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**THEME** In a healthy place

## Placing relational wellbeing at the centre of our concern



**Leigh Burrows (PhD) School of Education, Flinders University of South Australia**

Wellbeing is not quite like other academic disciplines in that while it is quite possible to talk *about* wellbeing that is really to miss the point since it is actual *experience* of wellbeing that should be the primary focus. As Jennings (1995) has observed, the experience of wellbeing is one in which:

*You become aware of your connection with other people. It's not just an intellectual understanding, I mean your happiness and sense of wellbeing is connected as well, that's part of the connection. It's not just an abstract, intellectual connection with others of your species (pp 76-77).*

Relationships are the centre of the classroom atmosphere for Sherwood (2008) and the main hurdle to wellbeing in school communities is negative or faulty relationships according to Morris (1995). A more relational approach to wellbeing opens the door to kinds of well-being that are more peaceful, cooperative, spontaneous and less calculative and competitive As Miller and Stiver (1997, p22) suggest:

*In creating mutually enhancing connections, we can transform all the institutions in our lives, from school to workplace to home.*

For this reason I suggest we should be placing relational wellbeing in school communities at the centre of our concern.

According to a study conducted by Erebus International for the Australian Catholic

University (2010) the degree to which a student demonstrates effective academic, social and emotional functioning in their school community is an indicator of his or her level of wellbeing. Many schools aim to build capacity for wellbeing in targeted students through the use of social skills programs that teach the language and strategies of problem solving, conflict resolution, restorative justice and positive play. However, as Riikonen and Vataja (1999) have observed, authentic experiences of wellbeing through relationship tend to occur in everyday contexts and situations without clinical intervention. Therefore an ethos of wellbeing needs to permeate all aspects of school life, beginning with the quality of daily interactions, and social skills programs are therefore only one part of an overall approach.

For example (see Burrows, 2009) the challenging behaviour of 'Jack', a year 6 student with Asperger Syndrome was leading some teachers to call for his exclusion. Jack told me:

*I just want friends. I want to have a friend at school. Nobody likes me. Nobody wants to play with me... I try to tell the teachers but they don't listen.*

His year 6 teacher wanted to 'give a relational wellbeing approach' a try and agreed to work with me with the aim of creating a genuinely inclusive learning environment rather than sending him outside the classroom for social skills training. The year-long classroom based peer- support intervention we developed for Jack led to his enhanced feelings of wellbeing, optimism, belonging and engagement at school and the comment:

*Kids seem happy to be my friend now. Now I am not weird at all and everyone considers me a normal friend... I find*

*it really hard to explain. It's about how teachers treat me and their attitude towards me. Mrs F is just the right teacher for me.*

Developing positive teacher-student relationships is at the heart of learning and wellbeing. While there is overwhelming evidence that teachers make a difference to student wellbeing, engagement and learning achievement (Hattie, 2003a) not all teachers appreciate the impact their own relational competencies can have on the development of supportive or stressful student-teacher relationships (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010). Students' social and emotional wellbeing is significantly affected by their teachers' social and emotional wellbeing (Hargreaves & Fullan 1998) and it is well to remember that

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*...and don't forget to dance*



Photo courtesy of Spring Head Lutheran School Mount Torrens, SA

when students and teachers come into our schools and classrooms they bring with them their relationships and states of wellbeing, all of which have a powerful impact on what happens in the school and in classroom lessons (Centre for the Analysis of Educational Futures, 2010, p1).

Supportive learning environments allow learning to flow and wellbeing to emanate from a sense of achievement and optimism as indicated by the following comment from a teacher who participated in a relational mindfulness research project with the aim of improving her relationship with a child with extremely challenging behaviours (see Burrows, in press):

*I practised stillness of thought with my focus child. I thought of her kindly before I slept last night. She did a whole page of neat work the next day. I thought this was a great effort from a child whose books were full of torn pages, scribbles and angry looking graffiti.*

This study explored the extent to which the practice of relational mindfulness could assist teachers to develop their relational

competence to maintain equanimity in the midst of emotionally charged classroom and school environments. Relational mindfulness was defined as:

A deepening awareness of the present relational experience, with acceptance, where connection is described as the core of psychological wellbeing and is the essential quality of growth fostering and healing relationships. (Surrey, 2005, p92)

Findings from this study indicated that regular relational mindfulness practice in the company of colleagues can give teachers and leaders the tools to help them stop in the middle of a crisis and take a different perspective rather than fall back on their habitual ways of thinking and acting. This suggests that mindfulness can build capacity for more relational ways of (well) being.

The experience of working with these and other teachers and leaders has shown me that the beneficiaries of a relational wellbeing approach may not only be those in receipt of support in that the resulting enhanced relational field of the classroom and staff room

can generate wider experiences of individual and collective wellbeing.

It is clear that the wellbeing of individual students is not only dependent on their personal wellbeing but also on the wellbeing of their relationships in their school community. I suggest that there is therefore a need to pay more attention to the impact of supportive and stressful relationships amongst **all** members of school communities. The development of more enabling and dynamic environments for our young people and through them, ourselves, may in turn lead to the creation of a better world.

*Leigh has a background in primary, secondary and special education teaching in both the independent and government sectors. She has held positions centrally in DECS in the areas of learning difficulties and wellbeing. She is currently a lecturer in the School of Education at Flinders University. She has conducted and published research in the areas of autism, working with parents, wellbeing and mindfulness and provides consultancy advice to DECS and the Department of Families and Communities. She is also a counsellor.*

## Spiritual health in the school



Stephen Pietsch is a Lecturer in Pastoral Theology (specialising in counselling studies) and Field Education Coordinator in the School of Pastoral Theology at Australian Lutheran College.

Even in Christian schools, the practice of heart level Christian living comes under pressure when we get tired and lose spiritual focus.

Despite having had the experience several times now, every time I walk into one of our schools I am bowled over by the level of energy and movement in the place. I see students and teachers engaged in all kinds of learning and teaching at various levels and in various locations. A school is a fast-paced and busy environment.

This is of course a healthy sign. It shows that we are blessed with staff and students who are involved and focused on their education and growth. But this high level of energy and output has its risk factors too. Even in Christian schools, the practice of heart level Christian living comes under pressure when we get tired and lose spiritual focus. With this in mind, here are five suggestions for better spiritual health. Yes, they are simple – so simple that we easily forget all about them.

### Caring conversation

Pastoral care is sometimes as simple as allowing your schedule to be interrupted by conversations in which you give and receive care. Ask a caring question. Listen to the answer. In this way we offer spiritual hospitality to one another. These conversations may not be long, deep and meaningful in all cases, but it's amazing what a difference you can make by sharing three to five minutes out of the day.

### Focus on forgiveness

The centre of our faith is God's grace and forgiveness toward us, and the more we remind ourselves and one another of this, the more this wonderful gift will heal and transform our relationships. Saying 'sorry' and 'I forgive you' may seem unnatural at first in the context of our work relationships, but these words carry transformative power.

### Blessing one another

I was delighted to be greeted by a class in my son's Lutheran school with the words, 'may God bless you'. This was not just nice, but a powerful speaking of God's power into my life. Blessing our students, and even blessing one another with simple scriptural words like 'God bless you and give you peace', gives us the chance to invoke our Lord's loving power on one another. This is especially appropriate for the school principal, in his/her leadership role in the community.

### Making and modelling sacred space

The way we use our space to express our deep faith and Christian values is very important and makes a strong statement to everybody on the campus. In the busy environment of the school where sometimes space is at a premium, it may seem a bit impractical, but it is nevertheless important, to have some place – a room, an alcove, a quiet corner, for people to go and sit quietly, to pray, to have some space simply to be with themselves and God. There may be a Bible there, or Christian symbols: a cross or an icon or a biblical picture, a couple of cushions to kneel on. And if we have such space, it gives us not only the blessing of being able to have a quiet place to retreat to for a few moments, but also the opportunity to give witness and encouragement to one another by using it.

