

October 2014

## Religious Education Leadership and the 21st Century: Overcoming Disconnectedness

Michael T. Buchanan

*Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, michael.buchanan@acu.edu.au*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/ecea>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#), and the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Buchanan, Michael T. (2014) "Religious Education Leadership and the 21st Century: Overcoming Disconnectedness," *eJournal of Catholic Education in Australasia*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/ecea/vol1/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in eJournal of Catholic Education in Australasia by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact [researchonline@nd.edu.au](mailto:researchonline@nd.edu.au).



## Introduction

One of the major challenges facing Catholic education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the ability to foster and maintain a Catholic identity in its schools (McKinney & Sullivan, 2013). Consequently religious education leaders in Catholic schools have been designated the additional responsibility of assisting in promoting the Catholic identity of a school through its education and religious education program. This interest in Catholic identity has added significantly to the responsibilities associated with the role of religious education leaders and, as Rossiter (2013) pointed out, influenced the various position titles attributed to this leadership role. Traditionally a religious education leader was referred to as Religious Education Coordinator (REC); however, since the focus on Catholic identity, the title has reflected this focus — Director of Religious Education and Mission, or Director Catholic Identity (for a comprehensive list of titles see, Rossiter, 2013, p. 5). Since the emergence of this important role in the decades following the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) there has been a lack of clarity about what the role actually entails (Crotty, 2002; Fleming, 2002). While the role, especially in contemporary times, shares in the responsibility of promoting the Catholic identity of the school there remains many other aspects of the role that must also be fulfilled. These demands have contributed to the lack of clarity associated with the role and in many circumstances adding to a sense of alienation or disconnectedness for many leaders of religious education.

Prior to reporting this key finding an overview of certain publications and policies which have sought to explore the role of the religious education leader is provided followed by a brief outline of the research design which informed this study. This overview provides a context from which to consider the religious education leaders' experiences of disconnectedness. It is important to explore these experiences in a way that encourages opportunities for openness and critical dialogue through continued research with religious education leaders. Opportunities for critical dialogue and openness should be encouraged with the intention of bringing clarity to understandings about the role and all it entails.

## **The role of the religious education leader**

The role of the religious education leader began to emerge in the decades following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and is regarded as a relatively new role in Catholic schools (L. Crotty, 1998). Since the inception of the role, it has not been possible to provide a distinct and homogenous explanation of the role's function as it applies to Catholic education in Australia. This is largely due to the fact that people cannot talk about one Catholic education schooling system in Australia as there are many. There are approximately twenty-eight Catholic dioceses across Australia and each bishop responsible for that diocese has the right to establish his own schooling system and determine policies which guide his respective schools, including the religious education leadership role (Engbretson, 1998; see also Buchanan, 2005). Historical overviews of the policy descriptions of the role in various Catholic dioceses in Australia are highlighted in the following paragraphs and illustrate the varying perceptions pertaining to roles relating to religious education leadership. The diverse range of complexities, challenges and possibilities that surround the religious education leader are evident in these policy descriptions and illuminate a lack of consistency or clarity since the emergence of the role.

### **The Archdiocese of Sydney.**

The 1983 handbook entitled *The Religious Education Coordinator* published by the Catholic Education Office of Sydney (CEOS) indicated that the role of the REC was essentially concerned with curriculum development and planning, and with supporting and assisting in the professional development of religious education teachers (pp. 10-13). By 1988 the role began to emerge as a position of leadership where "the REC, as a delegate of the principal, has the responsibility of providing leadership in the development of the religious education program within the school" (CEOS, 1988, p. 4). In 1989, the document, *Religious Education: Its Place in Catholic Secondary Education* (CEOS, 1989) broadened the role of the REC. In addition to leadership in religious education curriculum, the role was also perceived as one of witness to the mission of the Catholic

Church in the school, as well as one responsible for promoting a school's Catholic ethos (L. Crotty, 1998, p. 10). By 1996 the role of the REC was regarded as a significant position of leadership in both primary and secondary schools, particularly in the area of school policy and administration (CEOS, 1996).

