

THE PIVOTAL MODEL: IMPROVING POSTGRADUATE LEADERSHIP LEARNING FOR PRACTISING SCHOOL LEADERS

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Abstract

The Commonwealth Government of Australia OLT-funded PIVOTAL (Partnerships, Innovation and Vitality – Opportunities for Thriving Academic Leadership) cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional research confirmed the validity of the PIVOTAL model and its positive impact on the design of postgraduate leadership courses. An improvement in students' satisfaction with the level and focus of knowledge and skills needed by school leaders who undertake Masters of Business and Masters of Education studies was identified. The research approach capitalised on developmental work informing the National Professional Standards for School Leaders which resulted in the Excellence in School Leadership model (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2011). The AITSL model was used as a framework to investigate school leadership requirements as perceived by practitioners in schools across the sectors (government and non-government) on the Sunshine Coast and in the Toowoomba region of Queensland Australia. The researchers tested the effective application of leadership theory and design of learning activities as well as perceived improvement in leadership performance within participants' complex learning communities. Focus groups were undertaken with groups of local school principals and senior school leaders. The groups were characterised as potential students, current/graduate education students and current/graduate business students. The research highlighted specific learning needs of school leaders which were not addressed in the AITSL model or through the previous postgraduate leadership courses: the importance of retaining personal vitality whilst undertaking challenging leadership roles, peer mentoring and realistic simulated leadership projects for international school leaders. The second cycle of research extended the benefits of the initial study and forms the basis for partnerships with other tertiary providers of postgraduate Education Leadership programs who are open to adopting the model in the future. Since these findings will inform leadership education in postgraduate Education and Business programs, there are also a number of cross-disciplinary benefits. The study demonstrates how lecturers in two disciplines can collaborate to enhance their scholarship of teaching and learning. The study seeks to improve the delivery of Master of Education Leadership courses in two regional universities but also has the potential to benefit other universities and education providers by establishing an effective model of leadership and trialling a set of guidelines for effective leadership curriculum design. Our findings contribute to the design of innovative leadership programs at national and international level, through an initial investigation of the needs of school leaders undertaking postgraduate study in particular regional settings.

The PIVOTAL Project (Partnership, Innovation and Vitality – Opportunities for Thriving Academic Leadership) is a cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional research project with a focus on the design of innovative leadership courses within the fields of Education and Business at the University of the Sunshine Coast in conjunction with the University of Southern Queensland. Researchers and professional practitioners (Australian school leaders) have united to investigate approaches to innovative course design that authentically contribute to the preparation of confident

and successful school leaders undertaking complex and challenging leadership roles. For the purposes of this research project, the term 'school leader' is used to describe current school principals as well as those who are currently in senior school leadership roles (for example, deputy principals, heads of departments, deans of curriculum and deans of students) and who aspire to becoming a school principal in the future. This paper highlights the importance of practitioner advocacy in future leader preparation; specific school leadership learning needs from the perspective of local practising professionals; consequent innovations to postgraduate leadership courses to enhance postgraduate study and school leader preparation; specific findings from our research (including practitioner need for increased experience in peer support and focus on 'personal vitality'); and the PIVOTAL Model with potential for application in the wider Education context and other disciplines in Australia and internationally. The research has been supported by a grant from the Commonwealth Government of Australia.

Postgraduate courses based on practitioner need and advocacy

Professional learning across the disciplines

Examples of effective approaches to post-graduate course design based on engagement with practitioners are relatively few, but those that have taken this approach present evidence of the effectiveness of the strategy. For example, Tomlin, Costello, Kostrzewski and Dhillon (2006) highlight their postgraduate program for pharmacists built on peer review and an understanding of the professional learning needs of pharmacists and factors influencing learning outcomes (2006). In the field of Engineering, Jeffrey, Stephenson and Temple (2003) advocate the incorporation of 'sustainability' as a subject in a post-graduate course in order to address practitioners' on-going learning and practical application needs. Ireland's Innovation Academy offers the Graduate Certificate in Innovation and Entrepreneurship which has been designed in partnership with practitioners. This partnership has extended the practitioner advocacy component to even greater lengths by bringing practitioners into the course to team teach with academics (Jarvis and Mitchell (2012). On a broader platform, a study by Nelson, London and Strobel (2015) investigates the 're-structuring of university – community research partnerships that facilitate theoretically-grounded research while also generating findings that community partners find actionable' (p 17). School leader advocacy is used in the PIVOTAL Project in order to enhance effectiveness of school leaders' learning experiences and preparation through their postgraduate studies.