As we read the gospels we see Jesus in the daily press of busyness and the demands of other people. And yet we also see how he weaves into the fabric of his life and ministry small but beneficial pockets of time to pray, to be alone, to receive the care of others, to listen attentively with compassionate ears to an individual who seeks his friendship and help. His father used these small opportunities to bless, renew and equip Jesus for his mission, and wants to do the same for us.

## Wellness as a professional responsibility



Robyn Pulman is an author, conference speaker and organisational coach.

### Your health is the greatest of all blessings.

Yesterday, I pulled the antenna cable out of the back of my partner's television and the socket it was plugged into pulled right out of the television itself; snapped, broken off, kaput. Given that we live in far western Queensland and the closest service centre is 400km away, I felt sick. Several heartfelt apologies later (grovel, grovel), I decided to count my blessings that it was only a television that was broken. Everyone in the family was well. You can fix a TV.

For over 23 years now, I have been self-employed, following 11 years of being an employee. Running your own show certainly heightens your sense of responsibility around maintaining your health because, quite simply, if you don't work, you don't get any money. During that period of self-employment, my former husband and I lost all our money and I mean ALL our money, including our house; 50 years of combined work 'down the drain'.

That unexpected setback (now, how is that for an understatement?) brought me to the realisation that the only asset I had was my health and that, if I wanted to start rebuilding my life (I was 47 at the time), I had to do everything possible to preserve my body and mind.

Allow me to ask, 'Are you looking after your health as though your life depended on it?' (pun intended).

'Do you take responsibility for your wellness or do you think it is OK to over-indulge, over-work and over-stress and then expect your employer to pay for your *sickies*?'

As educators, you are constantly giving – of your knowledge, your energy and your spirit. Yours is an extremely demanding profession despite the public's perception that you work short hours and have long holidays (I was once a teacher).

The reality is that you cannot give away that which you don't possess in abundance. You can't inspire others if you don't feel inspired. You cannot energise others if you are lacking energy yourself. You set the tone and the pace of learning and if you are tired, frustrated, unwell and demotivated, so will be those around you. Anais Nin, French author

and diarist, claimed, 'We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are'.

A few years ago, I visited Indus Valley Ayurvedic Centre, a health retreat in southern India – a haven of harmony, ritual, nurturing, spirituality and science. The intent of Ayurveda is to create balance in your body, mind and soul. Their basic philosophy is to *eat food as medicine, not eat medicine as food*. We are what we eat.

For the weeks leading up to my departure, I had purposefully cut down on my one cup of *rocket fuel* (coffee) in the morning and eliminated all alcohol and sugars from my diet so as not to experience the dreaded detox headache. I still got it.

Once a body is in balance, the Ayurvedics believe we can maintain our state of well-being through our eating regime and selected exercise; medication is the third option only, ensuring the patient takes responsibility for their health.

A little over two weeks at IVAC, with a program of healthy eating and massage treatments (including Shirodhara, a warm oil drip to the forehead), culminated in my feeling almost euphoric. My skin was literally glowing, my eyes were clear and I had not one single twinge in my body – and I used to suffer quite severely with neck, back and shoulder pain.

'How well are you nourishing your body? Do you eat an appropriate breakfast? Do you skip lunch, grab a sugar-laden quick fix, eat on the run, drink one too many glasses of wine at night and then lecture the students on the benefits of healthy eating?'

Hippocrates said, 'All disease begins in the gut', whilst Thomas Edison once said, 'The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his or her patients in the care of the human frame, in a proper diet and in the cause and prevention of disease'.

What are you eating today and how will that make you feel tomorrow?

Another component of wellness is *doing what you love and loving what you do*. Do you still love your role? Are you constantly evolving so you can stay fresh and engaged? Every time I run a workshop on a subject I have delivered before, I start over and create the presentation from scratch. Every time I deliver a talk that I have delivered before, I invest as much time in refreshing the content as I do in revisiting what I have written. And every time I write an article, I refuse to look at previous articles I have

written on the same subject until I have revised my angle and attitude towards the subject.

Talking of attitude, how is yours? Do you walk around complaining, talking doom and gloom, swamped by your emotions? Do you say things like, 'I just can't think straight. I have too much to do. This job is just too much. The kids drive me crazy'.

Your emotions are your *stop power* or your *go power*. They have the ability to render us useless or drive us to achieving our goals. When you hear someone say, 'Oh, what a state I am in!' they are referring to their emotional reaction to a situation. Unless you learn how to control and channel your emotions, they will definitely control you. Your *emotional states* are your responsibility. Conservation of thought, energy and emotional drive are all necessary for success.

When you wake up in the morning, your first thoughts can control the outcome of your whole day ahead and determine whether you sink or swim. Most people I talk to tell me they wake up regretting the mistakes of yesterday or worrying about the future. When we focus on a problem, it brings up negative emotions. When we focus on a solution, it brings up positive emotions.

So, unless you set your intent for the day, and focus on it during the day, such as patience, tolerance, enthusiasm, calm etc, you will be tossed around by the emotional waves crashing through your mind. As Catherine Ponder says in her wonderful book, *The Dynamic Laws of Prosperity*, '...scattered thinking, scattered emotions, scattered actions lead to a scattering of your mind power. This in turn depletes your physical energy, your brain energy and saps your emotional drive'.

Sometimes, throughout my own day, I find that I have to change my state from one of *calm* to one of *determination*, depending on what is happening. Dividing my day into such segments further serves my control over my day.

When I was writing my book, *Habits Aren't Just For Nuns... Stories to Inspire and Habits to Acquire* (available through [www.robyn.com.au](http://www.robyn.com.au)), it was a real gift for me to sit with three lovely nuns: Sisters Mary Thorne, Maureen McCusker and Marie Eaton from Holy Spirit Home, Carseldine, Queensland. The 'girls' had collectively lived almost 150 years as nuns and were only too delighted to chat away with me about their daily habits and disciplines.

Sister Mary shared with me how, back in 1947 when she joined the Order, she was required



...think about all those things you have to be grateful for...

to spend several times each day in silence and stillness. It was, she said, such a cultural shock and, in the beginning, the silence 'nearly drove me silly'.

Sister Maureen almost admitted to being distracted in those early years as a nun when meditation and stillness were required disciplines. Sister Marie, who really missed her brothers and the sound of male voices when she first became a nun, agreed that it took her a long time to settle into silence and looking within.

All three ladies, however, unanimously agreed that the ongoing discipline to turn a required behaviour into a habit was worth the effort. Going within and coming back to stillness is today, for all of them, where they learn acceptance, can let go of worry and where they can begin to find the answers to whatever is troubling them.

In their busy lives, they all wished they had more time to meditate, pray and feed their minds through reading the Bible and listening to God. It is there that they find peace and purpose in stillness.

It is no coincidence that many great leaders spend considerable time alone, along with nothing but their thoughts. Jesus, Confucius, Gandhi all spent much time in solitude and in nature away from the distractions of life. Leading universities require their professors

to lecture as few as five hours per week so that they can have time to think. Now wouldn't YOU love that?

If you need to focus your thoughts on something positive, maybe think about all those things you have to be grateful for or imagine the sun rising over a smooth, glistening ocean or sunflowers smiling in an open field or perhaps you could listen to the bees making honey... ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ.

Why not close your eyes now, breathe deeply, still your mind and just *be* in the moment?

Robyn Pulman has extensive experience in national and international management and marketing and has invested the past eleven years studying and researching the power of habits in our lives and how to change them...

