty quickly. I'm very lucky that I've got three colleagues that are articulate, that are professional, but are not afraid to move forward either. And as I say, if they gang up I certainly know it!

I know they hold you in high respect Father. (Researcher)

Well that's a two way street too – there's no glory in being a school principal these days. It's a lot of hard work, a lot of extra hours, and a lot of silliness in dealing with parents and so on. I don't envy their jobs either.

The parish priest's empathy was a key factor in developing the collaborative climate which is characteristic of effective partnerships (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003).

The participants in the case study demonstrated excitement and passion for the partnership. They gave the impression that they were on an exciting journey and they cared about the partnership's success. This energy was characteristic of all the participants. The principals were passionate about their schools and the parish priest was passionate about his role as pastor. Principal 1 stated:

It is an exciting time for us all. Yes, like even doing this School's Council, that's very exciting! To be at the theory level and thrashing that around and what's our vision and how it can work and so that's definitely exciting for us all.

The parish priest also saw the schools as playing a major role in the mission of the Church:

... all this stuff that we are doing with schools is to make the mission of the church more workable in a practical sense. We have got these incredible tools of evangelisation and mission in our primary schools. OK. Let's make sure that we get the most out of them - that we support them as best we can - and give all the resources and encouragement they need to receive in order that they may perform at their best.

He was passionate about developing one parish and he believed the schools had a major role to play in the formation of the new parish. He stated, 'Well our schools are a major part of the mission of the parish. They're central to the life of our parish'.

He was well supported in this goal by the principals. Principal 3, for example, stated:

... and so, what we thought we would be stating that this is a part of a whole parish process that is happening at every level of the parish. Then we are going to look at historically how Jay came about and how the parish was formed in 2007.

As highlighted in the literature, a successful, sustainable partnership requires a clear, elevating goal (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003). A vision is required. This vision was shared by the participants and it impacted on all in the communities. This was commented on by the parish priest:

... fortunately we are blessed with three people with bigger visions than their own backyards. Once you have got that, the skies are the limit and if they see it as valuable then it trickles down and the teachers see it as valuable, the parents see it as valuable, and everyone sort of embraces that bigger vision rather than just thinking that it is just about what goes on in our playground.

The vision, in the early days of the partnership, was for the three schools to work together. The parish priest expressed his strong desire for the three schools to work together, stating:

If we made an investment in schools, let's make the investment to get them connected. So any time we can do anything together, we do it together.

What I am hoping it works towards is making life a little easier. I mean, it is all hard yard stuff at the moment. We've got three schools. That means that each week there are three school masses, and that means that the day before, the priest would visit the classes, connect with them and stuff like that. So it is all very labour intensive.

Clearly, the parish priest had a huge task and he was hoping that the workload would become more manageable if the schools combined. By these comments, he was expressing his desire for the partnership to address his major strategic objectives. This was identified as critical to the success of a partnership by Moss Kanter (1994): to be successful, a partnership needs to meet the major strategic objectives of the participants. The parish priest hoped the schools would work together and address his objectives of developing a successful, unified parish and making his workload manageable.

The principals also had a desire to work together. They wanted the partnership to work. Principal 1 said:

... because we share the one priest and the one area supervisor from Catholic Ed we wanted to establish a connection between the three schools so that we

could have a common sense of one parish. We genuinely believe we can cut our workload if we get common ground.

Principal 2 supported these comments stating, 'I've put my School Council on hold so I really want this to succeed'.

The participants wanted the partnership to work and to contribute to the achievement of their major strategic objectives. The schools' objectives, however, naturally related more specifically to the development of their educational goals. These goals were viewed in the context of the schools' role in developing the mission of the parish. Therefore, the parish priest and principals shared common objectives. This common vision of the parish priest and the principals, to develop the mission of the Church, provided a solid foundation for building the partnership. This is possible in all Catholic schools. Parish priests and principals of Catholic schools have the same calling – to build the Kingdom of God. This vision, this common, clear goal exists for all Catholic parish primary schools wishing to work in partnership.

Shared leadership was an important characteristic of the partnership. The parish priest expressed his desire to share leadership when he reflected:

So I've run with the ball, but it hasn't just been me – it has been a shared vision also with the principals that found themselves waking up into this reality called Jay and they decided as well, let's run with it. It has been shared – it hasn't just been me and everyone doing this because this is my little bandwagon at the moment and just run with it.

He further added:

Part of the problem with this model is that it works because I want it to work and the three principals want it to work. If you get the wrong personalities or a wrong vision or a different vision, it won't work. So part of the problem with this model at the moment is that it is very much that the key players have got to want it to work. In a parish this size I think it is a common sense way of working. But someone else might come along and have a different way of looking at it.

Many of the features of effective shared leadership as highlighted in the literature were identifiable in the case study (Duignan, 2007). The leaders shared a vision. They all wanted the partnership to work. The principals and parish priest were united in their vision that the schools were seen as part of the parish. They all commented that they believed that

the three schools should maintain their individual identities but be seen as part of the greater parish. This was encapsulated in the mantra, 'Three unique schools, one parish'.

There was diverse participation in the leadership of the group. This is a feature of shared leadership. Each participant brought their own strengths to the group and their skills were complementary.

When leadership is shared, the leaders relate well and there is a high level of collaboration and trust (Dinham et al., 2006). This was evidenced in the participants' comments about each other as well as in the numerous combined activities which had been initiated. This also resulted in open conversations. Two principals commented on the benefits of being able to 'vent' during the early morning meetings with trusted colleagues. These conversations, held in private and in confidence, strengthened the group and further developed their trust in one another.

The interviews revealed the principals were highly motivated towards each others' success. The principals did not speak of 'my' school, rather of 'the' schools. All participants demonstrated joint responsibility for the leadership and the success of the partnership. The parish priest was involved in the schools and the principals wanted the schools to play a role in the development of the parish.

The four participants also communicated well. They all presented as intelligent and articulate leaders.

They also demonstrated their ability to live with ambiguity. They appeared to be strong, resilient leaders, working within the current educational climate which is characterised by competing tensions. The shared leadership of the partnership was supportive of the principals' ability to live with such ambiguity.

These characteristics of the partnership are also identified in the shared leadership literature. The literature highlights that leaders involved in shared leadership are required to be team players, good communicators and to be comfortable living with ambiguity. (Ingvarson et al., 2006)

The leadership group focused their attention within the schools as well as more broadly. The parish priest reflected on the future of the schools in the Brisbane Archdiocese. He commented:

We have an issue with the retention of our boys. We are looking at what does the future picture of our primary schools look like in this part of Brisbane, considering all the private schools.

He was naturally concerned for the future of the three schools in the parish. The private schools were taking enrolments away from the parish schools, particularly boys from the senior primary grades. He was aware that this was an issue beyond his own parish and so he was expressing a concern for schools in this part of Brisbane. The literature highlights 'big picture vision' as an important trait of the effective leader.

The parish priest was also a strategic leader who looked for efficiencies. This was recognised by the principals. Principal 1, for example, reflected:

I would say he is relational but he is also strategic – they would be two words that come to mind in thinking about our own framework. They are ones that I can see. Apart from, obviously, he is religious and he is organisational but the two strongest characteristics would be he is strategic and he is relational.

He believed that the three schools could work 'smarter' by working together. He had a mandate to make the new parish work and he commented, 'This is a necessity for all of us'. The three principals also spoke of 'working smarter' and 'adding value'.

An interesting question arises from reflection on the literature: Is leadership about achieving objectives, or is it to serve and meet the needs of others? Greenleaf (1996) named the goal of meeting the needs of others as 'Servant Leadership'. The focus of servant leadership is on the needs of others, rather than upon the self. Self-interest does not motivate servant leadership; rather, leadership should ascend to a higher plane of motivation. Servant leaders require vision and they gain credibility and trust from their followers as they influence others. Greenleaf claimed that this requires the leaders to develop strong relationships within and beyond the organisation. Servant leaders develop people, helping them to strive and flourish. While the participants in this research highlighted the importance of achieving their own objectives, these objectives were chosen because the leaders were seeking to meet the needs of their communities.

The parish priest had a strong involvement in the schools. He visited classes prior to Masses and Liturgies and he travelled to Canberra from Brisbane to meet the Year 7's during their annual Sydney/Canberra trip. The principals were keen to emphasise that this involvement, however, was not intrusive, rather, it was welcomed.

The parish priest described his leadership as 'hands on' and he believed that he led by example:

I lead by example, so I don't just sit back and wait, like, if tables and chairs have to be moved, I'll get in there and help move them. So it is a very practical 'hands-on' leadership.

He was concerned, however, that people would leave tasks to him rather than taking them on themselves. 'The drawback is that nature abhors a vacuum, so everyone says "we won't do it because Fr. P will do it".'

The principals appreciated his approach. Principal 3 emphasised, '... while he likes to keep his finger in the pie, he is not intrusive at all'.

Articulating and promoting the vision are important activities for effective leaders (Earley, 2002). The principals promoted and articulated the concept of the combined parish whenever possible. Parent information nights, the school newsletter, staff meetings and the parent handbook provided opportunities to reinforce the vision. Principal 2 stated:

For me in fostering, it is putting Jay at the forefront of most things. We just recently had a night for all the new Prep parents for next year, so I talked about being part of the Jay Parish and that we are one of three schools of the Jay Parish. We have information available at the front office for parents about the Mass times and everything at the different Jay churches. At St. J's our Year 6 and 7s have Jay leadership groups and these have worked really well.

And Principal 1 commented:

At times, I speak in the context of Jay. So there is that accountability, there is that credibility, that when I am writing about a particular policy, it could be a Cath. Ed. or a curriculum, to say it, in the context of Jay or the Jay curriculum.

Earley et al. (2002) also emphasised two other activities of effective leaders which were demonstrated by the participants. He claimed that outstanding leaders must be problem-solvers and must develop strong, senior leadership teams. The participants in the case study

demonstrated their ability to solve problems by resolving a number of important issues. These included developing unified policies and processes, sharing staff and resources and combining some classes. These activities were initiated by the four participants, however, they were able to be implemented because the principals had established strong and effective leadership teams in their own schools.

The formation of a combined School Council was an important issue in the development of the partnership. This presented some challenges, due to the initial resistance from the local Catholic Education Office. Overcoming these challenges was a unifying experience for the members of the leadership group.

The formation of this Council also provided the opportunity for the leaders to re-affirm their vision. The principals nominated the representatives on the inaugural council. Parent and staff representatives were required to have a strong connection and a commitment to the parish. Principal 3 stated, 'Each member must have a strong connection to the parish and show a commitment to the vision and mission of the school in their daily actions.' This requirement reinforced the vision of, 'Three unique schools, one parish'.

The partnership developed, therefore, because of the strong leadership of the group. The four members were strong leaders individually and they decided that 'top down' leadership would most effectively drive the partnership during the formation stage.

The parish priest believed the schools could play a key role in the formation of the new parish and he was well supported by the principals. The four members of the leadership team developed good relationships. They were keen to work together and they wanted their schools to do the same. The participants had complementary skills and they were strategic and outward looking in their approach. They articulated the vision of one parish and they initiated activities to build connections between their school communities. Many of the characteristics of the leadership team have been identified in the reviewed literature. The characteristics of the team are summarised below and cross referenced with the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 (see Table 5.4).



**Table 5.4 Characteristics of the Leadership Team with Links to Selected Literature**

<b>Characteristics of Leadership Team</b>	<b>Katzenbach &amp; Smith (2003)</b>	<b>Moss Kanter (1994)</b>	<b>Kerr, Aiston, White, Holland &amp; Grayson (2003)</b>
Clear, shared goals	A clear, elevating goal	Importance. The relationship fits major strategic objectives of the partners	
Strategic leadership  Tangible results	A results-driven structure	Institutionalisation. The relationship is given a formal status with clear responsibilities and decision-making processes	Structural Balance – network processes and structures need to be balanced. Too heavy a structure can drain initiative, too light a structure creates confusion
Desire for the schools to maintain own identities  Competent members.	Competent members	Individual excellence. All partners are strong and have something to contribute to the relationship	Diversity and Dynamism need to be encouraged – one of the powerful capacities of networks is that they can bring together disparate people and ideas
Shared leadership  Complementary skills  Diversity of opinions	Unified commitment	Interdependence. The partners have complementary assets and skills	High levels of trust and strong relationships
Outward looking  Mutual support  Strong relationships  Deep collaboration	A collaborative climate	Integration. The partners build broad connections between many people at many organisational levels	Decentralisation and Democracy need to be fostered – decentralisation allows participants to address local interests while still operating within a collaborative environment
	Standards of excellence		Monitoring and Evaluation – processes such as reflection and inquiry are crucial within networks

**Table 5.4 Characteristics of the Leadership Team with Links to Selected Literature (continued)**

<b>Characteristics of Leadership Team</b>	<b>Katzenbach &amp; Smith (2003)</b>	<b>Moss Kanter (1994)</b>	<b>Kerr, Aiston, White, Holland &amp; Grayson (2003)</b>
A supportive environment	External support and recognition	Investment. The partners show tangible signs of long-term commitment by devoting resources to the relationship	Sufficient Time and Resources need to be allocated
Strong leadership Passionate leadership	Principled leadership	Integrity. The partners behave towards each other in ways that enhance mutual trust	Strong Co-ordination, Facilitation and Leadership
	Information. Partners share information required to make the relationship work	Good Communication	

The partnership documented in this research achieved positive outcomes for students, staff and parents in the school communities. This research, however, was particularly focused on whether there were leadership outcomes from the partnership. These will now be examined.

### **5.3.3 To what extent do leadership outcomes result when Catholic Parish Primary Schools work in partnership?**

Developing and sustaining a partnership requires effort. If this effort does not result in some positive outcomes, the partnership is unlikely to be sustained. The case study partnership achieved some early, positive outcomes. These included enriching the curriculum through combined activities and addressing the issue of parents seeking to enrol their children in a school which they perceived to be better than their local one. It is possible that principals would be willing to be involved in a partnership if these types of outcomes were the only ones achieved. The principals in this partnership, however, also experienced a number of outcomes which enhanced their leadership.

The four participants spoke of the support they received from the leadership group. They appreciated the ‘wisdom’ of their colleagues and they enjoyed the opportunities to discuss relevant issues. All principals commented on the wisdom shared in the leadership

group. Principal 1 stated, '[the other two principals] are both experienced and their wisdom has definitely supported me often with things'.

Principal 2 added:

... and also the sharing of wisdom. I know for me the benefit has been that you have the other two principals to share ideas with and you look at their practices and discuss them and it helps. For me it helps enhance my practices as well.

Principal 3 reflected:

I suppose I've come in as the experienced principal and I've seen what happens at other places. The other principal of St. F's was new and so I was her mentor. The principal of St. J's is a few years behind me. They are very eager to do things, but I tended to be the one they looked to. Fr. P was very good as well and so he'd tell me what he would like to happen and then I'd come in and suggest – well it could be done this way.

The participants' definition of wisdom was not explored, however, there appeared to be two levels of understanding. The first level was viewing shared wisdom as sharing best practice. This appeared to be occurring and it was obviously appreciated by the principals. The parish priest, however, as would be expected, did not mention the sharing of best practice. The second level of their understanding of shared wisdom was referred to, by Principal 3, when she stated that the leaders discussed, '... what is the right thing to do and how do we know it is the right thing to do.' The importance of ethical, authentic or moral leadership was highlighted in the literature. Richmon (2003) identified the essential role of moral judgment in effective leadership. Duignan (2002) wrote of authentic leadership and Branson (2010) suggested that leaders today, more than ever before, are called to show the virtues of doing good, honouring others, taking positive stands and behaving in ways that clearly show that their own self-interests are not the driving force behind their leadership. It appeared that one outcome of the partnership for the leaders was that they were able to discuss, reflect on and further develop this type of wisdom which is characteristic of ethical leadership.

The principals appreciated the regular opportunity to sit and talk with the parish priest and each other during their early morning meetings. Principal 2 commented:

(Principal 1) ... gets the coffee and brings it in. We have a lot of laughs as well. If there's something that is bothering you, it is good to have someone to

talk to. I appreciate the collegiality and to be able to dump on someone else. Sometimes it is a little bit isolated when you're in a school and there is no one that you can talk to about some things. So having other principals who understand, helps when you can sit down and chat about it. Sometimes we have an agenda for these meetings. Sometimes it just evolves.

While these meetings were seen as important occasions for the sharing of information and providing support, the principals also appreciated the chance to share their frustrations, in confidence, with colleagues in whom they trusted. Principal 3 reflected, 'If you have had a bad week you can just vent there! We have a high level of trust because you can't vent in a lot of places'.

Another positive outcome was that the participants appeared to enjoy each other's company. The reference to the importance of good coffee and having laughs indicated this. While the commitment to regular early meetings at 7:30 a.m. could be seen as a burden, this was not hinted at by any of the participants, rather, they spoke of the meetings enthusiastically. The timing of these meetings could be important. The fact that the meetings were scheduled at the beginning of the day meant that they were less likely to be interrupted or postponed. People tend to be 'fresher' at the beginning of the day and matters raised could be followed up during the day.

Principal 2 commented that the leadership group gave her more confidence when faced with difficult decisions. She believed that decisions emanating from the leadership group had more 'weight' than decisions she made on her own. She spoke of the 'richer' decisions achieved through group discussions which gave her more confidence to make and implement decisions at her own school:

It gives me personally, more confidence in my decisions at my school level. It's another base for decision-making, you feel like you're not alone, that there are other shoulders to lean on and to discuss problems or to discuss ideas and so it is very supportive. It gives you that confidence in your leadership yourself.