School leadership learning

Historically, there is scant evidence of a conscious approach on the part of school systems and governments to improve school leader effectiveness through active collaboration between researchers, school leadership course designers and practising school leaders. Almost twenty years ago, Clark and Clark (1996) voiced disbelief that a national Education Summit of that year in the United States had ignored the question of the need for better preparation of educational leaders - one of the 'crucial elements' necessary for school success. One of their strategies to ameliorate this deficit is that professional learning communities should be 'catalysts for university/ school collaboration' (p. 19). Currently, it appears that many school leaders in Australia remain unprepared for the complex job ahead of them (Simon, Graham, Christie and Call, 2015).

The decades-long debate surrounding quality of school leadership preparation, national priorities, contemporary emphases and relevance to changing leadership and managerial contextual needs is well-documented by Dinham, Anderson, Caldwell and Weldon (2011). Within the state school systems in Australia school principals are increasingly being given autonomy in decision-making in order to impact on school performance, whilst independent school principals are autonomous, having been recruited on assessment of their ability to manage complex organisations. Both sectors have a fundamental need for people to take on school principal roles and be prepared well for the business of educational leadership. It is argued that what is identified as a preparation gap for school leadership can be addressed through well-designed postgraduate leadership courses which are responsive to practitioners' learning needs, maintain a wide perspective in learning activities and build

confidence in leadership capacity. Better preparation of our school leaders will lead to their increased confidence to undertake a demanding role, and will, in turn, impact favorably on the effectiveness of the school and ultimately on the learning outcomes of the students.

Leadership sustainability

For ongoing sustainability of effective practice, school principals need to be given opportunities throughout their careers to acquire and retain confidence in their management skills and leadership capacity through effective programs of study (Simon, Christie, Graham and Call, 2014). With this in mind, postgraduate studies currently must respond not only to the needs of the school sector as a whole but also to the needs of individuals (school leaders) within the sector. Innovative programs of study will not only attract students but can also be designed to ensure effective, sustainable capacity-building programs that can secure future support for school leaders. Postgraduate students have indicated through USC's Student Evaluation of Teaching and Courses (SETAC) process that collegial interaction is an essential element in their leadership learning experience. Interaction with fellow professionals can alleviate the challenges of school leadership which often cause leaders to feel isolated and unsupported.

Of most relevance to this research is Fluckiger et al's (2014) international evaluation of school leadership preparation programs which includes the following research-driven criteria for judging the quality of leadership professional learning and its likely success and sustainability:

1. Philosophically and theoretically attuned to individual and system needs in leadership and professional learning.
2. Goal oriented, with primacy given to the dual aims of school improvement and improvement in student learning and achievement.
3. Informed by the weight of research evidence.
4. Time rich, allowing for learning sequences to be spaced and interspersed with collegial support, in-school applications and reflective encounters.
5. Practice-centred, so that knowledge is taken back into the school in ways that maximise the effects of leadership capability.
6. Purpose designed for specific career stages, with ready transfer of theory and knowledge into practice.
7. Peer-supported within or beyond the school, so that feedback helps to transfer theory and knowledge into improved practice.
8. Context sensitive, and thus able to build in and make relevant use of school leaders' knowledge of their circumstances.
9. Partnership-powered, with external support through joint ventures involving associations, universities and the wider professional world.
10. Committed to evaluating the effects on leaders, as well as on school practices to which their learning applies.

The Practice-centred criterion (5) and the Partnership-powered criterion (9) feature most strongly in the PIVOTAL research project, especially in terms of how practitioner advocacy can affect postgraduate course design. In order to fully demonstrate the alignment and impact that the focus of these two criteria have had on leadership preparation, the following section elaborates on the aims, methodology and findings of the PIVOTAL Project to date. It concludes with the PIVOTAL Model, which brings together the relevant dimensions of this research project.

