Supporting Learning in a Catholic School Context

inside this issue:
- Framing Learning in a time of Continuous Change
- Queensland Catholic Schools and Curriculum
- Inquiry Learning in the Study of Religion
- Caring for Students at the Margins
Editorial

The articles in this edition of Curriculum Matters illustrate diverse approaches to the theme supporting learning for all in Catholic schools.

Catholic schools base their curriculum on core beliefs, values and philosophies of learning reflective of Catholic understandings of the purpose and nature of education in a Catholic school. Who we are and what we do, the environment we create, our relationship with each other and our God, influence what we teach and how we teach. Likewise what students learn and how, and the ways in which they learn about themselves, each other and the world around them, is influenced by Catholic understandings of the educational mission of Catholic schools.

The Adelaide Declaration of National Goals for Schools in the 21st century states that schools through their curriculum, work to ‘enable young people to engage effectively in an increasingly complex world’. This is very true. However our Learning Framework (Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Brisbane) places Christ the teacher at the heart of the educational endeavour, and sets a distinctive overarching goal for learning - ‘Empowering learners of all ages to shape and enrich our changing word, by living the Gospel of Jesus Christ’. The Catholic school as an expression of the mission of the Catholic Church becomes an environment for educating, nurturing, caring and evangelising young people and other members of the school community to shape and enrich the complex world in which they live.

What guides us in our endeavours to meet this goal? Key documents provide concept maps or frameworks that articulate core values, beliefs, orientations as well as distinctive understandings of the mission of Catholic education in a Catholic school context. Such understandings help us to orient our approaches to pedagogy, assessment and learning outcomes. A number of the articles in this edition discuss ‘maps’ or ‘frameworks’ in terms of their meaning, and the possible orientations and implications for action in the context of supporting learning in Catholic schools (Refer to articles by Barry; Brennan; Rush; and Tsourounakis).

Other articles illustrate ways in which some schools have set about developing and enacting the values, beliefs, and visions for their school’s context (Refer to article – Vision and Values: Grealy, Lawson, Biddle and Coghill; Wedge). How do schools reach out to marginalised, out-of-home children, and how do teachers meet the needs of the ‘gifted’ learner, or those learners who, for whatever reason are at risk of not engaging fully in learning? (Refer to articles by Dethlefs; Kimmins & Brususco; Hollamby).

Catching Fire is a program aimed at staff in our school communities and their spiritual development for the mission of Catholic education. The article by Jill Gowdie describes the principles underlying the program, how it is integrated into professional learning and planning, and the resources that the program makes available to school communities.

Finally, we have an article on Inquiry Learning and how that is an integral process in the revised Studies of Religion which builds on the theme of Edition 1, 2008. It will have particular interest to secondary teachers (Goldburg).

So each article draws on a rich palette of understandings about how learning is influenced in Catholic schools and the experiences of these philosophies, values and beliefs in action.

We hope you find the edition interesting and stimulating. Our next edition will have a feature on the Arts and we encourage you consider submitting articles on this theme.

Fran Ralston
What frames learning in our schools? Is it the current QSA syllabuses and guidelines? Is it the QCAR framework that has been developed and released but not yet embedded in state syllabuses? Will it be the nationally consistent curriculum to be developed and released from 2011? In this changing context, what remains constant? Does our Learning Framework, released in 2002, remain a constant and relevant foundation for learning and teaching in our schools into the future?

Typically the documents of the state and nation map the territory of a KLA or subject. The actual content they contain does not change significantly from one to another except in some of the much debated detail. What mostly changes is how this content is organised, presented, and communicated. These documents, in and of themselves, do not create consistency, change, or improvement to learning and teaching in our classrooms. Teachers and teaching are the keys to these things.

As described in the Vision for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, educational ministry calls us to Teach, Challenge, Transform. "Learning is lifelong, life-giving and engages the whole person." A more secular view of school learning was expressed in the recent 2020 Summit where the future of education was debated within Australia’s ‘productivity’ agenda. "We’ll know that we’re on the right track when productivity is maximised by children’s development being at the heart of the productivity agenda". [The Productivity Agenda – Education, Skills, Training, Science and Innovation].

In the lead up to the development of a national curriculum in Australia, Reid (2005) stated that the development of an Australian curriculum through a capabilities-based approach provided a way to ground the concept of lifelong learning in a knowledge society (p56).

Reid referred to the work of Sen (1992, 1999, 2002) and Nussbaum (2000) to argue that the indicator of a nation’s quality of life should be “what people are actually able to do and be” (their capabilities), rather than indicators of economic growth (p53). Such a position ensures that not only do people have rights but they have the capabilities to exercise those rights. Reid argues further that a capabilities-based approach to education is based on the “personal capacities that might be required to live, work, sustain relationships and be a citizen in a nation-state in a globalising world” (p54). Reid indicatively named these capabilities as Knowledge Work, Innovation and Design, Productive Social Relationships, Active Participation, Intercultural Understandings, Interdependence and Sustainability, Understanding Self, Ethics and Values, Communication and Multiliteracies (p55). These categories align very closely with the Roles for Lifelong Learners in our Learning Framework.

The notion of learning has many definitions, theories and perspectives, but in reality, learning is part of everyday living. The act of ‘knowing’ is viewed as a holistic experience involving intellect as well as emotions, imagination, and experience so that learning and living are interconnected within a Catholic curriculum. [Treston, 2008 p2.] There is no single learning theory that can provide a complete basis for educational practice (Schwab, cited in Terwell, 1999, p196). To provide educational practice with a solid underpinning of ideas, educators use their understanding of the elements from a range of associated theories to provide the most effective environment for learning to take place. These theories have evolved over time, providing educators with areas of integration that allow a deeper understanding of the learner, learning, and the learning community.

Within curriculum in Catholic schools, a number of learning theories can be integrated to create effective learning and teaching environments. This approach to learning considers a number of key elements: it is learner-centred and focuses on the whole person; it has a perspective of how learning contributes to the lifelong learning of the individual; it values intellectual, scientific based evidence of knowledge but in the context of how many factors (social, emotional, experiential and spiritual) influence the construction of that knowledge; it acknowledges the integration of faith, life and culture and provides opportunities for learners to enact their roles as stewards of creation.
So what influences a teacher to teach in a particular way? What do teachers believe and value about learners and learning and how does this influence their classroom practice? The goal of our Learning Framework is underpinned by core beliefs about learners, learning and learning communities and those values that are foundational to our work. The Roles for Lifelong Learners emphasise learning that is lifelong and life-giving. The Learning Framework provides a starting point that aligns curriculum in Catholic schools with a Catholic theology and philosophy of education.

Empowering learners of all ages to shape and enrich our changing world by living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (LF goal 2002)

The Learning Framework provides our schools with a foundation on which to build curriculum programs in a changing environment. The curriculum of our schools do not equate solely with the content of state and national documents. They are built upon clear views about learners and learning and the role of our schools as learning communities established around the beliefs and values of the Catholic Christian tradition.

Although our Learning Framework continues to provide a solid base for the curriculum in Catholic Schools, it is timely to review the way it is presented and the words used to describe beliefs and values. With this in mind, all who belong to Brisbane Catholic Education are invited to respond to a survey on the current presentation and wording of our Learning Framework. Does it provide the foundational frame for learning in our schools into the future? How can it be changed to meet future directions? In the near future we will advise you of a link to an on-line survey and invite you to have input to this revision.

References


Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) and Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR). Refer to QSA website: http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/


Developing a School Vision and Values Framework for Teaching and Learning

Fran Ralston
Editor

How we plan and teach curriculum, and how we evaluate and assess learning, is influenced by the beliefs and values we hold about how young people learn. Often our beliefs and values remain covert until challenged as a result of an activity, a plan, policy or a program or as part of a review and renewal process. We might consider beliefs and values as we are asked to make judgements, to provide responses to ‘new’ curriculum, policies and directions, or as we plan future learning experiences for those we teach.

The Brisbane Catholic Education Learning Framework was developed out of a need to articulate what values and beliefs might inform the work of advising, responding, consulting, supporting and planning future positions and directions for learning and teaching.

Schools have used this Framework in a variety of ways. This article looks at how some schools have developed their own vision for learning based on the beliefs
and values held within their school community. Their frameworks of vision statements support learning in their catholic school context.

**Conversation with Cath Grealy – Education Officer, Curriculum**

Q Have you worked with any schools to see how they have used the Learning Framework?

A St Brigid’s Rosewood has been able to contextualise this document to their own community and their renewal needs. They wanted their renewal activities and any decisions they might make about curriculum, teaching and learning as well as a range of school activities, to be based on their own special beliefs and values about learning in their community.

Q How did you start?

