

Leadership in a Lutheran school: An exploration of principal and school pastor worldviews and their potential impact on the transformation of the school learning community

Submitted by

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STATEMENT OF SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for an award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

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Ken Bartel

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ABSTRACT

This ethnomethodological study focuses on the worldviews of Lutheran school principals and pastors. Essentially, these leaders in a Lutheran school provide direction and vision for the school learning community. The degree to which their worldviews coalesce will naturally result in positive or negative influences on the whole school community. These leaders within the Lutheran school can be seen as a hub for all kinds of learning experiences and interaction in the context of vital Christian communities in mission outreach and quality education. Any dissonance of worldview has potential for impact on school processes and relationships.

The Lutheran Church has defined the role of the pastor in the school and the difference from his role in a congregation (Lutheran Church of Australia, 2002). Lutheran principals have a delegated authority from their school councils to be responsible for the complete oversight of the school's direction, the observance of policies, and the assignment of tasks and duties of staff. The blurring of responsibility occurs over the pastor's rightful responsibility in regards to a word and sacrament ministry. In a Lutheran school where the Gospel is to inform all learning, such tension can cloud school dynamics and transformation.

The Lutheran church policy, *Relative responsibilities of pastor and principal within the Lutheran school*, identifies three critical areas of required mutual respect for the Principal and School Pastor: theological, professional and personal (Lutheran Church of Australia, 2001, p. 3). Thus, the 'worldview' dimensions considered in this research centre around the theological, the educational and the interpersonal domains. The school transformation themes of lifelong learning, postmodernism and curriculum, school organization and change, and school community relationships are used to challenge worldview dimensions of Principals and School Pastors through a series of online 'stories', or scenarios, backed by personal interviews and a document study. The identification of school leadership tension points brings about recommendations for action.

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CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This interpretive study focuses on the 'worldviews' of Lutheran school principals and school pastors. Essentially these leaders in a Lutheran school provide direction and vision for the school learning community. The degree to which their worldviews coalesce brings about either positive or negative influences on the whole school community. These leaders within the Lutheran school are a hub for all kinds of learning experiences and organisational interactions in the context of vital Christian communities being involved in both mission outreach and quality education.

The Lutheran Church defines the role of the pastor in the school and the difference from his role in a congregation (Board for Lutheran Education Australia, 2002b). Lutheran principals have a delegated authority from their school councils to be responsible for the complete oversight of the school's direction (including spiritual direction), the observance of policies, and the assignment of tasks and duties of staff. The blurring of authority occurs over the pastor's rightful responsibility in regards to Word and Sacrament. In a Lutheran school where the Gospel is to inform all learning, such tension can cloud school dynamics and any transformational processes in the school community.

The Lutheran Church policy, *Relative Responsibilities of Pastor and Principal within the Lutheran School* (Board for Lutheran Schools, 2001b) identifies three critical areas of required mutual respect by the principal and school pastor: theological, professional and personal (p. 3). Thus, the worldview dimensions considered in this research centre around the theological, the educational and the interpersonal domains. Chapter 3, the literature review, brings focus to the meaning of worldview from this perspective. Some commonly agreed school transformation themes involving lifelong learning, postmodernism and curriculum, school organisation and change, and school community relationships, also detailed in Chapter 3, are used in this study to challenge worldview dimensions of principals and school pastors. This is achieved through a series of 'stories' or scenarios centring on typical leadership

situations in a Lutheran school. The responses to these are supported by personal interviews and a documentary analysis of a Lutheran Church of Australia school leadership policy document. The scenarios are created by the researcher and the subsequent use of online technology gleans individual response data for analysis.

Using an ethnomethodological approach enables an examination of worldview to illuminate how the participants play out their well defined roles and make use of common understandings to get through daily life. Most people problems come about because one person or group fails to come to terms with the how, what and why of another person's reasoning. This study is to determine these persistent failures or dissonance.

1.2 CONTEXT

Evidence points to the importance of the principal and school pastor playing key roles in the continuing development of a Lutheran 'learning community' by having a personal passion for Christian learning and growth, which then flows through to community in a myriad of inspirational ways (Bartsch, 2001). Therefore leadership is largely transformative in nature, rather than being simply transactional.

