Some of the topics covered include Leading the Learning for Improved Student Outcomes; Having Difficult Conversations; Managing Stress and Balancing Work and Life. The participants are also given some valuable and practical input about applying for leadership positions.

Two significant sessions this year have been led by Diocesan Directors. Audrey Brown, the Director of Catholic education in the Ballarat diocese had just arrived as I was leaving today. Her session was to be centred on Faith Leadership – the call to leadership in a Catholic school and our role as leaders of Catholic identity under the umbrella of Knowing the Task.

Each year I have been invited to facilitate a session to the group. This year my session focussed on Knowing the Situation where exploration through presentation, dialogue and feedback attempted to answer the following questions - What is our contemporary Catholic context and culture? and Who are our schools, students, teachers and parents?

It is always interesting, when presenting the same basic topic to different groups each year, to see how differently the conversation goes. Certain topics will capture and enliven one group but fall flat with another. In focussing on what is our contemporary context and culture, I try to build up a picture of how these young budding leaders experience the Catholic Church at both a global and local level. It comes as no surprise to find their willingness to engage in discussion and share their opinions on the impact of Pope Francis on the Catholic Church at this time in our history. We also look at what it is to be a part of the Australian context and how that has changed and is changing. The challenges faced by Catholic educators to maintain the Catholic identity of our schools, and how important committed leadership is to that, is a significant point of discussion. I am always delighted to work with and listen to the voices of these committed young educators who are seen by their principals as having the potential to lead our schools into the future.

One of my favourite parts in the preparation for the session, which I leave to the day before I am due to present, is to sit with The Age newspaper and see what I can pull out of the news for that day that will be conversation starters and cast something of a spotlight on issues that are relevant, not just to our position as good citizens of our state and country but which call for a response from us as Catholics and leaders in the education field. I never have difficulty finding such articles, even at the last minute.

A favourite quote, which I consistently use in my presentation, comes from the General Directory for Catechesis, n 31

‘Having tested the ground, the sower sends out his workers to proclaim the Gospel through all the world and to that end shares with them the power of the Spirit. At the same time he shows them how to read the signs of the times and asks of them special preparation which is necessary to carry out the sowing.’

To me this is what we are

Cyber Smart Kids at St Michael’s Berwick

YOUNG people today are immersed in digital technologies as they become an essential part of children’s lives. To provide students, staff and parents with information on how to help children stay safe online, St Michael’s Primary School hosted a Cybersmart Outreach—Internet Safety Awareness presentation for the students.

The presentation, provided by the Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner, highlighted the many good things about social media and the potential dangers that we need children to avoid. As social media becomes an essential part of student’s lives, it has become increasingly important to provide information to the school community about internet safety including, protecting personal information from being collected and shared, using strong passwords, cyberbullying detection, prevention and response. Teaching students about Cyber safety and informing the parent community about social media and its impact on their children’s lives, is of utmost importance to St Michael’s Primary School.
Changing the Focus at St Therese’s Cranbourne

Since the last term of 2014, the staff at St Therese’s Cranbourne have shifted their focus from teaching to learning. It is a subtle shift but it has seen a greater concentration on ensuring that all children are learning. This has been done through weekly collaborative teacher meetings that focus on what children need to learn in English and Mathematics. At these meetings the teachers ask the following questions:

What do we want the children to learn in this next week? This requires the teachers to set clear learning intentions for English and Mathematics. These learning intentions are clearly communicated to the children and displayed in the classroom.

How will we know if they’ve learned it? The teachers need to set common formative assessment tasks to track student progress. They often develop pre and post tests and use the data from these to inform their teaching.

What will we do with the children who don’t learn what is required? The teachers plan for specific intervention needs for students who are struggling to understand the new knowledge or concepts. Support staff are allocated time to work with these students to give them every opportunity to succeed.

What will we do with those who already know it? This requires teachers to plan for different learning abilities and provide engaging activities for those who need to be extended.

This change of focus doesn’t mean that we don’t focus on our teaching at all. It means that now we teach to our students learning needs. It has made a significant difference already to the students’ learning outcomes. When we combine this with the school’s systematic response to intervention and the systems initiative to introduce a standard approach to electronically tracking student progress, we believe we will see even greater progress.

St Clare’s in Officer ‘ROCKS’

We are RESPECTFUL
We are OPTIMISTIC
We are COURAGEOUS
We are KIND
We are SECURE

As a school, the students explored the impact rocks have in the foundation of landscapes. They discussed the way that rocks offer protection and they also looked at rock formations in the town of Assisi – the home of St Clare. The students recognised the significance of rocks in scripture:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matt 7:24-27)

In a rapidly growing school, the significance of establishing how students learn and interact with each other is paramount. That is why students are proud to declare that ‘St Clare’s ROCKS!’

Winter Warmth for Charity at St Michael’s Berwick

St Michael’s Grade Six students are an inspiration to their peers as they raised an amazing $970 for charity. As part of their social justice program, the students embraced the opportunity to raise funds for their local St Vincent de Paul Society branch in Berwick, by knitting woolen squares over several weeks. Collectively, the children knitted around 400 squares and with the help of some wonderful parents and grandparents, the pieces were sewn together to make eight warm and very colourful, one of kind, blankets. It was an inspiration to see the children adding their squares to their ever increasing pile. The perseverance shown whilst knitting these colourful squares for such a worthy charity, was a valuable and inspirational experience for them all.

