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Project Tile: Mentoring and Leadership

Developing the leadership capacity of middle leaders through targeted and directed mentoring. Key foci being on middle leaders learning to understand leadership, developing leadership strategies for improving student learning outcomes through their leadership and evolving a Catholic identity for and in leadership.

Project Leadership Framework Focus:
Main Focus: Area 4 -People and Resources Minor foci: Area 1 -The Faith Community
Area 2 -Vision for the Whole School

Project Action:
Identified position of leadership holders who are either first time leaders or experienced leaders were invited to participate in this project as a structured mentoring program.

The program involved pairing of a first time leader with an experienced leader. As members of the action research group each pair undertook a guided leading and leadership dialogue with support and direction from an external facilitator who specialised in mentoring for effective leadership. Dialogue about leadership and leading was framed around the Guiding Conceptions of Leadership and specifically focusing on leadership actions from **Area 4: People and Resources**, **Area 1: The Faith Community** and **Area 2: Vision for the Whole School** as well as others which each participant identified.

Specific emphasis in the program was given to aspects of **Area 4: People and Resources** - 4.1 **Professional learning and development,** 4.2 **Staff appraisal and performance review,** 4.3 **Resources** and 4.4 **Pastoral care.** These foci are underpinned by a school improvement philosophy that is consistent with the context of **Area 2: A Vision for the Whole School** and our College **School Improvement Agenda (SIA).**

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Project Reflection and Learning

The value of this project to the College community continues to unfold in the actions and perspectives of the group of leaders actively involved in the project as well as those with whom they have shared their leadership story.

Key to the project team's successful action research experiences was the opportunity to share their experiences regularly and in a structured, focused and meaningful way with each other in their pairs and as a whole group. Whilst the original design of the project was for the whole team to be a broad framework and the pair mentoring and external consult mentoring be the core interactions the action research team forged a strong identity of its own, which shaped each pair and in turn became a powerful contributor to reflections on leading. The individual action research projects that each individual designed related specifically to their current work and this relevant enabled an authenticity in the research, investigation, implementation and reflection cycle that was undertaken.

As the project progressed it became vitally important that the individual projects and the broad action research team project respond to the demands and realities of school life. Whole team meeting times, interaction with the customised MyClasses portal, updating of project tracking tools and external mentor consultations were regularly highlighted by the project coordinator, however determined by the relevant individuals and the group.

The original intention for the coordination of the group was for the College Leadership Team (LT) to develop and propose the project; approach current Position of Leadership (POL) holders to ascertain their interest and to provide the framework for investigation and action. The members of the LT had intended to remain at an observers distance from the participant's individual action research projects and in so doing further promote confidentiality and trust amongst and within leaders. Providing active coordination and focus for the project, as well as being a springboard for ideas in team meetings proved to be more desirable for the project coordination and this active involvement further shaped the team.

Interest in the AGQTP team and the focused work of individual participants was of interest to the rest of the school community. Maintaining confidentiality and trust between mentor pairs and their external consultations was of very high importance and in the interest of enabling a climate of trust to develop between team members. As a result the decision was made to not directly communicate to all staff the AGQTP project but to approach it as a part of the internal professional learning in leadership project. Other POL holders were particularly interested in the project as they weer more aware of their colleagues participating. A session in the end of year POL holders 2007 professional learning in leadership, "Strategic Leadership" forum day included an overview of the whole team action research project and then a briefing by each pair to a small group of POL holders about their experience in the project.

A particularly powerful aspect of the learning about leadership that the project realised was the importance of strategic planning for leadership by leaders. The use of tools to track and

actively reflect in order to build and extend current leadership capacity was critical at mid and end project phases. All participants commented on the value of having a dedicated colleague with whom they could confidentially discuss their specific leadership plans, actions and intentions and receive questioning feedback. The original pairing of participants with expectations and titles of novice or experienced leader proved to be unnecessary and actively abandoned by the team. A genuine recognition of the contribution that a critical colleague can make to how a leader shapes their own self image of their leadership and their actions was deemed to be unconnected to their experience of leadership and more determined by a shared common framework of leadership standards and perceptions of leadership in Catholic education.

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Ideas, Processes and Abandonment:

A structured and monitored program of professional learning in leadership for a small group of school leaders was an important context within which to set this leadership capacity building. Facilitating (changed from coordinating) the project team with a definitive timeframe and the expectation that there is a desired outcome for the team and for individual projects remains important.

Selection of POL holders as participants could now be open to nomination and should be facilitated by another member of the LT so as to diversify the working and leading relationships of the middle level leaders and the senior LT. Maintaining an external consultant for the team and for the pairs would be critical to sustaining a culture of collaboration, shared and evolving wisdom and trust.