The PIVOTAL Project – Partnerships, Innovation, Vitality – Opportunities for Academic Leadership

Aims

The PIVOTAL Project has a goal of being the catalyst for innovation and change within the postgraduate learning experiences of school leaders and to inform the future direction of postgraduate leadership studies within both Business and Education. The connection between Education and

Business studies is that, whilst school leaders often choose to study a Master of Education, a number of them choose to undertake an MBA (Master of Business Management). This is based on the fact that principals and business managers in the state sector in Queensland are being given increasing autonomy and greater responsibility for financial, human resource and operational management matters and therefore have learning needs aligned to these new responsibilities. Principals and business managers in the independent sector have had such responsibilities and autonomy previously, but stepping up into such a leadership role from what may have been predominantly an educational leadership role within a school likewise requires new skills and knowledge which can be obtained through studying within such a postgraduate Business program. Thus, the processes and outcomes of this project became increasingly aligned with Practice-centred criterion (5) (Fluckiger, 2014) in order to reflect these significant leadership learning needs. At the same time, improved communication with and development of partnerships between higher education institutions and practitioners - external education colleagues, employers, schools and associations - was deemed to be a favourable outcome for all parties and one which would sustain the process over time. The effectiveness of subsequent innovations to course design as perceived by students is being systematically tested after each phase in order to draw conclusions regarding the level of sustainability of the approach.

A central feature of the project is that of responding to practitioner and student feedback, an approach which reflects Fluckiger et al's (2014) Partnership-powered criterion (9) (2014). Reference Groups of school principals representing a range of education sectors (State, Catholic and Independent) have maximized input from Queensland schools in this research. Thus, through taking a 'practice-centred' and 'partnerships-powered' approach to catering to leadership learning needs (Fluckiger et al, 2014), the result has been an increase in opportunities for collegial interaction and for innovative revisions to be incorporated into postgraduate courses to the benefit of future school leaders.

Methodology

Prior to external consultation regarding leadership learning needs, an analysis was conducted utilising data received through the universities' processes of Student Evaluation of Teaching and Courses (SETAC) for the Master of Education (M Ed) and the Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programs over the past three years, the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) and the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ). However, it was believed that the establishment of Reference Groups would provide essential contextualisation and clarity concerning leadership needs across all sectors of schooling and that would be important to meet early in the planning stage. Consequently, working closely with representative external educators to maximise input from schools, this research benefitted significantly from gathering input from a Reference Group convened for this specific purpose at USC and through a broad investigation and sector scan completed at USQ as part of the process for re-accreditation. At USC, principals selected from local schools across the sectors (state, catholic and independent) participated in a facilitated discussion at USC's Innovation Centre.

The next phase incorporated the opportunity to participate in online surveys and focus group discussions between current and past M Ed and EMBA students who are also practising (or aspiring) school principals. To provide indication of the scope of the research, there were 55 school leaders who were invited to participate at USC, with 52% completing the survey and 41% participating in focus group discussions. The focus group sessions with these participants expanded further on the trends identified in the online surveys. The *Integrated Model of Professional Standards for Principals* (AITSL, 2011) (Figure 1) was used as the framework for research questions incorporating AITSL's designated *Leadership Requirements* of: Vision and Values, Knowledge and Understanding and Personal Qualities, Social and Interpersonal skills, and the *Professional Practices* of: Leading teaching and learning; Developing self and others; Leading improvement innovation and change; Leading the management of the school; and Engaging and working with the community. The process involved two stages - online surveys and focus groups were held in October 2014 to inform potential changes to programs, followed by a second stage of online surveys and focus groups in June 2015 to evaluate the changes incorporated in identified courses.

