PIVOTAL

Partnerships, Innovation and Vitality – Opportunities for Thriving Academic Leadership

Guidelines for application of the PIVOTAL Model across Higher Education Learning and Teaching

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Acknowledgements

Australian Government

Office for **Learning & Teaching**

Introduction

The PIVOTAL Model (Figure 1) and associated Guidelines are the result of a 2014-2015 cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional research project with a focus on the design of innovative leadership courses for school leaders. The Pivotal Model aims is to be the catalyst for innovation and change within the postgraduate learning experiences of future leaders by informing the direction of postgraduate leadership studies within Business, Education and potentially other professional fields of study.

Leaders face ever-increasing levels of accountability and new leaders deserve to be offered better pathways in their learning journey. What is identified as a preparation gap for leadership can be addressed through well-designed postgraduate leadership courses which are responsive to practitioners' learning needs. These responses must also maintain a wide perspective in learning activities and build confidence in leadership capacity. Better preparation of leaders will lead to their increased confidence to undertake demanding roles, and this will, in turn, impact favorably on the effectiveness of their organisations and on those who work and learn there.

Academic understanding of the holistic nature of leadership is a significant factor in better preparing school leaders, whilst practical skill development in leadership is another that will help emerging school leaders as they progress from lower to higher levels of responsibility. The *Six Principles for Impact* bring these two aspects together to form a contemporary understanding of the development of academic leadership capacity. These Guidelines will support improvements to postgraduate learning and leadership performance within complex learning communities and provide a 'road map' that will ultimately prepare innovative and successful school leaders for the twists and turns in their leadership journeys.

The PIVOTAL Model
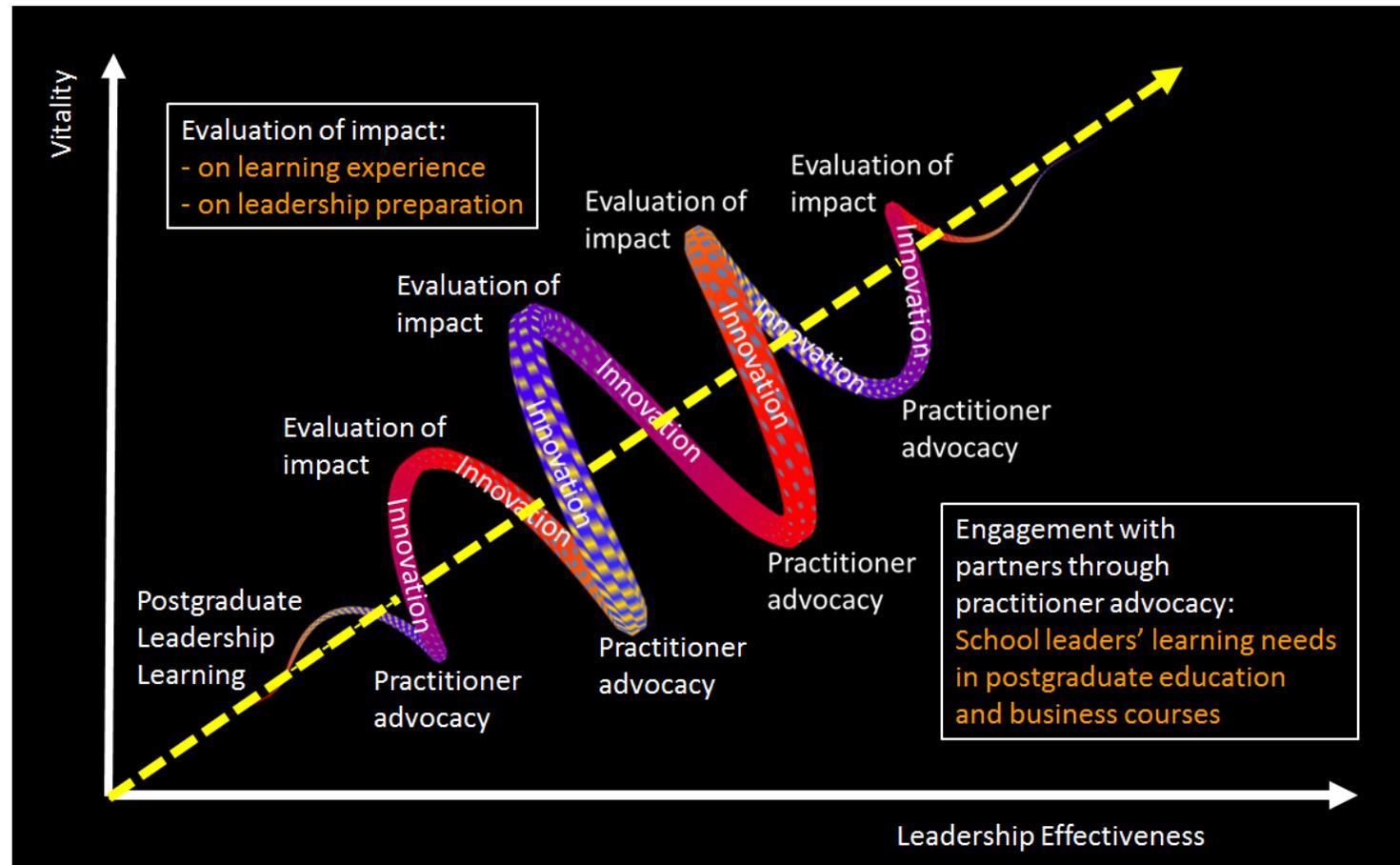
Figure 1: The PIVOTAL Model (Simon, Graham, Christie and Call, 2015)

Features of the PIVOTAL Model

▶ The PIVOTAL Model depicts a process of seeking and acting upon practitioner advocacy (practising school leaders) in order to impact favourably on postgraduate curriculum design.

