

MAGISTERIUM PERSPECTIVES ON CATHOLIC SCHOOL IDENTITY

Abstract

Australian based research on the identity of the Catholic school (Sultmann & Brown, 2011) generated key pillars to depict the dynamic, complex, and unique life of the school. Notwithstanding this, a limitation of findings lay in particularising theoretical perspectives and generation of a wider discussion as to their theological implications. Within this context, Post Conciliar Magisterium literature on the Catholic school was examined more exclusively. This documentation was exposed to a Leximancer analysis to extract identity concepts which, in turn, were subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to detail identity themes, narrative expressions and principles of integration. Findings from Magisterium perspectives confirmed and expanded the significant dimensions of Catholic school identity established previously. The discussion of findings proposes definitional criteria for these pillars and offers a practical theological reflection on their associated themes, narratives and integrative principles.

Introduction

Identity within a Catholic Christian tradition is defined as the “constants that define Christianity in its missionary nature” (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004, p. 33), or more broadly, ‘the worldview’ – “what people, individually or collectively, know and believe, feel and value” (D’Orsa & D’Orsa, 1997, p. 72). Within the context of the Catholic school, the elaboration of this identity has been argued to be an ‘extraordinarily timely topic’, the exploration of which is said to constitute a project akin to “shaping the future of the Church and of society” (Miller, 2007, p. 17). Moreover, in light of the Conciliar and Post Conciliar literature emanating from the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), the necessity and opportunity for exploring and advancing Catholic school identity is significant. Pope John Paul II contended that this literature has lost none of its brilliance and provides “a compass by which we can take our bearings in the century now beginning” (John Paul II, 2001, p. 33).

The fundamental approach at Vatican II was to explore the tradition and apply it to the signs of the times. The intention of the Council to be pastoral, non-condemnatory and open to new learning gave it a style illustrated by horizontal as well as vertical relationships, service over control, openness to change, inclusiveness, and active pastoral participation. Some twenty years on from the closure of Vatican II, Pope John Paul II announced an extraordinary session of the Synod of Bishops to reflect on the “experience, meaning, implementation and effects of Vatican II” (Dulles, 1985, p. 5).

The Synod of 1976 determined that the central theme emerging from the Vatican II was that of the Church and that this should be examined in terms of itself (*ecclesia ad intra*) and in relation to other realities (*ecclesia ad extra*). The ensuing Final Report of the Synod (1976) offered five dominant and continuing themes: The mystery of the Church and the universal call to holiness; the Word of God and evangelisation as the first and continuing responsibility of all Christians; Liturgy and active participation; the Church as communion, a spiritual union among the faithful based on a common sharing in the life of the triune God; and, the Church in the World and the evangelisation of cultures through transformation in the light of the Gospel and the signs of the times (Dulles, 1985). These themes, captured explicitly in the encyclical, *Christifideles Laici* (CL) (John Paul II, 1989), served to reinforce the milestone statements of Vatican II and invite an elevated consciousness of not only “belonging to the Church, but of being the Church” (John Paul II, 1989, p. 26). At the same time a series of Post Conciliar literature on the Catholic school was progressed, documents which

offered a substantial source of reflection for understanding and integrating those concepts of Vatican II and its aftermath. It is from this Magisterial literature that concepts appropriate to identity can be derived and so offer a perspective on the constants, or the worldview, which underpin Catholic school life.

The Catholic School (TCS), (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977), the first of the post Conciliar documents, declares “Jesus Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, p. 33). That is, within the totality of its life, in the ordinary and not-so-ordinary happenings, the pervasiveness of Christ is experienced. In this light, the Catholic school is challenged to review its entire program according to that vision from which it draws its inspiration.

Another post Conciliar document, *The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988), gave particular attention to those areas that apply to the religious dimension of education. Here, the Catholic school is challenged to fulfill its educational goals by blending human culture with the message of salvation into a coordinated program; one that allows the Gospel to permeate and renew, in the manner of leaven, all of the systems that constitute sound educational practice.

The post Conciliar document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998), advances this renewal by concluding that the school derives its mission as an instrument of the Church and its pastoral ministry draws from the richness of Church tradition. In this way, Catholic schools are seen as places of evangelisation where a lively dialogue allows for enculturation and formation of people with differing religions and social backgrounds.

