

SCHOOLLink

Lutheran EDUCATION Australia

Quality or service – is that the question?

Why do we list 'quality' in the ten core values for Lutheran schools? Isn't this playing right into the hands of those who accuse Lutheran schools of being elitist and being too concerned with academic results and sporting prowess and musical excellence and the status of the school? Aren't we falling into the trap of 'theology of glory' with this approach? How does quality fit with the current interest in some Lutheran schools with 'service learning'? Isn't there a contradiction here as we consider how to motivate an attitude of service in the school community?

However, as we look at these concerns theologically beginning with the doctrine of creation, not only is quality legitimate, it is vital and necessary.

God's initial creative work was certainly 'quality'. In fact, initial creation is called 'good' which really means it was just what God had intended and what he wanted it to be. And that's not surprising since God called it into being through his creative word which always does what God says it will do.

Human beings were part of that initial creation, created perfectly in the 'image of God'. But we know that sin came into the world and corrupted that image. We no longer have the quality of perfection in the eyes of God unless we accept and live in the perfection which Jesus Christ earned for us when he took our sin, and total lack of quality in our relationship with God, onto his cross with him.

But although we need the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ to restore our relationship with God (and in Christ that relationship is again 'perfect') it does not mean that as human beings we are without quality. We are still God's work, created for good works 'which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life' (Ephesians 2:10). We are valuable in God's eyes – so valuable that he died for us as Jesus Christ, and now as the Holy Spirit God wants to live in us and work through us.

And this takes us to the second important aspect of the doctrine of creation.

We sometimes seem to give the impression that God the creator retired after his work of creation. He called the world into being through his word, set it going and then stepped back and let it run according to its inbuilt natural laws. He may intervene from time to time when things get out of hand because human sin ruined his 'good creation', but that's the extent of God's current involvement.

However, that is far from the reality! God continues to be very active in creation, looking after it, continuing to



'Prepare them to be useful, creative and contributing members of their particular culture and society'. Photo courtesy of Tatachilla Lutheran College.

create in it and through it, continuing to help it to function in the way God intended it to function even though sin has spoiled it.

But the process is different from the initial creation because God has chosen to continue the work of creation through agents or stewards (Luther calls them 'masks') who are part of that creation. So, for example, he works through people to create

families, and through families to bring up the children and to prepare them to be useful, creative and contributing members of their particular culture and society. As Luther said in the preface to his catechisms, this is the prime responsibility of parents, to ensure that their children are prepared

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Quality or service – is that the question?

for a productive life in the world and in the church. Else, says Luther, God would have no need for parents. But Luther also says that where parents are too busy, too lazy, or too incompetent to educate their own children God has provided teachers to do it for them. God also places a responsibility on those in authority in the state to ensure that such education happens. God continues to work creatively in church and society and so cares for creation and ensures its future.

Working together with God to continue his creative activity in the world is the way we therefore see our responsibility in our Lutheran schools. It is putting the value of quality into action. Only the best is good enough. We have the enormous honour, privilege, power and responsibility God has given to each one of us to participate with him in his creative activity. We therefore need to have excellent schools so that God's creative purposes can be done in and through these schools. This is not to promote excellence simply to enhance the reputation of the school, but it is excellence which picks up another of the core values for Lutheran schools 'service'.

In doing this, each of us fulfils the role God has created for us. God has gifted each of us in different ways and only I can fill God's place for me because of the particular gifts and abilities God has given me. This is part of carrying out my God-given vocation in the world. Not to use to the best of my ability the gifts God has given me is like throwing these gifts back into the face of God. And we can also be tempted by a false humility which leads us to make a virtue of mediocrity.

Thanking God for these gifts means making the best and most professional use of them that we can. This is not in order to draw attention to ourselves and to seek glory for ourselves and for our school, but in order to serve God through serving those he has put there for us to serve. This is putting theology of the cross into action.

Theology of the cross becomes our motivation for service through quality. Theology of the cross recognises God working in hidden ways, often in ways that we don't anticipate and which may be the opposite of what we expect. The most dramatic demonstration of this is Jesus' death on the cross through which he won victory over death and gives us his righteousness for our sinfulness.

Theology of the cross leads us to serve God through serving others to the best of our ability in thankfulness for what God in Christ has done for us. In the parable of the last judgement, Jesus says, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' [Matthew 25:40]. As Luther remarked, 'God doesn't need our service but our neighbour does!' This also means that Lutheran schools will challenge students and staff to become more aware of suffering and injustice in both the local and global situation and to work to relieve some of the impact of sin and injustice in our society and world. The program of these schools will also remind us of our need to care for and preserve the creation which God has provided for our benefit.

Quality education also means to help those with whom we work and those

whom we teach to recognise their gifts and abilities and to help them be caring and contributing members of society. Quoting from *Lifelong Qualities for Learners*:

People bring their gifts, abilities, skills and talents to fruition seeking excellence, striving always to do their best, giving careful attention to every task, every relationship, every interaction.

worship, witness, fellowship, nurture, pastoral care and service to one another in the school community. This is where we see the full responsibilities of our vocation relating to church as well as society.

Lutheran schools are challenged to be schools of excellence where quality is promoted. This is our responsibility as those who have been created by God and those who work together

Quality education also means to help those with whom we work and those whom we teach to recognise their gifts and abilities and to help them be caring and contributing members of society

They ensure that their input and efforts result in quality outcomes that, in turn, lead to successful use of their gifts, abilities, skills and talents for the benefit of others.

Within this Lutheran school context of quality in education, Christian teachers also have the opportunity and responsibility to witness to their faith. As well as excellence in learning and teaching also in the area of Christian Studies, we participate in quality

with God in continuing creation. All of this is done for the benefit of those whom we are called to serve and for the society and church in which we serve together to the glory of God the creator who continues his creating through us.

Malcolm Bartsch
Head of School of
Educational Theology
Australian Lutheran College
North Adelaide SA



'God continues to be very active in creation...'

Making good schools better

Has the Better Schools Project told us anything about improving Lutheran schools that we did not already know?



