



## **Taking It To The Next Level**

*A Strategic Plan for Marist College Canberra,  
2007 - 2011*

**Learning and Teaching Renewal**

**Evidence for Change**

*December 2007*

***Marist College Canberra, December 2007***

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## Preamble

When setting out the College's priorities for being a 'Leader in Learning' in *Taking it to the next level – A Strategic Plan for Marist College Canberra, 2007 – 2011* considerable evidence was gathered from the College community throughout 2006 to define the key areas that need to be addressed in this vital part of the work of the College. The outcome of this consultation process, in part, is the following statement which sets out a basis for the change that is considered necessary over the coming years as the College implements this strategic plan:

*Engaging students for learning – innovation and excellence*

*We will extend our reputation for excellence in well-rounded boys' education in a bold and disruptive program of curriculum innovation and learning and teaching reform that meets and exceeds best practice. This is not about 'business as usual'. It represents a major investment in change, anchored in the fundamental commitment to a culture of learning and engagement for all MCC students whatever their academic or vocational ambitions so that Marist Canberra is a "school of possibilities".*

*This should be an educational community characterised by a genuine engagement and desire by all to learn. This includes all sections of the College community.*

The purpose of this document is to report on the evidence that has been collected from a range of sources to support the nature and extent of the changes that are required as part of the Learning and Teaching Renewal initiative which is currently being undertaken by the *Leader in Learning Priority Working Group*.

A number of other documents should also be read in conjunction with this report to provide the reader with a complete understanding of the work and decisions made during the course of 2007 as part of the Learning and Teaching Renewal. These documents are:

*Marist College Canberra – Charter of Learning and Teaching, 2007*  
*Learning and Teaching Renewal, School Visit Reports- December 2007*  
*Learning and Teaching @ MCC in 2012*

In concluding, I would like thank Kirsty Bell, John Folan, Chris Foley, Jane Haigh, Sue Lavery, Carmel Luck, Liz McGinnis, Christine Robertson, Cameron Tarrant; Kerry Todd and Janet Williamson. These staff were members of the *Leader in Learning Priority Working Group* who gave of their time and expertise throughout this year to produce the first stage of our implementation of the *Learning and Teaching Renewal*.

Ian Hewitt  
**Director of Learning and Teaching**  
December 2007

## Executive Summary

In the work that has been done during 2006 and 2007 there have been many positive aspects of the College which have been highlighted. Whilst not wishing to negate these achievements it has become apparent that there are a number of issues within the areas of learning and teaching at the College that have been identified as weaknesses which need to be addressed through reform in the learning and teaching across the College from Years 4 – 12.

“If young people are to remain in education, if they are to experience enjoyment and engagement in their learning, if they are to develop the skills, strategies and dispositions needed for satisfying lives in a globalised, knowledge society, then we must take seriously the need for reform in approaches to schooling and to learning ...”

Russell, J., 2003, p 3

The question of reform is a complex one as a starting point must first be established so that the type and extent of the reform can be defined. In collecting data from the College community over the last few years and throughout 2007 some key areas that must be addressed have been identified. Further to this, an analysis of a variety of contemporary educational research has identified a number of areas that the College can undertake to take our learning and teaching community to the next level.

For our students: there is a lack of connectedness between their learning and the world in which they live; the learning and teaching often lacks relevance to real-life situations; the classroom environment needs to be improved so students are able to learn in an environment where all are engaged and not disrupting others; smaller class sizes need to be considered so more individual attention can be given; the use of ICT should become an integral part of the learning and teaching both in and out of the classroom; and more practical and group activities should be included within the learning and teaching.

Student comments were often reflected by parents in their responses. This could be expected in many cases as a parent’s experience of learning and teaching will largely be provided by their own children in what is discussed about a ‘school day’. There were issues raised about making connections and including activities outside of the classroom to make learning and teaching more practical. Many parents were concerned about the large class sizes and also made comments about the ‘crowded curriculum’. These comments were made many times but it should be noted that by far the majority of parents, often well above 85%, are very pleased with the learning and teaching provided to their sons. The comments reflected here are those areas which we need to focus on to improve the learning and teaching.

