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Adolescents possess enormous leadership potential. They are tomorrow's leaders in the workplace, the family, the community, and in government. Increasingly, schools have taken on the significant responsibility of nurturing leadership in young people. Schools are, as van Linden and Fertman (1998) have noted, "hotbeds of leadership development" (p. 224). This article explores the role and function of the secondary school principal in developing student leadership. Specifically, eight principals of secondary schools in Perth, Western Australia were interviewed about their vision of student leadership and what they saw their role as in promoting student leadership at their schools. As a prelude, the literature review centers on four themes: school-based student leadership, student leadership in Catholic schools, the development of student leadership in schools, and the role of the principal. The methodology for the research is then outlined. The findings of the study are subsequently presented under the following headings: Student leadership, Student leadership in Catholic schools, and the Role of the principal. The findings are then examined in the light of the literature on student leadership. Finally, various recommendations are made for principals, teachers, and Catholic education authorities.

Developing the leadership potential of young people is vital. Society will always require leaders who are ethical, collaborative, transformative, and have a strong sense of service. Secondary schools are in a unique position to influence the leadership development of adolescents. Such influence comes in the shape of offering formal and informal opportunities for leadership, specific training in leadership, and adult mentors to accompany adolescents on their leadership journeys. Catholic secondary schools, moreover, can draw upon a rich tradition of Gospel values exemplified in the person of Jesus to inform their efforts to develop student leadership. This article explores the notion of student leadership through the eyes of eight principals of Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia. Specifically, the article examines what each of these eight school leaders understands as the most appropriate model of leadership in Catholic schools, the ways each considers student leadership can be fostered and implemented, and what

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each believes to be the role of the principal in enhancing student leadership and student leadership development

Underpinning this research is a belief that school principals play a dynamic role as catalysts for developing student leadership (Lavery & Hine, 2012). By virtue of their status, school principals are in a preeminent position to influence the vision of student leadership and leadership development exercised in their schools. They ultimately decide what human and financial resources will be allocated to student leadership. They—through their words and actions—model leadership behavior for students (and staff). Moreover, they—by their level of involvement—indicate to the school community the degree to which student leadership is valuable and worthwhile. In such ways, school principals —perhaps more than anyone else—affect the culture of student leadership in the school (Lavery & Hine, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

Four theoretical constructs form the conceptual framework underpinning this research into the role of the Catholic secondary school principal in student leadership development and formation. These theoretical constructs are Christian leadership within Catholic schools, the notion of student leadership *per se*, the development of student leadership in schools, and the role of the school principal in fostering student leadership. First, the literature on Christian leadership and its meaning for Catholic schools furnishes a rationale on which to base the position of the Catholic secondary school principal in student leadership development. This literature includes a review of leadership within the New Testament, pertinent Church documents, and insights from prominent Christian writers. Collectively, these sources represent a leadership approach recommended for leaders within Catholic schools. Second, material specifically focused on student leadership offers some insight regarding the foci of school-based student leadership, as well as the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for student leaders themselves. The third construct concentrates on student leadership development, and how leadership development is engendered through student involvement in leadership programs. This construct is explored with regard to current trends in research, benefits of participation in leadership programs, and the increasing popularity of service-learning as an approach to leadership development. Fourth, literature on the role of the school principal regarding student leadership and student leadership development is presented. Attention is given

to the approaches principals use to promote, develop, and sustain student leadership activities within schools.

Christian Leadership in Catholic Schools

Christian leadership draws its inspiration from the life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. The approach to leadership exemplified by Jesus is one of service (Adair, 2001; Agosto, 2005; Blanchard & Hughes, 2005). The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education provides insight into the purpose, significance, and character of Catholic schools, in which the tenets of Christian leadership can be applied. Four documents published by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education speak authoritatively about community, culture, and witness in relation to the task of Catholic education itself, and collectively provide a framework within which Christ's model of leadership can operate (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1965, 1977, 1988, 1997). Collectively, these documents promote a unilateral message for school communities to train and develop young people within a culture of faith, illuminated by the Gospel message. Furthermore, these documents call for all within Catholic school communities to develop a special relationship with Christ, and for those in positions of leadership within such institutions to model their leadership efforts on the servant approach lived by Jesus.

More specifically, the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia's *Mandate Letter for all Involved in Catholic Education* (2009) specifically states that those individuals who assume a position of leadership within Catholic school communities have a special role to perform—one modeled on service. Moreover, as the *Letter* underscores, "For staff, parents and students, they are to reflect the Christ who came to serve rather than to be served" (p. 43). As all school leaders are called to embody the vision, values, and outlook of the Catholic school, leadership through providing witness is critical for the effectiveness of the school community. In addition to recommending that a servant leadership style be the chosen model of leadership within Catholic schools, the Western Australian Bishops exhorted those leaders to serve in a spirit of collaboration. Specifically, they noted:

> the contributions of our Catholic school leaders to the life and mission of the Church are examples of God's presence in our schools. We value their generosity and willingness to collaborate with us in the fulfillment of our responsibilities regarding Catholic Schools. (Catholic Education Commission, 2009, p. 43)

The servant leadership approach, therefore, is the recommended model of leadership for Catholic schools (McLaughlin, 1997; Neidhart, 1997; Whitehead & Whitehead, 1993) and the staff and students who undertake leadership positions within such institutions.