The Catholic Education Office of Sydney argued that the role should be one of senior leadership, with representation on the school executive. The role description specifically stated, "It is expected that the REC will have a very real part to play in formulating the total school policy and in the general administration of the school" (CEOS, 1996, p. 13). With the principal, the REC was required to develop an annual role description based on four areas outlined in a document titled, *Religious Education Coordinator: Conditions of Appointment and Employment* (CEOS, 1996). These areas were: leadership in the liturgical and faith life of the college; ensuring quality teaching and learning in the coordination of religious education programs; nurturing positive relationships in the school; and administering the organisational and record keeping aspects of the religious education program (CEOS, 1996). Section four of the document outlined selection criteria that applicants for the position of REC were required to meet.

During the 1980s and 1990s the Catholic Education Office of Sydney attempted to conceptualise the role of the REC in various policies. Eight aspects associated with the role emerged. They are: a) religious education curriculum development, planning, administration and implementation; b) the professional development of religious education teachers; c) leadership of and witness to the mission of the Church in the school; d) leadership in the development and maintenance of the Catholic ethos in the school; e) leadership in school policy and administration; f) leadership in the liturgical and faith life of the school; g) nurturing positive relationships in the school; and, h) administering the organisational and record keeping aspects of the religious education program.

### **The Archdiocese of Hobart.**

In 1978 the Catholic Education Office in the Archdiocese of Hobart (CEOH) recommended that each school appoint an REC. Subsequently, conceptions of the role were formulated into policy in the 1984 document *The Religious Education Co-ordinator* (CEOH, 1984). This policy positioned the role within the context of the Catholic school as a community in faith. *The Religious Education Co-ordinator* “shares the concern for the development and enrichment of the school, as a vital faith community” (CEOH, 1984, p. 4). The *Declaration on Christian Education* (DOCE) of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) had claimed that the role of the Catholic teacher was a vocation within the Church (1965, para. 5), and the CEOH emphasised that integral to the role of the REC was the responsibility to assist teachers in fulfilling their vocation. The role of the REC required not only professional competence, but also “a living commitment to the Catholic faith tradition [and] a living commitment to Catholic education” (CEOH, 1984, p. 7). The role involved “the development and implementation of a coordinated sequential program of religion...” (CEOH, 1984, p. 9). Those drafting the REC role selection criteria also saw as essential to the work of the REC the planning of opportunities for reflection, prayer and liturgy which would “enable all to develop as people and to grow in their personal faith” (CEOH, 1984, p. 1). It also required attention to pastoral care and personal development program, retreat programs, staff development, development of the Catholic ethos of the school and resource management (CEOH, 1984, pp. 2-6). While the overall responsibility for religious education lay with the principal, the REC held a position of “responsible leadership within the school community working with, but always accountable to the principal” (CEOH, 1984, p. 2).

The role of the REC in Hobart has a strong focus on the ministerial aspects associated with the role. There were five dimensions associated with the role, those being: a) assisting teachers to fulfil their vocation as Catholic educators; b) commitment to the Catholic tradition and to Catholic education; c) development and implementation of a sequential religious education curriculum; d)

provision of a prayer, liturgy and retreat programme; d) provision of pastoral care and personal development program; e) development of the Catholic ethos of the school and e) management of religious education resources (CEOH, 1984, pp. 2 – 6).

**Canberra/Goulburn, Western Australia, Parramatta, Brisbane, Darwin.**

In 1979, the Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulbourn (CEOCG) published a document entitled *The Religious Education Coordinator in Catholic Schools*. This document emphasised the role of the REC as a position of leadership in “the Catholic school and the school’s apostolic mission of the Church” (CEOCG, 1979, p. 1) and conveyed the following dimensions as integral to the role. Firstly the RECs were to be Catholic, committed to Catholic faith and moral values and able to be a witness to the life of the Church. They were required to promote the Catholic ethos in the school, inspire faith, share vision and build community, as well as offer spiritual leadership. Furthermore the REC was responsible for managing resources, enriching learning and developing excellence in the religious education curriculum (CEOCG, 1979, pp. 1 – 5).

