

Chapter 13

Shepherding Talent – An Informal Formation Programme for Aspiring Catholic School Leaders’. In: *Irish and British Reflections on Catholic Education*

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Abstract

Shepherding Talent is a pioneering informal formation programme in which teachers identified as having potential for leadership are challenged to explore their vocation to lead. The content of the programme is based around the imperative for all Catholic schools to maintain a balance between school improvement and Catholic distinctiveness. The integrity of vocation and profession in the context of discipleship figures prominently and defines the nature of the seminars. Through workshops, the mission of the Catholic educator is elucidated alongside a consideration of personal disposition and values, inviting a critically reflective response to leadership. This interplay and its impact will be discussed in this chapter alongside the key concepts and ideas embedded within the five constituent modules of the *Shepherding Talent* programme.

Keywords

Catholic leadership,
model,
standards
Formation of school leaders
Vocation

Introduction

The programme consists of five seminars. The first, entitled *The Catholicity of Leadership*, explores the characteristics of Catholic distinctiveness, the distinctive nature of the Christian

leader and the integrity of academic standards and Catholic distinctiveness. The second, entitled *Evaluating a Catholic School*, outlines the history and structure of Section 48 denominational inspections and the proposed new national Section 48 inspection framework in England and Wales. The interrelationship between Ofsted Section 5 and Section 48 inspections is signposted. In a seminar *Aspiring Catholic Leadership for the 21st Century – Servant and Christ-Centred Leadership*, the changing demographic being experienced by Catholic schools both in terms of staff and students and its potential impact on the distinctive nature of a Catholic school is explored. Mission Integrity is defined and the centrality of servant leadership is discussed alongside contemporary challenges. The fourth seminar, the *Professional Paradigm* focuses on values, skills and knowledge in the context of the DfE Teaching Standards. The extent to which the relationship between Catholic distinctiveness and the teaching standards are mutually enriching is explored in some depth. Finally, in *Revisiting the nature of Catholic Identity and the Professional Paradigm*, the implications of the statement that “there is no distinction between having a vocation and being a professional”, which encapsulates the nature of the programme, is reflected upon, signposting the belief that all teachers, irrespective of religious affiliation, can commit to the principles of Catholic identity because of their inclusive and holistic perspective, underpinned by a profound belief in the dignity of every person made in the image and likeness of God.

The Catholicity of Leadership

In 2014ⁱ the *Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales* (CBCEW) outlined the five characteristics of the distinctiveness of Catholic Education. These are the dignity of the individual, the search for excellence, the education of the whole person, the education of all and moral principles. The perennial nature of this document is reflected in the fact that these key principles reflect those outlined by the same Bishops’ Conference in 1996.ⁱⁱ That the principles resonate with key themes of the documents published by the *Congregation for Catholic Education* (CCE) afford an additional level of authority, documents which, in the words of Cardinal Grocholewsky “deepen the principles of the Second Vatican Council.”ⁱⁱⁱ The key concept of holistic approach to education, integrating both religious and human formation, enabling each individual to fulfil their unique calling as children of God, underpins the characteristics. Each student should “experience his/her dignity as a person before he/she knows its definition.” (CCE 1977 par 55). The Bishops’ Conference documents then go on to insist that “Both through religious education and in the general life of the school young people

are prepared to serve as witnesses to moral and spiritual values in the wider world” (CBCEW 2014 p. 3).

The term ‘witnesses’ is particularly significant, evoking the iconic statement of Pope Paul VI that “modern man listens to teachers when they are witnesses” (1975, par. 41). The *Congregation for Catholic Education* documents are replete with references to the centrality of the witness of teachers in the context of forming young people to *serve as witnesses*. In our view modelling ministry on Christ, a sacramental vision, is *the* most important formative metier rather than such concepts as “imparting” or “transmitting”, reflected in the Congregation’s 1977 document which maintains that:

Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school... The fact that in their own individual ways all members of the school community share this Christian vision, makes the school “Catholic” (para. 34).