The final document, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (CCE, 2007) continues the stream of teaching from earlier Magisterium statements and emphasises a personal and group response by those who serve in the school. Conscious that the school is an ecclesial community, this document highlights that the Catholic school is a ‘home and school of communion,’ communitarian and intentional; a place of formation for the individual and the community of persons who constitute it.

The preliminary analysis of themes from the four Magisterium documents (please note that the only other document since Vatican Council II is on lay Catholics as witnesses to the faith. This document is not specifically on Catholic schooling and, as such, is not included here) illustrates an unfolding and integrated set of dimensions to the identity of the Catholic school: The centrality of Christ; the integral and pervasive impact of the religious dimension; the significance of outreach and inclusiveness; and, the authentic response of those who serve and witness through the communitarian nature of the Catholic school. Notwithstanding these dimensions, what becomes important is an explicit identification of identity (see Hirst, Renshaw & Brown, 2009), and what might support the nature of their connection. The present research does this by applying systematic qualitative procedures of data analysis so as to extract and clarify from Magisterium literature that which is considered as core to the tradition and is responsive to the ‘signs of the times.’

Method

Magisterium literature as data pool

Analysis tools

Leximancer is a data mining and visualisation tool (Leximancer, 2005). The key to Leximancer interpretation is the notion of concepts: collections of words that travel throughout the text. These concepts are reported in terms of how frequently they occur in sentences (absolute count) and their frequency of occurrence compared with the dominant concept (relative count). Leximancer also specifies and depicts the associated text that accompanies the concepts identified within the text.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) attempts to “unravel the meaning contained in accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with text and transcripts” (Smith, Jaman, & Osborn, 1999, p. 189). The process offers flexibility to data analysis of language discourse and provides accessibility to meaning in ways that otherwise would not be possible. IPA has relevance to the analysis of narratives such as that contained in concept passages drawn from teaching documents of the Magisterium.

Results

The Catholic School

The Leximancer analysis of *The Catholic School* (CCE, 1977) revealed five significant concepts: School, Catholic, Educational, Work and Religious in terms of their overall frequency and comparative levels of representation in the text. The results of the discourse analysis on these concepts confirmed the specific identity expressions for each key concept as follows: School – through mission of Church, integration and cultural dialogue; Catholic – through outreach to poor, mission of Christ, teacher authenticity and school renewal; Educational – through purpose, aims and process; Work – through stewardship, connectivity and pedagogy; and Religious – through religious education and religious environment. Taken together these identity expressions reflect a school culture which is open in its approach to sharing a liberating faith, to experiencing grounded life-giving relationships, to applying quality organisational systems and to emphasising religious education and faith practice as mechanisms for enhancing meaning.

The Catholic School provides a basis from which the Vatican II's themes of Christ centeredness, the significance of evangelisation (personally, socially and culturally), the challenge of service and prophetic action, the call to Christian discipleship and operating in right relationships could be recorded. At the same time, recognition is given to the functional organisational aspects of the school as a system, its on-going task of adapting to the signs of the times through renewal, and its distinctive focus on religious education and the religious dimension of its mission. Notably, this religious dimension of identity was least recorded in the document and thereby invited a more detailed interpretation in subsequent Magisterium literature. Such a response emerged from the Congregation of Catholic Education (1988) in the statement: *The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School*.

The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School

The Leximancer analysis of *The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School* (CCE, 1988) established two dominant identity concepts: Students and School. The discourse analysis on the related text for these dominant concepts pointed to their fundamental and integral relationship. The concept of Students was expanded – through expectations and outcomes; and School – through interdisciplinary relationships, Church community, personal integration and school climate. In summary, the core identity concepts and themes were summarized by integrative principles: Students – Formation; and School – Integration.

Within the first identity concept, Students, the significance of the Catholic school engaging in, and educating towards, a culture of faith is highlighted. Moreover, in recognition of a changing context, and a view of learning as life-long, the importance of faith, skills and journeying in a changing world are recognised. The themes of expectations and outcomes are practical in nature and leave little doubt as to the nature of identity and the associated goals of mission. The integrating principle of Formation mirrors a uniquely religious approach to this Catholic educative experience.