A The staff had started work on this in 2006 by reviewing the Belief Statements and the Statements about Values from the Learning Framework (Brisbane Catholic Education). They discussed the meaning these had for them and how they might influence not only what they do in their planning, teaching, assessing, reporting and resourcing but also how they go about their work in these areas. This process continued through until the end of 2007 – so it was a long and considered journey.

Q Their own Framework looks impressive...

A Yes, and it gives you a great idea of the range and depth of their work – their thinking about the values which underpin their 8 Belief statements about learning at their school. They have converted these belief statements into activity statements for implementation, thus enabling those beliefs to become practical actions. As a result, they have ownership of these statements which are strengthened by the fact that their Framework looks so professional.

Q How did that happen?

A A discussion was held with the Communication and Marketing section of Brisbane Catholic Education Centre and this resulted in a kind of ‘branding’ which was specific to Rosewood…hence the school logo and colours are represented in this diagram.

Q I have been talking with Cath Grealy about your Believing, Growing, Learning statement for your school. It looks very professional and seems to depict a number of connections to the processes of teaching and learning. What does it mean for St Brigid’s to have their own statement about learning?

A The statement and the processes we used to develop this gives us a focus for the way we approach our teaching. It is particular to our school and our needs and it gives us the opportunity to reflect on our own beliefs and priorities.

Q Its development took a year or so…..I was interested in how you might be using the finished product?

A It helps us to address 2.1 and 2.2 concerning Student Learning Outcomes of the Catholic Schooling Priorities in the Strategic Renewal Framework 2007 – 2011 (Catholic Schooling, Archdiocese of Brisbane). It also helps us by reflecting on the framework to sharpen our overarching vision and focus in both planning and teaching. We have our learning framework on display in all classrooms, on our website and in the School Administration Office.

Q How did you involve staff, parents and students?

A Although we had no formal consultation with parents, the exercise itself arose from the teachers and their awareness of the needs of the community at St Brigid’s. In this way parents and students were indirectly involved. The work was completed in a series of staff meetings supported by Cath Grealy – our Education Officer: Curriculum for this district. We articulated our beliefs about learning and then fleshed these out to elaborate how these might look in our classrooms – in our pedagogy, etc.

Q Is there any advice you could give other schools about to embark on this process?

A We were pleased with the process – however I now believe that parents could have been better informed about the final product.
Conversation with Melissa Diaz (Graphic Designer in Communication and Marketing) Brisbane Catholic Education Centre

St Brigid’s Rosewood has been able to contextualise a document around the BCE Learning Framework to their own community values and beliefs about learning and renewal needs. Melissa worked on the design of the final document.

Cath Crealy approached me to see if I could help her with the design of a ‘poster’ that might represent the values and beliefs about learning held by St Brigid’s at Rosewood. She wanted something that captured the ‘whole’ and to be something they would be proud to show to the school community.

I have already designed a suite of materials for Rosewood, so things like the school’s branding concepts were already in place for their marketing materials. Cath had drawn up a word document showing the achievements in renewal work at the school that she wanted represented.

I was able to design a template…and it all just fitted perfectly. I think everyone was really happy with the finished product. It looked professional and was something that was unique to the school community and therefore owned by them.

I enjoyed working with school and curriculum personnel to design a polished product…in this case a poster - that represented a vision the school had of learning. The poster is to be used in classrooms and by the school as a whole on a continuing basis.

Since then I have been able to design a similar template for a number of school communities with a similar concept in mind.

Conversation with Eileen Coghill
Education Officer Curriculum, and Andrew Biddle
APA St Thomas More, Sunshine Beach

Q Eileen, you have worked with a number of schools using the Learning Framework?

A [Eileen] Yes, and the processes develop and change over time. I believe school staff need to know that they are not developing their own learning framework, but rather developing a vision for learning aligned to the Learning Framework. I see that the statements of belief schools settle on are either the same or very similar – perhaps, simpler – to those on the BCE Learning Framework.

The challenge comes when staff start to articulate statements of principle that drive the way teacher’s work is done within that particular community and culture. The more I am involved with schools working this way, the easier I find the process.

Recently I facilitated a process at St Thomas More School, Sunshine Beach which became a partnership of work with a key teacher and the Assistant Principal Administration (APA). They both worked at keeping the process moving and my role evolved into being a ‘critical friend’, offering feedback to statements of principles as they were developed. This resultant Vision Statement was recently used to support staff in their reflection on pedagogical practices used in focus literacy lessons. This was completed on a Professional Development Day (Pupil Free Day) facilitated by the APA, and the Assistant Principal Religious Education (APRE) and Curriculum Support Teacher (CST).

They reflected afterwards that the vision statement gave them a starting point and was used to challenge current pedagogical practice. It was also used as an end point to reflect on the work they had presented during the day.
Q Andrew, can you add to this from your perspective at St Thomas More?

A [Andrew] St Thomas More School, Sunshine Beach prepared for the introduction of the Prep year by forming a working committee to address the vision of what we wanted to achieve and the practical organisation required. The committee wrote a fantastic statement about ‘Learning in the Early Years’ however I challenged them to make it a document that they, and maybe others in the school, would use regularly for different needs and purposes. Eileen has mentioned some of the other ways our school has used this document.

Q So, I get the impression from you Eileen that the formation of a Vision Statement is not necessarily an end point in this process?

A [Eileen] No, the strength of the work is in the time given for staff reflection and development of a common vision. This is used to guide a staff collectively and collaboratively forward. Moving forward can take a number of different directions. For example, one school has used their statements of principle to support staff to identify their own personal professional learning plans. Some schools further develop a student friendly version to support class visioning and behaviour management.

Eileen Coghill [Education Officer Curriculum] came to work with staff on one of the PD days where a lot of professional conversation took place as we worked on, discussed and then composed our beliefs and values. By the end of this day we had come up with approximately 7 major statements which we felt captured the main concepts from our extensive deliberations.

A committee of approximately 7 staff members from all year levels continued to work on the statements over the next 6 months, refining and defining the statements and writing principles and practices. At each step along the way, the staff was given an opportunity to discuss and provide input on the developments. We met as a committee each fortnight after school to work on this, and committee members were very enthusiastic about the process.

The completed document – our Vision and Belief Statement, became part of all our educational decisions and curriculum based developments. For example, we used it when planning with some teachers to see if the plans aligned with our beliefs and practices. Likewise, we were in the middle of revising our Spelling program and used the statement to support our decisions regarding the composition of the program. We used a similar process to guide us when we were working on a homework policy at the beginning of the year.

Even though this process of developing the Vision and Belief statement took some time we have found it really useful as a basic and foundational resource to guide our decision making process.

Carolyn Hayes [Acting Principal at St Ita’s Dutton park] writes the following about the Vision and Belief Statement developed whilst she was at Queen of Apostle’s Primary School, Stafford.

At Queen of Apostle’s, Stafford we worked on our Vision and Belief Statement at the beginning of the 2007 school year. It was initiated after the arrival of a new Principal along with about 12 new staff members. This seemed an ideal time to revisit the beliefs we held about learning at this school.
The posters about learning - St Brigid’s Rosewood, and St Thomas More, Sunshine Beach
In April of this year the Queensland Catholic Education Commission released a statement entitled *Queensland Catholic Schools and Curriculum*. This statement emanated from a review of Catholic Curriculum Policy, which the Commission had promulgated in the 1980s. The members of the Queensland Catholic Commission’s Education Committee were tasked with updating that policy. Their advice to the Commission was that it was timely to develop a statement rather than develop a policy.

The rationale for developing the statement is that we are in a period of rapid educational change. The Committee felt that it was important for a core document to be developed which could offer a framework for reflection on key themes in Catholic Theology and Philosophy that assist the development of curriculum in Catholic schools.

The Commission took the advice of its Committee and appointed Dr Kevin Treston OAM to write a draft statement. This draft was reworked with the author over several months before the Commission promulgated it formally at its 2008 Curriculum Conference in April.

**What the document presents**

The document is a very readable, beautifully produced publication over fourteen pages in length and in seven parts. It presents key concepts and questions which may assist school communities in their engagement with the document and in their reflection on its key themes.

In the opening section about defining curriculum it suggests:

- Three core assertions should constitute a Catholic framework for curriculum;
  - learning and living are linked in the curriculum in the context of the Catholic understanding of purpose, meaning and destiny
  - curriculum forms a whole person in the context of a Catholic understanding of the inherent dignity of a person created in the image and likeness of God
  - Curriculum prepares students for global responsibilities in the context of a Catholic understanding of justice, peace and ecological sustainability.