Student Leadership

Since the 1990s, there has been an increased understanding of student leadership as centered on ministry, namely civic responsibility (van Linden & Fertman, 1998), civic service (Chapman & Aspin, 2001; McGregor, 2007), leadership as ministry (Willmett, 1997), and servant leadership (Lavery, 2007), whereby students have developed a belief that their talents are to be used for others and for the common good (Ryan, 1997). Hawkes (1999), for instance, has raised the need for school leaders to develop within themselves "a servant heart" (p. 23) and suggested frequent checks to ensure that this commitment was taking place. He pointed out, moreover, that the task of school leadership was "to bring about within the school community a desire to know the good, desire the good, and do the good" (p. 24). Wright (1999) stressed that leadership was "fundamentally about nurturing a better quality of humanity" (p. 26), contending that such an approach was not beyond the capabilities of schools. Moore (1999) observed that student leaders must be strong when others need their help, yet compassionate for those who are weaker. She noted, moreover, that student leaders must fully accept the trust placed in them and put their sense of service before their sense of self. Further, Lineburg and Gearheart (2008) argued that one central reason for involving students in the leadership process was that it creates "an atmosphere of students caring about the greater good of the school and the community as a whole" (p. 2). This sentiment is echoed by McNae (2011), who has stated that student leaders can develop a disposition to serve others and show leadership for the good of other people. Additionally, she argued that students can view leadership as "fulfilling a bestowed role to serve other people . . . it provide(s) the opportunity to serve or give something back to the school" (p. 42).

A notion of student leadership based on service has ramifications for what exactly students do in their leadership role, how they are prepared for leadership, and even the way they are elected to formal positions of leadership. Leadership based on service debunks the myth that leadership is all about heroics. One does not have to be a super-heroic Xena Warrior Princess, a Lara Croft, a Jason Bourne, or a James Bond. Students do not have

to be members of the senior baseball, volleyball, basketball, or football teams to exercise leadership (Lavery, 2007). Rather, as Hawkes (1999) has pointed out, most leadership is covert and unassuming. It can be found "in the gentle word of encouragement, in the helping of another, the steering of a conversation, a suggestion, or some small service" (Hawkes, 1999, p. 21). Student leaders should, as Moore (1999) has explained, still be the person prepared "to be first to abseil down the cliff and last to climb aboard the lifeboat" (p. 19). However, leaders also need to work collaboratively, delegate, and exercise their leadership in the interests of others and for the greater good.

Research into student leadership in Catholic schools highlights the significant place of service, both as a leadership approach and as a means of leadership development for young people. For instance, a study conducted with twelve Year 12 students at a Catholic girls school in New Zealand (McNae, 2011) indicated that participants believed leadership was "a bestowed role to serve other people…and provided the opportunity to serve or give back something to the school" (p. 42). Similarly, the idea of service emerged as a key facet of students' understanding of Year 12 leadership in research involving 368 Year 12 students in three Australian Catholic schools—two in Victoria and one in Tasmania (Lavery & Neidhart, 2003). A study of staff in 11 Catholic schools in Western Australian stressed the positive value of service-learning as a means of promoting and developing student leadership in secondary students (Lavery, 2007). Teachers in the study commented that service-learning provided multiple opportunities for students to lead and was instrumental in developing confidence, character, and a constructive attitude.

Development of Student Leadership in Schools

Various authors have highlighted the value and benefit of leadership training programs for elected student leaders (Chapman & Aspin, 2001; Hine, 2012; Myers, 2005). Such training often takes the form of a school camp or leadership in-service day. Chapman and Aspin (2001), for instance, have argued that developing student leadership through explicit, intentional programs is crucial to promoting social responsibility, community leadership, active citizenship, and service leadership. Myers (2005) argued that leadership opportunities provide students with "extra skills and confidence that will help them in their later lives. . . extra opportunities in organization, facilitation, speaking in public, and working collaboratively with younger students" (p. 29).

Hine (2012) echoed this point, noting that the acquisition and development of certain leadership skills was a key personal outcome for students involved in leadership programs. These skills included "public speaking, decision-making, organization, time management, interpersonal communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution strategies" (p. 233).

Although leadership programs are viewed as beneficial to students, researchers found that schools often provide little ongoing leadership preparation for their student leaders. In their research into practices of student leadership in primary and secondary schools in New South Wales, Buscall, Guerin, Macallister, and Robson (1994) reported that many schools have extensive leadership programs. Yet, they observed that few, if any, of these schools carried out on-going leadership courses for their student leaders. Indeed, they noted the tendency for schools to treat training in student leadership as "a 'one-off' time, and expect that students, having undergone a leadership camp, would have a clear understanding of what being a leader is all about, instead of seeing it as a continuing learning process" (p. 34).

