

Called Connected Committed

24 Leadership Practices
for Educational Leaders

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THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
EDUCATION OFFICE

FOUNDATION FOR
EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP

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Educating for life in all its fullness is the goal of our Church of England Vision for Education, ‘Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good.’

Foreword



‘EDUCATING FOR LIFE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS’ is the goal of our Church of England Vision for Education, ‘Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good’. At the heart of our vision is the search for a wisdom that rings true both with the Bible and Christian understanding and with experienced educational practice in the twenty-first century. The vision gives a distillation of that wisdom, and we offer it as a resource for anyone involved in education. For those who in various ways identify with Christian faith and practice, we hope it can open up further dimensions and depths; for others, we hope that it can stimulate their thinking and educational practice, and encourage them to respond by bringing their own understanding into conversation with ours.

The vision developed by bringing educational leaders together to shape and produce it. We now turn our attention to the sort of leadership that might help to realise this vision in schools. We recognise, as the vision did, the great variety of both leaders and schools, and the inappropriateness of a ‘one size fits all’ approach. We hope that each leader and each leadership team, board of governors, and diocesan or other board of education, in whatever situation, will find our work worth thinking with, reflecting on

in relation to their experience and challenges, and that they emerge with fresh thinking, energy, and vision for their own work.

Above all, we want to inspire a set of leadership practices that both exemplify Wisdom, Knowledge & Skills, Hope & Aspiration, Community & Living Well Together, and Dignity & Respect, and that also go to the heart of educational purpose:

Called – inspiring the vocation of the education leader; **Connected** – enabling the flourishing of children, adults, teams and communities; **Committed** – sustaining long-term engagement in realising this vision for education.

We are extremely grateful to Professor David Ford, who chaired the original working group that wrote the Church of England Vision for Education in 2016, and Andy Wolfe, who as Deputy Chief Education Officer (Leadership Development) oversees all of the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership’s programmes, networks and research, for all the work they have done in writing and producing such a rich resource.

The Rt Revd Stephen Conway
Bishop of Ely & Lead Bishop for Education

1. Introduction

In publishing the Church of England Vision for Education, 'Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good' (Church of England Education Office 2016) we sought to offer a vision for education that is for all schools, not just church schools. It is inclusive, aspirational and has underpinned all the programmes, networks and research of the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership. Equally, our vision for education seeks to articulate the deeply Christian nature of the educational approaches we seek, placing at its heart the flourishing of children and adults.

Like the Vision for Education, these leadership practices have deep roots both in the Bible, Christian wisdom and in educational experience, and have been matured in conversation with a range of religious and non-religious traditions and educational approaches. In the context of this diversity, we want each to be able to draw on their

depths and riches in relation to education, and to bring these into conversation with others in order to contribute to ongoing discussion and negotiation of educational policy and practice. If that is to be of high quality, each needs to sound their own depths and articulate them in relevant educational terms.

Our 24 leadership practices are inspired by a Christian faith that has been shaped and tested over many centuries and through engagement with diverse contexts, cultures, philosophies, and civilisations. The past century has been a particularly fruitful one for thought, practice and education among the world's two billion or so Christians and pervading it all has been ongoing interpretation of the Bible. In the following condensed reflections, we give pride of place to the Bible. We hope that the reader will be encouraged not only to go deeper into the riches of scripture

This document is shaped into 4 sections:

01

Called, Connected, Committed –

an outline and definition of the leadership development aims of the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership

Leadership Practices Matrix –

a mapping of the 4 areas of the Church of England Vision for Education against the definitions of 'Called, Connected, Committed' giving 12 pairs of Leadership Practices – they are offered in pairs to enable leaders to develop a healthy sense of reflective dialogue between the two practices

02



but also to explore the wealth of Christian thought and educational practice today, and then to bring that into conversation with his or her own current position and understanding – whether as a Christian, as a member of a different religious or non-religious tradition or community, as an agnostic, or as a searcher.

The Bible is not only passionate about the importance of wisdom, hope, community, and dignity in the flourishing of human life and of the whole creation, but a good deal of its writing on these matters is addressed to those with leadership responsibilities in different spheres of society. Both in the Old Testament (in the first five books on law and the shaping of a community, in what the prophets say to the leaders of their society, and in the wisdom literature that was widely used both in education and in counselling political, religious, and other leaders), and in the New Testament (especially

focusing on Jesus, on the early church, and in the letters of Paul as he exercised his leadership in relation to the first urban churches in the Roman Empire) these responsibilities are set within a horizon of God's creation of and concern for all people and all reality. Christians are part of a community that constantly reads and re-reads those scriptures, and here we develop that tradition further as we seek a wisdom of educational leadership for schools in the twenty-first century. The responsibilities are many and great, but the goodness and generosity of God are even greater. Responsible leadership is a blessing to many, and is resourced by being itself part of an ecology of blessing, as God continually blesses us and all creation, we and the rest of creation bless God, and we are invited and enabled to bless each other, as Jesus blessed the children brought to him (Luke 18:16).

The Revd Nigel Genders Chief Education Officer

03

Leadership Practices Descriptors –

a clear summary of what we mean by each of the 12 pairs of practices for educational leadership

In addition, a range of other leadership resources will be produced based on this document, including further development activities for school leaders and an online 360 appraisal tool.

Our Christian Inspiration: Reflections on Leadership Practices –

24 think-pieces and discussion starter questions enabling leaders to reflect on the deeply Christian nature of these practices and consider the potential implications for their own leadership journey as individuals and teams

04



2. Leadership Practices Matrix

The Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership's mission is:

“ To develop inspirational leaders who are called, connected and committed to delivering the Church of England's vision for education ”



Through its range of Programmes, Networks and Research it is working with thousands of leaders across the country using the ‘Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good’ Vision for Education as its starting point. The Foundation defines these three key terms as:

Called

Leaders who are called can articulate a strong sense of personal vocation to their role, and demonstrate this through their words, actions and decision making, exemplifying a strong moral purpose, confident vision, and ambitious trajectory of improvement. For some, this sense of vocation will be driven by an established or developing faith commitment. All will show integrity, honesty and a deep sense of resilience, underpinned by their personal sense of vocation as a leader.

Connected

Leaders who are connected operate deliberately within communities of practice, positioning themselves within positive relationships that sustain and encourage all parties. They embrace interdependence, demonstrate compassion and embody humble service to others. They create shared identity within their teams and draw colleagues around a common purpose.

Committed

Leaders who are committed show energy and passion in all they do, inspiring confidence and faithfulness in their teams. They are clear about their purpose and resilient in the face of challenge. They take long-term decisions and are not easily swayed by short-term changes of policy or procedure. They articulate a sense of mission in their approach to education, into which they draw others, and they are committed to the flourishing of their pupils and colleagues.

In seeking to explore how these ideas come to life in real leadership practices, we have designed the Leadership Practices Matrix, to help us first to consider the kind of practices we seek to develop in our leaders and teams, teachers and pupils, and second, to explore the rich Christian inspiration for these leadership practices. There are a number of possible activities to be drawn from this matrix – including for example self-reflection, team analysis, appraisal – and this document seeks to provide the educational and theological underpinning for these important concepts.

Leadership Practices Matrix

Called

**Educating for Wisdom,
Knowledge and Skills**

**Leading Learning
Refining Judgement**

**Educating for Hope
and Aspiration**

**Developing Imagination
Nurturing Ambition**

**Educating for Community
and Living Well Together**

**Removing Disadvantage
Seeking Reconciliation**

**Educating for Dignity
and Respect**

**Celebrating Diversity
Enabling Flourishing**

Connected

Creating Confidence
Embracing Interdependence

Healing Relationships
Pursuing Renewal

Accepting Vulnerability
Demonstrating Generosity

Offering Encouragement
Encouraging Service

Committed

Deepening Understanding
Driving Improvement

Sustaining Vision
Building Resilience

Inspiring Faithfulness
Embodying Integrity

Practising Humility
Learning Love

3. Leadership Practices Descriptors

3.1 Educating for Wisdom, Knowledge and Skills

Leading Learning | Refining Judgement

Leading in education starts with the call to learn and teach. A *head*-teacher demonstrates their vocational passion for learning by modelling effective practice in the skills and understanding of pedagogy. Leaders of learning need to be resourced by deep wisdom. Their professional development and personal growth are shaped and directed by well-informed, discerning judgement, and by ethical, accountable decision-making.

Creating Confidence | Embracing Interdependence

Leaders in education create confidence by perceptively encouraging, supporting and resourcing others in their learning, teaching, and leading. They recruit and promote wisely, invest in their teams, and cultivate shared vision, value, trust, and joy. They regard interdependence and service of others as crucial to their development, asking not just what can we gain, but also what can we give.

Deepening Understanding | Driving Improvement

To lead in education means to seek continually to deepen understanding and wisdom, extend knowledge, and develop professionally.

Education is long term, requiring sustained commitment and endurance. Fuller flourishing of children, of staff, of the school community and its wider environment, is always possible, and leaders can inspire and enable the improvements that can help achieve this. Leaders passionately pursue the best and broadest outcomes for their children, removing barriers, empowering teams, and celebrating the success of others.