She added:

I think, because I can say it's been discussed with Fr. P, and we've discussed it with the other principals, it gives you more weight for the decisions that you are making. You can say, 'It is a decision of the Jay schools' not just something, like 'I think this is a good idea, and I think we should do this'.

Principal 1 also spoke of the increased credibility associated with the leadership group:

At times, I speak in the context of Jay. So there is that credibility, that when I am writing about a particular policy, I say it, in the context of Jay or the Jay curriculum. So it probably gives it a bit more transparency, credibility, accountability and supports the leadership of the school.

Principal 2 stated that she appreciated the collegiality and solidarity from the principals working together. She claimed that it enhanced her practices, 'I know for me the benefit has been that you have the other two principals to share ideas and you look at the practices and discuss them and it helps. For me, it helps enhance my practice.' Principal 1 also stated, 'I really value the networking. You know that you can ring up and have a chat if you need to'.

The parish priest also commented positively on the leadership outcomes of the partnership. He valued the support of the group which helped to give him the sense of satisfaction that he was fulfilling his role as pastor:

The partnership has just continued to grow in a positive spirit. The issues that have concerned us have been dealt with in a positive atmosphere. So it is a continuing thing of trust and co-operation, which adds to the sense of satisfaction, both professionally and personally. It is a lot of work but the results are there. So I am fulfilling my role as pastor. I don't know how I'd do that if I didn't have the co-operation and the goodwill of the three principals.

These comments highlight some of the benefits of working in an effective team. Egberts (2010) emphasised the importance of developing a team atmosphere which encourages constructive and respectful debate. Through sharing a diversity of opinions in an atmosphere of trust and respect, an effective team may make 'richer' decisions which can give principals added confidence during the implementation phase. This occurred in the case-study.

The partnership achieved positive leadership outcomes for others in the community. Principal 1 commented on the influence of the group on other school leaders. She highlighted that it had been helpful for the other leaders in her school to experience different leadership styles, 'We have learnt from each other and they see different models of leadership at the other schools, and so they recognise what works for us'.

One of the principals spoke of the impact of a dinner for the leaders and the Parents and Friends Executive. The parish priest and principals invited the executives of the three Parents and Friends to a combined dinner. The role of the Parents and Friends Associations was discussed. She stated that the dinner helped to clarify this role for her new parent members and that this was a ‘huge success for me as principal’.

These comments highlight the transformational leadership resulting from the partnership. The participants, and some of the other school leaders, appear to have been enriched by the partnership. Transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers engage with each other in ways which raise one another to higher levels of performance, thus, having a transforming effect on both. The case study can be seen as an example of transformational leadership, ‘... tapping the depths of human potential and producing levels of performance that are beyond expectations’ (Hart, 2000, p.122).

The partnership was, therefore, regarded as being valuable and successful by all the participants. All participants were able to identify positive leadership outcomes resulting from their involvement. These outcomes are summarised in Table 5.5 and linked with the selected literature.

**Table 5.5 Leadership Outcomes linked with Selected Literature Reviewed in Chapter 3**

<b>Outcomes for Leaders Arising from the Process of Leading the Partnership</b>	<b>Supporting Themes in the Literature</b>
Shared wisdom	Building knowledge (Hill, 2007)
Support from trusted colleagues	Reduced professional isolation (Sliwka, 2003)
Increased collegiality and solidarity	Enhanced morale and improved performance from collegiality (Rallis & Golding, 2000)
Enhanced decision-making	Adding capacity (Hill, 2007)
Increased confidence when implementing decisions	Enhanced practice (NIACE, 2007)
Transformational leadership	The total is more than the sum of the parts (DCSFS, 2010)
Greater satisfaction	Enhanced morale (Toole & Louis, 2002)

The participants valued their involvement in the partnership because of the support provided. They appreciated the shared wisdom, the learning, the collegiality and the solidarity. The leadership team was clearly an effective one with positive leadership outcomes for the members. I then sought to discover whether these benefits extended to support for the leaders in their roles as leaders of faith.

#### **5.3.4 How did the partnership support the principals in their role as faith leaders?**

In order to gain a common understanding of the principals' perceptions of faith leadership, the principals were asked to describe this role. They all identified the importance of faith leaders being role models, that is, 'My leadership must give authentic witness to the heart of Gospel values' (Principal 1), '... to be ones who give witness to the beliefs and values of the Catholic tradition' (Principal 2) and '... to lead by example' (Principal 3). Two principals also stated that the role required them to 'share personal faith experiences' (Principals 2 and 3) and to 'nurture the Religious life of the school' (Principals 1 and 3). Principal 2 understood her role to include ensuring 'that the Catholic vision is embodied in the school's goals, policies, programs, structures and operations.' This was echoed by Principal 3 who emphasised the importance of ensuring 'connections are made to all aspects of the religious dimension especially through newsletters, assemblies and parent meetings'. Staff faith formation was also highlighted by Principal 3 as well as the importance of 'nurturing the spirituality of staff '. Principal 2 recognised this, when she also emphasised that faith leaders are required to develop 'opportunities for the faith formation of individuals'.

All the principals believed the partnership supported them in their role as faith leaders. They highlighted that their involvement in the leadership group supported them as they continually sought ways to 'work together to embody the Catholic vision within the school' (Principal 3). Principal 1 spoke of sharing 'common goals which have Christ at the centre' and Principal 2 valued the 'many opportunities to discuss ways of embedding the Catholic faith into our schools'.

The value of planning faith-based activities together was also highlighted by two principals. Joint planning for professional learning, liturgies and Sacramental Programs was highlighted by both Principals 2 and 3. Principal 2 also highlighted two areas of support which were important to her, that is, having 'multiple opportunities for dialogue about our faith' and helping her 'develop and promote an Archdiocesan perspective'.

Principal 3 also highlighted her positive feelings regarding the introduction of a new religious practice in the three schools. She felt the support from, ‘Coming together as individual schools at noon for the Angelus and yet knowing that across the three schools we are all doing the same thing at the same time – it is a lovely, connective feeling’.

The attitude of the three principals to the support they experienced as faith leaders can be summed up by the following comment from Principal 2. She stated that, due to her involvement in the leadership team, she, ‘did not feel alone in my faith and religious leadership role, as Fr. P and the other principals were so supportive’. These comments, therefore, clarified that the leadership benefits experienced by the participants supported them in their role as leaders of faith.

This research explored the qualities of the relationship created amongst the three schools and the parish as experienced by the research participants. This exploration led to the emergence of four themes.

## **5.4 Leading Successful Partnerships: Emerging Themes**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

The partnership was unique in several ways. Due to unusual circumstances, a newly appointed parish priest employed three principals to three schools in a newly formed parish. This created a ‘level playing field’ which set the scene for the development of a dynamic partnership.

All participants were enthusiastic about their involvement. They believed that the partnership provided support for their schools and for themselves. During the data analysis consistent characteristics of the partnership emerged. The participants related well, they experienced high levels of trust and respect and they communicated well. The leadership was shared, the participants were strategic and they had complementary skills. The participants believed that the partnership supported their leadership. They highlighted collegiality, solidarity and wisdom as benefits. They valued the mutual support. They emphasised the importance of top-down leadership during the formation to assist the efficiency and effectiveness of the change and the importance of each school maintaining its own identity.



Four distinct themes emerged during the data analysis – clear vision, deep collaboration, strong leadership and collegial support. These will now be discussed.

#### **5.4.2 Clear vision**

The purpose of the partnership was clear to the principals and to the parish priest. While the vision developed over time, it was always clear. In the early days, the formation of the new parish created an urgency and focus on the development of the partnership. In the words of the parish priest, ‘Sometimes it’s like a front-row-forward: you’ve just got to get the ball and up you go!’ The three schools quickly found themselves in the reality of one parish. The principals and parish priest wanted the partnership to work. The purpose, at this early stage, was to establish the partnership.

Once the partnership had begun, there did not appear to be confusion over the long-term purpose of the schools. The parish priest believed the schools were important forums for evangelisation and he was a dynamic leader. The principals were supportive of his vision. I believe this shared vision is possible for all Catholic schools. While it often lies dormant, the reality is that Catholic schools and the Catholic Church share the common bond of faith in Jesus Christ. When this shared vision can be ignited, the Catholic Church and its schools can come alive. This appeared to be the case in this partnership. There was a clear, uplifting vision which was shared by the four research participants who formed the leadership team. The research highlighted that successful teams have a clear understanding of their objectives and elevating goals challenge the team to continuous improvement (Katzenbach and Smith, 2003). This clear, shared vision helped shape the partnership.

The parish priest was passionate about his role as pastor of the newly formed parish. He saw Catholic schools as being a major part of the mission of the Church. He believed that a successful partnership between the schools would help to achieve that mission, that, in fact, ‘... we have got these incredible tools of evangelisation and mission in our primary schools. OK. Let’s make sure that we get the most out of them, that we support them as best we can.’

The participants also hoped for short-term practical benefits from their involvement. The parish priest sought to make his workload manageable, while the principals sought benefits from the economies of scale such as, improvements to the curriculum and professional development as well as sharing staff and resources.

There were, therefore, two elements to the clear vision. United by their faith, the leaders sought to further the Kingdom of God through making full use of the opportunities available through the newly formed partnership. The leaders also worked strategically to maximise the practical benefits of the schools working together.

The partnership continued to evolve. The parish priest spoke of the partnership building from 'the ground up'. As issues were addressed, plans implemented and relationships strengthened, the vision became clearer.

The importance of this cannot be over-emphasised. For sustainability, a partnership must be relevant and provide clear direction. All those involved must see their efforts as being worthwhile. If people believe the partnership is irrelevant they will not provide support. The partnership, therefore, must provide clear direction with which people can identify. Competing agendas can render such an arrangement ineffectual. A clear vision was critical to the implementation, development and sustainability of this partnership.

The development of the combined Schools Council was an important step in the implementation of the vision. As part of their desire to 'work smarter', the leaders were keen to establish a combined Schools Council, rather than three separate Boards. With support from the Catholic Education Office, this Council was eventually established and a core group was set up. This group was comprised of two parents, two staff members and the principal from each school. The process of documentation was begun and a statement was formulated outlining the aims, roles, tasks, responsibilities, religious character and accountability processes of this Council. To maintain the clear vision of the Council, the leaders initially selected members of the core group, each of whom was required to have a strong connection to the parish and a commitment to the vision and mission of the schools. It is important to note that outstanding leaders develop a culture of clear and high expectations (Earley et al., 2002). The requirement for Council members to have a strong parish connection sent a message to those chosen and to others in the school community, 'These schools are *parish* primary schools'. This was an important message which helped develop that culture of clear and high expectations.

The parish priest and principals in the case study demonstrated their belief in sharing leadership. By sharing the leadership with the Council members, the potential was created to enrich the vision through the involvement of others with complementary skills. The

involvement of the Council members also had the potential to build further ownership of the vision.

Maintaining a clear vision is critical to the sustainability of the partnership. A potential challenge to maintaining a clear vision will be presented when the leadership group begins to change. The participants were aware of the importance of succession planning in order to maintain the vision. They believed that the three principals should not leave at the same time and that a commitment to the partnership would be part of the selection criteria for a new principal. The principals hoped that, if the parish priest were to leave, the Archdiocese would replace him with a priest with a commitment to the partnership. They also believed that appropriate structures would need to be set up to assist in the maintenance of the vision.

Data analysis showed that the partnership was driven by a clear vision. It directed the efforts of the leaders during the formation stage and contributed to the further development of the partnership. The vision was able to be developed and shared due to the deep collaboration within and beyond the leadership group.

#### **5.4.3 Deep collaboration**

Another theme which emerged was that there was a trusting, collaborative climate. The research identified that successful teams foster a collaborative climate, characterised by trust, which allows open, direct and problem-centred discussion and decision-making (Hitchcock and Willard, 1995).

All participants stated that they related well. They commented that their relationships worked well due to the ‘personalities’ of the leaders. The meaning of this term was not explored. The trusting, collaborative climate which was created enabled the participants to share confidences. It also provided opportunities for the leaders to express their frustrations without need for a resolution. This was referred to as ‘venting’ by two principals and it was regarded as important.

The three principals highlighted collegiality and solidarity as benefits of the partnership. While the meaning of these terms was not explored, it is reasonable to assume that the terms refer to the level of support the participants experienced from their involvement. This high level of support achieved through deep collaboration within the group was an important outcome for all participants.

Two principals had a pre-existing relationship, having worked previously as principal and deputy principal (APRE) in the same school. There was, however, a clear desire to establish a high level of collaboration amongst all the partners. The regular meetings of the leaders and the bus trip helped to further develop these high levels of collaboration. The leaders stated that their relationship was characterised by trust, respect, co-operation and openness.

The leaders believed that deep collaboration within the group supported their own individual confidence as well as enabling the group to lead the partnership with confidence. Two principals commented that they believed the partnership enabled them to make better decisions, based on the input of the other leaders. The other principal also commented on the extra 'weight' she believed was associated with decisions emanating from the leadership team compared to her own decisions. This enhanced decision-making and implementation was a result of the deep collaboration within the leadership group and it is described in the literature as an outcome of effective teams.

While no conflict had been experienced between the parish priest and the three principals, there were, of course, some differences of opinion. However, it appeared these differences were able to be addressed readily, due to the strength of the relationships in the leadership group. This was to be expected. While the participants presented as confident, strong leaders, they were also committed to supporting the vision. They trusted and respected each other. The regular opportunities for communication and the good relationships amongst the members decreased the potential for misunderstandings and conflict.

The strength of character of the four participants enhanced their leadership. The literature speaks of the importance of team members possessing complementary skills. This emerged during the analysis of the data. Leaders spoke confidently of their own skills and of those of others. Terms such as 'relational' and 'strategic' were used readily to describe different leadership strengths. Participants were able to identify their own strengths and to show their appreciation for the strengths others brought to the team.

All participants identified deep collaboration as a quality of the partnership. This led to a range of positive outcomes for the parish priest as well as for all the principals. These outcomes contributed to the confidence of the leaders and enabled them to individually and collectively provide strong leadership.

#### **5.4.4 Strong leadership**

It emerged from the interviews that one of the main reasons the partnership was successful was because the parish priest was a strong leader. Being 'strong' refers to inner strength, self-confidence and the ability to maintain one's opinion during times of challenge. He believed he had a mandate to make the newly formed parish work and that is what he sought to do. He described himself as a 'hands-on' strategic leader. He saw a practical need before him, a challenge, which he obviously enjoyed. His task was clear – to make the new parish work.

He was ably assisted in this task by the principals. The four leaders shared a clear vision, they collaborated well and they provided the strong leadership needed to realise the vision.

The elements of the strong leadership within the partnership can be understood by cross-referencing some of the behaviours of effective leaders. The importance of developing a strong senior management team and developing a culture of clear and high expectations has already been highlighted. Other behaviours will now be explored.

Earley et al., (2002) concluded that outstanding leaders are problem-solvers and solution driven. The parish priest and one of the principals referred specifically to the strategic leadership of the group. The parish priest gave a clear insight into his own problem-solving approach when he said, 'I lead by example, so I don't just sit back and wait. Like if tables and chairs have to be moved, I'll get in there and help move them'.

The resolution of the combined School Council issue was another example of this approach. Initially, the local Catholic Education Office area supervisor was not supportive of the idea of one Council for three schools. The parish priest and principals, however, were not prepared to accept this and they persisted. A change of area supervisor, with a different opinion, saw the resolution of this problem. There were other examples of the leaders' problem-solving abilities including addressing the problem of uneven enrolments in the three schools, a shortage of resources and small class numbers affecting the viability of some school activities.

The major problem which needed to be addressed, however, was the heavy workload of the parish priest. This appeared to be the key driver for the formation and development of

the partnership. The parish priest was a practical leader. How was he to manage the huge task of leading one large parish which had previously been seven separate parishes? It was a problem which he was able to solve, in part, by requiring the schools to work in partnership. He believed that if the schools worked together, his workload would become more manageable.

His goal, however, was more than just managing the situation. He was passionate about his role as pastor and he believed that the schools working in partnership could provide rich opportunities for evangelisation. He led, not to achieve practical results per se, but to bring about the Kingdom of God. This was the 'solution' he was aiming to achieve and he was well supported by the principals.

Cotton (2003) identified that effective leaders were highly visible and accessible. The parish priest said that he celebrated three class Masses each week and he visited each class prior to the Mass. He also attended the annual Year 7 Camp in Sydney/Canberra. The relevance of being visible is that the leader is emphasising the importance of an activity by his/her presence. Leaders also place themselves in situations where they can readily relate to others. By making the commitment to regular Thursday meetings, the four leaders were giving witness to each other – they believed the success of the partnership was important. They were also placing themselves in a situation which facilitated regular communication and collaboration. They made this a priority.

Duignan & Gurr (2007) identified a strong support for learning, and a focus on the growth and development of themselves and others as behaviours of outstanding school leaders. The parish priest and principals spoke of the value of designing shared, professional development opportunities. They stated that the economies of scale assisted them to employ quality presenters. The parish priest also emphasised the importance of joint, on-going professional development. He stated:

On pupil-free days, if there are things we can do together, we will. There is a child-safety program that we have got to do, so we will do it together. Or I might get in someone to do something on spirituality.

