

**REINVENTING A SCHOOL FOR THE 21ST
CENTURY:**

**A CASE STUDY OF CHANGE IN A MARY WARD
SCHOOL**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and in my belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or on part, for any academic award at the Australian Catholic University or any other tertiary educational institution.

I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design, conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the Australian Catholic University Ethics Committee.

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Abstract

The focus of this study is the attempt of one school, Loreto Normanhurst, to draw from its values base and traditions to develop and implement a new holistic paradigm of schooling, more relevant to the needs of its 21st century students. Loreto Normanhurst is a Catholic secondary day and boarding school for girls in the northern suburbs of Sydney, Australia. It is a school over 100 years old, associated with the 400 year old, Mary Ward, international tradition of educating women.

Aims

The aims of the study were threefold: to document and analyse the process of reinvention from a 'living systems' perspective (Senge et al., 2000; Sergiovanni, 2000), while it was happening, thereby enhancing the reinvention process itself through a reflexive approach; to document and acknowledge the efforts of the members of the school community in seeking to meet the needs of its students in a 21st century context; and, through its blend of theory and practice, to contribute both to the literature on educational leadership and school reform, and to practice in schools.

Scope

The study was limited to Loreto Normanhurst, the school in which the researcher is principal. A mixed methodology was adopted, although the study was chiefly qualitative. As an ethnographic case study, it incorporated phenomenological data from the school community, as well as some quantitative data. The particular situation of the researcher, however, as an insider researcher in a position of power within the community studied, necessitated some innovative methodological strategies in order to protect both the participants and the integrity of the research. The situation of the researcher led also to the incorporation of the research traditions of autoethnography and transpersonal research methodologies.

The researcher drew from the literature on change, culture and leadership to analyse and interpret data gathered, predominantly, over a five-year period. The study traces the process of reinvention within the school from 2001 to 2005. Most of the data were gathered between 2001 and 2004, although antecedent data, particularly from 1994 to 2000, were included, as well as some data from 2005, by which stage the new paradigm had been implemented for two years within the school.

Conclusions

The study presents findings in three main areas: change processes in schools; educational leadership; and insider research methodology

Findings related to change processes are addressed in two parts. The first of these relates to the development, implementation and evaluation of the new educational paradigm, while the second relates to the school's attempt to 'continually reinvent' itself, thus institutionalising change (Schein, 1992). The school's values played an important role in both of these aspects of change.

Findings related to educational leadership are derived from the study of the school's reinvention processes. These findings include insights into how a range of leadership theories supported, or failed to adequately support, leadership of the reinvention process as well as the identification of twelve dilemmas associated with leadership for change in a Mary Ward school.

Findings related to methodologies for insider researchers in positions of power address the need for techniques, methods and research traditions which will protect participants and the research, as well as assisting the researcher in managing the multiple roles entailed in research of this kind.

The study concludes with important contributions to the fields of school reform, educational leadership, and insider research methodology. First, it offers a framework for the reinvention of a school and the development of a culture of continual reinvention. This is the eight-step 'Framework for Reinventing a School'. Second, it proposes a model of leadership for such a reinvention, identified as 'Contemplative-reflexive leadership for reinvention'. Third, it presents a more fully developed method for conducting insider research, which can be used by school principals and others in positions of authority. This is known as 'PIRM – Powerful Insider Research Method': a research method for use by insider researchers in positions of power in their own organisation.