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Student Leadership Development: A Functional Framework

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This article presents a longitudinal, qualitative case study of a student leadership program in a Catholic secondary school in Perth, Western Australia. Data were collected over a period of three years through multiple methods, including one-on-one interviewing, focus group interviewing, document searches, field notes, and researcher reflective journaling. Through the analysis of the longitudinal data, key characteristics of seven models of leadership presented in the literature—transactional leadership, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, distributed leadership, Christian leadership, and student leadership—are compared with those found in the leadership program of the school. This article contributes to the growing body of school-based leadership literature, and may inform school leaders and staff responsible for the development of student leadership potential.

Keywords

Student leadership, positional leadership, Catholic school leadership, adolescent leadership development

Introduction

Student leadership and student leadership development within secondary schools is a critical issue worth investigating due to its dynamic nature and implications for the future, as well as to the striking dearth of literature associated with this subject (Archard, 2009; Hine, 2013; McNae, 2011). The preparation and establishment of a student leadership program at secondary school level is important for those involved in the educational process, as leadership experiences contribute positively to student development (Chapman & Aspin, 2001; Myers, 2005), school culture (Freeborn, 2005), and the level of the school's inclusion in the community (Hawkes, 1999).

Although many Australian, Catholic secondary schools have integrated a program of student leadership and student leadership development into their curriculum, an analysis of one functioning program and its participants has

the potential to provide considerable insight into how to refine and optimize such efforts. Thus, the intention of this qualitative case study was to explore how one Catholic secondary school developed leadership potential in adolescents, and to inductively conceptualize the underlying program of leadership being pursued consciously or implicitly by the school. This exploration took place by examining (through observation, interviewing, and document analysis) the philosophical perspectives held by those who designed and implemented the student leaders' developmental experiences. Through this research, the researcher compared the program to models of leadership and leadership development available in the published literature. The researcher expected that elucidating and considering these factors would lead to a better understanding of how the school might focus and strengthen its commitment concerning the structured development of its student leaders.

Conceptual Framework

Three theoretical constructs form the conceptual framework underpinning this research, which investigated the underlying program of student leadership being pursued by a Catholic secondary school. These theoretical constructs are models of leadership, Christian leadership, and the notion of student leadership *per se*. First, the literature on five selected models of leadership offers a broad baseline of characteristics to compare to those evidenced within the extant model of student leadership. Second, the literature on Christian leadership and its meaning for Catholic schools furnishes a rationale upon which to base the position of leadership within Catholic secondary schools. 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. Third, 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.

Review of Literature

Models of Leadership

This review presents an analysis of the literature currently available for five contemporary leadership models: transactional leadership, transformational

leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, and distributed leadership. Transactional leadership maintains the status quo (Locke, 1999), is task and relationship oriented (Tuohy, 1999), and “involves an exchange process between leaders and followers, whereby followers reap immediate, tangible rewards for carrying out the leader’s orders” (Locke, 1999, p. 5). By contrast, transformational leadership is described as leadership that seeks to change the status quo (Locke, 1999), involves leaders motivating followers to improve present attitudes and assumptions (Friedman, 2004; Yukl, 1994), and is principally concerned with notions of purpose and vision (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; DuBrin & Darglish, 2003). Charismatic leadership is based on the admiration and respect shown to a leader by subordinate coworkers, and is grounded in trust, honesty, and credibility (Friedman, 2004). Charismatic leaders are treated by followers as possessing superhuman or exceptional qualities (Weber, 1947), and are concerned with “influencing followers to accept and own a vision and to work together towards its realization” (Crawford, 2002, p. 278).

Servant leadership focuses chiefly on the concept of service, and emerges from a leader’s natural desire to serve first before leading (Greenleaf, 1977). Such leaders demonstrate care for and nurture those within a group, organization, or society (Greenleaf, 1977) in their attempts to express unlimited liability for others, build community, and use power and persuasion ethically (Lopez, 1995). In contrast to viewing leadership practice as a product of a leader’s knowledge and skill, distributed leadership is defined by the interactions between people and their situation (Spillane, 2005). Additionally, a distributive leadership perspective acknowledges that there are multiple leaders in an organization (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), and that leadership capability and capacity is not fixed, but can be developed and extended (Harris, 2008).

This examination of the literature elucidates the defining characteristics, practical relevance, and philosophy underpinning each leadership model. These aspects, along with a consideration of what each leadership model offers leaders, followers, and institutions is important to this research for two reasons. First, the distinguishing features of these leadership models assisted in inferring the extant program of student leadership offered at the school. Second, an understanding of this program presented a basis for characterizing the type of leaders produced through the efforts of key staff at the institution.

Christian leadership. Christian leadership is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels provide much insight into the leadership approach favored by Jesus himself, perhaps best exemplified when he washed his disciples' feet in a dramatic act of service (Jn 13:12-15). By contemporary measures, scholars have characterized this approach as resembling servant leadership. Christian leadership is communal (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005; McLaughlin, 1997), transformative (Carey, 1991; Whitehead & Whitehead, 1993), empowering (McLaughlin & Sultmann, 2000), and serving (Adair, 2001; Nuzzi, 2000), and draws those involved into a deeper spirituality (Burn, 1990, McLaughlin & Sultmann, 2000; Neidhart, 1997). Documents from the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1965, 1977, 1988, 1997) revealed much about how Catholic schools are distinctive in nature, and are places in which all members of the school community should share the Christian vision. Furthermore, these documents encouraged those responsible for working in such institutions to impart an education based on authentic Gospel values to students. The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia's Mandate Letter: 2009-2015 (2009) recommended that staff—particularly those assuming a role of leadership within a Catholic school—adopt a leadership style of service. The literature on Christian leadership, and its relevance for leadership in Catholic schools is significant to this research as it presents an unequivocal position on how leaders should act in a Catholic school. The relational, participatory, and serving aspects of Catholic school leadership, in particular, act as focal points for the essence of the research itself.

