

Annotation

Trinidad, C. “Characteristics of Effective President and Principal Partnerships in Lasallian Catholic High Schools.” Ed.D. dissertation, Creighton University, 2025, 104 pages.

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In this grounded theory dissertation, Trinidad examines partnership effectiveness within the president-principal leadership model operating in Lasallian Catholic high schools in the United States. The president-principal model, which emerged in the 1990s as a structural adaptation to increasing administrative complexity in Catholic secondary schools, divides leadership responsibilities between an external-facing president and an internal-facing principal (p.1).

Despite its prevalence, the model has received limited contemporary scholarly attention. Trinidad identifies this gap in the literature as a central problem, noting both the importance of empirical research and concerns regarding leadership attrition and burnout (p.3). The purpose of the study was to define effectiveness within president-principal partnerships and to generate a framework that may guide practice, formation, and evaluation.

A grounded theory methodology, as articulated by Glaser and Strauss and later refined by Corbin and Strauss, was conducted (p.7). Semi-structured interviews with nine chief administrators serving in Lasallian high schools across the Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN) were completed. The coding process yielded 286 initial codes, which were triangulated and synthesized into themes and eventually distilled into seven defining characteristics of effective partnerships (p.13). The framework, which integrated practitioner wisdom with leadership theory, offers both conceptual clarity and applied relevance (p.15).

The first and foundational characteristic identified is relational trust and mutual respect (p.16). Themes within this category include knowing one another, conflict resolution, and the detrimental effects of mistrust. Participants emphasized that trust enables courageous conversations and productive conflict, while a lack of trust leads to guarded behavior, diminished morale, and second-guessing (p. 15). This finding aligns with broader leadership scholarship that situates trust as a prerequisite for team effectiveness and organizational health (p.16).

The second characteristic, mission and vision alignment, underscores the focus of Lasallian Catholic identity (p.18). Leaders articulated that effectiveness depends upon shared commitment to faculty and student success and fidelity to the Lasallian mission. Participants repeatedly referenced the necessity of being “mission driven” and ensuring that both president and principal operate from a unified leadership vision. This alignment mitigates fragmentation and reinforces the school’s religious and educational purpose (p.19).

The third characteristic, clarity in roles and responsibilities, addresses the structural integrity of the model (p.20). Participants cited micromanagement, bypassing supervisory lines, and ambiguity regarding final decision authority as sources of tension. These findings corroborate earlier research by Dygert (1998) and James (2009) that identified role confusion as a principal weakness in the model. Trinidad's data suggest that effective partnerships require explicit lines of reporting structure and adherence to agreed-upon lanes (p.21).

The fourth characteristic, communication and transparency, operates as the mechanism through which trust and clarity are maintained (p.16). Leaders described intentional structures such as weekly team meetings as sacred spaces for dialogue. Conversely, public reprimands or indirect communication were cited as damaging to partnership cohesion. This finding reinforces organizational theory perspectives emphasizing psychological safety and open dialogue (p.16).

The fifth characteristic, complementary leadership styles, highlights the importance of self-awareness and differentiated strengths (p.30). Rather than advocating for similarity, participants affirmed that effective dyads capitalize on diverse competencies while compensating for individual weaknesses. This dynamic reflects principles of team theory and distributed leadership, positioning effectiveness as interdependent rather than individualistic (p.30).

The sixth characteristic, support systems, incorporates both structural and spiritual supports (p.31). Participants emphasized prayer, reflection, and retreat practices as integral to sustaining leadership resilience. Given the Lasallian context, spirituality is not peripheral, but constitutive of effective partnership. This integration of faith and leadership practice differentiates the study from secular leadership research and situates it within ecclesial educational leadership discourse (p.31).

Finally, the seventh characteristic, strategies and structures to manage duties, translates theory into application (p.33). Trinidad proposes the development of hiring profiles, onboarding instruments, retreat materials, and evaluation tools grounded in the seven characteristics. The framework provides a conceptual model for ongoing formation and assessment (p.33).

Overall, this dissertation makes a meaningful contribution to educational leadership literature by defining partnership effectiveness within a specialized yet influential governance model. The study's strengths include methodological rigor through triangulation, integration of practitioner voice, and practical applicability. This dissertation was a theoretical framework and gave actionable guidance. The seven interrelated characteristics, grounded in empirical data, help the reader to understanding collaborative executive leadership and provide a pathway for enhancing staff retention, mission fidelity, and operational vitality in Catholic secondary education.