3.2 Educating for Hope and Aspiration

Developing Imagination | Nurturing Ambition

Leaders in education are shaped by visionary imagination, evaluating the present accurately, and energising their teams towards a hope-filled future. Imagination is at the heart of pedagogy, bringing creativity to the classroom and nurturing possibility in every learner. Ambitious leaders pursue broad and deep outcomes, developing character in children, equity in community and social justice in curriculum. They seek the flourishing of adults, with patience, compassion and courage.

Healing Relationships | Pursuing Renewal

Leaders in education recognise that hope grows in the fertile soil of positive relationships, and show empathy, humility, grace and forgiveness in their interactions. They cope wisely with things and people going wrong, taking difficult decisions and offering compassionate understanding and fresh starts. They draw colleagues together around a common purpose. Leaders take time to understand the past, and pursue transformative futures for the children, families, colleagues and communities they serve.

Sustaining Vision | Building Resilience

Leading in education is grounded in a picture of the future that inspires passion that lasts. While good leaders create vision, great leaders sustain it. Leaders demonstrate that hope is sticking around, providing consistency and dependability for the long term. Teams with sustained vision can still see where they are going in the dark times, and they grow through the difficulties they face together. Leaders show that resilience is not simply coping or working harder. Leaders are changed and transformed through adversity, as their skills and character are formed in the crucible of the challenge.

3. Leadership Practices Descriptors

continued

3.3 Educating for Community and Living Well Together

Removing Disadvantage | Seeking Reconciliation

Leaders in education are called to pursue social justice and wellbeing of all, showing love for the disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable. They create and implement a curriculum that liberates and empowers children and communities. Barriers are removed by wise pedagogy, transformative pastoral care and wise allocation of resources. Leaders build schools that enable disparate communities to live well together, rooted in dialogue, empathy and love. Their schools become beacons of restoration, filled with peace-seeking, environment-saving, community-loving activists.

Accepting Vulnerability | Demonstrating Generosity

Leading in education makes room for vulnerability, present in life-giving relationships, pastoral care, and processes such as supervision, mentoring and coaching. Leaders recognise the importance of mutual support and encouragement and create hospitable environments in which students and adults feel able to be vulnerable, thus deepening their connection with one another. They lead generously, supporting an economy of grace and collaboration within and between institutions, and they look outwards, using their limited resources, time, money and expertise in line with their vision.

Inspiring Faithfulness | Embodying Integrity

Leaders in education gather colleagues around a co-created vision, attracting and retaining strong people in their teams and then enabling them to be faithful through the highs and lows of their experiences. They recognise the difference between the call to be faithful and the pressure simply to succeed. They are committed to the flourishing of their teams and earn their authority through the hard yards of integrity. Their actions evidence their words and their practice reflects their vision. Their ethical decisions are grounded in wise thinking and reflection.





3.4 Educating for Dignity and Respect

Celebrating Diversity | Enabling Flourishing

Leaders in education cherish diversity and inclusion, recognising that their communities are inherently better and richer in their differences. They take every opportunity to celebrate learning together, and hold their doors open to people from all backgrounds and traditions. Leaders unlock opportunities for their children to flourish in a wide variety of disciplines, not simply those that are measured. They patiently nurture development and growth, knowing that character stands at the heart of educational achievement.

Offering Encouragement | Encouraging Service

To lead in education is to give courage to teachers and children, rooted in energising memories and summoned by radical hopes. Leaders advocate for their people, noticing things going well, cheering on and never missing an opportunity to praise. Their encouragement and coaching nurtures leaders who go on to achieve even greater things than the leader themselves. They encourage generous acts of kindness, inspiring children to respect and serve others first.

Practising Humility | Learning Love

Leaders in education know that humility is intrinsic to authenticity. They acknowledge their own imperfections, take responsibility for their mistakes and shine a light on other people's successes. Their choice to serve others builds trust and enables genuine collaboration. Whether rejoicing in success or dealing with failure, they pursue love, around which everything turns and towards which everything should be drawn. This love "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

4. Our Christian Inspiration: Reflections on 24 Leadership Practices

4.1 Leading Learning – Refining Judgement

Leading in education starts with the call to learn and teach. A *head*-teacher demonstrates their vocational passion for learning by modelling effective practice in the skills and understanding of pedagogy. Leaders of learning need to be resourced by deep wisdom. Their professional development and personal growth are shaped and directed by well-informed, discerning judgement, and by ethical, accountable decision-making.

Leading Learning

The leader needs to be gripped, energised, and delighted by learning. This is a fundamental response to the wonder of creation, and to the amazing richness of the ways of appreciating it, knowing it, and living in it. Wonder is the beginning of wisdom. Curiosity, intrigue and the joy of discovery are at the heart of the spirit of learning that inspires good teaching.

The Bible personifies Wisdom as involved with God in creation and gives her a voice: “I was beside him, like a little child; and I was daily a delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race” (Proverbs 8:30-31). Solomon, the archetype of the wise person, represents the range of knowledge and understanding in a civilised education, not only embracing religion, human development and relationships, culture and the arts, politics, economics, and law, but also the natural world.

Transmission of knowledge and sharing of wisdom across the generations was central to the identity of ancient Israel, as it has continued to be in Judaism to this day (see for example Deuteronomy 6:1-7).

Jesus as a child was an eager learner in this tradition, “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers”. He “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour”, and later is described as “greater than Solomon” (Luke 2:46-47, 52; 11:31).

Teaching was at the heart of his ministry, done through questioning, riddles, conversation and debate, responses to difficult issues, stories, discourses, sermons, challenges, symbolic acts, and personal example. The disciples (literally ‘learners’) he gathered regularly misunderstood him, often learned through going wrong, and only entered deeply into his meaning during the years after his death and resurrection.

A leader in education is called to love those who are being taught. The wisdom of love and the love of wisdom go together, and this means that the teacher longs for the full flourishing of the pupils. This desire motivates both a vocation to all-round education of the whole person and also keeping up with best practice in the field, acquiring better teaching skills, and drawing on relevant sources for improving our leadership.

Leading learning cannot be reduced to leading examination outcome improvement, or instructional pedagogical competence. Rather, it champions the craft and art of teaching, raises its status as a profession, and seeks wisdom in leadership across the whole curriculum. It places children at the heart of all decision making, in the face of the immense challenges of competing demands and scarce resources. The leader also proactively makes time and space for their own adult learning and professional development, prayer, reflection, refreshment, and rest.

1. How important is it for leaders in school to be (known as/seen to be) excellent classroom teachers?
2. To what extent do ‘wonder’, ‘curiosity’, ‘intrigue’ and ‘joy of discovery’ play a part in your school’s approach to pedagogy? What difference do these attitudes/experiences make to pupils’ progress?
3. What can we learn from Jesus’ approaches to teaching and learning?
4. How are you making space for ‘time and space for [your] own adult learning and professional development, prayer, reflection, refreshment, and rest’? To what extent do your colleagues see you as leading learning?

Refining Judgement

Leaders are immersed in the drama of actual life in all its complexity, messiness, and difficulty. Leadership is usually under pressure. Hardly a day goes by without the need to face awkward people and problems. These cry out for wisdom, and that is rarely instantaneous: it needs to have grown over the years, with roots deep in what has been learned by others. Therefore the leader needs to be resourced deeply, while also alert to the reality of the present. Then comes the risky necessity of making judgements and taking decisions. Educational, ethical and environmental wisdom must lead into practical decision-making, often between two or more seemingly good choices. It acknowledges the strain of decision-making, and recognises the rarity of easy answers.

The Bible has many stories of leaders under pressure, and of their better or worse responses, such as, Jacob's covenant with Laban (Genesis 31), Moses taking Jethro's advice on sharing leadership (Exodus 18), Moses handling the issue of succession (Deuteronomy 31), Deborah's initiative against Sisera (Judges 4-5), Samuel's response to the popular demand for a king, with which he disagreed (1 Samuel 8), the personal story of Nehemiah of how he led the rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in the face of massive hostility, injustice and oppression (Nehemiah 2-6), and the complex dilemmas of spiritual leadership by one prophet after another, from Isaiah through to Zechariah. Distilled from all this experience is a rich body of wisdom literature in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and many of the Psalms.

Leadership in this tradition permits lament and anger, confusion and despair. It dwells in the chaos and cries out the biblical refrain – “Hear my cry for help, my God, for to you I pray.” (Psalm 5:2),

and, as the refining builds perspective, leans into the promises of God: “Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.” (Psalm 63:7). Wise judgement holds to the bigger picture and sees beyond the current day, term or year for a longer-term journey. As leaders refine their judgement, so their own character grows, formed in the crucible of the challenge. The New Testament inherits all that and takes it for granted, with illuminating accounts of the judgements involved in the ministry of Jesus (especially in the face of the pressure that led to his execution), in the growth of the early Church (in the Acts of the Apostles) and above all the inside story in the letters of Paul – perhaps the most innovative leader of that period.

Wise leaders in our schools seek to evaluate evidence carefully, and define their current reality accurately, however challenging it may seem. They take difficult decisions and treat the affected with dignity. They embrace risk, and frequently choose greater risk for the common good. They consult widely and read slowly. They often answer questions with another question, causing their teams to think for themselves. They recognise the injustice of resource distribution and fight for the young people in their care to get the very best opportunities, prioritising the most vulnerable.