▶ The fluid and spiral format of the graphic reflects a cyclical process with the qualities of pivoting and moving onwards and upwards, based on evaluation, innovation and practitioner input.

▶ The practitioners are members of professional bodies, practising school leaders and students enrolled in postgraduate leadership courses with whom the researchers form partnerships for the purpose of the research.

▶ The diagonal line depicts the anticipated alignment of vitality (of both curriculum content and of the individual) with leadership effectiveness.

▶ The PIVOTAL Model reflects the principles of participatory Action Research expounded by Kemmis and McTaggert (1988) which has the over-arching intention of making changes for the better in the learning environment through active participation.

The Six Principles for Impact

Principle 1:
Foster professional partnerships

The fundamental principle contributing to the success of the PIVOTAL Model is that of fostering professional partnerships between schools and organisations on a local, state, national and international level.

Strategically fostering partnerships with local schools, individual school leaders and professional bodies, such as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), provides opportunities to develop meaningful ongoing relationships that serve as a platform for future collaboration and knowledge-building exercises.

Central to this concept of fostering professional partnerships is that of identifying common ground from which the partnership can flourish. This approach enables a reciprocal arrangement to occur, where partners promote and support the development of meaningful postgraduate courses that will reveal the learning needs of schools leaders. Academics are empowered to provide leaders in the profession with optimum opportunities for thriving academic leadership throughout their careers.

 The PIVOTAL Model (Figure 1) highlights the importance of developing these *tripartite relationships* between schools, professional bodies and academia (Shaw, 2011) as an integral element in the development of successful future leaders.

Leaders need to be skilled in working with others to ensure the established vision is futures-focused and responsive to the needs of their clients now and in the future.

What this looks like in practice

Sustainable relationships are formed and reciprocal benefits occur by fostering professional partnerships with local schools and their leaders across the sectors of state, independent and Catholic, and with professional bodies such as AITSL, The Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL), Principals Australia Institute (PAI), the Australian Institute of Management (AIM) and the Stronger, Smarter Institute. It is part of the institutional responsibility to ensure authenticity in its programs of study and the successful development of academic leaders through on going and collaborative ventures with external colleagues, employers, schools and associations.

Professional Standards from a nationally-endorsed framework provide the common ground from which to begin professional conversations with external partners based on these sustainable relationships. Within the field of Education, the common ground was found in the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (APSP) (Figure 2). This model provides the shared vision, language and underlying goal of developing 'high quality learning, teaching and schooling', which then leads to 'successful learners, confident, creative individuals and active, informed citizens' (AITSL, 2011).
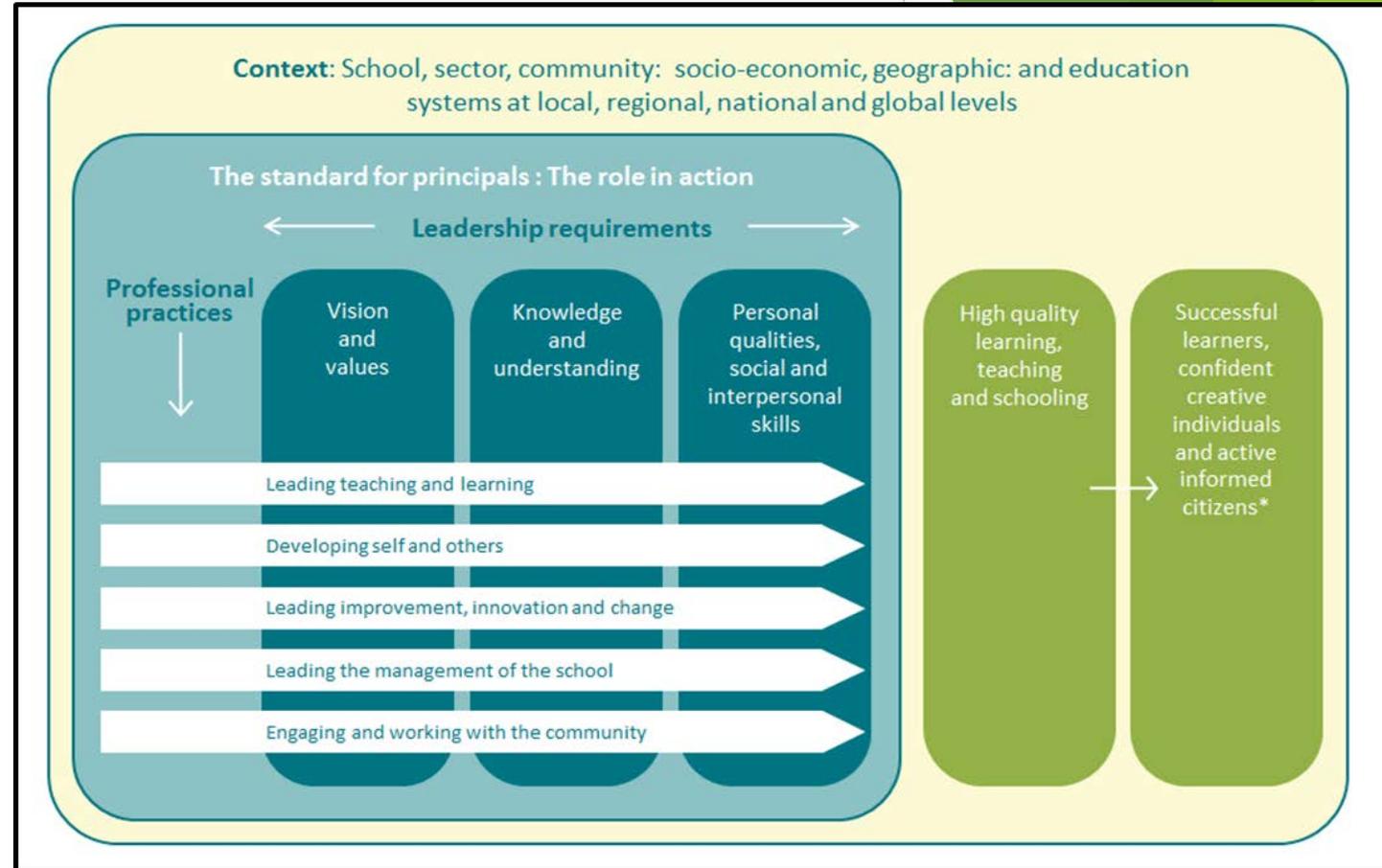