Ocean Forest Lutheran College. '...schools are complex places...'

The Better Schools Project is a longitudinal project (2009 – 2013) that arose out of a perceived need to provide Lutheran schools, regions and Lutheran Education Australia with meaningful and quality data that would subsequently inform and drive school improvement. Lutheran schools are driven by the mission of the Lutheran Church of Australia but can also use the blessings of reason, research and best practice. The vision driving the Better Schools Project is to support all Lutheran schools to become better schools, reflecting excellence in terms of teaching and learning, spiritual guidance, and the wellbeing of staff and students.

The key issues for Lutheran Education Australia and the regions were identified to be:

- how do we ensure our schools continue to improve?

- how do we know what to focus on to ensure we continue to improve?
- what are the main drivers of student learning/wellbeing in our schools?

The Better Schools Project represents the ongoing commitment to quality Lutheran schools that are faithful to their unique culture. Significant system resources have been allocated to train twelve school improvement facilitators, to tailor survey instruments to Lutheran schools and to provide school leaders with a comprehensive and credible knowledge base about the key drivers of school improvement and the tools to assist them. The Better Schools Project surveys identify causes rather than symptoms of staff and student wellbeing, motivation and performance.

Schools are complex places in which time is a limited commodity so it is

imperative that effort is focused on those things that really matter and that will make the greatest difference. For example, school morale is primarily driven by professional interaction, supportive leadership at all levels, goal congruence and role clarity (Hart 2000) so energy should be directed towards improving these rather than trying to reduce stress and keep people happy! More importantly, the Better Schools Project focuses on strategies for facilitating change and encouraging leaders and their teams to take responsibility for school development. The Better Schools Project should be part of an overall improvement strategy, not just a one-off event.

Every Lutheran school in Australia participated in the Better Schools Project, an achievement to be celebrated. Of those invited to participate, 60% of staff (2,610 people), 70% of students and 38% of parents provided feedback, response rates

that far exceed the standards set in international research literature for reliable and valid data. The process of diagnosing the underlying causes of performance can be confronting, so year one of the Better Schools Project has not been without its challenges, but it has been an important phase of developing understanding of school improvement and growing capability.

With the first phase of the Better Schools Project underway it is early days but some key messages have already emerged.

How do Lutheran schools compare with other schools?

The project team was initially shocked by Lutheran schools' results compared to the other 1,800 schools in the data base. Results from staff surveys were below benchmarks in all areas. Student results were below in all areas

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except for student safety. Fortunately, parents are strongly supportive of and very satisfied with Lutheran schools, with most parent results equal to or better than those of the other schools. The biggest gaps (and therefore priority areas for improvement) are empowerment, appraisal and recognition of staff and development of student oriented teaching and learning.

While disappointed with these results (and initially somewhat defensive), we were reminded that the important thing is not where each school is now but that it has a clearly defined destination and uses the data to inform the process of directing effort towards that destination. Most other schools in the data base were well down the track by comparison and had allocated significant resources to school improvement initiatives. Lutheran schools have only just commenced this journey.

Results from all Lutheran schools

While the greatest diversity is between individual school results and there is some variation between regions, the results from different sub-groups within schools were remarkably consistent. There was no discernible difference between the responses of teaching and support staff and there is very little gender difference. Staff responses from senior schools were consistently lower than those from middle schools on all indicators yet the same split does not occur in other school systems – although there is a primary-secondary difference in other systems. If the differences were due to the type of school, the quantum of difference would be consistent – but it is not. Parent data does not show the same sub-school variation that staff data does. Considerable variation across individual schools cannot be

attributed to school size, resource constraints or broader change processes so culture has to be a factor to consider.

There is a wide range in student opinion about the importance of Lutheran culture but more consistency in opportunity and behaviour. Staff felt that there were many opportunities for expression of Lutheran culture but actual behaviour was rated lower. In other words Lutheran values are not always translated into practice.

Opportunities for growth

There are four fundamental behavioural building blocks for effective school performance. With the number of Lutheran schools with opportunities for growth in a particular area in brackets, they are:

- learning – the extent to which staff feel that their efforts are recognised and their capability is developed through appropriate learning opportunities that incorporate feedback, personal growth and challenge (26 schools)
- empathy (or supportive leadership) – the extent to which leaders build trust, respect and understanding (24 schools)
- role clarity – the extent to which school staff members have a sense of purpose and know what is expected of them, attained through dialogue, discussion and accountability (24 schools)
- engagement – the extent to which school staff collaborate, share ideas and solve problems together leading to a shared understanding of and alignment with school goals (11 schools)

The four drivers of school improvement are inter-related, and a

school's data will reveal the exact areas towards which improvement efforts should be directed. However it is clear that staff learning is a significant opportunity for development particularly given that teacher learning drives both classroom and school improvement (Fullen 1992).

Growing learning

Supportive leadership, defined in terms of interpersonal skills, involving behaviours, managing core business and providing direction, is one of the most influential drivers of a wide range of wellbeing and performance indicators. In particular, leadership plays a critical role in staff learning and the perception of staff in Lutheran schools is that there is too much top down leadership, most commonly due to one of three factors:

1. leaders (principal or senior management members) who have a directive leadership style that informs and delegates
2. leaders who are collaborative but who use consultation processes that are not always effective in engaging staff (Most commonly a leader seeks the views of each stakeholder group before making a decision. However one group may not be aware of the views of other groups and hence perceives the outcome as top down control and non-supportive leadership if a decision is not to their liking. The most effective, albeit time consuming, form of engagement for learning is facilitation, where all groups are brought together in an environment structured to ensure that all views are presented and heard.)
3. service leadership where a leader, out of genuine concern for staff, tries to protect them

and ends up doing everything, thus inadvertently disengaging people (Christian service is service to God and working to fulfil his will and purpose – it is not about becoming a burnt out martyr to the demands of others!)