Service-learning has become increasingly popular within Catholic secondary schools as a way of involving students in the social mission of the Church (Hackett & Lavery, 2011; Lavery, 2007). It is an approach that actively promotes Catholic social teaching (Ferguson, Kearins, & Brennan, 2011), and provides an alternative approach to leadership development in students, both at the tertiary level (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Morgan & Streb, 2001) and within secondary schools (Lavery, 2007; Hackett & Lavery, 2011). Service-learning is a teaching method in which classroom learning is deepened and extended through service to others. It is undertaken by students in the context of meaningful school-community partnerships and is intended to provide experiential learning opportunities within a curriculum that is beneficial to the community (Gilding & Wallace, 2003). Service-learning experiences can enhance a sense of civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998) and present opportunities for students to develop their talents while making real positive changes in the lives of others (Morgan & Streb, 2001). They can have a positive effect on interpersonal development and the ability to work well with others as well as improve leadership and communication skills (Eyler et al., 2001). Involvement in service-learning can aid in the personal growth of students as future leaders by developing young men and women as leaders who act with compassion and a strong sense of justice (Lavery, 2007). Moreover, service experiences can provide students with opportunities to "step up" and develop confidence in leading. As an ap-

proach to student leadership development, service-learning has four advantages. It is (a) open to all students; (b) not a one-off activity; (c) supports an understanding of leadership based on ministry through active citizenship and civic responsibility; and (d) can be used in conjunction with initial student leadership in-service activities (Hackett & Lavery, 2011).

The Role of the Principal

The involvement of the principal is pivotal to the development of student leadership within schools (Lavery & Hine, 2012). Such involvement can be direct, as when the principal is personally engaged in leadership activities and works closely with student leaders. For example, some principals meet with their senior school leaders on a weekly basis (Lavery & Hine, 2012). Meeting and working with senior student leaders "allows even the busiest administrator to have a true pulse on the schools" (Lineburg & Gearheart, 2008, p. 4). Other principals may take a less direct approach, empowering colleagues to engage with student leaders (Leo, 2006), while still taking an active interest in student leadership development. Both methods of involvement have merit. However, whatever the degree of involvement—direct or indirect—research indicates that the principal must take the lead in promoting the philosophical understanding of student leadership at his or her school (Lavery & Hine, 2012). Such a philosophical understanding forms part of the responsibility of the principal as a visionary for implementing and sustaining initiatives that promote student development. That is, the principal ensures that the school's philosophy of student leadership reflects the values of the school. Ideally, the philosophy will embrace an inclusive policy that acknowledges and supports both students elected formally to leadership positions, as well as those students elected to formal leadership positions (Lavery & Neidhart, 2003). In such a way the principal can play a critical role in fostering a culture of leadership within the school (Lavery & Hine, 2012).

Methodology

This research on the place of Catholic secondary school principals in the development of student leadership was interpretive in nature, and used two qualitative research methods to collect data: semistructured interviews and researcher-generated field notes. The three specific research questions were:

1. What do Catholic secondary school principals understand by the concept of student leadership in a Catholic school?
2. What do Catholic secondary school principals believe to be the most appropriate form of student leadership in Catholic schools?
3. What do Catholic secondary school principals envisage as their central role in the promotion and development of student leadership

The researchers conducted individual interviews with eight Catholic secondary principals in Perth, Western Australia. The interviews were conducted on-site, and each interview lasted approximately 50 to 60 minutes. The researchers endeavored to interview principals who were actively engaged—directly or indirectly—with student leadership development at their schools. Hence the eight principals were purposively selected to participate in the study due to the established student leadership programs at their schools, and the considerable place student leadership has within each of their school communities.

Website information and personal contact with school leaders and teachers formed the basis for participant selection. There was also an attempt to maximize the variation of the sampling (Patton, 1990). Hence, the principals selected for this research included those from three coeducational schools, two boys' schools, and three girls' schools. Four of the principals were male and four were female. A summary of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of the Participants

School Type	Male	Female
Co-educational	1	2
Boys	2	0
Girls	1	2

The interview questions used by the researchers were trialed with two highly experienced, former Catholic secondary school principals before data collection commenced. The feedback provided by the former principals was used to improve the quality and overall focus of the original interrogatives. Six interview questions were used to initiate discussion with the principals.

These questions are listed in Table 2. The eight interviews were digitally recorded with the principals' permission, and the researchers took field notes during each interview. Interview transcription occurred after all interviews had taken place. Subsequently, each participant was offered a transcribed copy of the interview he or she participated in to check and verify that the conversation was captured accurately. Each copy has since been re-collected for safe storage.