Figure 2: The Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2011)

Principle 2:
Facilitate practitioner advocacy

The natural extension of the first principle (*Fostering professional partnerships*) is the opportunity to facilitate *Principle 2: Practitioner advocacy*. It is here that partners are given the opportunity to share their knowledge, experience and understanding of the profession and contribute their insight into how institutions might better design curriculum that will effectively prepare future leaders.

Practitioner advocacy provides the opportunity to gather crucial contemporary perspectives of situations within the profession and is an essential factor in future leader preparation. Authentic professional insight into current practices and experiences provides an understanding of current professional contexts and their impacts on school leaders. It is from this point that a picture begins to emerge of how course content can have the potential to meet the needs of students in postgraduate leadership courses and prepares them for the realities of the profession.

During this process of collaboration, professional partnerships begin to deepen their connection and on-going partnerships flourish. In working towards a shared professional goal, institutions are able to demonstrate the value they place on the partnership and the high regard they hold for the professional insight. It is important to provide feedback to the contributing partners regarding the innovations made based on their input and their impact on student learning.

The multifaceted role of School Principalship and the preparation for the role is often not consistent.

What this looks like in practice

Anchored in a consultative framework, practitioner advocacy provides opportunities for various forms of partnership contribution. Initially, through participation in a survey, local school leaders are invited to share their professional insights. The survey seeks to determine their perspectives of contemporary leadership requirements and capacities for leadership effectiveness. This approach enables partners to share their professional insight whilst enabling ethical and institutional obligations of confidentiality and anonymity to be met.

An opportunity is also provided for all survey participants to add further depth of understanding to their professional insight through participation in a Reference Group. This meeting of school principals, representing a range of education sectors (State, Catholic and Independent), maximizes the opportunity for input from individuals. It also provides opportunities for clarification of survey data, whilst also serving to strengthen the on-going professional partnership.

Academic staff members from within the same university and other universities who are involved in the preparation of leadership courses are also consulted in order to support understanding of leadership needs.

Figure 3: The PIVOTAL Reference Group, USC, October, 2014

Principle 3:
Listen and respond to the student voice

The PIVOTAL Model (Figure 1) illustrates the investigation process which focusses on the development of thriving academic leaders through innovative course design. Leadership course designers must not only attend to the needs of the profession as articulated by the Reference Group advocates, but must also ensure they are responsive to those who are students as well as school leaders. A vital feature of the PIVOTAL Model is that of listening to the student voice and being responsive to various points of view. Many postgraduate students of educational leadership courses are current or aspiring school leaders and so their unique input is crucial in this regard.

The long term benefit of listening and responding to the student voice, is that future educational leadership courses will be informed by what is deemed by them to be highly relevant for future school leaders. Students have an opportunity to be part of a collaborative process which has the potential to be professionally rewarding and provide for collegial interaction. They also have an opportunity to contribute to the future development of the University's learning and teaching effectiveness, participate in community engagement and to be empowered. Through this process, the students have the opportunity to have their leadership capacity recognised and further developed – a benefit which aligns well with the benefit of leadership development of future students of the courses.

This approach demonstrates a way of working that fosters an appreciation and understanding of the significance of individual perspectives from this significant stakeholder group. Each student comes with a personal perspective of their professional learning needs and the postgraduate leadership course provider endeavours to meet these needs in order to positively impact on both the learning experience and future leadership capacity.