Teachers as a whole raised some similar concerns to students and parents. In particular comments were made in the following areas: class size combined with a wide diversity of student ability put pressure on teachers; and where there is a difficulty in accessing

technology effectively. Other issues raised by Senior School teachers were: the problem of a busy school where the main issue seems to be lack of time; where teachers have too many classes; where teachers feel they see their students too infrequently; and where there is a need to address the problems of the current time table. In the Junior School many of the same issues prevailed including the need for a better transition between the Junior and Senior Schools as well as more communication between the two campuses.

There are a number of differences between what students, parents and teachers have identified as areas of concern. Some of these are as a result of the perspective that each brings when responding to the survey questions and all must be considered in any changes as they are implemented over the coming years. Most importantly it must be recognised that students are acute observers of their own educational experience and are able to report on the characteristics that assist them in their learning (Ruddock, Day & Wallace, 1997). The characteristics that are required are (Russell, J., 2003):

- school goals that are clearly stated and honest
- a sense of belonging
- relationships between teachers and students that are fair, friendly, informal, caring, supportive, respectful and valuing of others
- student participation in school decision-making
- work worthy of effort rather than routine, trivial or superficial
- content that is meaningful, significant and part of the real life of young people
- learning and teaching practices that are challenging, active, deep, thought-provoking and cooperative
- decision making about the curriculum content, process of learning and assessment that is influenced and owned by students

As the College moves forward in implementing change in learning and teaching it is vital that this is done in a manner which is supported by contemporary educational research findings. In doing so a number of key pieces of research have been found to assist in defining particular areas that should be addressed.

The development of learning communities is one of the keys to success, where it is seen as both an individual and a collective task to implement learning and teaching. This is to be achieved through: collaboration to draw on individual strengths whilst respecting a variety of perspectives; shared vision to actively promote and evaluate learning opportunities; the development of knowledge networks with teams of staff; and direct involvement by all levels of senior and middle management. This can only be achieved through a process of whole school reform.

We must embrace these opportunities as we reflect on the reforms necessary and acknowledge that the need for change is not new (Russell, B. 1926):

*The sum of human knowledge and the complexity of human problems are perpetually increasing; therefore every generation must overhaul its educational methods if time is to be found for what is new.*

## Reports of Surveys

### *Learning and Teaching*

As part of the Strategic Plan implementation in 2007 the Leader in Learning Priority Working Group created a survey to provide specific detail with regard to the Learning and Teaching that is occurring in the College from Year 4 – 11.

The survey specifically focused on the areas of learning, teaching and on-line culture. This survey was comprised of 29 questions. Of these, 18 were an open-ended response type and the other 11 were a likert scale.

### **Teacher Results**

*There were 76 respondents to the survey from staff in the Priority of Learning and Teaching Survey 2007. 19% of these are from the Junior School and 81% from the Senior School. From these survey responses a snapshot was obtained of what is already happening in this area and it is interesting to see what is going well in teaching.*

*There were several issues raised which teachers believe require attention and these include in the Senior School the problem of a busy school where the main issue seems to be lack of time, where teachers have too many classes, where teachers feel they see their students too infrequently, where size of classes combined with a wide diversity of ability put pressure on teachers, where there is a difficulty in accessing technology effectively, where there is a need to address the problems of the current time table.*

*In the Junior School many of the same issues prevailed including the need for a better transition between the Junior and Senior Schools as well as more communication between the two campuses.*

### **Learning**

Of staff responding to the question whether they used a wide range of appropriate resources, the majority (51%) agreed that they did and 29% strongly agreed. A wide range of resources included textbooks, DVDs, TV, CD ROMs, notes, computers, internet, written information, visual, excursions and so on. Main issues raised included access to computers and white boards and more time needed to learn, train and produce appropriate material. It was also suggested that PD including IWB training (perhaps a summer school) should be considered, that use of share drive for storage needs to be discussed; that notes, resources and advices should be included in course documents which are collaboratively developed.

There was a strong agreement that students have access to guidance from other teachers to assist their learning. The assistance came from the Special Education Department, Tutors, Teacher-Librarians, informally from other teachers and organized tutorials in some subjects. Some teachers spoke of teachers being guest speakers and some team teaching. It was felt that there was limited time for this. Suggestion was made that the

intranet should be used for practice items and other help. Also that Science and Maths tutorials after school could be more widely advertised.