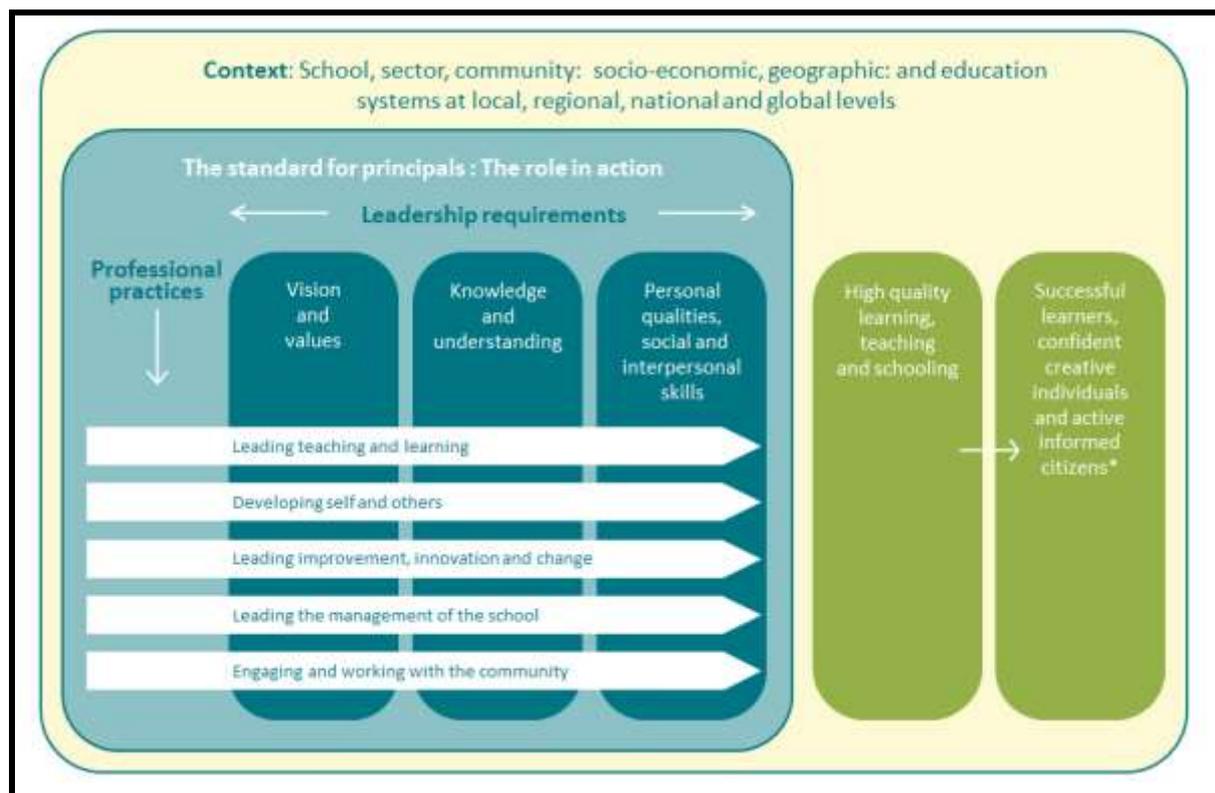


Figure 1. *Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2011)*

The PIVOTAL Project has its origins in the developmental work informing the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2011) (Figure 1). AITSL’s model, used as a framework in this research, clearly aligns *Leadership Requirements* with *Professional Practice* demands within unique learning environments, leading to what is anticipated will be ‘high quality learning, teaching and schooling’, which then leads to ‘successful learners, confident, creative individuals and active, informed citizens’. An extensive review of the literature conducted by Dempster, Lovett and Fluckiger (2011) underpinned the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2011). The PIVOTAL project has been inspired and influenced by this work and aims to address what Dempster et al. define as a ‘gap in research regarding the effects of leadership learning experiences and subsequent development’ (p. 35). The cyclical stages of the PIVOTAL research, application of findings, innovations based on practitioner advocacy and the evaluation of impact on leadership learning, are depicted graphically in Figure 2:

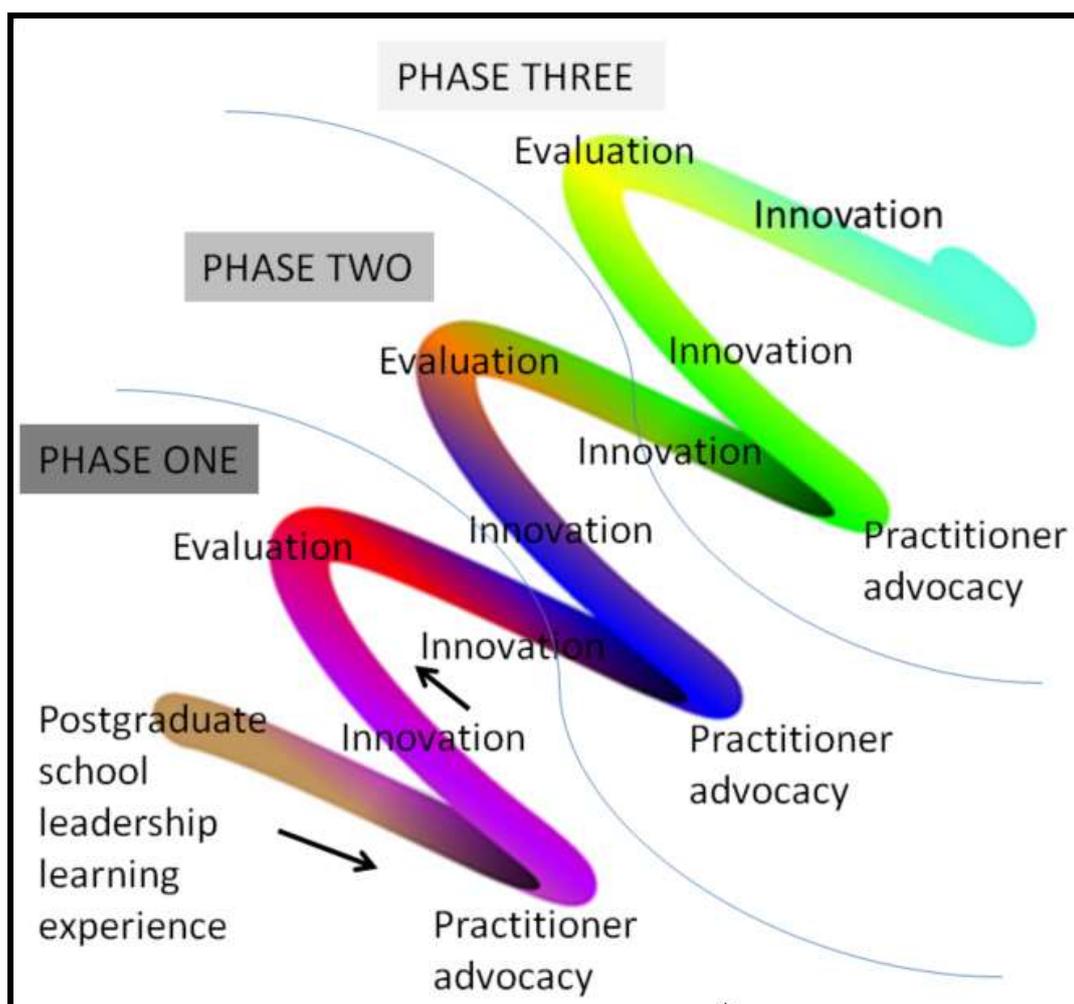


Figure 2: The PIVOTAL Project 2014

Innovations based on findings

Practitioner advocacy provided guidance regarding changes which were deemed necessary to impact favourably on school leadership confidence and effectiveness. Innovations incorporated into courses, therefore, were also intended to improve leadership confidence and practice in varying contextual situations. Various elements of innovation, based on findings from the research have been embedded in leadership courses during 2015:

Personal vitality

Practitioner comments during the Reference Groups and Focus Group sessions (2014) alerted the PIVOTAL research team to the topic of ‘personal vitality’ for leaders undertaking demanding leadership roles with potential stress on the individual. Practitioners felt that ‘personal vitality’ had been omitted from the model – but that this was an essential criterion in the preparation, development and sustainability of school leaders: they spoke with passion for their schools and the work they do, but made reference to the difficulties faced in maintaining their own vitality at times. This, they believed, was partly a consequence of the long working hours entailed in the job, competing and complex responsibilities and tasks, and a lack of peer support. However, they emphasised that the difficulties in maintaining ‘personal vitality’ were compounded by a general unawareness in those around them of school leadership demands and the toll this has on them as individuals (Simon et al., 2015).

Investigations into the concept of ‘personal vitality’ commenced, yielding little evidence in the literature. Of the relevant studies identified, Earley, Weindling, Bubba and Glenn’s ‘Future Leaders’ study (2009) does have a focus on ‘sustainability, well-being, recruitment and retention’ of

UK school leaders. However, the more recent National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services *10 Strong claims about successful school leadership* (2010) does not allude to any such specific component of personally sustainable leadership development in UK, with the most relevant comment being that 'self-efficacy, commitment and a sense of well-being' can 'indirectly influence pupil outcomes' (p.3).

At a national level, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2011) identifies 'Developing self and others' as one of the key *Professional Practices*. Within this criterion, the school leader will 'model effective leadership and (be) committed to their own ongoing professional development and personal health and wellbeing in order to manage the complexity of the role and the range of learning capabilities and actions required of the role' (AITSL, 2011). The research team considered that being committed to personal health and wellbeing, whilst crucial to performing the role, does not necessarily emphasise the invaluable capacity to retain the original motivation to teach and lead young people nor does it address ways to ensure sustainability of the essential 'personal vitality' for the duration of a career. Emphasising this aspect of leadership sustenance was suggested by practitioners participating in our research to be essential in postgraduate leadership courses and that including this content would better prepare school leaders for their roles.