I think that people want to belong; people want to not feel like they are sitting outside the system. It think one of the things that postgraduate study can really do, is arm you with the ability to really critique what's going on.

What this looks like in practice

Whilst current student perspectives are central to developing an understanding of the situation, past student experiences are equally valid. Online surveys to both groups offer an understanding of how courses are meeting/ have met students' professional learning needs, and provide quantitative and comparable data across disciplines and sites.

Surveys are followed by semi-structured focus group sessions, with student feedback providing rich qualitative data which is anticipated to 'improve teaching, the curriculum and the student experience' (McInnis, Ramsden and Maconachie, 2012, p. 36) interacting with others in a supportive and nurturing environment. Ensuring professional partnerships are continually fostered, AISTL's designated *Leadership Requirements* and *Professional Practices* from the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2011) (Figure 2) is used as the framework for discussion.

Through the listening to the student voice through surveys and focus groups that comprise current and aspiring school leaders enrolled in postgraduate courses, the institution ensures maximum input from the target group and consequently has the opportunity to engage learners of the future in relevant and innovative ways.

Principle 4:
Innovate the learning experience

Aspiring leaders need to be given opportunities throughout their careers to acquire and retain confidence in their management skills and leadership capacity. Therefore, an important role of universities is to develop innovative and effective programs of study that support these needs. This will ensure effective capacity-building programs are developed that prepare leadership students for the complex job ahead of them.

Innovation in course design is built on the responses providing professional insight gleaned through professional partnerships, practitioner advocacy and listening to the student voice. Innovative programmes of study will not only attract students, but can also be designed to ensure effective, sustainable capacity-building programs are developed, in order to secure future support for school leaders.

Through taking a 'practice-centred' and 'partnerships-powered' approach to catering to leadership learning needs (Fluckiger, Lovett & Dempster, 2014) the result will be maximized opportunities for collegial interaction and for innovative revisions to be incorporated into postgraduate courses to the benefit of future school leaders.

I think, too often, we do just get really focused on me and my little village, and what I'm doing here as opposed to learning from each other.

What this looks like in practice

Changes are made to courses based on the engagement with, and data gathered from, practitioners and leadership students. This process leads to innovations in leadership courses.

During the PIVOTAL Project 2014/2015 practitioners and students proposed the following changes which were subsequently made to courses in Semester 1:

- Peer review activities (written and verbal) to support peers in assignmen development

- The introduction of Professional Learning Conversations in to assignments to encourage mentoring and professional engagement

- Consideration of the Vitality Model (Resource 1) and the way that the dimensions impact on the personal vitality of school leaders

- Inclusion of a simulated leadership task for students currently not working in a learning community

- Specialised resources and reading material for educational leaders in specific contexts (i.e. schools, higher education and clinical settings)

Students rated collegial interaction as being an essential component to their leadership learning journeys, alleviating the challenges of leading in an isolated context in which leaders can feel alone (Caldwell, 2006). Course activities were subsequently designed to capitalise on this opportunity to optimise collegial interaction.

Principle 5:
Evaluate course effectiveness

Evaluation of course effectiveness is based on the feedback provided from leadership students in response to changes that are made to courses. This crucial aspect of the evaluation of course design provides professional insight into the relevance of adaptions and the impact on leadership capacity.

Feedback can be informal, formal (through the SETAC process) and through specifically targeted focus group discussions. These processes can be considered after each iteration of the leadership courses to contribute to the evidence of effectiveness of the innovations made.

Further to feedback from students experiencing these courses, peer review undertaken by teaching colleagues, professional learning conversatons with Reference Group contributors and networking with colleagues in other higher education institutions involved in postgraduate leadership course design and delivery, are additional strategies which can illuminate effectiveness and potential alternative approaches. Ultimately, a longitudinal research study of leadership students at six months, one year and longer after their completion of the leadership studies, will be considered in order to gather evidence of the long-term effectiveness of these innovated courses.

The leadership course could include more interactive engagement with current high-profile educational leaders (school leaders both in Australia and international) via personal visits, or even digital facilities – to enhance the leadership capacity of school leaders.

