A Guide to Develop a Framework for Staff Formation
In Catholic schools in Queensland
A guide to develop a framework for staff formation in Catholic schools in Queensland

The Queensland Bishops initiated a research project that spanned three years to identify the “Defining Features” of Catholic Schools for the 21st Century in 2001. Five diocesan reports were produced as part of this project and from this data the following features of Catholic schools in Queensland were documented. Each Catholic School will:

1. Have a strong Catholic identity and give witness to Christian values
2. Be open and accessible to those who seek its values
3. Offer a holistic curriculum
4. Be a community of care and right relationships
5. Be staffed by qualified, competent people who give witness to Gospel values.¹

In order to maintain the strong Catholic identity of these schools, the report noted as a consequence, that:

Staff of Catholic schools will have appropriate professional qualifications and ongoing formation.²

To support this direction, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission published a policy statement in February 2010, Formation for staff members in Catholic schools in Queensland that stated:

All Catholic school authorities will ensure that all staff members participate in formation experiences to assist them to grow in understanding of their ministry as part of the mission of the Catholic Church.

This policy document was inspired by other Church documents and emphasised four areas that provide a focus for formation. The areas are:

1. Human qualities critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary to be apt instruments of God’s love and compassion
2. A spirituality and practice of prayer grounded in God that animates all they do in ministry within the community of the Church
3. Adequate knowledge in theological and pastoral studies, along with the development of the capacity to use it among the people and cultures of our country
4. The practical pastoral abilities called for in their particular ministry.

The policy Formation for staff members in Catholic schools in Queensland recognises the ongoing challenge of ensuring that all members of staff are provided with opportunities for professional development which includes both professional and religious formation.

In order to provide some practical insights to support the development of suitable and effective means of faith formation in Catholic schools, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission hosted a colloquium in 2010. This event provided the opportunity for leading educators to examine contemporary models of formation, to share their understanding of the principles of effective contemporary formation and to critique existing approaches and programs of formation.

Following the colloquium, it was envisaged that each diocese and religious institute would develop/review a staff formation framework. Some of the principles, articulated at the colloquium, and underpinning such a framework can now be identified. These were confirmed at the 2012 colloquium on staff formation.

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² Ibid. p. 9.
A quality formation framework will have the following characteristics:

1. Formation starts from where people are at, not where other people would like them to be, hence the importance of an invitational approach. Guided and led by the Spirit as Jesus was, this approach connects with the person’s unique life story and offers ways of connecting with the Spirit through prayer and contemplation.

2. A formation framework will consist of a variety of ongoing formation experiences, and not be a “one off” presentation or experience. It would be helpful therefore to include a range of formation experiences into which staff can enter with confidence and comfort and which provide them with good choices.

3. Formation needs to reflect a relational culture modelled on Jesus Christ who sought to foster a climate of love and compassion and emphasised the dignity of each person. Formation experiences contribute to forming a unique Christian school climate. In the Catholic school, prime responsibility for this rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community. Staff in Catholic schools can never remain in isolation from the community, but must live in a continual interaction with others.

4. A vision of Church, Christianity and discipleship that reveals what we believe ourselves to be about. It will inspire and express what the Catholic school community holds close to its heart, how it engages others and uses its resources.

5. The programs outlined will be theologically and ecclesially well founded. It is important that schools provide an understanding and experience of Jesus Christ and His Church for staff, students and their families. Formation should be characterised by strong partnerships between parents, teachers and students and with the local church and wider community.

6. The framework will recognise the context of its participants and offers a way to engage critically with the local cultural and social milieu. It is in local community where values are mediated by authentic interpersonal relationships among the various members that form it and by the individual and community acceptance of them.

...where values are mediated by authentic interpersonal relationships among the various members that form it, and by the individual and community acceptance of them. In this way, the life of communion of the educational community... directs its formational action as a service for the achievement of a culture of communion.

In Christifideles Laici, Communion is explained in terms of lifegiving participation: the incorporation of Christians into the life of Christ, and the communication of that life of charity to the entire body of the Faithful (19). It is a great gift of the Holy Spirit, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility (20). For this to be realized, staff in Catholic schools can never remain in isolation from the community, but must live in a continual interaction with others. In this context, formation aims to develop the rich potential that each has inherited.
7. Formation needs to be developmental as it has the power to lead to personal transformation. Some consideration needs to be given to its sequential nature but this does pose the challenge of trying to cater for staff mobility and the tracking of individual programs over time.

8. An emphasis on the experiential can reveal many hidden treasures.

9. The principles of adult education should be applied to ongoing formation processes.

While it is advantageous to share these frameworks, each diocese and religious institute should make adaptations to meet the needs of the individual diocese. Similarly, since no single approach is relevant for all members of a school community, diversity of approaches and methods will be a feature of any effective staff formation framework.

People are the key resource for formation, hence the importance of providing opportunities for key personnel to share and develop through networking. This would afford easy access to relevant resources on staff formation, contact details for people willing to share expertise and the possibility of mentoring opportunities for those engaged in staff formation. In addition a ‘form the formator’ program would assist schools to establish their own formation programs led by their own talented staff.

Conclusion

Teaching and working in a Catholic school is an important part of the Mission of the Catholic Church and it is hoped that a formation framework will help all staff to grow personally and professionally. The challenge of the nine characteristics of a quality formation framework into the future will be to offer experiences of Christian community and personal spiritual formation at school and authority level. This is understood to be a joint responsibility of the individual staff member, the school and the schooling authority.