The second concept, School, reinforces the religious dimension within the totality of Catholic school life and culture. Emphasis is given to the integrated aspects of the religious dimension in curriculum, Church community, pastoral care and relationships. The impact of this religious dimension conveys the development of a cultural climate that is distinctly Catholic, yet sufficiently general to permit the pervasiveness of the dimension to apply as broadly as circumstances and mission application allow. While it can be established that *The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988) presents a comprehensive view of the religious dimension and by implication, the extent of formation in support of this, what is not specified is the level of connectivity across the arenas of Church life and community within which this might be nurtured. This latter set of interests was discussed in the next core document of the Magisterium, one that attended to the reality of the multiple environments engaged by the Catholic school as the new millennium was anticipated.

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium

The Leximancer analysis of *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (CCE, 1997) revealed seven concepts for detailed analysis: School, Education, Formation, Teachers, Catholic, Experience and Genuine.

The discourse analysis of concepts highlighted their significance and related themes: School – through prophetic call and defining features; Education – through responding to the signs of the times and being integral to society; Formation – through a focus on the totality of experience and a process of conversation; Teachers – through being significant contributors to an educating community and through professionalism; Catholic – through service in a challenging world; Experience – through the continuance of tradition in innovative ways; and Genuine – through school, faith and life integration, and witness. The associated integrating principles for the seven concepts selected for detailed analysis were: School – Prophetic Mission; Education – New Evangelisation; Formation – Story Conversation; Teachers – Vocation; Catholic – Outreach; Experience – Renewal; Genuine – Integrated Living.

The comprehensive nature of identity and its expressions of being as articulated in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (CCE, 1997) are directed primarily at the institutional level of the school. It is the Catholic school's mission to be prophetic and distinctive by its defining features, to respond to the signs of the times through dialogue, to recognise the relationship between formation and experience, to value teachers, exercise a primary role of service and yet to be faithful to the tradition in integrating faith with life as culture is experienced. The document addresses these significant themes of Catholic school philosophy and achieves a point of integration where meaning is generated with respect to mission and context. In this way, the document articulates a worldview which is already formed from its history, one that is mindful of its tradition yet still open to the development of a deeper interpretation of its identity through engagement. It is in the nature of this engagement, specifically through the personal and collective journey in faith by those who comprise the community, that the institutional focus is achieved. It is to these themes that the most recent document, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (CCE, 2007), advances the Council's principal theme of communion in Spirit as foundational to Church and school identity.

Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful

The Leximancer analysis of *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (CCE, 2007) revealed five identity concepts of significance: School, Persons, Ecclesial, Community and Communion. The first two concepts possessed considerable frequency counts and provided a reminder of themes from earlier Magisterium documents. The next three elaborated on themes appropriate to a deeper appreciation of the identity of the Catholic school in light of the Vatican II's teaching on communion.

The discourse analysis of key concepts provided related themes of: School – through mission, conscience, relationships and climate; Persons – through communion, vocation and formation; Ecclesial – through subjectivity; Community – through relationship inclusiveness; and Communion – through connectivity and complementarity. Overall, the core identity concepts were specified in more precise terms through the attribution of integrative principles with results comprising: School – Witness; Persons – Servant Community; Ecclesial – Baptismal Leadership; Community – Communio; Communion – Interdependence.

The analysis of *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007) identified themes of a distinctly personal and relational nature. The first, School, while giving emphasis to mission did so from the perspective of a living communion with an orientation on personal attributes of conscience, relationships and climate. The second and third themes, Persons and Ecclesial, gave added impetus to this trend through concepts of communion and vocation which were linked with formation.

The remaining concepts of Community and Communion served to offer increasing perspective to the overall and central theme. In this light, integrating principles supported personal engagement and included identity characteristics of witness, service, leadership and interdependence. Overall, the identity concepts, seen collectively, presented as not only defining tradition, but also suggesting an engagement from an institutional perspective which is premised on an interior commitment and vocational orientation to mission and culture.

The aggregated findings of the Leximancer and discourse analyses are shown in Table 1. Overall, fifteen concepts were registered as important, with concepts of School, Catholic, Students, Persons, Educational, Ecclesial, Community and Communion possessing significant levels of frequency.