The emphasis on professional development went beyond engaging professional development facilitators. The principals initiated a number of staff activities which provided professional development opportunities. These included activities such as the Moderation

Days. On these days, teachers from similar levels from the three schools would meet to assess and judge students' work for reporting purposes. This type of activity facilitates discussion and reflection which can enrich a teacher's professional practice.

There were also a number of opportunities for teachers to plan the curriculum together. This included the preparation and implementation of the Sacramental Programs. This networking, with its associated professional development, reflected the networking occurring within the leadership group. The four participants were involved in continuous professional learning through their involvement in the partnership. This professional growth was specifically recognised by them when they spoke of 'mentoring'. It would be reasonable to assume that each leader was being continually challenged through their involvement in the group. The parish priest and principals regularly sought solutions to problems which required them to reflect on issues relating to best practice. These discussions would lead to a sharing of ideas. Each participant would bring to the discussions their own learnings from outside the group which would enrich the professional growth of the others. The leaders' involvement in the leadership group, therefore, ensured they were involved in continuous professional development. This practice was extended by the leaders into staff groups which enabled staff members to also be involved in continuous professional development. This focus on developing a culture of continuous professional development was a further example of the strong leadership which characterised the partnership.

Data analysis demonstrated that the partnership had a clear vision and that it was characterised by deep collaboration and strong leadership. This contributed to its success, resulting in a high level of support for the leaders.

#### **5.4.5 Collegial support**

As already stated, the purpose of this research was to explore whether leadership benefits were created when Catholic Parish Primary Schools work in partnership. The study was undertaken because the researcher had personally experienced a variety of partnerships and believed a partnership between schools had the potential to support the leaders. The study of this particular partnership was begun because the researcher was seeking a successful school partnership to research. This particular partnership was chosen, as the site for the research, as it promised to expose important elements of a successful partnership. The recommendation came through a chance contact with one of the principals in the partnership

who believed it was successful. No objective criteria for measuring the success or otherwise were available. Rather, it was the belief of this principal that the partnership appeared to be successful and it had something to teach others. It was reasonable to presume that, within this belief, there were some benefits for this leader and others with whom she worked.

From the beginning of the data gathering stage it emerged that the partnership provided support for the leaders. This support included shared wisdom, support from trusted colleagues, enhanced decision-making, increased confidence, collegiality and solidarity, transformational leadership and an increased sense of satisfaction. These outcomes have already been described in Section 5.3.3, ‘To what extent do leadership outcomes result when Catholic Parish Primary Schools work in partnership?’ The outcomes will be further discussed in Chapter Six. Suffice to reiterate at this stage, that it emerged early on in the study that there were a number of outcomes which provided support for the leaders.

The principals also indicated that the partnership supported them in their roles as faith leaders. This could have been expected, as the very reason the partnership existed, was because they were leaders of faith schools. As has already been observed, the parish priest was a strong leader. He drove the partnership. His focus was on his role as pastor. He wanted the partnership to maximise the evangelisation possibilities in the schools. The ultimate focus of the leadership team, therefore, was on faith leadership. This was the unifying factor for the four leaders. Issues relating to such matters as enrolments and school fees were addressed in the context of maximising the evangelisation possibilities. It could be expected, therefore, that the three principals who were faith leaders, working with a dynamic priest, would have the faith leadership of their communities as their highest priority. This would be their unifying force. This common vision, to maximise the evangelisation possibilities, united the leaders and provided them with support in their roles as leaders of faith.

## **5.5 Summary**

All participants spoke with enthusiasm about the partnership. They were proud of its success. The partnership was successful due to the strength of the relationships amongst the members of the leadership group, the strong ‘top down’ leadership and the clear vision. Good communication, a high level of trust and openness to new ideas helped to develop the good relationships. The leaders were strong individually and they believed that ‘top down’



leadership was required during the formation of the partnership. The vision was always clear. While it evolved over time, it was continuously articulated to the community.

The participants identified a number of positive leadership outcomes from their involvement in the partnership. They chiefly spoke of the value of the shared wisdom, the support from trusted colleagues and the enhanced decision-making. It emerged that the total outcome of the partnership for the participants was greater than the sum of the parts.

Analysis of the data identified four themes. The partnership had a clear vision, it was characterised by deep collaboration and strong leadership and this led to the positive outcomes for the participants. Reflecting on the success of this partnership, I would like to propose some recommendations.

## **Chapter Six**

# **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This research was designed to study whether leadership benefits result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. Chapter Six outlines the conclusions and recommendations from the research. These are based on the four themes which emerged from the analysis of the data.

### **6.2 Purpose of the Research**

The problem underpinning this study was the increasing dissonance between the expectations being placed on principals and the limitation of the traditional model of one principal leading a school. The research explored whether leadership benefits result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. It was hypothesised that leadership, shared across a number of schools by principals in partnership, may provide support for school leaders. Underpinning the study were constructionist assumptions and a symbolic interactionist perspective.

### **6.3 Design of the Research**

The research methodology was case study. As the focus was on leadership, the participants were the senior and middle managers, that is, the parish priest and the three principals. Methods adopted included semi-structured interviews, participant reflection and textual and thematic analysis of the data.

### **6.4 Research Questions Answered**

Three specific questions were considered in order to explore the leadership outcomes of the partnership. The answers to these questions have already been explored in terms of the key concepts in the research literature. They are summarised here as a basis for further consideration of the implications of the findings.

*What was the nature of the emerging partnership?*

The partnership began in 2006 and it was unique. The parish priest drove the partnership in order to maximise its evangelisation potential and to help him manage the workload. The combined parish was newly formed, with a new parish priest and three principals. These people formed a strong leadership group. The leaders related well and they developed confidence which assisted their creativity. The four leaders expressed a common desire for the partnership to work and to add value. They initiated a number of combined staff activities and student activities. They also introduced some common policies and the schools shared resources. The leaders were determined to form one School Council and, despite some initial reluctance from the local Catholic Education Office consultant, this was achieved.

*How did the school leaders involved lead the development of the partnership?*

The parish priest and Principal 3 identified the leadership group's approach as 'top down'. They believed that strong leadership was required during the formation of the partnership. The good relationships amongst the four leaders assisted in the development of a common approach and of a shared vision leading to clear goals. The complementary skills of the four leaders assisted in the implementation of these goals. Two leaders identified themselves as 'strategic' and the other two stated that they were more 'relational' leaders. The leaders sought to develop an internal and external focus. They sought to develop collaboration within and beyond their individual schools as well as seeking external support. Above all, the four leaders were united by their passion for the partnership to succeed.

*To what extent do leadership outcomes result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership?*

It became evident that the partnership resulted in a number of positive outcomes for the leaders. They identified the benefits as shared wisdom, support from trusted colleagues, collegiality and solidarity, enhanced decision-making and improved confidence when implementing decisions. These benefits led to transformational leadership and an increased sense of satisfaction.

## **6.5 Conclusions**

The exploration of whether leadership benefits resulted from the partnership was at the heart of this research. The behaviours and meanings the participants attached to the concepts of the partnership and their leadership was explored. The methodology used was case-study. Following interviews, data were analysed, using the constant comparative method. The analysis of this data led to the emergence of four themes: there was a clear vision for the partnership; the partnership was characterised by deep collaboration – there was a high level of trust – the leaders exercised leadership strength during the development of the partnership – they demonstrated inner strength during times of challenge and all were firmly of the view that the partnership supported their leadership. These themes relate to the participants' perceptions of the characteristics of a successful partnership between Catholic parish primary schools. They are important, as they form the basis of the recommendations of this research. These four themes are now discussed further and summarised.

### **6.5.1 Clear vision**

The partnership was driven by a clear vision and this vision kept the parish priest and principals focused throughout the times of rapid change and challenge. The importance of a clear, shared, goal was reinforced by the literature. In 2007, in the UK, The Association of School College Leaders (ASCL) undertook a survey of one hundred and thirty partnerships to better understand the nature of partnerships. The survey identified the need for a clear focus and a defined purpose as being absolutely essential to the success of a partnership, 'The point that comes out strongly time and time again in the research, in the ASCL survey and in the case study visits is that the values, purpose and focus of a partnership have to be clear and agreed' (Hill, 2007, p.243).

This emphasis on maintaining a clear vision was enhanced by the use of two mantras. In the early stages of the partnership the mantra emerged as 'working smarter'. As noted, the parish priest and all the principals used this phrase. As the partnership developed, the mantra became 'Three unique schools, one parish' and again each participant individually made this comment. This was an important strategy as it helped the vision to be clear, easily remembered and articulated.

Hill's research (2007) also highlighted the importance of beginning with a narrow vision. He wrote, 'It may be that the initial focus of the partnership is quite narrow, but it is better to be realistic and succeed than to be over-ambitious and fall short.' (p.243).

The early vision was to establish the partnership. This was driven by the parish priest. He wanted the partnership to work. He believed the partnership created great potential for evangelisation and he believed it would assist him to manage his workload. He had a mandate to make the new parish work and he had a unique opportunity – he was able to choose the principals of the three schools in the newly formed parish. This assisted in the implementation of his vision. Once the partnership had begun, the goal became for the schools to work together. The parish priest and principals all commented individually that they were seeking to 'work smarter'. This goal, this vision, was shared by the participants and it drove the partnership at that stage.

The goal of 'working smarter' led to the introduction of the sharing of staff, activities and resources. This desire to maximise the economies of scale was sought due to the personalities of the four leaders. The parish priest and Principal 1 were strategic, problem-solvers. They were well supported by the other principals who described themselves as more relational. The strengths of the leaders, therefore, were complementary. As a group they sought to achieve their goals while maintaining a balance between focusing on the task and on the people. The parish priest, being the employer and strongest personality, ensured the partnership continued to move forward – the clear vision of working smarter was always being emphasised.

The next goal was to maximise the evangelisation opportunities presented by the partnership and to establish 'Three unique schools, one parish'. The two earlier goals were sub-sets of this broader vision. The three schools were united as they were all Catholic schools. The parish priest and principals were committed to their roles as faith leaders. As noted earlier in this research, many Catholic schools and Catholic principals struggle to understand the purpose of Catholic education. This uncertainty was not present in the case-study. The participants demonstrated that they believed they were on an exciting journey. The vision was clear.

A vision needs to be shared. The unique circumstances of four like-minded leaders beginning in a new partnership at approximately the same time assisted in this vision being shared. The four leaders all wanted the partnership to work.

The extent to which this vision can be further shared will be critical to the sustainability of the partnership. It can be seen that the vision was initiated by the parish priest and then shared by the principals. This group of four then sought to share the vision by involving others in the community, that is, staff, students and parents. This was achieved by initiating some relevant activities, articulating the vision, beginning documentation and the setting up of structures. The task ahead of the leadership group will be to ensure the vision is further shared.

The partnership, therefore, was driven by a clear vision. The initial goals were narrow, however, they were achievable and they were important early steps in the vision of establishing, 'Three unique schools, one parish'. The clear vision drove the partnership during the formation stage; however, for the sustainability of the partnership, the vision will need to be continually shared. This will require the leaders to maintain their focus on deep collaboration within and beyond the leadership group.

### **6.5.2 Deep collaboration**

The shared vision was a source of unification for the parish priest and principals. Their efforts were united for a common purpose. This encouraged the leaders to develop a deep level of collaboration. They had a solid base from which to work because they all respected and liked each other. The challenges associated with the formation and development of the partnership strengthened the relationships within the group which helped to foster deep collaboration. Overcoming obstacles, such as the resistance of the area supervisor to forming one School Council, served to strengthen the group and to facilitate further collaboration.

The parish priest commented on the importance of deep collaboration when he said, 'Schools and parishes need to work out what sort of relationship they want'. The four leaders had got the relationship 'right' in the leadership group. They collaborated well and, importantly, they desired to involve others in their collaboration. This was critical for the growth of the partnership. While leaders may enjoy a high level of collaboration, the

partnership will only grow and thrive if the vision is shared more broadly. This requires the leaders to continue to seek ways to involve staff, parents and students.

Lambert (1998) identified six skills that leaders need for successful collaboration:

1. the ability to develop shared purpose;
2. good communication;
3. the ability to adopt a constructivist approach to learning and to construct meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively;
4. the ability to facilitate group processes including structuring meetings and establishing an environment that is friendly, supportive, efficient and effective;
5. the ability to mediate conflict. (While conflict has not been highlighted in this case study so far, it is inevitable that tensions will arise within the group);
6. an understanding of how change and transition affect people. (p.26)

It will be important for the leaders to reflect on, and continue to develop these and similar skills.

It will also be important for the schools to continue to develop collaboration within and beyond their individual schools. West-Burnham, Farrar and Otero (2007) described the processes of bonding and bridging. They referred to bonding as the building of internal social capital; inward looking and exclusive, and bridging as building social networks and interdependency; outward looking and inclusive. They asserted that ‘effective communities combine the capacity to bond with the ability to bridge.’ (p.33) This will be a requirement for the sustainability of the partnership.

The high level of collaboration within the leadership group developed a confidence amongst the members. This led to the leaders being open to new ideas. The leaders were prepared to move the partnership forward – to tackle new challenges. This was directly commented on by the parish priest when he stated that the partnership was ‘evolving’. Interestingly, this attitude was directly identified in the literature. Hill (2007) commented:

Deep collaboration means being constantly prepared to move the partnership forward: to tackle new challenges. What was striking (about the research) was how many of the partnerships we visited saw themselves as being on a journey. In some cases they had just set off. Others were well down the partnership road. But whatever stage, they knew they had not arrived: they

recognised there was still more value and increased benefit to come from moving the collaboration up another gear. (p.250)

This desire 'to move the collaboration up another gear' emerged as a theme of the case-study.

The issue of 'venting' at the regular leadership team meetings was raised by two principals. Clearly, the meetings provide regular opportunities for the participants to seek support from trusted colleagues. The role of a principal can be a lonely one. As I was reflecting on the importance of venting with trusted colleagues, I thought back to the suicide of Barger. Jeff Barger was a primary school principal in Melbourne. In 2003 he committed suicide. Media reports detailed his overwhelming work load, the impact on his family and friends and his resultant depression. Perhaps regular opportunities such as these meetings may have made a difference.

Sustainability is the critical issue for the partnership and the depth of collaboration will be a key element. The partnership began well. The leaders related well and they sought to broaden the involvement of others. It will be important to continue this focus on seeking to develop high levels of collaboration. A danger will arise if the leaders do not maintain this focus. The danger is that others will not 'own' the vision and apathy may develop. Hill identified this danger when he stated, 'Collaboration can be killed by apathy as well as by outright opposition' (Hill, 2007, p.249).

To ensure the clear vision is maintained, a commitment to on-going communication and deep collaboration will be essential. This will require continued, strong leadership.

### **6.5.3 Strong leadership**

It would not be an overstatement to say that this partnership would not have existed without strong leadership particularly that of the parish priest. He was well supported by the three principals, but there is no doubt that he drove the partnership. He believed that Catholic parish primary schools are wonderful 'tools' for evangelisation. Faced with the reality of three schools in his newly formed parish, he wanted to maximise that evangelisation potential through the partnership. He was also a realist and he believed his workload would be more manageable if the schools worked together. He had the vision, the desire to share the vision and the required skills to bring that vision to fruition. He was in the ideal position to lead a successful partnership. The principals would have been unable to provide the same drive.



This researcher's experience illustrates this. I was principal of a Catholic parish primary school. The parish was amalgamated with the adjoining parish which also had a primary school. The other principal and I sought to create a partnership between the two schools. The parish priest was ambivalent about the concept and the partnership had minimal success. It is my belief that a partnership led by a dynamic priest with a clear vision and good leadership skills has the potential to succeed. When the partnership is supported by capable principals, who share this vision, this potential is enhanced.

The parish priest's skills and those of the principals have been discussed elsewhere in this research. They demonstrated many of the behaviours of outstanding leaders.

Another perspective on the leadership in the case study can be seen by referring to an ASCL (2007) survey. The survey identified several key elements of the leadership. The survey highlighted that the most effective leadership skills, essential in leading school partnerships, were: developing a shared purpose; communicating well; thinking strategically and being honest in relationships (Hill, 2007, p.257). The leaders in the case study demonstrated all these skills.

The need for strong leadership of a partnership was also identified by a review of The Every Child Matters (ECM) Project in the UK (NCSL, 2008). The ECM Review highlighted that effective leaders of a partnership provide strong direction and articulate a clear vision for the partnership (Key Message 3).

The case-study, therefore, reinforced the findings of other research in this area, namely that effective partnerships are characterised by a clear, shared vision, deep collaboration and strong leadership. It should be recognised, however, that Catholic parish primary schools are in an ideal position to create effective partnerships. The shared, faith-centred vision is part of their reason for existing; the imperative to collaborate flows from the Gospel call to live in relationship and the structure of a partnership in an amalgamated Catholic parish provides great potential. One leader, the parish priest, can work with two or more principals in an on-going relationship to bring a shared vision to fruition. While the overall vision will be common to the parish priest and principals, the schools and parish will also have separate and shared goals.

The clear, shared vision from a partnership between Catholic schools comes from their *raison d'être* – they are *Catholic* schools. Deep collaboration will result when Catholic

school communities live out the gospel call to live in relationship. An effective partnership, however, is not possible without strong leadership from the parish priest and principals. When this does occur, the potential is there for positive leadership outcomes and collegial support.

