

Spirit

of Sandhurst



Issue 10
November 2014
Catholic Education Sandhurst



Contents:

- 3 Reflections from the Director
- 4 Arts on Show
- Cue the lights!
- 6 Educaré
- 8 Farewell to Philomena
- 10 Cebu
- the importance of hope
- 12 Alliances in Sandhurst
- 14 Setting Up A Good Foundation

Contributors:

Brownyn Beer	Mgr Peter Jeffrey
Philomena Billington	Helen Ramsdale
Tricia Boak	Tom Sexton
Kate Fogarty	Leonie Walsh
Liz Grogan	Maria Weatherill
Kerrie Hill	

Front Cover Photos:

Top right: Charlie Conway & Tom Twycross - St Monica's Primary Wodonga
 Top left: Very Rev Dr Brian Boyle EV presents Ms Wendy Chuck from Galen Catholic College Wangaratta with the Educaré Award
 Bottom right: Harry Link - St Mary's Primary Cohuna
 Bottom left: Ms Philomena Billington

Inside Front Cover Photo:

Jade Littler - FCJ College Benalla

Back Cover Photos:

Top left: Olivia Roberts - St Monica's Primary Wodonga
 Middle left: Nicholas Thorp & Principal of St Joseph's Primary Numurkah, Mr Paul Arnel at the unveiling of the MacKillop Sculpture
 Bottom right: Early career teachers in Cebu, the Philippines

Editor: Jenni Kennedy
 jkennedy@ceosand.catholic.edu.au

Layout: Catherine Barianos

© Catholic Education Office Sandhurst 2014
 Licenced under NEALS
 Printed by Espresso Printers Epsom

Reflections from the Director



'I thank my God each time I think of you and when I pray for you, I pray with joy'
 (Philippians 1:3)

As I write my final reflection for Spirit of Sandhurst I am very mindful of the many blessings which this diocesan community of Sandhurst has brought into my life. As I recall the students, staff and families across our 55 schools I am filled with joy. This joy has come not only from happy times but also from the sad times which we have encountered as a community – the floods, the tragic and untimely deaths of students, staff, our priests and Bishop Joe but in the midst of it all, a community which loves and supports each other.

The heart of our mission is education – to bring forth the hidden wholeness in each student and in so doing, each educator, so that all may flourish, inspired by the Catholic story! During these past years we have gathered for three large conferences – the Secondary Conference in 2004 and two Diocesan Conferences in 2007 and in 2012. The joy of everyone coming together and celebrating our combined achievements, staff-led workshops and seminars, launching Diocesan documents and learning together are hallmarks of who we are. This outward looking philosophy of living and learning as God's people continues to ensure that we flourish personally and communally.

A significant aspect of our recent journey is our exploration and growing understanding of our Catholic identity. Source of Life continues to guide and inspire not only our Religious Education teaching but also our foundational documents. It is a rich and nourishing document because of the shared wisdom which created it. It is a living document which is called to inspire ourselves and our families in seeing and recognizing God's love in our lives. As Pope Francis says 'the Gospel inspires us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others'.

There is so much for which to be thankful – too much to note in this short reflection! In each stage of my life I have been enriched, sometimes through very challenging times, other times through joy. I wish to thank you all for helping me to grow more fully into the person God calls me to be. In the edited words of my favourite theologian, Joan Chittister whom I quote often, 'you have been the miracle workers to me. Within this community I have grown and come to see God more fully in the other. Within this community I have seen my own emptiness filled up and I have been called beyond the pinched horizons of my own life and you have given me the gifts I do not have within myself. The function of community is to enable us to be about something greater than ourselves' - thank you for calling me beyond myself and for being my community, my family!

Blessings

Philomena Billington

Ms Philomena Billington
 Director Catholic Education Sandhurst

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 2013. n. 39
 Joan Chittister, How Shall We Live? Benetvision, 2006. p.59.



Sandhurst Arts on Show

Cue the lights!

Our Place '9 by 5' Impressions Exhibition Goulburn Valley Deanery



The Shepparton Art Museum recently hosted an art exhibition by primary students of the Goulburn Valley Deanery. The aim of the exhibition was to encourage children to interact with The Arts in a stimulating and exciting way. Exhibiting their work in a designated gallery space fosters a sense of pride and appreciation for the importance and care of artworks in the community whilst furthering student understanding of the place of art in Australian history.