In Chapter 8 of his 2011 book *Sharing Faith*, Thomas Groome explores five aspects of what “modelling ministry on Christ” might mean: invitation; inclusion, building community, respecting an individual’s discernment and challenge. Each aspect is rooted in the ministry of Jesus, for example Jesus’ calling of the Twelve to “be with him”. (Mark 3:14-20), and the pastoral implications of each aspect are discussed with the aspirant leaders. The commitment of Catholic schools to inclusion, particularly in the context of students with special education needs and disabilities, is regarded by most participants as axiomatic. Other aspects, for example the lens through which performance of staff is viewed and the extent to which it “respects an individual’s discernment” educes wide-ranging discussion. Similar in-depth discussions take place around building community. The word community is referred to 24 times alone in the CCE’s 1988 document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* alone. In wider literature on Catholic school leadership speaks about a *community of leaders* (Grace 1995) while others Anthony Bryk suggests that “solidarity around the school mission” (Bryk 1993 p. 58) is the key factor in the inspirational ideology of Catholic schools. Edwin McDermott notes that Catholic schools are religious communities within an academic community suggesting that “to form community in a school is to teach as Jesus did...His whole public ministry was aimed at forming people into a unity” (1997, p. 33).

A great deal of discussion takes place around the nature of challenge, encapsulated in the response to the call of Jesus by the first four disciples (Mark 1:16-20) and summed up by the

Greek word *Aphentes* representing a radical break with the past leading to a new beginning. One of the challenges discussed pivots on the centrality of standards in the context of maintaining a balance between school improvement and Catholic distinctiveness. It can be argued that if students do not achieve their potential at least two of the characteristics of Catholic distinctiveness referenced earlier are not being achieved:

1. Search for excellence
2. Uniqueness (Dignity) of the individual.

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales in their Plenary Meeting in 2011 emphasised the importance of high academic standards achieved in so many Catholic schools while recognising their awareness that some schools fall short of the standard expected by both Government and Church, citing the Code of Canon Law (806§2) in support of their position (cf. Can. 806 §2). Andrew Morris' assertion that "the Catholic sector schools seem able to generate and sustain a positive school culture that can mitigate the effects of deprivation more easily than the generality of other schools" (2009, p. 94) is particularly germane in the context of academic standards. His further contention that "the suggestion that Catholic schools enhance socio-economic divisions because they fail to serve the educational needs of disadvantaged youngsters is unfounded. The empirical evidence suggests exactly the opposite" (Morris, 2013, p. 239) is equally significant.

Evaluating a Catholic School

Discussions begin by outlining a brief history of the inspection of Catholic schools. Catholic schools in England have been inspected since the establishment of education for all following the creation of the Catholic Poor School Committee in 1847. In *A View from the Bridge: The Catholic School* Maurice Whitehead quotes the Acts and Decrees of the First Council of the Province of Westminster which insisted that Catholic schools had to be "up to the mark of modern demand and yet...solid in faith and piety" (1999, p. 233).^{iv} This statement is particularly prescient in that it reflects the challenge for all Catholic schools currently to maintain a balance between school improvement issues and Catholic distinctiveness, a principle canonised in contemporary literature.

Such early inspections were carried out alongside meticulous inspections by the Government Board of Education an example of which is chronicled in the archives of the Sisters of Mercy in Handsworth dated 1854 following an inspection of their school:

There are above four hundred children on the school roll, of whom many of the most destitute are supplied with clothing. The schools are connected with the Government Board of Education. Her Majesty's Inspector, Mr. Marshall, visited them officially...and he passed a very high and flattering eulogium on the efficiency and complete success of the system carried out in the schools (1856 *Annals of St Mary's Convent*, Archive 10).

Whitehead (1999) notes that Cardinal Manning could claim with some justification in 1871 that high standards in Catholic schools were being maintained. He was particularly vigilant in relation to the quality of teaching, insisting that "there is nothing false and more mischievous than the notion that anyone is fit to teach in a poor school." (p. 233) Inspections were carried out routinely in Catholic schools across England and Wales with inspectors meeting together for the first time in 1875, the date traditionally associated with the founding of the National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisors, the body charged by the Bishops Conference of England and Wales with the responsibility for formulating the Section 48 inspection framework.