#### **6.5.4 Collegial support**

The partnership achieved positive outcomes for many members of the community. Initially the parish priest was driven to form the partnership to make his workload more manageable. His greater, and possibly stronger, ambition was for the partnership to maximise the evangelisation potential. The principals, as people of faith and leaders of faith, were supportive of the parish priest. Once the decision was made to form the partnership, the principals, with support from the parish priest, sought to maximise the educational advantages for their schools. Ultimately the principals' goal was for the partnership to benefit the children. As Principal 1 said, 'I can see there would be success when the children are benefiting from the success and that's the reason we all exist – it's for the children, that's our core business'. They sought to benefit the children by creating shared activities to broaden the educational opportunities. This included sharing resources and creating activities to enrich the professional practice of the staff.

The staff, students and parents benefited from the formation of the partnership. It is possible that, for the parish priest and the principals, these achievements alone would have provided sufficient reason for continuing the partnership. As noted earlier in this research, their leadership was characterised as 'servant leadership'. The leaders were seeking to benefit those whom they served.

Throughout the interviews the parish priest and principals readily spoke of the benefits of the partnership for the community. They spoke of the tangible results such as the joint Sacramental Program and sharing of staff and resources. Reference to leadership outcomes required further discussion. It was almost an unintended outcome. While it was not their primary motivation, it emerged that there were positive leadership outcomes for the parish priest and principals.

The over-arching benefit of the partnership for the leaders was referred to by them, as the 'sharing of wisdom'. All participants commented on the advantages of the shared wisdom of the group. The four participants presented as being high-functioning practitioners and they

placed a high priority on growth and professional development. While an element of the sharing of wisdom referred to the sharing of best practice, the sharing of wisdom also provided the four leaders with opportunities for growth through ‘moral and emotional’ support. This sharing of wisdom incorporated the benefits of gaining support from trusted colleagues. A leader’s role can be a lonely one. The four leaders valued the collegiality and solidarity available to them through their involvement in the partnership. They were fortunate to belong to a group of trusted colleagues who met regularly and provided good support. During my time as principal, I would talk with other principals about the value of networking and belonging to a cluster group. Most principals did not belong to a group and those who did, met infrequently. Weekly meetings, with trusted colleagues, to discuss relevant matters, have the potential to provide timely support to principals in times of frequent challenge and rapid change.

Another outcome of this sharing of wisdom was the enhanced decision-making and implementation of decisions. The sharing of wisdom provided the leaders with broader perspectives on their decisions. Trusted colleagues were in a position to challenge each others’ thinking as well as to provide further ideas. One principal commented that she felt more confident when implementing decisions when she could add weight to her decisions by emphasising they were decisions from ‘the leadership group’.

The parish priest was the only participant who commented that his involvement in the partnership led to an increased sense of satisfaction. He said, ‘The partnership has continued to grow in a positive spirit ... which adds to the sense of satisfaction in the job, professionally and personally’. While this was not referred to specifically by the principals, it is reasonable to assume that an increased sense of satisfaction would have been an outcome for all.

An examination of the data identified that the leaders’ involvement in the partnership was transformational. The total was more than the sum of the parts. Each participant brought their own skills to the group, however, because of the clear vision, deep collaboration and strong leadership, it is reasonable to assume that the group achieved more together than each principal could have achieved individually.

### **6.5.5 Summary**

The partnership, therefore, was a successful one, with positive outcomes for the parish priest and principals. A clear focus and a defined purpose were essential to this success. The

focus evolved over time. It can be succinctly understood as a change from a focus on ‘working smarter’ to developing ‘Three unique schools, one parish’. The leaders sought to develop wide support and ownership of the vision. This was achieved because they were collaborative leaders. The parish priest and principals communicated well and they provided strong direction. This helped to develop the partnership which enabled the parish priest and principals to share their wisdom.

The sustainability of the partnership will be the critical issue for the leaders. They will need to ensure the partnership continues to be driven by a clear vision and they will need to continue to collaborate widely. The leadership to date was ‘top-down’ and this will need to continue for some time. It is to be hoped that others in the community will share more fully in the leadership; however, until the partnership is regarded as being effective and worthwhile, this will be a challenge. The partnership began well. It provided positive outcomes for many and clearly illustrated the benefits of an effective partnership for the leaders.

## **6.6 Recommendations**

The recommendations which follow are offered for consideration. The researcher is mindful, however, of the limitations of this study. The case study was unique. Three newly appointed principals worked with a newly appointed parish priest in a newly formed parish. The parish priest was an outstanding leader and he was ably assisted by one of the principals in particular, who demonstrated strong, strategic leadership. As such, all recommendations should be treated with caution and other researchers and/or system authorities may need to use a larger sample to seek ways of confirming the conclusions and assessing the value of the recommendations.

### **6.6.1 Clear vision**

The literature search identified the importance of a clear vision for the development and sustainability of a partnership. The case study reinforced this finding. Catholic parish primary schools seeking to work in partnership have a unique opportunity to develop a clear vision. As they are faith schools, their reason for existing, their mission, is common. This vision, this drive, comes from the common evangelisation role of Catholic parish primary schools. A parish priest, whose schools are entering into partnership, has an opportunity to develop the partnership between the schools which may create rich evangelisation

possibilities. The principal of each school seeks to enrich the faith life of those in his/her community. Once the schools join together, under the umbrella of one parish, this common bond, which is shared by the whole parish, allows for the development of a common, clear vision which has the potential to unite the schools. This bond, of working together to enhance the evangelisation potential of the schools, may readily become the overarching vision, which unites the schools in a partnership. It is suggested, therefore, that leaders explore the implications of this shared, faith-centred vision and return to it frequently for reflection and direction.

This research seeks to make recommendations to schools that are considering, or have just launched into, a partnership. The early days of a partnership are a liminal time during which the past no longer applies and the future is unknown. Leaders have the freedom to create a new culture, with new rules, behaviours and attitudes. This culture will develop largely through the actions which are taken. Those in the community will be looking to see what, if any, changes will take place as a result of the formation of the partnership. It is important that some early, positive actions take place which will set the future direction of the partnership. Goals relating to achieving economies of scale and consistency across the schools are recommended. It is important that schools beginning a partnership consider sharing personnel and resources and developing shared opportunities for professional development. It is also suggested that schools consider bringing the staff, parents and children together in the early days of the partnership.

It is important that any such activity actually enhances the experiences of the participants. Gathering together for a ‘get to know you’ activity, for example, will only be valuable if the participants mix together in new groups.

It would be expected that members of separate communities, joining in partnership, would come to see themselves as belonging to one parish. The members of the parish could, therefore, reasonably expect some commonality across the schools. Some common school policies are necessary. Enrolments and schools fees are the most likely areas for early discussion. Enrolments are the key to the operation of a school. Enrolment numbers directly affect the resources available to a school. Partnered schools cannot compete with each other for enrolments. It is strongly suggested that schools develop common enrolment policies to ensure enrolments are equitable and a common approach to school fees is adopted.

This does not require all schools in a partnership to charge the same fees. Socio-economic differences between schools and differing priorities may require different charges. It is recommended, however, that common approaches be developed to address matters such as the structure of charges, for example, whether a fee is charged per family or per student, the timing of accounts and policies relating to the collection of late fees.

It is important to recognise that discussions about proposed changes in these areas will readily draw out the values and beliefs of those involved and therefore need to be managed carefully. Decisions relating to enrolments and school fees can impact on the very existence of a school. They are important matters. A decision to enrol only practising Catholics, for example, may have a critical effect on the operation or viability of a school. Discussions in these areas can expose deep differences in beliefs about the purpose of Catholic schools. One belief may be that Catholic schools exist only for Catholic families; therefore, only children from practising families may be enrolled. A differing belief may be that Catholic schools have a missionary role and therefore, it is quite appropriate to take children from all families who seek enrolment. A difficulty may also arise in Catholic schools from the juxtaposition of the school's role to be pastorally aware of the needs of poorer families as well as to provide quality education. One belief may be that Catholic schools should charge only a minimal school fee to increase accessibility for poor Catholic families. This has the potential to result in larger classes and possible decreased educational opportunities. An opposing case could be made to charge a higher school fee to enable the school to decrease class sizes and seek to provide improved educational opportunities. The successful resolution of these matters is critically important to schools in a partnership. It is important that discussions relating to enrolments and school fees be addressed as a priority and that discussions are handled carefully with respect shown for all opinions.

Catholic schools joining in partnership have a unique opportunity. The literature identified a number of school partnerships in the UK. These partnerships were usually formed to address a problem. Typically, one of these schools was facing some sort of difficulty, such as falling enrolments or poor academic standards. As a result of such issues, schools entering these partnerships did so to address a problem. A difference in power, therefore, would have existed between partnered schools. One or more successful schools would work with one or more struggling schools. This is generally not the situation for Catholic parish primary schools in Australia moving into partnership. Declining numbers of parish priests, forcing the

amalgamation of parishes, is the usual impetus for such arrangements. This creates a 'level playing field' for schools beginning a partnership. The 'problem' has been with the parish, not the schools. It would be advisable, therefore, for schools to embrace the opportunity to work in partnership and maximise the benefits available.

A partnership between Catholic parish primary schools is also unique due to the leadership structure. The likely structure is one parish priest working with two or more principals in a leadership team. The power structure is clear. This structure allows for a focus which is less likely if an external facilitator were leading the team or with the principals leading the team themselves. This creates the potential for a visionary priest to work with a supportive team of principals to lead dynamic, faith-centred school communities. It is recommended that parishes and schools maximise such an opportunity. The opportunity is too good to waste!

The literature explored, and the experience of the participants in this study, highlighted the importance of sharing the vision. The leaders in the case study developed mantras which helped them share the vision and maintain the focus. The early mantra, 'working smarter', appeared to have evolved informally as discussions between leaders occurred. While not referring to the statement as a 'vision statement' directly, all participants used the phrase. It was clearly a shared vision. The later mantra of 'Three unique schools – one parish' was formalised through discussion on the future direction of the partnership. The leaders communicated this vision throughout the school communities. This use of mantras, encapsulating the immediate and future direction of the partnership, was a valuable strategy. The use of mantras is suggested as a strategy to develop and sustain the vision.

The leaders in the case study incorporated other strategies to develop ownership of the vision. They recognised the important role the School Council could play in the success of the partnership. The creation of one Council for the three schools was viewed as a non-negotiable. The leaders hand-picked the members of the initial Council ensuring the Council supported the vision of the leadership team. This further enhanced the sharing of the vision. The early documentation produced from the partnership was also used to reinforce and share the vision. The mantra, 'Three unique schools, one parish' began to be included on documents. These strategies assisted the development of the clear, shared vision. It is recommended that school leaders consider: creating one School Council, selecting the initial

members of the Council and commencing documentation as a priority in order to reinforce and gain further ownership of the vision.

The clear vision of the case study partnership resulted from good communication and a common desire to make it succeed. This was due to the deep collaboration within the leadership group.

### **6.6.2 Deep collaboration**

One of the keys to the success of the partnership was the high level of collaboration amongst the leaders. When asked why the partnership was successful, all participants highlighted the good relationships.

It is probable that the strong relationships within the leadership team were due to two factors. The parish priest employed all three principals. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that he selected people he believed would be compatible. He also possessed the skills to foster the relationships. The strategies the parish priest employed to develop the relationships were not explored in detail, but building good relationships is critical to the success of a partnership. It is advisable that those beginning a partnership recognise, and give due emphasis to, the importance of developing good relationships amongst the leadership team members.

Good relationships cannot be mandated, however, it can be expected that competent people such as principals and parish priests will work together for a common purpose if they have the desire to do so and if they share a vision.

Good communication was a key element of the partnership. The weekly, early morning meetings of the leadership team were important. These meetings were an extra commitment for the leaders, but they were seen by all participants as essential to the on-going success of the partnership. It is strongly suggested, therefore, that regular, out of hours meetings of the leadership team are scheduled to facilitate regular communication.

It is reasonable to assume that school leaders, beginning a partnership, would desire to meet regularly, however, the meetings need to be valuable for all involved and their purpose needs to be clear. The level of communication, and hence the value of the communication, needs to be considered. The relevance of the information shared needs to be assessed



continually. A mere sharing of information regarding current activities or issues is insufficient to sustain a partnership. It is important that such meetings be structured so that they address relevant short and long-term goals.

An issue, which was not explored in the case study, bears some reflection. As well as the regular leadership team meetings, it could reasonably be expected that each principal maintained regular one-on-one contact with the parish and the other principals. Decisions requiring confidentiality may have arisen. The leaders may have been required to decide whether an issue was relevant to the whole leadership group, or a matter between the parish priest and themselves. It is important that those entering into a partnership are aware that such other relationships will occur, are to be expected and have the potential to further enrich the relationships within the leadership team.

The value of 'venting' within the leadership team was highlighted by the three principals. This was understood as the process of expressing negative feelings about a situation without any need for a resolution. The principals valued these opportunities to share their frustrations with understanding, trusted colleagues in a confidential environment. It would be wise to allow, and perhaps encourage 'venting' within the leadership group.

The leadership group was made up of members with complementary skills. It can be viewed that the Parish Priest and Principal 3 were strategic leaders, whereas the other two principals were more relational. This complementarity of skills enriched the partnership. While most parish priests will not have the 'luxury' of choosing people with complementary skills, it is suggested that, wherever possible, they aim to choose principals whose skills are complementary and that diversity of opinions and skills be encouraged and fostered.

The introduction of a change, such as the formation of a new partnership, has the potential to be problematic. Identities may be threatened and power-bases may be challenged. Conflict can be expected. Differences of opinion will arise. Handled appropriately, these situations can lead to enriched decision-making. Challenging ideas provide opportunities for team members to reflect. When mature leaders share conflicting opinions in a trusting, respectful atmosphere, with a desire for positive outcomes, richer decisions are possible. Two principals spoke of the enhanced decision-making achieved through discussions at the leadership team meetings. They also spoke of the extra 'kudos' associated with decisions emanating from the leadership team. Diversity of opinions amongst the leaders should be

expected and encouraged to enrich the decisions of the group. It is further recommended that decisions made by the leadership team be communicated as relating to ‘The Parish’ or ‘The Parish Schools’.

When describing the leadership outcomes of the partnership, the three principals emphasised ‘solidarity’ and ‘collegiality’. This was achieved because of the deep collaboration within the leadership group. There was a high level of trust, a clear, shared vision, a common desire for the partnership to succeed and strong leadership.

### **6.6.3 Strong leadership**

Another key factor in the success of the partnership was strong leadership, particularly that of the parish priest. He had a clear vision, a strong will and the skills to bring others along with him. It is unlikely that the partnership in the case study would have been as effective without his involvement.

When parishes, with primary schools merge, the structures formed create the potential for strong leaders to establish dynamic partnerships. It is an obvious structure: one parish priest leads a team of principals who lead their own schools. A partnership cannot be effective without the commitment and leadership of the parish priest. While it is theoretically possible, it is unlikely that a partnership would flourish without his active involvement. It would be reasonable to assume that all principals would be fully involved in leading their own school. Their mandate is to lead their school. It is the priest’s mandate to lead the parish. When parishes merge, it is the parish changes that are the driving force behind the formation of a partnership and hence the responsibility, the challenge, the opportunity, is with the priest. Well-meaning, capable principals do not have the same opportunity. In the new structure they become middle-managers. The leadership dynamics change for a principal who is involved in a partnership. When one parish has one primary school, the priest and principal have a one-to-one relationship. Within this relationship, the principal is expected to have a clear focus and responsibility for his/her own school. This changes when the priest needs to relate to two or more principals. Each principal becomes one of a number of leaders working with the priest. Each principal’s responsibility is also extended. Principals become somewhat responsible for the other schools in the parish. The dynamics change. A principal or a group of principals cannot lead the development of a partnership – they have become middle managers. It must be led by the leader who is responsible for the parish. Strong leadership

may occur naturally, due to the personalities of the leaders, however, it is important that system authorities support all leaders.

Schools and parishes moving into a partnership are going through uncertain times – uncharted waters. All leaders would benefit from the advice and wisdom which could be provided by external facilitators. It would be negligent of these authorities not to provide support to schools entering a partnership. Research, including this particular research, has identified the characteristics of successful partnerships. Strategies should be recommended, advice and support should be readily available to schools entering into such an arrangement. Strong leadership is required. Confused, uncertain, bewildered leaders would be unable to lead their communities into a successful partnership. External support is essential.

The bus trip was an important leadership strategy in the case study. Through this activity, the leaders sent a number of strong messages to the community. They were emphasising that change was taking place. It was non-negotiable. All staff members visited the other schools because they were expected to begin, or continue to, develop relationships with the other staff members. The activity also emphasised that the schools would retain their own identity. As well as the trip providing the opportunity for the members of staff to get to know each other and more about the other schools, the trip also reinforced the identity of each school as it hosted visitors. This reinforcement was important, and it was picked up by the later mantra ‘Three unique schools, one parish’. The leaders wanted the schools to retain their own identities. Rather than giving it up, the leaders wanted each school’s identity to be enriched through their involvement with the other schools and for the schools to identify themselves as part of the new, larger parish.

It is recognised, therefore, that strong leadership was critical to the success of the partnership. Those leading a partnership should communicate to their staff that involvement is non-negotiable. Staff visitations to partnered schools should be considered as a priority. It is further suggested that schools be encouraged to retain their own identity, while enriching it through new relationships within the larger parish.