Table 2

Interview questions
1. What does the term student leadership mean to you?
2. What do you consider to be the most appropriate approach to student leadership within Catholic schools?
3. How does student leadership operate in your school?
4. What do you believe is the principal's role regarding student leadership and student leadership development?
5. In what ways are you yourself involved in the development of student leadership at your school?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to comment on regarding student leadership?

Data Analysis

Data from the eight interview transcripts and researcher-generated field notes were analyzed and explored for common themes. When analyzing the collected data, the researchers adhered to the framework and guidelines offered by Miles and Huberman (1994), which attempts to identify relationships among social phenomena based on the similarities and differences that connect these phenomena. The approach itself is comprised of three main components: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. These components themselves involve three main operations: coding, memoing, and developing propositions. Within each of the components, the researchers employed a continual process of coding, memoing, and developing propositions. Codes, as Miles and Huberman (1994) have explained, "are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential

information compiled during a study" (p. 56). These codes were attached to the data gathered through interviews and field notes, and were selected from those data based on their meaning. The researchers then used memoing to synthesize coded data so that they formed a recognizable cluster grounded within one general concept. The memoing process also captured the ongoing thoughts of the researchers as the process of coding took place. As a study proceeds, there is a greater need to "formalize and systematize the researcher's thinking into a coherent set of explanations" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 75). For this project, the researchers generated propositions about connected sets of statements, reflected on the findings, and drew conclusions from the study.

Presentation of Findings

The intention of this research was to explore the role of the principal with regards to student leadership development within secondary schools. Specifically, through the use of three research questions, the researchers sought to identify (a) what the principals understood by the concept of student leadership; (b) what these principals considered to be the most appropriate form of student leadership in Catholic schools; and (c) what the principals envisaged as their central role in the promotion and development of student leadership. An analysis of the gathered data generated four themes stemming from each research question. These themes are presented under the broader categories of student leadership, student leadership in Catholic schools, and the role of the principal.

Student Leadership

The principals in this study interpreted the concept of student leadership in two ways. First, they viewed leadership in terms of program development and implementation. Specifically, this view entailed opportunities for students, the structure and organization of student leadership programs, specific goals for student leadership within schools, key staff to mentor and work with students, and the impact of student leadership upon school culture and identity. Such an understanding emphasized the practical aspects of program implementation and development. Second, from a philosophical perspective, each of the principals shared that the most preferred model of student leadership in all Catholic schools embodied that of servant leadership, modeled on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Structure and Organization of Student Leadership Programs

Each of the principals interviewed shared the structure and organization of the student leadership program at his/her school. For example, the principals were able to describe some of the leadership positions held by students across various years of study, the duration of those roles (typically one year), and the preparation required by students wishing to be elected into those roles. One principal stated:

> Prior to leader elections we have meetings. At these meetings, prospective leaders are informed by current student leaders and senior staff about the responsibilities that go with student leadership. It is emphasized at such meetings that student leaders need to be engaged in school projects; they need to be seen doing something. They are provided with examples of student leaders putting project proposals to the principal and the positive outcomes that occurred.

Most principals (6 out of 8) indicated that the elected student leaders were clearly identifiable through the display of a leadership badge; this badge bears the school crest, the student's name, and the leadership position. Additionally, most principals proffered a structural view of their student leadership program as one that embraces a "traditional" system of operation. Such a system entails elected student leaders (or prefects) to specific positions such as Head Boy, Head Girl, Deputy Head Boy, Deputy Head Girl, Arts Captains, Ministry Captains, and Sports Captains. One principal, however, shared that the student leadership program at her school was experiencing a period of change from a traditional "prefect" system through regular solicited input from key staff, students, and parents.

All principals in this study articulated that student leadership programs offered students deliberate and invaluable activities within their schools. Specifically, these programs enabled students of all ages to attend leadership-training events, to engage in leadership tasks, and to demonstrate Christian values. These programs also enabled students to become further involved with the student body through their leadership positions. Most principals (7 out of 8) stated that their role with student leadership—particularly with the Year 12 leaders—provided them with an opportunity to meet and work directly with those students on a regular basis. One principal who met with her Year 12 student leaders every Tuesday morning for breakfast in the staff boardroom commented:

> At this meeting we plan for the next school assembly. Our school assemblies are run entirely by the students, and we discuss the desired message for the assembly and how they intend to get it across. I see this as an important opportunity for giving the student leaders their voice, and the opportunity to stand up in front of their peers and deliver a key message.

Principals who did not meet regularly with student leaders commented that a key staff member specifically empowered with the responsibility of student leadership at the school assumed this role instead.

