



Vive Spiritu Fidei
Live by the Spirit of Faith

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Formation for Mission

A systems model
for advancing the
formation of the
Catholic school
educator within the
Australian context

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Introduction

The La Salle Academy, working with the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy is developing a new specialisation within the Graduate Certificate Catholic Studies. This specialisation, Catholic School Foundations, will attend to both academic content and the faith formation of the participants. This will be achieved through a systems model of formation that incorporates four interactive sub-systems:

ALIGNMENT:

understanding the religious context and balancing the expectations and insights of the engaged partner entities.

ENGAGEMENT:

identifying quality formation practice and the delivery of experiences through effective adult learning processes.

EMPOWERMENT:

generation of formation outcomes from relevant fields, identification of participant capabilities, and evaluative practices.

INTEGRATION:

ensuring goals and contributions across the collective sub-systems are interactive and mutually productive.

Practice elements incorporate national formation principles; engaged practice partnerships with employing authorities; assessment of participant interests and priorities; pathways to further learning; application of theological and ecclesial content within an educational context; community based learning; and outcomes that acknowledge the agency, challenges and opportunities of the learner.

Implications include the specification of formation elements in communication; identification of sub-systems as a basis for formation research; utilisation of the model for the development, delivery and assessment of formation initiatives; and generation of an approach for consideration in wider pastoral contexts.



Religious context

The profile of Australian religious culture generally, and within the Catholic Church more particularly, is undergoing change of a dramatic nature.

The most recent census of the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2016 revealed that the percentage of Christians reduced to 52.2 per cent, whereas for Hinduism and Islam, growth was experienced. The only Christian tradition to experience an increase was the Pentecostals. The Australian Catholic community is now 22.6 per cent of the population; down from 25.3 per cent six years ago. Moreover, while 60.3 per cent of Australians report an association with some religion, some 31.1 per cent indicate 'no religion' and the remainder of respondents did not complete the optional question. The percentage of respondents in the 'none' (no religion category) rose dramatically from 22.3 per cent six years ago.

The profile of the Catholic school mirrors the religious context of the Catholic Church. The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) Report of 2016 states that 69 per cent of students in Catholic schools identify as Catholic and 31 per cent 'other than Catholic.' With regard to staff, the NCEC reveals that 80 per cent of primary school teachers and 61 per cent of secondary school teachers identify as Catholic. Moreover, the NCEC advances that just 25 per cent of the Catholic staff are engaged in regular worship and report, "For most staff, the Catholic school is their only regular experience of the mission and life of Catholicism." Commentaries on staff participation in Church life (Arbuckle, 2017; Franchi and Rymarz, 2017) highlight the overall inadequacy of data in this regard, for what is left unspecified, is the breadth and depth of commitment and its associated relationship with the mission, life and culture of the Catholic school.

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Terminology

The Catholic school in Australia is complex, multicultural, interdependent and religiously diverse. Formation in this context cannot presume Baptism into a Christian community, nor the practice of a Catholic faith tradition. Rather, formation provides access and invites participation in processes that support an understanding of what is happening in the school, Church and in the world. It is centred on a commitment to a shared moral purpose and an understanding of participant openness to the movement of the Spirit through meaningful encounters in ways that make a difference.

A systems model of formation establishes sub-systems and identifies strategies that underlie complex situations and enable discernment of high from low leverage opportunities (Senge, 1990, p. 69). In this light, “A system can be detailed in terms of its components: composed of people, processes and products; its attributes, composed of the input, process and output characteristics of each component; and its relationships, composed of interactions between components and characteristics” (Tien and Berg, 2003, p. 23).

The Catholic school educator is defined as one who supports a relationship with the transcendent (Groome, 1980); is open to developing an appreciation of religion and being religious (Moran, 1991); exercises a

professional role as a vocational call to service (Sultmann and Brown, 2011); and is committed to the development of Catholic school identity (Gleeson, Goldberg, O’Gorman, and O’Neill, 2018). Therefore, a Catholic school educator is one who encounters to varying degrees formal religious instruction; the religious dimension of the curriculum; the religious traditions of the school; and culture in relationships, organisational structures and system processes.