Research into the behaviours of effective leaders and analysis of the behaviours of the leaders in the case study highlighted the importance of the attitude of the leaders. People will follow a leader who is passionate, optimistic, open to new ideas and effective. The introduction of a partnership creates a liminal space. The partnership could go in any

direction. The opportunity arises for a strong, dynamic leader, to seize the moment and take the partnership in a particular direction. When parishes amalgamate and school partnerships are formed, the message is sent to the communities that the old way could be improved – change is coming. As Fr. P reflected ‘Nature abhors a vacuum’. The opportunity for a strong leader to take the new parish in a different direction becomes available. Much can be achieved when dynamic, strong leaders seize the day.

The early days of a partnership are critical to its future. People look for change. It is important for leaders to ‘get some early runs on the board’, to achieve some tangible results. Wise leaders can strengthen their leadership and reinforce their vision for the partnership with some early, positive results. The greatest impact could be expected from goals to improve student outcomes. These outcomes do not need to relate solely to academic achievement. Goals to enhance the students’ social, emotional, spiritual and physical development could be considered. It is advised that, as a priority, leaders seek to achieve early tangible results which improve student outcomes and that these results are widely communicated.

Strong, effective leaders do not operate in isolation. They develop collaborations both within and beyond their communities. The process of bonding and bridging was described by West-Burnham, Farrar & Otero (2007). They highlighted the importance of leaders building internal, social capital as well as building external, social networks. The principals in the case study maintained both an internal and external focus. They directed much of their attention to developing the partnership from within their communities. Importantly, however, they also sought external support from the local Catholic Education Office. It was necessary for the schools to gain approval from the CEO to establish one School Council. In gaining this approval, the leaders benefited from the external perspective of the CEO personnel. They were both challenged and supported. It is recommended that leaders of a partnership look for both internal and external support.

The case study explored a successful partnership. This success was enhanced by the partnership having a clear vision, by the leaders seeking deep collaboration and by the strong leadership, particularly of the parish priest. There were positive outcomes for the staff, parents and students. However, this research sought to explore whether leadership benefits resulted from the partnership. These outcomes can be described as collegial support for the leaders.

#### **6.6.4 Collegial support**

The focus of this research was on leadership benefits. I became interested in leadership outcomes during my time as principal of Catholic parish primary schools. During this time, I was involved in a number of principal clusters. These clusters were created to support principals. During cluster meetings, each principal would share a personal action plan. These plans included goals relating to both school improvement and personal growth. My experience led me to believe that such groups had the potential to provide a high level of support. It was, however, rarely achieved. These were voluntary groups and often, during busy times, the meetings were cancelled. Principals often sought to put the care of their community before their own well being. During these times, principals often aimed to gain more time in their day by cancelling the very meeting which may have helped them better manage their day. Principals were frequently so engrossed in the ‘minutiae’ of running their school that they could not consider the bigger picture. The agenda did not seem relevant. The agenda for principals working in a school partnership should be clearly relevant. The partners have an obvious, important relationship which requires fostering. This necessitates the sharing of information and mutual support. Regular meetings of the leadership team would be expected to occur because of the structure created when schools in the same parish work in partnership. While the agenda for these meetings would naturally be directed to the urgent and important school and parish matters, the structure also allows for on-going support for the leaders. This was the experience of the leaders in the case study. Agenda items were not directed towards supporting the leaders, however, the resultant collaboration within the group enabled the leaders to experience positive leadership outcomes. It is critical that the leadership team meets regularly and that the members encourage and support one another.

All participants were enthusiastic about their involvement in the partnership. It was evident that they valued the collegial support. They identified this support in a number of ways. The sharing of wisdom was highlighted as one positive outcome. This referred to the sharing of best practice as well as ‘moral and emotional’ support. The role of a principal or a priest can be a lonely one. A leader on his or her own, when faced with a difficult decision or issue, would benefit from sharing thoughts and emotions with trusted colleagues who are aware of the context, have some shared ownership of the situation and who may be able to draw on their own experience to offer advice. It is recommended that those working in partnership maximise opportunities for the sharing of wisdom.

The leadership team of a Catholic parish primary school partnership is a unique group. Three or more colleagues work together with a shared focus, a shared vision. The uniting factor is the parish. Each principal naturally has responsibility for his/her own school, but he/she also has some shared responsibility for the other schools in the parish. This creates the situation in which a number of colleagues have a shared understanding of the context of the other schools. In some ways, all members of the leadership team are a part of each school. The potential is created for transformational leadership. The sum can be more than the total of the parts. The potential is created for each school to be able to gain the benefits of being led by a team of three or more competent leaders who enrich each other and thus achieve more together than any could on their own. The resultant possible success could also be enriching for the leaders. It is important that the benefits of this transformational leadership be maximised.

The parish priest referred to his increased sense of satisfaction through his involvement in the partnership. It was revealing that he was the only participant who made this comment. Perhaps he had reflected more than the principals. The importance of reflection has already been highlighted in this research (Schuttloffel, 2010). However, no evaluation process or opportunity for reflection had been structured into this partnership. This was understandable, as the research was undertaken during the formation of the partnership. This research, however, provided an external review process for the participants which they valued. Evaluation and reflection will be important for the continued growth of the partnership. It is suggested that schools involved in partnerships adopt an action research approach which creates cycles of evaluation, planning, implementation and further evaluation. The evaluation phases of these cycles should provide affirmation for the leaders as goals are achieved. It would be valuable for the leaders to take the opportunities provided to recognise and celebrate achievements.

Collegial support, therefore, was identified by the participants as a major outcome of the partnership. This support facilitated the sharing of wisdom and transformational leadership and created the potential for an increased sense of satisfaction for the leaders.

#### **6.6.5 Targeted recommendations**

This research confirms that school partnerships can have great potential. While partnership can benefit a number of groups in the community, the focus of this research has

highlighted the positive leadership outcomes which can be achieved. This potential can be maximised if all groups in the partnership learn to work well together. The following recommendations are targeted to particular groups.

#### *System Authorities:*

Schools embarking on a partnership require support. External authorities should become involved when parishes merge, to support the formation of the partnership. This support could include a focus on maximising the possible leadership outcomes. Partnerships provide a structure which readily enables another level of support for principals. It is recommended that when partnerships are formed, System Authorities maximise the potential for enhancing the leadership outcomes created.

The beginning of such an arrangement can be a stressful time for those involved. External support and expertise are essential to lead those involved during this uncertain time. It is recommended that System Authorities:

- Work with Archdiocesan authorities to ensure priests who are supportive of school partnerships are appointed appropriately, whenever possible.
- Appoint a co-ordinator who has direct responsibility for the support of the partnership or add this responsibility to the role of, for example, a consultant.
- Allocate funding for support, including personnel, professional development costs, release for teachers, resources, transport costs etc.
- Appoint a school partnership co-ordinator for each zone with the responsibility to brief staff, School Councils, parents etc. and provide regular on-going support for schools in partnership. This person would also be responsible to lead the schools in the process of developing a common vision.
- Encourage schools to view moving into a partnership as a chance for school renewal and as an added support for principals.
- Facilitate the meeting of priests, principals, middle leaders, staff and School Councils from different partnerships for support and collaboration.

#### *Canonical Administrators:*

A successful partnership between Catholic parish primary schools has the potential to create reciprocal benefits for the schools and the parish. The benefits for the schools have

been identified throughout this research. There is also a reciprocal benefit for the parish. A successful partnership between the schools in a parish may support the sustainability of the parish. A partnership between schools in one parish also has great potential for Canonical Administrators. Evangelisation possibilities can be enhanced and working in partnership can make the workload involved in leading a large parish more manageable. It is recommended that Canonical Administrators:

- Embrace the potential of the school partnership.
- Support each principal equitably and seek to establish a good relationship with each of the principals in the partnership.
- Seek support from other canonical administrators involved in partnerships.
- Establish a strong leadership team with the principals.
- Work with the principals in the formation of a clear vision for the partnership. Note: this vision will evolve over time.
- Create one School Council and select the inaugural members. Choose representatives who support the vision and have a strong parish perspective.
- Visit each school regularly and develop positive relationships with staff, teachers and children.

#### *Principals' Associations:*

Principals' Associations have the opportunity to provide another level of support for principals. They are readily available to communicate to principals as 'peers'. These associations can generally highlight to all principals that positive leadership outcomes are possible when schools work in partnership, as well as providing another level of support for schools working in partnership. It is recommended that Principal Associations:

- Conduct, or arrange for, research into effective partnerships.
- Promote school partnership as another form of leadership support.
- Appoint an officer/consultant with the specific role of supporting those schools involved in new partnerships.
- Create networks of principals working in partnerships.
- Provide opportunities for principals working in partnerships to share their experiences.



- Ensure principals are made aware of the initial workload as well as the future benefits so that their expectations of a partnership are realistic.

### *Principals:*

It is recommended that principals embrace the opportunities presented through their involvement in a partnership. The research shows that by focusing on improving student outcomes through the partnership, positive leadership outcomes will also result. The research also shows that involvement in a partnership can be transformational, that is, the sum can be greater than the total of the parts. It is recommended that principals:

- Provide strong, positive, ‘top down’ leadership in the early days of the partnership and encourage shared leadership.
- Build a strong relationship with the priest and with the other principals in the partnership and establish a strong leadership team with them. Conduct regular out of hours meetings of the leadership team. Encourage moral and emotional support within the leadership team. Allow for ‘venting’ in the leadership group and encourage diversity of opinions within the leadership team. Communicate decisions from the leadership team to the school community as coming from ‘The Leadership Team’ and being ‘Parish School’ decisions.
- Create one School Council and select the inaugural members who have a strong parish perspective and will support the vision.
- Give a high priority to the development of common enrolment policies and a common approach to school fees. Seek economies of scale wherever possible, such as sharing personnel, resources and professional development.
- Lead the school community through a process to develop a clear vision shared by all the partnered schools and consider the use of ‘mantras’ to help develop, communicate and sustain the vision for the partnership.
- Bring staff, parents and children together in the early days of the partnership and create opportunities for the development of good relationships between the separate school communities in the partnership. Facilitate staff visits to partnered schools. However, ensure schools retain their own identities whilst enriching their identity through new relationships in the larger parish.

### *School Councils:*

School Councils play an important role in the implementation and development of a partnership. School Councils are an important link between the parents, parishioners, staff

and students. They have a unique opportunity to unite the school communities under the umbrella of the newly formed, larger parish. It is recommended that the members of the School Council embrace the opportunities created by the establishment of a school partnership and:

- Create one joint School Council and form an Executive with representatives from each of the partnered schools.
- Provide regular communication to the school and parish community to highlight developments and successes of the partnership such as newsletters, information sessions.
- Create and encourage opportunities for the development of good relationships between the separate school communities in the partnership. Foster the unique identity of each school in the partnership and how they all enrich each other.
- Become actively involved in the development and promotion of the vision for the partnership.
- Build links with School Councils from other partnerships.

#### *Middle Leaders:*

The success of a partnership is dependent to a large degree on the level of shared leadership within the individual schools and across the partnership. Middle leaders have a critical role in supporting and leading the introduction and development of the partnership. They are also in the position to enrich their own professional learning by observing, and learning from, a number of principals. Partnerships also provide a ready opportunity for middle leaders to create meaningful, small networks within the partnered schools. It is recommended that Middle Leaders:

- Support the parish priest and principals during the formation and development of the partnership.
- Create and support meaningful joint activities for staff, parents and children to enrich the curriculum.
- Provide release time for 'expert' teachers to visit the other schools to share their learning.
- Seek opportunities to observe the various leadership styles of the principals of the partnered schools.

### *Staff Members:*

Members of staff have a critical role in supporting and leading the introduction and development of a partnership involving their school. While moving into a partnership is a time of change and uncertainty, research shows that there can be benefits for all those in the school community. While staff members will require support, they play a vital role in promoting the partnership to their colleagues, parents and students. The focus of this research was on the leaders of the partnership, however, from my experience as a teacher, prior to becoming a principal, I would like to make the following recommendations to staff members. It is recommended that members of staff:

- Seek to build a relationship with the priest and with the other principals and staff members in the partnership.
- Create opportunities for students to be involved in combined activities and develop networks with the staffs from the other schools.
- Foster a positive attitude in the classroom towards the students from the partnered schools.
- Become actively involved in the development and promotion of the vision for the partnership.

### *Implications for Future Research:*

This research identified the unique potential of Catholic parish primary schools working in partnership.

United by their bond of faith, these schools have a ready opportunity to develop a clear vision in the context of the newly formed parish. Due to the obvious structure of the leadership team, that is, the parish priest and two or more principals, they have the opportunity to develop deep collaboration and strong leadership. These benefits have been shown to create the potential for positive leadership outcomes.

The issue of faith leadership was explored. It was highlighted that faith leadership for Catholic parish primary school principals was problematic. It became apparent that there is no clear understanding of what faith leadership involves, or, how to provide it.

On reflection, it would have been valuable to explore how partnerships between Catholic parish primary schools could provide particular support for principals and priests in their roles as faith leaders. This is recommended for future research.

#### **6.6.6 Summary**

The initial impetus for undertaking this research came from my desire to explore shared leadership. As principal of Catholic parish primary schools for seventeen years, I had come to realise the potential benefits of such an approach. When the parish in which I was working joined with the neighbouring parish, the opportunity was created for the parish priest, the neighbouring principal and me to develop a dynamic partnership. I believed such a partnership had the potential to provide positive leadership outcomes for ourselves as well as providing a model for other schools embarking on a partnership. Unfortunately, this did not occur during my principalship.

Through this research, however, I came to understand that partnerships between Catholic parish primary schools can be successful and they have the potential to provide positive outcomes for their leaders. I came to realise, however, that the parish priest has the critical role. No matter how passionate a principal may be, the partnership will not flourish with a priest who is ambivalent. Through my research, I came to reflect on the unique opportunity presented to Catholic parish primary schools when parishes merge. Being faith-based schools, the common bond of faith provides a ready opportunity to create a shared vision. Schools will most likely begin a partnership on a 'level footing,' that is, there will most probably be no major school problems to face, no power struggles or loss of identity. This shared vision can create enhanced opportunities for the parish and school leaders. Furthermore, the obvious leadership team structure of one parish priest working with two or more principals creates great potential. United by a clear vision, willing to share the leadership and to collaborate, the team can provide the strong leadership required to initiate and develop a successful partnership.

The research revealed that leadership benefits result when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership. The overall recommendation is that the benefits of these partnerships be maximised.

School amalgamations are more likely to occur in the future due to the declining number of priests. Such a change creates a liminal space, rich with potential. It is

recommended that principals moving into a partnership recognise the potential such an arrangement has to offer for leadership support.

Principals embarking on a partnership would often naturally focus on improving student outcomes as their major driver, however, they can be assured that the potential also exists for the creation of many positive leadership outcomes.

Wise leaders are well advised to recognise and maximise this potential, to ‘seize the day’ or as the following quote, attributed to Mark Twain states (Brown, 2000):

Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Application form Ethics Approval**



Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

## Human Research Ethics Committee

**Office Use Only**  
HREC Register No.:

Principal Investigator's or Supervisor's Name:  
Dr Helga Neidhart

Students' Names:  
Mr Michael Harris

<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b>	Together We Grow: An Exploration of the Leadership Benefits When Two Catholic Primary Schools Work in Partnership
<b>SIMPLE TITLE FOR PARTICIPANTS:</b>	Together We Grow

### Application for Ethics Approval Research Projects with Human Participants

All research projects involving human participants and/or access to their records/files/specimens must be approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

1. **Before completing this form, applicants should read carefully the document *Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans: Guidelines for Applicants to the Human Research Ethics Committee* (approved by Academic Board 23 February 2001). This document is available on the Research Services website at [www.acu.edu.au/research](http://www.acu.edu.au/research). All applications are assessed in accordance with the National Statement available at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e72syn.htm>**
2. Completed applications are to be emailed as an attachment to: [res.ethics@acu.edu.au](mailto:res.ethics@acu.edu.au). Once the application has been checked by the relevant Research Services Officer, you will be required to submit a signed hard copy.
3. Applications must be submitted at least six (6) weeks before the proposed date of commencement of the research project.

[Please note that any information of a commercial or patentable nature should be forwarded separately and marked "COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE".]

In preparing your application please note the following:

- ALL sections and subsections must be answered. Incomplete applications will be returned to the Investigator or Supervisor without being considered by the HREC.
- Insofar as possible, the *Information Letter to Participants* and the *Consent Form* are to be formulated in plain English. **There should be no typographical, spelling or grammatical errors.**

An editable *Information Letter to Participants* and sample *Consent Forms* are to be found at [www.acu.edu.au/research](http://www.acu.edu.au/research)

If you require assistance in interpreting the Guidelines, or if you have any queries, please contact the HREC Deputy Chair and/or the Research Services Officer in your state.