Whilst she applies her experience primarily to her city-slicker corporate world, her love is working with rural and remote Australia. Indeed, she claims her favourite presentations and workshops are to 'those on the land'; self-employed, hard-working couples and individuals who understand delayed gratification and are prepared to invest in their own professional and personal development. Robyn can be contacted on [robyn@robyn.com.au](mailto:robyn@robyn.com.au) or further information is available at [www.robyn.com.au](http://www.robyn.com.au)



Taken on 'Wombula', far west QLD, my new home in 'the middle of nowhere'.

# Acting on signs of wellness in a Lutheran school



Loyd Fyffe is the Deputy Director of Lutheran Schools Association (SA/NT/WA)

## Indicators of wellness

One in four Australian men had not visited a GP in 2006-07 compared to one in 10 women, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports. What does this statistic tell us about men's health? On the surface this data appears to tell us that men are healthier than women. However, additional research tells us that mortality rates for men aged 25 to 64 are: 300 % higher than women for suicide; 243% higher for accidents and injury; 161% higher for diseases of the circulatory system; 122% higher for diseases of the digestive system and 18 % higher for all cancers. [Source: Department of Health and Ageing]

Clearly, from the second set of data, not all is well when it comes to men's health from an Australian perspective. It all depends on how you look at the situation and how you interpret the data. The same can be said for assessing the health or wellness of schools in our Lutheran system.

Schools are people places and although they do not experience cancer and digestive complaints they nonetheless show signs of wellness and in some cases signs of sickness. And, like men's health, we need to look deeper in order to ascertain which vital aspects of the school are healthy and which need 'medical' attention.

Traditionally we have seen a school as well and healthy when we observe measures such as good enrolment numbers, good financial stability, good reputation, quiet parents, busy teachers, and students who keep coming back to school every day. However, none of these measures in and of themselves tells us if good student learning is taking place. And assisting each student on their lifelong learning journey is surely the reason that we have schools.

On the surface a school may look healthy but like men's health all may not be as it seems. We need appropriate data that goes beneath the surface in order to measure the real health of a school and the *Better Schools Project* is one model that seeks to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement in a school.

## The Better Schools Project

The *Better Schools Project* (BSP), conducted by InsightSRC, was set in place by Lutheran Education Australia in 2009 in order to help all Lutheran schools improve the people management and work practices that drive staff wellbeing, motivation and performance. And we know that staff wellbeing, motivation and performance directly drive student learning outcomes. 2009 saw the first round of *Better Schools* data and, since the survey

is conducted every two years, we are now in receipt of the 2011 data.

The *Better Schools Survey*, which each school fills in, integrates data from staff, students and their parents to build an understanding about the current state of the school; that is, its current strengths and opportunities for improvement.

From the model presented (figure one) it is clear that there is a range of areas that can either hinder or enhance student learning outcomes and student wellbeing. And like a good health practitioner we need to investigate fully the area(s) that require remediation. This requires careful diagnosis.

The BSP data gives all Lutheran schools information about each of the elements identified in the above model. School staff members give information about the way they perceive: their sense of purpose and their knowledge of what is expected of them (Clarity); their professional learning and development opportunities (Learning); their collaborative efforts and shared understanding and alignment of team goals (Engagement); and the extent to which leaders understand the needs of staff. Students supplement this data with their experiences of their wellbeing, student relationships and the teaching and

*Schools are people places and although they do not experience cancer and digestive complaints they nonetheless show signs of wellness and in some cases signs of sickness.*

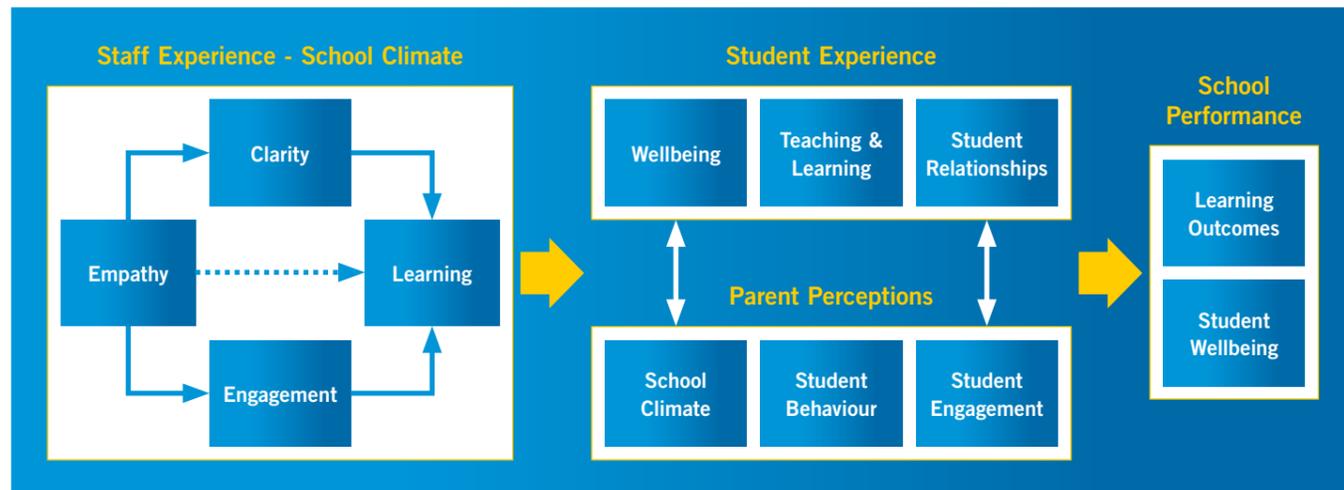


Figure one: Source: InsightSRC Better Schools Project

learning that they engaged in. Parents add their perspective concerning the school's climate, student behaviour and student engagement.

All of the data comes together to give one snapshot of the elements of health and areas for development for each school as understood at this point in time. And, in line with medical assessments, the data points to possible problems but it does not tell us the remedies. The first task for the leadership team in each school is to analyse the data and to identify areas of strength and flourishing health in the school. And, since we know from our own experience that when a part of our body is ailing (eg toothache) the rest of our body is affected, the second task for the leadership team in each school is to analyse the data and to identify areas where attention is needed to further strengthen the school's delivery of learning outcomes for its students.

We live in a broken world so it will not be surprising to learn that the areas needing attention will be clear and there are likely to be several. However, problems or areas of opportunity are best addressed in concerted ways so it is strongly suggested that each school focuses on just two or three such areas and like good health professionals the full staff team needs to apply its efforts to the task.

## The results

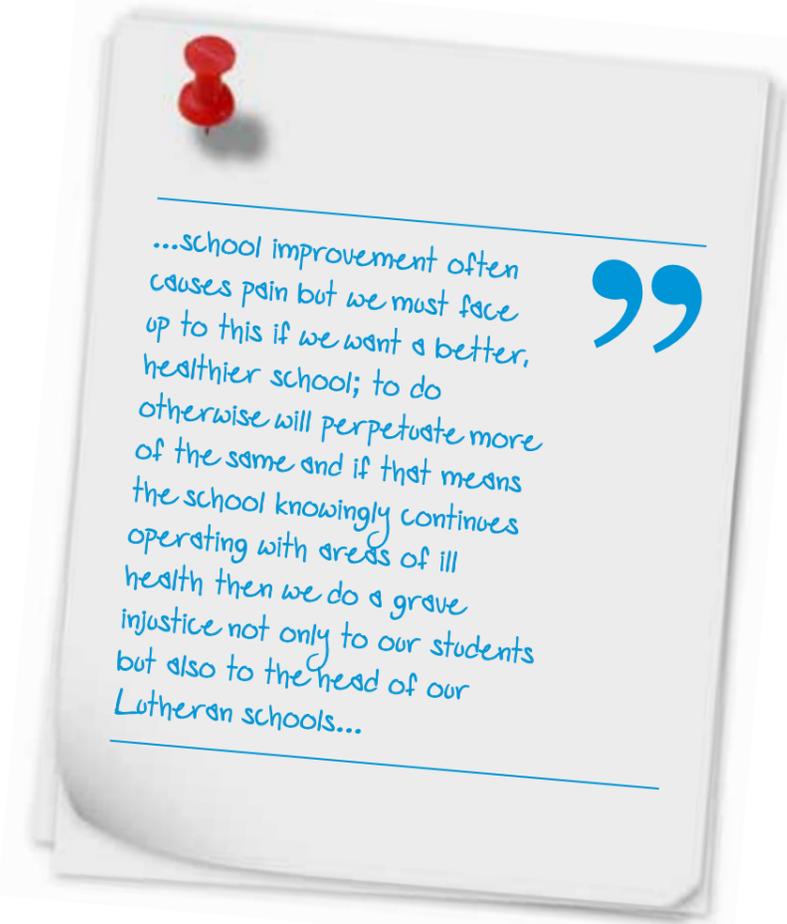
As noted above the data for each individual school tells us a story about the relative health of the school. After celebrating the strengths of the school the whole staff team should then focus their concerted attention on two or three areas of opportunity. In this way areas for growth are addressed with the health of the school firmly in mind.