A selection of works from each school were submitted in the '9 by 5', two dimensional format through painting, drawing, printing or collage and installed in the gallery. Themes for the works reflected local landscapes, outdoor drawing or elements of nature and people in nature.

Nicky Houtas-Mamone, an art teacher at St Luke's, Shepparton fostered the idea, supported and built the capacity of teachers to enable a consistent delivery of the project including background information, visuals, tips and higher order thinking.

The exhibition was officially opened by Director of Catholic Education Sandhurst, Ms Philomena Billington, on Thursday 16 October, 2014, at the Shepparton Art Museum.

In 2014 the stage was set for the largest Arts program ever undertaken by Catholic Schools in the Sandhurst Diocese. Over four days every Catholic school in the diocese took part in an Arts Extravaganza called Sandhurst Arts on Show!

The much anticipated event heralded a new era for performing Arts in the Sandhurst diocese, with the program successfully engaging over 450 students each day through choral, dramatic and dance workshops.

Each morning the students arrived in Shepparton by bus from various locations throughout the diocese, travelling from as far away as Corryong and Kerang to take part. At their designated venue they joined with other Catholic school students to participate in the program run by experts in the field.

A partnership with a3 – Australian Arts Alive, a branch of the renowned Australian School of Performing Arts provided the tuition along with Sandhurst Secondary teacher Vicky McGowan, who facilitated her own drama program which proved to be very popular with the students.

Director of Catholic Education Sandhurst, Ms Philomena Billington said the landmark event brought together students from every school in the Diocese for the first time.

"Sandhurst Arts on Show provides students with an experience which focuses on performance through a feast of performing arts including dance, speech, drama, choral ensembles and Instrumental work, bringing all our schools together to showcase the performing Arts."

A large scale festival of the Arts is not new to the Diocese; in fact the Festival of the Sacred has been running for the past five years. The previous program focused on grade five and six Primary school students and invited Secondary schools to perform at the festival. The partnership with a3 – Australian Arts Alive began with this event in 2009.

The success of the Festivals of the Sacred, held in each of the three deaneries every year, provided the impetus for the Arts program to grow and explore the possibilities of what could be achieved if every school had the opportunity to engage in Arts workshops in a single location.

The logistics of organising such an ambitious event were monumental to say the least, and it was almost eight months in the planning. During this time the a3 – Australian Art Alive tutors conducted workshop at individual schools to prepare them for the event. Schools were encouraged to perform an item that they had already been working on in their individual school communities or they could rehearse an item prepared by a3 staff.

The students performed their individual acts in the workshops held at four locations around Notre Dame College and St Mel's Primary School in Shepparton before reassembling at the Mercy Centennial Stadium for the afternoon reprise. Family, friends and community members were invited to the afternoon performance where four schools were selected to perform their item for the audience.

The afternoon reprise began with a presentation from the combined secondary school students which demonstrated the high level of performance skills that can be achieved by students who study drama and/or music at a senior secondary level. Three primary schools were also selected to perform based on the high standard of performances during the workshops.

Each day, Sandhurst Arts on Show had a particular focus of dance, drama or choral performance, injecting a different dynamic and energy into each of the reprise performances. As a grand finale all 450 students formed a mass choir to perform the upbeat hit song by Australia's Vanessa Amorosi, 'Absolutely Everybody.' The result was spectacular!

For the organisers and the band of volunteers from the Catholic Education Office and Sandhurst schools, congratulations to you all! Thank you for dreaming big, thank you for realizing the potential of performing Arts on student learning and self-expression, and thank you for giving a whole generation of students the opportunity to fall in love with The Arts.





If education is the key to a better world then teaching is among the noblest professions on earth.

For those who choose to become a teacher this statement will come as no surprise, education, whilst not without its challenges provides an opportunity to nurture young minds, encouraging creative and critical thinkers who can be agents of change for the future.

The passion for teaching stems from a desire to impart knowledge, and inspires a love of learning that can last a life time, teaching is a rewarding profession which when done well improves outcomes for all children.

Some teachers stand out in our minds because they go above and beyond what is expected and never lose sight of the end result. For all the teachers out there who go the extra mile, thank you for encouraging, thank you for caring and thank you for believing that every person has the capacity to be great.

In the Sandhurst Diocese Excellence in Teaching is acknowledged with through the Educaré Award, this award was inaugurated in 2009 to recognise the noble pursuit of teaching and to

acknowledge those individuals or teams who are making a difference in their schools.