Student leadership. A number of authors have written authoritatively about student leadership and the importance of student leadership development programs within secondary Catholic schools (Lavery, 2002, 2006; Lavery & Neidhart, 2003; Willmet, 1997), secondary Christian schools (Hawkes, 1999), and secondary public schools (Lineburg & Gearheart, 2008). Insights gleaned from recent research have indicated that student leadership is a topic worthy of investigation (Appleton, 2002; Archard, 2009; McNae, 2011), that the provision of leadership opportunities is vital to the promotion of student leadership (Appleton, 2002; Hawkes, 1999; Lavery, 2006; Lavery & Neidhart, 2003; Lineburg & Gearheart, 2008), and that much is to be learned from future research efforts (Neumann, Dempster, & Skinner, 2009). Practitioners and researchers alike have heralded many benefits of student leadership initiatives within middle and secondary schools (Fertman & van Linden, 1999; Karnes & Stephens, 1999; Myers, 2005), and more specifically, within special-

ized programs for gifted and talented children (Milligan, 2004; Parker, 1983), and those children with special educational needs (Imada, Doyle, Brock, & Goddard, 2002; Milligan, 2004). Importantly, attention has also focused on factors that hinder the successful promotion, implementation, and maintenance of student leadership programs (Freeborn, 2000; Johnson, 2005; Karnes & Stephens, 1999; Willmetts, 1997). Studies conducted within the past two decades focusing on adolescent student leadership have illuminated trends and areas of interest for school-based leadership programs. Researchers have concentrated their efforts on investigating the methodological improvement of such programs (Densten & Gray, 2001), providing leadership opportunities for students (Appleton, 2002; Archard, 2009; Gordon, 1994, Lavery & Neidhart, 2003), creating provision for student leadership training (Carey, 1991; Leatt, 1987; Stiles, 1986), analyzing how student leadership is promoted and sustained within Catholic schools (Lavery, 2002; McNae, 2011; Willmetts, 1997), and examining the perspectives of student leaders themselves (Neumann et al., 2009).

Research Question

The specific research question that guided the focus of this research was: *What explicit or implicit program of student leadership development is being pursued at the school?*

This question contained several subquestions that were modified to suit the participant grouping being investigated. These subquestions were:

1. What do the Principal and Deputy Principal for Pastoral Care understand to be the program of student leadership and student leadership development being pursued?
2. What do the House Co-ordinators understand to be the program of student leadership and student leadership development being pursued?
3. What do the elected students understand, on the basis of their personal experiences in the program, to be the program of student leadership and student leadership development being pursued?

The semistructured interview schedule used by the researcher for all three participant groupings has been included as Appendix A.

Context for Research

The school selected for this study was a Catholic, co-educational, secondary institution in the Perth metropolitan area that caters to the educational needs of approximately 800 students. Demographically speaking, this school was largely populated by Caucasian students from a low to middle socioeconomic background. Pastorally, the school had employed a Vertical House System for all students since its inception in 1990. The Vertical House System required all students to report to a Pastoral Care Group every morning upon arrival at the school. Each Pastoral Care Group was comprised of approximately 20 students from across Year 8 to Year 12. There were six Pastoral Care Groups within each House, constituting a total of 36 Pastoral Care Groups for the school. The student body of the school was distributed across six Pastoral Houses, each named after a patron or patroness. Each House was comprised of a House Coordinator, six House teachers, 10 ancillary staff (teaching and nonteaching), and approximately 120 students.

Student Leadership at the School

Each year, all students in Years 8 to 11 were encouraged to self-nominate for election by their peers to a leadership position in their Houses. From the nominees, each House elected a leader for the arts, a leader for sports, and a leader for ministry for each of the years from Year 8 to Year 11, generating a total of 12 elected leaders for each House. Across the six Houses, the elections thus produced a total of 72 elected student leaders for Years 8 to 11. Those who self-nominated for these Year-level positions were required to prepare and deliver a speech in front of their Year-level peers prior to the election date, at which time these peers voted for their preferred arts, sports, and ministry candidates. Appointment to the positions was essentially by popular vote among their respective Year peers, although all positions were subject ultimately to approval by the House Coordinator and the House teachers. Tenure in all positions was for the year of election only, but students were free to nominate for leadership again in any subsequent year's election, should they wish. Neither gender nor prior experience in an elected leadership position had any bearing on a student's eligibility for election to a leadership position in any year.

Year 12 students in each House were invited to self-nominate for House Leader positions in arts, sports, and ministry, and overall House Captain,

generating a total of 24 leadership positions across the six Houses. Those who chose to self-nominate for a position within their House were required to prepare and deliver a speech in front of their entire House before the annual election date, at which point the students of that House voted for their House's preferred arts, sports, and ministry leaders, and their overall House Captain. After these elections, overall School Captains for arts, sports, and ministry were determined by the six newly elected House Leaders in those respective disciplines. The three elected School Captains for arts, sports, and ministry were expected to exercise dual roles as School Captains and House Leaders for their disciplines. Additionally, among the 24 elected Year 12 leaders, votes were cast by the staff to determine the Head Boy and Head Girl for the year. The Head Boy and Head Girl were thus each expected to represent both their House (in their elected House positions) and the school as a whole.

Implications for Longitudinal Research

With some new school leaders being elected in the study cohort's second year (as the group progressed to Year 11), and with the inclusion of an additional leader (the overall House Captain) in Year 12, there was thus an opportunity to consider the impact of the program on (a) any of the original cohort who had left the program after one or two years, and (b) any new student leaders who had been elected to the cohort in Years 11 or 12. It was interesting to observe whether "experience in the program" appeared to have had any impact on the nature and extent of the students' development of leadership ability and behaviors, or on their self-perceptions of their leadership development.

Although a program of student leadership existed at this school, it must be noted that no formal documentation explicitly stating the rationale or structure of this program had been drafted. However, House Coordinators individually established the criteria required for potential leadership positions, emphasizing certain skills, responsibilities, and duties as desired prerequisites.