Judgement is refined in relationship – “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17). Wise leaders rarely fly solo but create networks and communities of practice on which they draw and to which they contribute. They recognise that refining frequently requires heat and pressure – “For you God tested us, you refined us like silver” (Psalm 66:10) – but that this pressure is easier to endure together than alone.

1. In what ways does wisdom in judgement which ‘holds to the bigger picture’ develop in leaders?
2. How do you deal with the ‘strain of decision making’ as an individual or as a team? What resources do you draw upon?
3. What role does prayer play in your leadership? Who could you talk to about this to develop it further?
4. If ‘as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another’, how can our relationships and networks help us share and permit ‘lament and anger, confusion and despair’ in making difficult decisions?

4.2 Creating Confidence – Embracing Interdependence

Leaders in education create confidence by perceptively encouraging, supporting and resourcing others in their learning, teaching, and leading. They recruit and promote wisely, invest in their teams, and cultivate shared vision, value, trust, and joy. They regard interdependence and service of others as crucial to their development, asking not just what can we gain, but also what can we give.

Creating Confidence

In the midst of doubt, failures, and a developing identity, Paul writes to his fledgling church in Corinth, “I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.” (2 Corinthians 7:16). His rich, re-assuring and life-giving words ring positively through history, and echo into the office of the contemporary leader concluding an appraisal meeting, or making a new staffing appointment. The assurance that someone else believes in us, despite any doubts we may have ourselves (concealed or exposed) is hugely edifying and empowering. The biblical narrative shows that God does not always call the equipped, but does equip the called, placing deep confidence in humble and unexpected people – the youngest brother in the fields with his sheep who would become David the King, or the uncertain disciples who are inspired and empowered to leave their nets and follow Jesus. Leaders creating confidence do not promote their own ego, but rather engender a sense of being part of something bigger, a wider mission, and being on a journey their teams would not want to miss out on.

Biblical leaders at their best place their confidence not in themselves, but in leaning on God and God’s wisdom – “I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13); resting in God’s security – “You are my strength, I watch for you; you God are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely” (Psalm 59:9);

bold in ambition – “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7); expectant in prayer – “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14). Christian confidence is not simply about boldly doing more, or becoming more self-assured, but about a choice of orientation towards God and God’s purposes, and a commitment to serving the community.

While confidence can be created in teams, it can also easily be lost, and works in harmony with humility, steering clear of arrogance or over-certainty, and becoming stronger through the faithfulness we have experienced in the tougher times. Leaders become more alive to the possibility of failure – things going wrong are a meaningful part of the human journey. Our confidence grows the more we have been shaped and formed through responding to our challenges and mistakes – Christians understand the Holy Spirit to be at work in us as leaders refining our character and building our hope. Just as teachers create confidence in their classrooms, so leaders create confidence and engender trust in their teams through feedback, faithfulness and encouragement. The goal is an ecology of encouragement, like the one Paul evokes in the opening of his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

1. How would your team know by your words and actions that you have confidence in them? What impact does that have on their behaviour, choices and long-term commitment?
2. To what extent are you able to place your ‘confidence not in [yourself], but in leaning on God and God’s wisdom’?
3. If you could accurately gauge these 4 concepts: ‘vision, value, trust and joy’ for your team – where would the gauges be reading at the moment? What could you do to ‘refill’ the team if it were near the red?
4. What could an ‘ecology of encouragement’ look like in your team?

Embracing Interdependence

The early church that developed immediately following Pentecost was established through embracing interdependence inspired by teaching – “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need...” (Acts 2:42-45). The sharing was actual, not hypothetical – goods and money, food, teaching and worship. Paul imagined his vision of community as one body with many interdependent parts (in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12-14). Each member is secure in who they are (confident, not envious or resentful), and understands that flourishing is reliant on their authentic interaction with other parts. This is a vision for a cohesive and life-giving staff room, school, MAT or Diocese. It also affects those with whom we choose to partner, and how those partnerships are formed – there is always something to be learned, whatever our current badge or job title may say.

As children grow up and mature, there is an interplay of dependence, independence, and interdependence, and a continual rebalancing of them in growing relationships. It is the great skill of the parent and the teacher to support these three dimensions, and the emergence of maturity is the integration of dependence and independence with interdependence. Strong reciprocal relationships are at the heart of flourishing schools. The Gospel of John has a core concern with mutuality and reciprocity – Jesus encourages it again and again, teaching it in three ways.

First, in practical action: he washes the feet of his disciples and says that this example is to be followed by them doing similar acts of humble service to each other: “... if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (John 13:14) Mutual service is at the heart of

interdependence. This leads directly into the new commandment of mutual love that imitates him: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (John 13:34)

Secondly in relationship in the Parable of the Vine, in which his own intimacy and mutuality with those who trust and love him is pictured as the relationship of branch and vine: “Abide in me as I abide in you... As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” (John 15:4, 9) Service remains essential, but the mutuality has the quality of friendship, and the difference is made by shared understanding springing from the teaching of Jesus. Moreover, this friendship of Jesus is sealed by a love that is willing to sacrifice to the point of laying down his life. Most experienced teachers have been challenged to go the extra mile for their pupils, their colleagues, their school or their community. For an educational leader, the response to voluntarily sacrificial action should not only be gratitude, but also dedication to encouraging the sort of mutuality and reciprocity which mean that those who risk giving themselves in costly ways (beyond the contractual) are warmly supported and protected.

Finally in a prayer: Jesus prays to his Father, culminating in his desire for later generations. “I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one... so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:23, 26) It is a desire for our utter mutuality with God and with each other in love, for the sake of the whole world. This is a vision of the glory, peace and joy of God embodied in relationships, all energised by the free gift of God’s love. In a century threatened by nuclear warfare, environmental catastrophe, and much else, this can be an inspiration to give ourselves together as never before for the sake of “life in all its fullness” (John 10:10).

1. To what extent do you resonate with Paul’s picture of a community as ‘one body with many interdependent parts’?
2. How could you encourage your team to feel confident, secure and authentic in who they are?
3. What have you got to share with others? How could you help be the answer to another leader’s questions?
4. What can we learn from Jesus’ example of washing his team’s feet, and his subsequent command to ‘love another’? What does love require?

4.3 Deepening Understanding – Driving Improvement

To lead in education means to seek continually to deepen understanding and wisdom, extend knowledge, and develop professionally. Education is long term, requiring sustained commitment and endurance. Fuller flourishing of children, of staff, of the school community and its wider environment, is always possible, and leaders can inspire and enable the improvements that can help achieve this. Leaders passionately pursue the best and broadest outcomes for their children, removing barriers, empowering teams, and celebrating the success of others.

Deepening Understanding

The leader’s pursuit of wisdom is a commitment to a lifetime of learning, personal development, and engagement as deeply as possible in each area of their work. It is a necessarily continuous process of formation. It characterises us as leaders, and evidences our orientation to God, one another and ourselves, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). This is not a scary or intimidated fear, but rather a reverence, humility and awe which retains the posture of learning despite job title or accolade. And such an attitude to God can help put our other fears and anxieties into perspective – for, “perfect love casts out all fear.” (1 John 4:18). Leaders who seek this deepening are building their house on rock, not on sand, in contrast to the shorter-term pursuit of effectiveness and improvement.

The Bible shows us characters known for their own learning and discipleship, growing through their errors and experience, and seeking to trust God in the challenge. Often they don’t get it, and can’t see the purpose, but yet grow through the challenge, deepening and refining their understanding of God, themselves and leadership through it all. The character formation and leadership of Moses or Joseph through their political struggles, or David through his personal and military activities, shows us a God who is at work in our most testing times,

refining and re-shaping us. The stories are full of probing questions and long-standing doubts. Job when tested, is pointed to the elusive mystery of God, and shows us that deepening understanding is based on deeper questioning: “Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens above – what can you do? They are deeper than the depths below – what can you know?” (Job 11:7-8)

Deepening understanding is not all down to leaders simply working harder – it is first of all about openness to listen and receive. God is at work in the wilderness situations and testing problems. To silence the doubt or mute the question is to cut off the road to one’s own development and flourishing. Leadership is a process of continual learning and formation. The early team of disciples learned through experience – by committing together, eating and discussing together, experimenting, failing, correcting, re-starting, disappointing, and celebrating. Though they would go on to lead the early church, they stumbled and tripped numerous times, yet their teacher was faithful and patient as their understanding deepened. Leaders create the culture of a learning community in their staff, which in turns models this to their pupils.

1. What kinds of activities do you engage in as a leader to help your long term professional development and the deepening of your understanding? How do you learn best? From courses and programmes, or networks and relationships?
2. How can an understanding of faith in God help ‘to put our fears and anxieties into perspective’?
3. To what extent have your ‘most testing times’ deepened understanding for you or your team?
4. How important to deepening understanding is the development of healthy and active listening skills?



Driving Improvement

Leaders who see the adults and children in their school through God's eyes recognise how precious each one is, and how important is the opportunity that each individual has been given during their time in school. To such leaders, each child is a unique gift, 'the lost sheep or coin', 'a pearl of great price', infinitely valuable – the child is "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:14) They hold the highest aspirations, and treat each one with the utmost dignity, regardless of their starting point. These leaders pursue the very best for each pupil, and regard high standards as the norm, consistently seeking to realise ambitious expectations for their children's development at each stage of the journey. That which leaders choose to improve communicates much about their values. While academic learning is essential to good education, character and all-round development are fundamental to a worthwhile life.