Table 1

Summary of magisterium literature analysis

Concepts	Integrating Principles	Source*	Absolute Count	Relative Count %
School	Evangelisation	TCS	81	100
	Integration	RDECS	158	100
	Prophetic mission	CSTTM	34	89.7
	Witness	ETCS	113	100
Catholic	Liberating faith	TCS	80	98.7
	Outreach	CSTTM	27	79.4
Students	Formation	RDECS	176	94.5
Education	New evangelisation	CSTTM	32	94
Educational	Organisational systems	TCS	74	91.3
Formation	Story conversation	CSTTM	31	91.0
Persons	Servant community	ETCS	99	87.6
Teachers	Vocation	CSTTM	28	82.3
Experience	Renewal	CSTTM	27	79.4
Work	Life-giving relationships	TCS	49	60.4
Religious	Religious literacy	TCS	49	60.4
Genuine	Integrated living	CSTTM	18	52.9
Ecclesial	Baptismal leadership	ETCS	59	52.2
Community	Communio	ETCS	59	52.2
Communion	Interdependence	ETCS	58	51.3

*TCS – *The Catholic School*; RDECS – *The Religious Dimension of Education in Catholic Schools*; CSTTM – *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*; ETCS – *Educating together in Catholic schools*

Examination of Table 1 reinforces Catholic school identity as centred on evangelisation and characterised as integrative, prophetic, witness based, outreaching and liberating. A primary focus on student learning (holistic formation) exists, delivered within a context of relationships, community, and engagement of systems for sound organisational and pedagogical practices. Formation of all participants, nurturing authentic service and interdependence within a servant community are fundamental, with each finding expression in vocation, baptismal leadership and renewal.

The concepts arising from the collective analyses reflect Catholic school identity within the wisdom and proclamation of the Council. The release of each document offers a relevant position to the challenges of the decade and yet incorporates a response which respects the wisdom that preceded it. This litany of key expressions of identity depicts a progressive and systematic response to Vatican II's call for the Church to read and respond to the signs of the times while maintaining connection with its tradition. Overall, the findings listed in Table 1 suggest a pattern of core pillars similar to those established from integrated research (Sultmann & Brown, 2011) while providing a depth of definitional detail within each (see Table 2).

Table 2

Definitional elements to identity pillars of the Catholic school

PILLAR	ELEMENTS
FAITH	
Faith in a Catholic school is:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • founded on the person and message of Christ; • appreciative of Church tradition; • expressed with the support of Church community; • in dialogue with life and culture; • inclusive and outreaching to the poor; • in service of a challenging and changing world; • expressed through spirituality which integrates, provides witness, engages leadership and involves life-long conversion; • conscious and committed to identity and mission; • expressed in life-giving relationships which are integrated, prophetic and distinctive; • evident in the integration of faith, life and culture; • intent upon nurturing joy and hope within personal and communal life lived in the Spirit of the living Christ.
LEARNING	
Learning in a Catholic school is:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shaped by foundations in faith; • possessive of an educational purpose with aims, goals, programs and processes; • evident in a community of witness, professional practice, connectivity and tradition; • prophetic and inclusive, grounded in a relevant and responsive pedagogy; • nurtured through personal formation and school renewal; • shaped by life-giving relationships, school religious climate, and systems of management and stewardship; • focused on being and building the kingdom of God within and without.
LEADERSHIP	
Leadership in a Catholic school is:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ centred and integral to Church mission; • expressed by all; • founded in baptism and evidenced in an authentic vocational call to discipleship; • nurturing of the integration of faith, life and culture in self and others; • seen in service and communion which is open, systems based and authentic; • contextualised in communicative, complementary and co-responsible action for the common good; • emergent from and open to the liberating action of the Spirit; • accountable for its stewardship.

FORMATION

- Formation in a Catholic school is:**
- integral to understanding, commitment and practice of identity and mission;
 - possessive of a clear intention in support of all to share in the mission and ministry of Christ;
 - in dialogue and connection with 'story' which begins with experience and facilitates the search for meaning;
 - seen in processes of conversion of the 'head, heart and hand' to the person and message of Christ;
 - advanced through personal readiness and commitment to engage a Baptismal call;
 - observed in outcomes of witness, sacramental consciousness, religious literacy and faith practice.
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COMMUNITY

- Community in a Catholic school is:**
- an ecclesial servant community within the wider community of the parish, local (Diocesan) and universal Church;
 - sensitive to the signs of the times and in dialogue with a changed and changing context and culture;
 - a living Christian community united by Spirit;
 - inclusive of programs and practices which are in-reaching and out-reaching;
 - a model community where belonging, collaboration and life-long formation and conversion are lived out;
 - in service of itself for service within the world.
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Discussion