Sampling

Student Participants

To address the purpose of this study and to maintain the longitudinal character of the research, the researcher interviewed the entire cohort of

elected student leaders each year (from 2007 to 2009) with the exception of certain students. Although 18 students were elected to positions of leadership in Years 10 and 11, there was a perceived power differential between the researcher and three of the student leaders. This power differential existed due to the researcher's position as a House Coordinator at the school, and data for this study were not collected from the student leaders he coordinated. In 2009, the school leadership cohort expanded from 18 students to 24 students. As noted previously, this expansion was due to an additional position of House Captain being added to each of the six Houses. Acknowledging the potential conflict of interest with participants, the researcher therefore interviewed 20 Year 12 students in 2009.

In 2007 and 2008, all 15 elected student leaders were interviewed. For the purposes of this paper (and because 2007 was the first year of data collection), all 2007 elected leaders were collectively categorized as Cohort A. In 2008, two groups of students comprised Cohort B: the 10 newly elected individuals (Cohort B₁), and five students who had been leaders in 2007 and who were subsequently re-elected in 2008 (Cohort B₂). In the final year of data collection, 20 student leaders were directly involved (as Cohort C) in this project. Four groupings within Cohort C were identified: six newly elected leaders (Cohort C₁), five leaders who had been elected only in years 2007 and 2009 (Cohort C₂), six leaders from 2008 who had been re-elected into a position for 2009 (Cohort C₃), and three individuals who had assumed a position of leadership within the school for all three years (Cohort C₄). Each year, the researcher conducted focus group interviews with elected student leaders. Focus groups consisted of three, four, or five participants, and the groupings were arranged according to cohort. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The cohorts of elected leaders are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Cohorts of Elected Leaders 2007–2009

Leadership Cohort	Subcohort	Number of Participants
Cohort A 2007	A: Elected Year 10 Leaders assuming formal leadership responsibilities	15
Cohort B 2008	B1: Elected Year 11 Leaders assuming formal leadership responsibilities	10
	B2: Elected Year 11 Leaders re-elected after previous experience as Year 10 Leaders	5
Cohort C 2009	C1: Elected Year 12 Leaders assuming formal leadership responsibilities	6
	C2: Elected Year 12 Leaders re-elected after leadership experience as Year 10 Leaders only	5
	C3: Elected Year 12 Leaders re-elected after previous experience as Leaders in Year 11 only	6
	C4: Elected Year 12 Leaders re-elected after previous experience as Leaders in Year 10 and Year 11	3

Staff Participants

Although the study closely monitored the leadership growth and development of the student cohorts over the time they held elected positions of leadership at the school, the same extent of coverage was not practicable for every staff member who might have been considered as having a direct involvement or legitimate interest in the form and outcomes of the student leadership program. Due to the study's intentional preference for in-depth interviewing rather than broad-sample data collection, and the naturally limited scope and time available to the researcher, it was necessary to concentrate on a sample of key informant staff who, by virtue of their particular positions and responsibilities in the school, had a significant and ongoing involvement with the school's student leaders. Although almost any staff member could legitimately provide insight into the existing leadership program and its

participants, the researcher focused upon those individuals who had a direct and tangible relationship with the cohort of student leaders and who had a formal responsibility for mentoring them during the course of their development. The key staff members, therefore, were purposively selected from their respective populations. As such, the principal, deputy principal for Pastoral Care, and five House Coordinators comprised a purposive sample of key informant staff and were interviewed four times each year during the three years of the study.

Data Collection Methods

The study relied principally on recorded exchanges between the researcher and the participants through focus group discussions and individual interviews. Such exchanges were opportunities for the participants to express their perceptions, opinions, and the “lived experience” of student leadership in their own language. Drawing meaning from this kind of data required methods of qualitative data analysis, and the adoption of a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm (Neuman, 2011) to inform the methodological conduct of the study. Furthermore, and consistent with the theoretical foundations of interpretive social science, symbolic interactionism (Berg, 2007) was chosen as the interpretive “lens” for the study. Then, in turn, the researcher sought to validly interpret and “uncover” the personal meanings conferred upon student leadership experiences by the main participants of the study.

A number of methods for investigating the concept of student leadership development were available to the researcher. A qualitative, longitudinal case study was chosen to answer the specific research questions and acted as the orchestrating perspective of the research. A longitudinal study was the most appropriate selection, as it maximized the opportunity for the researcher to track, report, and compare findings over the three-year period and to gain insight into any developmental changes within the student leaders with regard to their leadership capacity. It was expected that the data gathered in this way would be more convincing than that which might emerge from a one-year “snapshot” (Rose, 1991, p. 194) examination or a cross-section analysis. Additionally, focusing on a single case in this way allowed the researcher to investigate the central issue of student leadership at considerable depth (Payne & Payne, 2004), and to gather data that would help to ultimately produce a thickly descriptive account of the issues of concern (Stringer, 2008). Qualitative case studies involve researchers spending considerable amounts of

time on site, personally engaging in activities and operations of the case, reflecting, and revising descriptions and meanings of occurrences (Stake, 2007).

Most of the data for this study were collected through qualitative interviews. The researcher made a deliberate effort to maintain self-discipline in the way the research was conducted, and picked the methods of field notes and reflective journaling to serve this effort. Researcher-generated field notes were chosen to supplement the typed transcriptions of the interviews, and recorded. The researcher employed journaling as an ongoing and reflective method for compiling the study's data and procedures. A document search was conducted of available school records to generate insight and background information regarding the school's student leadership program and its current philosophical underpinnings.