What this looks like in practice

Professional Learning Conversations
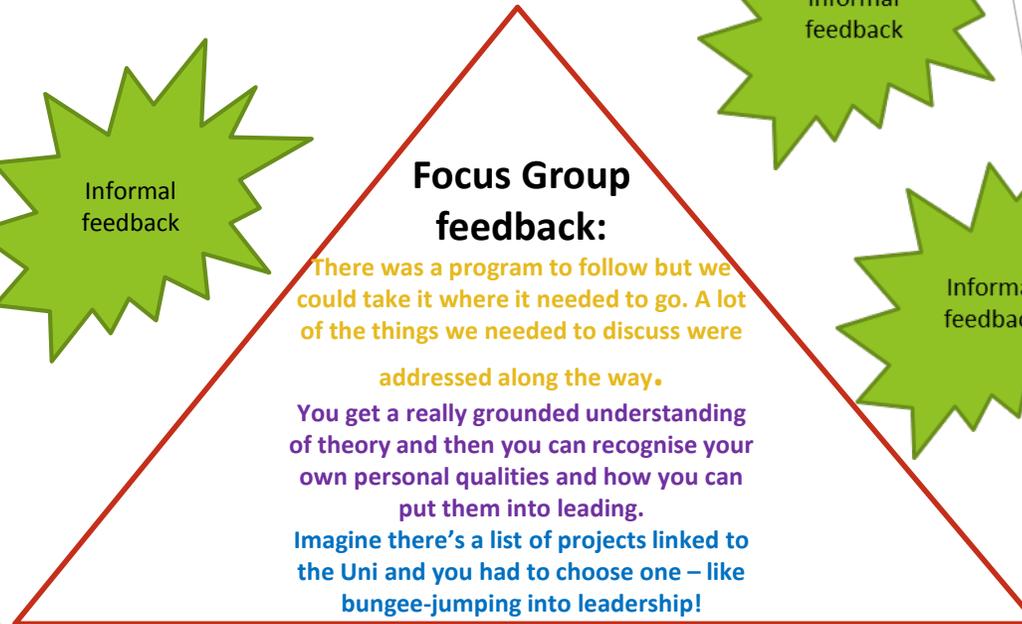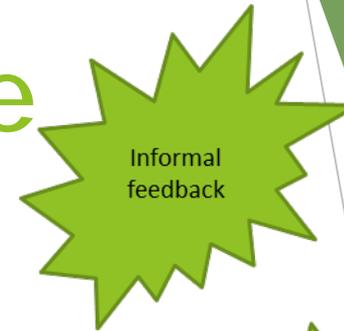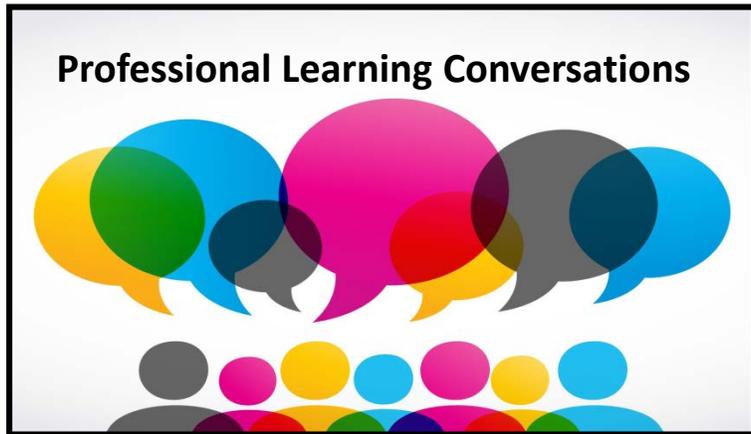
SETAC

(Student Evaluation of Teaching and Courses)

The peer review concept was conducive to giving me insight into giving and receiving constructive and positive feedback through a professional process.

I learnt a lot about myself as a teacher and a leader. This course forced reflection due to the assessment pieces. This proved invaluable — particularly when teamed with peer review practices.

The professional conversation was a great process. Great course that has enhanced my knowledge and growth of leadership traits, qualities and direction as a result of the project.

SETAC feedback Semester 1 2015

Informal feedback

Informal feedback

Informal feedback

Informal feedback

Informal feedback

Focus Group feedback:

There was a program to follow but we could take it where it needed to go. A lot of the things we needed to discuss were addressed along the way.

You get a really grounded understanding of theory and then you can recognise your own personal qualities and how you can put them into leading.

Imagine there's a list of projects linked to the Uni and you had to choose one – like bungee-jumping into leadership!

Peer Review and Collegial Networking

Principle 6:
Optimise vitality and sustainability.

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.

Vitality and sustainability come about, in this instance, through the direct result of each of the *Six Principles for Impact* being undertaken. Adopting an approach that fosters partnerships, facilitates advocacy, listens to the student voice and acts on these insights, leads to innovation in course design which will, in turn, provide opportunities and pose challenges for thriving academic leadership.

A leader doesn't have to know everything, and in fact sometimes they don't. If they have the qualities where they've got a vision and where they want to get to, and they've got the social and interpersonal skills that they can put people in place, they don't need that much knowledge and understanding, what they need is the………. challenge.