Growing professionalism

The results from the Better Schools Project show that teamwork in Lutheran schools is effective to the degree that it depends on personal rather than professional relationships. Inherently the risk is that social relationships lead to an avoidance of challenging conversations about performance and hence behaviour left unchallenged is tacitly encouraged. Moreover in Lutheran schools there is direct link, which should *not* exist,

A critical factor in learning is attitude

between the principal and individual morale. This means that how staff members relate to the principal affects how they feel about their work. There are implications for leader development to assist leaders to deal equitably and professionally with staff instead of relying on good personal relationships. A principal's job is to provide tools to facilitate professional conversations, to manage the behaviour of the leadership team and to empower others to drive change. The Better Schools Project aims to equip them to fulfil these responsibilities, while recognising that facilitation and empowerment are not about giving up the reins and allowing others to make decisions.

A critical factor in learning is attitude. People with a proactive attitude

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The Better Schools Project provided an opportunity for a different way of working at a regional, national and school level

see challenges as opportunities for learning and growth and accept the responsibility for making things happen while those with a reactive attitude blame others for difficulties and abdicate responsibility for change. However the Better Schools Project focuses on changing behaviour rather than attitudes as behaviour is observable and measurable. There are opportunities to develop a stronger sense of professionalism, responsibility and accountability in Lutheran schools through an emphasis on coaching (proactive) rather than dealing with performance once it has become a problem (reactive). This is particularly apparent in the results

for quality of teaching, with the greatest diversity between schools being Curriculum Coordination (where scores range from around 14 – 92), and is paralleled by the range and lower scores for Stimulating Learning and Classroom Behaviour in the student survey, with the latter also the biggest concern to parents.

Growing involvement

The Better Schools Project provided an opportunity for a different way of working at a regional, national and school level. Having been initiated with the support of regional directors, the project was driven by

a team of nine current principals and a representative from each region and the national office who were trained in understanding the key drivers of school performance and staff wellbeing and motivation. This ensured that the project was Lutheran specific, and assisted schools in managing survey feedback and implementing school improvement and action plans as required. It was an effective model. Similarly, school improvement is the responsibility of all teaching and support staff members as well as senior leaders, so schools have been encouraged to use school improvement project teams. For staff, working with a team of colleagues on a school-based project is an excellent form of professional learning and is worth the investment of time.

In this first stage of the Better Schools Project it has been very evident that there is a universal desire to create

the best learning environment for students. Any learning that supports this goal is beneficial but the process of change can be time consuming, costly and threatening. It requires clarity of purpose, a focus on the future not the past, empowerment of staff, a willingness to learn rather than blame and sometimes a change of culture. The fact that every Lutheran school in Australia has participated in a process of data driven, evidence based school improvement and a critical mass of schools have used the data to develop improvement plans reflects the commitment to improvement and a willingness to embrace accountability.

Bev Saegenschneider
Former Assistant to the Executive Director:
Research and Project Officer
Lutheran Education Australia



Immanuel Buderim Early Learning Centre providing opportunities for growth

The journey from good to great



'If we focus on where we want to go... we can commence an amazing journey from good to great'

Everything that a Christian school does has a spiritual dimension. Jesus reminds us that apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Apart from the Spirit of God at work in a school, nothing of lasting value will be accomplished spiritually there. But in keeping with the axiom that *all truth is God's truth*, the research world has many truths to offer that can be applied to the discipline of running a Christian school. To the degree that any practice is truth it can provide a vehicle for the spirit to work' (Gene 2007).

It is therefore of paramount importance that every Lutheran

Education Australia school's passion is centred on its mission. Any school can be passionate about great curricular and co-curricular programs, provision of state-of-the-art facilities and improved year 12 results. For a Christian school, however, assets such as these, along with other specific programs that might align with 'being the best', are always dependent on the right people and must emanate out of the mission and core beliefs.

'Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great. We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools' is how Collins (2001) has stated the argument.

Before exploring some principles of growing greatness in a Christian school there are a few points of clarification about what is inferred by the phrase 'moving from good to great'. It does not imply running a school like a business (many businesses are not good), or comparing against other schools as there is not a prescribed formula for all schools (each school is unique). 'It is the relentless pursuit of being the best you can be with the resources you have' (Gene 2007). Schools that operate in a paradigm of abundance or resource richness, where the focus is on the resources they do have not on the ones they do not have, are best positioned to take

the first steps from being good to being great.

Importantly greatness is not a function of circumstance, rather it is largely a matter of conscious choice (Collins 2001). To move from good to great, to transform our schools we need to consider a preferred future. November (2006) refers to this as scenario casting. If we focus on where we want to go rather than where we have been, in other words stop looking in the rear view mirror and look forward to and beyond the horizon, we can commence an amazing journey from good to great! Hightett (2009) stressed that schools must think about the future today or live in the past tomorrow.

The journey from good to great

Collins (2001) in his book *Good to great* proposed a framework of stages and associated concepts that capture the organisational pattern of the process of going from good to great. This is represented in the diagram *Flywheel*.

Lutheran Education Australia schools is simple:

- do they have a personal relationship with Jesus and or wholly embrace the core

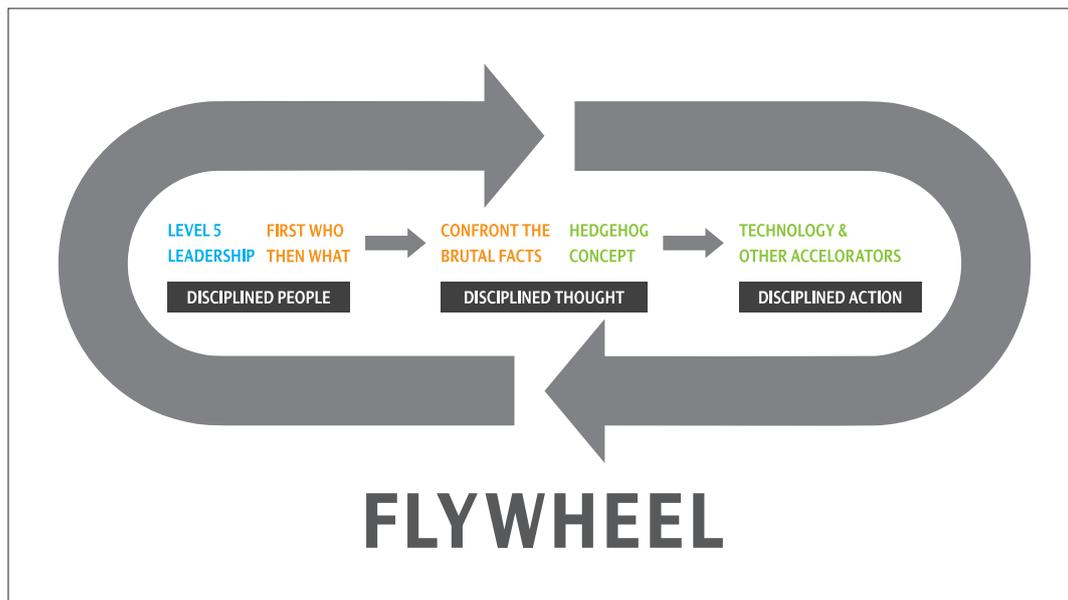
to the transformation from good to great. Wright, Horn and Sanders (1997) state '... the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. ... the immediate and clear implication of this finding is

the brutal facts. The key is to find out what they are. The use of the Better Schools Project survey for staff, students and parents served as an instrument to get feedback on school performance. It is difficult for any school or organisation to admit weakness and failures but a sign of growing towards greatness is acknowledging, discussing and dealing with shortcomings. Collins (2001) offers four constructive practices for facing and dealing with brutal facts:

1. lead with questions, not answers
2. engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion
3. conduct autopsies without blame
4. build red-flag mechanisms that turn information into a required response.

A final ingredient in facing and dealing with the brutal facts that we need to recognise is the Holy Spirit's role as we navigate these difficult issues. We are in constant need of God's guidance and this is very evident in such trying situations.

In introducing the journey from good to great the vital importance of the centrality of the mission to the Christian school was highlighted.



The first important stage of moving from good to great is through the commitment of disciplined people. Maxwell (2010) suggests 'everything rises and falls with leadership'. A level 5 leader is one who 'builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will' (Collins 2001). Whilst Collins does not refer to level 5 leadership as 'servant leadership', that is, however what it is. This leadership is characterised by an unwavering resolve through quiet and calm determination to do whatever is required to motivate others to achieve the best long-term results. In doing this leaders must ensure that they have the team that is committed to excellence, relationships and service.

Having the right people on the bus and then training and developing them for maximum effectiveness is vitally important. The criterion for teachers in

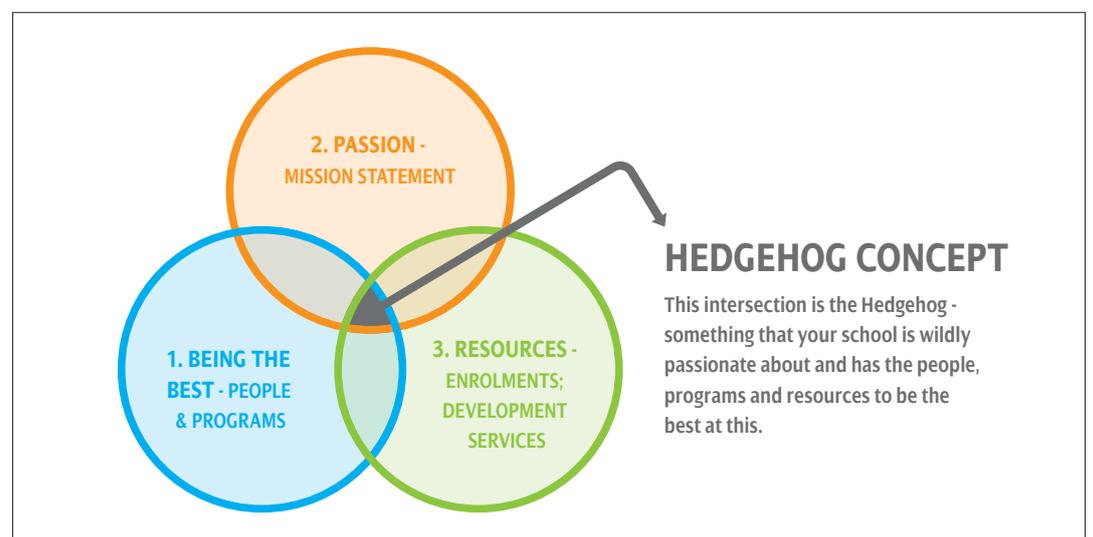
beliefs and values of the school community?

- do they love kids?
- are they excellent teachers?

Regular and transparent evaluation of teacher and staff competence is crucial

that seemingly more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor'.

The second key stage of moving from good to great is through disciplined thought. This begins by confronting



The journey from good to great

The *Hedgehog Concept* (Collins 2001, adapted by Frost 2007), when applied by an organisation or school, is the ability to find the one thing it does best. The key is to understand what your school can be the best at in the world and equally important what it cannot be the best at. This is disciplined thought. The *Hedgehog Concept* is not a goal, strategy or intention; it is an understanding. It has three components:

1. a service, product or skill at which the school or organisation can strive to be the best at in the world
2. a passion for doing that activity
3. resource management to support this entity

The final stage of moving from good to great is centred on disciplined

action. Within the school context there are a number of accelerators of success that can significantly enhance the growth towards greatness such as curriculum development, technology, parental engagement, transition processes and student support and counselling. Whilst these can be contextually specific and varying in importance they are nonetheless accelerators of success.

Where there is a culture of disciplined application of good to great principles, a cycle of continuous improvement and accomplishment can flourish. It should be the goal of all schools to create the inertia to get the *Flywheel* of school improvement in motion so that school improvement gains its own momentum and becomes unstoppable.

Greatness can therefore be seen as a journey of growth rather than as

something fixed and pre-determined. How to get there will depend on the road chosen, the conditions at the starting point and along the way, and the interactions of the group of travellers who make up the party. The journey from good to great involves moving the focus from reflection to action.