For the study, trustworthiness was established through deliberate, prior field testing of the data collection instruments, the researcher's gaining of experience and expertise in conducting interviews, and the researcher's consistent attention to the four characteristics stressed by Guba (1981); namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Specifically, all data collection instruments for this study were field tested and validated prior to their use in formal data collection. The interview questions were administered to a past principal of a Catholic secondary school, a past Head Boy and Head Girl of the school, and the elected Year 10 student leaders within the researcher's House Group. Following the transcription of each interview, all research participants were engaged in the member-checking process by reviewing their interview transcripts and returning them with any corrections, deletions, or amplifications. Additionally, multiple methods were used across the three years of data collection to "corroborate, elaborate, or illuminate the research problem and its outcomes" (Stringer, 2008, p. 49). The researcher collected detailed, descriptive data that could permit comparison of a given context to other possible contexts in which transferability might be considered (Guba, 1981). To enhance the possibility of transferability, the researcher developed detailed descriptions of the context so that others could make judgments about fittingness with other possible contexts.

Data Analysis

Data from the various interview transcripts, field notes, and the researcher's reflective journal were analyzed and explored for common themes. When analyzing the collected data, this researcher adhered to the framework

and guidelines offered by Miles and Huberman (1994). This framework assisted the researcher in inductively conceptualizing the underlying program of student leadership being pursued consciously or implicitly by the school. The framework 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. As data were collected, the researcher 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 data gathered through interviews, journal entries, and field notes, and were selected from those data based on their meaning. The researcher 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 researcher as the coding process took place. Lastly, as the study proceeded, there was a greater need to “formalize and systematize the researcher’s thinking into a coherent set of explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 75). These explanations were formalized according to research participant grouping, namely: *Principal*, *Deputy Principal*, *House Coordinators*, and *Students*. For this project, the researcher generated propositions about connected sets of statements regarding student leadership from all participants, reflected on the findings, and drew conclusions about the functioning student leadership model from the study.

Findings

Findings from the 2007 Interviews

Staff and student participants offered a variety of responses to what they perceived as being the explicit or implicit program of student leadership pursued at the school (see Table 2). Some similar claims were proposed by two or more participant groupings; specifically, the facilitation of leadership opportunities, the role of nonelected leaders at the school, and the notion of servant leadership. In describing the student leadership program at the school, all key staff mentioned how leadership opportunities were planned and facilitated for Year 10 students.

Table 2

Longitudinal Findings, 2007–2009

Principal	Deputy Principal	House Co-ordinators	Student Leaders
2007			
Year 10 Leadership Day	Servant Leadership	Year 10 Leadership Day	Peer Support Training
Facilitation of Leadership	Facilitation of Leadership	Facilitation of Leadership	Elected Leaders
Non-elected Leaders	Non-elected Leaders	Non-elected Leaders	Non-elected Leaders
Servant Leadership	Peer Support Training	Junior Leadership Council	Junior Leadership Council
2008			
Change of Dep. Principal	Elected Leaders	Elected Leaders	Elected Leaders
Facilitation of Leadership	Facilitation of Leadership	Change of Dep. Principal	Facilitation of Leadership
Elected Leaders	Servant Leadership	Facilitation of Leadership	Involvement of Key Staff
Servant Leadership	Peer Support Training	Servant Leadership	Peer Support Training
2009			
Elected Leaders	Elected Leaders	Elected Leaders	Elected Leaders
Facilitation of Leadership	Servant Leadership	Facilitation of Leadership	Facilitation of Leadership
Involvement of Key Staff	Facilitation of Leadership	Involvement of Key Staff	Involvement of Key Staff
Servant Leadership	Involvement of Key Staff	Election Process	Election Process

The principal shared some insight into the rationale behind the inclusion of one such event, Year 10 Leadership Day, in the school’s co-curricular calendar, when he stated that he wanted:

To expand the leadership opportunities for the Year 10s where they would go away for a day, and the students who went away were the whole group of Year 10s. [They are] not just a selected group of students that were perhaps hand-picked by teachers as the chosen ones and were also perceived that way by the student body. I think that by broadening the base you got staff nominating students who felt they could be leaders, and in some situations certain students ended up volunteering to become a leader. Prior to that opportunity, they had not seen themselves as being a leader.

A House Coordinator echoed these words by offering his views on the same event:

Rather than just take our best kids out for the day, we’ve decided to give the opportunity to all the Year 10s before they go into Upper School. We give them this opportunity to go out, learn and practise leadership skills.

To further support these claims, many key staff noted how the Year 10 students were given the added opportunity to exercise leadership through their involvement in the Peer Support program.

When commenting on the functioning leadership program at the school, all key staff and students mentioned nonelected leaders as having a legitimate role as school leaders. After drawing attention to the philosophy underpinning the leadership program at the school (viz. You don't need a badge to be a leader), the deputy principal of Pastoral Care remarked:

It's nice to know that even students who didn't get selected for an official position actually feel that they can take a leadership role, and that type of thing does come about; an example being when a stranger comes into the grounds or the school and students are only too willing to offer to show them around and look after them for the day.

This comment received support from a Year 10 leader (Cohort A), who volunteered: I don't think you need to have a badge or be known as a leader to be a leader; you can be a leader without having a badge. Like in a Sports Carnival, someone could offer to do a race that might be hard for someone but easy for them, and that's leadership. It's showing other people how to do things.

Many participants noted that the emphasis placed on "unbadged" leadership, particularly at planned events such as Leadership Day, helped to reinforce the notion that everybody is called to fulfill leadership in some capacity.

Both the principal and deputy principal for Pastoral Care described the functioning student leadership program at the school as embodying a servant leadership approach. To illustrate, the latter noted:

Our program here is very much a Servant Leadership model. Our leaders are encouraged, both on [leadership] training days and here at school, that we're here to help serve people, and that leadership is much more than the badge. We also reinforce in the students that we're all leaders; we need to help and serve others whether we wear a badge or not.

Although most staff was able to explicitly or implicitly describe the present, functioning program of student leadership as servant leadership, the student sample was largely unable to do the same.