While a detailed account of inspections from 1875 to the *Education Act 1992* and the introduction of Ofsted is beyond the scope of this chapter, the resonances between Cardinal Manning's references to quality of teaching and the current inspection mechanisms are illuminative^v. The focus of Section 48 inspections on the Catholic life of the school, Religious Education, prayer and worship are discussed, highlighting the holistic perspective that permeates this framework. In this context the 2017 guidance of the *National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers* (NBRIA) is especially apposite. There is an increased emphasis on the extent to which pupils are involved in the planning and preparation of acts of collective worship. The descriptor used by NIBRIA for *Outstanding* maintains that almost all pupils have an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feast. Appropriate to their age and ability, they are able to prepare acts of Collective Worship, which fully reflects this understanding.

This is followed by a further descriptor which links with interreligious dialogue and the development of spiritual capital among pupils:

The experience of living and working in a faithful, praying community has a profound and visible effect on the spiritual and moral development of all pupils, irrespective of ability or faith background. They have a deep sense of respect for those of other faiths and this is reflected in the manner in which pupils prepare and participate in prayer and liturgy (NBRIA, 2017, p. 23).

Discussion around the challenges to the Section 48 inspection mechanism by the *National Secular Society* (NSS) and the introduction by the Bishops Conference of England and Wales of a *National Inspection Framework* generate a great deal of discussion. The National Secular Society submitted a 'Freedom of Information Request' regarding the amount of money being paid in grants for Section 48 inspections of schools with a religious character. Their request was cited on grounds of accountability for the effective use of public money. The response of the *Catholic Education Service* has been particularly positive, reflected in a consistency audit commissioned in 2018. This has led to discussions around quality assurance mechanisms that would guarantee security of judgements across dioceses, prominent among which is the formulation of a National Inspection Framework. The Bishops Conference of England and Wales confirmed their commitment to this in the following statement:

The Bishops' Conference approved the introduction of the National Framework for Inspection of all Catholic schools, colleges and academies. The National Framework for Inspection will be approved and revised from time to time by the Department for Education and Formation. This will include national recruitment, training and accreditation of inspectors. Training and accreditation of existing inspectors will begin in 2020 and the National Framework will have replaced existing diocesan frameworks in all dioceses by September 2021 (CBCEW Autumn 2019 Meeting, London).

Such a framework will address current discrepancies between Dioceses in respect of judgement grades, notice periods, limiting judgements (for example the Bishops Conference requirement of 10% curriculum time for Religious Education at Key Stages 2 to 4) and the weight given to each section in arriving at overall judgements. It is worth noting that the students were exercised in this context since most aspiring middle leaders believed that Section 48 was analogous to Section 5 in regard to homogeneity of framework.

“Believing without Belonging” Servant and Christ-Centred Leadership

By way of introduction the contrasting nature of Catholic school communities in England and Wales in the pre- and post-Vatican II eras is described by Abbot Christopher Jamison who speaks of:

‘a “not wholly mythical golden era” when “every Catholic boy and every Catholic girl would, at some stage of their education, consider becoming a priest or a nun.” He describes this era as a totally Catholic culture which, in the context of Catholic education, was strengthened by the 1944 Education Act Building on previous legislation, this Act enabled every Catholic child to attend a Catholic school free of charge. Jamison suggests that this total Catholic culture embracing Church Youth Clubs, sports teams as well as Catholic schools underpinned by strong family [cultural] support began to die in the 1960s and disappeared by the 1980s. He cites the statistics for Mass attendance which halved between 1980 and 2000 to around 1 million as evidence of this disappearance’ (2010, p. 224).

This exponential decline in Mass attendance is reflected in a study by Stephen Bullivant (2016) which reveals that 25% of the total self-declared Catholic population of 5.2million attend Mass weekly which may appear relatively positive. Drilling down into the statistics demonstrates, however, that among 25-34 year olds 9% attend regularly while the figure is 29% among 35-44 year olds, the age ranges of the majority of parents of students in Catholic Primary and Secondary schools.