The Educaré Award acknowledges long and consistent commitment to high levels of teaching practice in Catholic education through outstanding contribution to classroom teaching and curriculum innovation. It is awarded to an outstanding teacher or teacher team who is recognised by the school community as a model for and example to others.

Recipients of the Educaré Award are deemed to be deeply committed to Catholic education, actively support their colleagues' development, engender hope and optimism, implement innovative approaches to learning and have a circle of influence well beyond their own classroom.

Great teachers engender real and positive results on a daily basis with classroom practices tailored to meet the learning needs of all students, excellent results occurs when education becomes relational, flexible and authentic and. Effective teachers inspire other educators to greatness.

Educaré Award Winners 2014



Year 9 Teaching Team St Mary's of the Angels – Nathalia

The Year 9 Teaching Team of John Nihill (Team Leader), Vanessa Byrnes, Nicole Quinn, Dani Blain, Jessica James, Paul Congues and Michael Ross from St Mary of the Angels (SMOTA) in Nathalia have been recognised for their outstanding Year 9 Program.

Year 9 students are provided with opportunities to learn directly from Aboriginal people both locally and nationally. They also develop a close relationship with the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang people from the local area, including key representatives such as Uncle Wally Cooper, Leon Atkinson and Greta Morgan. The national immersion experiences include service in the One Arm Point and Billiluna communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and Yipirinya School in Alice Springs. A group of students were also involved in a spiritual and educational experience at Mungo National Park.

The Year 9 team promotes reconciliation and awareness of cultural understanding. They advocate for equality, justice and acceptance, honouring the Catholic principle of the dignity of the person through outreach and service in these communities.

The Year 9 team frequently reviews and assesses the program to ensure constant improvement. They exercise a 'whole team methodology' to curriculum development and innovation that is unique to their program. The program is constantly evolving as a result of reflection, evaluation and feedback. The team is always open to feedback as a means for improvement. The student is always at the centre of all that they do.

The College is known in the local indigenous community as offering an 'authentic' Aboriginal education program. Past participants of the program recall it as having had a significant effect on their life and their understanding of the complex issues surrounding indigenous youth, the concept of opportunity and how this is impacted upon by inequality and personal circumstance. The Year 9 team exemplify collaboration as a means to deliver quality outcomes for young people



Wendy Chuck Galen Catholic College – Wangaratta

A teacher for more than 30 years, Wendy Chuck is an inspirational and engaging educator who is held in the highest esteem by all members of the Galen community.

Wendy has been entrusted with a homeroom for 28 years and has been a Year Level Co-ordinator for 15 years. During Wendy's career in education she has held numerous positions of leadership including: Student Welfare Co-ordinator, Year 9 Discovery Team Leader, Year 7 SENIT program and is the newly appointed Junior School Director.

Wendy gives living witness to the Gospel values and exemplifies the ethos of Galen College - 'Faith and Integrity' through her words and her actions. A compassionate and positive leader, Wendy never has a bad word to say about anyone. She speaks the language of the student, building rapport and gaining their respect as she encourages them to pursue their interests and needs. Wendy empowers and enables others by the ways she lives and teaches.

Wendy is an optimist who always looks on the bright side of life. She has an infectious energy and enthusiasm. Wendy's colleagues at Galen College in Wangaratta regard her as an exemplary classroom practitioner who has a strong understanding of contemporary learning and teaching. Wendy's classrooms are always open to her colleagues and she has engaged many in regular team teaching - continuing to build her capacity and that of others. Wendy leads by example and inspires others to believe that there is always a better way.

Wendy Chuck is an incredibly dedicated and highly skilled teacher.



For 13 years, Philomena Billington has called the Sandhurst Diocese home, her initial appointment was as Deputy Director in 2002 and for the past four and half years she has held the highest position in Catholic Education when she was appointed as the first female Director in July, 2010.

Her contribution to Catholic Education across Australia is outstanding over a career that spans more than 40 years, during this time Phil has been a teacher, Principal, Deputy Principal, Educational Officer, R.E. and Curriculum Coordinator, Deputy Director and ultimately, Director.