Therefore, the pursuit of the very best and broadest outcomes for all young people defines education driven by a Christian vision – this is life in all its fullness. So leaders pursue and drive improvement; they are impatient with mediocrity, and passionate about doing better. They seek to go beyond narrow measures of performance and success, and recognise the dangers of zero-sum criteria that

divide children into winners and losers. Leaders who love their pupils and colleagues recognise the fear and anxiety that our system can generate, and care deeply for their mental health and wellbeing, taking great care with them, particularly at pressure points of inspections, appraisals and examinations.

Leaders live with the sort of passion with which Paul writes to Philippi about dealing with the past and pursuing the future: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14).

In seeking to serve the most vulnerable, leaders recognise the need to design and implement curriculum and pedagogy that redresses inequality and offers opportunity for broad-ranging activities for all pupils. They take care not to pigeon-hole children by narrow assessment of ability through static groupings, and spur children on to greater knowledge and wisdom through creative and inspirational teaching, which encourages the very best and broadest outcomes.

1. To what extent do leaders 'see the adults and children in their school through God's eyes'? What difference does this lens make to the way you interact with one another?
2. If that which 'leaders choose to improve communicates much about their values', how does your improvement plan reflect your vision?
3. To what extent does your team 'recognise the fear and anxiety that our system can generate'? What kinds of fears or pressures might you inadvertently transfer onto your team, and consequently, your pupils?
4. What could it mean for your team to '[forget] what is behind and strain toward what is ahead'? To what extent can inspection grades, league tables and labels hold us back?

4.4 Developing Imagination – Nurturing Ambition

Leaders in education are shaped by visionary imagination, evaluating the present accurately, and energising their teams towards a hope-filled future. Imagination is at the heart of pedagogy, bringing creativity to the classroom and nurturing possibility in every learner. Ambitious leaders pursue broad and deep outcomes, developing character in children, equity in community and social justice in curriculum. They seek the flourishing of adults, with patience, compassion and courage.

Developing Imagination

In his study of the biblical prophets, Walter Brueggemann writes: “The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and imagine almost nothing. It is our vocation to keep alive the ministry of imagination” (Brueggemann 2001:40). The Bible understands God as inherently creative: “...he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.” (Jeremiah 10:12), and imaginative: “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:19)

Jesus constantly reconceives the expected notions of the saviour the people of Israel were awaiting, and shows himself to be an imaginative and observant teacher, storyteller and question-poser. The New Testament heightens and broadens the Christian imagination through a concentrated attention on rich symbols such as light and darkness, water and wine, wind and breath, bread and fish, stench and fragrance, seeing and blindness, and more. Above all, it focuses on life-giving images and stories which point to the God who is love, and Jesus as God’s self-expression and self-giving, breathing his Spirit of love into those who trust him. Its practical impact is to stimulate us to imagine living in line with who Jesus is and what he does, and to improvise ways of continuing his work of teaching and service in love.

Brueggemann builds his notion of imagination around two core concepts –

to criticise and *to energise*. Prophetic leaders offer a wise and evaluative critique of the current situation, and then energise their teams to pursue a future that cannot yet be seen. The prophets do this in their context, and Jesus’ ministry does the same, reimagining the past, present and future. God-centred imagination sometimes defies what currently seems plausible or realistic. Leaders who develop this imagination in their teams, like teachers who do the same with their children, not only enable hope but also build resilience for challenging moments.

Imagination is an expression of the heart’s treasure, an orientation of desire, a trajectory of intent: “All my longings lie open before you Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.” (Psalm 38:9). It defines our behaviour and communications, including our communication with God, who transcends our imagining. The Letter to the Ephesians encourages us to stretch all our capacities in order to comprehend “what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God...” But then it goes even further, opening our imaginations, no matter how daring, to the ever greater possibilities and surprises of God: “Now to him, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:18-21)

While it is easily squeezed out of the pedagogical craft, when lost to the narrow pursuit of productivity, the

1. What could it mean in your school to ‘keep alive the ministry of imagination’? What aspects need to ‘criticised’ and ‘energised’?

2. When you think about your community, to what extent do you resonate with Isaiah’s picture of ‘making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.’?

3. How can a sense of faith change our view as to what is actually possible for our community?

4. To what extent does imagination stand at the heart of great pedagogy – how can it be squeezed out, celebrated or resourced in our planning?

imagination of a child has immense potential for good or ill, and it is a raw force present in children, there for the teacher to encourage, refine, and cheer on. It can lead not only into worship and empathy with other people, but also into appreciating and sometimes creating music, art, poetry, fiction, drama, dance, and many other forms and media of communication. Other spheres of activity vital to society also thrive on imagination, such as innovative science and

technology, entrepreneurial business, politics that serves the common good, creativity in organisations and institutions, and the shaping of homes, neighbourhoods and the natural environment. Imaginative teachers can open their pupils to the significance and fascination of beauty and quality in such fields, so that they become able to envisage themselves making some contributions to them.

Nurturing Ambition

The apostle Paul was a supremely ambitious leader, leading an action-packed, geographically expansive international network which catalysed the establishment of the early Jesus movement in a string of urban centres. There were many outward signs of success and growth, yet he consistently re-defines ambition in an upside-down way. The main criterion of success is building a community that has “the same mind... that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5), centred on humble service. Not only is each person valued, but the least attractive and able are seen as of special worth in God’s eyes – “the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable... If one member suffers, then all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:22, 26) Above all, this is ambitious love. In his hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13 he relativises all other criteria – he says that, whatever his abilities, gifts, faith, generosity, and even self-sacrifice, “I am nothing... I gain nothing without love” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). This love is described very differently from most ideas of ambition (it is patient and kind, it does not insist on its own way, and more), and crucially, it involves a process of learning and maturing: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when

I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.” (1 Corinthians 13:11)

What is ambition for? Leaders are tasked with nurturing expansive ambition – which includes excellence in key subjects, designing curricula for social justice, loving the most vulnerable, broadening the definition of educational success and flourishing, and tenaciously removing barriers (including those relating to self-esteem, disability, attachment, support, resources, geography, economics) for the children in their care. Many architects of great cathedrals knew for certain, on completing their design, that they would never see the final building built. Yet they still chose to design the cathedral with creativity and humility, ambitious not their own glory, but to serve others (as outlined Paul’s description of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-11).

Leaders recognise the factors that stifle positive ambition (including fear of failure, lack of trust, loss of momentum, absence of self-esteem, breaking of relationship), and therefore recognise that the nurture of this broader sense of ambition takes time and patience, and can rarely be achieved by force or instruction. They protect and water emerging green shoots, and teach their teams to do the same, creating learning cultures and classrooms that enable a shift in the ambition of children.

1. What are you ambitious for as a leader, as a team? How would people know what motivates you and your hopes for your organisation’s future?

2. What could it mean for your team to ‘protect and water emerging green shoots’? What role might patience play in nurturing ambition?

3. How might education feel like designing and building a cathedral you might never see?

4. What factors have tended to stifle ambition in your context? What resources and relationships could you draw on to re-build that which is broken?

4.5 Healing Relationships – Pursuing Renewal

Leaders in education recognise that hope grows in the fertile soil of positive relationships, and show empathy, humility, grace and forgiveness in their interactions. They cope wisely with things and people going wrong, taking difficult decisions and offering compassionate understanding and fresh starts. They draw colleagues together around a common purpose. Leaders take time to understand the past, and pursue transformative futures for the children, families, colleagues and communities they serve.

Healing Relationships

In the drama of ongoing life, relationships often go wrong. Schools are complex institutions, with intricate webs of people working and living together, and are often the only place where disparate community groups meet each other. There is power and prejudice, pleasure and pain. We are created to be social beings, flourishing together in community, yet where the relationships are not right, hope and aspiration can be blocked and frustrated.

Love is at the heart of the biblical narrative, its golden thread woven through the Old and New Testaments – it is the headline of the gospel, the centrepiece of the divine. When Jesus is asked to name the greatest commandment in the law, he follows the Deuteronomy 6:5 central Torah command – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”, by quoting Leviticus 19:18 – “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). The climax of New Testament teaching on love comes in the letters of Paul and John. In both, the radicality of the imperative to love is accompanied not only by assurance of the prior abundance of God’s love for us but also by realism about our many failures in love and our constant need for forgiveness. John is clear about all three: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness... Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another... God is love, and those who abide in love abide in

God, and God abides in them... We love because God first loved us.” (1 John 1:8-10, 4:11, 16, 19)

God’s vision for relationships is not rose-tinted nor fair-weather, but grounded in the challenge, shaped by the storm: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” (Proverbs 17:17). In the same way, leaders are called to find a way back – a journey of healing, and a recognition that there is hope for broken relationships. Wise leaders show humility, contrition, patience, forgiveness, inclusion and openness to fresh starts. Teachers who know this create the climate for learning by the quality of their relationships; wise behaviour management works out love in the midst of conflict; wise line management recognises how vital relationships are for the flourishing of colleagues. Healing relationships through the art of the difficult conversation is frequently more about listening than talking.