Findings from the 2008 Interviews

Frequently, responses by a majority of staff and students included the manner in which the school facilitated student leadership opportunities, the

structure and organization of the leadership program in terms of elected leaders, and the notion of servant leadership. In describing the existing program of student leadership at the school, all key staff and students made references to the efforts made by school personnel to facilitate leadership opportunities for students. Specifically, the deputy principal for Pastoral Care spoke of how:

We've [recently] introduced morning training specifically for Year 10 students who would like to take on a leadership role within the school, or even to develop their leadership skills. The students have had to come in their own time an hour before school, and we tackle various issues that relate to leadership. We're trying to develop them to be a leader within the school because even though we have a number of "badged" leaders, our theme at the School is "You don't need a badge to be a leader."

A House Coordinator added, "Year 10 students are given the opportunity to nominate themselves for a Peer Support leadership role . . . each House usually can only have about 10 or 12 Peer Support Leaders, but [many] more [students] than that apply [for a position]."

All participants agreed that the facilitation of morning leadership classes, Peer Support in Years 10 and 11, and leadership positions of sports, arts and ministry helped to describe the program of student leadership at the school as one of inclusion, opportunity, and careful planning on behalf of the key staff.

All key staff and students in the study were able to proffer a detailed description of the structure and organization of the functioning program of student leadership at the school. When discussing these features of the program, the principal stated:

The School has a formal structure where we have students that would be a representative of their student body, they'd be the ones that the student body would look up to, and have a respect and regard for. They would also have to be students who appreciate and are prepared to uphold the values and ethos of the school, and you would hope that in any position of leadership that they'd get the opportunity to grow as a leader.

The deputy principal for Pastoral Care articulated this statement by adding: Across all the year levels there is a Sports, Arts and Ministry Leader for each House; except in Year 12 where you have a House Captain as well those other three areas of leadership. We also offer positions of leadership to our Year 11s, and they play an important role in the transition of Year 8s into high school life.

It should be noted that all staff and student participant groupings were able to offer a similar description of the structure and organization of the functioning leadership program. Additionally, these participants were able to confirm that there had been no changes to the program in the past two years.

All staff members characterized the program of student leadership at the school as consistent with servant leadership. For example, the deputy principal for Pastoral Care shared how she was trying to encourage students to develop their own leadership by

Encouraging them to follow and model Christ's example of servant leadership, by being prepared to walk with people and do the hard yards, and to provide that model for other students to follow. We try to develop the notion that leadership is not about power, that leadership comes from within, and it's the attitude you bring to the position that's really important. We want [our leaders] to appreciate their responsibility, to be there to serve others, and to be inclusive of others.

All five House Coordinators echoed this claim, concurring that the school's efforts toward student leadership resembled a servant leadership approach. In a similar vein to the findings in 2007, the student leaders were not able to explicitly describe the functioning program as embodying servant leadership; however, they were able to implicitly describe aspects of the program as exemplifying servant leadership.

Findings from the 2009 Interviews

The key staff and students continued to generate varied responses during the 2009 interviews. In particular, responses offered by more than two participant groupings cited the structure and organization of the leadership program in terms of elected leaders, the manner in which the school facilitated student leadership opportunities, and the involvement of key staff in the program itself. In describing the current program, staff and students shared a unanimous view of the structure and organization of the elected leaders. This view was put forth by a student leader (Cohort C₄), who stated:

[At Year 12 level] there are four positions for each House. There is a House Captain, Sports Leader, Ministry Leader and Arts Leader; there are four leaders for each of the six Houses, which is [a total of] 24 leaders. From those 24 there is a Head Boy, Head Girl, Sports Captain of the School, Arts Captain of the School, and Ministry Captain of the School.

As presented in the previous two years of research findings, no apparent changes to the student leadership program were mentioned by key staff members and student leaders.

All staff and students described how school personnel facilitated Year 12 student leadership opportunities. An opportunity that received significant mention within these descriptions was the Year 12 Leadership Camp. According to a House Coordinator, this camp:

Takes place in Term Four after the Year 12 Leaders are elected, and all of these [24] leaders go on a two day camp with the Deputy Principal for Pastoral Care and the [6] House Coordinators. There are also other teachers, like the Heads of Physical Education, Arts and Ministry, who attend a few sessions and speak with the students who are now the Ministry, Sports and Arts Leaders for each House. In those groups they sit down and vote on who should be the School Captain for each area.

A student leader (Cohort C₄) explained the purpose of the Leadership Camp by stating: “[The camp] was centered around making us better leaders and preparing us for our roles in Year 12. The activities we did helped us to use our initiative and develop our leadership skills.” Another student (Cohort C₃) concurred, adding:

We got to practise public speaking, using our initiative, building up our confidence, and the interaction between everyone was really good. [The teachers who led the sessions] taught us how to work with different types of people, and how to deal with stressful situations.

To encapsulate how school personnel facilitated leadership opportunities for elected leaders, a House Co-ordinator offered:

We try to empower [the students] and make them grow as leaders by helping them to develop a new sense of ownership. If they’ve got that sense of ownership, then they’re going to take more pride in their school. We want them to grow, part of [facilitating] their growth is to create an environment where they feel safe to make mistakes.

According to the study’s participants, Year 12 students experienced this ownership through additional staff-facilitated opportunities. These included holding regular meetings with Year 12 leaders, and assisting them with the facilitation of house meetings and house events.

All key staff members and students mentioned how certain key staff was directly involved within the program of leadership itself. A student (Cohort C₁) listed these staff members, which included “the Principal, Deputy Prin-

principal of Pastoral Care, the House Coordinators and the Heads of P[hysical] E[ducation], Arts and Ministry.” This statement echoed similar claims made in the previous two years of data collection, and affirmed that the direct involvement of key staff appeared to be a deliberate, unilateral approach toward student leadership development at the school.