What this looks like in practice

The PIVOTAL Road Map (Figure 4) demonstrates the process of consultation of ideas and perspectives from stakeholders in the leadership journey. The effect of the process and subsequent innovations to course design on students is systematically tested in order to draw conclusions regarding sustainability of the approach.
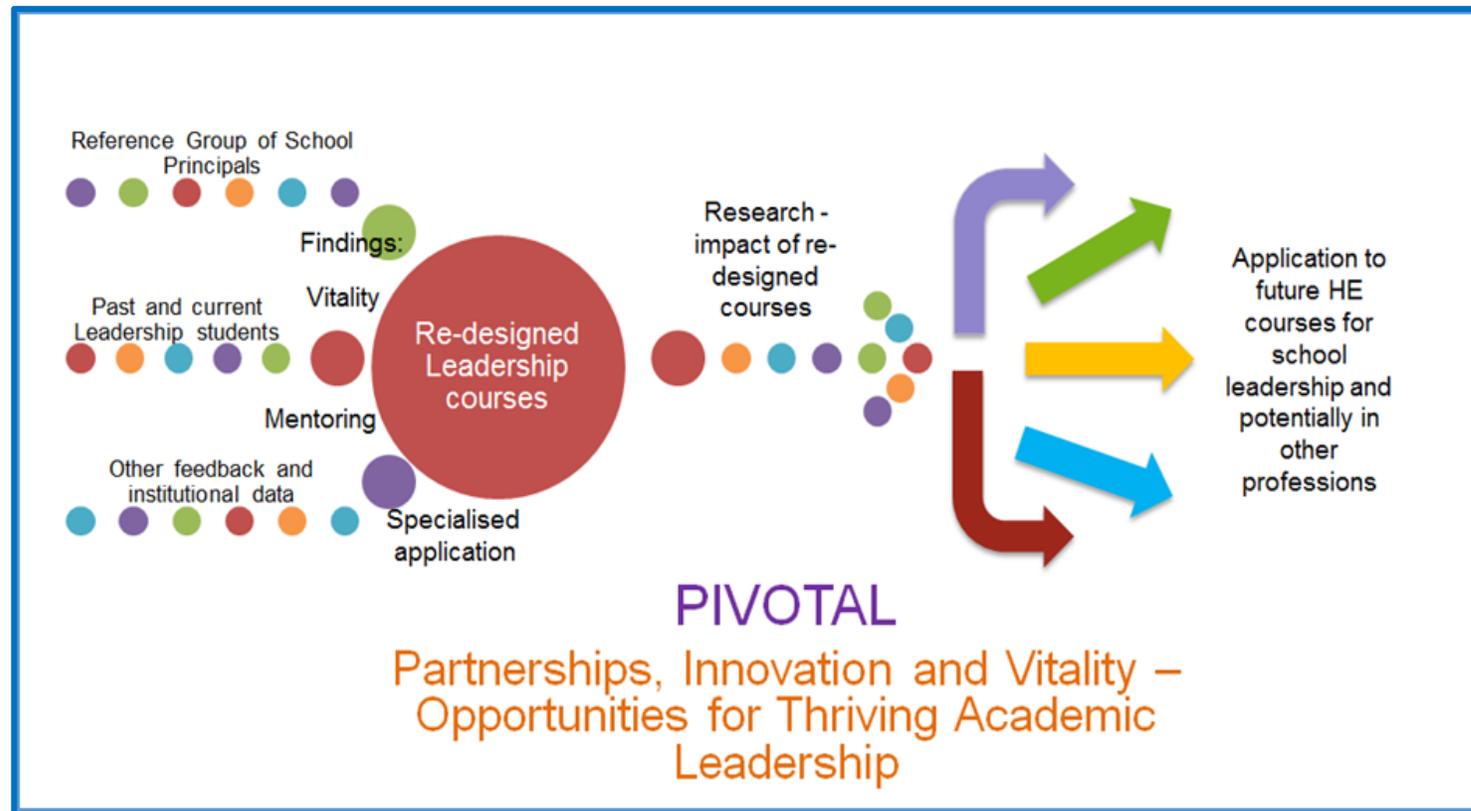