## The way forward

Identifying areas for growth and locating the specific cause for a sign of *ill health* is the first step to improvement. Selecting the means of treatment and applying this is the critical element to improve the *health* of a school. Here again I would like to use an analogy from the medical literature to outline the steps to foster better, healthier schools.

Professor Allan Walker, in a recent ACEL monograph, used the analogy of reflexology to focus on school leadership. I think that such an analogy also sits comfortably with whole school improvement.

Reflexology, like eastern medicine, posits that treatment of illness is not predicated on



focusing on *bits*, but on the whole. When the reflexologist finds a blockage (you can often feel it sharply when they do) they apply pressure to the connected *zones*. As reflexologists massage these zones they feel tiny deposits and imbalances and by working on these they free the flow of energy or *vital energy pathways* to the whole body.

In short, reflexology holds that the health of each part of the body is dependent on what happens in others. The state of one element resonates in the others. All are linked, sometimes in ways we understand, in others we don't. School improvement programs are, in my opinion, best seen in the same way.

School improvement programs that reflect the principles of reflexology recognise that the school body is a fully functioning organism which, from time to time, experiences *blockages*. Radical surgery to remove the blocked area or limb is rarely, if ever, the solution; rather, by working on the blockages school teams free the flow of energy or *vital*

*energy pathways* to the whole school body. And, as the blockages are cleared pain is nearly always present. In the same way school improvement often causes pain but we must face up to this if we want a better, healthier school; to do otherwise will perpetuate more of the same and if that means the school knowingly continues operating with areas of ill health then we do a grave injustice not only to our students but also to the head of our Lutheran schools namely Jesus.

## Summary

Across Australia our Lutheran schools are currently in good health, at least at the level that the *Better Schools* data tells us. However if we do not take seriously the messages the data reveals for each school AND if we don't seek further diagnosis through other assessments of our health details then we are in danger of becoming like Australian men's health; good at face value but potentially very vulnerable with the possibility of dire consequences if we ignore the signs.

## Young people's health and wellbeing: the need for a new narrative



Richard Eckersley is an independent researcher and a founding director of Australia21.

[This article is based on part of the author's presentation to the Lutheran Principals National Conference, held in Canberra on August 21-24. Richard's papers are available on his website: [www.richardeckersley.com.au](http://www.richardeckersley.com.au)]

Young people's health is continuing to improve in line with historic trends. Death rates are low and falling, and most young people say they are healthy, happy and enjoying life. For most, social conditions and opportunities have got better. Health efforts need to focus on the minorities whose wellbeing is lagging behind, especially the disadvantaged and marginalised. This is the widely accepted story of young people's health today.

There is another, very different story. It suggests young people's health may be declining – in contrast to historic trends. Mortality rates understate the importance of non-fatal, chronic ill-health, and self-reported health and happiness do not give an accurate picture of wellbeing. Mental illness and obesity-related health problems and risks have increased. The trends are not confined to the disadvantaged. The causes stem from fundamental social and cultural changes of the past several decades.

Which story is the more accurate matters. Stories inform and define how governments and society as a whole address youth health issues. The usual narrative says interventions should target the minorities at risk. The new narrative argues that broader efforts to improve social conditions are also needed.

Evidence can support both stories because the topic is inherently complex and 'fuzzy', with elements that are probably impossible to pin down scientifically. My analysis draws on several different streams of evidence to try to cut through the contradictions and ambiguities. These streams include: growing evidence of increased mental illness among young people; higher rates of mental disorder in youth than older age groups (not previously the case); widespread expert concern about youth health; concerns among parents and young people themselves about

their wellbeing; and adverse trends in many explanatory factors.

I will focus on the last to demonstrate the complexity of cause and effect. Specific pathways to ill-health in young people include:

**Developmental:** a growing biological and social mismatch in individual development through the 'adulthoodification' and sexualisation of childhood at one end, and the prolonging of aspects of 'adolescence' at the other.

**Psychological:** generational changes in personality and other psychological traits, including increased neuroticism and narcissism, and less self-control.

**Behavioural:** trends in risk factors such as: diet, sleep, activity and play (especially outdoor), drugs and alcohol, violence and bullying, sexual activity, and media use.

**Social:** broad societal changes, including in: disadvantage and inequality, family and work, education, the mass and social media, religion and spirituality, residential mobility, social relationships and isolation, and exposure to environmental contaminants.

Many of these explanatory factors are inter-related and linked to cultural changes in western nations, notably greater materialism and individualism, which underpin modern consumer culture. These cultural factors also have more intangible, pervasive effects that affect wellbeing, including: a heightened sense of risk, uncertainty and insecurity; a lack of clear frames of reference; a rise in personal expectations and a perception that the onus of success lies with the individual; too much freedom and choice, which is experienced as a threat or tyranny; the confusion of autonomy with independence or separateness; and a shift from intrinsic to extrinsic goals such as money, status and recognition.

For example, a cultural focus on the external trappings of 'the good life' increases the pressures to meet high, even unrealistic, expectations, and so heightens the risks of failure and disappointment. It leads to an unrelenting need to make the most of one's life, to fashion identity and meaning increasingly from personal achievements, possessions and 'lifestyles', and less from shared cultural traditions and beliefs. It distracts people from what is most important to wellbeing: the quality of their relationships with each other and the world, which, ideally, contribute to a deep

and enduring sense of intrinsic worth and existential certainty.

The orthodox story does not reflect this multiplicity of influences and the complexity of their effects. This is apparent in the changing worlds of the family, education and work. Research often shows little if any socio-economic differences in youth mental illness (and some studies have found higher levels among the better-off); nor do socio-economic factors explain adverse trends over time.

Not only parental poverty and unemployment, but also parental job quality (such as security, flexibility, control and paid parental leave) affects children's health. Income-rich parents are often 'time poor', and young people in rich families can face greater pressures to achieve and greater isolation (both physical and emotional) from their parents. British research suggests parental supervision and monitoring have increased in recent decades, but parental wellbeing may have declined, and this, too, is a risk to young people's health.

The worlds of education and work are similarly multidimensional. The orthodox view is that poor mental health in young people is linked to social vulnerability and disengagement, and concerns about mental health have become part of government efforts to ensure all young people are 'engaged' in either work or education. However, Australian research shows most young people who suffer mental illness are in education and work (the proportion is about the same as for those who have not been ill); even most of those with severe impairment are engaged in this sense. While the usual story sees increased education as wholly positive, the new story acknowledges the pressures that come with it, especially in the context of rising expectations and competition.