It came as a surprise to some of the prospective middle and senior leaders, therefore, to find that a study by Ann Casson (2014) revealed that the Catholic ethos of primary schools was one of the key reasons for parental choice. In contrast to Richard Rymarz’s study (2012) in Australia, who found that religious considerations are often parents’ lowest priority when choosing a Catholic school, Ann Casson’s research demonstrated that ‘The reasons why baptised Catholic parents choose a Catholic primary school when they do not actively participate in the Catholic Church are complex. However, many Catholic parents in this research sample maintained that the prime reason for the choice of a Catholic school was the Catholic nature of the primary school’ (Rymarz, 2012, p. 109).

Dr Casson’s findings reflect the concept of *believing without belonging*, a concept canonised in the writings of the Catholic sociologist Grace Davie. In her seminal work *Religion in Britain*

since 1945: *Believing without Belonging* (1994), Davie argues that Europe is marked by a culture of *believing without belonging*, characterised by a profound mismatch between religious values that people profess (believing), and actual churchgoing and religious practice (belonging).

Davie was writing around the time of major European values surveys (for example that undertaken by Jan Kerkhofs in 1993). Kerkhofs spoke of a shift away from the tradition as the yardstick by which to interpret the meaning of life and to define moral rules with identity being found through flexible adaptation.

In *Religion in Modern Europe – A Memory Mutates* (2000), Davie starts from her “convenient shorthand, [that] Europe believes but it does not belong” (p. 33) and finds it significant that “churches remain, however, significant players” within society (p. 38), performing a moral, spiritual and social role on behalf of the population, i.e. *vicariously*. It is interesting to note that this is a term used by Rymarz in the title of his book referenced earlier. Davie herself defines vicarious religion as “the willingness of the population to delegate the religious sphere to the professional ministries of the state churches” and, moreover, Europeans are grateful that “churches perform, vicariously, a number of tasks on behalf of the population as a whole.” (p. 59). At specific times, Churches – or Church leaders or Church members – are “asked to articulate the sacred” on behalf of individuals, families or society as a whole. Whilst ordinary European citizens may not practise religion on a daily basis, they recognise its worth, and are “more than half aware that they might need to draw on [it] at crucial times in their individual or collective lives” (p. 60).

In 2005 David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, partly in response to Grace Davie, published *Religion in Britain: Neither Believing without Belonging*. In essence Voas and Crocker concluded, based on relatively extensive sampling, that Davie painted too positive a picture in regard to religion in Britain. They suggest, *inter alia*, that:

‘everyone agrees that religion has lost ground; the key dispute concerns why. How much, in what way, and with what prospects. We suggest that the only form of BWB that is as pervasive as Davie suggests is a value willingness to suppose that ‘there is

something out there’ accompanied by an unsurprising disinclination to spend any time and effort worshipping whatever that might be’ (2005, p. 24).

Davie developed the notion of vicarious religion in her 2015 work *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*. In summary the argument is:

- Davie repeats definition of vicarious religion which underpins this book
- a move from obligation to consumption
- an exploration of the persistent paradox that the decrease in religious activity measured over a wide range of variables alongside the growing significance of religion in public debate.

In this context of “vicarious religion”, when many Catholic express their Catholicity by sending their children to Catholic schools, the adoption of servant leadership as the dominant leadership paradigm within Catholic schools has taken on an increased importance. While Religious Education programmes and collective worship remain key constituents of the spiritual and moral development shared by students, the modelling of ministry on Christ by all members of staff is equally, if not more, significant. This sacramental vision, alluded to earlier, is demonstrated with greatest acuity when, “in imitation of Christ, the only Teacher, they [teachers and leaders] reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behaviour” (CCE, 1977, para. 43).

The Professional Paradigm

This seminar begins with a discussion around the way in which values, skills and knowledge are embedded within the DFE Teaching Standards. In respect of values concepts such as empathy, quest for learning and collaborative learning and practice are related to specific teaching standards while a variety of skills and knowledge, including reflective and thinking skills, pedagogic skills and multicultural literacy are mapped against other standards. The significance of developing such values in the context of the centrality of academic standards in the context of Catholic distinctiveness is explored and the tenet investigated earlier that vocation and profession in relation to teaching are simply two aspects of discipleship is seen to be particularly relevant in relation to the teaching standards.