The Better Schools Project longitudinal goals are to assist Lutheran schools to celebrate success and build on levels of excellence in terms of teaching and learning, spiritual guidance, and the wellbeing of school staff, students and parents. The first phase of the project has focused on reflection. This came in the form of surveys aimed to assist our understanding of the experience of staff, students and parents in our respective communities. In Lutheran schools this reflection

provided valuable insights into existing practices. The second phase of the project has focussed on action – building a bridge between the present and the preferred future. Each of our schools is being challenged to be a great Christian school where God is at work. How are we going to respond?

Moving from good to great is doing right things (strategy) and doing things right (practice).

John Proeve
Principal
Cornerstone College
Mt Barker SA



'The journey from good to great involves moving the focus from reflection to action'

Regional news:

Lutheran Education South Eastern Region



A warm welcome

Educational partnership in action

An educational partnership is strengthening between Lutheran Tsang Shing Siu Leun School, Hong Kong and Holy Trinity Lutheran School, Horsham.

Early in the morning of Tuesday 23rd March, ten students and four adults departed from Melbourne on our second annual study tour to Hong Kong. This was a twelve day tour that consisted of many cultural experiences in and around Hong Kong and culminated in a seven day stay on site at Lutheran Tsang Shing Siu Leun School.

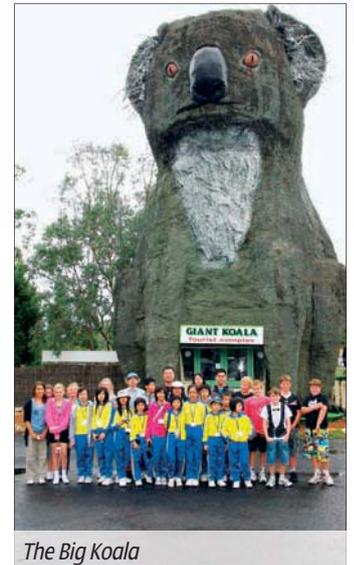
While at the school our students participated in many English speaking activities, cultural activities and generally continued to foster the friendship and relationship between the two school communities.

What was an exciting new dimension to our relationship this year was our sponsorship of a return visit by 17 members of their school community to Horsham. Our visitors were billeted out to host families and this experience proved to be one of the highlights of their trip – a true Aussie experience.

During their visit to Horsham they spent every morning attending class lessons while in the afternoon they

were exposed to cultural activities with an Australian flavour: surfing, canoeing, a visit to a broad acre farm and tractor rides, making a campfire and cooking damper, a visit to a goat farm, horse riding, a visit to an Australian wildlife zoo and much more.

Their overriding impressions were of space, blue skies, stars at night, the generosity and openness of the people and the different emphasis we place on aspects within our educational system. Without a doubt, their visit to our school has created much excitement in the future of our school relationship and upcoming tours.



The Big Koala

One major outcome of our tours to Hong Kong, and especially the visit by our brothers and sisters from Hong Kong, has been a growing sense of and appreciation for the global nature of education and our Lutheran school system including a real understanding and acceptance of cultural differences.

**Holy Trinity Lutheran School
Horsham Vic**



Wildlife zoo



Wildlife zoo

Regional news: Lutheran Education Queensland

The Better Schools Project building a better future

There is a lot of building going on at Peace Lutheran Primary School. Not just in the new playground developments, the new resource centre or the new additions to classrooms and school grounds. It is not the type of building that can be easily seen. It might take a conversation with a staff member, parent or student to see what else is being built at Peace.

The Better Schools Project team at Peace has been active. Our goal is to continue to build our school into a place of excellence and the Better Schools Project has helped us to do this. We analysed the results carefully and began creating a focus for further improvement.

The Better Schools Project helped us focus our goals for 2010. It identified a need to stimulate growth in staff

through the development of rigorous professional discussion and open and honest communication. We also agreed with the survey's findings – that the disruptive behaviour of students was affecting learning and teaching. Staff were keen to learn how to lessen these disruptions and increase quality teaching and learning time.

To begin the year we invited Mr Tony Ryan into our school to inspire and focus us. He encouraged us to 'think outside the dodecahedron' and stimulated some critical thinking in the way we plan lessons, interact and motivate students and hold professional dialogue. He focused us on developing children socially and emotionally as our first priority and this would impact positively on behaviour and learning. This reinforced our focus on building skills to be able to speak restoratively to children.

We have identified that we want to effectively interact and communicate with them and help them feel valued.

The importance of making our resilience program *Bounce Back* more deliberate in our timetable has also been highlighted. Further surveys will be conducted to identify the things that interrupt learning and plans made to deal with these interruptions.

Implementation of our action plan has begun. Staff came away keen to begin peer coaching. Coaching buddies have been identified and a government grant will allow us to move to making managing children's behaviour a major focus for staff professional development. As we begin BEARS (Building Empathy and Relationships Project) in second term staff will identify areas of student management and restorative practice they wish to improve and use their coach to help them set and achieve identified goals. Many positive ripples are spreading throughout the school.

The Better Schools Project has played a major part in helping us to become focused on what we can do to move



Peace Lutheran Primary School

and improve our school. It is already a great school but what makes our great school even greater? US! As our school motto indicates – at Peace students and teachers are learning and growing together through Christ.

Genevieve Clark (Principal)
John Trappett (Teacher)
Peace Lutheran Primary School
Gatton Qld

A reflection on the Better Schools Project

Recently I attended an Independent Schools Queensland breakfast and presentation on staff wellbeing. We know that the most valuable resource our school has is our staff, and opportunities to consider how we can more effectively support and look after staff are important ones to grasp. Even more important is genuinely looking after and caring for people because that is what we are called to do in our Christian communities.