Most teachers believed that they were able to cater for the different needs of students. (24% strongly agreed and 68% agreed.) The ways in which they cater for the students' needs were by one to one support, varying assessment tasks, differentiation through providing different assignments, matching tasks/activities to learning styles, providing negotiated tasks and pacing activities/delivery, by modification of tasks and providing extension activities. Access to support from other teachers' and departments (Special Education) helped teachers to cater for students' needs. There are, however, many impediments and difficulties to prevent teachers' catering for students' different needs including lack of frequent contact with classes and the subsequent lack of continuity made it hard to know students' needs. As well, class sizes make one-to-one discussion difficult. Other issues raised were the physical impediments – changing rooms, lugging equipment around, access to computers makes it difficult to use technology as an integrated part of learning. Time is also an issue in meeting the needs of students e.g. to prepare differentiated materials and to assist students in need of extra help in the classroom. Additionally, there was the problem of teachers' lack of knowledge/experience in implementing teaching strategies that cater for a variety of learners. Comment was also made about the weak literacy skills of a significant number of students making it difficult to teach a prescribed syllabus.

Of those teachers responding many had been involved in professional activities and say that their teaching practice is supported by critical reflection and current research. In providing examples of the ways in which they have incorporated in their lessons what they had learnt, teachers referred to focusing on teaching boys; using different prayer styles and Christian meditation; using forums, group work, scaffolding for research; developing online learning and web links; Self evaluation and using reviews to reflect on teaching practice; developing student behaviour plans.

### ***Teaching***

On the question of whether they provided students with a relevant curriculum, 42% of teachers strongly agreed and 57% agreed. The ways in which staff believed they provided a relevant curriculum were by responding to student evaluation; by adapting material to current affairs; by altering programs to match needs and abilities; by using a variety of tasks and resources; by providing a choice in topics/tasks; by integrating technology; by minimizing chalk and talk; by providing extension work. However, to make the curriculum more relevant, it was felt that more time needed to be made available by reducing the number of things we do, by reducing the crowded curriculum and reducing class sizes. There was a suggestion that the course was too prescribed but another thought the course was not detailed enough.

Most teachers believed that they refine their teaching programs by tracking assessment and student learning outcomes and by responding to student evaluations. Examples of how they have done this are by utilizing different teaching strategies so students better understand concepts; by utilizing different and more varied assessment tasks;

development of new units; by the introduction of new resources to assist with the delivery of teaching programs; by the regular review and evaluation of 7-10 curriculum units by subject departments. Changes to unit content and teaching programs occurred as a result; by the rewriting and refinement of assignment and essay tasks in response to student feedback and suggestions; by providing more time for revision activities and including more practical components in teaching programs.

While 59% of teachers strongly agreed that they share ideas and experiences with colleagues to improve teaching practice and 37% agreed, that did feel that there were impediments to these. These are predominantly the lack of time available to meet, that administration and student behaviour problems dominate discussion and curriculum issues are not always a priority. As well there was comment that it was not always valuable to discuss teaching styles and experience with colleagues and some colleagues were disinclined to collaborate.

There was a mixed response about whether the college continually makes modifications to its programs to improve what it does. 11% strongly agreed and 65% agreed that the college makes modifications to its programs to improve what it does but 23% disagreed, 15 strongly disagreeing. There were positive comments about the way in which the college responds to signs that change is necessary (Evaluations, reviews). However there were many issues raised where change was seen to be urgent. The most pressing seemed to be a revision of the current timetable. The number of classes teachers teach and the accompanying work load, and the lack of continuity which comes from 4 period classes were seen as real problems. Reduction in the number of subjects which boys study and time to slow down the pace of the school. A reduction in the number of “events” was also suggested.

Evaluation and review of the curriculum was seen by some as a real need. An updated curriculum should include updating assessment tasks. Years 7 and 8 should have fewer teachers especially those skilled in dealing with students in those years and there could be timetabled meeting times for people to discuss the same lower school units they are teaching to plan and review work. Units should be developed across KLAs. Suggestions were also made that attention should be paid to the Transition processes across Years 4 – 12 and there should be stronger links between the junior and senior schools. As well the increasing number of students with learning difficulties means staff should be provided with specific professional learning and support to cater for them. There is also a need identified to evaluate the Gifted and Talented Program.