These are both affirming and challenging assertions. They rightly place the curriculum offerings of the school at the forefront in presenting a particular religious view of life and reality. A religious view of life, within the Catholic tradition, is not limited to the formal Religious Education program nor to that which constitutes the religious life of a school community. The total curriculum offerings of the school constitute that Catholic world view which I assert is a gift we can offer to students in our schools and to their families.

The document presents the contemporary issues that influence curriculum and some Catholic perspectives on curriculum that have occurred over time. These two sections provide an excellent entry point for teachers and school communities in order that they understand that which has been important within our tradition. It also suggests those things which we might wish to hold on to.

**Foundational themes for curriculum in Catholic schools**

I find this section of the document to be very powerful and life giving. Interestingly it proposes that there is an overarching focus of curriculum in Catholic schools. It states that this …… is to empower learners to enrich the quality of life in the community by living out the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. Those of you who are familiar with our own Learning Framework would note some similarity to our overarching goal for learning – Empowering learners of all ages to shape and enrich our changing world by living the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, a foundational theme for curriculum in Catholic schools is the person of Jesus Christ.

Within this document there are four major headings, which expand this notion. The document presents a Catholic understanding of the human person as central. It also talks about a Catholic appreciation of knowing and learning within which the teaching enterprise occurs. It suggests there is a Catholic perspective on how humans are enjoined to live within the integrity of creation. And it reasserts the 2000 year old history of the Catholic Christian heritage of learning and teaching within the mission of the Church to promote the reign of God. These four headings are presented as Anthropology, Epistemology, Cosmology, the Catholic Christian Story and Tradition. I would recommend that this section of the document be well worth unpacking in creative ways in staff professional learning activities.
The way ahead
The final sections of the document place before us some excellent questions for school community reflection. They challenge all of us to see how our Catholic school communities are aligned with a theology and philosophy of Catholic education. Such questions require us to reflect upon whether we are becoming private or elite schools — schools which are not founded upon a Catholic world view. I found the following sentence to be very powerful within this section: the development of each student includes empowering students with a motivation, knowledge, skills and spirituality necessary to live and work effectively as witnessing people in society inspired by a Christian vision of life.

How well do we do this?
The document orients the reader to a way forward. It proposes five themes as possible pathways for deepening an awareness of and practical application of the theological and philosophical foundations of curriculum in Catholic schools. I find these to be very useful, positive and productive.

Conclusion
I recommend this document to principals and staff in our Catholic schools. It would be an excellent resource for all teachers to read, particularly those who are struggling with the concepts of the Catholic Christian story, and how to convey it, and live it within a contemporary Catholic schooling environment.

The document will be very useful for those who negotiate with Government on the various emerging trends in curriculum. It provides in a well written, comprehensive understanding of what we believe and value about students and their learning. I look forward to using it in such forums as we attempt to bring about an “educational revolution”, quoting our current Australian government, which is well resourced, purposeful and meaningful.

One of the document’s strengths is its unpacking of Catholic Christian anthropology. My experience suggests that often debates and developments in curriculum falter around questions of anthropology. What is it that we believe about human beings, particularly young learners and their potential? Do we really value a developmental approach to education and to learning or are we becoming limited and sanitized by testing regimes and standards that are being imposed upon us for economic reasons rather than for the development of the human person? The document is useful in providing a framework for such discussions.

I commend the document Queensland Catholic Schools and Curriculum to you. It is available from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission GPO Box 2441, Brisbane 4001.

The web address is www.qcec.qld.catholic.edu.au

Features of Catholicism and their implications for the curriculum of a Catholic school

Graeme Barry
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In this article I identify eight distinguishing features of Catholicism that provide points of reference to assist a school community to reflect on its Catholic identity in relation to implications for the design, enactment and evaluation of the school curriculum and its associated learning and teaching.

The document The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium situates the Catholic school clearly within the mission and ministry of the Church

“The complexity of the modern world makes it all the more necessary to increase awareness of the ecclesial identity of the Catholic school. It is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its “structure” as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry. The Catholic school participates in the evangelising mission of the Church and is a privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out … It is a true and proper ecclesial entity by reason of its educational activity, “in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony”. (The Catholic School On The Threshold of the Third Millennium, #11).
Synthesis of faith and culture, faith and life
The Catholic school, as educational institution, has as its core business the synthesis of faith and culture, faith and life. Promoting this synthesis through the whole curriculum of a Catholic school is a significant challenge to all who promote and are accountable for learning and teaching in a Catholic school.

Embracing the whole
The word ‘catholic’ from the Greek kata holos means ‘universal’, ‘in keeping with the whole’ or “embracing the whole”. To be ‘catholic’ then is to be open to every person and to everything of value, to everything that is life-giving. In his great prayer for unity John the evangelist has Jesus pray that all may be one “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17.21). The Church and Catholic schools do not exist for themselves but belong to this broader mission of Jesus to the whole world. In its mission to the world the Catholic tradition promotes a spiritual vision that is humanising and a curriculum that endeavours to teach, challenge and transform all those who engage in learning and teaching in the school.

Distinguishing features of Catholicism

• Positive Vision of the Person
• Sacramentality
• Community
• Tradition
• A Reasoned Wisdom
• Spirituality for Everyone
• A Faith that does Justice
• Openness and Inclusion

These eight distinguishing features of Catholicism provide useful points of reference for the design, enactment and evaluation of the school curriculum and its associated learning and teaching.

1. POSITIVE VISION OF THE PERSON
The Catholic tradition affirms the inherent dignity of each human person created in the image and likeness of God. Catholicism has a realistic optimism that affirms love over hate, hope over despair, good over evil and justice over injustice. Each person has inherent rights and responsibilities as co-creators with God. The individual person is always both an individual self and yet turned toward “the other”; we are individual but communal, autonomous and relational, free and responsible.

This Catholic vision of the human person is expressed in curriculum when the ways in which learning and teaching is conducted clearly demonstrate that each individual and his or her learning needs and capacities are taken seriously and each person is supported in valuing themselves and other learners. Nurturing the value of each learner and providing for the diversity of learners is given priority and expression in tangible ways within the curriculum. Positive and effective social and personal development learning based on the Catholic vision of the human person and their intrinsic human dignity as individuals created in the image and likeness of God is explicitly programmed and provided for across the whole of the school curriculum. The formation of moral conscience and a Catholic understanding of human freedom, rights and responsibility are developed in ways adapted to the context and age of students. Students are challenged to develop their gifts and talents, to excel and become the best person they are capable of becoming.

2. SACRAMENTALITY
Catholic tradition has at its very core a sacramental vision of reality that experiences all created reality as permeated with the presence of God. In Catholic sacramental understanding we live in a symbolic universe which acknowledges a deeper reality behind all experiences, from the most mundane to the most exalted. In this sense Catholic understanding of sacramentality gives meaning and significance to all human experience. Catholic sacramentality has at its heart the Paschal Mystery, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Paschal Mystery is the underlying pattern that connects Catholics to the story of Jesus and our life in the world.

A school curriculum reflects a Catholic sacramental vision when it clearly and explicitly integrates and fosters appreciation of what is good, beautiful and true. Learning and teaching nurtures a Catholic sacramental vision when a sense of awe and wonder is promoted and the sacredness of all created reality is reinforced in what is taught and how it is taught. All learning areas of the curriculum have the potential to connect with this sacramental vision but the humanities and the sciences have the power to make a particularly telling impact on the minds and hearts of students.

A Catholic sacramental vision, when integrated into a school curriculum, can affirm that life is inherently good, meaningful and worthwhile even in the face of the brokenness, sinfulness, sadness and tragedy that are also part of human experience.
3. COMMUNITY

Catholic tradition gives particular prominence to community. Within Catholicism community is much more than a social reality. Community is also a theological reality focused on understandings of community as Communion, Body of Christ and People of God. Community is promoted through the development of right relationships and service of others. In community individuals gather for worship, hear and proclaim the Word of God and provide witness through their lives and service to others.

The curriculum in a Catholic school reflects Catholic understandings of community and communion by promoting learning about and experience of inclusion, belonging, participation, engagement and service to others. Teaching and learning in a Catholic school challenges the individualism and self-centredness of our times by developing opportunities for students to understand and act for the common good. Thus the curriculum of a Catholic school educates for peace, justice, reconciliation and ecological sustainability. Learning and teaching focuses upon the Christian challenge to service, social responsibility, social participation and effective citizenship. A curriculum that truly promotes community and communion fosters a stance towards society that affirms what is good and true and challenges beliefs and practices that are neither good nor true causing division and alienation within and beyond the school community.

4. TRADITION

Catholicism is a faith tradition that continues to journey in history. Catholics look to Scripture and its authoritative interpretation in the lived tradition of the Church as a source of guidance in their lives. Tradition emerges from the dialogue between culture and the Christian story in different historical periods. Tradition is a dynamic, living reality grounding Catholics in the wisdom of the past and shaping two thousand years of received wisdom to respond to present and future contexts.