Paul is regularly seen to be urging people to reconcile and heal their relationships – “May the God who gives you endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus” (Romans 15:5), “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:12-13) and “...be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3). He turns to the metaphor of ‘one body, many parts’ working well together

1. Where at the moment are ‘relationships not right’ in your teams, and what might it take to heal, repair and renew?

2. To what extent do you and your leaders ‘show humility, contrition, patience, forgiveness, inclusion and openness to fresh starts’? What impact can this have on children who are watching and learning from your adult relationships?

3. To what extent do you agree that ‘the art of the difficult conversation is frequently more about listening than talking’?

4. We are given the example of ‘the suffering servant Jesus, who even at the point of total darkness on the cross, finds forgiveness for his executioners’. How might we ‘reframe [our] relationships in the light of the love and grace afforded to themselves, trying to see each person through God’s eyes.’?

to illustrate the kind of hopeful communities he was seeking to build, both in Romans 12:4-8, and in more depth in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, the prelude to his great hymn of love.

The Christian resources for turning things around do not come from well-meaning gestures or simply being kind. Rather, the

radical forgiveness and grace that we are to offer one another draws its inspiration from the suffering servant Jesus, who even at the point of total darkness on the cross, finds forgiveness for his executioners. Leaders reframe their relationships in the light of the love and grace afforded to themselves, trying to see each person through God's eyes.

Pursuing Renewal

A Christian understanding of relationships seeks healing, repair, forgiveness, and renewal, but not without acknowledging problems, dealing with them, and creating the conditions for fresh starts. Situations can be turned around, people can change, and hope refuses to let bad situations or actions have the last word. In the light of Christ there is always a way back, even if it is often hard; there is always the offer of newness and fullness of life, even if it may be costly. This stands at the heart of restorative justice, behaviour management systems, and exclusion practices.

Jesus offers a new vision of what we are invited into. His promise of life in all its fullness is given when he describes himself as the good shepherd who calls his sheep by name, loves them to the point of laying down his life for them, and opens up a vision of an ever-wider, united community (John 10:1-18). A school where the things that go wrong are faced in that spirit can nurture in children a lifetime of perseverance in hope. The same spirit can motivate teachers to be patient with difficult pupils, leaders to

take on difficult schools, and schools to accept those excluded elsewhere.

In the midst of hardships, vulnerability and challenges to his leadership, Paul expresses confidence to the Corinthians "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17), echoing the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:19). Education creates good possibilities and surprises, and imaginative, hopeful teachers can invite children to be open to welcoming them.

Renewal is not only concerned with the new, it also encourages the continuation and consistency of that which is good – just as we renew a library book that has gripped us, a subscription, or a contract. In times of crisis, faithfulness to the tried and tested can be vital, and holding trust and hope in the bigger picture is a special responsibility of leaders. Hopeful leaders pursue and chase down renewal, confident in their values and bold in their hope.

1. Can your team sometimes 'let bad situations or actions have the last word'? What is the impact of this on morale or team spirit?
2. To what extent do you agree that 'in the light of Christ there is always a way back'? How could this affect your policies for behaviour management or exclusion?
3. How can your leadership choices reflect your hopes not your fears?
4. How can things going wrong lead to the development of perseverance and a renewal of hope?

4.6 Sustaining Vision – Building Resilience

Leading in education is grounded in a picture of the future that inspires passion that lasts. While good leaders create vision, great leaders sustain it. Leaders demonstrate that hope is sticking around, providing consistency and dependability for the long term. Teams with sustained vision can still see where they are going in the dark times, and they grow through the difficulties they face together. Leaders show that resilience is not simply coping or working harder. Leaders are changed and transformed through adversity, as their skills and character are formed in the crucible of the challenge.

Sustaining Vision

The story of the people of Israel in the Old Testament is one of sustaining vision. There are complex dimensions to the narrative in terms of history, geography, politics, sociology, relationships with God, each other, and their enemies. There are times of revelation, dedication and flourishing, and long periods of confusion, suffering and patience. There are people who experience elation and success, and others who never get to see the future towards which they were leading (we might consider the timing of the death of Moses, still having not reached the promised land in Deuteronomy 34:12). While contemporary leadership discourse rightly places significant weight on creating and sharing a vision, the idea of sustenance for the long-term is central to the biblical narrative.

Sustaining is not simply doggedly holding to a particular position, or reinforcing particular traditions, but rather it is about the basic convictions and commitments we live by and grow in, and being open to radical change. Vision is sustainable even if circumstances and situations are against you. The prophet Jeremiah shares the secret of long-term flourishing – “Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:7-8) Then, he writes with encouragement and hope: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope... When you search

for me, you will find me...” (Jeremiah 29:4-13) That letter has encouraged many going through crises to sustain in the present the practices and prayer required by commitment to future generations.

Contrary to some short-term and volatile elements of our educational landscape, a Christian vision is oriented to the long term, and sustained through drought and plenty, through highs and lows, or, as Paul puts it, “through good report and bad report” (2 Corinthians 6:8). He explains this vision is ambitious – “Therefore since we have such a hope, we are very bold.” (2 Corinthians 3:12) – and requires orientation beyond our current reality towards what is not yet visible – “for we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Sustaining vision is an inherently patient leadership activity.

Paul is writing to a church in Corinth that was still very young, at its foundational stage. He had already inspired them with the expansive vision of what a church could be in 1 Corinthians, with teaching about the cross and the resurrection, having “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16), teamwork, leadership, ethics, the Lord’s Supper, worship, gifting, how to be a united community, and love put into action. However, just a few years later, things were not going as well, and the vision, which had started off so promisingly, needed to be sustained. A Christian understanding of vision does not assume that everything is consistently getting better. It acknowledges that life is not like that, and recognises that in seeking to sustain vision, the building of resilience in individuals and teams is vital.

1. How important are consistency, dependability and ‘sticking around’ in leadership?
2. What resources does your team need to draw on in order to sustain a vision, as oppose to merely create it?
3. To what extent do you agree that ‘Vision is sustainable even if circumstances and situations are against you’? How could this be reflected in your actions and decision making?
4. How could prayer help you gain a different perspective on your situation? How could you make time for this, in the rhythm of your day? Who would be good to share with?

Building Resilience

Resilience is often offered as a catch-all solution to many of the pressures we face – if only the children, teachers, or budget were more resilient. It's a pervasive concept. From Latin roots, we draw the English verb “to resile” – meaning ‘to return to the same place’, to ‘spring back’, or ‘return to normal’. However, the word itself can feel quite uninspiring – easily reduced to just determination, grit, hanging in there, or getting through. Such an important concept merits some consideration of how it is built up in leaders who are seeking to sustain their vision.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul shares very vulnerably about the source of his resilience and his hope, which starts by acknowledging the challenges, writing “we were under pressure, far beyond our ability to cope” (2 Corinthians 1:8) and then later, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). He shares physical challenges (hunger, thirst, lack of sleep, pain) and yet finds these are an opportunity for growth and blessing, acknowledging the promise of God that “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:8).

This is the upside-down ecology of God's kingdom, where in our weakness we can become strong, and in our humility we grow deeper roots. It trusts Jesus, who offers “life in all its fullness” yet shows the ultimate vulnerability in suffering. He fails to fulfil contemporary expectations of a dominant warrior Messiah, rather fulfilling the description of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him... a man of suffering,

and familiar with pain.” In another of Paul's letters, to the church in Rome, he traces the deep interconnection between key elements – “we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5)

Jesus' offer of “life in all its fullness” is not rose-tinted or naïve. The Christian life does not offer exemption from challenge, or removal of suffering. Rather it gives us a lens through which to see our challenges, and recognises that in our most challenging or painful times, God is at work in us, both as individuals and teams – guiding, strengthening, refining and re-focusing us, enabling us to bounce back stronger. In *The Road to Character*, David Brooks writes: “Most people shoot for happiness, but feel formed through suffering... Suffering, like love, shatters the illusion of self-mastery... [and] oddly teaches gratitude.” (Brooks 2015: 93-94)

Leaders who are seeking to build resilience in themselves and their teams can reflect deeply on this counter-cultural model of leadership, based on servanthood and suffering. While school leaders may not face the same physical persecution, fear, imprisonment or beatings that Paul experienced, they will daily be confronted with severe challenges to their resilience – disciplinaries, budget cuts, complaints, safeguarding tragedies, exclusions, accountability – and a Christian understanding of resilience is that God is at work in the challenge, re-shaping us and further developing our character, building our hope, and sustaining our vision.

1. From where do you get your resilience as a leader?
2. How might you define resilience in your organisation? What practical strategies or experiences do you think help to build resilience in teams? Is it the same for adults and children?
3. How does the Christian narrative help us to deal with disappointment? What kind of lens or perspective does your understanding of God bring?
4. Are there circumstances where you have experienced the need to rely on God? How has this affected your leadership journey?

4.7 Removing Disadvantage – Seeking Reconciliation

Leaders in education are called to pursue social justice and wellbeing of all, showing love for the disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable. They create and implement a curriculum that liberates and empowers children and communities. Barriers are removed by wise pedagogy, transformative pastoral care and wise allocation of resources. Leaders build schools that enable disparate communities to live well together, rooted in dialogue, empathy and love. Their schools become beacons of restoration, filled with peace-seeking, environment-saving, community-loving activists.