Student leadership goals. All principals cited various goals that their student leadership program sought to achieve. Specifically, principals outlined two types of goals: goals for students, and goals for staff. Commonly stated goals for student leaders included the express desire for students to develop as leaders and as people, and the desire for students to exercise their leadership in a spirit of service. Most principals (7 out of 8) explicitly argued that leadership programs function for students to acquire, develop, and exercise leadership skills. One principal referred to an "overt form of leadership where [students] need to display organizational skills, public speaking skills, confidence and charisma." He also commented, "Another set of leadership behaviors is almost counter-cultural, which is where the student is required to 'stand up' and do the right thing rather than the popular thing." Other program goals mentioned by the participants in this study included broadening student leaders' perspectives of life, emphasizing the need for good role models (leaders) within the community, and underscoring the model of servant leadership through service to others. One principal highlighted these goals by stating that, as a whole, staff "emphasize that leadership is not a popularity contest or organization. This is a program by which the student leaders 'walk in a service model' as demonstrated by Jesus Christ." Principals clearly highlighted the need for teachers to become actively involved in student leadership programs. Such involvement included key staff encouraging teachers to assume a key mentorship role with student leaders, instilling a sense of advocacy within the student leaders, and remaining committed to the holistic development of the students themselves. For instance, one principal insisted that teachers be directly involved in student leadership activities for the sake of students wishing to assume future leadership roles.

Key staff. Principals asserted that the most appropriate form of student leadership in Catholic schools includes key staff working with and mentoring

student leaders. In addition to allocating staff to a particular role within the school's model of student leadership, most principals made the following two recommendations. First, staff allocated to leadership-based roles must act as role models to these students, particularly in exemplifying servant leadership and the school's faith values. Second, these staff members must be accessible to students and considerate of student-generated ideas. A final point made by four of the principals was that school staff, either in an administrative or mentoring role, should not manipulate any aspect of student leadership; to illustrate, manipulation could involve staff electing students to a leadership position through underhanded means, limiting the role of a student leader to serve only the interests of the staff, or completely disempowering student leaders. Instead, these principals suggested that staff encourage students to take active leadership roles by making decisions, creating opportunities, and enacting change within the school, but under the pastoral guidance of key staff.

School identity and culture. The principals highlighted that student leadership *per se* is a vital component of the identity and culture of the school. Moreover, the group stated that leadership programs should be available to all students, and election to a leadership position should require students to display appropriate and worthwhile behaviors. Most principals (6 out of 8) stated that they want a school culture in which every student feels he or she is a leader and in which servant leadership is prized. One comment in particular highlighted this creation and maintenance of culture. As the principal stated:

> My role is to have an expectation of excellence in everything the girls do . . . every young girl who walks through the College gates I see as a potential leader. Everything we do here is about developing leadership qualities . . . I must work towards creating opportunities for the girls to demonstrate their leadership qualities.

Another principal underscored how her staff and students had recently focused on taking key leadership messages to the school community through a family-oriented program. Specifically, she declared:

> This program reinforces the Christian virtues of: serving others, faith, hope, learning, and love. In our homeroom system we highlight the actions that underpin these virtues. As well, where appropriate, teachers will endeavor to reinforce these virtues in their subject teaching commitments. Thus it can be said from Junior School to Senior

> School [our] students are thinking about and talking about serving others and the dignity of the individual.

These statements reinforce the unanimously proffered belief that leadership opportunities should be accessible to all students within the school, and—that by virtue of their positions—elected leaders must display exemplary behavior as role models for other students.

Student Leadership in Catholic Schools

The principals articulated three central elements that comprise an appropriate form of student leadership in Catholic schools. These elements included: (a) a servant leadership focus grounded in Christian values; (b) a vision for student leadership at the school; and (c) opportunities for the students themselves.

Servant leadership. All principals stated their belief that the most appropriate form of student leadership in Catholic schools embodies the leadership style of Jesus Christ (i.e. servant leadership), is planned for participants to live the Gospel message, and is grounded in Christian values. One principal amplified this assertion, highlighting that student leadership should be concerned with providing opportunities for students to exercise servant leadership within the school community (e.g., to develop a sense of advocacy), and particularly for those who are marginalized. Moreover, a principal stated that student leadership

> must emphasize selfless leadership; the main thrust in our school is for a group of 17-18 year old men to look beyond their own needs to the needs of the student body and school community and identify how to serve them.

The same principal later commented that the servant leadership model is "almost counter-cultural for students in many ways . . . if [their leadership] is viewed as self-serving the leadership will be short term and won't be gratifying for the individual." Another principal echoed these sentiments, explaining that that in addition to "putting others before yourself . . . what the student body looks for in their student leaders is empathy and their capacity to listen."

Vision for student leadership. All principals affirmed that having a vision for student leadership at the school was of critical importance to the student

leadership program itself. To reiterate previous sentiments, principals offered that their vision for student leadership in Catholic schools embodies a servant leadership focus, and requires its leaders to be advocates for others. For example, one principal highlighted that the core values of her school's leadership program underpinned the school's vision for leadership; she declared, "The student leaders feel privileged to be in the positions they are [in], and consequently they feel a responsibility to serve others." Another principal shared how her school's vision for student leadership complemented the servant leadership model, in that leaders "need to recognize that student leadership is not a 'top-down' process but rather a journey alongside their student body." A principal drew attention to the leadership opportunities afforded to all students, whereby an emphasis is placed on informal development of leadership skills. He stated, "There is a leadership structure at every year level. [Key Staff] work with students to encourage them to be the leaders of their year group, mentors for others, and to stand up and do what is right." Various principals also asserted that a vision for student leadership should include the establishment of clear leadership aims, an early identification of future student leaders, and the formality given to the nomination and election of leaders.