As I sat and listened to the various speakers share their approaches to staff wellbeing, completed the obligatory questionnaire and participated in the table group



Peace Lutheran Primary School staff

Regional news: Lutheran Education Queensland

discussions, three words kept coming to mind – Better Schools Project. It seemed to me that the process our school has initiated, together with every other Lutheran school in the land, incorporates many of the ideas for promoting and developing positive staff wellbeing about which I was hearing the various speakers.

The Better Schools Project has given each of our staff the opportunity to reflect on how we are doing things in our school and how they personally feel about it. It has also allowed them further opportunities to contribute to creating a better school. Through a process of reflection, information gathering and follow up discussion, staff members were able to consider and challenge the feedback that had come as a result of surveys completed by colleagues, students and parents. During a whole of staff workshop, we were able to identify aspects of our work that lift us up, as well as areas that we felt were weighing us

down. We compared our lists with the data provided through the survey. We received some encouraging surprises as we were affirmed by the comments of colleagues, students and parents. Sometimes we can be a bit hard on ourselves as we focus on our deficiencies while overlooking the things that are working well.

While affirmed, we were also challenged by the areas identified, and confirmed during our workshop discussions, as elements of our work and workplace that need some attention. We are now in the next phase of the process. We have our staff nominated project team. We have identified our goals and strategies and, with staff involvement, now work together to create a better school; for staff as well as for students.

Peter Weier
Principal
Grace Lutheran Primary School
Clontarf Qld

Any school knows the most valuable resource is its staff

St James Lutheran College is growing

St James Lutheran College is moving rapidly from a small country school to dynamic P – 12 college. In its first seven years of operation enrolment numbers hovered between 100 and 120 students. The announcement of a secondary program beginning in 2010 had an immediate impact and the college began this year with P – 8 enrolments exceeding 250.

This growth in enrolments has presented a number of challenges for the college. Initially, preparing the facility to cater for these extra

students meant an expansion of the current campus. A building program was quickly established and will continue for the next few years as the student cohort moves towards year 12 in 2014.

The resource base of the college quickly became exhausted, the need for more reading material for expanded primary classes, books for the library, sporting equipment and the like became rapidly apparent. Specialist items such as microscopes, woodworking equipment and teacher resources for a secondary program needed to be acquired in a relatively short period of time. Any school knows the most valuable resource is its staff, St James Lutheran College needed to employ ten new staff to begin 2010, an increase of nearly 50 percent.

With such a large increase in staff and students over a short period the challenge of sustaining a distinctively Lutheran ethos in the college arose. Coupled with the shift in culture from a very intimate small school this remains one of the paths that must be negotiated very carefully to bring families from the small school era comfortably into a different reality.

With growth comes blessing as well. St James has been able to start with a blank sheet in many regards. The addition of new buildings on site also meant the acquisition of new furniture. Round byte styled tables are able to be fitted together in an array of interesting ways and coupled with other contemporary educational furniture a very deliberate statement



Year 8 students at St James Lutheran College

Regional news: Lutheran Education Queensland



Tablet technology at St James Lutheran College

is being made to students and staff regarding pedagogical expectation. Engaging environments need to welcome 21st century learners into a space that delivers a connected and relevant *way of doing* that meets the needs of all students.

In a 21st century college information technology is very important. St James is at the cutting edge here as well. A new wireless umbrella has been cast across the campus with up to 32 wireless hotspots. Staff and students can be connected to the new high speed network and online inside or

home and at school. These devices supplement the laptop program and are used in a variety of ways. At a very basic level they replace a dictionary, a diary and a scientific calculator. It is their ability to be used in a creative way that really sets them apart and breathes life into the ICT program.

Teachers are able to create a suite of learning experiences using the powerful tools that are available online and a little bit of creativity. Students tweet responses or pose questions using apps such as *Twiducate*. They are able to manipulate digital images

...a very deliberate statement is being made to students and staff regarding pedagogical expectation

out. The network itself reads where the need is greatest and redistributes the load to keep connectivity fluent. This has opened up learning spaces that previously did not exist in the courtyards and under the trees of the college. Mobility is paramount, flexible learning spaces are critical.

All year 8 students at St James are given an Apple iPod Touch for use at

in art lessons, take home interactive, touch sensitive anatomical maps for Science, listen to spoken Japanese for LOTE and write the corresponding character on the screen, watch video safety instruction and how to use specific tools for woodwork, download a novel ... the list is endless. The power in these mobile devices is that all these things can happen while the rest of the class work on something else or even

while the students are having their lunch break.

There is no computer lab at St James. Laptop computers are distributed throughout the college and shared by all students from prep to year 8. Tablet technology has been used in prep engaging the very young with touch screen capability, interactive whiteboards exist in every room and a number of mobile interactive whiteboards can be taken into the newly created spaces mentioned above.

St James is growing. Staff and students are working hard together with the families of the school to create a contemporary learning place that is

relevant to students of all ages. Three and a half hours north of Brisbane, nestled in a bushland setting alongside the tranquil waters of Hervey Bay overlooking beautiful Fraser Island sits a small Lutheran school that is becoming something very special.

Shane Altmann
Principal
St James Lutheran College
Hervey Bay Qld



St James Lutheran College staff

Regional news: Lutheran Schools Association SA/NT/WA

Better schools – for better or worse?

The Better Schools Project involving all Lutheran schools across the country became a reality for us in the middle of 2009. Like many of our schools, we at Tatchilla were inherently suspicious of the project, seeing it as an 'intrusion' on the relative autonomy of our school. Then there was the inevitable discussion around the relevance of the data when mapped nationally, and exactly what did it mean for us?

This is a typical reaction in schools when faced with an external body either surveying internally or generating public scrutiny of its operations. All of us believe that our schools are serving the best interests of our community; providing the best possible educational and social environment for our students; and more importantly, providing a Christian framework for our young people to become productive citizens in society.

None of these ideals are threatened under the Better Schools Project, national publication of data or greater transparency in schools. In fact, the opposite is true. In education we have always maintained the notion that our classrooms and school related data are somehow 'off limits'. When we take the time to reflect on the purpose of these initiatives, we start to see the potential for our schools, and ultimately our students, to grow and develop. The enormous range of data that is available to schools is only a small piece of the improvement puzzle, and how this intersects with the strategic vision for the school is the important element.