### **Online Culture**

Teachers believe they are aware of much that the students do on the web. Teachers think that there are both positive and negative ways that students use the web but there are varying views about what is positive and what is negative. Students use the web for social networking (chatting, MySpace etc); research (often as an ‘easy solution’ to find answers); playing games; downloading music. There is a great deal of concern about the misuse of the web both at school and at home, including time wasting, inappropriate sites

and behaviour on line. There were also concerns that students may not use sites effectively and that it does not apply to all students.

In response to the question on what are the trends in technologies and social networking we need to be aware of, teachers raised a number of issues. Accessibility to computers meant students had an ease of use generally and personal use has become easier in the areas of personal posting and communication. It is popular with students and use is increasing. The types of communication teachers were aware of included Blogs, Wikis, MySpace, Bebo, Facebook, YouTube, chat sites, SMS, camera phones, Podcasting and the internet. Concerns raised were that sites should be regularly monitored, and that trends and networking should be monitored more. On a positive note it was thought that usage is good if used maturely. Educational implications referred to showed that teachers believe it is a whole different world. There are concerns about site reliability (eg Wikipedia). The mobility, speed and smallness of devices leads to immediacy of communication. Of the negative aspects teachers spoke of cyber bullying, the individual impact (time wasting, isolation, recreational time take over, replacing use of conversation) and illegal down loading and plagiarism.

Respondents were interested in the question relating to the implications for Gen X, Gen Y learners. Along with the increased and more confident use of technology by Gen Y, there are some concerns. Teachers need to be aware and savvy but also need to be aware of the problems/issues that are emerging including Gen Y needs instant results, have short attention span, little perseverance, visual learners, group oriented, global focus, immediacy; teachers need to challenge superficial and stereotypical thinking and students need to be taught to be discerning with respect to information available. There is also the issue that formal literacy, thinking and expression are declining. Do Gen Y students socialize more online rather than face to face?

This question also elicited comments on the educational potential of this ease of use by Gen Y. Teachers commented on the need for teachers to keep up-to-date as students are far ahead. There was also a thought that the mindset by teachers needed to change about the daily use of technology so teaching becomes more effective. More time is needed to be spent on e-learning and student centred learning was also recommended.

As educators we can tap into this culture in a wide range of ways. This includes: e-learning content on mcc.net; podcasts; interactive discussions using forums and blogs; use of online world to make connections beyond the classroom; provision of online information for students including electronic submission of work and outside;

## **Student Responses**

*There were 754 respondents to the survey from students in the Priority of Learning and Teaching Survey 2007. 39% of these are from the Junior School (Years 4 – 6) and 61% from the Senior School (Years 7 – 11). It was decided when surveying in the Senior School to limit the survey to approximately half of each year level to assist in the processing of a smaller number of respondents. From these survey responses a snapshot was obtained of what is already happening in this area and it is interesting to see what is going well in the areas of learning and teaching for students.*

*In analysing the data it was noted that the cohort of Year 9 & 10 students presented a different view of their learning and teaching than their peers in other year levels. Generally the Year 9 and 10 students were less positive about their experiences and did not engage in class as others did. As a result much of the student data has been analysed using the following groups of students: Years 4 – 6; Years 7, 8 & 11; and Years 9 & 10. This has allowed for a consistent grouping to be used throughout the report which can then translate into a set of recommendations for each of these groups.*

*The key issues that have been raised and that will need to be addressed are: the lack of connectedness for students between their learning and the world in which they live; making the learning and teaching relevant; improving the classroom environment so students are not disruptive; smaller class sizes; the use of ICT as an integral part of the learning and teaching both in and out of the classroom; more practical and group activities.*

### **Learning**

The responses of students when asked if they are provided with a stimulating environment varied with 93% of Year 4 – 6, 87% of Years 7, 8 & 11 and 83% of Years 9 & 10 students agreeing with this statement. Students listed a wide range of resources that were used by teachers in their classes yet were not always of the view that these provided a stimulating environment in which to learn. The use of a variety of teaching resources such as DVDs, computers, and interactive whiteboards did not in themselves make for a stimulating learning environment. Some students also made comments that internet research was one of the learning activities they least enjoyed when there is little instruction or guidance given about the task.