**Figure 4: The PIVOTAL Road Map (Simon, Graham, Christie and Call, 2015)**

Selected Resources

1. The Vitality Model
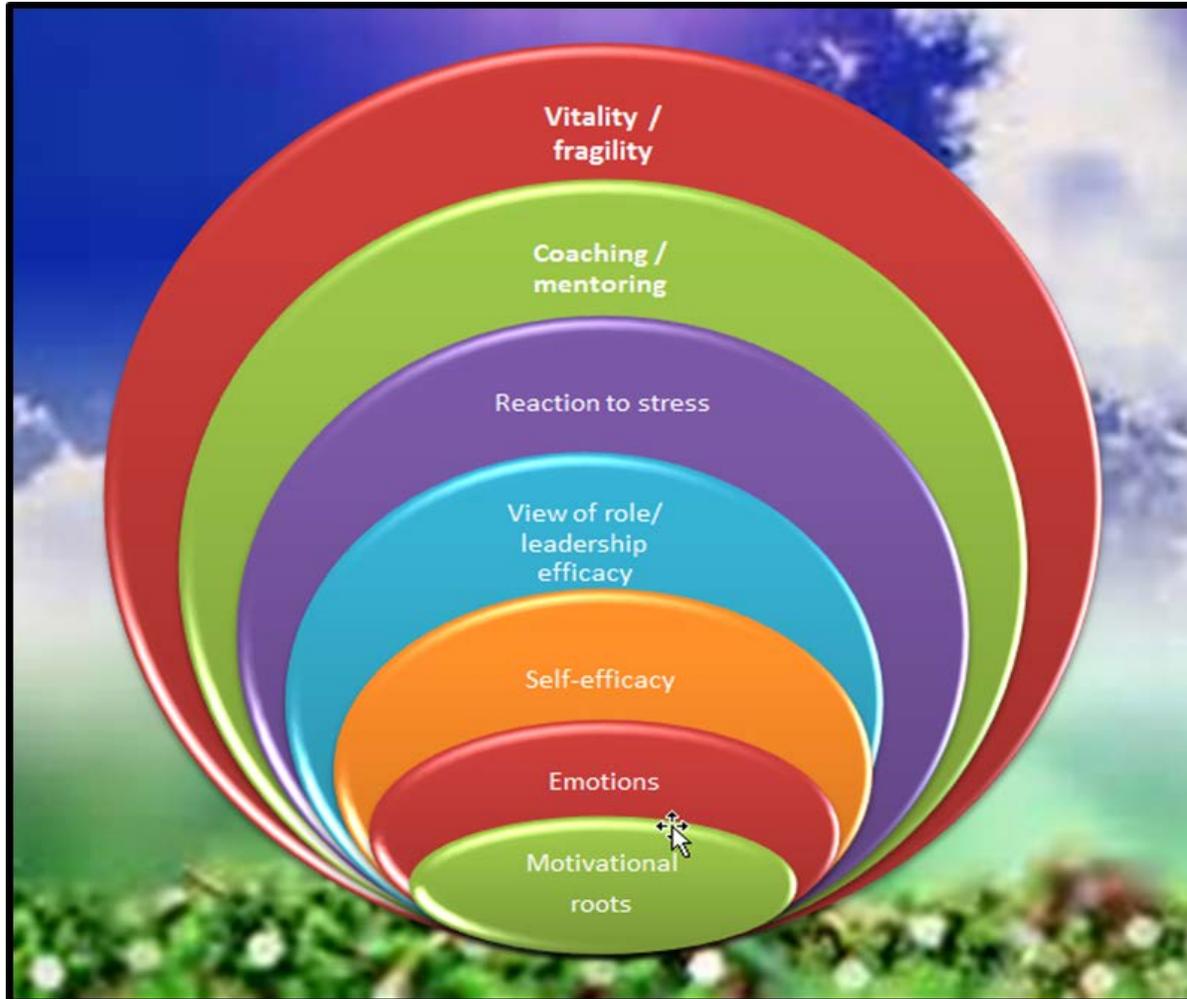
Simon, Graham, Christie and Call (2015)

2. Action Research Cycle
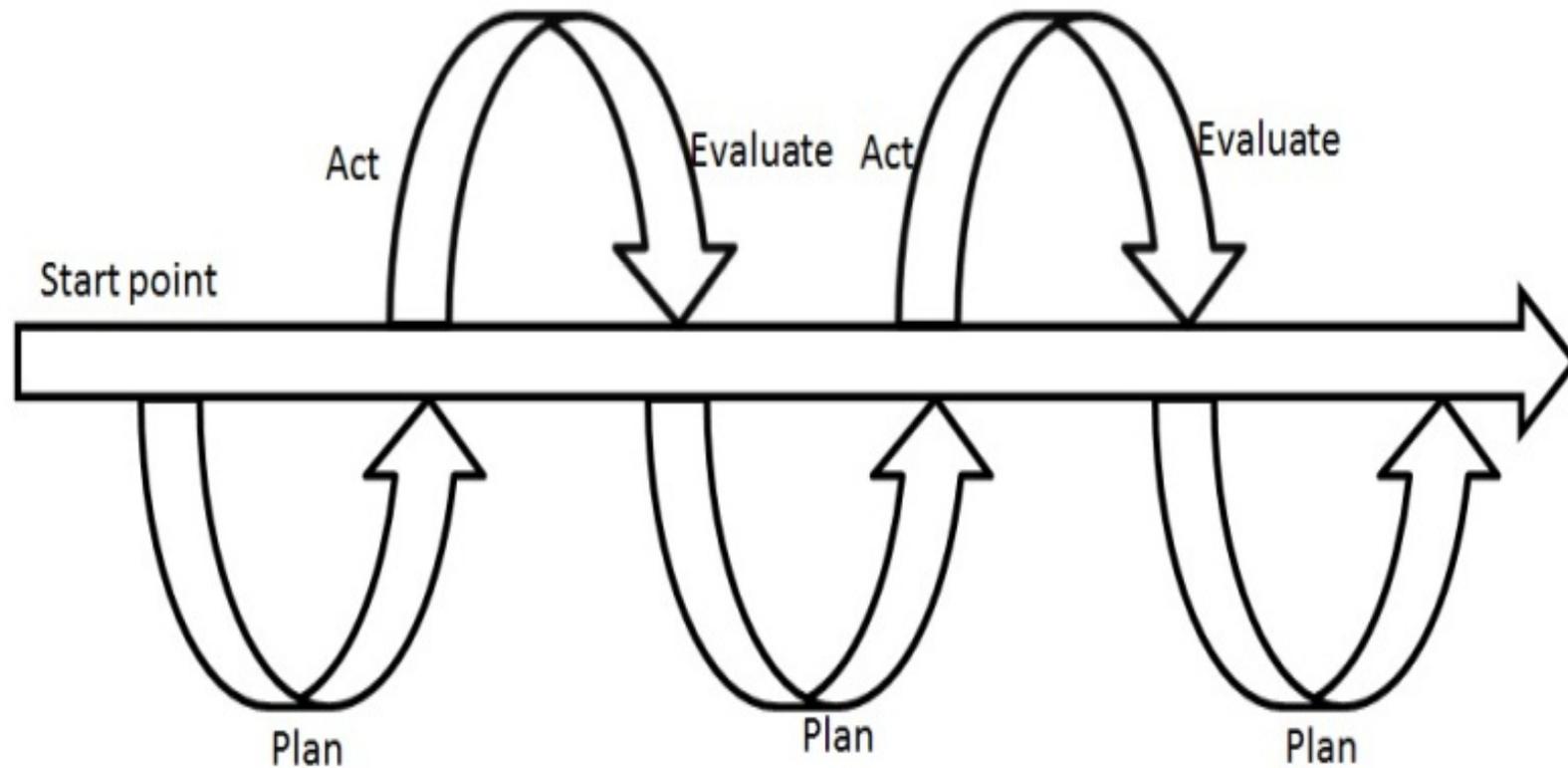
Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)

3. Key websites

ACEL (Australian Council of Educational Leaders)

http://www.acel.org.au/acel/

AERA (American Educational Research Association

http://www.aera.net/EducationResearch/tabid/10065/Default.aspxAIM

AIM (Australian Institute of Management)

http://www.aim.com.au/

AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership)

http://www.aitsl.edu.au/

BELMAS (British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society)

https://www.belmas.org.uk/

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)
http://www.oecd.org/education/school/improvingschoolleadership-home.htm

PAI (Principals Australia Institute)

http://www.pai.edu.au/

Stronger Smarter Institute

http://strongersmarter.com.au/

4. Survey of students/school leaders

1. Are you currently:

❑ School Principal?   ❑ Member of the Senior Leadership Team of a School?

2. Based on your experience to date, prioritise the following *Leadership Requirements** (1 – 3, with 1 being the most important and 3 being the least) in order to be an effective leader of schools :

❑ Vision and Values   ❑ Knowledge and Understanding   ❑ Personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills

3. Which of the above *Leadership Requirements* is / are most in need of additional development in aspiring and current leaders?

Please comment in the box below and detail any particular aspect of the requirement which you feel is especially important for leadership development:

4. Prioritise the following five key *Professional Practices** (1 – 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least) in order to be an effective leader of schools :

❑ Leading teaching and learning ❑ Developing self and others

❑ Leading improvement, innovation and change ❑ Leading the management of the school

❑ Engaging and working with the community

5. Which of the above *Leadership Requirements* is / are most in need of additional development in aspiring and current leaders? Please comment in the box below and detail any particular aspect of the requirement which you feel is especially important for leadership development:

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Sue Simon has had extensive experience in leading Queensland schools, having been a principal of three independent schools, including being the foundation principal of one of them. Sue is now the Portfolio Leader for the Initial Teacher Education Programs at USC, lectures in a range of education topics, specialising in leadership with postgraduate students, and is an academic leader in USC's International Projects Group's Leadership initiatives. Sue has been the recipient of a 2014 Vice-Chancellor's Award for engagement with local schools and was awarded an OLT Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning for 2015 for her teaching in leadership education. She is actively involved in school governance as a board member of St Andrew's Anglican College, Peregian Springs, Queensland, and is a principal mentor with ACEL (Australian Council for Educational Leaders). Sue has published regularly in peer-reviewed journals and presented her leadership research at national and international conferences. Sue's publications are to be found at:
http://research.usc.edu.au/vital/access/BibliographyStatistics/Simon,%20Susan%20E

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Michael Christie has an extensive research background in Australia and internationally in large externally funded research projects related to learning and teaching (total funding from research grants exceeds $1.4 million). Michael has been a member of the PIVOTAL OLT-funded research project 2014 – 2015, where he acted as mentor researcher. He is also a member of the Portfolio Leaders Team within the School of Education as Portfolio Leader: Research. He teaches into the Master of Education at USC where he has direct engagement with many practising school leaders. Michael's extensive publications include the articles written jointly with Simon, Graham and Call concerning the findings of the PIVOTAL Project, with the full list of his publications to be found at:
http://research.usc.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository?exact=sm_creator:"Christie%2C+Michael

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Wayne Graham is Program Coordinator, Management and Chair, Innovative Teaching Working Group, School of Business, USC. He has a PhD in Strategic Management and has worked across a variety of business sectors. Other relevant roles of responsibility have included: Director, Caloundra Christian College (2013-present); Executive Officer, Higher Education Project, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council (2008-2011) (a position which involved strategic liaison with regional School Principals); Director, Heritage Christian School Port Macquarie (2010-2011); Director, Universal Education and Training Nambour (2007-2008); and Council member, Chancellor State College, Sippy Downs (2003-2004). Wayne has been leader and team member of research and industry projects with a funding totalling $400K. His publications are to be found at: http://research.usc.edu.au/vital/access/BibliographyStatistics/Graham,%20W%20A

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Kairen Call is a sessional lecturer and tutor within the School of Education at the University of the Sunshine Coast and is currently undertaking her Ph.D. with a focus on the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. She is also a Professional Learning Liaison for pre-service teachers on their Supervised Professional Experiences and in this capacity regularly meets with local school leaders. Kairen has previous experience as a research assistant on two projects, including this OLT Seed Project; PIVOTAL. Her most recent publication is, *Improving the quality of assessment grading tools in Master of Education courses: a comparative case study in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (2015).