School and community development occurs in a number of different, but usually complementary, ways. This development is considered to begin with school leader cognitive understanding. These understandings are fostered by a variety of contextual experiences involving active involvement by leaders in church, local community, professional organisations and formal study. It is considered important that Lutheran principals and school pastors have a carefully thought out worldview since they are the mentors for their learning communities. Since the educational world could be considered to be facing new challenges and rapid change, it is conjectured to be vital that these Lutheran leaders need to be well prepared for the process of school and community renewal. Thus, there seems to be the need for well thought through personal leadership understandings that would help support school, church and personal needs of those in the Lutheran school and community facing the challenges of the contemporary postmodern world.

Chapter 2 provides the theological, organisational and historical contextual framework within which these leaders find themselves working in the Lutheran school. This informs the study and assists in understanding the manner in which Lutheran leaders make meaning of their everyday interactions. The scenarios (Section 4.2; Appendix E) developed to act as ethnomethodological provocations (Section 4.6) are likewise surrounded by this Lutheran hermeneutical framework.

Thus it is in this context that the relational dimension of leadership in the Lutheran school is challenged to determine whether principal and school pastor theological and educational worldview causes a degree of dissonance between them. The Lutheran Church might well define how the relationship should be seen (Board for Lutheran Education Australia, 2002), but the manner in which individual cognitive and affective harmony occurs in the school environment is important for determining the manner in which potential conflict might be handled. This is an important consideration in the dynamics of school transformation.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses an interpretive approach to examine the worldview of principals and school pastors in Lutheran schools in order to determine areas of contention involving new approaches to education within Lutheran schools and their associated communities. Using ethnomethodology enables a thorough examination of some social/cultural processes in school leadership and helps increase the understanding of taken for granted practices. Too often schools have been considered by many commentators to have processes reflecting tradition, hegemony and social reproduction without any thought for meaningful school and community transformation (Sections 3.2.2 and 3.3.2).

Chapter 4 outlines the ethnomethodological approach taken and the theoretical constructs that underpin this manner of research. The chapter explains that this study is located within the constructivist inquiry paradigm. In general, the ethnographical approach helps recognise the social understandings of practice and therefore will

hopefully assist in future transformative processes. It could be said that all people are playing well defined roles as they act out their daily lives in community. When personal or community expectations are not met, then interpersonal interaction between people becomes dysfunctional. Ethnomethodology focuses on how people make sense of their lives. Their worldview may contain assumptions (Garfinkel, 1967) that are so embedded that the manner in which they interact in community and interpersonally can bring about dissonance. On many occasions people are completely unaware of these background assumptions. This study seeks to shed light on some of these in order to enable a degree of personal and community transformation through bringing about new levels of cognitive and affective harmony.

However there are implications for the researcher (Section 4.2.4). The social characteristics of the researcher may impact on the conduct of the research. Age similarities and institutional authority may affect the relationship between the researcher and the participant and this is considered important when dealing with them.

1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Once the points of departure between principal and school pastor worldviews come into focus, then the identification of dissonance can promote new understandings and assist more collaborative change processes within the Lutheran school. Unless principals and school pastors have thought through these various cognitive positions and the dimensions of contemporary educational change, then affective relationships alone (important as they are) will not carry the day. It is contested that cognitive confusion and disagreement will eventually disempower leaders and their communities. Principal and school pastor interpersonal skills that enable school community transformation to occur through reconnecting people with theology and education is seen as vital to allow staff and students to excel, while relating to one another with dignity, authenticity and respect in a Christian context. Any dissonance between leaders makes the task more difficult. The researcher's feelings about potential dissonance are flagged in Section 4.3.5. The specific research questions are found in Section 4.3.6., but in general they centre around establishing if there is a critical degree of worldview difference between leaders, the gap between their believed and normative role, the degree of importance of a special relationship

existing between these leaders, and establishing how important alliance building by the leaders is in the school and its sponsoring congregation.

The study concentrates on four major educational themes in order to gain insights into the school community as seen through the eyes of the principal and school pastor. These themes are lifelong learning, postmodernism and curriculum, school organisation and change, and school community relationships. They have helped frame a substantial part of the literature review in Chapter 3. Elements of these themes are contained in the developed scenarios as outlined in Appendix E.

1.5 RESEARCH ISSUES

The educational themes used to challenge individual worldview are put to the participants through the various scenarios. These scenarios require them to look at situations from different angles and from the perspective of others. This leads to a degree of participant self evaluation in the cognitive domain and an appreciation of the manner in which affective relationships can possibly lead to some degree of compromise in one's cognitive position in order to allow the school community to be ultimately transformed and re-invigorated. For the researcher this issue revolves around an appreciation not so much on what is the 'theological essence' or church doctrine, but the process or the manner of bringing this to the Lutheran community. Some important questions explored through ethnomethodological analysis are:

- Is it possible to determine if there are critical differences in worldview through comparing the 'reactions' of principals and school pastors to 'learning community' scenarios?
- Is there a gap in the principal's or school pastor's believed or experiential role and their normative role and phenomenal role?
- Can the concept of 'intelligent or emotional' leadership involving the importance of relationships contribute to understanding the new directions and challenges confronting Lutheran school communities?
- To what extent is the creation of alliances important in establishing a learning community involving school and parish?