Phil's journey in Catholic education began as a student when at the age of six she attended boarding school at Our Lady of Mercy College in Goulburn, leaving the family home near Canberra at a very young age. A talented student, Philomena immersed herself in all aspects of school life and was selected as Head Prefect in her final years. After completing her secondary studies Phil was awarded a scholarship to study physiotherapy but decided to pursue a career in teaching instead.

After graduating in 1972 Phil's first teaching position was at Railwaytown State School in Broken Hill, NSW. Phil's passion for teaching and learning led her to further studies and a Diploma in Teaching and a Bachelor of Education followed in the next nine years.

In the early 1980s she lived for 4 and a half years in a remote mining town, 400m kilometres north of Kalgoorlie where she administered the town site and also taught Music in the local state school. Phil and other women formed a faith community as there wasn't a resident priest and Mass was only celebrated every two months.

Phil moved to Bayswater in Perth in Western Australia in 1985 with her young son Ryan. Her first appointment as Principal was at St Columba's Catholic Primary school in Western Australia after twelve months as Deputy Principal at the same school. It was during this period that Phil became foster mother to Vu Uy Vu, a Vietnamese refugee to whom she taught English and whose parents were still in Vietnam. They have since come to Australia and Vu, Trang and their children are a joyous part of Phil's life.

Phil is a champion of The Arts and has a solid background in music as a performer and specialist teacher. She was the inaugural chairperson of the Western Australian Catholic Schools and Colleges Performing Arts Festival which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. The festival now involves 20,000 students from across Western Australia. During this time Phil completed a Graduate Diploma Royal Society of Arts (London).

Phil returned to the east coast in 1993 as Deputy Principal of St Monica's in the ACT where she remained for twelve months. Throughout Phil's career she has maintained a deep connection to church; her faith journey which was fostered by her father has been a constant in her life. It was this connection to church that led Phil to the Catholic Education Office in the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn and the role of R.E. and Curriculum Education Officer (Primary).

Over the course of the next six years Phil was promoted from Education Officer to R.E. and Curriculum Coordinator (Primary), and in 2000 became Coordinator of R.E. and Faith Development from kinder to year 12. These roles provided challenging, rich experiences that enabled her to further develop the Catholic Identity and vision and mission of schools, building stronger relationships between parish and school. It was during this period that Phil completed her Master of Education as well as a Diploma in Religious Education and a Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies. She later completed a Graduate Certificate in Theology.

There are many facets to Phil Billington; she is efficient, loyal, intelligent and hardworking, Phil has a remarkable ability to recognise talents in others and helps bring them to fullness, she often see potential in colleagues before they are aware of them themselves, it is one of her many gifts.

Her legacy to Sandhurst is immeasurable, in nine short years there have been countless school visits, Masses, meetings, programs, strategies, festivals, policies, committees, conferences, ceremonies, gatherings, professional development, initiatives, musings and dreaming, all in the name of excellence. 'Near enough' is not in Phil's vocabulary and her best effort always hits the mark. Phil Billington has been an outstanding leader and Director.

Finally, in the words of the theatre which Phil loves, take a bow Philomena, for you there is no doubt the applause will be long and loud, a standing ovation, marking the end of a stellar career and no doubt the beginning of another new and exciting stage in your life, you still have much to give. Congratulations on all you have achieved and for all that you are.

God Bless.



Farewell to Philomena

A Woman of Service

Philomena Billington came among us as a person of faith with an eager desire to spend herself unstintingly in the service of the Catholic Education Community of the Diocese of Sandhurst.

As we came to know Phil over her years as Director of Catholic Education in the Diocese, we came to appreciate that her zest for our school communities and Parishes flowed from her own personal faith and her relationship with the Lord.

She has led by example. Actively involved in her own Parish, she was always ready to help the Priests of our diocese in facilitating developmental programmes for Parish Councils and especially School Boards. So many teachers, parents and Parishioners across the Diocese have been inspired by Phil's fostering the co-responsibility in mission and ministry that flows from our Baptism.

Perhaps something that we treasure most of all has been Phil's readiness to personally support school members (teachers or student families) who have been struck by tragedy, bereavement or serious illness. These gestures of kindness have spoken volumes to the people involved.

Phil has been sustained in her ministry of service by her own strong faith. Not only has she raised the bar for those in positions of leadership within our system, she herself has kept up her own formation by serious reading and study programmes. We are grateful to Phil for her Christlike example of loving service. As she prepares to move on we realise that we are sharing a treasure!