Formation entails the intentional and systematic integration of faith, life and culture; addresses the expectations of participants, schools, system authorities and profession; and facilitates personal encounters of the head, heart and hand. Drawing from recent, focused and sequenced research (Neidhart and Lamb, 2016, p. 50), it’s been concluded that formation is “a matter of urgency for the success and sustainability of the Catholic school.” Moreover, it is an opportunity through dialogue “to provide a privileged environment for the complete formation of her members” (Congregation of Catholic Education, 1977, p. 16) within a new context where education is grounded in fraternal humanism in the “creation of a civilisation of love” (Congregation of Catholic Education, 2017).

While the vision and mission of the Catholic school remain unchanged, Catholic entities are challenged to provide formation that is responsive to a new Catholic school community while being authentic to Church tradition.

Alignment sub-system

Formation entails the intentional and systematic **integration of faith, life and culture**; addresses the expectations of participants, schools and profession; and facilitates personal encounters of the head, heart and hand.

The sub-system of alignment establishes what is important to all parties in the provision of formation.

It begins with a shared understanding of the formation process, the priorities of employing entities, and the nomination by formation providers of service strategies in response to these understandings and priorities.

COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF FORMATION

The Congregation for Catholic Education underlines the integrated nature of vocation within the Catholic school as invitational and formative. It is the invitation to not only participate in mission but to also be caught up in its intentions. In this light, formation becomes “an ever-clearer discovery of one’s vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfil one’s mission” (Pope Saint John Paul II, 1988, para. 58). Moreover, the Synod of Bishops has appealed to Catholic schools and universities to share this privilege through service and witness. In this way, the post-synodal apostolic expectation concludes with the view, “Formation is not the privilege of a few, but a right and duty of all” (Pope Saint John Paul II, 1988, para. 63).

EMPLOYER PRIORITIES

The identity and mission of the Catholic school is supported by new and renewed strategies by Catholic employing authorities. Practices include: nurturing respectful and complementary partnerships; ensuring the inclusion of Catholic identity in graduate education programs; incorporating ‘the basics’ from traditional disciplines within formation experiences; recognising the value and relevance of experiential

learning; resource support for religious education and the religious traditions of the school; nurturing practices and skills (being witness) to vision and mission; aligning assessment and reporting with participant, school and authority needs; utilisation of adult learning principles in meeting diverse learning expectations; articulating learning into other forms of formal experiences or for accreditation purposes; and acknowledging the breadth of participant capacities and commitments across personal, social, professional and ecclesial environments.