The PIVOTAL research team consequently analysed a broad range of literature on seven related, interconnecting themes which have informed the development of a 'personal vitality' model which has been included in educational leadership course content in 2015 (Simon et al., 2015). These seven dimensions come together in Figure 3, highlighting the contributing factors to the phenomenon of 'personal vitality' for leaders in schools.



Figure 3: Dimensions of Vitality in School Leadership (Simon, Graham, Christie and Call, 2015)

Future research will build on the existing body of research into these dimensions and provide increased understanding in this overlooked yet important concept of 'personal vitality' for effective

school leadership development: Motivational roots (Gottfried, 2011, and Murphy, 2011); Emotions (Beatty, 2006 and Morrison, 2011); Self-efficacy and wellbeing (Devos, Bouckenooghe, Engels, Hotton and Aelterman's study (2007); View of role / leader efficacy (Hannah, 2008 and Fernet, 2011); Reaction to stress (AITSL, 2011 and Robbins, 2013); Coaching / mentoring (Carey, Philippon and Cummings, 2011 and Fluckiger et al.,2014); and, the Vitality - Fragility Continuum (Moss, 2009, Guglielmi, 2012 and Maulding, 2012).

Peer mentoring

Feedback from the practitioner Reference Groups and Focus Groups in 2014 endorsed the important *Leadership Requirements* and *Professional Practices* of the AITSL model (2011). However, they advocated additional opportunities to develop peer mentoring skills, and consequently these were incorporated into leadership courses for 2015. For example, the postgraduate leadership course in the Master of Education Program at USC now includes 'Peer Review' and 'Professional Learning Conversations' as part of assessment tasks in order to respond to practitioner requests for increased peer mentoring (Table 1). Students confirmed that their leadership capacity was impacted by these activities; for example, regarding the peer review activities, students commented during the feedback sessions:

- *Very helpful, it helped to confirm some of my own thoughts about my journey.*
- *I feel this is a great and valid process for gaining a broad and holistic view and insight into future considerations and development.*
- *It is always beneficial to receive feedback from leaders and peers who may have a different leadership style to you.*

(USC Educational Leadership students' comments, 2015)

Other innovations to leadership courses:

The creation of specialised readings for educational leaders in specific contexts (for example, school communities, higher education environments and clinical settings) was incorporated in response to student feedback. The introduction of a simulated leadership project catered for students not currently engaged in leading learning in a formal setting (for example international students and those not currently working in their usual learning environment for personal reasons). Table 1 illustrates all innovations (peer mentoring, personal vitality model, simulated leadership project and specialised readings for context) included in assessment tasks in the USC Master of Education leadership course – innovations informed by practitioner advocacy and student feedback during the research:

Table 1: USC M Ed leadership course EDU705, Semester 1 2015

 University of the Sunshine Coast Queensland, Australia	EDU705: <i>Leadership for Learning Communities</i>
Assessment Task 1: <i>Presentation of Intended Leadership Project</i>	<p>You will develop and outline the Leadership Project* you intend to undertake in your chosen community including the rationale for undertaking the project at this time in this context, your approach to leading change and innovation as well as the anticipated outcomes of the project.</p> <p>You deliver a presentation to your peers during scheduled course time. You peer-review other presentations and consequently reflect on the feedback you receive from others in order to develop your own and others' leadership skills.</p> <p>The focus of the presentation is an exploration of your intended Leadership Project. The peer-reviews will be undertaken during the class presentations and using a provided template based on the learning outcomes of the course. Your reflection, based on your own and others' reviews of your presentation, will be created individually and should relate to the learning outcomes of the course.</p>
	<p>You deliver a multi-media presentation to a community group relevant to your</p>