Monsignor Peter Jeffrey

One of the enduring qualities of Phil Billington that has struck me over her years in Sandhurst, is Phil's empathy and compassion for others in need. Countless times; sometimes privately, sometimes publicly Phil has offered her personal and/or professional support to members of the Sandhurst community.

Phil cares deeply for people in need; she thinks nothing of jumping in her car and driving hours to be with someone, no matter the day, the time nor the hour.

The individuals and families that Phil has assisted over the years will be forever grateful for her support, encouragement and prayers.

As Albert Schweitzer once said, "The purpose of human life is to serve and show compassion and the will to help others."

One legacy Philomena Billington will leave in Sandhurst is her compassion and willingness to help others, especially those most in need.

Tom Sexton

Assistant to the Director - Planning and Resources

"When educating the minds of our youth, we must not forget to educate their hearts."

In reflecting on the past 13 years of working with Phil, these words from the Dalai Lama came to my mind. Phil is, first and foremost, a teacher of both the mind and the heart. Teaching has been and will always be her passion; regardless of whatever pathway she walks. Phil's motivation and drive come from her strong belief in the capacity of every child to learn. She truly sees the divine possibilities in each person and has dedicated her ministry of teaching to providing students with opportunities to discover their love of learning and belief in their own ability.

Forty plus years of ministry in teaching is an amazing career. Phil's contribution to Catholic education has been significant and she has touched the lives of many people on her journey as a teacher.

Maria Weatherill
Consultant: Catholic Identity

There's a marvellous quote attributed to Bishop Daniel Delany, founder of the Brigidine Sisters: 'What you are, those who come after you will be'. I think there's no greater tribute to pay to Phil, than to say that there are dozens, if not hundreds of us across the Catholic schools of Sandhurst who have, in significant part, had our professional and personal character enhanced and expanded in working alongside her.

The Principals and teachers of Sandhurst have known in Phil both trust and challenge. With the unnerving eye of an old-testament prophet, she has called forth the best in us time and time again, and with the gentleness of a trusted friend, has walked with us in our struggles and sadness.

From one woman of the Church to another, I thank Phil for her example and her leadership. We are all changed for the better because she has walked with us.

Miss Kate Fogarty
Principal, St Joseph's College

We choose to enrol our children in our local Catholic primary school, looking forward to them taking their place in a playground full of happy, open and trusting children; thriving in the knowledge that each and every one of them was valued within this school community which recognised and nurtured their individual gifts and talents. Yet, through the confident and inspired leadership of Phil Billington, schools have grown in their understanding that it is not only the children who have the opportunity to grow and develop when enrolled in their care. The generosity of Phil's grace, wisdom, spirit and faith has led many parents such as myself, on a journey which has seen us grow through recognising our abilities and worth as partners in the education of our children. Our lives and those of our families and schools are richer for having had you lead us Phil; thank you and may God bless you.

Liz Grogan - Parent

Phil lives by a mantra, Who are we, therefore How are we? - and it is this mantra that has directed Phil's mission which has Jesus Christ at its heart. To achieve her vision has required courageous dreaming, followed by strength to act on those dreams, bringing them life.

Her unbelievable support to all in our diocese through attending celebrations whether they be a Golden Jubilee, or 10 year celebrations, declaring to those communities how much they matter are all marks of how far Phil's influence and care have spread. At many times we have wondered does she ever sleep? The kilometres she must have travelled, the innovations she has dreamed.

In all the dreaming Phil's attention to detail has been acute, whether it be setting an agenda for a meeting, introducing a person by their correct title or the clarity of wording in a key document, Phil gets it right and she unashamedly, has those same high expectations for those she works with.

Reflecting on Phil we see strength and love of what she does. We are all greater for having experienced Phil, and our schools are places where all are brought to the edge of their own divine possibilities for recognising the divine everywhere ... for every human experience is a threshold to God.

Patricia Boak

Principal - St Bernard's Primary School Wangaratta



Cebu

the importance of hope

Kerrie Hill

For the past nine years the Social Justice Immersion program has opened the eyes and hearts of over one hundred Sandhurst early career teachers. For ten days each year, participants set off for Cebu in the Philippines with the aim of connecting with, and being moved by, global poverty and injustice. The experience is an opportunity to understand how Catholic social teaching helps to put our faith into action.