Catholic understanding of tradition recognises both the value of understanding and wisdom from the past as well as the need to interpret and apply that wisdom in ways that promote truth and right action in the present and into the future. Thus those who plan teaching and learning experiences in a Catholic school provide for an appropriate balance between past, present and future. Catholic schools ensure a strong historical dimension in their school curriculum in order to enhance student understanding and appreciation of the interplay between culture and Catholic tradition in different historical periods including the present. An approach to curriculum that respects tradition endeavours to ensure that cultural richness, difference and diversity is respected and celebrated. At the same time schools reinforce perennial wisdom and truth that gives authentic meaning, purpose and direction to human existence.

5. A REASONED WISDOM

Catholicism has had a long and rich tradition of seeking to establish truth through rational processes in the light of scripture and tradition. A well-known definition of theology is “faith seeking understanding”. Thus, Catholicism values highly rationality and all types of knowledge. Catholicism recognises both the value as well as the limits of reason in the search for truth. Catholic schools promote a reasoned wisdom in their curriculum when they can point to a well-organised, well resourced, intellectually challenging and competently taught whole school curriculum program. Such a program supports learning and teaching that embodies sound reasoning, critical thinking, academic excellence and a genuine search for truth. Students are intellectually challenged and assisted to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions of reflective, self-directed learners. Learning and assessment tasks are structured in ways that enhance the thinking and reasoning skills of students.

6. A SPIRITUALITY FOR EVERYONE

The Catholic faith tradition has given rise to a wealth of expressions of spirituality in diverse historical and cultural contexts. For Catholics, spirituality is relational connecting the individual to God, to life, to persons and to all creation. The Catholic tradition has valued both individual and communal expressions of spirituality. Spirituality has its source in a sense of awe and wonder at the mystery of life. Spirituality is nurtured through prayer, meditation, contemplation, asceticism, religious practice and action.

The various learning areas of the curriculum in a Catholic school have the potential to impact positively upon the developing spirituality of students. For example the social sciences can enhance the social consciousness of students and challenge them to adopt a spirituality that does justice and is other-centred rather than self-centred. The humanities learning areas can contribute to the development of spiritual sensitivity, an appreciation of the aesthetic and an understanding of, and compassion for people particularly those who
7. A FAITH THAT DOES JUSTICE
At the heart of Catholic social teaching is recognition of the intrinsic value of each person and the whole of creation. Catholics recognise that faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ entails recognising and acting upon a ‘fundamental option for the poor’. Action for social justice aims at restoring and promoting ‘right relationship’ within the created order.

A faith that does justice entails integrating Catholic social teaching and social justice education across the curriculum and providing opportunities for students and staff to be involved in action for social justice. Students are supported in developing a sense of social responsibility, acquiring the necessary dispositions and skills for making their contribution to the transformation of the world in the light of the gospel. Policies, structures and practices that impact on the curriculum need to reflect a faith that does justice.

Teaching and learning in a Catholic school supports the dignity of the human person, challenges stereotyping and biased thinking and values all that is good, true and supportive of human life in the diversity of cultures and religions in our world.

8. OPENNESS AND INCLUSION
The word ‘catholic’ means ‘embracing the whole’. Thus openness and inclusion are fundamental to what it means to be Catholic. These same values of ‘openness’ and ‘inclusion’ lie at the very heart of the ministry of Jesus. Gospel hospitality and welcoming of the stranger are intrinsic characteristics of communities that bear the name ‘catholic’.

Catholic schools support a curriculum that is open and inclusive when they make provision for the inclusion of students with special needs and create create learning environments that provide well focused, supportive and flexible educational experiences for such students. Learning and teaching supports openness and inclusion when participation is encouraged and provided for, partnership and dialogue is fostered and when young people have a ‘safe’ place to grapple with and question their lives, their world and their faith tradition.

Conclusion
In this article I have attempted to reflect briefly on the significance of the specifically Catholic character for the school curriculum and for the processes of learning and teaching in the school. Each of the eight characteristics of Catholicism provides a potentially fruitful focus for evaluation, discussion and action for curriculum renewal.

A Catholic school community can profitably reflect on these questions. What is authentically Catholic in our current curriculum? What is currently lacking in relation to an authentically Catholic curriculum? What curriculum renewal do we require to further develop a more authentically Catholic curriculum?

References

Caring for Students at the Margins
Marginalised Students: Project and Website

Rev Wally Dethlefs
Project Officer – Marginalised Students

In the New Testament, James stresses that caring for those who experience powerlessness and voicelessness is at the core of religion:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27).

Catholic teachers with their commitment:
…to justice and equity for all students implement strategies which lead to more equal opportunities and outcomes (Celebration and Challenge: The Teacher in a Catholic School. Archdiocese of Brisbane. 1998. p16).

In 2003, the BCE Leadership Team, affirming their belief in the Church’s teaching of preferential option for students who are on the margins, commissioned research into the nature, extent and needs of these students. As they said, we know we have these students in our schools, but we don’t know how many there are,
where they are, what their needs are and how well the school community is meeting their needs.

Research was undertaken with the assistance of a reference group concentrating on secondary colleges but sampling the situation in primary schools. Thirty-two secondary colleges responded to the surveys which reported out-of-home students at a yearly rate of 14 students per 1000, 129 students per 1000 for marginalised students and 15 students per 1000 for disengaged students. Twenty-seven of the thirty-eight primary schools who returned the surveys reported out-of-home students at the average of 10 students per 1000 and 69 students per 1000 for marginalised students.

The Leadership Team’s response to this research was to put in place 27 new full-time guidance counsellor positions and to commission further and more intensive research in 2004 into the situation in primary schools. 104 out of 109 primary schools returned the survey forms in 2004. They reported out of home students at a yearly rate of 14 students per 1000, marginalised students at a rate of 79 students per 1000 and disengaged students at a rate of 27 students per 1000.

The research used the following definitions/descriptions:

**Students at the margins** - students who are relegated to, confined to, a lower or outer limit of society due to reasons such as: violence at home, mental health issues, being parentless, behavioural issues, learning difficulties, substance abuse, cultural discrimination, sexual identity, material poverty.

**Students who are out-of-home** - those students who are not necessarily without a roof over their heads, but who are not living with their parents on a permanent basis and are living, for example, with their grandparents, or are in foster care, or youth shelters, or couch surfing etc.

**Students who are disengaged** – those students who are not able to engage with the curriculum as offered in the school they attend.

The surveys had a section on recommendations in terms of how school communities and Brisbane Catholic Education could improve their approaches, interventions and / or strategies for these students. In 2005, the Leadership Team requested that these recommendations be analysed and prioritised into an Implementation Report. The recommendations in this report were accepted by the Leadership Team in July 2005.

The recommendations from the Implementation Report encompassed a specific mention of out-of-home, marginalised and disengaged students in the Strategic Renewal Framework 2007 – 2011; the role description of Principals, and key personnel; a stand-alone policy on out-of-home and marginalised students; and a website **Marginalised Students: Believe in Us** to assist staff in their work with these students. It is anticipated that all recommendations will be fully implemented by the end of this year.

The website can be accessed from BCE’s Public Homepage. It can also be accessed directly at www.studenthelp.bne.catholic.edu.au. The main content pages are: Caring Community, Students, Teachers, Parents/Carers, Local Community. Each of the above content pages include:

- How To’s, which is a check list of suggested actions which could be undertaken by the school community or individual teacher,
- Stories about responses, strategies, interventions of what has worked and why they have worked, in other words, ‘practice wisdom’,
- Resources which are links to relevant websites and

The website has further resources including:

- BCEC Student Support Services
- Lighthouse Projects
- Support Materials
- Policies
- Research

Under the title of Social Justice, the website contains extensive materials on why we, as Christian Catholic educators should be assisting students who are out-of-home or at the margins, as well as a section on schools as sites for early intervention and prevention work.

The web site, while primarily aimed at assisting staff, is also available to parents and students. As one Year 11 student wrote,
The marginalised student website helped my Mum and I deal with a very trying family situation. They provided us with the necessary tools to succeed in our recovery. I learnt not only a lot about myself but also how to remain strong and focused so that we could be happy again. I can now let go of my anger and resentment and this has made me a better person.

While the Marginalised Students: Believe in Us website is up and running, it will not be publicly launched until later in the year. In the meantime, we are endeavouring to iron out any glitches in the site. Your comments, suggestions and criticism are most welcome.