Opportunities for students. All principals highlighted the need for students to actively engage in leadership opportunities offered at Catholic schools. For instance, one principal affirmed that "staff responsible for student leadership in Catholic schools must be open to students 'doing' leadership rather than passive participation." In support of this statement, other principals acknowledged that students require opportunities to lead, to accept responsibility, and to contribute to the school community. For instance, one principal avowed that student leaders must be visible to the school community, and that one demonstration of this—together with their acceptance of responsibility—is to organize and deliver school assemblies. He added, "The key message here, and for student leadership in general, is that the leaders are to be seen working together to make the school environment better." In a similar vein, one principal described how Year 12 student leaders accepted responsibility. He stated:

> One example is the Year 12 Retreat. This is organized, administered and led by five Year 12 students. This group of students, guided by staff, work for four weeks in preparing for the event. The five students run the Retreat; staff attend and available when needed.

Another principal affirmed that, in addition to the formal duties and responsibilities leaders are required to fulfill, there are certain expectations the school holds for its leaders. Specifically, there is an

> awareness that [leaders] will be required to engage in a range of cultural and sporting events representing the school. They need to be up-to-date with their Service Journal requirements and need to actively engage with the school's Religious Education program. These criteria are clearly stated to each prospective student leader and become the appointment criteria.

All principals acknowledged that active participation in student leadership opportunities encouraged students to achieve their potential inside the classroom, around the school campus, and within the school community.

The Role of the Principal

Principals outlined four central personal responsibilities regarding the promotion and development of student leadership at their respective schools. These personal responsibilities included assuming the role of a mentor and role model to all leaders, designing and refining the student leadership program, communicating leadership and school values, and taking a visionary approach to the future of student leadership within the school.

Modeling and mentoring. All principals asserted that a key responsibility for them in promoting and developing student leadership was to be a role model and mentor to staff and students. To illustrate the responsibility of role modeling, one principal stated:

> The students and staff need to observe me as the key role model related to [leadership]. I need to act in a way that reflects my recognition of the culture of the school; this is a high priority. I talk to students both one-on-one and at assemblies and whilst doing this, [I] model the positives of the culture we are committed to using terminology related to the "virtue"culture. I need to be seen to be doing this consistently.

Another principal described how she acts as a role model for her students by "journeying" with the student leaders. To amplify, she described this approach as collaborative, whereby student leaders, staff, and the principal "walk

side-by-side" in modeling leadership. Additionally, this principal averred that "as the key leader in the school I would never ask a student leader to do anything that I would not be prepared to do myself." In terms of mentoring student leaders, two principals said that they interview all Year 12 leaders individually with regard to their student leadership appointment, progress within their leadership role, and perceived leadership development. One of these principals shared that in his role as a mentor to leaders, he had to exercise caution in what he said in the company of others. To amplify, he stated:

> You must be very careful what [you] say because frequently others take it as something that must be acted upon . . . this is especially the case with prefects and senior school leaders who are keen to please you. They watch your every move and listen to everything you say and attempt to build it into their leadership style . . . as principal you have this kind of influence whether you want it or not.

Other comments regarding role modeling and mentorship included principals being directly involved in leadership training activities for students, and empowering students to undertake a mentoring or role modeling responsibility themselves.

Designing leadership opportunities. Principals commonly stated that their central role concerning the promotion and development of student leadership involved creating leadership opportunities within the school. Specifically, all principals asserted that collaboration with key staff regarding student leadership was invaluable in establishing and refining leadership opportunities. Furthermore, principals placed an emphasis on encouraging collaboration among key staff, empowering all staff members to accept role model responsibilities, ensuring that the student leadership program is properly resourced, and regularly reviewing student leadership outcomes in consultation with key staff. One principal spoke of how her key staff had reviewed the student leadership program and subsequently collaborated to improve several leadership outcomes. She noted:

> Some of our Year 12 student leaders were struggling with the burden of senior academic studies and leadership responsibilities. The prospective Year 11 leaders were to be mentored by the current Year 12 leaders in preparation for the demands of the tasks that lie ahead. In doing this the Year 11 student leaders assumed some of the responsibilities of the current Year 12 leaders.

Similarly, another principal shared how the staff leadership team at her school had worked to develop specific leadership criteria for prospective student leaders. For instance, several team members were given the tasks of researching models of leadership and, on the basis of this research, recommending how the existing leadership program within their school could be developed. Other claims included staff establishing and maintaining high standards for student leaders, staff empowering students to develop leadership skills through the provision of new opportunities, and staff responding to the need for new leadership roles to be created.