For us at Tatchilla, the Better Schools Project was both revealing and confronting. Feedback, however, is the only way that we can gauge the quality of the service we are providing. Having a rich source of feedback from a range of stakeholders in our community allowed us to rethink some of the perceptions and strategies for the school. After forming a project team, a deeper analysis of the survey data was undertaken.

Ultimately, there were three key areas we chose to focus on for the next 12 – 18 months; role clarity, behaviour management and student motivation. The last of these is the perennial challenge for schools. Students who are motivated generally have less behavioural issues, are more engaged and produce better results. Strategies to increase student motivation are partly informed by the recent research by Dr Douglas Reeves, who asserts students who are involved in extracurricular activities generally have better attendance, more engagement and demonstrable improvement in academic achievement.

As a system of schools we have always argued that the education of the whole student is important, and now at Tatchilla we are refining this approach to target specific activities for students. Linking these activities with the interests of students is also critical for their engagement, and as the global awareness of the environment has increased, so has the interest of our young people. The Student Environmental Council,

with over 100 members from R – 12, provides opportunities for students in the areas of recycling, environmental sustainability and revegetation through the EcoClassroom. This blending of social conscience and global citizenship is proving to be a powerful motivator for students.

As we continue to navigate through the opportunities and challenges offered up by initiatives such as the Better Schools Project, we would do well to look to at our pedagogical models, which feature centrally the notion of feedback.

Colin Minke
Principal
Tatchilla Lutheran College
McLaren Vale SA



Tatchilla Lutheran College fauna monitoring night



Tatchilla Lutheran College
EcoClassroom

Regional news:

Lutheran Schools Association SA/NT/WA

Moving from good to better – goal to become a great school

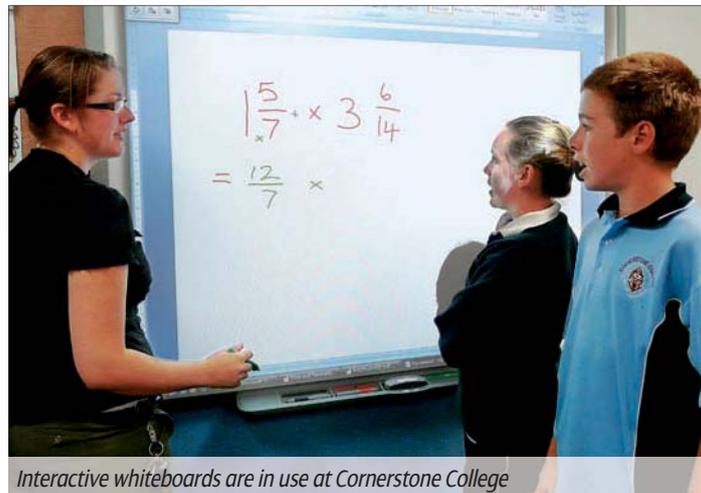
Throughout 2009 all Lutheran Education Australia schools commenced participation in the Better Schools Project which will continue for the next five years. This project is focussed on assisting Lutheran schools to celebrate success and build on levels of excellence in terms of teaching and learning, spiritual guidance, and the wellbeing of school staff, students and parents.

The first aspect of the project was a survey aimed to assist our understanding of the experience of staff, students and parents in our Cornerstone College community. This provided valuable insights into existing practices.

The project team comprising teaching and administration staff was formed to conceptualise a preferred future for the school, review and analyse the current practice and propose ways of bridging between the present and the future.

The preferred future is a school where:

- Christ is the firm foundation and there is a positive aura and warmth
- the focus is on learning (if learning is the focus wellbeing will automatically be attended to)
- students, families and staff willingly embrace and have ownership of the ethos of the community
- excellence, self-worth and opportunities for engagement and involvement abound
- programs and practices are organised and structured in such a way that all staff and students have a shared sense of purpose and work cohesively as a team



Interactive whiteboards are in use at Cornerstone College

In summary the points of celebration regarding our existing practice are:

- staff feel that their efforts are recognised and that they are developing capability and confidence in their roles
- students feel safe and generally are well behaved
- parents believe that the transition programs for students entering the school, the learning focus and reporting on student achievement and learning are relative strengths

To bridge the gap between *present practice* and the *preferred future* the following have been identified as areas for development:

- focus on learning through the development of innovative teaching methodologies that captures the imagination of students and supports their strengths and builds on areas for growth
- increase empowerment of staff through greater engagement in decision making processes
- effectively communication of change processes
- enhance teamwork through better understanding of how

staff are going and their respective workloads

- recognise, both publicly and privately, student worth through what they achieve
- know the students better
- focus on relationship building – 'I see you, I am here'

These areas for development have been incorporated into the college Strategic Plan 2010 – 2013. They will be monitored through the use of Key Performance Indicators.

An effective school is a school full of effective classrooms.

John Proeve
Principal
Cornerstone College
Mount Barker SA

Student leadership reflected in the Better Schools Project

The Better Schools Project conducted during 2009, provided Encounter Lutheran School with some valuable information about the way our school community views students in our school. In particular it has been interesting to analyse areas such as

decision making, stimulation and motivation, opportunity for worship, and extracurricular activities.

It was evident that the students do have opportunity to be involved in decision making, but to a lesser extent in school policy making. The year 6 and 7 students at Encounter are encouraged to be involved in leadership which provides opportunity for each student to have a degree of responsibility. The leadership is based on service and following the servant hood that Jesus models to us all. Therefore students do not tend to become boastful or bossy in their roles, but instead carry out their duties so that their peers, the school and wider community benefit. They accept responsibility and staff are confident in their abilities to design, promote and manage events that involve all students and the school community. Three fine examples of this have been carnivals, sports day and the eight hour famine. Each was very successful and the large amount of student input was greatly appreciated and recognised.

In 2010 Encounter is developing a sustainability policy and program and students will have input into the development and practical applications of it. An example of this practicality is their involvement in recycling cans to sponsor children through World Vision. They are the first students in South Australia to be involved in this program and have been very successful.