We are also keen to receive material from teachers and those who work collaboratively with teachers, about learning and teaching practices that are responsive to, and inclusive of, the needs of all learners. This could be in the form of stories or lighthouse projects. Should you have ideas you would like to share, please do not hesitate to contact me on wdeethlefs@bne.catholic.edu.au

Many students who are at the margins have to come to grips with their situations in order to benefit from and contribute to their educational experience. Deepening our understanding as adults, of the complex causes of social, emotional or spiritual disadvantage and knowing ways of walking with and engaging these students will assist and empower them to engage actively with the curriculum and the life of the school.

Caring for Students

The website referred to in Fr Wally’s article contains information on how some schools meet the special and varied needs of students who fall within the marginalised or out of home student category during their time at school.

The website is located on the Brisbane Catholic Education public site - http://www.bne.catholic.edu.au and titled Marginalised Students - Believe in Us.

From here you can navigate to the Lighthouse Projects and to Community Participation where you can read how St Paul’s at Woodridge engaged in action with others in their community to surround one family with the care needed for their empowerment and inclusion within the life of the school. The story ‘Being there’ illustrates how members of the school community came together to assist the members of this family work through troubled times, providing an environment where the students are able to participate more fully and have a genuine sense of belonging to that school community.


Similarly, the student centred program Hop-To-It operating at St Francis College, Crestmead and devised by Leo Hoponoa, assists ‘troubled’ students develop behaviour which, amongst other things, leads to structuring order out of chaos in their lives. The program aims to build the capacity of the students to change their own behaviour by assisting them to become aware of the distinction between their ‘Pretending Self’ and their ‘True/Authentic Self’. The website explains how the program works - with features such as regular meetings for reflection and mentoring. Three students have written their own stories about how they have personally benefited from participating in the program.

What are the benefits? These include how they feel about themselves, improvements in confidence about learning and self responsibility, and in their connections with others.

“The program helps me to understand myself, the difference between what I do… and what I want… and why I always behave badly.

I have raised my self-confidence, I am interested in my study. Now I can walk around at school with my head held high and feel good about myself. I can relate to other students easily”
(Mr Timmy, 14 and in Year 9.)

“I feel I can handle my anger in a much better way.

I know I am improving heaps”
(Mr Willy, aged 13 in Year 8.)

Read more about the program and the stories on the website. This link will take you directly to Hop-To-It.

Supporting Learning in the Prep Class

Jo Kimmins and Jacqie Brusasco
St James Primary School, Coorparoo

In 2007 we noticed after a couple of days that one of our new Prep students was reading fluently and demonstrating advanced writing ability. This presented a challenge concerning what we could do in order to create an appropriate learning environment for this child.

In the first instance, we thought to discuss options with the parents which included the possibility of their child being accelerated to a Year 1 class. English was her second language and she had a very clever older brother attending the same school. It was the parent’s preference for their daughter to remain in the Prep year for a number of reasons. She was a physically small and quiet child and they felt she would benefit socially from a play based curriculum with other children similar to her in both age and social development. They did not want to see her being ‘singled out’ as ‘special’ and wanted her to be part of the usual school structures and processes.

Planning

We needed to have a clear idea of her abilities in order to plan appropriately for her learning needs. Jacqie - a Support Teacher Inclusive Education (STIE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher - used a variety of assessment materials including a Reading Continuum record and other reading tests. Assessment indicated the Prep student was already reading at what was judged to be a 10+ reading age. We realised we needed to create a differentiated curriculum for her which would recognise her past experiences, knowledge and skills, and build on these whilst avoiding ways that might make her feel ‘different’ in class.

The Prep Class had a number of ASD students (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) and so we needed to plan for play based learning activities that could meet a variety of learning needs existing within the group. A play and negotiated approach provides natural inclusivity for all. In Prep (and the Early Years) planning for learning is built around five contexts for learning – play, investigations, routines and transitions, real life situations and focused learning and teaching. Planning focuses on all the Early Learning Areas, but for the following activities the areas of particular focus were – Social and Personal Learning (SOSE and H & PE), Language Learning and Communication - oral language and early literacy, and Active Learning Processes – thinking, investigating, imagining and responding (Science, SOSE, Technology and the Arts).

Many times the focus interest or context for the learning activities were initiated from within the group, with students ‘volunteering’ to undertake various roles and associated tasks. Planning for play was a class construction and documented on large paper. In this way modelling print visually contributed to the building of student confidence in their writing ability whilst illustrating a purpose for writing.

Play based learning activities

This activity provided a means for the Preps to demonstrate and extend their skills. For example, our Prep girl ‘volunteered’ to make all the signage related to the class activities around the VET, PET SHOP and Dog Grooming Service. Children volunteered to take on the roles of for example, the receptionist, the Vet, and shop assistant and centred their play on the expectations and demands of the different roles. Naturally, writing opportunities existed with note taking, prescriptions and surgery waiting lists. In our negotiations with children about role playing...we needed to address aspects of each role and the rights and responsibilities associated
with that role (the Social and Personal Learning Areas of the Early Years Guidelines).

In the Language Learning and Communication area we focused on writing involving daily planning, copying print in the classroom, making lists, labelling for play space, designing concept maps, using speech and thinking balloons, writing caption books, invitations, simple reports, descriptions, and innovating texts.

We aimed to provide opportunities which would allow children to explore writing on a daily basis in a play negotiated curriculum context and by this means, to develop skills in producing simple text.

Writing opportunities grew from a child initiated investigation centring on Egypt such as exploring aspects of ‘Cleopatra’s Curse’. This involved children being engaged in a range of activities as per their interests and abilities related to the Arts, labelling, and for the Gifted and Talented children...exploring hieroglyphics, and plurals of words like sarcophagus, cartouche etc. An Egyptian museum was created including signage, viewing platforms with queuing ropes, antiquities and a scene from a pharaoh’s tomb. Parents and students from other classes were given a tour complete with a guide to communicate information. Through these activities children learned about language and its use, including grammar; in a range of contexts and at an early age.

Planning and implementing a differentiated curriculum for one child enabled us to provide multiple and varied opportunities to write, write, write and engage many of the children in the process. Writing evolved through the play experience and met the varying needs ands interests of all in our Prep class. The children’s experience throughout the year was documented and presented as a Showcase for the Australian Quality Teaching Program, Gifted and Talented Strand.

From the sandpit up: Developing the Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines for the Early Years

Kerry Rush
Coordinator Multimedia Centre
Brisbane Catholic Education

A common childhood experience of playing and planning in the sandpit provides a helpful analogy for developing the Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines for the Early Years Archdiocese of Brisbane. Why the sandpit? Sandpits provide great opportunities for the young at heart to collaboratively enjoy the experience of creating, dialoguing, evaluating, knocking down and reshaping structures until the final design meets the approval of the stakeholders or, in sandpit vernacular; the rake-holders.

The ‘end users’ of these guidelines, the early years classroom teachers of religion in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, have always been at the forefront of the development of these guidelines. At the outset of the project to develop the Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines for the Early Years, and as Queensland moved towards getting ready for Prep in 2007, several grassroots trial and phase-in Prep teachers * were intentionally invited to join Maureen Truasheim,
 Restructure and new building in the sandpit always reflected the purposes, principles and priorities of two underpinning discourses. These discourses were teaching and learning in the Early Years, as determined by the Queensland Studies Authority Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYGC) (2006) and the classroom teaching of religion, as determined in the suite of Religious Education Guidelines Archdiocese of Brisbane. The suite of Guidelines documents for the classroom teaching of religion includes:

- A Statement of Religious Education for Catholic Schools (1997)
- A Syllabus for Religious Education for Catholic Schools (1997)
- Religious Education Years 1 to 10 Learning Outcomes (2003)
- Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines for the Early Years (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Learning Areas - ELAS</th>
<th>Early Learning Areas: Religious Education</th>
<th>Religious Education Learning Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and Personal Learning</td>
<td>Religious Education and Social and Personal Learning</td>
<td>Students are introduced to Scripture and Catholic Christian teachings to further their understandings about relationships, diversity and self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Physical Learning</td>
<td>Religious Education and Health and Physical Learning</td>
<td>Students engage with and reflect upon life experiences and messages within religious texts to build upon their understanding of physical and spiritual wellbeing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Language Learning and Communication | Religious Education and Language Learning and Communication | Students explore, interpret and experiment with spoken, written, visual, gestural, spatial, audio and multi-modal religious texts* to expand their religious understanding, oral language and early literacy.  

* Religious texts include: Scripture and moral stories, simple prayers, gestures, celebrations and expressions of belief, religious symbols, artefacts, art and music. |
| Early Mathematical Understandings | Religious Education and Early Mathematical Understandings | Students engage with early numerate practices to enhance their understandings of the meaning of Scripture stories, simple celebrations and prayers, moral messages and beliefs. |
| Active Learning Processes | Religious Education and Active Learning Processes | Students imagine, investigate, and respond to their own and others’ ideas about phenomena in the natural world, sustainable environments and technology*, in light of their emerging understandings of religious texts.  