Longitudinal Findings, 2007–2009

A longitudinal review of the collected data revealed that the four groupings of participants offered similar responses to the specific research question. Across the three years of data collection, all staff interviewees spoke about the manner in which leadership opportunities were facilitated at the school. Over the same time span, and with the same frequency, the principal and both deputy principals for Pastoral Care characterized the present program as that of servant leadership. Furthermore, the principal commented in 2008 and 2009 that the focus, overall structure, and organization of the student leadership program had remained constant throughout the three years of data collection. In 2008 and 2009, staff and students mentioned the elected student leaders when articulating an opinion about the structure and organization of the operational program at the school.

During the three years, some differences in participants’ responses can also be noted in the presented data. These differences include mention of the Junior Student Leadership Council (2007), the role of nonelected leaders in the program (2007), and the change of deputy principal for Pastoral Care (2008). Firstly, some House Coordinators and elected student leaders mentioned the Junior Leadership Council when describing the leadership program at the school. One of the House Coordinators articulated the purpose of this council by stating:

We have [a teacher] who has taken on the responsibility of looking after the junior leaders. We’re trying to give the younger students more of a voice at the School, and the elected leaders of each House from Years 8-10 each have a turn of attending the Student Council meetings over the course of a year.

In a separate interview, an elected student leader (Cohort A) added:

Each of the leaders in each House goes to the Junior Leadership Council meetings for a whole term, and then we switch. We go to the meetings and talk about things that the younger leaders can do for the School. Right now we’re thinking of starting up something called “Knitting for

the Homeless,” and later on in the year we might even get to organize a social for the younger students.

The notion of the Junior Leadership Council was not mentioned by any other participant groupings during any years other than 2007. Secondly, and similarly, all staff and students in 2007 mentioned the role of nonelected leaders in the program of leadership; however, this theme did not receive any further attention in subsequent years. Third, the principal and several House Coordinators spoke about the change of deputy principal for Pastoral Care when discussing the school’s functioning leadership program. This change had occurred in 2008, and only received mention from these participants during this year. One House Coordinator elucidated how the change in personnel affected the school’s leadership program by stating:

What [the new deputy principal for Pastoral Care] has done with the Year 10 Leadership Days, involving more staff members in student leadership activities, and running the leadership training sessions on Wednesday mornings has meant that leadership has become more important in the school overall.

Two other House Coordinators and the school principal concurred with this assertion, offering similar testimony concerning the efforts of the newly appointed deputy principal.

A document search was conducted in each of the three years during the study. The researcher found school literature and documents that explicitly mentioned student leadership. In particular, these documents included the school yearbook, school newsletter, minutes taken from Pastoral Care meetings, and memoranda between staff members. An examination of the documents revealed the following insights. The school yearbook contained an annual report from the Head Boy and Head Girl, and all six House Captains. These reports summarized the past scholastic year from a school and House perspective, respectively. On one occasion during the data collection period, the entire cohort of elected leaders (i.e., Year 8 to Year 12) was tabulated within the yearbook. Similarly, annual reports from the School Arts Captain, School Ministry Captain, and School Sports Captain appeared together in one yearbook. Sections of the yearbook written by the school principal, head of physical education, head of the arts, and campus ministry specifically mentioned and thanked the efforts and achievements of student leaders. The school newsletter reported student leadership activities to the school community, namely: information regarding imminent leadership elec-

tions, results from elections, announcements of student leadership cohorts, upcoming leadership training and development activities, articles written by student leaders, and articles written by staff members. Minutes taken from Pastoral Care meetings mentioned student leadership initiatives, cohorts of student leaders, student leadership training and development activities, and leadership elections. Memoranda between staff members were chiefly concerned with the facilitation of student leadership activities.

Discussion

The Program

All of the study's participants were able to report elements they believed characterized the functioning program of student leadership development at the school. Those elements were examined against key and defining characteristics of the leadership models summarized in the literature review, namely: transactional leadership, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, and distributed leadership. Consideration was also given to key principles and features of Christian leadership, leadership within Catholic schools, and student leadership. This examination assisted the researcher to discern the program of student leadership pursued at the school.

Students

The descriptions the students proffered made it clear that they possessed an accurate awareness of the organizational and structural aspects of the school's leadership program. This awareness was consistently evident across all three years of data collection. Specifically, when describing the program, all students listed the positions of student leadership available within the school. These positions included: elected student leaders from Years 8-12 within each House, Year 11 Peer Support Leaders, and the Year 12 Student Leadership Executive. Those staff responsible for student leadership at the school also received frequent mention, namely: principal, deputy principal for Pastoral Care, six house coordinators, head of physical education, head of drama, and campus minister. Such consistency aligns with the notion that the school had maintained the status quo (Locke, 1999) with regard to the structure and organization of its student leadership program. The students' testimony clearly demonstrated that the program at the school functioned

primarily as a system of management (Tuohy, 1999), whereby all participants were aware of the basic needs and roles of those within the school. In a similar vein, the students had a firm understanding of the operational procedures of the school's leadership program before entering into a leadership role (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). All students shared that the mentoring staff were responsible for the management and development of the student leadership program, and for the development of student leadership at the school.

A second feature of the functioning program frequently mentioned by the elected leaders was the opportunity for all students—both elected and nonelected—to exercise leadership. In particular, a number of students spoke of how elected leaders were in a position to help and encourage others, organize and facilitate events, attend meetings, and become involved in House events. This list of opportunities contributed to an understanding of the overall manner in which students exercised leadership at the school: They feel a desire to help other people (Greenleaf, 1977), engage in goal-setting activities to maintain the status quo (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), share responsibilities among numerous leaders (Harris, 2008), and encourage others to work for “higher level” goals that transcend the status quo (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). In 2007 a number of students also mentioned the role of nonelected leaders at the school, with specific reference to the exhortation: “You don’t need a badge to be a leader.” These comments affirmed the efforts of staff and students to encourage “unbadged” students to become involved in leadership activities, attend leadership meetings, and exercise leadership autonomously. The underlying purpose of promoting leadership to all students coincides with the idea of social utility, serving the common good, meeting the needs of followers and leaders, and elevating followers to a higher moral level (Burns, 1978).