SERVICE STRATEGIES

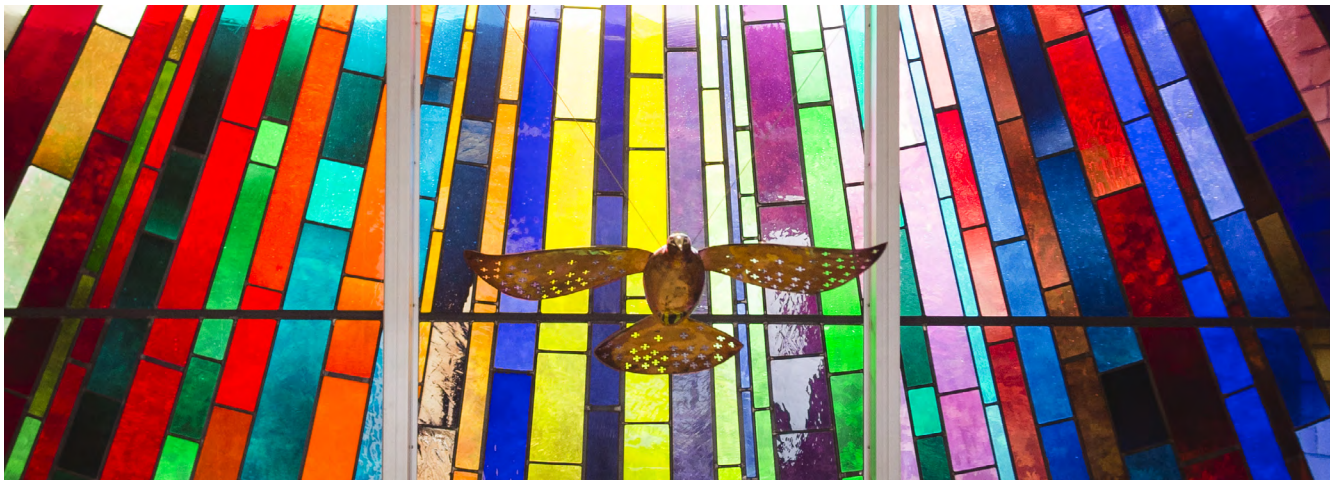
The La Salle Academy, within the Office of the Vice President, Identity and Mission, was established to give explicit support to formation, research and teaching in areas of faith development, religious education and educational leadership. Integral to this strategy is consultation with employing authorities and faculties within the University and the promotion of partnerships in service of mission. One Academy initiative, supported and auspiced within the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, is a proposed specialisation (Catholic School Foundations) within the Graduate Certificate in Catholic Studies. The course is aligned with university wide processes that evidence “Richness, complexity, culture, connection and practicality” (Craven, 2016). At the same time, the initiative addresses employer formation principles of advancing personal meaning, addressing ecclesial expectations and supporting school and system strategic initiatives (Gowdie, 2017).

“Schools can and must be a catalyst... a place of encounter and convergence of the entire educating community, with the sole objective of training and helping to develop mature people who are simple, competent and honest, who know how to love with fidelity, who can live life as a response to God’s call, and their future profession as a service to society”

(Congregation of Catholic Education, 2013, para. 18).



The course endeavours to be compelling and unique to participants and employing authorities and so advance engagement, development and further research within and for the Catholic school community.



Engagement sub-system

The sub-system of engagement focuses on the development and delivery of formation. The sub-system entails the activation of quality formation practices, meeting the design expectations of the service provider, and the promotion of engaged practice partnerships as mechanisms of collaboration between the service provider and the sponsoring authority.

QUALITY PRACTICE

Quality formation is argued to be characterised by intentionality, engagement, and reflection (NCEC, 2017). It has as its focus the formation of the whole person and the development of the community through the integration of faith, life and culture informed by Catholic anthropology. In essence it is a process of wholeness that applies equally to the educator and the educated. “It is only when our students have become completely human, only when their religious experience has been fully nourished - in the body, heart and mind, can we expect to see a living faith in living human beings” (O’Shea, 2017, p. 205). It is within this context that the course specialisation seeks to integrate the subtle and not so subtle shifts in quality practice as reflecting: formation for the Mission of God already present; knowledge and relationship with

Christ as foundational to service; advocacy by employers that is strategic and systematic; the interdependent and co-responsible relationships of experiences; the application of creative pedagogies within adult learning; identification of capabilities aligned with school, community, and system priorities; individual and collegial learning; assessment and reporting of outcomes; and, the goal of mutual transformation of participants and facilitators.

DESIGN EXPECTATIONS

Subject to the priorities of employing authorities and in keeping with University processes for authorisation, the Graduate Certificate in Catholic Studies (Catholic School Foundations) is designed on the core elements of outcomes, content, and learning and teaching (inclusive of assessment). Participant outcomes include: recognition and application of professional capabilities (knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions); resource support for religious instruction, the religious dimension of the curriculum, the religious traditions of the school, relationships, and school culture evidenced in systems, structures and processes; and preparation of a professional profile aligned with ministry. Learning units

in support of these outcomes include foundational studies in Christology; Church life; identity and mission; and a workplace practical unit on the integration of capabilities. Pedagogical practices within each of the units will include ministry profiling; digital learning; direct and indirect instruction; literature support; case study applications; collegial inputs; resource development; personal journalling; and skills training.