In 1986, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia produced a handbook entitled *The Religious Education Coordinator*, which emphasised the responsibility of the REC in implementing the religious education curriculum (pp. 9-12).

In the diocese of Parramatta the role was described as a position of central leadership, promoting the mission of the Church as well as undertaking specific responsibilities outlined as follows:

The Religious Education Coordinator has a specific responsibility for learning programs, resources and the professional development of staff in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education. (Catholic Education Office Parramatta, 1997, p. 1)

The Archdiocese of Brisbane saw the role of the REC as one of leadership and management, and emphasised its educational dimension:

The primary focus of the role is the enhancement of effective teaching and learning of students. The assistant principal religious education (APRE) has delegated responsibility for the leadership and coordination of the teaching of religion in the classroom. The APRE has shared responsibility for the religious life of the school community. (Catholic Education Office Brisbane, [CEOB] 1997)

In the diocese of Darwin (Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Darwin, [CEOD] 1998) an REC or an Assistant Principal (Religious Education) was expected to be an active member of the Catholic Church and demonstrate by deed and example a strong commitment to the work of the Church. They were seen as a role model for teachers, able to lead the prayer and liturgical life of the College and to develop the school as a faith community. The role also required the REC to have approved tertiary qualifications in religious education, be a member of the school executive and coordinate a religious education curriculum focussed on quality teaching and learning (CEOD, 1998, pp. 1 – 6).

### **The Archdiocese of Melbourne.**

In 1995, the Catholic Education Office of Melbourne's (CEOM) curriculum document, *Guidelines for Religious Education for Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (Guidelines)* included a section concerning the role of the REC. *Guidelines* (1995) focussed on three areas: formation, curriculum and administration. *Guidelines* (1995) did not define the role of the REC but recommended that the role should be constructed by each individual school according to its particular needs.

Schools and parishes should clearly define the role of the religious education coordinator in the light of their needs, expectations and profile, and within the school provide sufficient

release time so that a clear vision of the Catholic school as an integral part of the Church's mission is demonstrated. (CEOM, 1995, p. 21)

*Guidelines* (CEOM, 1995) conceptualised the role of the REC primarily in theological terms. The 1988 document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (RDECS) by the Congregation for Catholic Education, framed the role of the teacher of religious education in terms of being a personal witness to the faith tradition. While the RDECS (CCE, 1988) referred to the importance of professional and pedagogical training in religious education, it emphasised that it was the personal witness of the teacher that brought the teaching to life (CCE, 1988, para. 96). The essence of this understanding of the religious education teacher stemming from the RDECS (CCE, 1988) was enshrined in *Guidelines* (CEOM, 1995).

Religious educators are called to be prophets and cooperate with parents in communicating the living mystery of God to their students. Ultimately, the school program depends on the staff who are both models and teachers of faith. (CEOM, 1995, p. 20)

The role of the REC was to provide for the formation of the religious education teacher, and to develop, implement and administer the religious education curriculum.

The foregoing overview of approaches to the role of the REC in several Australian dioceses suggests that there is no uniform perception about the role. Liddy (1998) explored the role from the perspective of RECs across several Australian dioceses and found that: "There was a general consensus that the role as described in CEO [Catholic Education Office] documents from various dioceses was too big for one person to manage" (p. 27). The religious education coordinators whom Liddy (1998) interviewed indicated that the role involved many diverse aspects. Her research identified aspects such as curriculum development, pastoral care of staff and students, professional development, managing resources, coordinating the liturgical programme, convening social justice



activities, faith formation programs for staff, and maintaining communication with students, staff, parents, and their Catholic Education Office.