For the duration of the study, students spoke of the school's deliberate efforts to provide leadership training opportunities for elected leaders. Specifically, those opportunities cited included: the Year 10 Leadership Day, Peer Support training, and Year 12 Leadership Camp. Students (e.g., ministry leader, sports captain) frequently summarized these opportunities for the school community in the school newsletter. A review of data revealed that these opportunities were facilitated by mentoring staff, and focused on developing leadership skills, “drawing out” leadership qualities, and providing “practice” sessions for students. Some sessions concentrated on communication, co-operative skills, problem solving, public speaking, and handling difficult situations. Additionally, a longitudinal review of the presented data

revealed that Year 12 students perceived the program of leadership as one that was receptive to modification; and that suggestions provided by leaders to staff helped improve the school's leadership efforts on a yearly basis. Examples included the addition or deletion of activities during leadership training days, and requests for increased assistance and guidance by staff during student-led school initiatives. Although, as noted earlier, the student leadership positions and arrangement of such positions remained unchanged for three years, the manner in which leaders were trained, taught, and developed was kept flexible. Such a guiding principle for student leadership development enabled the participants to describe the program as promoting change, providing decision-making parameters, and offering the opportunity to develop a strategy or vision (Bass, 1990).

Across all years of data collection, several student leaders implicitly described the program as one of service. Reference was made to the level of assistance leaders provided to other students at the school, and the approach leaders used when undertaking events at a House level or within the school community. Some examples of students serving others, House, and school, included: participation in the school ministry event "Knitting for the Homeless," offering to compete in a race for another student at the Athletics Carnival, looking out for younger students, and preventing bullying. In light of the New Testament notion of service, these actions embody those of Jesus during the Last Supper (Jn 13:12-15) and seek to uphold the covenantal values (Sergiovanni, 1992) that helped shape the school community. Consideration of the secular notion of service revealed a desire within elected student leaders to help others, to serve first before leading, and to ensure that others' highest priority needs were being served (Greenleaf, 1977). The leaders themselves manifested a commitment to understanding the personal needs of those within the school (Marzano et al., 2006), and to building the community (Lopez, 1995) at the school. This commitment was evidenced in the school yearbook and school newsletters, in which student leaders highlighted the focus of a school ministry event, leadership cohort, or House Group. For example, students consistently wrote about the charity their House sponsored, and congratulated the efforts of those students involved in the planning, preparation, and facilitation of fundraising activities.

A longitudinal analysis of student responses revealed increased awareness of the students becoming more autonomous in their thinking, decision making, and actions as leaders. More specifically, whereas the Year 10 student leaders tended to act in a role of dependence toward mentoring staff and fel-

low leaders, increasingly during Year 11 and Year 12, their roles developed into ones of more autonomous service to others and to the school.

Staff

All staff members repeatedly described the functioning program of student leadership development at the school as embodying a service approach. The principal and deputy principal for Pastoral Care described the program in this manner consistently for all three years of data collection, and all House Coordinators confirmed this description frequently throughout the study. For instance, a comment from the 2007 deputy principal for Pastoral Care provided insight into the school's philosophy regarding student leadership, insofar as specifically nominating the servant leadership model as that to which the school adhered. In addition to offering an explicit description of the leadership program at the school as embodying a servant approach, the deputy made reference to certain elements of servant leadership. These elements included the desire felt by student leaders to serve first before leading, and to care for others within the school community. This understanding echoes the approach to leadership offered by Greenleaf (1977). The deputy's sentiments also coincided with the Catholic Church's vision for servant leadership within schools, with specific emphasis placed on service (Adair, 2001; Blanchard & Hodges, 2003; Nuzzi, 2000), empowerment (McLaughlin, 1997), and community (McLaughlin & Sultmann, 2000; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1965).

In 2008, a new deputy principal for Pastoral Care was appointed. Several House Coordinators mentioned the attitude toward leadership this deputy brought into the school. Several staff statements also described this outlook, revealing an approach focused on involving more faculty in student leadership training activities, facilitating Wednesday morning leadership training sessions for interested students, and heightening the awareness and importance of student leadership within the school. All adult participants saw the efforts of the deputy as visionary (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005), of purpose (Bass, 1993), and embodying positive change (Ford & Ford, 1994; Friedman, 2004). Likewise, a personal reflection from the deputy underscored her philosophy of student leadership. She made direct reference to the notion that servant leaders must give up their power in order to lead, and to make use of various sources of social power so that relationships and organizations can be built (Wong, 2003). Within the reflection some key characteristics of servant

leaders were mentioned; among them are a commitment to the growth of others and a willingness to build community (Lopez, 1995; Spears, 1988).

After the appointment of this deputy principal, the House Coordinators were able to describe nominally the school's student leadership program as one embodying servant leadership. This ability can be directly attributed to the deputy's leadership focus; specifically, her articulation of the purpose of Catholic school leadership during Pastoral Care meetings, and the preparation and training of all cohorts of student leaders. During leadership training events, staff provided students with theoretical and practical activities focused on the Catholic understanding of servant leadership. Such activities involved a teacher-led analysis of particular Gospel readings, student engagement in carefully selected role-play situations, and collaborative (House Coordinator/teacher and students) planning for school events. An examination of minutes taken from Pastoral Care meetings revealed that discussions on planning for student leadership activities were grounded in an approach consistent with principles of servant leadership.