Communicating leadership and school values. Principals believed that a central role in their promotion and development of student leadership included communicating leadership and school values to the wider community. For instance, one principal felt that his communication lent itself to "promoting the view that both within the school and in the broader community there are leadership opportunities for all students." More specifically, four other principals indicated that they interact regularly with the student leaders during planned meetings. These meetings took place predominantly with the Year 12 student leaders, and interaction comprised sharing, discussing, and evaluating leadership experiences—and developing a close relationship with the student leaders themselves. One principal stated that in communicating leadership and school values to the wider community she had to

> be a powerful role model for the student leaders, and to convey a 'presence'. [At all times] I need to reinforce to the girls that they might not always know where their leadership is taking them but they need to know it is somewhere important for them to be.

She added that to effectively communicate the school's leadership vision to students, she needed to know the "heartbeat" of the school. Two principals avowed that in addition to meeting with student leaders regularly, they met with key leadership staff. During meetings with key staff, the principals reported that they were able to discuss pertinent leadership issues, offer guidance and support, and familiarize themselves with the current status of the student body.

Creating and sustaining a vision for leadership. The principals involved in this research expressed the view that their central role was to create and sustain a vision for student leadership within the school. Most principals (6 out of 8) outlined that articulating a clear vision of leadership that best

suited the school community was of critical importance. To illustrate, one principal stated that her role was to "work from the ground up and arrive at a consensus regarding future directions of the school's student leadership program." Additionally, and central to the vision of Catholic school leadership, this principal acknowledged the importance of

> not losing sight that this is a Catholic school, which means that there are components within the [Catholic Education Commission] Mandate related to student leadership that need to be recognized. Furthermore, and in conjunction with the Mandate, the school motto and implications must be considered.

Another principal shared how her vision for student leadership was articulated to the community, in that she

> needed to do her homework on student leadership. I also needed to be aware of the successful leadership models that are available, to consider the history and tradition of their school, and to familiarize myself with who have been successful leaders in the school community.

Various other comments from principals emphasized the importance of ensuring that student leaders were both connected and committed to the school's values and philosophy, giving students the confidence and belief that they could exercise leadership effectively, and making certain that students and staff understood the service component associated with student leadership.

Discussion

Responses from the eight principals of Catholic schools indicated that these leaders clearly saw student leadership as an integral component of their schools. Moreover, each principal openly articulated his or her own responsibility in fostering student leadership. That is, principals not only stated that student leadership was important, but also actively took a purposeful role in the application of student leadership at their schools. Their discernment of the role varied somewhat; however, it included the mentoring of particular student leaders and of staff specifically tasked with the responsibility of

working with students elected to leadership positions. It involved being a model of exemplary leadership for all to see and emulate. It embraced the desire to design and promulgate an appropriate understanding of student leadership in their schools—an understanding based on the Gospel imperative to serve. Finally their role ensured that student leadership was a meaningful activity, one that the students could undertake with purpose and pride, safe in the knowledge of adult support.

All eight principals reported characteristics of direct involvement in the formation of their student leaders. Direct involvement entails principals being actively concerned with student leadership, working closely with elected student leaders, and planning specific events that promote student leadership (Lavery & Hine, 2012). Being directly involved with their student leaders has definite benefits for principals. For example, Lineburg and Gearheart (2008) noted that actively engaging with student leaders "allows even the busiest administrator to have a true pulse on the school" (p. 18). Moreover, these scholars underscored the importance of principals working with student leaders as a way of improving the climate of a school. Most principals in the study commented on the positive impact that student leadership can have on a school's culture and identity. In particular, the point was made that a leadership position should require students to display appropriate and worthwhile behavior, namely that of servant leadership.

The principals were also indirectly involved in the promotion and development of student leadership at their schools. Specifically, each engaged key members of staff collaboratively in the formation and facilitation of student leadership. Involving staff members allows the principal to delegate responsibility for student leadership to those best positioned to work with the students, but at the same time to undertake a mentoring or collegial role with staff (Lavery & Hine, 2012; Leo, 2006). The principals thus ensured that students elected to formal leadership positions always had the assistance of adult mentors. The importance of such a consideration cannot be overstated. Strong staff support is an essential feature of any successful student leadership program. As Buscall, Gurin, Macalllister, and Robson (1994) observed, "If there is one reason for the failure or death of a Student Representative Council it was largely due to lack of staff support" (p. 34). The actual responsibilities of staff supporting student leaders will vary according to the needs of the students; however, the capacity to listen, explore ideas, share experiences, facilitate processes, share information, give advice (sparingly), and provide feedback (Hunter, Bailey, & Taylor, 1997) would seem to be central. Notably,

four of the principals in the study clearly indicated that staff working with student leaders must not manipulate any aspects of the student leadership process.