This year the population of the Philippines jumped to over 100 million. According to the United Nations, around 18% of the population lives on less than \$1.25 a day. Extreme weather, earthquakes and ongoing pollution often create many challenges for vulnerable communities across the country.

Having just returned home from my third immersion trip to the Philippines, the impact of this experience is as strong as ever. These are the ripples that can be felt in the weeks, months and years following the journey to Cebu. I am not the same nervous girl who boarded a plane in 2006 with little idea of what to expect. The incredible experience has shaped the person (and teacher) who now looks at the world in a new way.

The Cebu Immersion begins with an enthusiastic group of Sandhurst primary and secondary teachers each September. We arrive in Cebu with bags full of stationery, clothing and money donated by our generous school communities. While there are many gifts carried within our luggage, they do not compare to those we receive. The children of Cebu offer joy to everyone they encounter. A wave, high five and an embrace are shared between people who are no longer strangers to each other.

A child holds my hand and clutched at the nametag, reading it in a quiet whisper, "Kerrie". He has come from the place where he has most likely spent the night wandering the city streets. Writing his name on the piece of paper, he points to it. "James." As I read his name, he smiles widely. Perhaps he finds joy when someone recognises him, in a life where he is often alone and in danger? In his name maybe this boy wants to show that he is someone. We don't need to share words. For this moment, we are present to each other.

Thank you Cebu, for reminding us how to love

The classroom of the Balay Samaritano drop-in centre is noisy and full of activity. I glance around the room. Small children sit, embraced in the safe arms of Aussie teachers who are a long way from their school and families. I'm blessed to be right here, looking down at big, brown eyes searching my own. Perhaps these are the only hugs that will be received today? I pray in this moment that as teachers, we grow to respect the dignity of every person and teach that same principle to our students. I am grateful for the gift to love another and to share in the story of the other without judgement.

Thank you, Cebu, for teaching us the importance of hope

We wander through the local rubbish tip. The pungent smell of rubbish overwhelms us as we walk on through the workplace and home of many families.

Children play nearby the daycare centre and health clinic that serve the needs of the community. Later, we learn about the opportunities for a new life in San Pio Housing Village and the hills of Compostela. On the first visit by Sandhurst teachers in 2006, San Pio was a large empty block with a vision for relocating people from the dumpsites. This year the village is home to over 140 families and a newly built school sits on site. In addition, parents earn their own income both in and outside the community to support their children. From the despair of the dumpsites, they have found a home to call their own.

Thank you Cebu for reminding us how to dream

On each trip, we search and find the face of God in the people who work for the common good. We listen as each community shares their dream of a brighter future. They are mothers and fathers who hope for the opportunity of education for their children. "We dream that one day she will go to college," says one delighted mother. There is great pride in the achievements of each project, including a food store and a room of sewing machines that will be used to teach new skills and create profit. Pigs, goats, chickens and a shared vegetable garden are significant reasons to celebrate and continue looking forward in hope.

Hundreds of teachers in Catholic Education Sandhurst have experienced the Cebu immersion program. Our groups have also benefited from the guidance of chaplains Fr Tony Shallue, Fr Des Welladsen and Fr Michael Morley. The connection between the participants remains powerful, long after they arrive home.

My hope for participants is that our own classrooms and homes will be enriched by the joy of the Filipino people we have met. I pray that we will see the hope that education offers all children and young people. Let us continue to be inspired by those who work tirelessly to empower people to make decisions that will change their life direction. May the immersion allow us to be enlivened by the passion of those who search for justice? I hope that we continue to be people who show our faith through action.

While the heartbreaking memories of poverty surface from time to time, so too does the experience of joy. I, too, must keep my eyes open in my own life to see Jesus in the faces of those suffering, hurt or lonely. Should I fail to see or speak up for injustice, I pray that the memory of the people of Cebu will remind me. To love, hope, dream and open my heart.



“On each trip, we search and find the face of God in the people who work for the common good.”

Alliances in Sandhurst

Helen Ramsdale

Collaboration and teamwork have been signalled as key enablers of creative potential within teams of professionals motivated towards achieving greater good. In educational terms this can be demonstrated in the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning.

Key characteristics of an effective collaborative approach is the openness to new ideas and engagement with staff in one's own school, across other schools and the community more broadly, to learn, innovate and enquire together into their collective practices. This activity is purposeful, designed, sustained and facilitated.

