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William Sultmann · Janeen Lamb ·
David Hall



Formation for Mission in Catholic Education

Transformation in an
Ecological Space

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William Sultmann 
La Salle Academy
Australian Catholic University
Sydney, NSW, Australia

Janeen Lamb 
La Salle Academy
Australian Catholic University
Sydney, NSW, Australia

David Hall 
La Salle Academy
Australian Catholic University
Sydney, NSW, Australia

ISSN 2211-1921
SpringerBriefs in Education

ISSN 2211-193X (electronic)

ISBN 978-981-19-3769-9

ISBN 978-981-19-3770-5 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-3770-5>

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The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

Foreword

The Morley Review (2021) conducted by the La Salle Academy at Australian Catholic University (ACU) engaged representatives from Catholic education offices across Australia to consider the future of leadership in Catholic education. Consensus from a broad group confirmed that the pre-eminent issue for attention was formation of staff in Catholic schools and education offices, the ordained and those who govern in Catholic education. Coincidentally, only a few weeks before the Morley Review Report was issued, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) announced its three priorities to guide its work into the future: Formation; Becoming More Missionary; and Fostering Collegiality.

The emphasis on formation within the Morley Review and the ACBC priorities is not surprising. Literature on Catholic education leadership alerts us to the importance of formation, while formation participants frequently comment on the significance and impact of their experience. Moreover, we are acutely alert to the niggling concern that the future identity of our Catholic schools is precipitous without more confidently committed educators and leaders understanding and witnessing to faith within authentic educational practices.

The plurality of our Catholic schools is and should be celebrated and yet our earnestness for inclusion presents as impacting our distinctiveness. How do we hold in creative tension two potentially juxtaposed attributes: diversity and distinctiveness? Pope Francis is emphatic in his insistence that the posture of Christianity to the world must be one of dialogue. Living compassionately in the world invites formation that is inclusive, respectful, authentic and dialogical where attention to the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of our human identity are pursued personally and organisationally. As we undertake collectively the task of evangelisation, sharing the Gospel within the life of the Catholic school, we are challenged to become conscious of our co-responsibility for a shared mission underpinned by formation.

Formation for Mission in Catholic Education: Transformation in an Ecological Space narrates and evaluates the richness of our formation vision, history of commitment and our contemporary practices. The work expands on the national framework through insights from transformational learning and system processes. In this context, the work of this text is to be valued for its identification of what is; and significantly,

what might also be considered into the future. It is with joy and hope that I commend the work to governors, leaders, facilitators and pray that the same Spirit that inspired its conception continues to support its application and enhancement.

Father Anthony Casamento, csma
Vice President & Dir
Identity and Mission
Australian Catholic University
Sydney, Australia

Dedication and Acknowledgments

This study only begins to identify the magnitude, comprehensiveness and generosity of the many people who pursue formation and its contribution to the mission of Catholic education and more particularly within the Catholic school. May these leaders and their inclusive, respectful, innovative and intentional practices continue to inspire and motivate the focus on formation as an ongoing priority for mission authenticity and effectiveness.

The authors acknowledge the support of the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) to publish an extended literature review with accompanying theoretical modelling and practice implications of the NCEC 2017 publication *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education*, 'The Framework.' The writers also convey appreciation to Dr. Teresa Brown for a contribution to the literature and to Dr. Maeve Heaney, Dr. Jill Gowdie and Associate Professor Ormond Rush for their critique of drafted material.

Introduction and Overview

Formation for Mission in Catholic Education: Transformation in an Ecological Space arose from commissioned research by the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) on the alignment and effectiveness of A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education (NCEC, 2017). This national formation resource articulates contemporary best practice and traces the experience of the Catholic Church in pursuing formation as integral to mission. More particularly, this monograph reviews and reports on formation within the context of the Catholic school. The research validates ‘The Framework’ and provides a complementary narrative for enhancing formation alignment and effectiveness, specifically with a focus on the Catholic school but also with implications for formation in the wider context of ministry applications. *Formation for Mission in Catholic Education: Transformation in an Ecological Space* is a resource for formators, school and system leaders and Catholic school governors. It will also support postgraduate teaching and research.

Catholic education is education for meaning and purpose derived from the dignity of the human person and the invitation to live fully and interdependently within community. Catholic education is education that is formative, developmental, integrated and aligned to the Gospel of Jesus, the Traditions of the Church and the experience of abundance in life and living. It is a process of transformation in a formative space.

Formation in the broadest of terms is the process of shaping and guiding a person or group in the hope of going beyond the experience (trans) and being informed and engaged in ways that build from the process and signal the outcome of transformation. Formation for mission in the Catholic school engages the efforts of facilitators and supports transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit. The role of the formator is that of the ‘sower’ (Luke 11:5–15), characterising formation as a collaborative endeavour: ‘I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow’ (1 Corinthians 3:6) and the experience of God with and for us: ‘I came that they may have life and have it abundantly’ (John 10:10). It is a response to the great commission of Christ to ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations’ (Matthew 28:19) and to view the journey as supported, worthwhile and personal.