Encounter Lutheran School fundraising for World Vision

Regional news:

Lutheran Schools Association SA/NT/WA

A second example is the enthusiasm of a group of students to support Lutheran Community Care after their involvement in an Impact Student Leadership Convention.

Being at a Lutheran school is important to our students and families and, whilst the Lutheran component is very small, the active Christian component is large. Our students appreciate the opportunity to be involved in devotions and worship, and they recognise that forgiveness is an integral part of who we are. Students also identify with behaviour that is based on care, respect, fairness and trust. Written responses from older students reflect a confidence in their faith and their family's worship life that they are comfortable sharing with their peers.

Students and parents indicated that students were cared for, motivated and connected in their education by professional, dedicated teachers who recognise the individual needs of the children and are prepared to extend and encourage each of them.

Lyn Roberts
Deputy Principal
Encounter Lutheran School
Victor Harbor SA

The Better Schools Project – its place in the life of a busy school

The Better Schools Project took place in my second year as principal at Waikerie Lutheran School. Even though a very busy year because of the wonderful gift of our activity centre through the Building the Education Revolution, our school continued to improve as a school undergoing change. We had been through a pre-authorisation visit in 2008 for the primary years program

of the International Baccalaureate and many projects were underway, addressing the things necessary for our authorisation visit.

As many exciting things were happening, as well as the preparations for our 30th birthday celebrations, staff, parents and students were already very positive about what we had to offer. Consequently when we completed the Better Schools Project survey, our responses were most pleasing.

Leading the staff through the survey led to a dialogue about what and how we did things, as well as identifying what the positives were and which areas were problematic. We identified a very positive student/staff/parent relationship due to good lines of communication and the accessibility of staff to parents, and the quick follow up on issues of concern. Staff identified that working collaboratively helped them with their own programming as well as having input in what was going on in the school. As we are a small school, staff also identified the stress of their work load and how one change in the daily routine of the school affected all the classes. Sometimes due to the busyness of the school, follow up with a staffing concern and clarity of procedures were not as good as we would have liked.

In the second half of the year, due to our student numbers, we needed to undertake a staffing restructure. Trying to find the best way to communicate the restructure to the staff, then to the parents was something that I struggled over. In the end I decided to use a more personal approach, talking to the staff individually, then collectively. Parents who were directly involved were the first to be spoken to then all the other parents.

Staff morale appeared to drop as did the satisfaction of parents during



Waikerie Lutheran School outside of the classroom



Waikerie Lutheran School in the community

the process of communicating the restructure. However, as the year ended and the new year began, the student engagement and hence satisfaction was high.

We completed the final component of the Better Schools Project early in 2010, with current staff feeding into the action plan. Our action plan incorporated the following five priorities:

- increased extra-curricular activities
- explicit social skills being taught to the children

- inviting the parents/community into our school and classrooms
- focusing on beginning and closing the day with prayer
- staff wellbeing

Linda Warner
Principal
Waikerie Lutheran School
Waikerie SA

Valuing our corporate and individual identities



Adrian Wiles, Ann Mitchell and Adrienne Jericho at the opening of the Canberra office

Sometimes it is very instructive when a number of issues come together in somewhat of a serendipitous manner. Recently I was invited to address a meeting of retired Lutheran secondary school principals in Adelaide. Although I had committed myself to this presentation some five months ago, it turned out to be at a most inopportune time. I had just returned from the inaugural Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) Lutheran Leadership Conference and at the same time the LEA Canberra office had opened and I wanted to spend a week in Canberra. In addition to these opportunities I was asked to provide a briefing for a visiting Indonesian Bishop on Lutheran schools.

However, all of these events were powerful reminders of where Lutheran Education Australia is at the moment. I was strongly encouraged that those who have retired and have given distinguished service to our schools have an abiding interest in what we do. The Indonesian Bishop has Lutheran schools in his church. He was looking to the Lutheran Church of Australia with its rich and long tradition in education to help his church to achieve its mission and ministry goals through schools.

The Lutheran Leadership Conference in Brisbane was a very special event.

We had been delighted that so many had put their name down to be participants in the Leadership Development Program (LDP) and were strongly encouraged that another 30 people wanted to be part of the inaugural conference on leadership in Lutheran schools. As I reflected on the profile of participants attending the conference I caught a glimpse of the future of Lutheran education and it was a most positive and reassuring picture.

At the same time the LEA office in Canberra opened and over 25 years of debate about LEA's national role was being resolved with a clear statement of intent. In some ways the clarification of our organisation through a visioning process over the past two years has been necessary to bring us to this point.

These events epitomise some of the great strengths of Lutheran education in Australia and demonstrate what can be achieved by working together. The Better Schools Project has been another good example of what we can achieve by adopting a corporate approach to school planning and development. National resources and coordination with regional support and school input enabled schools to garner some very important and significant data to guide school improvement.



Retired Lutheran secondary school principals



Lutheran Leadership Conference

In addition, the consolidated data has provided important information on the culture of Lutheran schooling that can guide leadership development and vocational formation.

Lutheran schools across Australia are uniquely placed at this time. We want to work together to generate synergies as we seek to be the best that we can be. We are united and bonded by a common ethos. At the same time we value local governance autonomy that can respond quickly and flexibly to community needs.

Lutheran schools nationally are a microcosm of Australian education and a good example of what it means to be systemic. Systemically we will support and work with individual community schools so that they can not only be good schools but also quality schools. At a time when there is an expectation that the growth of non-government schools will continue, we will be well placed to build on what we already have in support of new



Lutheran Leadership Conference

initiatives. In this way schools are an important contribution of the Lutheran church to Australian communities.

We are bound by a common history, a common ethos and by being part of the Lutheran Church of Australia. At the same time we value the individual – students, staff members and all who make up our school communities. Vive la difference!

Adrienne Jericho
Executive Director
Lutheran Education Australia

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A full list of references for the articles in this issue is available from the LEA office.