When asked specifically about the use of appropriate resources being used by teachers in their classes there was large difference between the junior school and senior school students' responses. 94% of junior school students and only 76% of senior school students agreed with this statement. In looking at the responses many senior school students cited examples of textbooks and note taking being used as the prime focus for learning and teaching in many of their subjects that they least enjoyed. These subjects were also commented on for not making the learning relevant and/or practical to engage and enthuse the students.

To improve the learning and teaching, many students made a number of specific areas that they believe need to be addressed. These can be listed as: smaller classes; better and more consistent discipline in some classes; remove disruptive students; better facilities/resources with interactive whiteboards being used by more teachers; fun activities such as games, group work, videos, computer work; more interactive learning; more relevant and meaningful content; more help from teachers; more class discussions; hands on activities; more variety of courses, reduce core subjects.

### **Teaching**

In looking at the statistical results for the relevance of curriculum for the students there are large differences between different cohorts of students. In the Junior School 96% of students believe that their curriculum is relevant whilst in the Senior School there are differences across Year levels. For Years 9 & 10, 82% of students agree that the curriculum is relevant whilst Years 7, 8 & 11 have 90% of students agreeing. Students list a range of things that would make the curriculum more relevant with the key ones being: making a connection between classroom and the real world; making connections with other subject areas/content; and using practical examples and uses to apply the skills and knowledge.

Meaningful lessons were seen as a way to engage students in the learning and this was best done by: working with friends; undertaking interactive work; content relevant or connected to today's world; practical work; broad teacher knowledge; use of a variety of visual material; excursions that made the lessons at school 'real'; providing material that was new, not something that they had done before; and when it was seen to relate to their future, a connectedness.

A specific question was asked of students regarding paying attention in class. In the Junior School 93% of students report that they pay attention most of the time, whilst in Years 9 & 10 this is only 86% and Years 7, 8 & 11 91%.

Teaching programs should be responsive to the interests, needs and abilities of the students. In this area the students gave varying responses with: 92% of Junior School students; 80% of Years 7, 8 & 11 and only 76% of Year 9 & 10 students agreeing that their teachers met these needs. These results are in contrast to 93% of staff and 89% of parents agreeing with this statement.

In addition students were asked what stops them from paying attention in class. This elicited a number of responses that related specifically to the type of teaching and learning that occurred in particular classes. They made comments about teachers making long speeches, giving boring work, students not understanding and the resultant disruptive behaviour. For many, the disruption of other students was the main reason for their lack of attention in class.

It is important for teachers to know if students are 'doing their best' and the students were asked to indicate how this would be known. Comments that would be expected such as; effort, doing work; paying attention; not talking; answering questions in class; listening;

joining in discussions and participating were given by students. Some students commented that being happy and smiling was also an indicator that they are doing their best.

### **Online Culture**

Students across the College are accessing a wide range of online resources in their daily lives outside of school. Many of these activities are centred on ‘social networking’ and involve the sharing of information in a virtual world. Listed below are the main resources that they access along with an explanation of each.

**Bebo** is an online social media network where friends share their lives and explore online entertainment

**MSN Messenger** is a freeware instant messaging client that was developed and distributed by Microsoft

**YouTube** a video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips

**MySpace:** an international site that offers email, a forum, communities, videos and blog space

**LimeWire** is a peer-to-peer file sharing client: you can download mp3 files as usual and you can also download movies, software, images, games

**Internet Relay Chat (IRC)** is a form of real-time Internet chat or synchronous conferencing. It is mainly designed for group (many-to-many) communication

**Facebook** is a social networking website that allows people to communicate with their friends and exchange information

**World of Warcraft** (commonly known as **WoW**) is a massive multiplayer online role-playing game

A **blog** (web log) is a website where entries are written in chronological order and commonly displayed in reverse chronological order

Students are aware of a new conceptual framework that is unfamiliar to many of their teachers. This framework is one that students use as part of their daily lives and is a large part of the world they live in. Many of their teachers have little or no understanding of this world and don’t use any of these technologies in an educational environment with the students or in their own lives from what the students know. For the students this is seen as a negative thing as they would like their educational experience to incorporate parts of their world and so offer them an educational experience at least in part with a real connection between school and their online world.