* Including Information Communication and Learning Technologies (ICLT)
Creating child-centred, integrated guidelines in Religious Education was a challenge as there were no existing sand mould shapes to fill or water down. Over time, and after some collapsed bridges, the sturdiest connection made was to the Early Learning Areas (ELAs) and Religious Education. This ELA: RE combined key elements of the Early Learning Areas from the EYCG (QSA) and Religious Education. The Religious Education elements were drawn from religious texts, religious knowledge, Catholic Christian beliefs and religious practices.

From feedback received from ‘end-users’ these guidelines are acknowledged as being religiously sound, inclusive of solid early years philosophy and pedagogy, technologically and contemporarily aware and ‘user-friendly’. Early years teachers feel well supported to align and integrate quality Religious Education into overall learning programs developed around the EYCG. Other positives include the helpfulness of the RE Learning Statements and clear and relevant suggestions for planning, interacting, monitoring, assessing and reflecting. Finally, teachers feel they can more easily integrate and make reliable connections to the Religious Education Syllabus Content through the Five Planning Support Tables (See pages 29 -47).

According to Scripture, an unwise person builds a structure on the sand. However, the moving sands which helped build these new guidelines were underpinned by solid foundational rocks of collaboration, relationship, wisdom, knowledge, truth, faith and trust. The Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines for the Early Years for now, are set in stone in the changing sands of time and curriculum development.

*Thanks to the trial and Prep phase-in teachers who were involved in the initial phases of the development of the Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines for the Early Years: Donna Porteus, Alicia McNamara, Judith Wilson and Kelly Nicholas.

Dreamtime Personalities

Br Daniel Hollamby fms
Principal
St Josephs Primary School, Murgon

At the beginning of this year the staff from Saint Joseph’s School Murgon spent a very useful and enjoyable day working with Michael White who developed the Dreamtime Personalities Program. This program is simply another instrument that helps us to understand and appreciate our preferred learning styles, and the different learning styles of children. It helps children to have a greater sense of their own identity and special gifts, and therefore leads to increased self-acceptance, self-confidence and a healthy appreciation of differences.

Dreamtime Personalities is modelled in part on some of the ancient systems (eg Choleric, Phlegmatic, Melancholic, Sanguine: Hippocrates 450 bce); but it is largely based on the Myers Briggs Personality Indicator with an emphasis on the four basic personality types or Temperaments. Each of these four types has been given the name of an Australian animal –

**NF Dolphin • NT Eagle • SJ Wombat • SP Kangaroo**

**Dolphins** value harmony, peace and kindness. They enjoy being creative, expressing themselves through drama and poetry, working in groups and responding to harmony in the classroom and regular affirmation. They do not respond well to noisy classrooms, tests and pressure, and any form of conflict.

**Eagles** value challenge, mastery and independence. They enjoy debates, research projects, independent study, having clear goals to achieve, and being an expert. They find group work difficult, do not enjoy drama or ‘show and tell’ type activities, and sometimes find it hard to follow directives if they perceive a better way of doing things.

**Wombats** value order, certainty and closure. They enjoy helping others, group work, assignments, clear rules and guidelines, and teachers who are well organised.
They tend to be hard workers who love being able to finish work. Wombats do not cope well with interruptions from others, unexpected changes to routine, unclear instructions, and people who are lazy and/or waste time.

**Kangaroos** value action, variety and fun. They learn best by doing, and want all learning to be fun. Excursions, experiments, drama, audio visuals all bring out the best in Kangaroos. Creative writing activities, independent study and too many details make life difficult for Kangaroos in the classroom.

Our challenge as teachers is to know our own preferences, and the preferences of the children in our classes, and then to develop a classroom management plan that is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of all the children.

Generally about 40% of children are Dolphins, 40% are Wombats, 20% are Eagles, and 20% are Kangaroos. The distribution of types within our classes will mean changes in structures and learning environments from year to year: (Something that good teachers have always done).

Children’s types can be determined through a simple questionnaire. To administer the questionnaire a licence is needed and this is obtained through attending a two day seminar. On completion of the questionnaire children are given a colourful certificate with the painting of their animal type in Aboriginal art style on the front, and a description of their type and characteristics on the reverse. They are encouraged to share this with their parents.

The children from Saint Joseph’s were first introduced to the Dreamtime Personalities when Year Six attended their annual camp at the Barambah Environmental Centre in 2007. Dreamtime Personalities is part of the camp program. The children have responded very well to the program, and in the upper classes it has become a part of the routine classroom language. In conflict resolution situations, children are able at times to identify their own type as an underlying cause of the conflict, and understand the responses of others to the situation in the light of their ‘animal’ type. The Dreamtime Personalities forms part of our leadership program with year seven, and is also part of their preparation to be leaders in the Peer Support program.

Each classroom has a set of colourful posters of the four animal types describing their likes and dislikes. The words on these posters were chosen by children from the four different animal types to describe themselves.

The Dreamtime Personalities is now well established at Murgon State School, Murgon State High School, a number of the smaller surrounding state schools and in other schools in the South Burnett region.

There is an excellent website that outlines the Program in detail: [www.dreamtimepersonalities.com](http://www.dreamtimepersonalities.com)
Holy Family Indooroopilly

Celebrating and building on the special character of the school as an environment for learning in the Brigidine traditions & charisms

Erin Wedge
Education Officer Religious Education
Brisbane Catholic Education

It is 80 years since Holy Family at Indooroopilly opened their doors to their primary students. Run by the Brigidine sisters the school, attached to Brigidine College, welcomed 60 students from the surrounding areas in 1928.

Staff at Holy Family spent their professional development day for Term 2 walking down memory lane. Elizabeth Banks, Acting APRE, had organised for a “Parkinson” style forum for teachers to gain an understanding and appreciation of the school history and charism. On the panel were Sr Patricia (counsellor at Brigidine College and Parish worker), Sr Maureen Keady (ex Brigidine Provincial) Norma Forgiarini (ex student during war years), Rosemary Probyn (ex student), Lola Harris (ex teacher) and the first lay principal Margaret Gallen, who after 14 years will be retiring at the end of 2008. This panel shared their memories of the school, covering topics that ranged from: the number of students in classes, school fees, topics taught, text books, the physical layout of the school and the changes that have occurred over time as well as the celebration of fete days, Holy days, the nuns and priests, war time years and much more.

The staff then spent time learning about the history of St Brigid and the Brigidine Sisters, as well as the spirituality and charism of the Brigidine Religious Order.

Staff will now spend time with their APRE and Education Officer RE to plan units of work for implementation in their classrooms for students to have a knowledge and understanding of St Brigid and her spirituality. This will build the prayer life and charism within the school, and students will have a connection to, and an understanding of, the special Brigidine influence on the learning environment of their school.
Catching the Fire … Keeping the flame

Jill Gowdie
Senior Project Officer: Evangelisation and Spiritual Formation

‘Were not our hearts gradually Catching Fire within us …’ Luke 24: 32

The real fire at the heart of Catholic education is its proclamation of a bigger and deeper sacred reality for us all – a proclamation that is unequivocal; that is talked about, celebrated, glimpsed and lived in our communities of schools from Childers to Currumbin. This ‘bigger picture’ vision permeates Catholic teaching and learning, architecture and environment, leadership, and team development. It is a sense of the sacred made tangible in the day to day encounters of the classroom and the staff room.

context of religious life is not a ready-to-wear fit for the everyday lifestyle of our current and emerging generations of Catholic school staff. The times have called for new designs and new lines. The challenge for us all is to develop a new shape so that the essence remains the same and the shape is authentic.

This issue of appropriate formation of staff for the contemporary context of Catholic education is a challenge not only for all Australian dioceses, but also for Catholic education systems right across the western world. The attendant issues of succession planning and leadership development have signalled urgency around this formation focus. Significant research has been done deconstructing what has been outlining what is not working and why this issue of formation has become such a challenge.

Brisbane Catholic Education has taken the next step by developing a new approach to spiritual formation for Catholic educators that is dynamic, strategic, comprehensive and contemporary. The carefully developed approach that has emerged is built upon the learnings, research and experience of the past 20 years, including research into what has happened in Queensland, Australian and overseas dioceses.

The keepers of the flame at the heart of Catholic education are our teachers. For a significant part of our history in Catholic schools, the identifiable ‘flame keepers’ were those sisters, brothers and priests from religious orders who staffed and ran our Catholic schools, who lived in community close to the school and who were both sign and symbol of the transformative vision and purpose of Catholic schooling. Whatever the shortcomings in this model and approach, it was certainly clear and provided those three things so critical to Catholic identity – witness, vision and community.