ENGAGED PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS

The course invites the facilitation of continuous local community learning through mentoring and dialogue on unit content and implications, contextual challenges and assessment applications. The range of initiatives in support of learning prior to, between and after the delivery of core units will incorporate ministry profiling on mission familiarity and professional expectations; accompaniment, both personally and collegially; accountability, to participants, school and employing entities; resourcing support and collegial development of a ‘teacher bookshelf’; and communication through a memorandum of agreement confirming intentions and commitments.

Empowerment sub-system

The sub-system of empowerment attends to the focus and scope of formation in terms of participant outcomes and their subsequent impact on professional responsibilities. Outcomes are specified through the designation of relevant formation fields, participant capabilities, and assessment practices. In turn, and as appropriate, assessment practices inform service support and provide for accountability and reporting.

FORMATION FIELDS

Formation fields are the generic dimensions of development on which formation activities typically focus. They are not explicit professional statements of role, but are foundational and applicable to multiple roles within the mission, life and culture of the Catholic school. Formation fields within the new specialisation, which are particularly applicable to the practicum unit, assessment processes and across engaged partnerships, were identified from an analysis of formation research literature selected on the basis of relevance and recency. Ten studies were subjected to the process of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to “unravel the meaning contained in accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the text of transcripts” (Smith, Jaman, and Osborn 1999, p. 218). The stages involved the examination of specific and overall data observations, generating theme titles, and connecting themes to register the overall superordinate domains to which formation activities might apply. In this light, the fields of formation summarised as most significant included: the self; relationships; professional situation; and community context.

PARTICIPANT CAPABILITIES

Capabilities are the identifiable outcomes that populate the relevant formation fields. Examination of

Effective assessment processes reduce the seduction of making decisions by intuition; **enable** proceeding based on identified goals; **generate** performance information of significance; and **utilise** an information system integrated with **strategy and purpose**.

(Drucker, 1998)

current curriculum expectations by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) reveal a similarity of focus in terms of capabilities that incorporate knowledge, skills, the application of knowledge and skills, and overall dispositions. The knowledge capability covers the necessary technical information to operate effectively; the skills dimension identifies the abilities central to the carriage of responsibilities; behaviours indicate the observable characteristics; and dispositions reflect an overall integration of these learning domains (ACARA, 2013, p. 5).

Within the formation fields nominated earlier, the following dispositions summarise the outcomes of significance.

- **The Self:** “Personal awareness and engagement with meaning, affect and behaviour grounded in a Catholic Christian view of life and living”;
- **Relationships:** “Respect for the inherent dignity of self and others and encountering the life of the Spirit in personal, social and group situations”;
- **Professional situation:** “Engagement in mission through authentic curriculum practices, participation in the religious life of the school, and personal witness”;
- **Community context:** “Dialogue about beliefs, values, structures,

systems and processes congruent with school, Church and wider community expectations.”

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

The development of an instrument to support formation practice for the new specialisation arose from this base. It drew upon the ‘rules’ of instrument construction through a focus on the immediate concerns of participants; ease of instrument usage; giving attention to key concepts; analysing data to build an integrated and coherent information base; trying ‘out of the box’ thinking to generate ideas; measuring everything that matters; and looking for natural expressions for the generation of information (Anderson and Simester, 2011, p. 102-105).

In view of the present course proposal and in light of the aforementioned guidelines, a self-report questionnaire, nominated as the Catholic School Formation Index (CSFI), was developed to provide pre- and post-course data integrated from three interdependent processes: a self-reporting quantitative assessment of mission and associated formation needs; shared collegial reflection of quantitative responses; and a personal reflection on prior formative experiences (formal and informal) of most significance. The aggregation of responses within each process is summarised as a preliminary ‘formation profile’, which is utilised to support teaching and as a benchmark for reporting outcomes.

Integration sub-system

The integration sub-system articulates and applies strategies to ensure a holistic approach to formation which is respectful of the interests of all parties. The elements of the sub-system include the provision of a 'balanced curriculum' for participants; a review of processes for service delivery authenticity; and facilitating formation within the local community in keeping with participant, school and employer priorities.