Several scholars had explored the lack of clarity pertaining to the role of religious education leaders. This lack of clarity about the role and in particular its position within education was apparent in Johnson's (1998) research which revealed that even in situations where the religious education curriculum was in dire need of attention and reform religious education leaders ignored these needs. They gave priority to attending to the ministerial functions of the role such as preparing liturgical and retreat experiences. Even though these scholars provided evidence based research to illustrate the complexities and demands of the role little reform since has lessened these demands or brought clarity to the role. Crotty (2002) questioned whether the role was a position within the Church or a position within education. This problem also dogged the religious education leaders who participated in Fleming's (2002) research analysis of the role. Many of the religious education leaders indicated that they had strong backgrounds in curriculum leadership in religious education. However, they were seldom, if ever asked questions about curriculum leadership when being interviewed for the position despite this area being a criterion for the position. Fleming noted that many of the religious education leaders recalled being asked questions about their ability to prepare liturgical and prayer experiences, to plan and facilitate students and staff retreats, take responsibility for the faith formation of staff members and to promote social justice activities. These types of interview questions by the principal and interview panels for the appointment of a religious education leader posed questions with a bias towards ministries within the Church or as Crotty (2002) articulated — a position within the Church. While it is not possible within the space of this paper to present a detailed overview of all the diocesan policy reforms since the beginning of the twenty-first century a brief overview of the South Australian and Brisbane reforms serve to illustrate this point.

A wave of religious education leadership policy reforms and initiatives began to emerge across several dioceses throughout Australia. The policy writers sought to establish the role as a senior leadership position in Catholic schools and give public recognition to the increased status and importance associated with the role. However, in reality the policy initiatives in general actually added to the complexity and demands of the role (Buchanan, 2013b). This is illustrated in diocesan policy initiatives of, for example, South Australia (South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools, 2004) and Brisbane (Catholic Education Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2012). These policies maintain the ministerial responsibilities as integral to the role but also prioritise the importance of leading the religious education curriculum as well ensuring that the entire school curriculum assumes a religious character. Religious education leaders are responsible for the religious education and faith development of the staff members. They are also expected to foster partnerships with students' families, parishes, the diocese and the universal Church, and promote opportunities for the school community to learn and work towards social justice. In addition to exercising religious education leadership, they are required to exercise educative leadership, staff and community leadership, strategic leadership and organisational leadership. Diocesan policy initiatives require religious education leaders to demonstrate a personal faith commitment that extends beyond the boundaries of the school and it is expected that they be committed to public ministry in the Church and to actively participate in a Eucharistic community. Furthermore, in addition to their initial teaching qualifications, they must hold or be working towards a postgraduate qualification in religious education and / or theology such as a Masters in Religious Education degree.

The demands and complexities reflected in historical and contemporary diocesan policies relating to religious education leadership have done very little to clarify the role. This study, which sought to identify the kinds of support leaders need, found that a lack of clarity and understanding about the role contributed to experiences of disconnectedness for religious education leaders. Prior to exploring these experiences which have emanated from the findings of this study, a brief

overview of the research design is presented as it provides a context for considering the experiences of disconnectedness.

### **Research design that informed this study**

The participants were religious education leaders who were enrolled in a study unit which is generally undertaken by students in the final stages of a Master of Religious Education degree at Australian Catholic University, Australia. The unit focused on various leadership dimensions which have been associated with the distinctive nature of leadership in Catholic schools (but not exclusive to leadership in such schools). These dimensions included educational leadership, curriculum leadership, faith leadership, spiritual leadership, ministerial leadership, and religious leadership (Buchanan, 2013a). The unit was offered in a fully online mode and those enrolled in the unit had access to their lecturer and each other via online discussions, email and telephone communication. There were online discussion forums for students to interact with each other as a means to stimulate peer learning and feedback. These participants were suitable for this study because they were experienced religious education leaders committed to professional growth in their discipline.