Grade six students proudly display the blankets created and donated to St Vincent de Paul Society.
SSP Excites Learners at St Joseph’s Orbost

THERE is great enthusiasm for learning reading and spelling at St Joseph’s Primary School in Orbost. Teachers, students and parents are excited about the recent introduction of a new way of learning about English. This year the staff at St Joseph’s introduced a program in literacy called SSP - Speech Sound Pecs. This program teaches foundational skills relating to Phonemic Awareness (which is listening for sounds within a spoken word) and Phonics (understanding the sound a letter makes). SSP has been popular with the children and they move quickly to their SSP stations each morning. There is a buzz around our school and motivation for learning reading and spelling is high. SSP teaches children to:

- hear speech sounds, beginning, middle and end of words, and know how many there are.
- know that we use sound pics to represent speech sounds in print (letters).
- be able to blend individual speech sounds and pics to make a word.
- be able to segment and manipulate speech sounds and pics.
- to understand that some sound sound pics can be made up of one or more letters.
- to understand the words they are saying and reading and be able to write and spell them.

Once a child has a solid understanding of how speech sound pics are used, they can read and spell almost any word using their sound choices. This ability helps a child become a much stronger and more confident reader and writer. We are teaching the children to:

- read a word from right to left.
- read a word from left to right.
- write a word from left to right.
- write a word from right to left.
- write a word from left to right.
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MARY MacKillop Primary School welcomes parents to be active in our school community and attend Level assemblies is just one way our parents can engage in our school. Recently our assembly format has changed from parents just observing and being part of an audience, to parents engaging in the learning that takes place in the classroom. Level Assemblies in Term Two focused on our parents being actively involved by participating and contributing to the learning. Level teams invited parents along to school to find out more about what and how they learn. Classrooms today look and feel different to what they did even just a few years ago. Contemporary learning environments allow students to access both independent and collaborative learning contexts, along with developing skills and strategies to be successful learners. Year One and Two students organised a Learning Expo where each of the six classes set up a class stall, highlighting a different content area of the concept “Interdependence.” Parents learn about recycling, by playing a student created board games. They completed a T-chart thinking carefully about needs and wants. Some parents even thought that chocolate was definitely a need! Other Expo stalls invited parents to use an interactive screen to sort and order how food progresses from “farm to table”. Year Three and Four students engaged their parents in the process of creating and developing physical structures in classrooms, representing different ecosystems. Parents learnt about environmental systems including: the rainforest, the ocean, the desert, wetlands, the arctic and the alpine tundras. Parents placed themselves as learners and explored the actions of good learners by communicating, accessing and linking prior knowledge, planning and creating with others. Together students and parents constructed log cabins, illustrated mountain backdrops and even helped build a life-size igloo from empty milk cartons. Parents have responded enthusiastically to our new learning assemblies. Interaction between students, teachers and parents supports the strengthening of relationships and acknowledges that we are all working together to support the best learning outcomes for students.

Back to School for Parents at Mary MacKillop Narre Warren

Students and parents built a life-size igloo from empty milk cartons as part of the school’s Learning Expo.

LESSONS in Learning at St Joseph’s Trafalgar

SOCIAL Justice Education is alive and part of everyday learning at St Joseph’s School Trafalgar. Respecting the dignity of all and trying to ensure that every person, especially the most disadvantaged and marginalised, has reasonable access to more than just the basic necessities, is a core belief of Catholic social teaching. The values of kindness, caring, compassion, being thoughtful and able, and doing things for others are taught and reinforced across the school in many ways.

Just recently, following the catastrophic earthquake in Nepal, the Grade Five and Six students decided to have a fundraising drive through baking and selling cupcakes as part of the school’s cooking program. Over the two-week period six students baked dozens of cupcakes. On the morning of the stall, they iced and decorated cupcakes in bright colors, sprinkles and sweets that were then sold to the school community. A total of $300 was raised and sent off to CARITAS to assist in the rebuilding of Nepal. As an end of term cooking program experience for the entire school and to further reinforce the theme of sharing what we have with others, students dramatized the story of Stone Soup at a whole school assembly. In this story, hungry soldiers entered a village where no one was willing to share any food with them. One after another, each family turned the soldiers away declaring they had no food to spare or share. The soldiers set themselves up in the town square, declaring that they would make a delicious stone soup. The villagers, curious as to how the soldiers would be able to turn water and a stone into soup, eventually shared the vegetables they had, one by one putting them into the large pot. With a few contributions by many, the water and stones became a delicious soup, which was then shared with the entire village.

St Joseph’s students then made our own version of “Stone Soup” with each student bringing an item of fresh produce which could go into a massive soup pot. Practising food preparation skills learned in the cooking program, students peeled, chopped, sliced and grated carrots, potatoes, parsnips, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, cabbage, herbs, and added lots of other flavors and seasonings to make their own large pot of “stone soup”. By lunchtime, the massive pot of soup was ready and there was enough for everyone in the school to share. Every class in the school now has access to the weekly cooking program on a rotational basis. As well as learning food preparation skills, students are learning applied literacy and numeracy skills, learning about weights and measures, mass, volume, doubling and halving quantities, working cooperatively in groups, using equipment safely, as well as learning about and tasting new and unusual foods.

Catholic Education

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