***You are reminded that contact with participants and/or access to their records/files/specimens must not commence until written ethics approval has been received from the HREC.***

## SECTION A: ISSUES RELATING TO HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Does your research involve any of the following? (Please tick)		YES	NO
<b>A.0</b>	<b>Use of non-identifiable data about human beings that is use of existing collections of data or records that contain only non-identifiable data about human beings</b> If your answer to the above question is "Yes" go to Section B1 and complete B1, B2.1, C1 <u>only</u> and attach a copy of the Research proposal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>YOUR PROPOSAL ONLY REQUIRES TO BE RECORDED AND DOES NOT NEED ETHICS CLEARANCE</b> If you answer "yes" to any of the questions A.01 to A.08 your research project must be reviewed by the full committee.			
<b>A.01</b>	<b>(Chapter 3.3 of the National Statement) Interventions and Therapies, including Clinical and non-clinical trials and innovations. Does your research involve</b>		
01.1	Administration of any substance or agent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
01.2	A treatment or diagnostic procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
01.3	A surgical procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
01.4	Any other therapeutic procedure or devices, preventative procedure or diagnostic device or procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.02</b>	<b>(Chapter 3.4 of the National Statement) Human Genetics. Does your research involve</b>		
02.1	Study of single or multiple genes, gene-gene interaction or gene-environment interaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
02.2	Acquired somatic variation or inherited gene sequences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
02.3	Gene expressions or genes of individuals, families or populations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
02.4	Epigenetics or use of informatics and genetic information or clinical phenotypes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.03</b>	<b>(Chapter 3.6 of the National Statement) Human Stem Cell Research. Does your research involve</b>		
03.1	Use of embryonic or somatic stem cells or those derived from primordial germ cells	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.04</b>	<b>(Chapter 4.1 of the National Statement) Women who are pregnant and the human foetus. Does your research involve</b>		
04.1	Research on a woman who is pregnant and the foetus <i>in utero</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
04.2	Research on the separated human foetus or on foetal tissue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.05</b>	<b>(Chapter 4.4 of the National Statement) People highly dependent on medical care who may be unable to give consent. Does your research involve</b>		
05.1	People who are highly dependent on medical care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
05.2	People in terminal care, emergency care or intensive care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
05.3	People who are unconscious or in a state of post-traumatic coma unresponsiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.06</b>	<b>(Chapter 4.5 of the National Statement) People with a cognitive impairment, an intellectual disability or a mental illness. Does your research involve</b>		
06.1	Anyone who is intellectually, mentally or physically impaired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.07</b>	<b>(Chapter 4.6 of the National Statement) People who may be involved in illegal activities. Does your research involve</b>		
07.1	Study that intends to expose illegal activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
07.2	The likelihood of discovering illegal activity, even if not intended	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
07.3	The inadvertent and unexpected discovery of illegal activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
<b>A.08 (Chapter 4.7 of the National Statement) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. your research must conform to the Values and Ethics – Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research document. All applications must be referred to the ACU Indigenous unit prior to submission to the Research Office. Does your research involve</b>		
08.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>The following questions are designed to help you and the Committee ascertain the level of risk involved in the project and factors that may affect consent</b>		
<b>A.1 Access to members of the following groups who may be vulnerable or unable to give fully informed consent:</b>		
1.1 Minors (anyone under the age of 18, e.g., students or children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.2 Anyone at risk of criminal or civil liability, damage to financial or social standing or to employability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.3 Elderly people who may be vulnerable or unable to give fully informed consent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.4 Welfare recipients who may be vulnerable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.5 Members of minority groups who may be vulnerable or unable to give fully informed consent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.6 Anyone who is a prisoner or ward of the State	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.7 Other: (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.2 Risk of social, mental or physical harm:</b>		
2.1 Access to confidential data (including student data, patient or client data) without the participant's written consent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.2 Performance of any acts which might diminish self-esteem or cause embarrassment or distress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.3 Use of non-treatment or placebo control conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.4 Collection of body tissues or fluid samples	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.5 Administration of any stimuli, tasks, investigations or procedures which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally stressful, painful, noxious, aversive or unpleasant, either during or following research procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.6 Any possibility of cardio-pulmonary difficulties (e.g., asthma, headaches, shortness of breath, chest pains, heart attack)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.7 Treatments or techniques with unpleasant or harmful side effects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.8 Contact with electrical supply (e.g., electrical stimulation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
2.9 Use of injections which may result in the transmission of HIV (AIDS) or another disease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.10 Intended contact with persons with infectious diseases (e.g., measles, hepatitis, TB, whooping cough)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.11 Other: (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.3 Possible breaches of State or Commonwealth legislation:</b>		
3.1 Interviews/Focus Groups involving the photographing or audio/video-taping of participants	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2 Deception of participants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.3 Possibility of identifying participant/s, either directly or indirectly, through identifiers or by deduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.4 Disclosure of participants' identity to anyone other than the investigators at any stage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.5 Use of one or more fertilised ova	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.6 Finger-printing or DNA "finger-printing" of participants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.7 Recombinant DNA, ionizing radiation, or contact with hazardous, illegal or restricted substances (e.g., chemicals, quarantinable materials)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.8 Other: (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.4 Secondary use of existing human specimens:</b>		
4.1 Access to human pathology or diagnostic specimens (e.g., blood sera or tissue samples) originally provided to authorities for purposes other than those sought in your research project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>A.5 An application for funding either internal or external to the University</b>		
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



#### A.6 Level of Risk

"Negligible risk" is defined as follows: "Negligible risk research describes research in which there is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort, and any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience. Examples of inconvenience may include filling in a form, participating in a street survey, or giving up time to participate in research. (*National Statement*, 2007, p. 16)

"Low risk" is defined as follows: "low risk research describes research in which the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort. Discomfort can involve body and/or mind and include, for example, minor side effects of medication, the discomforts related to measuring blood pressure, and anxiety induced by an interview." (*National Statement*, 2007, p. 16).

"More than low risk" refers to "Research in which the risk for participants is more serious than discomfort." This could include research with potential for physical or psychological harms, devaluation of personal worth, social harms, including damage to social networks, economic harms and legal harms.. (*National Statement*, 2007, p.16)

[Note: See *Guidelines*, Part A, Section 3.]

Please indicate the level of risk to the participant in this research.

- ☒ Negligible Risk
- ☐ Low Risk
- ☐ More than Low Risk

#### A.7 Peer Review of the Research

The National Statement states that where prior peer review has judged that a project has research merit, the question of its research merit is no longer subject to the judgement of those ethically reviewing the research (*National Statement* 1.2)

A.7.1 Has the project been peer reviewed?

☒ ☐

A7.2 If Yes, please indicate what process was used to review the project  
Research proposal was successfully defended at ACU,  
St Patricks Campus, 23 November 2007.

## SECTION B: GENERAL INFORMATION

### B.1 Supervisor

**Title & Full Name:**

Dr Helga Neidhart

**Qualifications:**

PhD

**Full Postal Address:**

Australian Catholic University  
115 Victoria Pde, Fitzroy, Vic, 3065

(delete inapplicable title)

**School:**

Primary: School of Educational Leadership

**Campus:**

St Patricks

**Telephone No:**

9953 3267

**Fax No:**

9953 3515

**E-mail address:**

H.Neidhart@patrick.acu.edu.au

### Student Researcher 1

**Title & Full Name:**

Mr Michael Harris

**Qualifications:**

- Master of Education
- Grad Dip Student Welfare
- Grad Dip Curriculum
- Grad Dip Educational Administration
- Grad Dip Religious Education
- Diploma Teaching Primary

**Postgraduate or Undergraduate (if student):**

Postgraduate

**Full Postal Address:**

7 Golden Grove, Ringwood, VIC, 3134

(delete inapplicable title)

**School:**

Australian Catholic University

**Campus:**

Fitzroy

**Current Enrolment Programme:**

Doctor of Education

**Telephone No:**

9876 1583

**Fax No:**

**E-mail address:**

michaelh@sannpark.melb.catholic.edu.au

### Co-Investigator 2 (if staff) or Student Researcher 2 (delete inapplicable title)

**Title & Full Name:**

**School:**

**Qualifications:**

**Campus:**

**Postgraduate or Undergraduate (if student):**

**Current Enrolment Programme:**

**Full Postal Address:**

**Telephone No:**

**Fax No:**

**E-mail address:**

### Co-Investigator 3 (if staff) or Student Researcher 3 (delete inapplicable title)

**Title & Full Name:**

**School:**

**Qualifications:**

**Campus:**

**Postgraduate or Undergraduate (if student):**

**Current Enrolment Programme:**

**Full Postal Address:**

**Telephone No:**

**Fax No:**

**E-mail address:**

### Co-Investigator 4 (if staff) or Student Researcher 4 (delete inapplicable title)

<b>Title &amp; Full Name:</b> <b>Qualifications:</b> <b>Postgraduate or Undergraduate</b> (if student): <b>Full Postal Address:</b>	<b>School:</b> <b>Campus:</b> <b>Current Enrolment Programme:</b> <b>Telephone No:</b> <b>Fax No:</b> <b>E-mail address:</b>
--	--

<b>Co-Investigator 5 (if staff) or Student Researcher 5</b> (delete inapplicable title)	
<b>Title &amp; Full Name:</b> <b>Qualifications:</b> <b>Postgraduate or Undergraduate</b> (if student): <b>Full Postal Address:</b>	<b>School:</b> <b>Campus:</b> <b>Current Enrolment Programme:</b> <b>Telephone No:</b> <b>Fax No:</b> <b>E-mail address:</b>

**B.2 Duration of Project**

2.1 Anticipated duration of project as a whole

From: 01/01/06 DD/MM/YY	To: 31/12/11 DD/MM/YY
----------------------------	--------------------------

2.2 Anticipated duration of data collection

From: 01/02/08 DD/MM/YY	To: 31/12/08 DD/MM/YY
----------------------------	--------------------------

2.3 Is this a student project?

☒ YES
 ☐ NO

**DATA COLLECTION MUST NOT COMMENCE UNTIL ETHICS APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED.**

*[Note: Multi-year approval may be given by the Committee. All projects, however, are subject to annual review. The Annual Renewal of projects is covered by the Progress/Final Report Form. Extensions beyond the approved duration are also covered by this form.]*

**B.3 Is the research covered by a funding contract, agreement, or conditions of award?**  
 (please tick)

☐ Yes  
     Name of Funding Body:  
     Name of Grant:

☒ No

## SECTION C: RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

### C.1 Brief description of project

*Please provide a brief description of the research proposal. Also, please attach to this application, in electronic format, a more detailed outline of the research design, objectives and methodology (2-4 pages).*

The purpose of this study is to explore whether leadership benefits are created when two Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership, and as the focus is on the leadership required, the participants will be the senior and middle managers, i.e. the Parish Priest, the two principals and members of the two leadership teams (twelve in one school, seven in the other). Please note the Researcher is one of the principals. Methods adopted will include semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant reflection and textual and thematic analysis of the data.

### C.2 Potential benefits of the research project

#### 2.1 To the participant:

To gain a greater understanding of the leadership outcomes created when two Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership.

#### 2.2 In general:

The research has the potential to influence the theory, policy and practice of the leadership of schools in partnership or those wishing to, or being mandated to, embark on a new partnership.

### C.3 Brief description of the procedures to be followed

*List sequentially the procedures which will apply to the participants, e.g., use of questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and indicate any procedure/s which may have adverse effects.*

#### The Data Collection Process

Participant(s)	Number of Participants	Data Collection Activity
Parish Priest	1	Interview
Principal of Partner School	1	Interview
Self	1	Research Journal
Leadership Team One	12	Focus Group
Leadership Team Two	7	Focus Group

### C.4 Risks to participants

#### 4.1 If there are any risks to participants, please describe the risks and the measures that will be taken to limit them.

This is a negligible risk Project.

- 4.2 If there is any chance that the participants may become distressed, alarmed or disadvantaged in any way, please identify a person to whom they may be referred for counselling or other appropriate support.

*[Note: It is normally not appropriate for investigators, supervisors or student researchers to undertake this role themselves.]*

**C.5 Administration of drugs, compounds, or biological agents**

Does your research involve the administration of any substance ☐ YES ☒ NO or agent?

If "YES", please complete Attachment 1 and append it to your application.

**C.6 Use of body tissues or fluids**

Does your research involve any procedures to remove body ☐ YES ☒ NO fluids or tissues?

If "YES", please complete Attachment 2 and append it to your application

**SECTION D: PROJECT PARTICULARS**

**D.1 Participant Details**

**D.1.1 Brief description of participants:**

[E.g., Year 11 students in public schools, childless couples who have been married for 10 or more years, nurses who have been working for at least 5 years etc.]

Parish Priest, Principal of the partner school, Leadership Teams of the two schools

**D.1.2 Estimated number involved:** Females **15** Males **5** Total **20**

**D.1.3 Age range for each gender:** Females **30-60 years old** Males **30-60 years old**

**D.1.4 Participants' state of health** ☒ Normal ☐ Other (please specify)

**D.1.5 Method of recruitment of participants (including how participants will be approached)**

[Note: Researchers who intend to use their own students, patients, clients etc. as participants need to be especially aware of the potential risks, e.g., coercion, misuse of power.]

The Parish Priest and Principal will be approached personally. The Researcher will meet formally with the two leadership teams (separately).

**D.1.6 Compensation to participants**

Will a reward or incentive of any kind be offered to the participants?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If "YES", provide full details.

**D.1.7 Involvement of special groups of participants**

Will participants be selected specifically based on cultural or community groups to which they belong? (e.g., Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, Asian communities)?

☐ YES ☒ NO

In the case of research involving Indigenous issues or people: (a) the Values and Ethics - Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research must be adhered to; and (b) the application must be forwarded to a Head of one of the University's three Indigenous Support Units for comment prior to submission to the Research Office and (c) written comment from the Head, ATSI unit must be attached to this application.

**D.1.7.1** If so, do these participants require permission from community leaders?

☐ YES ☐ NO

**D.2 Access to personal information, data/files/records or samples of human tissue**

Will the project involve access to personal information, student files, computerised records or other data banks, human pathology or diagnostic specimens provided by one or more institutions or government departments?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If "YES", please identify the sources and location of the data.

Again, if "YES", will the identity of the participants be known in any way?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Please explain how they will be known and what will be done with the data.

**D.3 Location of Study**

**Where will the research be conducted?**

**D.3.1 If outside ACU, give name and address of institution and contact names:**

Two schools from one Parish.

**D.3.2 If at ACU, give campus location:**

**D.4 Approval from institutions or organisations external to ACU to access participants**

*[Note: Researchers should be aware of the requirements set out in the current privacy legislation.]*

**D.4.1 Is formal approval required to access participants from an external institution or organisation?**

(E.g., from the state Department of Education, Catholic Education Office, School Principal/s, Hospital HREC)

[Note: If participants are to be recruited from schools, hospitals, prisons or other institutions, approval from the institution or appropriate authority must be sought.]

☒

YES

☐

NO

**D.4.2 Please indicate whether formal approval has already been obtained from the appropriate authorities of other institution(s) or from another HREC:**

[Please refer to Part B, Section 2.2 and Section 3 of the Guidelines.]

☒

YES – If “Yes”, when was it obtained? 03/12/07

Please attach a copy of the formal clearance/permission

☐

NO

Please attach a copy of the letter of request or of the Application Form used by the relevant institutions or organisations, or please indicate when such approval will be requested:

**D.5 Informed consent of participants, parents or guardians of minors, next-of-kin, community leaders**

**D.5.1 Will persons aged 18 or above be asked to complete a Consent Form?**

☒

YES (If “Yes”, attach a copy of the proforma to this application. See sample Consent Form at [www.acu.edu.au/research](http://www.acu.edu.au/research))

☐

NO (If “No”, please explain; e.g., participants will be completely anonymous at every stage of the project.)

**D.5.2 Consent of parents/guardians to access minors**

[Note: See Guidelines Part B, Sections 4.8 and 6.2.]

Does the research involve minors as participants and therefore require the consent of parents/guardians?

☐

YES

☒

NO

“If “Yes”, a copy of the proforma for gaining the consent of the primary care-giver must be attached to this Application. See the sample Parent/Guardian Consent Form at [www.acu.edu.au/research](http://www.acu.edu.au/research)

**D.5.3 Consent of person responsible for those unable to give consent**

[Note: See Guidelines Part B, Section 6.2.]

Does the research involve participants who are unable to give consent (e.g., because they have an intellectual or mental impairment, or because they are highly dependent on medical care)?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If "Yes", a copy of the proforma for gaining the consent of the person responsible must be attached to this Application.

**D.5.4 Consent of community leaders**

Does the research involve participants from special groups or communities where such approvals are customary?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If "Yes", a copy of the proforma for gaining the consent of the community leader must be attached to this application.

**SECTION E: GATHERING OF DATA, SECURITY OF DATA, DISPOSAL OF DATA, AND DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS**

**E.1 Gathering of data**

**E.1.1** How will the data be gathered?

Interviews, Focus Groups, Research Journal, Document Analysis

**E.1.2** How will the data be recorded?

Interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed

**E.2 Security of Data**

Data needs to be regularly archived in a secure environment, in a room at ACU during the study, and held for a minimum of five years following completion of the study.

[Note: See Guidelines, Part B, Sections 8.1 and 8.2]

**E.2.1** In which room at ACU will the primary data be stored during the study?

Room 4:32 at Fitzroy Campus

**E.2.2** In which room at ACU will the data be stored following completion of study?

Room 4:32 at Fitzroy Campus

**E.3 Disposal of data**

How are the data to be disposed after complying with the requirement to retain data for a minimum of five years (e.g., erasing of tapes, shredding of questionnaires, deletion of electronic data)?

Tapes will be erased. Questionnaires will be shredded. Electronic data will be deleted.

**E.4 Dissemination of results**

Do you intend to use the results of your study in publications or in other communications with colleagues?



☒ YES ☐ NO

If "Yes", participants must be advised both in the Information Letter to Participants and on the Consent Form, if applicable, that results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the participants in any way.