When asked about what their teachers need to be aware of the students listed a wide range of technologies such as Bebo, blogs and online music as well as how to use hardware such as ‘smartphones’ and Bluetooth. A number of students also suggested that teachers need to be far more familiar with the use of technology such as notebooks, projectors and the use of computer software in general that is or should be used in the classroom. In general, teachers are seen as being far from technologically literate and that this needs to change so teachers are able to bring the digital world into the learning and teaching of the boys.

To ‘tap into this culture’ the students make a number of comments which indicate that they want their teachers to know about the student’s online world and that this can be achieved in the first instance by teachers ‘asking for help’. In practical terms this could be done by: talking to students; engaging with them over the net about school work; and being open to explore what the student’s online culture is by joining in. Many students indicate that they would like their teachers to be aware of the online culture that is outside of the classroom and to bring elements of this into the class. To do so for many teachers will involve a great deal of understanding and professional learning.

## **Parent Results**

*There were 248 respondents to the survey from parents in the Priority of Learning and Teaching Survey 2007. 31% of these are from the Junior School parents and 69% from the Senior School parents. From these survey responses a snapshot was obtained of what is already happening in this area and it is interesting to see what is going well and not so well from a parent’s perspective in the classroom.*

*Several issues were raised which parents believe require attention and these include in class sizes across the College and the ability to cater for the needs of all students, especially with large class sizes.*

*In many instances there were very similar results from both Junior and Senior School parents. The exceptions to this were in the area of catering for all students and providing a curriculum that was responsive to the student needs, interests and abilities.*

*Parents had very similar responses to students which you could expect as much of a parent’s information will come from what their sons talk about. The key issues that parents have raised and that will need to be addressed are: the lack of connectedness for students between their learning and the world in which they live; making the learning and teaching relevant; improving the classroom environment so students are not disruptive; smaller class sizes (this was commented on by many parents); the use of ICT as an integral part of the learning and teaching both in and out of the classroom; more practical and group activities.*

## **Learning**

The majority of parents (95%) across the College agree that their sons are provided with a variety of learning opportunities. Enjoyable learning opportunities for the boys often relate to practical and real life experiences as well as learning that makes a connection to their world. The activities that are least enjoyed by the boys are those where the teacher is directing and controlling much of what is happening and as a result there is a great deal of sitting and listening. A number of parents also made comments about poor quality teaching which was defined as poor preparation, lack of control of the class and lack of subject knowledge.

A wide range of resources are used by teachers with 92% of parents agreeing with this statement. Parents list resources such as computers, interactive whiteboards, simulation games, DVDs and excursions as the resources that are used. When asked to list the additional resources that could be used if they were available the parents list a wide range of resources that in many cases they believe are under or poorly utilised. Resources such as the various national institutions, government departments and CSIRO available in Canberra are some of the resources parents believe should be being used to make education real and practical for their sons. They also cite the lack of sufficient access to technology or the lack of staff ICT competency as an issue in many cases.

Parents agree that their son's have access to a range of teachers other than their class teacher to assist. In the Junior School this is 95% whilst in the Senior School it is 76%. Junior School parents believe that their sons can ask a wide range of teachers who are known to their sons and support the system where the boys experience having different teachers for some of their subjects. Many parents in the Senior School mentioned tutors, House Deans and special education teachers as being accessible to their sons for assistance. A number of parents gave examples where their sons wished to get assistance from others but were not sure who could assist or how to go about this. Formal tutoring sessions offered by some subject areas was seen as a very positive and useful time where assistance could be sought.

Teachers are able to cater for the different needs of students in classes but there were large differences between parents of Junior (92%) and Senior School (77%) boys. Whilst there is strong agreement for the statement a number of reasons are given for why teachers cannot cater for all. The statements were similar across both groups of parents. Difficulties and impediments listed were: large class sizes (this was commented on by over one third of parents); not enough time with so much in the curriculum; mixed ability classes – including not knowing how to cater for all; not knowing or understanding the learning styles of boys; disruptive students; and the large numbers of boys that teachers often see in a week

### ***Teaching***

A relevant curriculum is provided to the students with 96% of parents agreeing with this statement. Many parents listed the: type of content; range and level of subjects; choices in the later years of schooling; relating of content to real and practical examples; and the study of contemporary issues as elements that made the curriculum relevant. Where the curriculum is seen to be less relevant is where there is a lack of connection between the class and a real-life context. The study of contemporary issues also needs to be more pervasive across the curriculum as well as avoiding repetition across subject areas and year levels.