There were a total of twenty-one people enrolled in the unit and at the completion of the unit a letter of invitation was sent to each person. The letter invited them to participate in the study. If they agreed to participate in the study they were asked to download a questionnaire from an online learning environment website, type their responses to the questionnaire and return it via post in a stamped self-addressed envelope which was provided. The questionnaire was completed anonymously in that participants were asked not to disclose their name or any information that would reveal their identity. Twenty responses were received out of a potential of twenty-one participants.

The questionnaire asked four broad questions about the type of support participants perceived they needed to do their job effectively. The participants were asked what type of support

they felt they needed in general and what type of support they felt they needed from the school in which they were employed, the centralised authority to which their school belonged (the Catholic Education Office in their respective diocese) and the university in which they were undertaking their course (in this case Australian Catholic University).

Founded on the assumptions that knowledge is constructed and that learning can only be understood in social contexts, this qualitative study was situated within a constructivist paradigm (M. Crotty, 1998). It sought to construct meaning from the perceptions of the leaders and aspiring leaders about the support they conveyed in their responses to the questionnaire. The conceptualisation of the participants' responses to the questionnaire was guided by the principles underpinning the original approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) to grounded theory. By intensive engagement with the participants' responses particular categories of findings began to emerge. According to Glaser (1998; 1992; 1978) the categories of findings should emerge from the data. Categorising the data in this way allows for the data to tell their own story (Goulding, 2002). This approach was appropriate because little is known about the kind of support leaders and aspiring leaders of religious education in Catholic schools perceive that they need. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that if one wants to know and understand a particular phenomenon about which very little is known, one should ask those involved. In this case the religious education leaders themselves were asked.

As indicated by the number of participants this was a small scale study. However, the qualitative researcher is not preoccupied with numbers of participants or numbers of participant responses as in quantitative research. Insights, events, incidents, and experiences, not people *per se*, are typically the objects of purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Glaser (1998; 1992; 1978) has emphasised that it is only necessary to stay in the field of data collection until the categories have reached saturation point. This is not determined by the quantity of participants but rather the quality of data, for saturation occurs when no new information or categories emerge from

the data. Category saturation is an important factor that contributes to the plausibility of the study (Glaser, 1998). The insights gained from the social world of the participants were analysed and categorised in light of Bowers (1989) interpretation of symbolic interactionism which holds that “interactionists begin in the empirical world and build theories from there” (p. 36). An associated category of findings which is the focus of this study indicated that religious education leaders encounter experiences of disconnectedness largely due to the lack of clarity regarding what their role entails. An exploration of these findings proceeds in the following section.

## **Findings**

There were a range of experiences pertaining to the role of religious education leader that contributed to a sense of disconnectedness. The range of experiences and circumstances identified include the demands of leadership policies, the demands of the RE leader role being out of step with school calendar, the demands of being a member of a school’s leadership team, the ministerial dimension of the role and holding a leadership role with no one to lead. In this section these experiences expressed by the participants are critically reflected upon. Some of the texts from the participants’ responses to the questionnaire are drawn upon in the following section.

### **Leadership Policies.**

Religious education leaders sometimes felt that the religious education leader policies in some of the dioceses actually contributed to their sense of disconnectedness. They believed that the expectation that they hold a postgraduate qualification in religious education intruded on their time to the extent that they could not keep up with all the demands of their role as religious education leaders. The following comment from a participant reflects this concern:

We have three Deputy Principals at my school. I am the Deputy Principal Religious Education and Catholic Identity. We also have a Deputy Principal Curriculum and Deputy Principal Student Wellbeing. In my diocese to hold my position I am required to have a Masters degree

in religious education or be studying towards the completion of the degree. My position is the only deputy position that requires you to have a postgraduate Masters degree. I am tired all the time and feel like I am not fully engaged in school life or family life for that matter. The demand of study and meeting assignment deadlines is always hanging over me. (Participant L)