Removing Disadvantage

Both the Old and New Testaments insist that God's desire is for generosity, love and practical action towards the poor, the marginalised, the oppressed and the immigrant. "The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18), so in staying close to those who are suffering we stay near to God. In announcing his own ministry, Jesus quotes the sleeves-rolled-up action-packed mission of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18-19), and our vision for education must show special concern for the disadvantaged. In starting a new church community in Galatia, Paul was questioned by the other apostles as to his actions and motives. He writes, "All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along." (Galatians 2:10). Wisdom, knowledge and skills, hope and aspiration, and the support of a community that gives children dignity, and treats them as unique and precious – leaders understand that these combine to liberate children, giving freedom to learn, grow, relate, create and flourish. Their curricular decisions reflect this pursuit of emancipation.

Removing disadvantage has implications for admissions policies and the extent to which they reflect the pursuit of social justice and equity. Jesus tells the story of an unlikely party: "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind and you will be blessed." (Luke 14:13).

Social justice requires proactive advocacy, seeking justice and compassion, having the courage to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are poor." (Proverbs 31:8). It opens up learning experiences that may otherwise be unlikely, empowering children with what Professor Michael Young calls "powerful knowledge" (Young and Lambert 2013: 39), building cultural capital for the benefit of the whole community.

This is so central to the biblical message that it does not simply define the intended ethical behaviour patterns of believers, but the very nature of the worship that we are to bring to a God who, the Psalmist says, "secures justice for the poor" (Psalm 140:12). Isaiah is stern: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free...to share your food with the hungry...to provide the poor with shelter..." (Isaiah 58:6-7), while Micah is concise: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Leaders who remove disadvantage make tough decisions together about admissions, partnerships, relationships, resources, and curriculum. They take a road less travelled but do so with a deep sense of vocation and thrive in networks who can support one another in this journey of love in action. There may be no more tangible way of extending God's kingdom in a community than the removal of disadvantage through the transformative beacon of a school minded to choose this path: it becomes a sign of the possibility of abundant life for all.

1. How can our schools show 'generosity, love and practical action towards the poor, the marginalised, the oppressed and the lonely'?
2. How do you define disadvantage in your community? What are the issues and how does your leadership approach help to address these?
3. To what extent does our curriculum help to 'liberate children, giving freedom to learn, grow, relate, create and flourish'?
4. What role does a school play in the expression of God's kingdom in your community? How does this relate to the role of the local church?

Seeking Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the healing of broken, wounded or distrustful relationships, in honest recognition of past hurts. Our society has many such relationships at all levels, such as polarised politics, divisions centred on wealth, class and culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, family, health and disability, and conflicting responses to controversial issues such as the environmental crisis, immigration, or crime. All of these affect schools. So, can schools be places where reconciliation can be learned and practised? They have daily opportunities to attempt to do so.

Christians trust that God is a God of peace in the fullest sense, far more than the absence of war and conflict, and that there are resources for peace-making and peacebuilding in both Christian and other traditions – religious and non-religious. A healthily plural school is where both staff and children are learning to put energy, thought and imagination into forming a culture of reconciliation. Be reconcilers! is an imperative for all.

A Christian understanding of reconciliation first of all hopes in God, and in Jesus as embodying peace – with God, within ourselves, with others, and with creation. Our first response is to trust that this peace has the last word – this is the good news. So we can face and repent of our own part in alienation, conflict and bad relationships. Then we can wholeheartedly be reconcilers.

School leaders need to face difficult questions, and work out with staff, children, parents and other stakeholders how best to tackle them. How are deeply held yet historically-divided identities to be treated in school? Leaders can work out ways in which deep divisions and related conflicts can become occasions for resolving some of them, improving the quality of our disagreements about others, and learning how to be a community where we live in mutual respect, understanding and peace. A school that does that is making one of the most important of all contributions to its members and to society.

1. What are the key issues or relationships in your community that are in need of reconciliation? What is your first move towards this?
2. To what extent does faith/religion help us think about ideas of reconciliation and inclusion, when it may have a historical reputation for reinforcing or contributing to social division and conflict?
3. What would it mean for your school to become a 'beacon of restoration, filled with peace-seeking, environment-saving, community-loving activists'?
4. What part does humility and authenticity play in facilitating reconciliation in a community?



4.8 Accepting Vulnerability – Demonstrating Generosity

Leading in education makes room for vulnerability, present in life-giving relationships, pastoral care, and processes such as supervision, mentoring and coaching. Leaders recognise the importance of mutual support and encouragement and create hospitable environments in which students and adults feel able to be vulnerable, thus deepening their connection with one another. They lead generously, supporting an economy of grace and collaboration within and between institutions, and they look outwards, using their limited resources, time, money and expertise in line with their vision.

Accepting Vulnerability

Vulnerability can lead to being hurt: in the sting of the short term, and the lingering pain of the long. Through vulnerability, leaders show that they care, and that their teams matter, but it is risky. It is an appeal for understanding, trust, gentleness, and a matching response, but these may not be given. Yet, when the risk is taken and the response does match, there can be a quantum leap in trust, solidarity and energy. We do not always expect our leaders to be vulnerable, yet the releasing realism of this stands at the heart of the Christian message.

Jesus lived vulnerably. He was born poor, soon became a refugee, and during his ministry had no fixed home. He went around teaching, healing, forgiving, and controversially relating to those who were marginal, powerless, or outcast. He gathered disciples, offered them teaching and friendship, and opened himself to their misunderstanding, denial and betrayal. He challenged the rich and powerful, and those who dominated the religious and political institutions, exposing himself to their enmity. He wept over Jerusalem and at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, and pleaded with his disciples to watch with him as he agonised in Gethsemane. The humiliation and violence of the cross bring all this to its greatest intensity.

That might seem to prove the failure of a life of vulnerable love, but the good news of the gospel is that it is not the last word. Through his resurrection, the sharing of his Spirit, and the transformation of his followers he inspires others to risk living

in humble service and love, challenging the dominance of invulnerable toughness, violence, hardheartedness, ‘might is right’, and those who fail to recognise the preciousness and dignity of each person. This includes those who are weak, sick, bereaved and mourning, poor, very young, very old, or very different.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) distils the wisdom of this way, in which it is conceivable to turn the other cheek when struck, to love enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, to be free of anxiety about food, drink and clothes, and to do to others as we would have them do to us. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-11) headline not only the importance of risky vulnerability but also the overwhelming blessings that come to those who persevere in this way:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek [the Greek word, *praeis*, also means gentle and humble], for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”.

1. What can we learn as leaders from the example of Jesus’ vulnerability in his story?
2. To what extent do you think your team is vulnerable with one another, and what difference does it make to your relationships when they are? What are the challenges of a lack of vulnerability for the trust of a team?
3. How do you resonate with Paul’s image of ‘treasures in jars of clay’? What could you draw from this picture for yourself and your colleagues?
4. Where is the balance between having the highest standards, and also developing self-compassion in your leadership?

There is no suggestion that such exposure in, for example, gentleness, a passion for justice, or showing compassion, is cost-free or always successful in the short term, but there is a trust that it leads to comfort, full life, deep peace and joy, and communities where all can flourish. And the tragic costs of the alternatives, such as hardheartedness and invulnerability, brutality, indifference, injustice, mercilessness, and endless bitterness and conflict, are far, far greater. To be with Jesus as he says, “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29), is to lead one’s life in a different way.

Paul’s frank letters are themselves an exposure to rejection and disappointment, as he appeals

passionately to his churches and agonises in his love and pastoral care for them. And this was backed up by his willingness to expose himself to imprisonment, floggings, and multiple dangers, adding: “...we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:7-8). Such concern, empathy, and fellow-feeling to the point of identification are marks of a leader whose exercise of authority includes being in vulnerable solidarity with his or her community, shown by pastoral care, mentoring and other sensitive school practices.

Demonstrating Generosity

The remarkable description of an economy of generosity given by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8-9 succeeds both in being inspired by the gospel (2 Corinthians 8:9) and being realistic about available resources and what can lovingly and fairly be achieved in that situation. In the culminating encouragement of generosity, the giving of money is taken up into a whole ecology of mutual support, thanks, prayer and love. God is both the source of abundance and “loves a cheerful giver”. There is trust that “the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”. (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

Being generous runs similar risks to behaving vulnerably, since there is no guarantee of a positive response, let alone active participation in the desired ecology of mutuality and interdependence. Meanness, selfishness, and refusal to share or risk can block the dynamics of generosity and restrict the community’s flourishing. Perhaps the scarcest resources of all are time and high-quality attention, and the leader is constantly having to make difficult decisions about diary priorities, just how much time should be given to whom and to what, and how patient to be. As with other desirable activity, practical demonstrations of generosity need to be weighed against other claims on time, energy and resources, but there is a great

difference between those schools where leaders are open to generosity whenever possible and those with a tighter, more anxious, or more restrictive attitude. The creation of an atmosphere in which volunteering, doing more than the minimum required, taking time with each other, hospitable relationships, warm encouragement, forgiveness, and other signs of generosity found among pupils requires a similar atmosphere among teaching and other staff.

A school takes decisions about relations with parents, the local community, nearby and overseas schools, charities, and many other bodies it is involved with. The quality and spirit of these engagements are key elements in demonstrating how important generosity beyond the interpersonal level is for how our society can flourish, and in modelling for pupils what good citizenship and courageous advocacy looks like.