<p>Assessment Task 2: <i>Leadership Project multi-media presentations, Professional Learning Conversations and Reflection</i></p>	<p>Leadership Project*. A key purpose of this presentation is to enrol support and engage the group in the Leadership Project. Specifically, in your presentation you outline the proposed Leadership Project and the intended outcomes. Further, you demonstrate understandings in relation to futures thinking and identify emerging problems, trends and/or issues in learning communities. You also articulate the proposed action to be undertaken in your own context in terms of improving leadership and organisational capacity.</p> <p>You participate in Professional Learning Conversations based on yours and others' presentations. You then reflect further on your own and others' leadership growth and development during this course.</p> <p>Oral presentation, participation in a Professional Learning Conversation and written reflection.</p>
<p>Assessment Task 3: <i>Leadership Folio</i></p>	<p>You are to compile a Leadership Folio based on your Leadership Project*. You are encouraged to use the folio as a basis for critical conversations within your community, celebration at the close of the program and, importantly, for your multi-media presentation to a community group relevant to your actual Leadership Project. The portfolio consists of a series of evidentiary artefacts that offer insights into a personal/professional leadership framework that articulates a philosophical and theoretical statement about your concept of leadership for the 21st century. Such a statement includes an articulation of values and beliefs, along with evidence of how the statement resonates with specific learning contexts, your personal learning journey, as well as current literature, research, trends and issues in Education.</p>
<p>*For students who do not currently have a leadership role in a school or another learning community, a range of appropriate simulated leadership projects will be provided for them to choose an appropriate one. The chosen simulation will entail periodic interventions which will mirror real-life leadership scenarios and necessitate reflection and remedial action</p>	

Data gathered through the SETAC process at the end of Semester 1, 2015, is available at the time of writing and samples of qualitative responses to EDU705 are included in Table 2 below. Analysis of the data gathered in the Focus Groups of Education and Business students in June 2015 will inform future dissemination outputs.

Table 2: Sample comments from SETAC feedback, Semester 1 2015

<p>SETAC (Student Evaluation of Teaching and Courses) feedback from USC M Ed leadership students Semester 1 2015.</p>	
<p><i>I learnt a lot about myself as a teacher and a leader</i></p>	<p><i>The professional conversation was a great process.</i></p>
<p><i>Great course that has enhanced my knowledge and growth of leadership traits, qualities and direction as a result of the project.</i></p>	<p><i>This course forced reflection due to the assessment pieces. This proved invaluable - particularly when teamed with peer review practices.</i></p>
<p><i>The peer review concept was conducive to giving me insight into giving and receiving constructive and positive feedback through a professional process.</i></p>	

Outputs from PIVOTAL research

The PIVOTAL Model

A theoretical model reflecting the process adopted in the PIVOTAL research incorporates the concepts of Partnerships, Innovation, Vitality and Opportunities for Thriving Academic Leadership

(Figure 4).