The growth of media and communication technologies is another area of change that the old story of young people's health tends to underestimate. While their impacts remain debated, the mass media and social media are among the most distinctive features of modern times: powerful and ubiquitous, employing stunning technologies, dominating young people's leisure time. For all their value in entertainment, education and work, they are also powerful vehicles for adverse influences on both mental and physical health, including the encouragement and promotion of: poor diet, alcohol abuse, aggression and bullying, poor



Photo courtesy of Cornerstone College Mount Barker, SA

body image, sedentary lifestyles, loss of sleep, cognitive impairment, reduced social cohesion, social isolation, sexualisation of childhood, negative images of society and the future, invidious social comparisons, and extrinsic goals and expectations based on financial success, social status, looks and lifestyles.

Thus a central feature of the changed patterns and trends in the health of western youth over several generations is a shift in emphasis from material and structural factors to cultural; from socio-economic deprivation to psychosocial deprivation; from a problem of material scarcity to one of excess. Another way to express this difference is in terms of social structure as 'systems of social relations', on which the old narrative focuses, and culture as 'systems of meaning', which it neglects and the new story emphasises.

This argument is not to suggest sharp, categorical distinctions and clear breaks from the past. Physical and mental health are closely interwoven and interdependent. Infectious diseases still matter (rates of sexually transmitted disease are rising). Disadvantage and inequality still matter. Indeed, the cultural changes of past decades may well have exacerbated their effects by making material wealth and status more important to how people see and judge

themselves. Environmental problems such as climate change have serious implications, including the risk of possible catastrophic effects on human health.

The critical importance of culture in our lives is highlighted by this quotation from the 2009 Massey Lectures by the Canadian anthropologist Wade Davis: 'Were I to distill a single message from these Massey Lectures it would be that culture is not trivial. It is not decoration or artifice, the songs we sing or even the prayers we chant. It is a blanket of comfort that gives meaning to lives. It is a body of knowledge that allows the individual to make sense out of the infinite sensations of consciousness, to find meaning and order in a universe that ultimately has neither.'

Culture's central role in human societies has special significance for education, given that, to cite one educational authority, 'the purpose of education is, as it has always been, to initiate the young into those aspects of our culture on which their (and our) humanity depends.' Do principals believe this is education's role? Do they think it is fulfilling this role? What does this mean for them as school leaders? Do we (as a society) even know what aspects of culture we should be initiating young people into if we are to nurture our humanity?

As a society, we have been far too careless about our culture. We have surrendered control of it to commercial interests, and we urgently need to wrest back that control. Education is the best, perhaps the only, way of doing this.

Richard Eckersley is an independent researcher and a founding director of Australia21, a non-profit research company. His work explores progress and wellbeing, and includes: measures of national progress; the relationships between economic growth, quality of life and sustainability; the social and cultural determinants of health and happiness; visions of the future; and young people and their world. He trained as a zoologist and has worked as a science journalist, policy and issue analyst, futurist and academic. His articles and book, 'Well & Good', are available at [www.richardeckersley.com.au](http://www.richardeckersley.com.au).

## Regional news: Lutheran Schools Association (SA/NT/WA)

### Making healthy connections at Cornerstone

At Cornerstone College our aim is to provide a community for all students to grow and develop into healthy, responsible and caring citizens. We focus on providing an environment where they can develop: spiritually, mentally, socially, physically and emotionally.

We value the importance of relationships in this community and understand that authentic and real relationships enhance student wellness. Our pastoral care structure provides a range of opportunities for students to connect with a significant adult role model at school. Relationships are nurtured between:

- » student and home group teacher
- » student and house leader
- » student and subject teacher
- » student and counsellor/chaplain/school pastor
- » student and student receptionist
- » student and staff members

We understand that students won't always connect with all of these people but our hope is that students will connect with at least one of these staff members. In so many ways we find Carol Buchner's words to be true: *They may forget what you said but they will never forget*

*how you made them feel.* We certainly encourage all staff members whether in the classroom, working in the library, servicing computers or preparing food in the canteen to seek out opportunities to make meaningful connections. We are all responsible for pastoral care.

At Cornerstone we have implemented a number of programs and practices that we believe enhance student wellness. We are currently in our fourth year of using restorative practices as the basis of our Relationships Management within the College community. This has enhanced the authenticity of our relationships and the school tone. We have also implemented the *40 Developmental Assets* as a framework to guide our pastoral care program. This framework based on research involving over two million young people provides a checklist of assets for young people to incorporate into their lives to enhance their wellbeing.

The ongoing challenge of connecting with the 750 young people in our community is always a work in progress. Our current goal is to get our heads around the best ways to communicate with the gen Y students in our care, remembering the words of Mother Teresa: *Do not think that love, in order to be genuine, has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired.*



Cornerstone College students

God guides us as we encourage each other to care for the students in our community—their wellness is always our prime focus.

*I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.* Matthew 25:40

**Corrin Townsend, with Pastor Stuart Traeger & Emma Rieger**  
Cornerstone College  
Mt Barker SA

### Promoting healthy relationships

*Schools have a profound influence on children, their families and the community. Young people's ability and motivation to stay in school to learn and utilise what they learn is affected by their mental health. Schools are crucial in building or undermining self-esteem and a sense of confidence.* (World Health Organisation 1995)

No one disputes that student learning is the central purpose of schooling. It is explicitly stated in policy and planning documents wherever you look. However, at Spring Head Lutheran School there is another dimension which is taken very seriously, and is an important part of what we do and that is *the development of wellbeing.*

We believe that at the heart of effective teaching and learning are the wellbeing of people in our community and the culture of resilience and respectful relationships underpinning them. Healthy, happy people make for healthy, happy communities.

Here at Spring Head we strive to promote wellbeing not just amongst staff and students but also amongst our families. We run a playgroup once a week for our families who have preschool children and for the families of the community who don't necessarily attend the school. We encourage people to get to know each other and for children to play and interact with each other.

Parents are given support in the difficult job of raising their children in a variety of ways. As well as a regular column in the school newsletter which features practical parenting ideas, workshops about key issues affecting families are also offered. There is also the family support given by our chaplain who is as much available to the parents as to the children and teachers.

We have a class carers program in place at the school. There are two class carers per class; as well as looking after the wellbeing of the teacher they also support the families in that particular class. If the class carers become aware of a problem with a family –

for example, mum is in hospital – they arrange meals for the family, child minding, lifts to school, etc. Parents are given opportunities to come together as a school community. Coffee mornings are arranged for each class as well as opportunities to come together as a wider community in the form of sausage sizzles, morning teas, evening events, wine and cheese evenings and fundraising events.

In order to assist with learning, we also run programs at the school with different classes. Depending on the issue, students are assisted to:

- » find ways to solve their problems and exercise control over negative feelings so that they can take responsibility for choosing how to act and feel
- » have inner strength, social and inter-personal skills and skills to communicate effectively
- » try new things, enjoy a challenge
- » persist with a task and persevere
- » have a sense of optimism

### Reflections on student growth

During term 3 I have been working alongside our year 12 students during their Christian Studies lessons as they prepare for their final presentation in term 4 – a time of celebration on their last school day. The students have been reflecting on their five years at Faith and their shared experiences over that time. It has been a joy to watch them laugh and smile as they reminisce.

At one of their year level devotions, the school captains presented a devotion to the year 12s, thanking them for their support throughout the year and presenting their own form of reflection. Part of this was a montage of photographs from year 8, of all year 12 students. As we all watched and giggled at the images, I began to think about the changes that were obvious in many of the students, not just the physical changes but the emotional, academic, social and spiritual changes – so much growth it has been a privilege to be a part of.