Team briefings evolved during the project and provided an invaluable forum for a variety of purposes for the development of the group identity and for individuals. From catching up on what had been happening to collegial support and open ended questioning the team briefings whilst not many in total across three terms were evidenced as culture shaping in the work and conversation of the last briefing (a four period summary, reflection and preparation for sharing session)

One of the original intentions of the whole project was to promote and enable online collaboration through a dedicated MyClasses portal. The structure, focus and format of the portal were redeveloped during the project in an attempt to more realistically meet the needs of the action researchers in recording and reporting confidentially their experiences. Eventually the portal was abandoned because it was not serving a meaningful purpose. One to one contact that was dedicated to discussing in a focused way the specific leadership experiences, whilst some times as infrequent as once per month was more valuable than a consistent online ideas record.

Recommendations

The AGQTP Action Research Team concluded that their experience in this action research did build their capacity as leaders. In particular they reflected on the value of having a critical friend with whom to dialogue in a professional paradigm. The group recommends the College LT that the mentoring of leaders is further explored and that a similar project is available to POL holders in 2007.

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Participant Reflections:

Ella's learning:
The importance of:
• building positive relationships with staff
• having clear goals
• being transparent
• creating a climate for offering and accepting critical feedback
• being adaptable
• raising colleagues' awareness of the need to develop the common understandings, goals and purposes that make up the school's vision for learning.

" The mentoring process was extremely beneficial because it allowed me to clarify ideas about Pastoral Care that I was thinking about, but hadn't yet articulated. The Action Research Project provided the vehicle to address my broad issues and questions relating to Pastoral Care"

Chris' learning:
The importance of:
• Having clear aims, and to communicate them regularly
• To be flexible with the aims and be willing to change the focus through collaboration
• Positive relationships
• Ongoing support for leaders within the school, and the need to continue to develop structured ways (eg through mentoring) to maintain this

"I found that as the project progressed, a supportive leadership community developed. I was able to share my progress and new ideas with the group and felt strengthened to continue with the process. The mentoring process was also very helpful – it allowed in depth sharing and support. For me, the project emphasised that leadership is an ongoing process and requires both reflection and support. I am very interested in developing the mentoring process in the future."

Karin's learning:
• Helped to be able to discuss leadership standards in terms of project and what we were hoping to develop, e.g. SIA
• As a leader acknowledging and celebrating the work and learning achievements of colleagues
• *(Affirmation so important for building teamwork, building customer service, developing self and encouraging initiative)*

As a leader I recognised the importance of organising more opportunity for informal staff PD particularly relevant to their needs as support staff and also to facilitate sharing knowledge both informally and formally (*encourages ideas, promotes collaboration, and offers encouragement)*

• As a leader the importance of encouraging and helping colleagues to engage in professional conversation and reflection on practice as part of self appraisal, self

development, and as a key to assisting in performance review.
• For this process to be a regular part of team meetings, as a positive and supportive
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Melissa's learning:
• I learnt about the value of the leadership standards
• Flexibility and adaptability in action research is necessary
• Uncertainty is a fundamental part of learning and leading
• • Mentoring is invaluable! My mentor, Karin:
  • Provided encouragement and support
  • Clarified the issues
  • focused my attention
  • Helped me build on my own talents

Karin and Melissa's reflections on pair mentoring:
Meeting with each other:
• Helped us select our projects from the possibilities we had come up with
• Helped us to discern which project had the most chance of realistic success
• Provided ideas from different perspectives
• Helped us discuss concerns and clarify issues
• Helped us to stay motivated by believing in our projects
• Helped us to value leadership in another area of the College
• Added impetus to the project
• Helped us realise mentoring was a two way street
• The project helped to put into a real context the guiding conceptions of leadership and to discuss this in terms of our actions with each other was invaluable
• Having a visual tool to outline the project was very useful in keeping track of the process and to remind us of the whole picture

Misal's learning:
The importance of:
• developing a shared meaning and common ground in reviewing change – development of a checklist
• Ensuring that the learning needs of our students are the priority
• a full consultation process
• building a relationship with others
• the need to have done background research and organisation
• sharing and conversing with a critical friend

"Being an inexperienced leader, I had reservations about what sort of a leader I'd be. This action plan/mentoring experience has helped me clarify my own role in leading others" " When guided by a clear moral purpose, decision making in a team becomes easier to ensure student learning is the priority.

Jenni's learning:
The importance of:
• Having clear goals
• Developing a cultural shift takes time
• Valuing the skills and talents of others
• Creating a climate of offering and accepting critical feedback among colleagues

•   Differentiating between learning and teaching

" I feel now that I can make my own leadership journey not follow a role set out by someone else" "Leadership is easier when you can share the experiences and knowledge with others" "Each small step forward is a part of the bigger picture"

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