## **SECTION F: NON-IDENTIFIABILITY OF PARTICIPANTS**

**Non-identifiability**, in this context, means that the identity of the respondent is not known in any way to anyone involved in the research, including the researchers themselves. **Non-identifiability** is therefore to be distinguished from confidentiality, as described below. Research interviewees, for example, are identifiable, because their identity is known to the researcher/interviewer.

F.1 Will the participants be non-identifiable?

☐ YES ☒ NO

F.2 Please indicate whether the identity of any participant will be disclosed to anyone other than the researcher/s, and, if so, please explain the reasons for this disclosure.

The identity of the participants will not be disclosed to anyone other than the researcher.

## **SECTION G: CONFIDENTIALITY OF PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES**

**Confidentiality** refers to the obligation of people not to use private information – whether private because of its content or the context of its communication – for any purpose other than that for which it was given to them. (*National Statement*, 2007, p.99) The information given is to be used only for the research purposes stated in the protocol. Without the explicit permission of the person providing it, such information must not be divulged to others in any way that might allow it to be linked to that person.

G.1 What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the personal information gathered in this project (e.g., removal of names and other identifiers either before, during or after analysis of data; reporting aggregated data only)?

The Participants will be informed that, as much as possible, confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from it, however, due to the limited size of the project, it is acknowledged that there are limitations to maintaining confidentiality. Names and other identifiers will be removed before analysis of the data. Pseudonyms will be used.

G.2 In this project are there any particular risks to the confidentiality of personal information (e.g., reporting non-aggregated data or descriptive data from small samples)? If so, how is it proposed to minimise them?

The Participants will be informed that, as much as possible, confidentiality will be ensured during the research and in any report or publication arising from it, however, due to the limited size of the project, it is acknowledged that there are limitations to maintaining confidentiality. Names and other identifiers will be removed before analysis of the data. Pseudonyms will be used.

## **SECTION H: INFORMATION PRIVACY**

Researchers should be familiar with the existence of relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation regarding privacy. Of special note are the *Information Privacy Principles - IPPs* (see Appendix D to the *Guidelines*) and the *National Privacy Principles – NPPs* (from the *Privacy Act 1988* (Commonwealth), incorporating the *Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000* (Commonwealth)).

**H.1** Are you aware of any privacy issues that may impact on participants?

☐

YES

☒

NO

If "Yes" please identify this issue (making reference to IPPs and NPPs).

**H.2** If applicable, please identify the IPPs/NPPs which are being cited to justify the use of identifiable data without seeking the participant's consent.

## **SECTION I: ETHICAL ISSUES – still to be addressed**

**If you answered "YES" to any of the areas on the checklist in Section A (above) and have not commented on those areas in any other section of this Application Form, please indicate here how you intend to address the ethical issues arising.**

A fully written description of the purpose and nature of the study, its processes and participants' requirements for involvement will be given to all participants. This will also indicate that involvement is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. Written permission to audio-tape interviews will be sort from all participants. Participants will have access to the transcripts of the interviews and be provided with opportunities to add or alter sections.

**SECTION J: CHECK LIST – to be completed before submitting the application**

Please tick, as appropriate	YES	NO	N/A	Office Use Only
<b>J.1</b> The Guidelines have been read and adhered to.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>J.2</b> All sections of the application form have been completed.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>J.3</b> Details of participant requirements have been fully described.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>J.4</b> All relevant supporting documents are attached:				
4.1 Documentation from the Indigenous Support unit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2 Copies of any external approval forms to be submitted to hospitals, schools, etc.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.3 Evidence of permission to use off-campus locations.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.4 Ethics approval from external institutions (e.g., hospitals, schools) if available.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.5 Research Proposal (as requested at Section C.1 of the Application Form)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.6.a Information Letter to Participants on University Letterhead.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.6.b Information Letter to Participants follows the recommended format and wording as at <a href="http://www.acu.edu.au/research">www.acu.edu.au/research</a> .	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.7 Two copies of the Consent Form have been provided. Both Consent Forms follow the recommended format and wording as at <a href="http://www.acu.edu.au/research">www.acu.edu.au/research</a> .	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.8 Copies of all questionnaires and interview schedules. (If interviews are to be open-ended, a list of sample questions for each stage of the interview schedule.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.9 In cases of more than low risk to participants (at Section A.6 of the Application Form), copy of statement from medical practitioner, psychologist, counsellor prepared to provide professional assistance as required for procedures which might have an adverse effect on a participant's well-being.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>J.5</b> The Information Letter/s is/are in plain English.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>J.6</b> The Information Letters and this application have been checked for typographical, spelling and grammatical errors.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**SECTION K: DECLARATION – to be completed before submitting the application electronically.**

I/We declare that the information I/We have given above is true and correct in all respects and that I/We have disclosed all aspects of the project. I am/We are familiar with and have access to copies of the National Health and Medical Research Council's *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007).

I/We accept responsibility for the conduct of this research in accordance with the principles contained in the NHMRC Statement and any other conditions specified by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University.

I/We will notify the Human Research Ethics Committee immediately of any variation to this project, e.g., changes to the number or mix of participants, to research procedures, to the survey instrument(s) or questionnaire(s).

**You are reminded that contact with participants and/or access to their records/files/specimens must not commence until written ethics approval has been received from the HREC.**

**I/We declare that we will NOT commence data collection and/or access participants' records/files/specimens until written approval has been received from the Human Research Ethics Committee.**

Name (block letters)	Signature	Date
Dr HELGA NEIDHART Principal Investigator or Supervisor	_____	_____
MICHAEL HARRIS Co-Investigator 1 or Co-Supervisor (if staff) or Student Researcher 1 (if applicable)	_____	_____
_____ Co-Investigator 2 (if staff) or Student Researcher 2 (if applicable)	_____	_____
_____ Co-Investigator 3 (if staff) or Student Researcher 3 (if applicable)	_____	_____
_____ Co-Investigator 4 (if staff) or Student Researcher 4 (if applicable)	_____	_____
_____ Co-Investigator 5 (if staff) or Student Researcher 5 (if applicable)	_____	_____

**PRIVACY STATEMENT:**

Australian Catholic University is committed to ensuring the privacy of all information it collects. Personal information supplied to the University will only be used for administrative and educational purposes of the institution. Personal information collected by the University will only be disclosed to third parties with the written consent of the person concerned, unless otherwise prescribed by law. For further information, please see the University's Statement on Privacy [http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy\\_policy.cfm](http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy_policy.cfm).

## **ATTACHMENT 1**

### **AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY Human Research Ethics Committee**

#### **Administration of Substances/Agents**

*Detailed information on any chemical compounds, drugs or biological agents is required, together with indications of dosage, frequency of administration and anticipated effects.*

- Name(s) of Substance(s):

\_\_\_\_\_

- Dosage per administration:

\_\_\_\_\_

- Frequency of administration:

\_\_\_\_\_

- Total amounts to be administered:

\_\_\_\_\_

- Anticipated effects:

\_\_\_\_\_

- Other comments to assist the Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **PRIVACY STATEMENT:**

Australian Catholic University is committed to ensuring the privacy of all information it collects. Personal information supplied to the University will only be used for administrative and educational purposes of the institution. Personal information collected by the University will only be disclosed to third parties with the written consent of the person concerned, unless otherwise prescribed by law. For further information, please see the University's Statement on Privacy  
[http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy\\_policy.cfm](http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy_policy.cfm).

## **ATTACHMENT 2**

### **AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY Human Research Ethics Committee**

#### **Sampling of Body Tissue or Fluids**

*If the research involves administration of foreign substances or invasive procedures, please attach a statement from a medical or paramedical practitioner with indemnity insurance, accepting responsibility for those procedures.*

- What will be sampled and how?

- Frequency and volume?

- How are samples to be stored?

- How will samples be disposed of?

- Who will take the samples?

What are their qualifications for doing so?

- Other comments to assist the Committee:

#### **PRIVACY STATEMENT:**

Australian Catholic University is committed to ensuring the privacy of all information it collects. Personal information supplied to the University will only be used for administrative and educational purposes of the institution. Personal information collected by the University will only be disclosed to third parties with the written consent of the person concerned, unless otherwise prescribed by law. For further information, please see the University's Statement on Privacy [http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy\\_policy.cfm](http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy_policy.cfm).

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Modification of Ethics Clearance**

## Human Research Ethics Committee

### APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL TO MODIFY A RESEARCH PROJECT WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

1. This form is available upon request via Email [res.ethics@acu.edu.au](mailto:res.ethics@acu.edu.au) or on the Internet at: <http://www.acu.edu.au/research>. All questions must be answered fully. If a question does not apply, indicate N/A.
2. It is a requirement of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007) that any changes to a research protocol which involves contact with human participants or access to their records or files must be subject to review and approval by a Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The completed form should be signed and dated then lodged with the local Research Services Officer:  

VICTORIA	NEW SOUTH WALES, ACT AND QUEENSLAND
Research Services	Research Services
Australian Catholic University	Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus	Brisbane Campus
Locked Bag 4115	PO Box 456
FITZROY VIC 3065	VIRGINIA QLD 4014
Tel: 03 9953 3158	Tel: 07 3623 7429
Fax: 03 9953 3315	Fax: 07 2623 7328
4. The application will normally be processed within 20 working days.

NO modification to the protocol is permissible before written approval from the HREC has been received.

1. HREC Register No.: V200708 37
2. Approval End Date: 31-12-2008
3. Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr. Helga Neidhart
4. Student Researcher (if applicable): Michael Harris
5. Project Title: TOGETHER WE GROW: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES WHEN CATHOLIC PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS WORK IN PARTNERSHIP.
6. Proposed Modifications to the Project  
*NOTE: Such modifications may include changes to: the aims, procedures or direction of the project; the sources or manner of recruitment of participants; the number or age of participants; the questionnaire, survey instruments, Information Letter(s) to Participants, Consent Forms, or adding student researcher details.*  
The overall project is the same, however, the project is changing from Action Research of two schools to a Case Study of three different schools. The purpose, aims, questions, survey instruments, information letters and consent forms remain unchanged.



**8. Reasons for the Modifications**

*Please indicate whether any adverse effects have occurred or whether any concerns have been expressed by participants.*

For reasons beyond the student researcher's control, the Action Research could not continue.

---

**9. Certification by Principal Investigator (or Supervisor) and Student Researcher**

I/We certify that the information provided above is an accurate and full account of the modification proposed to the protocols for this research project. I/We understand that the proposed modification is not to be introduced until the written approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee has been received.

Name ( <i>block letters</i> )	Signature	Date
Dr. Helga Neidhart Principal Investigator / Supervisor	.....	.....
Michael Harris Student Researcher	.....	.....

**APPROVAL BY CHAIR / PANEL CHAIR OF HREC**

☐ Modification Approved.

☐ The application needs to be referred to the next HREC meeting.

☐ I approve the modification of the Research Project as described by the applicant subject to the following conditions:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: .....Date: .....

**Privacy Statement**

Australian Catholic University is committed to ensuring the privacy of all information it collects. Personal information supplied to the University will only be used for administrative and educational purposes of the institution. Personal information collected by the University will only be disclosed to third parties with the written consent of the person concerned, unless otherwise prescribed by law. For further information, please see the University's Statement on Privacy [http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy\\_policy.cfm](http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy_policy.cfm).

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Application form CEOB Approval**



# **Brisbane Catholic Education**

## **Research Guidelines**

### **GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS WISHING TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

These guidelines are intended for researchers wishing to conduct research within Catholic schools administered by the Archdiocese of Brisbane. Researchers wishing to undertake research in other dioceses beyond south-east Queensland will need to direct their requests to the Catholic Education Office in the diocese in which the schools are located (see contact information below).

Brisbane Catholic Education welcomes research undertaken in its schools and annexes when it can be demonstrated that the research will assist to maintain and improve the provision of quality Catholic education. All applications to conduct research in Brisbane Catholic Education schools are coordinated centrally through the Executive Director's Office. Applications to conduct research made directly to schools will be re-directed to the Executive Director's Office. Approval to conduct research will be based on the evidence provided in relation to the nature and standard of the research being proposed. Any approval granted to conduct research is in principle only. The decision to allow the proposed research to be conducted in any school resides with the school principal.

Brisbane Catholic Education is a community of Catholic educators in 132 schools catering for almost 59,000 students from the rural areas of Childers, Nanango, Kingaroy and Gympie to metropolitan Brisbane, Sunshine Coast and South Coast areas.

#### **IDENTIFYING SCHOOLS**

##### **Archdiocese of Brisbane**

Lists of schools located within the Brisbane Archdiocese are published on the Brisbane Catholic Education website <http://www.brisbanecatholicschools.com.au> under "schools directory". The lists include two types of schools: - diocesan or systemic schools, which are schools under the authority of the Executive Director of Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Brisbane and religious institute schools, which are independent of Brisbane Catholic Education schools and operate under the authority of religious institutes. The schools are differentiated by the "school type" descriptor within the schools profile. that is, Brisbane Catholic Education school or religious institute school.

## Queensland Catholic Education

There are five Catholic dioceses within Queensland. A list of Catholic schools in Queensland may be accessed through the Queensland Catholic Education Commission website <http://www.qcec.qld.catholic.edu.au> and can be accessed through the appropriate hyperlinks.

The listings of schools, are described under the heading *School Authority* as follows:

'BCE'	Brisbane Catholic Education Office
'TWBA'	Toowoomba Catholic Education Office
'RTN'	Rockhampton Catholic Education Office
'TVL'	Townsville Catholic Education Office
'CNS'	Cairns Catholic Education Office

All applications to conduct research in **diocesan** Catholic schools should be directed to the Executive Director of Catholic Education in the appropriate diocese.

Applications to conduct research in **religious institute** schools (independent Catholic schools administered by religious orders) must be addressed separately and directed specifically to the principals of these schools.

### APPROVAL PROCEDURES AND CONDITIONS

Researchers conducting research within Brisbane Catholic Education schools must ensure that their research does not negatively impact on the learning and teaching environment within schools. In submitting the research application researchers agree to comply with the procedures and conditions outlined within these guidelines.

The Brisbane Catholic Education Research Committee regularly receives applications for consideration. The committee meets on a monthly basis. Providing each application is supported by relevant documentation, the principal researcher will receive a response to their application within a week following the committee meeting. A letter of approval to approach the principal/s at the respective school/s nominated will be sent to the principal/s notifying them of the researchers' proposed approach.

It is a condition of approval that, upon completion of the research, the researcher will:

- provide Brisbane Catholic Education with a copy of the research findings;
- provide the schools in which the research was conducted with a summary of the research findings; give permission for Brisbane Catholic Education to disseminate reports to its personnel.

Please refer to **Form C** "Agreement to provide research findings published or unpublished to Brisbane Catholic Education".

It is also expected that unpublished reports from research pertaining to individual case studies conducted with students in Catholic schools will be given directly to the principal of the school for information purposes. (These do not need to be forwarded to Brisbane Catholic Education Centre).

### For undergraduate and postgraduate courses

Brisbane Catholic Education recognises that research assignments are often a component of an undergraduate or postgraduate course. It is therefore recognised that ethical approval may not be required for all research assignments.

If ethical approval is not required please refer to and complete **Form D “Application procedures for undergraduate and postgraduate students”** and attach your assessment criteria.

Research applications that are submitted in a form not consistent within the recommended proforma will not be considered.

### **Copyright**

Brisbane Catholic Education employees who wish to conduct research need to be aware that where a publication is made by an employee in the course of employment and as part of the employee’s usual duties, the first owner of copyright will usually be Brisbane Catholic Education as the employer. Any enquires in this regard should be forwarded to the Executive Director for consideration.

### **Commercial Gain**

It is not the intention of Brisbane Catholic Education to provide approval for research which is undertaken primarily for commercial or material gain.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

Researchers must ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of any personal details/information collected from research participants is maintained at all times. This includes the maintenance of privacy and confidentiality in the publication of research data collected for the duration of the research project.

The *Privacy Act 1988* regulates the way in which private sector organisations collect, use, keep secure and disclose personal information. Brisbane Catholic Education has adopted and is bound by the ten National Privacy Principles established by the Federal Privacy Commissioner. A privacy statement detailing Brisbane Catholic Education’s practices and procedures for the use and management of personal, sensitive and health information collected from parents/guardians, students and prospective employees (considered Brisbane Catholic Education’s ‘consumers’ under the Act) can be accessed at [www.brisbanecatholicschools.com.au](http://www.brisbanecatholicschools.com.au). Researchers who collect any personal, health or sensitive information from Brisbane Catholic Education’s ‘consumers’ while conducting research are required to comply with either Brisbane Catholic Education’s privacy statement or the comparable privacy policy of their sponsoring organisation.

Please note that if a research participant discloses to a researcher, during a research project, confidential information in relation to sexual or physical abuse/harm or circumstances where a student’s health, safety or well being is in danger, the researcher is required to disclose this information to the school principal or the Director – School Development and Quality Assurance on 3840 0655 immediately.

### **Code of Conduct**

All personnel involved in research within Brisbane Catholic Education schools need to familiarise themselves with **Form E “Research Personnel Code of Conduct”** reading and completing the acceptance agreement prior to approaching schools.

## ***Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2005 and Duty of Care Responsibilities***

The community has clear expectations of school personnel in matters relating to child protection. It rightly expects that children and young people, while at school, will be protected from all forms of abuse/harm.