The relationships that students establish and build during their time at school are such an important part of this growth: their relationships with their peers, their teachers, their God. What do we do to foster this, to encourage growth?

We have various structures in place in our school some of which include:

- » believe their contribution can make a difference to an outcome
  - » like helping people and look for ways to serve others
  - » possess a sense of fun
- The chaplain is available to work one on one with students to:
- » give unconditional support, nurture and encouragement
  - » encourage and help the children practise calming strategies
  - » model self-esteem, confidence and optimism through social stories
  - » talk about appropriate behaviours
  - » encourage independent thought and action
  - » assist with building an emotional vocabulary which enables them to label feelings
  - » help them to understand their own temperament and why they might react in a certain way to a particular situation
  - » practise effective ways to resolve conflict in the classroom or in the playground

- » our Village Care Group system with vertical grouping of students (to help bridge the gaps between the year levels) to establish relationships that will grow with them through their five years at this school; consistency of staffing is such an important part of this
- » the devotional life of the school which includes full school chapel presentations, year level devotions, and devotions as part of our Village Care Group time
- » year level activities: camps, interdisciplinary days, end of year activities

But it's not only structures that assist in relationship development. Professional, caring, devoted staff work alongside our students, encouraging, supporting, directing, teaching. Personal relationships are established, often not easily or quickly, but always the aim is to ensure each student feels cared for, feels safe and is supported to be the best learner they can be.

This cannot happen if our staff do not feel supported and cared for themselves. Pastoral care of staff is paramount to the welfare of our students. And that care must be genuine and heartfelt. It involves shared experience of professional, social and spiritual activities. And all of this must be based around the truth of the gospel, the grace of God.

We recently had a visiting pastor lead our morning chapel, Pastor Ben Hentschke from

Birdwood. He spoke of the gift that Jesus gave us by dying in our stead, taking us from much less than perfect to perfect in the eyes of God. His presentation was challenging for some, but the thing that astounded me most was hearing students in my year 12 classes (and not in a Christian Studies class) openly discuss the topic, and hearing some clarify for those confused, the truth of the gospel. That our students can feel safe sharing their faith both in front of a whole school when leading chapel, as well as in front of peers in a classroom situation, says a great deal to me about how safe our students feel.

I'm aware that no school is a perfect place, that we are all human and mistakes are made, but when I look at the young well rounded adults who are about to finish their secondary schooling I can't help but feel proud of the place where I work, proud of the staff and the difference they make.

My prayer is that all of our schools are not only places of academic growth but are places where our students can experience growth in every aspect of their lives, places where they can grow in their love and knowledge of God – places of grace.

**Judi Schmidt**  
Co-Director of Student Welfare  
Faith Lutheran School  
Tanunda SA

- » talk about ways that they can seek help and assistance if needed
- » provide comfort in stressful situations
- » praise completed tasks, work well done, perseverance, desired behaviours
- » discuss accepting responsibility for behaviour and why discipline is imposed to limit some behaviours
- » clarify expectations, rules and regulations
- » accept that failure happens and talk about ways they can overcome feelings of failure and try again
- » teach them how to focus on something else if they are worried or upset
- » explain the importance of eating properly, resting, exercising and self-care

Class based programs and individual support are always adapted as needs arise.

We strive to create a nurturing environment for all children at Spring Head by demonstrating kindness and constantly talking about tolerance and respect for others and our environment. As

a PYP school we also find the attributes and qualities of the Learner Profile (balanced, caring, knowledgeable, inquirers, communicators, principled, reflective, risk-takers, thinkers and open-minded) useful in underpinning all we do to promote wellness in our school community.

**Pamela Morley & Tori Weiss**  
Spring Head Lutheran School  
Mt Torrens SA



Spring Head students

## Regional news: Lutheran Education South Eastern Region

### A school of the community, not a school in the community

#### 40 Developmental Assets at Good Shepherd

In October 2008 at ACLE 3, keynote speaker Clay Roberts provided my first exposure to the 40 Developmental Assets framework. The Developmental Assets are 40 common sense, positive experiences and qualities that help influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible, successful adults. Because of its basis in youth development, resiliency and prevention research and its proven effectiveness, the Developmental Assets framework has become one of the most widely used approaches to positive youth development around the world. Search Institute research has found that these assets are powerful influences on adolescent behaviour – both protecting young people from many different risky behaviours, and promoting positive attitudes and actions.

Fast forward to April 2010—it was time to put thought, contemplation, research, and dialogue over the last 19 months into action. The first step was to convince leaders in the college that the 40 Developmental Assets framework had great potential both for our school and in our community. Once the leadership of the college was onside we had to get staff onside. I started slowly and introduced the Assets framework at staff meetings, gave information to other interested staff, used the Search Institute website, distributed the 40 Assets to colleagues, and ran my first 40 Developmental Assets workshop at a whole school staff meeting. The journey had begun.

The journey needed the support also of the school council and the parent body. I presented

the workshop at the next school council meeting. I wanted to empower the parents in our community as well, not only parents of students at our school but parents of students at any school. I ran a parent workshop on the 40 Assets and, because I wanted to engage the entire community, I held the well-attended workshop in town at the Performing Arts Centre. About half of the people attending were directly connected to our school; however, other schools in town had staff attend the workshop, parents of students from other schools attended and many staff from agencies in the community attended as well.

As with all journeys, we hit some stumbling blocks. One was the financial backing of this project. The school needed resources, time release, training, surveys, etc. To get funding, I had to apply for many grants that are offered to schools. In this process, I had to make strategic partnerships with community based organisations. I first approached the local Shire Council and made a pitch to them about the benefits to the community if we have young people with more Assets. I was pleased when they agreed to become a partner to our project. At first my applications for grants were unsuccessful but eventually I was able to form partnerships with the following organisations: Brophy Family Services, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology – Landscapes for Young People (L4YP), Victorian Police, Western District Health Service, Salvation Army – Salvo Connect, and the Department of Education. These further community partnerships enabled us to secure a grant to implement 40 Developmental Assets at Good Shepherd College and in our community.

The partners were keen to see this project get off the ground. The 40 Developmental Assets

framework is something new and different. It is a fundamental shift from working reactively to working proactively by giving young people the tools or the Assets to solve their problems. A reference group to oversee the implementation of the program was formed with a representative from each of the partner organisations. A young person reference group was also established, because anything done for young people should be done with young people.

The college aimed for the following outcomes:

- » Positive impact on students in areas such as: higher academic achievement; a stronger sense of belonging, self-confidence, and self-efficacy; possessing a more positive view of the future, a stronger degree of empathy for others, and a higher valuing of community service; a greater number of interactions with a wider circle of adults; and having strengthened relationships with significant adults in their lives
- » Decreases in alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use by youth
- » Decreases in academic failure
- » Increased commitment to school as demonstrated by improved attendance of students.
- » Expressions of adult leadership for asset building
- » Successful community mobilisation around asset building
- » Positive results for youth from redundancy and reinforcement of asset building across community settings
- » Changes in the behaviours of agencies serving youth
- » Youth and adults having more positive interactions with one another

- » An increase in asset levels for youth over time.

The College also aimed for the following community wide outcomes:

- » All schools in our community become 40 Developmental Assets Schools
- » All schools in our community survey their students using the Search Institute 'Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviours'
- » Local Shire adopts the Assets framework for all youth affairs
- » The Victorian Police adopt the framework and use it as a positive way to interact with youth
- » The Health Care system adopts the framework and uses it as a positive way to interact with youth

The first priority set by the reference group was for me to attend a Training of Trainers workshop to learn how best to implement the 40 Developmental Assets. In late November 2010 the Search Institute held what is called the 'Big Tent Conference' in Houston, Texas and 1,540 people from 46 US states and eight countries attended. I attended the Training of Trainers (TOT) Building Developmental Assets in School Communities. I was able to meet and speak with others and learn what they are doing in their communities. I felt empowered and also well equipped to go back to my community and implement the 40 Assets.