From this perspective it seems inconceivable that policy writers would place more expectations on leaders in highly complex and demanding positions. This added expectation of postgraduate studies is expected of leaders in roles that have already been established as being too big for one person to manage (Liddy, 1998). Many dioceses have understood these complexities and supported religious education leaders in their studies by sponsoring time release for those studying from their respective schools. However, many religious education leaders are reluctant to accept the time release because they feel obligated to meet the other pressing demands pertaining to their position (Buchanan, 2010). To overcome this kind of experience of disconnectedness, consideration could be given to the appointment of religious education assistant leaders. This should be done especially during the interim study period of the leader as a means to help to ensure that the demands of the role are being addressed. Such an initiative might require reconsideration and reallocation of the funding allocated to sponsoring time release to funding religious education assistant leaders.

#### **'Out of Step' with school leadership calendar.**

Many contemporary diocesan religious education leadership policies have articulated religious education coordination as a senior leadership position in Catholic school. Senior leaders need to be influential in planning and shaping the future directions of the school. Religious education leaders felt disconnected from some key opportunities to provide input in their schools' strategic planning. This was largely due to timing and the calendar of the religious education leader being 'out of step' with the school leadership calendar. The following example offered by one participant involved in the study illustrates this point.

At the end of the year when faculty teams and the leadership team have time to plan and prepare for the following year I am sidelined planning and preparing end of year liturgies for the various year levels as well as for the School Board, the Leadership Team and the Staff. I am never able to get to any of the meetings to have say in the planning for the following year.

(Participant B)

Based on the premise that a school is able to benefit from the educational leadership capabilities of the religious education leader, it is vital that planning of leadership meetings take into consideration the time constraints and demands of all school leaders where possible in preparing the yearly meeting schedule.

#### **Member of the Leadership Team.**

Many principals were reluctant to include their leaders in religious education on school leadership teams because of a belief that they lacked the depth of educational expertise. This was mainly due to the fact that principals traditionally sought to appoint religious education leaders who were highly proficient in leading the ministerial dimensions of the role (Fleming, 2002). Such attitudes to the role helped to entrench the position as being perceived as a position within the Church first (Crotty, 2002). Despite contemporary diocesan policies emphasising the senior education leadership dimensions of religious education leadership, several leaders still perceive their place on the leadership team as not being considered equal to other leadership team members. The following comment alludes to this perception.

I am probably the most qualified member of our leadership team and my experiences in education are equal to those of the other members. However, when we are discussing and planning strategic issues I am never asked to chair any of the sub-committees that might arise. I only seem to be asked to chair sub-committees when they are to do with pastoral care or

social justice. It is as if I am not seen as an equal member of the leadership team. (Participant K)

Participant K's comment not only provides an insight into this particular experience of disconnectedness as a school leader but also hints at a way to overcome the unequal perception. According to this testimony religious education leaders, as members of school leadership teams, take responsibility for chairing a diverse range of educational sub-committees. Doing so might enhance the leadership status of the religious education leader not only amongst leadership team members but also within the school community in general.

### **Educators or Ministers.**

The bi-dimensional nature of religious education leadership suggests that role is both a position within education and within the Church (Crotty, 2002). However, this understanding is seldom fully understood by other leaders and members of the school community. There has been a bias towards a ministerial perception of the role (Healy, 2011) despite efforts from religious education leaders to meet the educational aspects of the role as the following participant indicates.

As Head of classroom religious education I am a member of the Curriculum Committee. I make sure I implement all the curriculum initiatives other curriculum leaders are asked to implement. I align assessment in religious education with the same requirements expected from other discipline areas as well as integrate learning technologies and other learning and teaching approaches expected in other discipline areas. No matter how much I demonstrate the same educational standards and rigour to the religious education curriculum, I still get comments from staff and students to the effect of "that's only RE". — suggesting that religious education should not be taken as seriously as the other subjects. I really resent this. It devalues the subject and my professionalism. (Participant O)



Challenging these long held perceptions is no easy feat and may require a deliberate and strategic effort on the part of a school's leadership team to change this perception within the school.