Filming and any other process by which a child could be identified will not be approved in any research application unless the following conditions are met:

- That research participants and caregivers are fully informed regarding the intent, nature and scope of the research and that written consent is specifically given by the caregivers in relation to any filming/photography/videoing etc of participants;
- That the above condition also applies to research projects that involve longitudinal studies;
- That the researchers must provide details of the procedures they will use to ensure participant confidentiality – for example, strategies for information storage, access and disposal of data
- That additional written consent from the primary caregiver and research participants will be required, prior to utilising filming or any other participant identifying information, in any forum such as conference, teacher in-service, professional development, teaching instruction etc”

The *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2005*, implemented in May 2001, is an important child protection initiative. The Act requires people working in ‘*child related employment*’ to undergo employment screening and obtain a Positive Notice Blue Card. Researchers making application to conduct research in Brisbane Catholic Education schools whose research involves working with children under 18 years of age are required to contact the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian to ensure they are aware of and comply with their obligations in relation to the possession of a Positive Notice Blue Card.

Information in relation to researchers obligations in accordance with the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2005* can be obtained by contacting the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

Website: [www.childcomm.qld.gov.au](http://www.childcomm.qld.gov.au)  
E-mail: [bluecard@ccypcg.qld.goc.au](mailto:bluecard@ccypcg.qld.goc.au)  
Telephone: Employment Screening 1800 113 611 (Free call)  
Fax: (07) 3247 5145

**NB: Applications to conduct research that involves direct contact with children under the age of 18 years of age will not be approved unless the researcher is able to provide either a Positive Notice Blue Card or evidence that a Positive Notice Blue Card is not required.**

### **Other important considerations:**

Researchers making application to conduct research in Brisbane Catholic Education schools must comply with the provisions of the following Acts:

The *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2005*, accessed through [www.legislation.qld.gov.au](http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au)

The *Privacy Act 1988*, accessed through [www.privacy.gov.au](http://www.privacy.gov.au)

The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*, accessed through [www.legislation.qld.gov.au](http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au)

Researchers making application to conduct research in Brisbane Catholic Education schools must be aware of and comply with the provisions of the following Archdiocese policy statements:

*Student Protection Policy Statement*

*Workplace Health and Safety Policy Statement*

These policies can be accessed

at: <http://www.brisbanecatholicschools/pub/policies/policies.htm>

For further information regarding the research application process, please contact the Research Coordinator on (07) 3033 7427.

**APPLICATION  
TO CONDUCT RESEARCH  
IN  
BRISBANE CATHOLIC EDUCATION SCHOOLS  
ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE**

Principal researcher contact details

Name: Mr. Michael Harris.

Address: 7 Golden Grove Ringwood. Victoria. 3134

Telephone: 03-9876-1533 (w) Fax:

E-mail address: michaelh@saparkorchards.catholic.edu.au

The supervisor(s) of your research programme

Name: Dr. Helga Neidhart.

Address: Australian Catholic University. 115 Victoria Pde. Fitzroy, Victoria 3065

Telephone: 03-9953-3267 Fax:

E-mail address: h.neidhart@patrick.acu.edu.au

Name: Dr. Chris Branson

Address: Australian Catholic University. 115 Victoria Pde. Fitzroy, Victoria 3065

Telephone: 03-9953-3730 Fax:

E-mail address: chris.branson@acu.edu.au

Are you a current employee of Brisbane Catholic Education

☐

Yes

☐

No

If yes, please provide your Employer ID number:

**The title of your research project:**

"Together We Grow: Exploring the Leadership Outcomes Created When Catholic Parish Primary Schools Work in Partnership."

**Brief Overview:** This research explores the leadership outcomes for the leaders of three formally separate schools, now in the same Parish. Data will be gathered from individual interviews with the Parish Priest and the three Principals, followed by a focus group with the three Principals and another with the leadership teams.

**Benefits:** This research is significant because it has the potential to influence the theory, policy and practice of the leadership of schools in partnership, or those wishing to, or being mandated to, embark on a new partnership.



**Description of the research design and methodology:**

I have adopted an interpretive orientation to explore key stakeholders' perceptions of the partnership. To understand the participants' reality as they experienced it and interpreted it, a constructionism epistemology will be used. As the study seeks to gain the perspectives of the participants on leadership which is viewed as a relational activity, symbolic interactionism forms the theoretical perspective through which data analysis will be conducted. The research methodology used will be case study, as this is consistent with both the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction.

To ensure validity and reliability, member checking will be used. I will submit transcripts and emerging themes back to the participants for verification. I will also employ an audit trail to verify the credibility of the information collected. This will require regular discussions with my University supervisors.

I have attached the questionnaires which will be used.

**Parental Approval:** Not applicable.

**Victorian Institute of Teaching No:** 144172 (Copy attached)

**Confidentially:** Each of the interviewees and focus group participants will be allocated a pseudonym for anonymity. Each of the schools will be identified with a pseudonym. Storage and security of all data will be in accordance with the rules of the Australian Catholic University. Data access will be restricted to those authorised by myself.

**Schools participating in the research:** (All part of the one Parish)

**Duration of the Data Collection:** September – November 2009.

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Dr. Helga Neidhart.  
Principal Supervisor.

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Michael Harris.  
Student Researcher.

## Confidential Declaration by Principal Researcher

- a) I am aware of and will comply with the special responsibilities associated with undertaking research with children and young people, specifically, my responsibilities and obligations under the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2005*, and the *Privacy Act 1988*.
- b) I declare that there are no other circumstances or reasons that might preclude my undertaking research with children and young people.
- c) In relation to assistants conducting research with children and young people with me and /or on my behalf, I will ensure that:
  - They will be made aware of the special responsibilities associated with undertaking research with children and young people, specifically, their responsibilities and obligations under the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2005*, and the *Privacy Act 1988*.  
(See **Form B** for assistant researchers)
- d) I have provided as part of my submission a copy of my suitability card or evidence that a working with children suitability card is not required.

.....  
Signature of principal researcher

.....  
Date

## Confidential Declaration by Assistant Researcher

- a) I am aware of and will comply with the special responsibilities associated with undertaking research with children and young people, specifically, my responsibilities and obligations under the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2005*, and the *Privacy Act 1988*
  
- b) I declare that there are no other circumstances or reasons that might preclude my undertaking research with children and young people.
  
- c) I have provided as part of my submission a copy of my suitability card or evidence that a working with children suitability card is not required.

.....  
Signature of assistant researcher

.....  
Date

**Agreement to provide Research findings to  
Brisbane Catholic Education.**

As principal researcher:

I agree to provide Brisbane Catholic Education with a copy of the research findings published or unpublished of the proposed study upon completion.

I grant Brisbane Catholic Education the right to disseminate this report to personnel in Brisbane Catholic Education.

I agree to provide participating schools with a summary of the research findings published or unpublished.

I understand that, if Brisbane Catholic Education wishes to disseminate the report more widely, this will be done in consultation with me.

.....  
Signature of principal researcher

.....  
Date

## Application procedures for undergraduate and postgraduate students

**This report is to be completed by the research and the supervisor if the researcher does not require ethical approval under the universities ethics committee.**

Principal researcher contact details Name: Address: Telephone: <span style="float: right;">Fax:</span> E-mail address:
Name of supervisor Address: Telephone: <span style="float: right;">Fax:</span> E-mail address:
Title of research proposal/assessment task
Please comment on the following aspects of the proposal, in relation to the submitted applications.
Significance, purpose and value of the research (Please attach a copy of the assessment criteria for the unit of study being undertaken)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriateness of the research design (Please attach any data collection instruments, surveys to be used in the research)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodological adequacy and viability</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical considerations (please attach a letter of introduction/information letter pertaining to the research project, and a consent form for participants to complete)</li> </ul>

To what extent do you consider the principal researcher to be capable of undertaking the research described in the attached proposal?

Is this proposal exempt from ethical approval? Yes / No

.....  
Supervisor's Signature

.....  
Date



# RESEARCH PERSONNEL CODE OF CONDUCT

*This Code of Conduct applies to all persons conducting research within Brisbane Catholic Education.*

All research personnel should familiarise themselves with documents regarding *Student Protection Reporting Processes of Inappropriate Behaviour and Harm to Students*.

All research personnel must ensure that they comply with their obligations under the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2005* and hold a current Positive Notice Blue Card should it be deemed necessary.

Research personnel should ensure that their behaviour does not in any way compromise Brisbane Catholic Education's provision of a safe and enjoyable environment for young people.

Research personnel are expected to follow the principles of:

- safety
- respect
- support
- ethical communication
- ethical conduct.

Research personnel should:

- behave honestly and with integrity
- act with care and diligence
- behave and dress appropriately.

Research personnel should think and act safety:

- put safety first in all activities
- follow the safety procedures outlined by Brisbane Catholic Education and those outlined by the school, to the best of your ability
- if a direct threat is identified, assist in the evacuation of the area and/or situation as quickly as possible
- work only according to your level of competency. Contact and report to School Administration when confronted with a situation which you are unable to contend with or is beyond your role and responsibility.

Research personnel should treat students and staff with respect:

- respect the rights of individuals and maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality
- treat everyone with courtesy, sensitivity, tact, consideration and humility
- act in a manner consistent with an environment free of fear, harassment, racism and exploitation
- respect the cultures, beliefs, opinions and decisions of others although you may not always agree

- take instruction from and not obstruct the responsible staff members in any way in regards to the execution of their duties
- report any illegal activity to the School's Administration or appropriate staff member.

Research personnel should use appropriate communication skills when engaging with students:

- acknowledge the needs and concerns of the individual
- practice effective listening (For example ask open questions; be alert to non-verbal communication; stay calm and relaxed)
- be aware of the young person's physical space
- be aware of your own body language
- be judicious in making physical contact with young people and at all times seek the young persons permission to do so
- stay calm and relaxed
- be clear and consistent
- use non-discriminatory respectful and non-judgmental language
- seek advice whenever appropriate
- research personnel, must follow all instructions from the staff and School Administration. You should not engage directly with media representatives, and should refer all enquiries to School Administration.

Research personnel must not:

- smoke or use tobacco products while conducting research within and/or on school property
- use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol at any time while conducting research within and/or on school property
- use, possess, or be under the influence of illegal drugs at any time while conducting research within and/or on school property
- condone the use of or provided any of the above substances to any students, employees or volunteers
- verbally harass or abuse any person or use profanity while conducting research within and/or on school property
- utilize your position as research personnel to take advantage of any young person.

Any breaches of this Code of Conduct will be dealt with by the school principal in the first instance and appropriate authorities will be contacted if necessary.

Should you have any questions with regard to any of the above you should contact Brisbane Catholic Education in the first instance on (07) 3033 7478.



## **Agreement to adhere to the Brisbane Catholic Education Research Personnel Code of Conduct**

This form is to be completed by all personnel who will be involved in conducting research within Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Brisbane.

As a researcher,

I have read and understand the Brisbane Catholic Education *Research Personnel Code of Conduct*.

I agree to uphold the Brisbane Catholic Education *Research Personnel Code of Conduct* as a researcher conducting research within Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Brisbane.

.....  
Signature of researcher

.....  
Date

(Please note that a separate agreement needs to be signed for each researcher conducting research)

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Interview Questions December 2009**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** TOGETHER WE GROW: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES WHEN CATHOLIC PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** DR HELGA NEIDHART

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** MICHAEL HARRIS

**Proposed Questions for Individual Interviews and Focus Groups**

1. What is your vision for the partnership?
2. Can you describe how the schools have worked in partnership to date?
3. How have you lead the development of the partnership?
4. What do you see as the leadership outcomes that have resulted from the schools working in partnership?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Letter to Fr. P**



Australian Catholic University Limited  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
Melbourne Campus (St Patrick's)  
115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy VIC 3065  
Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy MDC VIC 3065  
Telephone 613 9953 3000  
Facsimile 613 9953 3005  
[www.acu.edu.au](http://www.acu.edu.au)

INFORMATION LETTER TO FR. P  
(INTERVIEW)

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** TOGETHER WE GROW: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES WHEN CATHOLIC PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** DR HELGA NEIDHART

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** MICHAEL HARRIS

**(NAME OF) PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:** DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Dear Fr. P,

You are invited to participate in a project which is being undertaken as part of a Doctor of Education for Michael Harris. The purpose of the project is to explore the leadership outcomes created when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership.

The project will be conducted at [three schools in one Parish].

If you agree to participate in the project you would be involved in one telephone interview in September 2009 and one face to face interview in November.

There are no risks to you beyond normal day to day living associated with your participation with this project.

The research has the potential to influence the theory, policy and practice of the leadership of schools in partnership and those wishing to, or being mandated to, embark on a new partnership. Results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications and may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the participants in any way.

Participation is voluntary and you can chose not to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time during the project without having to give a reason nor justify that decision.

Confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research and in any report of publication arising from it. Names and other identifiers will be removed before analysis of data. Pseudonyms will be used.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Supervisor or the Student Researcher.

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



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[www.acu.edu.au](http://www.acu.edu.au)

Dr Helga Neidhart  
Ph: 9953 3267  
School of Educational Leadership  
Melbourne Campus  
115 Victoria Pde,  
Fitzroy VIC 3065

Mr Michael Harris  
9876 1533  
St Anne's Primary School  
60 Knees Rd,  
Park Orchards VIC 3114

I will provide appropriate feedback on the results of the project.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065  
Tel: 03 9953 3158  
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Principal Supervisor or Student Researcher.

---

Dr Helga Neidhart  
Principal Supervisor

---

Michael Harris  
Student Researcher

CRICOS registered provider:  
00004G, 00112C, 00873F, 00885B

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Consent form Fr. P**



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Telephone 613 9953 3000  
Facsimile 613 9953 3005  
www.acu.edu.au

CONSENT FORM (Interviews)  
(Copy for Fr. P)

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** TOGETHER WE GROW: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEADERSHIP  
OUTCOMES WHEN CATHOLIC PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** DR HELGA NEIDHART

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** MICHAEL HARRIS

**PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:** DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

I ..... (the participant) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this 12 month study and the two interviews of approximately 45 minutes each and to be audio-taped, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time without comment or penalty. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

I recognise that as much as possible, confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from it, however, due to the limited size of the project, it is acknowledged that there are limitations to maintaining confidentiality. Names and other identifiers will be removed before analysis of data. Pseudonyms will be used.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .....  
DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....



## **APPENDIX G**

### **Letter to Principals**



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Telephone 613 9953 3000  
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[www.acu.edu.au](http://www.acu.edu.au)

INFORMATION LETTER TO PRINCIPALS  
(INTERVIEW)

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** TOGETHER WE GROW: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES WHEN CATHOLIC PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** DR HELGA NEIDHART

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** MICHAEL HARRIS

**(NAME OF) PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:** DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Dear Principal,

You are invited to participate in a project which is being undertaken as part of a Doctor of Education for Michael Harris. The purpose of the project is to explore the leadership outcomes created when Catholic parish primary schools work in partnership.

The project will be conducted at [three schools in one Parish].

If you agree to participate in the project you would be involved in one telephone interview in September 2009 and one face to face interview in November.

There are no risks to you beyond normal day to day living associated with your participation with this project.

The research has the potential to influence the theory, policy and practice of the leadership of schools in partnership and those wishing to, or being mandated to, embark on a new partnership. Results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications and may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the participants in any way.

Participation is voluntary and you can chose not to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time during the project without having to give a reason nor justify that decision.

Confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research and in any report of publication arising from it. Names and other identifiers will be removed before analysis of data. Pseudonyms will be used.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Supervisor or the Student Researcher.

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



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I will provide appropriate feedback on the results of the project.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065  
Tel: 03 9953 3158  
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Principal Supervisor or Student Researcher.

---

Dr Helga Neidhart  
Principal Supervisor

---

Michael Harris  
Student Researcher

CRICOS registered provider:  
00004G, 00112C, 00873F, 00885B

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Consent form Principals**



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CONSENT FORM (Interviews)  
*(Copy for Interviewees)*

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** TOGETHER WE GROW: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LEADERSHIP  
OUTCOMES WHEN CATHOLIC PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** DR HELGA NEIDHART

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** MICHAEL HARRIS

**PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:** DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

I ..... *(the participant)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this 12 month study and the interviews of approximately 45 minutes each and to be audio-taped, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time without comment or penalty. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

I recognise that as much as possible, confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from it, however, due to the limited size of the project, it is acknowledged that there are limitations to maintaining confidentiality. Names and other identifiers will be removed before analysis of data. Pseudonyms will be used.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .....  
DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Interview Questions April 2010**

## **Proposed Interview Questions April 2010.**

### **Clear Vision:**

1. How has the partnership evolved over the past months?
2. Are there any new goals for the partnership?
3. Do you have any plans to review the Vision?
4. Have you thought about succession planning (how to maintain, develop the Vision)?
5. How will you know if the partnership is successful?
6. What would you recommend to schools beginning a partnership?

### **Deep Collaboration:**

1. There seems to be a good level of collaboration in the partnership. Why do you think this is so?
2. Have you sought to build collaboration, collegiality, among the staffs of the schools?
3. How are others involved in the partnership?
4. Have you experienced any conflict in the partnership? What was the outcome?
5. Do you have links with other schools?

### **Strong Leadership:**

1. How would you describe Father P's leadership style? ( The question for Father P: How would you describe your leadership style?)

### **Leadership Support:**

1. How does the partnership support you?
2. How does the partnership support the leadership in your school?

## **APPENDIX J**

### **Faith Leadership Questions**



## **Faith Leadership Questions**

How do you understand your role of faith leadership?

How does the partnership enable you to manage the dual roles of educational leader and faith leader?

How does the partnership support you in your role as a leader of faith?