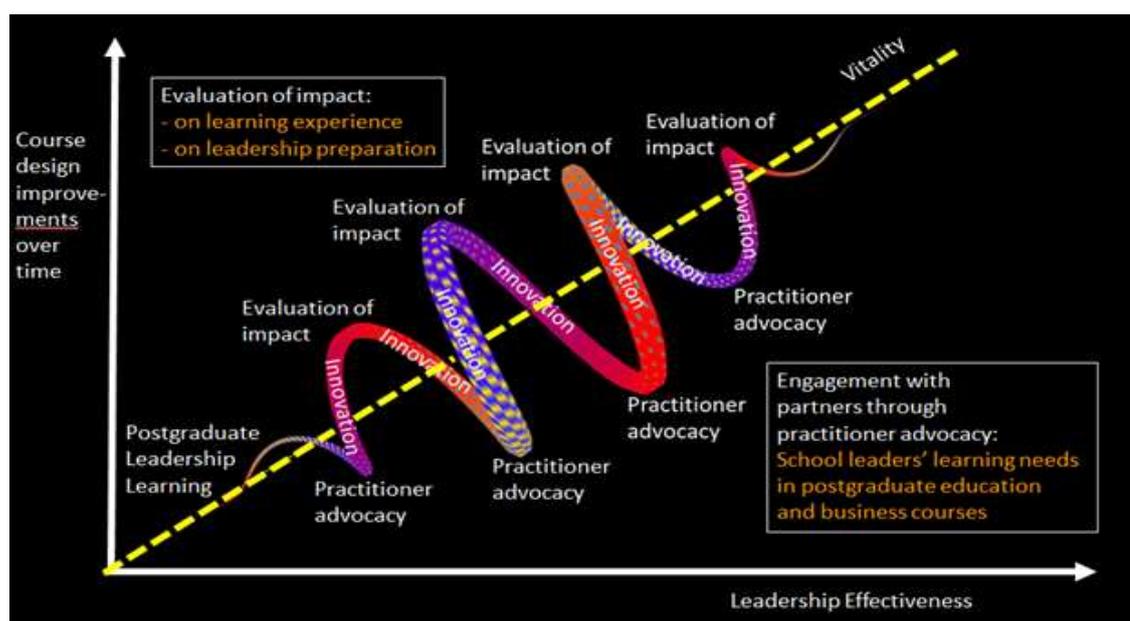


Figure 4: The PIVOTAL Model

The spiral format of the graphic reflects the qualities of pivoting and moving onwards and upwards, based on evaluation, innovation and practitioner input. The practitioners are practising school leaders and students enrolled in postgraduate leadership courses and with whom the researchers form partnerships for the purpose of the research. The yellow line depicts the anticipated alignment of vitality (of both course and individual) with leadership effectiveness. The components of the Model are as follows:

1. Partnerships: Practitioner advocacy and input regarding school leaders' postgraduate learning needs contributes to sustainability of course design and eventual improvement in school leader effectiveness.
2. Innovation: Changes are made to courses based on the engagement with and data gathered from practitioners (as shown in the example highlighted in Table 1).
3. Vitality: The notion of 'vitality' incorporated into the model refers to the relevance and continued responsiveness of the course designers to school leader learning needs, based on the ongoing invitation for practitioner advocacy at regular intervals. This intervention is intended to impact positively on the learning experience of future students / school leaders studying the innovated courses and that they will also benefit individually in increased levels of personal vitality. The research to be completed in later phases will aim to determine the correlation of these components.
4. Opportunities for Thriving Academic Leadership: PIVOTAL research aims to enhance school leaders' learning experiences within the Education and Business leadership courses and increase students' exposure to relevant leadership topics and innovative learning experiences (as contributed by current practising school leaders). It is anticipated that this improvement in leadership course design will assist in building students' capacity to be effective leaders in their schools. The research to be completed in later phases will aim to determine the impact of these components on sustainable leadership practice.

The PIVOTAL Leadership Guidelines electronic booklet

The PIVOTAL Leadership Guidelines electronic booklet is being launched along with the PIVOTAL Model during the AARE Conference, November 2015. It is based on the approaches this research has taken with regard to practitioner advocacy, cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional research collaborations, innovative curriculum design and the focus on facilitation of thriving

academic leadership.

Application of the PIVOTAL Model for future innovative course design

An approach which advocates responsiveness to practitioner advocacy, as highlighted by this research, could be adopted across the other higher education disciplines outside of Education and Business in the future. For example, developments in Clinical Education course design and delivery are based similarly on professional partnerships and input, along with the requirement to address professional standards. Thus, a PIVOTAL model for leadership in Clinical Education could include a Reference Group of medical practitioners and past and current students who all contribute ideas to the re-design of leadership courses in this field of study, based on their professional needs. Links with other projects with similar features and goals, collaborations with a broader range of institutions, partnerships with school leaders across Australia and internationally and further research into the notion of ‘personal vitality for school leaders’ are envisaged for the future, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Future extension of the PIVOTAL Project

PIVOTAL in the Future	
LINKS:	Build on other projects in the areas of curriculum design, employability skills and the student experience
INVESTIGATIONS:	Research further into the various dimensions of Personal Vitality and Peer Support for leaders
COLLABORATIONS:	Partnering with other Queensland, inter-state, Australian and international higher education institutions for further research
PARTNERSHIPS:	Building relationships with school leaders for further practitioner advocacy
FUNDING:	Application for an OLT Innovation Grant to further this PIVOTAL study
APPLICATION:	Potential further application of the PIVOTAL model to other disciplines – eg. Clinical Education and Engineering

The cyclical nature of reform in postgraduate course design aims to maintain vitality and professional relevance and is grounded in the ‘practice-centred’ and ‘partnership-powered’ criteria of Fluckiger et al (2014). The findings from the PIVOTAL research are already contributing to the design of innovative leadership programs for school leaders in Education and Business programs. The innovations to programs have resulted in higher levels of confidence of school leaders, and the emphasis on the importance of the retaining ‘personal vitality’ has been reported to be beneficial. Whilst this project currently relates directly to the regional contexts in which school leaders participating in the research operate, the findings are being shared with other universities in Australia and internationally. Sustainable partnerships with interested institutions are being established to extend this project in the future. Future research will endeavour to correlate practitioner advocacy, postgraduate learning experiences and sustainability of leadership effectiveness as a result of the adoption of the PIVOTAL Model at USC and other partner institutions in Australia and internationally.

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