Drawing on the testimony of Participant O, one way forward might be in the wake of education change (and where appropriate) to use the religious education faculty's response to a change initiative as an example for other faculties to follow.

### **No one to lead.**

A sense of isolation and alienation contributes to an experience of disconnectedness for some religious education leaders. In many situations they feel that they work in isolation and are responsible for completing all the tasks and initiatives associated with religious education on their own. The following insight draws attention to a reality which is commonly experienced by religious education leadership.

I have previously been a Deputy Principal Curriculum as well as Deputy Principal Pastoral Care and in both roles I had staff who directly reported to me and I was responsible for leading them. When I was responsible for the curriculum area I was responsible for leading the faculty leaders and when I was responsible for the pastoral care I was responsible for leading the year level coordinators and homeroom teachers. When I took on the religious education role in another school I assumed that there would be a team of people to lead but I was wrong. My role description says that I am a leader but in fact there is no one who directly reports to me to lead. I feel like I am expected to do the job myself and that is not leadership.

(Participant G)

Religious education leadership is closely tied to the personal witness given by the teacher who plays a vital role in the Catholic schools' achievement of its educational goals (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 96). It is important to develop leadership density and leadership succession in the area of religious education leadership because the religious dimension of the school should

not be the sole responsibility of one or two people. For strategies of how this might be achieved, see Buchanan (2013c).

## **Conclusion**

The Catholic identity of a Catholic school is vital if it is to achieve the education goals endorsed by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988). Key to this identity is the expression of the religious dimension of the school. Religious education leaders play a vital role in articulating and fostering this dimension throughout the school community. The role of the religious education leader is significant in fostering the religious dimension of the school and ensuring that its Catholic identity is transparent to all those associated with the school community.

The effectiveness of religious education leaders is enhanced when their role is clearly understood and contradictions pertaining to the role are alleviated. This requires constant investigation and awareness pertaining to areas that might lend themselves to experiences of disconnectedness. Ongoing attention to the development of leadership policies should be critiqued to minimise potential that limits religious education leaders from fulfilling their role. Strategic planning and other leadership decisions may occur during times where religious education leaders may be steep in ministerial commitments. Therefore an examination of the school calendar with a view to prioritising the lesser demand cycles of *all* members of the leadership team is vital if the expertise of all members is to be valued. The expertise a religious education leader brings to a leadership team needs to be recognised as having the potential to be beyond but inclusive of the religious and faith dimension of the school. There is a need for greater recognition of the interplay between the ministerial and education dimensions of the role (Crotty, 2005) to be acknowledged. It is recommended that such recognition also encourage all staff members to reflect on the ministerial functions associated with their teaching role. Further exploration into the bi-dimensional nature of their role may help them to gain an informed understanding of the role of the religious education leader. Leadership requires followership and a team of personnel who directly report to the leader

(Buchanan, 2013b). It is recommended that schools invest time and capital into building leadership capacity in the areas of religious education leadership by fostering specific responsibilities that are held by a team of staff members and overseen by the religious education leader.

It is vital that religious education leadership in Catholic schools not be an experience that disconnects such leaders. If the religious education leader feels disconnected then it is likely that the rest of the school community will not see the full purpose of the role. Without a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of the role, the potential to foster and maintain the religious dimension and Catholic identity of the school may be compromised.