The counterpart to generosity is gratitude, and, as Paul knew, the practice of giving thanks “in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) creates the atmosphere in which generosity thrives. School worship is a place where this can be expressed regularly, and where the abundant generosity of God in creation, history, and the gift of each person can be appreciated.

1. How does it feel when someone is generous towards you as an individual or organisation? How could the attitude of giving help our entire system to flourish?
2. What do you have to give? Do you know anyone who is in need?
3. What are you grateful for as a leader, and how could you foster a discipline of thankfulness as part of your meeting patterns? What is the relationship between gratitude and generosity?
4. What does the concept of a ‘generous God’ mean to you, and how might that shape your actions as a leader?

4.9 Inspiring Faithfulness – Embodying Integrity

Leaders in education gather colleagues around a co-created vision, attracting and retaining strong people in their teams and then enabling them to be faithful through the highs and lows of their experiences. They recognise the difference between the call to be faithful and the pressure simply to succeed. They are committed to the flourishing of their teams and earn their authority through the hard yards of integrity. Their actions evidence their words and their practice reflects their vision. Their ethical decisions are grounded in wise thinking and reflection.

Inspiring Faithfulness

The faithful leader is committed to the long haul with patience and dependability. Faith is not the absence of doubt, but the direction chosen within the doubt. It is the ability to take the next step without clarity or guarantee, but with a vision of what is not yet visible. School leaders are looked to for trustworthiness and reliability by those whose lives may often lack such figures.

Christians believe in a faithful God. Throughout the biblical narrative, this characteristic is restated in description and story, poetry and song – a dependability, security, strength, permanence and reliability in a world of change, question, doubt, pain and fear. In Exodus, God is described as “merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6), the Psalmist sings in a crisis, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4), while the prophet Malachi offers deep reassurance: “For I the Lord do not change, therefore you are not consumed.” (Malachi 3:6). The faithfulness of God echoes the faithfulness that teams long to see in their leaders.

Leaders who inspire faithfulness in their teams enable long term stability in schools. While retention of good staff can

be a challenge, strong teachers do not simply want to be retained, they want to be faithful to a vision, and inspired by their leaders, who embody integrity and hope. Leaders understand the difference between success and faithfulness, as in Jesus’ Parable of the Talents, which asks the simple question: can you be trusted to attempt something worthwhile with what you have been given? Inspiring faithfulness is often done in the most challenging circumstances where leaders show this by their reliability and steadfastness.

Working with a leader who inspires faithfulness is to experience something of the ‘loving-kindness’ of God – “Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22,23). These leaders can stretch you without abandoning you, giving courage and purpose for the journey together. They reflect the dependability and steadfastness of God, “He is a faithful God, keeping his covenant of love for a thousand generations”. (Deuteronomy 7:9) Leaders who can inspire faithfulness in their teams will find their teachers can inspire faithfulness in their classrooms.

1. What is the difference in leadership between ‘the call to be faithful and the pressure simply to succeed’?
2. How do leaders inspire faithfulness in their teams? Who have you worked with or for that has inspired this in you?
3. What is the relationship between faithfulness, recruitment and retention in schools? What are you looking for in the interview process?
4. What does it feel like to ‘take the next step without clarity or guarantee’? Do you need to see the whole staircase to take the first step’?



Embodying Integrity

The integrity of leaders is the extent to which their actions, words, budgets, diaries, agendas and decision-making reflect their values and character. This involves honesty, perseverance and reliability: “The Lord...delights in people who are trustworthy” (Proverbs 12:22). Integrity is the integrator of learning, practical wisdom, decision-making, and actions that put vision into practice. Paul gathers key related elements together in his practical list of the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Job is a biblical archetype of integrity, as commended in the story by God himself: “There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity...” (Job 2:3) Job is tested through the deaths of his children, the loss of his wealth and social standing, extreme physical suffering, and unwise spiritual advice from friends. The critical issue is whether he will stay loyal to God when stripped of nearly everything except his anguished, questioning relationship with God. He demonstrates what mature faith is like: facing challenging situations and enduring severe testing, asking the hard questions and sustaining the search for meaning, listening critically

to the opinions of others but making one’s own judgements, and letting some big questions remain open.

An integrity that is open to such a God allows for others too to maintain their particular integrity, even if it is very different. Integrity is one of the great challenges facing a plural, multi-religious and multi-secular world, and there are many areas where schools need to deal with this. Leaders need to listen as deeply as possible to what constitutes the integrity of others, to engage in appropriate conversation with them, and then, when there are practical consequences for their school, to work out through respectful discussion, negotiation, and if necessary mediation, how best to find a way forward.

On sensitive matters, there can be immense pressures exerted by special-interest groups, social media campaigns, concerned parents, and the many other stakeholders in education. The wise leader continually cultivates understanding and commitment around the school’s vision and policies and builds the networks of support that can weather storms. When the storms happen, a vital element in coming through them is confidence in the integrity and authenticity of those who lead the school.

1. If you did a survey with your colleagues, to what extent might they perceive that your ‘actions, words, budgets, diaries, agendas and decision-making’ reflect your values and character?
2. What is the relationship between integrity and authenticity in leadership?
3. How is leaders’ integrity affected by personal and professional challenges?
4. When people get things wrong in your organisation, do they feel able to share? Who gets the blame?

4.10 Celebrating Diversity – Enabling Flourishing

Leaders in education cherish diversity and inclusion, recognising that their communities are inherently better and richer in their differences. They take every opportunity to celebrate learning together, and hold their doors open to people from all backgrounds and traditions. Leaders unlock opportunities for their children to flourish in a wide variety of disciplines, not simply those that are measured. They patiently nurture development and growth, knowing that character stands at the heart of educational achievement.

Celebrating Diversity

An authentic Christian vision for living well together is one that is scandalously inclusive: where all are welcomed, and where everyone gets to play a part. Leaders should not seek diversity and inclusion just because it is the correct thing to do, we should pursue it and chase it down because it is inherently better. Diverse teams do not simply tick boxes or fulfil targets. We think, lead, teach and learn better because of our diversity.

The New Testament envisages a community where there “is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3.28). It is a community bringing their varied history, talents and desires, coming together in unity across their differences, and especially sensitive to discrimination against the disadvantaged. Indeed, Paul writes, “...there should be no division in the body... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.” (1 Corinthians 12.25-26)

While leaders embrace opportunities to celebrate living and learning together,

they recognise that the chequered history of faith-based inclusion usually requires particular attention to ethos, pedagogy, curriculum, appointments and use of resources in order to counter stereotypes of judgement, unjust discrimination, and often unconscious bias in relation to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and relations among faith groups. The dignity and integrity of each must be respected, and good practices can form generations to come, helping to re-define community, replace division, foster reconciliation, and shape ways of living better together.

The horizon within which a school lives and thinks can combine the local and the global, with concern for “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9-10). And the earth itself, on which all life depends, cannot survive without the global ecosystem and its biodiversity. There is a growing movement, not least among young people, to respond to the environmental crisis, and it needs to be resourced by education. Biodiversity is a particularly fascinating area of inquiry, and celebrating it offers an attractive opportunity for combining knowledge, imagination, and practical relevance.

1. How would you know that a school cherished and celebrated diversity and inclusion? What might you see, what might children and adults say about their experiences?
2. To what extent do you agree that ‘we think, lead, teach and learn better because of our diversity’?
3. What kind of unconscious biases do you have to work hard to remove?
4. What does it mean to live well together in your community, and how do your relationships reflect this desire?



Enabling Flourishing

Effective leaders set up systems, policies, budgets and structures to enable the flourishing of the children in their care. However, there will be few contexts where there are flourishing children without flourishing adults – and especially those in the senior staff team. The pursuit of human flourishing, in adults as in children, is multi-dimensional, including the interwoven domains of the academic, spiritual, moral, social and cultural. This is life in all its fullness, and a thirst for it is at the heart of our vision for education.

The biblical narrative highlights leaders who create the conditions for flourishing, being planted in the right place or conditions: “They will be like a tree planted by the water, that sends its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:8, see also Psalm 1:1-6, Ezekiel 17:22-24, 47:12). These leaders also know that plants are not always in flower and when necessary, are patient for the long-term. They recognise the challenges and limitations of short-term, one-shot measurement in

examinations and pursue a broader vision of flourishing for their teams, through creating the right conditions, clearing the paths and allowing people to fulfil their roles. They help each adult to understand their unique contribution to the institution and enable them to bring their best each day.

Effective teams flourish because of their diversity and quality of relationships. Jesus built a team of disciples through his ministry nourishing individual talents, creating high trust/high challenge situations, celebrating variety and giving away authority and encouraging autonomy. Adults and children flourish at different times and speeds, and there is patience for growth. Within the constant clamour of the new, leaders learn that we flourish when we stop doing things, when the gardener prunes the vine: “...every branch that does not bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” (John 15:2). We flourish not for our own sake, but so that we can look outwards and give. Leaders and their teams are themselves called to exemplify something of the abundant life to which they point.

1. To what extent does the flourishing of children depend on the flourishing of adults in flourishing teams?
2. What kinds of decisions do you make as a leadership team that directly help the flourishing of adults and children in your care?
3. How can we develop our patience in relation to flourishing – to what extent do we recognise that ‘that plants are not always in flower’?
4. What are you choosing to stop doing this term, this year? How could stopping and pruning things actually lead to flourishing?