Although the curriculum was seen to be relevant there was less agreement about the teaching being responsive to the students', interests, needs and abilities with 96% of Junior and 86% of Senior School parents agreeing. In classes where students have been given some choice parents indicate that the relevance increases for their son. The choices provided are often in the areas assessment choices or options in choosing content.

Another key area for relevance which has been noted before is in making connections to the real world and using practical examples in using the skills. There were a number of parents also commented that some content could be covered which draws on a number of different subject areas rather than making the content all fit in a single subject with no connections to other areas of learning.

A number of parents commented on the poor teaching that occurs in some classes as a result of poor discipline and the capacity of teachers to work with such large and diverse classes. In some instances the amount of content that teachers are trying to get through also detracts from the depth of learning and teaching that the students would like and indeed need.

### **Online Culture**

Parents listed a wide range of uses that their sons make of the internet and agreed with the same list as the boys had indicated. Whilst many parents commented that this was a very useful tool for education a number also made comment of their sons wasting time or accessing material that they have no control over.

Teachers should be aware of, and know how to use the various technologies that students are using according to many parents. They also comment that teachers need to be aware of cyber bullying and be involved with the education of students to assist in educating them about this side of the internet. For many parents there is a belief that the current uses of the internet by their sons should be better understood by all teachers. This is socially and technically so that these technologies can become a part of the educational process. There is also a need to work with boys on making informed choices when using these technologies and to use them in a socially responsible way. It is important in using these technologies that we continue to value face-to-face contact as a means of social interaction also.

Many parents believe the College should be embracing these technologies by incorporating the use of this throughout learning and teaching. This should include the following types of activities and uses: e-learning with lessons online; capacity to get and complete homework online; the use of chat as part of a class in a controlled environment; communication with the boys electronically; uploading of teachers notes for use by students; online help sessions; and in general make online the default way of obtaining information for their education from teachers.

There are also a few parents who have concerns about embracing these technologies for educational purposes. The main area of concern is the loss of interaction between teacher and student as well as student to student. Questions are also raised about the suitability of the 'tribal nature' of online social networks but then countered by suggesting that these can be used educationally within a safe and controlled environment where students can be taught an appropriate use of these technologies with respect for themselves and others.

## **Wellbeing**

### **Introduction**

The Wellbeing Project was begun at the College in 2004. The overall aim of the project is:

*To develop a philosophy and practice of academic care (Years 4-12) using student wellbeing as a cornerstone of our pastoral response.*

The survey was based on similar instruments devised by the Australian Council for Educational Research and Mind Matters. These surveys have been used with permission and have formed the basis for the College's Well Being Survey. The Catholic Education Commission *Pastoral Care in Public Schools* document was also used. Some questions were edited to make them more appropriate to the College and where required additional questions have been included that provide specific detail for Marist College Canberra.

In 2004 and 2006 the College conducted surveys of the College community which included teachers, students and in 2004 only also included parents. This report is adapted from an original report written by Chris Morrissey in February 2007

### **The Survey**

The survey contains 57 statements. The statements required a response using a Likert scale of *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree*.

In this report, the 2005 response is displayed in [ ] immediately after the 2006 response where there is a significant difference. The report provided here focuses specifically on the areas that relate to teaching and learning.

A summary of the results for 2004 and 2006 is provided below as it pertains particularly to Learning & Teaching.

*In reporting the results, statements that were common in the three surveys are presented as comparative results. These appear most often in the student survey. T refers to teacher and P to parent.*

### **Survey Results**

#### **Students**

##### **Consolidation**

Boys say that generally their teachers teach in ways that they can understand (85%). 92% of teachers maintain that they use a variety of teaching strategies to provide for different learning styles in their classrooms. Opportunities are provided to work alone (87%), (T-98%) in groups (86%) (T-87%) and quietly (75%)(T- 93%). However, less than half the boys (48%) maintain that they work better in a group than by themselves. The boys

believe that what they learn at school will help them get a job (86%), though this agreement declines from Years 7 – 11 (91%-79%). Generally, the boys perceive that their teachers provide variety in assessment tasks (77%) (T- 95%) and that their teachers are enthusiastic about their teaching (78%) (T-97%) (P-85%)