Six challenges, as identified by a variety of educationists, for example Dayna Laur (2011) and Susannah Dimond (2007) are then investigated in relation to the standards: authentic challenge, enquiry, pragmatic rehearsal, feedback, metacognition and progress. Relatively contemporary paradigms such as *learning to learn* and *differentiation* permeate the literature alongside personalised learning. The concept of *metacognition*, in particular, exercised the participants in the programme and there were discussions around the definition posited by the guidance report of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF):

‘metacognitive regulation is about planning how to undertake a task, working on it while monitoring the strategy to check progress, then evaluating the overall success. This is not a one-off process of discreet steps, but an ongoing cycle. As you progress through the task applying your metacognitive and cognitive skills, you update your metacognitive knowledge (of yourself, strategies and tasks) as well as updating your subject knowledge and skills’ (2018, p. 1).

This definition, with its cyclical notion of planning, monitoring and evaluation was regarded as an apposite summing up of the teaching standards generally. The assertion by the report that younger children do typically develop metacognitive knowledge even at a very early age, based on the evidence of David Whitebread and Penny Coltman (2019). The report was insistent that teachers should acquire the professional understanding and skills to develop their pupils’ metacognitive knowledge.

Participants were interested to note that, while concepts such as research-enhanced teaching feature in the report, there was no explicit reference to building teams or feedback from peers. There is, however, one reference in the teaching standards to “responding to advice and feedback from colleagues” (Standard 8), reflecting “active engagement through independent, or collaborative, research and problem solving” embedded within the second challenge, ‘enquiry’. Such collaborative research has been championed by Jenni Donohoo (2016) in her work on collective teacher efficacy, which she defines as teachers in a given school making an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities. Through their collective action, teachers can positively influence student outcomes, including those who are disengaged, unmotivated, and/or disadvantaged (Donohoo 2016).

Donohoo's work resonates with that of the EEF Report in terms of the cyclical nature of planning, monitoring and evaluation while there is a greater emphasis on Donohoo's work on the reciprocal nature of the "collective" and its impact on student achievement. This was regarded by our students to be evocative of a solidarity around the school-mission referenced earlier in the programme alongside the several references to the efficacy of building a community of teachers called for in CCE documents.

While the current UK teacher standards, at face value, appear to lack resonance with the principles of Catholic distinctiveness, a closer examination reveals a greater degree of congruence reflecting that between vocation and profession. This can be seen across all five aspects of modelling ministry on Christ signposted earlier (see page 3). The inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry, particularly in relation to the primacy of the Church's mission to the poor, is reflected in the teacher standards, for example ...to 'set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of *all* backgrounds, abilities and dispositions' (2011, Standard 1). The reference to *all* is especially significant in its resonance with the fourth of the five characteristics of Catholic distinctiveness, 'the duty to care for the poor and to educate those who are socially, academically, physically or emotionally disadvantaged' (CBCEW, 1996, para. 1). This broad range of poor, reflected in the mind of Jesus and the Church, finds an ¹echo in Standard 5 which insists that teachers have a 'clear understanding of the needs of *all* pupils, including *those with special educational needs*; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able *to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them*. The concept of 'challenge', central to Jesus' leadership style, is also reflected in Standard 2, which introduces the theme of accountability for 'pupils' attainment, progress and outcomes'.

Revisiting the nature of Catholic Identity and the Professional Paradigm

Teacher Standard 8, which calls on teachers to 'make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the school', provides an appropriate segue into the core of the Shepherding Talent programme. This emphasis is on the imperative for all leaders in Catholic schools to maintain

¹ See Lydon, J, (2010), *Renewing the Catholic Social Conscience*, Oxford, Las Casas Institute Unpublished Paper.

a balance between school improvement and Catholic distinctive. Such a balance is easy to exhort in theological and pastoral reflections, however it is not so easy to achieve in the daily business of running schools and meeting expectations of the key stakeholders. It is essential, however, to maintain such a balance in order to secure the future of Catholic schools otherwise there is a danger, on the part both of schools and individual teachers, of being seduced by measurable indicators of approval.