Times have changed. The culture and demographic has shifted. What has not changed is the centrality and importance of teachers – and indeed all staff – in the vision of Catholic education. Not 40 years ago, 50% of teachers in Catholic schools were vowed religious. Today, that figure is 1%. The lifestyle and formation

This framework – Catching Fire – not only provides a touchstone for our thinking and understanding, but also a map for planning and strategic renewal. This has provided a strong broad direction within which individual staff and schools may navigate and shape a program of formation according to their specific needs and context. The framework matrix and model links some of our core documents such as our archdiocesan vision – Jesus Communion Mission and our Catholic Education vision – Teaching Challenging Transforming. It gives focus to
The following are some of the guiding principles that underpin the implementation of this formation framework.

Firstly, it’s an approach that proclaims Catholic education is about education for transformation and this transformative vision is its core business. Spiritual formation is critical to everyone in Catholic education; it is not just for those who are interested in this sort of thing, or only for RE teachers. The target audience is all of our 9,500 staff!

Secondly, evangelisation or as John Paul II coined, the new evangelisation is about beginning with our own stories first. In other words, we start where we are. Where we are in this contemporary time often sees individuals not only disconnected to their own stories, but with no real understanding of the church story or the Jesus story. Thus this approach acknowledges the starting point of the individual, connecting to the collective Christian story and into the God narrative. It is the bedrock for evangelisation.

Thirdly, it’s connective to role and context, and targeted in approach. The research tells us that any effective adult learning must allow the individual to clearly see the connections to their everyday role and day to day context. In this case our context is the school, whilst recognising that formation for the principal has a very different context to formation for the school officer, middle manager or classroom teacher.

Finally, it’s an approach that is holistic – a ‘head, heart and hands’ design. Too often in initiatives under the banner of spiritual formation, we have seen programs that begin and remain in the head. People learn a lot about prayer, but never actually get around to praying. Programs may tap into the heart, moving people in their own being and feeling, but with little or no impact on their lives. Moreover, where the focus relates to action - usually with a social justice base - this may be without any overt connection to Jesus or church.

The approach in this new framework acknowledges and respects the different entry-points of the ‘head, heart or hands’, but is explicit about the need for the three to come together and to do so through three dimensions.

These include a real and lived relationship with Jesus and his vision, the participation with the whole company of travellers who follow Jesus across space and time in what is termed the Communion dimension; and the understanding that real spiritual formation in the Christian tradition moves us out of ourselves to action that makes a difference in the world – the Mission dimension.

And so, if spiritual formation in the Christian Catholic tradition is essentially about ‘growing people’ in a holistic way, respectful of where they are at, connective to role and context, and that this happens in community - then we need to be clear about what exactly each person is growing into, and what might be the discernible marks of such a community of people.

The Catching Fire framework identifies nine capacities as discernible marks within a Catholic educational

This is a community approach giving profile and building powerful depth to specific capacities, in a contemporary way that is invitational, holistic and sustainable. It seeks to build a culture of expectation around formation for all staff.

**Implementation – Three key thrusts**

The implementation of the framework has over the last year and a quarter seen a multi-dimensional development on a range of fronts with a view to an understanding of spiritual formation that rinses through the organisation. The three main thrusts of the scope and strategy include:

1. **Systemic Resources**
   
The following resource initiatives are accessible by all staff and all schools.

   The Staff PrayerFire resource. This growing resource provides modelling, contextualisation and different prayer experiences from the traditions connective to the chrisms of Jesus, religious orders and feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. The Staff PrayerFire is being received with great enthusiasm from schools. Through it, staff feel connected to a bigger story and grounded in their own story.

   The Light a PrayerCandle website has been another innovative way of providing a formative systemic resource to connect an age-old ritual with a contemporary audience, and has attracted users in other dioceses and overseas.

   The *Catching Fire* spiritual formation network is a resource circle of spiritual formators and facilitators offering a wide range of experiences explicitly connected to the framework. We have taken a collaborative approach in providing support to this, drawing formators and facilitators within and across diocesan boundaries to develop the network. It is a specific resource to support the planning and goal setting for individual school staffs. Brisbane has also been the catalyst for developing a national network.

   The *Catching Fire* website. The development of this – connected to our public site - is a key evangelising strategy in itself, as well as a hub for developed and developing resources. It seeks to be contemporary, connective and strategic. Go to www.catchingfire.com.au or connect from the Brisbane Catholic Education public homepage.

2. **Integration into Professional Learning and Planning**

These strategies reflect an integrative thrust in the broad areas of renewal across the system.

This is a critical dimension of strategic implementation. Spiritual formation and evangelisation have been explicitly headlined in the current strategic renewal framework. Schools have been provided with practical planning tools for annual planning and goal setting, and for explaining and unpacking the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the *Catching Fire* spiritual formation approach.

In addition, Formation is being intentionally integrated into our leadership programs, being developed with greater focus in our induction programs, and is central to our developing strategy around succession planning.

The integration of spiritual formation into leadership programs and succession planning, induction programs and emerging new initiatives across Brisbane Catholic Education involves ongoing collaborative work with senior staff across directorates in those programs as they grow and take new shape. Most recently, the integration of the framework into significant new documents has seen the *Catching Fire* capacities adopted as a key lens in a new draft document addressing the *Religious Life of the School*. Schools and BCEC sections are intentionally planning around formation using the resources provided. This kind of integration is critical to the success of spirituality becoming core to what we do and who we are, whatever our role or position within Catholic education.
3. Development of a targeted Staff Formation Program

The third thrust in strategic implementation is the development of a targeted program for staff formation. The Catching Fire Staff Formation Program has been extraordinarily successful, both on an individual level and at a whole staff level.

The Catching Fire Staff Formation Program takes a targeted community approach to formation and is designed to provide a bedrock for all staff communities. The program consists of 3 distinct programs with each targeted to different staff groups, connective to vocation and context, and designed to meet people ‘where they are’. Our vision for this program is a personal and professional transformation and last year’s pilot year experience is filled with stories that attest to this reality.

A. Guiding Lights. This retreat program for leadership staff gives particular focus to deepening an understanding of the spirituality of leadership with a ‘head, heart and hands’ approach. It is accompanied by the piloting of an ongoing leader companioning program. The initial live-in retreat includes an ‘on the streets’ experience and the use of psycho-spiritual tools to lay open a personal understanding of the role of spirituality in Catholic leadership. The model of companioning is characterised by flexibility and participant need, quite different from a mentoring or coaching model with fixed input points and meeting modes.

B. Keepers of the Flame begins with a 2 1/2 day live-in program for experienced teachers focusing on developing a reflective capacity for their personal and professional spiritual journey. The initial retreat makes for a ‘kairos’ experience for these ‘seasoned players.’ Focused very much on developing a sense of personal story and prayer within their lives, participants are then enabled to situate their individual stories and vocation within the shared archdiocesan and ecclesial story.

C. The SpiritFire program has a two-fold purpose of spiritual formation and skilling. Three people from each school, one from leadership with any two other staff members participate in four formation days throughout the year. A key focus is the reading of their own lives through an understanding of scripture and psycho-spirituality, as well as the learning of simple skills to walk with others, facilitating small group initiatives and reflection time. In their schools, they have particular carriage of the systemic resources provided to schools, especially Staff PrayerFire.

Into the Future

The strategic approach for spiritual formation across Brisbane Catholic Education includes the integration of spiritual formation into new and existing processes and structures across all directorates, as well as the provision of systemic wide resources and a targeted formation program for staff. It is a comprehensive and contemporary approach that holds in creative balance the tension between respectfulness for the individual spiritual journey and systemic needs and expectations. The approach seeks to do this in a collaborative and inclusive way with all stakeholders. Indeed, we have been blessed with the garnering of enormous energy and talent from so many people drawn into this important work.

We teach who we are, and we lead who we are. It is the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ that we bring to the children before us and the colleagues around us. This is essentially what Jesus was about – nurturing our deepest identity. If we lose a sense of this and the understanding that this is our core business, we are in dire trouble in terms of mission, of our transformative vision and of the sacred fire at our heart. It is the privilege of a lifetime to challenge and nurture this extraordinary gift at the centre of each of us and all of us.

Some nights stay up until dawn as the moon sometimes does for the sun.

Be a full bucket, pulled up the dark way of a well then lifted out into light.

Something opens our wings, something allows the load and the hurt disappear.

Someone fills the cup in front of us, we taste only sacredness.

(p. 277 Anam Cara by John O'Donohue [trans R Bly]).
Inquiry based learning is not new, in fact it was promoted by the American educator John Dewey (1859-1952) who revolutionised education in the early twentieth century. Inquiry learning is focused on the learner rather than the teacher and describes a process where students formulate investigative questions, obtain information which builds knowledge and then critique that knowledge in the light of the information gathered.