These questions are examined in the light of participant responses in Chapters 5 and 6. Their responses are firstly categorised through an analysis that focuses on

the manner in which the participants make meaning of some everyday interactions in the school setting. They are then brought together in a synthesis with the Lutheran context (Chapter 2) and the literature review (Chapter 3) to shed light on the research questions and point to some recommended lines of action.

The Lutheran Church seeks to define the manner in which the relationship between the principal and the school pastor should be understood and the manner of disagreement resolution. Anecdotally, it would seem that any dissonance seems to rely heavily on whether the protagonists approach the situation from either a rationalist or pragmatic perspective as explained in Section 4.2.2. School decision making results from a flow of interaction involving these two perspectives, and the individual leader will have to accommodate this within their worldview. Should there not be individual cognitive/affective harmony then problems will emerge. In these situations, what is written in church documents may not assist if there is a breakdown in the interpersonal relationship between the two leaders.

1.6 RATIONALE

This study is about revealing the common ‘touchstones’ in the worldviews of Lutheran principals and school pastors, in order to determine whether there are philosophical, leadership or relationship factors either helping or hindering the transformation of the Lutheran school learning community. It is through their worldviews that these leaders filter their responses to an educational world now framed, to a large extent, by learning communities surrounded by postmodernist thinking. Leadership is a process whereby human resources are utilised to commence and generate relational activity that brings about not only meaningful change, but also to maintain what is considered important to the community. Any change of this nature can be viewed as largely being transformative in nature. The purpose of leadership is then the orchestration of human resources to maintain that which is important to the school community and to facilitate any desired change considered important by this community. Leadership expertise is vital in helping the community to establish its vision and then to process it to make it a reality. In a Lutheran school, leadership is considered to be exercised in a context that has a desire to be God pleasing and consistent with Lutheran understandings of theology.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

“Ethnomethodology... considers how members themselves orient to and use rules, norms and shared meanings to account for the regularity of their actions” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 490). This is a study of the manner in which individuals persistently use various worldview understandings to construct their immediate social world within their local parochial school (Punch, 1998, p 224). There is an examination for pre-existing management order (Chapter 2) that can relate very directly to current relationships. Within the various social interactions of the Lutheran school community, there is a focus on the manner in which leaders negotiate meanings between themselves. This research has as an objective the creation of transformative practice through the linking of insights of the leadership group. This is Starratt’s transitional leadership model in action (Starratt, 1999). In the process, what is unmasked are some of the ideological roots of the community leaders and through this comes a greater understanding of the interactive worldview processes surrounding the Lutheran school community. Through the particular use of responses to various school leadership scenarios, there is an attempt to bring the dominant myths, submerged consciousness and contradictory behaviours into the open to allow an examination of agreed responses and any degree of dissonance. This examination is the substance of the analysis and synthesis of Chapters 5 and 6.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited by the number of participants and the specific context in which they find themselves. The number involved is limited to six in order to make the project manageable but, at the same time, to be meaningful in terms of an outcome within the Australian Lutheran school context. Despite this small number, it is contended that through this study some important reference ‘markers’ are established for further examination and deliberation concerning relational dynamics in Lutheran school and church learning communities.

Yet, a further limitation is the dichotomy of context within the Australian Lutheran community. There appears to be a marked urban/rural divide in thinking and

processing but the numbers involved in the study do not allow for this to be meaningfully established.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

There is anecdotal verbal evidence to suggest that Lutheran principals and school pastors are in disagreement on how to view the contemporary postmodern world and how the Lutheran school should react to this seeming challenge. This project enquires into this dissonance in order to establish the key points of departure mentioned in Section 1.4. In many cases, it appears that these leaders are talking at cross purposes, so this study aims to establish the degree of commonality in understanding new style Christian learning community models and processes. Through this examination of Lutheran school leadership, it is considered that findings can be discussed in professional development forums and workshops so that school leadership and transformation processes will be better understood. In addition it may well lead to further examination of the manner in which future leaders are introduced to the role and mentored to understand transformative processes and the operational dynamics of the contemporary Lutheran school.