All eight principals proffered the notion of servant leadership as the preferred model of student leadership at their respective schools. Servant leadership resonates well within Catholic culture and practice. The Gospel tradition plainly indicates that the most distinctive aspect of Jesus's teaching on leadership is his emphasis that a leader is essentially a servant. All four Gospels demonstrate Jesus's understanding of leadership as one of service. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus indicates that the only leadership allowed within his community is servant leadership, modeled on He "who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). Similarly, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus remarks, "The greatest among you must be your servant" (Mt 23:11). At the Last Supper Luke documents how Jesus tells the disciples, "the greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves" (Lk 22:26). Chapter 13 of John's Gospel records the manner in which Jesus moved from the status position as head of the table, knelt down, and washed his disciples' feet as a sign of servant leadership. It is not surprising that various commentators have endorsed service as a key facet of leadership within Catholic schools (Grace, 1996; Jolley, 1997; Lavery, 2012; McLaughlin, 1997).

Servant leadership is also an established approach to leadership. Greenleaf (1977), who is often attributed with the concept, argued that servant leadership "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (p. 13). Greenleaf stressed that at the heart of such leadership is the wish "to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served" (p. 13). He concluded that the best test of servant leadership is: "Do those being served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (p. 13). Various authors have subsequently expanded on this concept, particularly in relation to teacher education (Adair, 2001; Covey, 1992; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1992; Sofield & Kuhn, 1995). More recently, scholars have linked service with the notion of transcendental leadership, a relationship-centered approach to leadership (Liu, 2007; Rebore & Walmsley, 2009; Sanders, Hopkins, & Geroy, 2003).

Principals were unwavering in their belief that their schools must provide genuine leadership opportunities for the student leaders. These opportunities would require students to be a visible presence, accept responsibility,

and contribute to the school and wider community. One cannot overstate the importance of such an attitude. Scholars such as Hart (1992), Gordon (1994), Gray (2002), and Hawkes (1999) have raised concerns that sometimes students' participation in leadership is little more than manipulation, decoration, or tokenism. For instance, Hart's (1992) question about the meaning of student participation. It is a question that could just as easily be asked of student leadership. He used a "ladder metaphor" (p. 9) to outline eight levels of young people's involvement in endeavors, with the first three categories—manipulation, decoration, and tokenism—incorporating no real level of student participation. Yet Hart noted that these three categories often explained the very way students are used. Gordon (1994) has asked of student leaders: "Are they being co-opted into the system in a rather patronizing way, expected to play the part of willing co-operators with the decisions others make?" (p. 43). In addition, Gray (2002) highlighted the danger of trivialization. That is, having student leadership in name only, which can lead to student distrust, disrespect, and a consequent withering of student interest. Moreover, Hawkes (2001) observed that schools often confuse student leadership "with doing duties, and the duties are usually menial administrative tasks on behalf of the school" (p. 241).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research suggests that principals view student leadership to be of considerable value to students' personal growth and development, and to the positive cultivation of school culture. There is, moreover, a resounding and unanimous declaration from principals that the most appropriate model of student leadership within Catholic schools embodies servant leadership, the preferred leadership style of Jesus Christ. This research also indicates that principals believe their role to be central to student leadership at their schools, whether they profess to be directly or indirectly involved in leadership-related matters and activities. As a result of the finding and discussion, the authors offer two recommendations for consideration. These recommendations are directed specifically to principals and teachers, and to Catholic education authorities.

Recommendations for Principals and Teachers

The authors recommend that principals carefully appoint capable, enthusiastic staff to roles focused directly on working with student leaders. Addition-

ally, principals should create a network of committed staff responsible for facilitating and if needed, refining, any student leadership initiatives. Principals also communicate a strong, clear message about the importance of student leadership at their school through the amount of time, energy, and resources spent on facilitating leadership efforts. This message is underscored by their willingness to become directly and indirectly involved in student leadership-related matters. The findings of this study have relevance to all educators as students of all ages express a desire to become involved in leadership roles. Considering these findings together with the claim that all middle school and secondary school students possess leadership potential (Fertman & van Linden, 1999), all educators should carefully consider their responsibility and direct involvement in preparing tomorrow's leaders within their own institutions.

Recommendations for Catholic Education Authorities

Given the prominence of student leadership at eight Catholic secondary schools, the authors recommend that Catholic education authorities actively promote and sustain student leadership programs. Promotion may take the form of providing professional development modules for teachers and school leaders in establishing and facilitating student leadership initiatives within Catholic schools. This research has indicated the importance of student leadership development at a personal, school, and community level. In addition to the confidence, skills, and experiences leadership opportunities afford youth, the Catholic view of leadership encourages participants to "look beyond" themselves and minister to the needs of others through service. Moreover, it is difficult to predict how far the sphere of positive, meaningful leadership influence can reach within a school community—and possibly further after student leaders have graduated (Hine, 2012). Catholic education authorities are in a strong position to foster student leadership in Catholic schools by promoting student leadership as a valuable educational pursuit and by actively resourcing teachers and school leaders on current theory and best practice. Catholic school principals who promote servant leadership prepare their students to ultimately lead the Church and society in a manner consistent with the Gospel message.

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