The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) *Study of Religion* (SOR) syllabus has over the past few years been moving along the path of inquiry learning. Since 2001, the *Study of Religion* syllabus has moved away from purely didactic or transmission models and suggested an inquiry based approach which promoted a serious study of religion. The 2001 syllabus shifted from a mono-model approach (Smart’s dimensions) to a dialogical approach which required the use of multiple approaches including sociological, historical, feminist and phenomenological approaches. The syllabus also encouraged students to critique the content and approaches used, however, six years later there is only minimal evidence of this taking place at the classroom level. The 2008 *Study of Religion* syllabus, through the inquiry process, encourages students to move beyond the acquisition of facts to metacognition, to develop investigative and thinking skills, formulate ideas, make judgments, reach conclusions and to take responsibility for their own learning. It also provides a way forward in developing critical religious literacy.

Although Australian religion teachers have used the term religious literacy for some time, scant attention has been given to both the critical and transformative elements. Religious literacy needs to be expanded to encompass some of the competencies that Green suggests as essential dimensions of literacy: the operational, the cultural and the critical dimensions. The operational dimension involves “competency with regard to the language system” and is concerned with the way individuals use “language … in order to operate effectively in specific contexts” (Green 1988, p.160). The cultural dimension recognises that there is a mutually informing relationship between the language system, the meaning system and the “social construction of knowledge” (Green 1988, p.162). Implicit in this dimension of literacy is critique, which for Green, means that “individuals should not simply participate in culture but should in various ways transform and actively produce it” (Green 1988, p.163). The three dimensions operate together to provide an integrated view of literacies as social practices. The inquiry process for *Study of Religion* attempts to move the level of religious literacy from recognition to reproduction and to reflection (Unsworth, 2001).

The Inquiry Process developed for *Study of Religion* is not just for students but is designed to assist teachers in unit planning, in developing learning activities and in designing assessment instruments. The SOR inquiry process is shaped by five aspects of inquiry: framing, investigating, reasoning, judging and reflecting. Framing involves becoming aware of matters and issues relating to the topic, outlining and defining the topic or issue, identifying a range of sources, exploring knowledge, viewpoints, questions and approaches and identifying, focusing and recording key points of investigation. Investigating is concerned with identifying appropriate resources and methods, establishing validity of sources, formulating research questions, developing ideas for an hypothesis, gathering, collecting, organising, selecting, sorting, presenting data and evidence and investigating and researching issues related to the hypothesis. Reasoning requires students to speculate about sources including identifying bias, to propose/deduce interrelationships from data, to present findings and evidence using various genres, to move towards providing explanations and interpretations of religious beliefs, values, practices, events and to shape and reshape the hypothesis. Judging includes synthesising, making decisions, drawing conclusions and advocating a position. It requires students to draw conclusions based on evidence, justify conclusions about the hypothesis using evidence, and to decide whether further investigation, reasoning, evidence or action is required such as determining possibilities for informing, educating, mobilising, mediating or resisting.

These first four elements in the inquiry process are related to the syllabus’ general objectives of Knowledge and Understanding, Evaluative Processes, and Research and Communication. The final element in the inquiry
process, Reflecting, is linked to the affective objectives. It invites students to consider thinking about their learning and acting as a result of their learning. Students might ask themselves questions such as: How effective has my learning been? What problems did I encounter in the research and how did I respond to them? How could the investigation have been improved? How has this study helped my understanding of religion? What have I learnt about and from religion? How can I apply my personal learning to current religious issues? What action can I take?

The Study of Religion inquiry model is not a lock-step process, but fluid, enabling students to move freely between framing, investigating and reasoning before judging. The fluidity between elements will depend on the unit and topic being studied and the particular emphasis taken with the area under investigation.

The Inquiry Process recommended in the 2008 Study of Religion syllabus is inspired by social constructivist pedagogy which offers opportunities and occasions for students to develop their own questions, needs and purposes, and thereby gradually construct a more mature understanding of themselves, the world and others. The approach aims to develop ‘expert learners’ who will not only question themselves as learners and the strategies they use but will also broaden the tools they employ to assist their learning. Learning is spiral; it requires students to reflect on their experiences and to continually increase the complexity of ideas which in turn enables them to integrate new information. The challenge for the teacher is to provide inquiry-based learning activities for students so that they can test their ideas, draw conclusions based on evidence and share their knowledge in a collaborative learning environment. "Constructivist pedagogy and inquiry based learning are ways of involving the learner in a more dynamic way in the religion classroom" (Goldburg 2007, p.11).

When using inquiry-based learning, teachers have to adopt the role of facilitator and help the learner to acquire his or her own understanding of content. Facilitators ask questions rather than tell, and provide guidelines rather than instructions. Vygotsky (1978) believes that the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development occurs when speech and practical activity, two completely independent lines of development, converge. Through practical activity a student constructs meaning on an intrapersonal level, while speech connects this meaning with the interpersonal world shared by the learner and his/her culture. The teacher’s role in this process is to encourage learning and reflecting on learning. The inquiry process does not downplay the role of the teacher or dismiss the relevance of expert knowledge. Teachers are required to focus attention on helping students rather than provide the ‘answer’. The role of the teacher is to assist students to construct knowledge rather than to reproduce facts. If used effectively, inquiry learning assists the student to move from being a passive recipient of information to an active participant in the learning process under the guidance of the teacher. It does not require students to ‘reinvent the wheel’ but should engage the students in ways which stimulate curiosity. In turn, students become engaged through applying existing knowledge and real-world experiences, by testing theories, learning to hypothesise and drawing conclusions based on their findings. When using inquiry models we need to include contestable materials, primary and secondary source materials that offer differing views on the topic which enable students to enter a dialogical process of knowledge and investigation leading to critique and analysis.

One of the challenges in using an inquiry approach is asking appropriate and challenging questions which enable students to investigate a topic and use a variety of resources to find solutions and answers. It is also important for students to develop their own questioning skills to that they are able to participate successfully in an inquiry process. From Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy we know that information can be handled in more and less demanding ways depending on whether students are asked to recall facts, to analyse those facts, to synthesise or discover new information based on the facts, or to evaluate knowledge. An inquiry approach requires that students develop a range of challenging questions which should include some of the following: Inference questions which require students to go beyond the immediately available information to find clues, examine them, discuss what inferences are justified and to fill in missing information. Interpretative questions which empower students to understand the consequences of information and ideas, and transfer questions which encourage a breadth of thinking, asking students to take their knowledge and apply it in new situations.

Many issues impact on and shape the teaching of Study of Religion. While the syllabus attempts to set the agenda for the teaching of Study of Religion, it is often the style of assessment used which shapes and forms the approaches used for teaching and learning religion. Inquiry based approaches require assessment tasks which enable students to demonstrate their ability across diverse tasks and through a variety of genres. Assessment by portfolio enables students...
to view assessment as a powerful learning tool and requires them to present divergent materials which demonstrate greater critique and analysis than other forms of assessment. When students are only required to write under time-pressure, information is often decontextualised and they tend to rely on their ability to reproduce core content which leaves little opportunity for them to analyse and critique information. Often too the style of questions asked limit the student to declarative knowledge.

There are many inquiry processes but most inquiry models involve commitment of the learner to continuous reflection and re-evaluation of the direction and purposes of their inquiry. The inquiry model developed for Study of Religion is specifically designed so that students become well informed and are able to critique and talk about religion in an intelligent and sensitive manner.

References

Biography
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NEWSY BITS

The Archdiocesan Commonwealth Targeted Programmes Committee is presenting the following two conferences

1. Showcasing Innovations: Literacy and Numeracy Pilot Projects and ICLT Conference
Each year teachers applaud this day as a most practical and useful opportunity to learn from each other. School communities showcase the varied literacy and numeracy projects including those embedding ICLT undertaken in their classrooms and share good pedagogic practice and their learning outcomes.
Thursday 11 September 2008
9.30 am – 4.00 pm
O’Shea In-service Centre, Wilston

2. Celebrating Diversity: School Officer Conference
This Conference day will support, recognise and celebrate the valued contribution School Officers make to the teaching and learning in our schools. School Officers will attend a key note presentation and three practical workshops. There will be a variety of content offered to choose from including numeracy and literacy topics.
Friday 12 September 2008
OR
Monday 15 September 2008
9.30 am – 4.30 pm
O’Shea In-service Centre, Wilston
Register through the BCE Professional Development Calendar under the topic Literacy & Numeracy or contact Lorraine Tunn email ltunn@bne.catholic.edu.au or phone 3033 7406
Enrolments close 27 August 2008