The staff professional development week prior to school starting this year had two days set aside for Building Developmental Assets in School Communities. Every whole school staff meeting has a segment on the 40 Assets as ongoing professional learning. Each week at

Good Shepherd College, we have an Asset of the week which forms our Bible passage for chapel, assembly theme and focus for our Pastoral Care Groups (PCG).

To initiate our asset building endeavours our year 6 to year 12 students participated in the 'Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviours'. The completed surveys are mailed back to Search Institute, where the data is processed and an aggregate report is produced and sent back to the college. This report provides a developmental profile of the students and also paints a portrait of the human development community system for our young people. It also helps us celebrate which Assets are very high amongst our students. From the report, we are now able to develop programs in the school and community that will directly affect the named Asset.

Throughout this year, I have run four parent workshops for any parent in the community, professional development workshops for a total of 15 schools, addressed other community based organisations and run youth vents in the community. I am currently in the process of planning a day around asset number 34 (Cultural Competence – young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds) and asset number 17 (Creative activities – young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theatre, or other arts). Those Assets were identified in our survey as needing attention. I am working with local Indigenous Elders on an Indigenous Art, Music, Food and Dance festival at our College.

I also have begun mapping the 40 Assets to our school's normal activities such as curriculum, PCG, camps and excursions. I am in the process of applying for more funding

for 2012. I am excited about the future of the 40 Developmental Assets at Good Shepherd College, in our town, in Western Victoria, in Australia and beyond. The young people of Australia make up about 20% of our population but make up 100% of our future. I believe this gives us an opportunity to give something back to our community and be a school of the community not just another school in the community.

I encourage everyone to become Asset builders, start small and deliberately, make a difference in one young person's life.

For further information I can be contacted on pmoore@gsc.vic.edu.au or by visiting www.search-institute.org or www.parentfurther.com/.

#### Patrick Moore

Deputy Principal  
Good Shepherd College  
Hamilton, Vic



Students doing a 40 Developmental Assets Activity in PCG



There are many times when extra support is required.

When students leave they sign 'Victor' the defence bear - a record of defence students that have come and gone!

### Defence Force Families supported

I am employed at Victory Lutheran College as the Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) in the primary school and Defence Transition Mentor (DTM) in the secondary school. Essentially, the role is like a teacher's aide but I am employed to assist Australian Defence Force families as they relocate to a new school. My two positions assist students and their families to transition smoothly into Victory Lutheran College's school and wider community.

Another role of mine is to foster resilience and provide support to students if there are any concerns about their educational, emotional

or social needs. Sometimes children have difficulties making new friends, understanding, adjusting to the routines and different ways of a new school. I aim to answer basic questions about the school and link families to the right person to provide assistance.

Not only do these roles assist students who are new to our school, but the support is ongoing. There are many times when extra support is required due to the nature of the employment requirements of defence parents. For example, when a parent is deployed for active service overseas quite understandably this could cause children to be unsettled and produce anxiety. Another potentially

challenging situation is when a family is about to be relocated to a new area and therefore attend another new school.

Some of the activities I am involved in include:

- » running and supporting social skills groups
- » providing individual assistance
- » working in the classroom assisting students
- » meeting with ADF children
- » liaising with ADF students, their teachers and parents
- » working alongside the pastoral care team
- » encouraging the students to care for new children and fostering friendships

- » providing welcome and farewell kits for ADF students
- » assisting in both ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day ceremonies

This is an immensely rewarding position and one that provides a unique level of pastoral care to students in our College.

#### Lisa Enever

Victory Lutheran College  
Wodonga, Vic

## Regional news: Lutheran Education Queensland

*In 2012 SchoolLink will devote an issue to the Australian Curriculum. Meanwhile, three curriculum leaders from LEQ indicate steps being taken to engage with the new curriculum in their schools.*

### Catering for the diverse range of learners

Peace Lutheran College is a multicultural setting with students from a wide range of backgrounds. Fifty-nine students from a population of approximately 550 students come from Indigenous communities on Cape York and the Torres Strait. There are also students from an ESL background with limited knowledge of English. Many of these students enter the college in early secondary years as boarders. The college has embarked on a



The college has embarked on a number of strategies to support the learning of this diverse range of students.

number of strategies to support the learning of this diverse range of students.

### Accelerated literacy and numeracy

In 2011, following a twelve month investigation, the college commenced an immersion program designed to support small groups of students in the middle school with low literacy and numeracy skills. The aim of the program is to accelerate the learning in these key areas and enable students to participate in mainstream classes.

During the enrolment process, students undergo specific testing to ascertain their literacy and numeracy levels. The Probe reading assessment, South Australian Spelling Test and a writing sample are used to determine literacy levels while the Pat Maths

Test assessment provides information on numeracy levels. Students are selected for the program based on these results.

Accelerated literacy lessons focus on narrative texts. It looks at texts in a critical way and unpacks high interest, vocabulary rich texts developing literal and inferential levels of comprehension. This rich word knowledge background leads to the ultimate outcome of a willingness and confidence to write.

Accelerated numeracy is designed to invite all students into mathematics and focuses on students spending time exploring real life problems in depth, and developing their skills in number.

Constant monitoring of the students' progress occurs throughout the program. Once their literacy and numeracy skills have developed to an appropriate level they return to mainstream classes.

Support is provided for students across other subject areas with the timetabling of tutors to attend classes and assist the comprehension of subject specific language.

### Skills for learning

This subject elective is available for students in Years 8 and 9 to assist the transition into the school environment. Research skills, writing of assignments using referencing and study habits are some of the areas explored in this elective.

### Faith in times of curricular change

Any curriculum innovation or change takes time. It is not something schools rush into lightly; especially when the scope of the change is as extensive as the Australian Curriculum. At Faith Lutheran College, Redlands, the transition to the Australian curriculum has been systematic and measured. It is something we have taken time to think about, review, consider and apply.

Early forays into the Phase 1 curriculum were directed at establishing common language to talk about the Australian curriculum and understandings of teachers. Initially, we engaged in an investigation of the curriculum where staff explored the 'cross-curricular priorities' and 'the intended educational outcomes for young Australians'. Whole college discussions ensued where we sought to clarify what an Australian curriculum might 'look like, feel like and sound like' in the context of our college. This process was assisted by sharing ideas with teachers from Redeemer

Lutheran College. The exchange of dialogue between the two groups of teachers allowed an entrée into the next phase of the process: clarification. What does it all mean for us?

The second phase was to establish the nexus points between the Australian curriculum and the Faith curriculum. The two important questions addressed were: What do we **already do?** and what do we **need to do?** To do this it was essential to map the curriculum we had in place. QSA provided some very useful tools for doing that.

Heads of Faculty of Phase 1 Learning Areas in the Middle and Senior School (Year 10) used these tools to plot and match the college curriculum and the Australian curriculum. The Science Faculty found correlation between current offerings and that of the Australian Science curriculum. Consequently, little needed to be changed in the Middle School and Year 10 Science courses. On the other hand, gaps were identified in the Junior School Science curriculum.

Similar matches and mismatches were found with the Mathematics curriculum. Generally, the Australian curriculum asked more of students than did the Queensland curriculum. This was noticeable in Years 1 and 10. It did not involve rewriting as such, but extending that which was already offered to include the new elements; in particular, level 10A Maths had to be made more rigorous to bridge the gap between Years 10 and 11. This did involve a major revamp of our Extension Maths to include the new curricular demands of the Australian curriculum.

The English curriculum provided an opportunity to review and reconfigure curriculum offerings. In particular, it offered a chance to review the place of literature in the classroom and to address some areas where staff knowledge was needed to develop knowledge and skills. One of these areas was grammar. Grammar was made a priority for Professional Learning in the Junior School and for Middle School English teachers.