BALANCED CURRICULUM

The selection of units within the course specialisation endeavours to balance introductory theological and ecclesiological content with educational philosophy and practice. The units in theology and ecclesiology provide foundations in concepts, language and application, which are then applied incrementally within units on Catholic schooling; specifically, identity and mission, and personal professional practice within the workplace situation. In support of this final and complementary aspect of the course, students are encouraged to progressively journal insights and applications and build a portfolio of resources. A summative assessment is proposed to integrate course outcomes and be represented within a personal ministry profile.

PROCESS AUTHENTICITY

The NCEC *Formation Framework Guidelines* offer a series of probing questions to review the authenticity of formation programs. The paraphrased examples include: Is content explicitly Christological, scripturally rich and ecclesially grounded? Are participants invited into a personal relationship with Jesus and a deeper or renewed participation in the Eucharist and a faith community? Is it purposeful, strategic, developmental and sequential? Is formation of the heart characterised by prayerfulness, reflection and celebration of the Eucharist? Is there differentiation according to individual backgrounds, needs and roles? Does the experience build communal Catholic identity and culture? Is it respectful, experiential and relevant, building on participants' personal story and everyday reality? Is

there an affective focus on a person's faith journey and discipleship? Is there substantive theological content? Are personal vocation and responsiveness to mission promoted? And, does it seek to develop the willingness, confidence and capacities of participants to serve the evangelising mission of Catholic school education? While difficult to assess prior to trial and development of the Catholic School Foundations specialisation, the questions reinforce processes that seek to understand participant needs and priorities, along with prompting service providers as to content and process considerations.

COMMUNITY LEARNING

The significance of local learning communities is that they establish a distinctive culture whereby learning is dynamic, relational and dialogical. Within the process of formation, learning communities enable a search for truth and give expression to love, trust and solidarity as faith, life and culture are explored and integrated. Participants are said to grow as witnesses, moderators, specialists, co-inquirers and designers of their own learning, which integrates the professional input from others with personal and social capacities inherent within the group (Madden, 2017). The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant learning community, enhancement of potential for all members, and the expectation that new knowledge and collaborative experiences will be forthcoming (Kilpatrick, Barrett and Jones, 2003, p. 11). In short, learning communities seek to balance individuality with social connectedness within a shared commitment to mission.




Summary

Modelling formation in system terms establishes the relevance, interdependence, breadth and depth of its centrality to mission.

A systems model of formation incorporates the integration of faith, life and culture within a community of dialogue inspired by fraternal humanism (see Figure 1 below). The systems model is also a means to identify, incorporate and align the nature and rate of change that informs life and culture across communities, context and time. The development of the specialisation (Catholic School Foundations) responds strategically to this vision and highlights the significance of elements integral to the sub-systems of alignment, engagement, empowerment, and integration. In addition, the nominated specialisation evidences the commitment to Catholic authority priorities, inter-agency support, maintenance of university processes, and pathways for higher learning for participants.

Modelling formation in system terms establishes the relevance, interdependence, breadth and depth of its centrality to mission. More specifically, it facilitates an understanding of its key elements; provides a variety of interconnected entry points for research; establishes foundations for the development, delivery and evaluation of contemporary practices; evidences quality professional learning experiences in professional life; and enables a platform for discussion, application and critique within wider national and international forums. In this light, the systems model, and its accompanying initiative, are offered for critique and development and as a basis for further research and practice in support of formation.

A SYSTEMS MODEL OF FORMATION

VISION	STRATEGY	SUB-SYSTEMS	
			
Formation for Mission through the integration of faith, life and culture within a community of dialogue inspired by fraternal humanism.	Formation provision that is personally meaningful, ecclesially relevant and strategically effective.	Alignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common understanding of formation. • Employer priorities. • Service strategies. 	Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality practice. • Design expectations. • Engaged practice partnerships.
		Empowerment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation fields. • Participant capabilities. • Assessment practices. 	Integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced curriculum. • Process authenticity. • Community learning.



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