## References

- Bowers, B. (1989). Grounded theory. In B. Starter (Ed.), *Paths to knowledge: Innovative research methods in nursing*. (pp. 33-59). New York, NY: National League of Nursing.
- Buchanan, M.T. (2005). The religious education coordinator: Perspectives on a complex role within Catholic education. *Journal of Religious Education*, 53(4), 68-74.
- Buchanan, M. T. (2010). *Managing curriculum change in religious education: An inside perspective from school leaders in religious education*. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Buchanan, M. T. (2013a). Leadership dimensions associated with leadership roles in faith-based schools. In M. T. Buchanan. (Ed.). *Leadership and religious schools: International perspectives and challenges* (pp. 127-144). New York, USA: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Buchanan, M. T. (2013b). Learning for leadership in religious education in schools through continuing education. *International Journal of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning*, 6(1), 119-136.
- Buchanan, M. T. (2013c). Supporting learners learning for leadership in Religious Education. *Journal of Religious Education*, 61(3), 18-29.
- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Brisbane. (1997). *APRE in the Catholic school*. Brisbane: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Brisbane. (2012). *Role description: Assistant Principal Religious Education*. Brisbane: Author.

- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn. (1979). *The religious education coordinator in Catholic schools*. Canberra and Goulburn: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Hobart. (1984). *The religious education coordinator*. Tasmania: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Melbourne. (1995). *Guidelines for religious education of students in the archdiocese of Melbourne*. Melbourne: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Sydney. (1983). *The religious education coordinator: A handbook*. Sydney: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Sydney. (1988). *Policy statement: The religious education coordinator in Catholic systemic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney*. Sydney: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Sydney. (1989). *Religious education: place in Catholic secondary education*. Sydney: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Sydney. (1996). *Religious education coordinators: Conditions of appointment and employment*. Sydney: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Darwin (1998). *Conditions of employment leadership positions other than principal*. Darwin: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Parramatta, (1997). *Religious education coordinators: Conditions of appointment and employment*. Parramatta: Author.
- Catholic Education Office, Western Australia. (1986). *The religious education coordinator: A handbook*. Western Australia: Author.
- Congregation for Catholic Education. (1988). *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*. Homebush: St. Pauls.
- Crotty, L. (1998). The religious education coordinator: Evolution and evolving agendas. *Journal of Religious Education*, 42 (2), 8-14.
- Crotty, L. (2002). *Religious leadership in the Catholic school: The position of the religious education coordinator*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Sydney, Australia.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. NSW, Australia: Allen & Urwin.

- Engebretson, K. (1998). Structural arrangements for the role of religious education coordinator in Australian dioceses. *Word in Life*, 46(2), 23-26.
- Fleming, G. P. (2002). *An analysis of religious education coordinators perceptions of their role in catholic secondary schools in the archdiocese of Melbourne*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Australian Catholic University, Australia.
- Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis: Emergence v forcing*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Adeline.
- Goulding, C. (2002). *Grounded theory: A practical guide for management, business and market researchers*. Great Britain: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Healy, H. (2011). *Implementing curriculum change in religious education: A study of the perceptions of primary school religious educators in the Archdiocese of Hobart*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Australian Catholic University, Australia.
- Johnson, H. (1998). The role of the religious education coordinator: Mission and ministry. *Journal of Religious Education*, 46(2), 44-46.
- Liddy, S. (1998). Key issues for the REC. *Journal of Religious Education* 46(2), 27.
- McKinney, S. J., & Sullivan, J. (2013). *Education in a Catholic perspective*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- Rossiter, G. (2013). Perspective on the use of construct "Catholic Identity" for Australian Catholic schooling: Sociological background and literature – part 1. *Journal of Religious Education*, 61(2), 4-16.
- South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools. (2004). *Religious leadership in a Catholic School policy*. South Australia: Author.

Vatican Council II. (1965). Declaration on Christian Education. In A. Flannery (1995), *The basic documents of Vatican Council II: Constitutions, decrees, declarations* (pp. 575-592). New York: Costello Publishing Company.

**Michael T Buchanan** PhD is a senior lecturer at Australian Catholic University. His research interests include leadership in religious education and faith-based schools and managing curriculum change. He is the editor of *Religious Education Journal of Australia* and publishes regularly in international journals. His latest books are *Managing Curriculum Change in Religious Education* (2010) and *Leadership and Religious Schools* (2013). Michael also holds a tenured position as a Fellow at York St John University, UK.