### ISQ project

Teachers at the college have also been involved in a project with ISQ this year to extend their understanding of cultural differences for Indigenous students. Workshops with Tom Kirk and Ali Palmer have explored the structure of families and kinship amongst Indigenous people. Staff meetings have been devoted to teachers investigating the general capability of **Intercultural Understanding** from the Australian curriculum and how it relates to their particular subject area. Throughout the project, understanding of the cross curricular priority **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures** has increased.

The development of Personalised Learning Plans with strategies to assist teachers in the classroom is the next stage in this project.

Catering for all learners requires focus and attention at individual class level, subject and school level. Through implementation of these initiatives and ongoing professional development, teachers at Peace Lutheran College are striving to offer the best possible opportunities for all students.

### Cheryl Curtis

P-9 Curriculum Coordinator  
Peace Lutheran College  
Cairns, Qld

The two areas of frustration have been clarifications of time allocation and the absence of standards to match the curriculum. ISQ has been helpful in addressing the issue of times, which we are convinced will be accommodated by our current structures. As for standards; only time will tell.

So where do we go now?

We continue to develop our curriculum, check for correlations with the Australian curriculum, keep abreast of updates from ISQ and improve our teaching practices and professional knowledge— just as we always have. In short, we hasten slowly to continue to provide meaningful learning experiences for our students in a Christ-centred context.

### David King

Director of Learning and Teaching  
Faith Lutheran College  
Redlands, Qld

### Early adoption of the new Australian Curriculum

St John's Lutheran Primary School, Bundaberg, has undertaken the early adoption of the new Australian Curriculum with enthusiasm and a professional focus concentrating on the needs of our school as a whole. We have maintained a strong focus on our school vision and mission statement whilst keeping the Lifelong Qualities for Learners at the forefront of our curriculum journey. As a whole staff we felt that it was essential to maintain the values of the Lutheran schooling system whilst maintaining the unique values and attitudes that continue to set us apart at St John's.

After revisiting our values as a school our first priority became working together as a team in determining a strategic plan for engagement and in the implementation of the Australian curriculum. Through the use of the toolkit activities provided by Lutheran Education Queensland and developing activities that were site specific for our needs, we set about exploring the draft curriculum documents. During this time of engagement we worked together to identify common content descriptions that aligned with our current practice and worked on mapping areas of curriculum which needed a deeper focus in our classrooms.

When commencing the implementation process of the first phase Key Learning Areas at the beginning of 2011 the teaching staff identified the areas in which we needed to have professional learning opportunities, both individually and as a whole staff. This was one key process which ensured our pedagogy in each Key Learning Area remained a focus during the implementation phase and beyond as well as maintaining the positive attitudes of teachers by responding to their suggestions for professional growth.



Throughout our journey we have had many times of celebration.

In a small independent school that is located in a rural setting staff at St John's do not always have access to a large variety of professional development opportunities that may be offered in the larger cities. To ensure that this was not a disadvantage to us we have continued to seek and receive support through the curriculum officers at Lutheran Education Queensland, Independent Schools Queensland and other experts from throughout Queensland. Whilst employing the specialist assistance of those from other areas we have also developed a sense of collegiality amongst teaching staff which has allowed us to share our own experiences and expertise with each other. We found that our many internal professional development sessions and workshops during which we wrote new documents for our school, led to all staff feeling a sense of ownership for the curriculum and that their input in this process is valued.

Throughout our journey so far we have had many times of celebration as we have successfully moved forward in our intended direction. There have also been times when we have had to change focus and staff have needed to provide extra support to one another. The most positive aspect of the entire shift towards the Australian curriculum for us at St John's has been the development of a positive team spirit amongst the staff who have continually worked tirelessly as a collegial team of professional learners.

### Jocelyn Bakker

Curriculum Leader  
St John's Lutheran Primary School  
Bundaberg, Qld



The most positive aspect... has been the development of a positive team spirit...

## ...and don't forget to dance



**Stephen Rudolph is the Executive Director of Lutheran Education Australia**

Earlier this year, Lutheran Education Australia, in cooperation with our 85 Lutheran school principals, conducted both the 2011 Better Schools Project survey and the 2011 Principals Wellbeing survey. These processes formed the second round of such surveys and have resulted in some very useful feedback and data for our Lutheran schools and principals.

Understandably not all the information received is positive. Some can be difficult to read and accept. Some indicates the challenges of maintaining, or even achieving, a sensible work-life balance for principals and teachers. Some of the key challenges for our leaders and teachers include building relationships with local congregations, how to prioritise and rethink curriculum, how to deal effectively with parents and parent bodies, and how to cope with the complexities of the daily workload. These indicate the wide variety of leadership and teaching pressures faced regularly by Lutheran school principals and staff.

The surveys also spoke of the numerous celebrations evident in our schools: supportive staff and leadership teams, pleasing resources to support excellent teaching and learning, opportunities for mission and ministry and many more. But our schools are in a constant state of pressure – pressures of time, results, compliance, performance and deadlines.

In my role as Executive Director of Lutheran Education Australia, work and life pressures are also evident. Such constant pressure is not always healthy. So what did I do recently?

Last weekend Janelle and I drove to Melbourne to be with our grandson, Henry, for his baptism. We had a superb weekend with our family and came from it refreshed and deeply appreciative. Why? Firstly, our four children, their spouses and our three (and a half) grandchildren closed in around us the security blanket of family – the gift of children, grandchildren and family – thank you, God, for these people. Secondly, we had safe travel as well as great food and wine. Daily blessings taken for granted too often – thank you, God, for the gifts of these blessings.

Finally, we travelled such a long way for a baptism. In introducing the church service, the minister invited six people from the congregation to bring forward various items and place them on the altar. The following items came forward:

1. A bowl of water – to symbolise baptism, washing, life
2. A bucket of earth – to symbolise mother earth, nature, life
3. A plant – to symbolise growth, environment, life
4. A cup – to symbolise wine, blood and life
5. A plate – to symbolise bread, body and life
6. A cross – to symbolise death, salvation and life

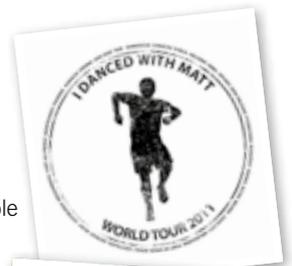
A dancing video was then played. This can be found at the website [www.wherethehellismatt.com](http://www.wherethehellismatt.com). I warmly encourage you to have a look at it. There is nothing more being shown than a young man doing his particular joyous dance, and being joined in at various times by people from locations all over the world. It is memorable, enjoyable and quite inspiring.

Then the minister brought baby Henry, his parents and sponsors out to the front of the church and spoke to them and the congregation about baptism. He also spoke about the joyous dancing and celebration that takes place in our hearts and in the hearts of the angels in heaven when children are brought into God's family. This joy goes a lot further than the obvious joy shown in [www.wherethehellismatt.com](http://www.wherethehellismatt.com) – for the joy of baptism goes beyond this earth. And as he baptised Henry, he spoke the words of baptism, of water and the Word, of Matthew 28:19 *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

The challenges of life – in Lutheran schools, in family, in living – are numerous, significant and sometimes too much. Last weekend God gave Janelle, me, our family, and especially young Henry, a peace that only he can give.

I encourage you as you face life's journey to turn to God for peace and joy. And don't forget to dance – in your heart (or in the street, like Matt) – every now and then in celebration of how God has blessed you. Janelle and I 'danced' during this baptismal service and we plan to for years ahead.

And remember to go to [www.wherethehellismatt.com](http://www.wherethehellismatt.com), and to turn to God so you can dance too.



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