Within rural communities over many years, the concept of clustering has been promoted and recognized for the positive benefits afforded to schools in geographic locations, including the opportunity for mutual support and expanding educational opportunities at a local level. Clusters of rural schools have often come together to explore ways of providing learning programs that they could not do as 'stand alone' schools in areas such as sports days, group days, shared mobile libraries and the like.

Internationally, the policy direction of many countries, including Australia, has been changing in recent times with a growing emphasis on greater autonomy provided to local learning communities. A number of key international educators (Fullan, Hargreaves) and researchers (Stanford, BfTE) have highlighted the significant impact of collaboration as a key approach in enhancing and improving education opportunities and outcomes.

Recently there has been a growing interest and renewed research in strengthening or re-imagining the concept of clustering. Drawing on the work of a number of individuals and organisations including David Hargreaves, the National College of School Leadership in the UK, the Ontario Education Department and Michael Fullan, and also on the experiences of school alliances in the U.K., clustering or forming of alliances has become a prominent concept under scrutiny in Sandhurst in partnership with the Country Education Project organization.

Alliances that are built on the core principle of, 'improving learning for all pupils through collaborative partnerships,' have emerged as a key means of contributing to improved outcomes for all students through the creation of a shared culture of improvement within designated communities. David Hargreaves promotes the concept of a collective responsibility that has not been undertaken in the past, where clusters of schools accept the responsibility for improving teaching and learning of all students within their learning community. Hargreaves proposes four key building blocks on which to model the organization of clusters. These include:

- Collective autonomy entails schools working together with common aims, whilst each retaining a sense of autonomy and uniqueness, however adopting a moral responsibility for all children within their learning community, educators and educational leaders focused on building the capacity of their peers as well as their own capacity. Initiated through, 'acts of kindness,' and undertaking inquiry through the utilization

of District Alliance Action Research Teams, improvement underpins the shared purpose.

- Locally determined alliances focused on geographic locations, developing responsive and high quality teaching and learning that embraces all children and young people within their community, across educational sectors and inclusive of early years and further education where applicable, and encourages creative and innovative thinking.
- Collaborative Teaching and Learning through the development of collaborative teams focused on learning across 0-18 years with a focus on curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and feedback.
- Building the capacity of education leaders and educators, identified as a critical element in achieving effectiveness and success in developing local self-improving learning systems and alliances. Outstanding education leaders with high skills and capacity must lead school improvement within their own education organization and also see themselves as 'system leaders.'

Maggie Farrar, a proponent of collaborative alliances, recently visited Catholic Education Sandhurst to share her wisdom and knowledge in a presentation entitled, 'Enhancing Rural Education Provision through Collaborative Leadership and Practice.'

As a senior leader at the National College for School Leadership within the UK serving as the Director for Leadership Development, Community Leadership, Research and Succession Planning for ten years and more recently as interim Chief Executive, along with her experiences as a school and regional education leader, and her more recent work in other countries, Maggie advocates that those leading and teaching in schools are best placed to improve their own schools and help others to improve, with students teachers and families as partners in the improvement of the learning experience.

In promoting the power of the collaborative group, Maggie articulated the challenge: of strengthening collaboration and collegiality in a system characterised by competition between schools. Maggie identified the indicators of learning focused schools & communities including:

- Clear values and beliefs which balance the past, present and future in plans
- Practitioners who keep abreast of research, trends and issues nationally and internationally
- Implementation of structures and the use of great data which has gathered evidence on effective and ineffective practice
- attention of whole community focused on issues of strategic importance and expressed in two to three compelling goals
- implementation of great self review and peer review processes and



In Sandhurst, significant interest has been generated in the Nathalia Community Alliance, recently reported in The Age (Saturday August 30th 2014) which outlines the philosophy motivating the alliance is a moral belief that all students in a community deserve the best possible education regardless of which school they attend. The four schools, Catholic and Government, have forged the alliance to provide a better education for all students in the area.

While still in its infancy, the concept of sharing resources to gain economies of scale, means St Mary of the Angels and Nathalia Secondary College are able to offer more than 50 VCE subjects plus Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning subjects, literacy, numeracy and personal development. This is a large number of subjects for any school let alone those in a small rural town, which are traditionally challenged by a shortage of specialist teachers. The two secondary schools also joined forces with St Augustine's College in Kyabram to establish a trade-training centre, with six vocational subjects offered across the three schools. The funding allowed St Mary of the Angels to build a commercial kitchen to teach hospitality. It also offers automotives while Nathalia Secondary School offers building and construction and hairdressing.