Such a seduction by indicators which, in the context of the holistic perspective articulated previously, could be both deemed shallow and lead to what Grace (1998) describes as *mission reductionism* which involves abstracting examination performance indicators from the integrated matrix of school outcomes which constitute the educational mission of a Catholic school. Participants on the programme were, however, convinced that academic excellence represented a central feature of Catholic distinctiveness that could be aligned with the mandate that pupils and students are given every opportunity to develop their talents to the full. This is the definition of excellence outlined in the Catholic Bishops Conference 1996 document that was discussed in the first seminar.

In this context a discussion ensued about the way in which teachers demonstrated servant leadership in creating a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities in response to the challenge to develop the talents of students, particularly for the more disadvantaged members of the student community. St Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:5-11) with its description of Jesus as "emptying himself (*Greek ekenosen*) taking the form of a slave proved to be illuminative.² The concept *ekenosen* is particularly significant in the educational philosophy of St John Bosco in the context of his holistic approach to education. By being familiarly present to young people, as opposed to maintaining an institutional superior-inferior style of imposition, the teacher reflects the *ekenosen*, the self-emptying, of Christ himself. Bosco, then, interprets the teacher's participation or entry into young people's recreation as an act of loving condescension, going beyond mere utilitarianism or paternalism. It involved adults leaving the lofty heights of their power over' or even 'power on behalf of' positions in order to engage in a genuine sharing of

² See Lydon, J, (2019), *Spiritual & Theological Foundations*, Twickenham, St Mary's University: 2.14

the bread of life. This engaging familiarity reflects the *I-Thou* relationship described by Martin Buber (1974), who explained that ‘...every human person looks bashfully yet longingly in the eyes of another for the yes that allows him to be. It is from one human person to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed’ (p. 73).

Concluding Comments

This holistic approach to the search for excellence featured prominently in the evaluations completed by participants as one of *the* most significant positive features of the programme/. The responses of the mainly middle leaders reflected a genuine idealism that Catholic identity featured strongly within their school communities, summed up in this response:

The programme allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the distinctiveness of Catholic leadership and education. It has also enabled me to identify positive traits of our school community and suggest ways and strategies for us to increase the Catholic identity of the school to allow us to offer a high quality education alongside an opportunity for pupils to act in the way Jesus has taught us (Participant 1, written response).

While the responses of most participants reflected this affirmatory comment about the programme and the school community, challenging comments were made. These were in the context of the motivation for the servant leadership modelled by the leadership team and realised in practice in the outstanding commitment demonstrated by the majority of staff. This is encapsulated in the following remark:

As much as this is a form of service to the poor, I do question the intentions behind it. School league tables and progress 8 figures are an increasing pressure for school leaders, although the implementation of this academic support benefits the target group I do feel that the line blurs in terms of if the primary intention is service to the poor by modelling ministry on Christ or if it is to keep up with the “competitive market culture” (Participant 2).

In conclusion, there is unanimity around the positive impact of the programme. It empowered participants to engage with the language of Catholic school distinctiveness whilst also

impacting positively on the life of their school community. This summed up in the following course evaluation:

I have been able to talk to senior members of SLT regarding the benefits of the programme and I was often asked after each session what was covered. I have also been provided with an array of readings that can be incorporated into everyday practice in my school community. Furthermore, I am currently studying for my MA in Catholic School Leadership as a result of the programme. The support and sessions delivered by the programme leaders was extremely valuable.

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ⁱ Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales, (2014), *Catholic Education in England & Wales*, London, CBCEW.

ⁱⁱ CBCEW (1996), *Principles, Practices and Concerns*, London, CBCEW.

ⁱⁱⁱ Grochowski, Cardinal Z, (2007), *Address to the Executive of the World Union of Catholic Teachers* (WUCT), Rome, WUCT.

^{iv} See Chapter 11 (above) *Step by Step: an introduction to the history of Catholic denominational inspection in the UK*, which provides a detailed assessment of these matter.