The expressions of identity arising from Post Conciliar documentation on the Catholic school parallel those conclusions of Miller (2007) as to Catholic school identity encompassing: "a supernatural vision founded on Christian anthropology, animated by communion and community, imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum, and sustained by Gospel witness" (p. 17). As well, the corresponding emphases on education as a means for formation towards a transcendent destiny, holistic in approach, contributing to person and community, sustained by integrated approaches across the curriculum and offered within an ecclesial culture reinforced by witness and relationships are powerful reminders of the inspiration and challenge within the Catholic school (also see Miller, 2007, pp. 17-59). The documents, singularly and collectively, expand on the tradition of the Catholic school to be a place where faith, life and culture are integrated and where the individual and community are invited into understanding, commitment and action across five interdependent and dynamic foundational pillars.

Faith

Within an ecological framework (Sultmann & Brown, 2011) the pillar of Faith was seen as foundational to identity while also 'rinsing through' the interdependent pillars of Learning, Community, Leadership and Formation. Significant themes for theological reflection within the analysis of the Faith pillar were the underlying meaning systems of Christ as cornerstone, school as Church mission, and evangelisation.

Learning

A core theme of the total data pool was the registration of the Church's educational project as central to the formation of the whole person. Learning was viewed from the perspective of a model life found in the model and message of Christ and finding ultimate fulfillment in being Christian in the world. Such a view, by implication, requires clarity with regard to the 'who' of the person and the 'what' of the message. Moreover,

a pedagogy that is developmentally sensitive as much as programmatically and instructionally sophisticated is required. Specifically, the quality of Religious Education, Catholic culture and the pervasiveness of the religious dimension across the whole educational enterprise are challenged to be aligned with the person and message of Christ.

The attributes of the Learning pillar which invite theological reflection were reflected in at least three themes throughout the combined narratives: The centrality of learning and teaching; the significance of relationships; and, the religious dimension of the school.

As the focus of schooling is learning, it is learning for a new social and cultural order where the goals of learning concentrate on the development of the person in relationship with, and for participation within, the community. Within a Catholic context, these goals become the expressions of “the graduate upon graduation” (Pastoral letter of Bishops of NSW and ACT, 2007) and are evident in at least three dimensions: self, relationships and community. Significantly, these goals parallel the *Goals for Schooling for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) in that they nurture successful learners (individual), encourage confident and creative individuals (relationships), and help to support active and informed citizens (community). Notwithstanding these goals, the foundational essence of them is premised upon what is valued in terms of the nature of the person, the processes that empower learning and the type of community that learning fosters.

Contemporary classrooms can be argued to be environments where aspects of command, control and survival have been replaced by imagination, creativity and collaborative learning. As such, the importance of relationships holds a time honoured place. The concept of living relationships reflects the permanence, pervasiveness and importance of relationships in the multiple and dynamic exchanges among people within the school community. Living relationships are conceptualised as possessing a ‘living’ dimension which is characterised in all dimensions of interpersonal activity and in the quality of the individual and relational outcomes of these exchanges. They are said to encompass an expression of lived spirituality (Whelan, 2010) which leads to the development of whole people, whole learning and whole communities (Bird & Sultmann, 2010).

The religious dimension of the Catholic school is the culture that pervades the totality of experiences within the learning community. In keeping with the Church’s mission of offering an enriched meaning to human existence, the Catholic school promotes the reign of God and the person of Jesus as the essence of education and the means of fulfilment for the human person. The characteristics of the reign of God are seen in relationships of justice, love and peace, and the growth of the person in Christ is evident in an individual’s action, thought and judgment, based on a Christian perspective (McLaughlin, 2000). The religious dimension of the school is manifested in the values which underpin curriculum choice; seen in structures and processes that critique, liberate, empower and build community; evident in social justice programmes, service learning and immersion experiences; nurtured through attendance to prayer life and spiritual devotions; and expressed in the celebration of sacraments, rituals, events, stories and history recollections.

Community

Community in terms of this research is not seen only as a collection of people, but incorporating shared consciousness, a communion of beliefs and values that unite and find expression in authentic action and witness. Key to a practical and theological understanding of the Community pillar of the Catholic school are the concepts of the Church as communion, the social justice principles which shape process and structure, and the application of these in governance and management systems.