Within a similar approach, the North East Secondary Education Provision Network collaborates to strengthen the shared provision of VCE and VCAL, linking schools through Polycom technology based communication, site visits, provision of additional subjects to schools, for example, Specialist Mathematics, and shared professional learning for staff.



- Intentional community investment in innovation so it becomes an 'incubator of new ideas and new practice over time

The integral task of the self-improving alliance, Maggie contends is in the learning. Crucial to this work is the appreciation of students, teachers and families as partners in the improvement of the learning experience.

As Michael Fullan proposes, 'learning is the work – the work is the learning,' through shadowing, mentoring and coaching and suggests, 'there is a heap of evidence staring policy makers in the face that it is the collaborative group that accelerates performance. These results occur because day-to-day pressure and support is built into the work. It is social capital that has the quality and speed essential for whole system reform.'

In collaboration with Country Education Project, three cohorts of leaders and teachers from Sandhurst and Government schools have participated in study tours to the U.K., an experience that has provided the impetus for focused conversation and the implementation of alliance structures across schools. Through participation in these Study Tours, observations enable learning more deeply the features and characteristics, and realize the potential of alliances for schools.

Setting up a Good Foundation

More than ever schools are providing an educational experience that is inclusive for all students regardless of learning styles. School communities' today advocate for respectful relationships and provide programs which respond to the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities or additional learning needs. This philosophy ensures that all students have an opportunity to flourish and to develop their capabilities both socially and academically.

Setting up a good foundation

Transition to Primary School is an exciting, and challenging time for families and young children alike. Young children can often be daunted by their first experience of schooling. Schools in the Sandhurst Diocese are tackling this issue with a range of programs.

Like many schools in the Sandhurst Diocese St Mary's Cohuna invites some families into the school for extra transition from the start of term 3. These are children who need a little bit of extra support before they enter their foundation year (Prep). In Term 4 all the prospective foundation children are spending one morning a week at the school.

The key people involved in setting up this initiative have been the school and the parent community. They have also accessed support from the relevant early intervention providers, made strong links with the kindergarten and been in regular contact with the Catholic Education Office.

Learning the routine of the day prior to landing at school takes a large amount of stress away from young children starting school.

This can include such things as where to put drink bottles, where to sit in the classroom and even knowing the name of the school can be a really useful thing to know.

It has been documented that a successful transition to school has a positive impact on how the child perceives himself or herself as a learner. One student who has benefitted from the program is Holly who has two cochlear implants.

Cochlear implants are designed for people with permanent hearing loss, the implant replaces the function of the damaged inner ear (cochlea) to provide sound signals to the brain.

The foundation class teacher has provided a gentle program based around news, writing, outside games and library sessions. Holly has stayed for playtime and this has allowed her to make friends out in the yard. It has also allowed all the teachers to know how best to communicate with Holly.

Holly has learnt all the teachers' names and is making a start on the children in the class. Holly can't wait for the start of school!



Good for you. Good for your community.

We don't just insure Catholic organisations. We also arrange a great range of quality insurance products for individuals.

And keeping with Church values, we support the Catholic community by channeling profits into a range of community programs.

Visit our new and improved website to learn more of CCI's dedication to the wider Catholic community.

www.catholicinsurance.org.au

Image: Australian Catholic Youth Festival, Melbourne, December 2013



[Home](#) ♦ [Contents](#) ♦ [Car](#) ♦ [Personal Accident](#) ♦ [Travel](#) ♦ [Landlord](#) ♦ [Caravan](#)

Catholic Church Insurance Limited ABN 76 000 005 210, AFS Licence No. 235415 (CCI) arranges this insurance as promoter of the underwriter Allianz Australia Insurance Limited ABN 15 000 122 850 AFS Licence No. 234708 (Allianz). We do not provide any advice on this insurance based on any consideration of your objectives, financial situation or needs. Policy terms, conditions, limits and exclusions apply. Before deciding please refer to the PDS available by calling 1300 655 003; or from www.catholicinsurance.org.au.



This Spirit of Sandhurst magazine captures the spirit of Catholic Education in the Sandhurst Diocese - its uniqueness, vibrancy, innovation and commitment to enhancing the lives of its students, families and teachers.