4.11 Offering Encouragement – Encouraging Service

To lead in education is to give courage to teachers and children, rooted in energising memories and summoned by radical hopes. Leaders advocate for their people, noticing things going well, cheering on and never missing an opportunity to praise. Their encouragement and coaching nurtures leaders who go on to achieve even greater things than the leader themselves. They encourage generous acts of kindness, inspiring children to respect and serve others first.

Offering Encouragement

To *en-courage* another person is literally ‘to put heart into’ them, to give them the vision, belief and energy to start or keep moving forward, just as to ‘*in-spire*’ another is to put into them breath, or life. Courage is built on the confidence of the shared stories of our past and leads us towards an unknown future within a bigger picture. Leaders who encourage need themselves to be inspired by encouragement and resourcing – through mentoring and supervision, governors, colleagues and other stakeholders, continuing professional development, and continuing spiritual exploration and encounter.

Leaders establish rhythms of prayer – of evaluation and gratitude, reflection and grace, enabling others to come back the next day with the imagination of something new. Encouraging leaders are not rose-tinted in how they see the future, nor are they simply ‘glass half-full’ people. Rather they take challenge seriously, and they define reality accurately, even when it presents uncomfortable truth.

The biblical narrative is no stranger to suffering, and recognises times of feeling surrounded, yet comforted and assured of the bigger picture – the encouraging perspective of faith. Isaiah writes ‘when not if’: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.” (Isaiah 43:2), while the Psalmist cries out surrounded: “I lift my eyes to the mountains, where does my help

come from?” (Psalm 121:1). Jesus himself acknowledges the reality of the challenge, but gives encouragement and the offer of life in all its fullness: “In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33), while Paul opening his second letter to the church in Corinth draws repeatedly on the legal notion of a *paraclete* (or advocate), speaking of a “God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we receive from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Encouragement is fundamentally relational, following the call to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24); this kind of leadership notices others, spots the good and catches people doing well. The advocate is someone consistent in your corner, giving validation, purpose and identity, and providing a safe environment for risk-taking and growth. Their nurturing words are chosen wisely, and are offered regularly, replenishing and enabling, restoring and renewing.

Encouragement takes some of the strain of leadership, giving perspective to the pressure of success or fear of failure, and replacing this with the call to faithfulness. The Psalmist speaks of a God who is both our shade and our shadow (Psalm 17:8, 63:7, 121:5), countering our dominant educational meta-narrative of ‘not good enough’, while Jesus offers peace and rest for the busy and fearful: “Come to me, all you

1. When you think back across your journey to date, who has genuinely encouraged and inspired you in your career? What did they do, and how could you thank them?
2. In moments or seasons of challenge or crisis, how can leaders ‘enable others to come back the next day with the imagination of something new’?
3. What strikes you about the ‘when not if’ of Isaiah – ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned’?
4. To what extent do you identify with the meta-narrative of ‘not good enough’ in education? Who is in your corner, or who do you need to ask to move into your corner?

who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ...I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls". (Matthew 11:28) This relational rest is grounded in teams known for a culture of encouragement.

Leaders set the tone, noticing and appreciating, boosting, giving validation, removing the fear of risk-taking, advocating for those lacking in confidence, and drawing everyone into realising the school's vision and purpose.

Encouraging Service

The upside-down economy of biblical leadership calls us to serve first, choosing generosity and preferring the other, loving them as ourselves. Jesus' ministry shows this to be central to his calling and identity: "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27); "I have come not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45), offering a model for education leaders as they work with adults, children and communities. This service does whatever is called for, including practical help if needed. Matthew 25:31-46 gives a list of "works of mercy", including giving food, drink, clothing, healthcare and prison visiting, but the variety of possible services is endless. In schools, dinners are to be prepared, premises cleaned, rubbish disposed of, security provided, as well as many administrative, pastoral and teaching tasks fulfilled. But there are also vital tasks of leadership relating to distribution of resources, determining policy and strategy, recommending for promotion, dealing with problematic people and situations, and more. Here especially the power of leadership is exercised, and in the words of John Stott, "Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve." (Stott 1990: 375)

Service encourages the sacrifice of self, defined by a humility offered by Paul as the ultimate example for our own

relationships, first in his Philippians poetry: "...he made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross..." (Philippians 2:7-8), and then later more fully in Romans 12, in the practical guidance of devotion and honour, prayer and hospitality – considering our worship lifestyle to be one of "a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God." (Romans 12:1). Paul's concept of service and sacrifice is grounded in the earlier promises of a saviour who would not come to dominate and coerce, but to suffer and to serve as outlined in Isaiah 53.

An education grounded in encouraging service may stand counter to dominant cultural messaging for young people for simply acquiring more, yet schools are well placed to offer a vision of a life in all its fullness where service becomes a habit not simply a project. Acts of service evidence our connectedness as leaders offering intense dignity to the served. The servant leader shapes their community not by force and power but by grace and meekness, not by instruction and policy but by example and action.

1. What kinds of practical acts of service could you engage with in your community? What is the impact of servant leadership in your teams?
2. How does our character develop through acts of service and social action?
3. What might it mean for 'service to become a habit not simply a project'?
4. What can we learn from Jesus' example of service, both in terms of his words and actions? How might this relate to other leadership paradigms and models?

4.12 Practising Humility – Learning Love

Leaders in education know that humility is intrinsic to authenticity. They acknowledge their own imperfections, take responsibility for their mistakes and shine a light on other people’s successes. Their choice to serve others builds trust and enables genuine collaboration. Whether rejoicing in success or dealing with failure, they pursue love, around which everything turns and towards which everything should be drawn. This love “always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

Practising Humility

To develop the posture, orientation or lens of humility in our interactions with one another takes significant practice. It places the other above oneself, drawing on the example of Jesus as outlined by Paul: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility, value others above yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3) – indeed the prophet Micah calls us simply “...to walk humbly before your God.” (Micah 6:8). Unlike many other things we may practise, it may be unlikely we will ever master it. It stands in tension with the constant pressure to be right and builds trust with teams through placing greater honour on other people than oneself.

Humility causes us to re-orient our desires before and more in line with God: “Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding...” (Proverbs 3:5), while acknowledging that it is acceptable (and even important) to get things wrong: “If my people will humble themselves and pray and seek my face...I will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14). It is not about being self-deprecating, but rather retaining appropriate perspective and spreading the credit across teams.

Leading with humility can have profound consequences for teams, and the leader themselves. It builds others up, causing leaders to become more approachable; it avoids bitterness in the face of a challenge or mistake; it helps diffuse arguments, and also builds patience in teams and individuals for the longer term: “Humble yourselves therefore...that he may lift you up in due time.” (1 Peter 5:6).

Practising humility is not to dispel confidence and momentum, but rather asks where is that confidence placed and how secure are those foundations? “Before a downfall, the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honour.” (Proverbs 18:12). It notes that in our weakness we are strong, and our power as leaders comes from God’s grace, not our own endeavour – as Paul outlines: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9). This re-orientation defines teams, communities and cultures in schools, and is also a fundamental posture for the teacher in classroom practice, showing themselves as adults to be learners first.

1. How do you think the concepts of ‘humility’ and ‘authenticity’ relate to one another?
2. To what extent are you able to take opportunities to shine a light on other people’s successes?
3. Where is the tension between appropriate levels of humility and the confidence to talk boldly about your school to an inspector?
4. How could we demonstrate humility in the classroom, and how integral might this be to effective pedagogy?

Learning Love

A Christian vision for leadership is not just about the development of the individual leader or the team, but rather is centred on and defined by the love of God which underpins the entire biblical narrative. This is a love that is unfathomable and indescribable in scale, dimension, time and space: “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...” (Ephesians 3:17-18). It is a love that is unconditional and sacrificial: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). It is a love that is gracious, practical, inclusive, dependable, generous, restful, empowering and forgiving.

It is a love that leads to freedom, and when we learn God’s love, our desires reflect this – as James K.A. Smith simply states in the title of his book: ‘You are what you love’ (Smith 2016). This love stands above and around all the other

virtues: “...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... And over all these virtues, put on love which binds them together in perfect unity.” (Colossians 3:12-14). It is a love that envisages God not as a line manager appraising our successes and failures, but rather a compassionate parent cheering on our growth.

Learning this love challenges us as leaders to let go of other scripts or narratives in which we dwell – those of fear, comparison, or the sense that we are not good enough and do not truly belong. Learning love is discipleship – choosing who to follow (and who not to follow), and learning to serve in action, looking outward. This is a love that grounds great teaching and defines great leaders. It is never proven by words, but only evidenced in actions, and despite all our greatest endeavours, successes, triumphs or accolades, is the central definition of leadership in action.

1. Is love something you can learn? If so, how do you learn, and from whom could you learn?
2. To what extent do you see God ‘not as a line manager appraising our successes and failures, but rather a compassionate parent cheering on our growth.’ – and how does this affect our ability to love?
3. If ‘perfect love casts out fear’, how do we respond to ‘fear, comparison, or the sense that we are not good enough and do not truly belong’?
4. How can a community be encouraged to choose to ‘put on love which binds them together in perfect unity’?



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