The building of relationships within the Catholic school community, and among the communities that constitute the wider Church communion, is supported by at least three longstanding social justice principles: collegiality, subsidiarity and common good. Collegiality recognises the whole communion and the demonstration of mutuality of interest and service beyond the immediate boundaries of responsibility. It implies a discipleship of equals and calls for a level of co-responsibility by all towards the good of the particular and the whole. Subsidiarity influences how ‘entities’ relate, specifically in terms of allocation and complementarity of responsibilities. It encourages decision making at the level most appropriate and most respectful of human

involvement. Common good emerges from the commitment to community in both the immediate and wider sense. It generates awareness and a desire to be mindful of relationships that are centred on justice, mutual development and needs of all.

Leadership

The concept of leadership entailing 'processes of influence' (Duignan, 2007) suggests that leadership is pervasive across individual behaviours, group action, relationships, managerial systems and wider organisational activities. In terms of a practical theological perspective, leadership is viewed as a response to Baptism, one that engages principles of service and communion and is advanced by knowledge and competencies.

The expression of leadership in the Catholic school, the 'special something', the 'deep vocational commitment', the 'x factor', is revealed in the unique reserves and qualities of Catholic school principals (Grace, 1997). Within a detailed analysis, Grace (2010) identifies the phenomenon as 'spiritual capital', and, while overlapping in conceptual terms with theological literacy and religious institute ethos, proposes that it includes a level of uniqueness that sustains mission, underpins purpose and nurtures hope. It is a spirituality which animates, inspires and operates dynamically. In practical terms, leadership which is Spirit based embraces a higher vision and the invitation to understand the Spirit of God in the world and to evaluate and transform culture in the light of the Gospel.

A comprehensive analysis of leadership research in Australia (Mulford, 2007) concluded that leadership no longer stands independent from the organisation and its core mission, nor is it separate from context. Clearly, it entails the activation of complex and engaging processes, necessitates a commitment of the heart and is accountable. It possesses a 'how', 'what', and 'why' which reinforce its expansive nature, its level of potential and its challenge. A summary framework on the relationship of leadership to learning is offered by Dempster (2009) in a landmark article geared to all educators. Central to the processes of influence are leader attributes of: Agreeing to and sharing a clear moral purpose; disciplined dialogue; evidence-based decision making; active professional learning; enhancing conditions for learning; monitoring curriculum and teaching; exercising distributive leadership as the norm; and, connecting with parent and community support for learning.

Formation

Formation within the Christian Tradition involves the shaping and directing of one's life in accord with the model and message of Christ. The practice of formation for the practical theologian is both a necessity and opportunity to reflect upon the underpinning foundations in faith that nurture Christian praxis. This is a progressive experience which draws upon the goal of knowing Christ, being clear about purpose and process, and recognising the complexity and sensitivity of experiences which engage the mystery of Christ.

Formation facilitates growth in the sense that, "there is the connection that at one and the same time each of us is the goal and principle of formation" (CL, p. 169). In this light, formation is fundamental to education in the Catholic school for it entails forming others while being open to being formed from the experience. That is, formation is founded on mission and is itself a necessary prerequisite for mission.

The experience of formation for mission within the Catholic school involves providing experiences that support the work of the Spirit within the Tradition and culture of the school. Key to these experiences is how the Gospel might engage the signs of the times within the lived reality of identity and mission. Within the mission of the Catholic school, formation becomes "an ever clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfill one's mission" (CL, p. 156).

Conclusion

This article aimed to propose definitional criteria for dimensions of Catholic school identity and to reflect upon these dimensions in terms of themes and principles. Catholic school identity as depicted in post Conciliar literature of the Magisterium was found to be Christ-centered and Kingdom-based, with the Gospel reflected in each of the strategic pillars of Faith, Learning, Community, Leadership and Formation. Moreover, reflection of data from a practical theological orientation revealed that life within a Catholic school is challenged to be

dynamic, authentic and integrated. Key to these outcomes has been the confirmation of a dynamic system of interdependent strategic pillars. Future research could model these pillars so as to identify their levels of significance, expand upon their core inclusions and that which might explain their dynamic relationships.

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