Much like comments raised by the student leaders, staff participant responses indicated firm recognition that the structural and organizational features of the school's student leadership program had remained unchanged over three years. These responses suggested a stable and consistent approach toward leadership, whereby all individuals understood the roles and positions operating within the program itself. Additionally, a majority of staff underscored the flexibility of the program with regard to student leadership positions. Several House Coordinators shared how they had "created" leadership roles for students who had unsuccessfully applied for a formal position. Examples of created roles included House Photographer, House Secretary, and House Spirit Leader. An analysis of memoranda (e.g., notes and e-mails) shared between staff members about "created" leadership roles underscored a leadership approach consistent with embracing change. In this sense, staff actions were synonymous with aspects of transformational leadership. An examination of interview transcripts revealed that students were offered these roles for considerable past contributions to the House. Such actions resonate with the view of leadership espoused by Dubrin and Daghish (2003) and Locke (1999), who have placed emphasis on rewarding individuals for meeting standards. Furthermore, the House Coordinators claimed that creating additional leadership roles empowered students to take greater responsibility for achieving set goals (Bass, 1990), and that emphasizing an inclusive and collaborative leadership approach helped promote a House culture of vision-

ary change (Friedman, 2004).

Following on the previous two discussion points, all staff described how the school offered leadership training opportunities for students in Years 10–12. In interview records, Year 10 Leadership Day and Year 10 Peer Support Training were mentioned as perennial school events. For Year 10 Leadership Day, the entire cohort of Year 10 students participated in a one-day, staff-led leadership training workshop. Focusing on the motto “You Don’t Need a Badge to Be a Leader,” and leadership through service to others, the workshop offered theoretical and practical activities to all students. The Year 10 Peer Support Training event was attended by those students elected to the position—approximately 15 students per House—and broadened the focus from Leadership Day to include a pastoral aspect. To assist with the process of inducting Year 8 students into the school, Peer Support leaders received specific training with regard to mentorship, role modeling, and dealing effectively with younger students. In 2008 and 2009, staff referred to the Wednesday morning leadership training sessions facilitated by the newly appointed deputy principal for Pastoral Care. These sessions provided insight into the leadership approach embodied by the school, outlined the roles and function of leaders within the school and society, and gave students an opportunity to engage in leadership-based activities.

The three opportunities described underscore the importance the school placed on student leadership development. According to all staff participants, the provision of leadership training was a valuable experience for the participating students (Carey, 1991; Gordon, 1994), promoting student leadership within the school (Lavery, 2006) and giving students opportunities to make a positive difference within the school community (Appleton, 2002). Furthermore, the service component of providing training opportunities addresses a key aspect of Catholic education, highlighting the need for Catholic schools to become genuine communities focused on helping all members adopt a Christian way of life (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977).

Summary and Conclusion

Examining the presented findings against relevant literature assisted the researcher to discern the functioning program of student leadership at the school. Testimony from staff and students revealed elements of transactional leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Dubrin & Darglish, 2003; Locke, 1999), transformational leadership (Bass, 1993; Ford & Ford, 1994; Sergiovanni

& Starratt, 1993), servant leadership (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977; McLaughlin, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1992), and distributed leadership (Harris, 2008). Analyzing data together from three years made apparent that the existing leadership program also contained elements found within established student leadership programs (Appleton, 2002; Carey, 1991; Gordon, 1994; Lavery, 2006) and Catholic school leadership (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1965). A longitudinal review of data revealed that student perceptions of the program developed as time progressed; in Year 10, the comments made by students closely resembled features of transactional leadership. In Years 11 and 12, these same views continued to reflect those transactional features, but included a focus on several aspects consistent with transformational and servant leadership. In 2008 and 2009, the students implicitly described aspects of the operational program as exemplifying servant leadership. From a staff perspective, the principal and deputy principal for Pastoral Care aligned the school's operational program closely with servant leadership; other mentoring staff provided a list of elements that suggested a servant leader approach. From 2008, onward, all mentoring staff openly described the program as resembling a servant leadership approach. Documents obtained by the researcher—specifically, minutes taken from Pastoral Care Meetings—supported this claim. This leadership focus was largely attributed to the work of a newly appointed deputy principal for Pastoral Care.

The functioning program of student leadership at the school highlighted the importance of leadership development at a personal, school, and community level. In addition to the confidence and skills leadership experiences afford youth, the Catholic view of leadership encourages participants to “look beyond” themselves and to minister to the needs of others (Hine, 2013). It is difficult to predict how far the sphere of positive, meaningful leadership influence can reach within a school community—and possibly further after leaders have graduated! With these aspects in mind, it is recommended that Catholic education authorities locate value in promoting and sustaining student leadership programs. Such promotion may take the form of providing professional development modules for teachers in establishing and facilitating student leadership initiatives within Catholic schools. This research suggests that student leadership is of considerable value to students' personal growth—and to the positive cultivation of school culture. Principals are advised to carefully appoint capable, enthusiastic staff to roles focused directly on working with student leaders. Additionally, principals should create a network of committed staff responsible for the facilitation and, if needed,

refinement, of any student leadership initiatives. Such initiatives (e.g., leadership training events) within Christian schools need to be anchored in a servant leadership approach. The findings of this study have relevance to teachers and students of all ages who 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), teachers should carefully consider their responsibility in preparing tomorrow's leaders within their own classrooms.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

1. Describe how your school functions in terms of staff leadership positions.

2. Describe how your school functions in terms of student leadership positions.

3. Do the Principal and Deputy Principal/House Coordinators work together with other school personnel and/or students in planning for student leadership opportunities?

4. If so, describe what happens during such planning sessions.

5. What are the responsibilities of the Principal and Deputy Principal/House Coordinators/students at your school regarding student leadership and student leadership development?

6. What is the apparent program of student leadership and student leadership development being pursued by the Principal and Deputy Principal/House Coordinators?
7. How can the underlying philosophy of student leadership and student leadership development be described?
8. Is the program of student leadership pursued at your school based on another program existing elsewhere, or modeled after the life of a person e.g. a saint?
9. What are some strengths associated with the program of student leadership existing at your school?
10. What are some weaknesses associated with the program of student leadership existing at your school?
11. How are the student leaders at your school recognized, with specific reference to their appearance, actions and words?
12. As a Principal/Deputy Principal/House Coordinator/student, what is your hope for the future of student leadership at your school?
13. As a Principal/Deputy Principal/House Coordinator/student, what is your hope for the future of student leadership development at your school?

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