The Junior School results showed that the vast majority of students:

- Found their lessons generally enjoyable (92%).
- Learn something useful most days at school (90%).
- Cope well with homework (81%) (P- 71%). 25% of parents believe that their boy receives an unrealistic amount of homework.
- Believe that what they are learning will help them get a job (95%).
- Keep working on a task until it is finished (90%).
- Believe their teachers are enthusiastic about their teaching (90%).(P-97%)
- Have opportunities to work well by themselves (89%) and in groups (92%), with two thirds (66%) believing they work better in a group than by them selves.
- Believe there are times when they can enjoy quietness (89%).

Doing well at school is important to the majority of boys (94%) and they feel good when they work hard (91%) A majority of the boys (96%) also believe that they have felt successful at some task this year (P- 86%) and 96% know that they can do well enough to be successful. 99% of teachers maintain that they ensure that students in their classes are given opportunities to achieve success. 83% of boys say that they cope well with schoolwork (P-83%) and that they are generally successful at school (P-86%). Most boys (97%) are optimistic about their future once they finish school.

The Junior School results showed that the vast majority of students:

- Enjoy school generally (90%) (P- 93%), find school work interesting (79%) (P- 95%) and do their best (94%).
- Cope well with their school work (90%) (P-85%) and think they are doing well in their studies this year (90%).
- Generally think they are successful at school (88%) (P-89%)
- Look forward to their future years at school (90%).
- Believe doing well at school is important to them (97%).
- Feel good when they work hard at school (94%).

### ***Investigation***

59% of boys in the senior school and 40% in the junior school say that they are bored with schoolwork. 22% of students across the senior school state that their lessons are not generally enjoyable. However, 100% of teachers maintain that they try to make their lessons interesting for their students.

More than half the students (52%) believe that there are big sections of some subjects that they do not understand. (Year 8 -30%). 24% of boys disagree that they learn something useful most days. (Year 11- 30%) Half the boys believe that they spend too many hours

on schoolwork and 30% maintain that they do not cope with homework. (P- 28%) 15% of parents believe that their boy receives an unrealistic amount of homework. Almost half the boys (47%) state that their marks are not a true indication of what they are capable (P- 64%) and only 73% maintain that they would keep working on a task until it was completed.

Interestingly, with regard to learning styles a majority of boys (91%) maintain that they know how they learn best but only 45% believe that their teachers know how they learn best. (P- 70%) 40% of boys do not believe that different learning styles are catered for in their classes.

On the other hand, 91% of teachers maintain that they are able to cater for different learning styles in their classes and use a variety of teaching strategies to achieve this. Further, 86% of teachers believe that they are aware of the individual learning styles of their students.

Over one quarter of the boys state that they are not given a chance to do work that interests them (P- 8%) (Y7 students- 40%). Further, less than 50% state that they are given opportunities to help decide or plan things like school activities, events, policies or procedures.

35% of boys do not look forward to going to school.(Y9 – 45%) (P- 8%, Y8P- 18%) One quarter of boys believe that they are not doing well in their studies this year and 20% say that they do not do their best at school. This is despite the earlier comment that they feel good when they work hard (91%). 20% believe that they will not do as well in their studies this year as they did last year.

With regard to choice, while 88% of teachers maintain that they offer choices in their class, 45% of teachers report that they do not provide opportunities for students to be involved in deciding and planning curriculum.

## **2006**

Across the senior school, 62% of students say that they are bored with schoolwork. 53% believe that there are big sections of some subjects that they do not understand. 31% do not look forward to going to school, 29% do not find their schoolwork interesting, and 22% say that they are not the chance to do work that interests them. 42% disagree that their marks really demonstrate what they are capable of

While 92% of students believe that they know how they learn best only 50% think that their teachers know how they learn best and 30% disagree that their preferred learning style is catered for in their classes.

Significantly, 54% of boys believe that other students' behaviour in their classes stops them from learning.

31% of boys report that incidents of bullying are not well handled by their teachers and 31% do not think that their teachers take an active stance against bullying behaviour in their classes. 31% believe that their teachers are not fair in dealing with students.

### **Staff Results**

#### **Consolidation**

All teachers (100%) believe that they take time to listen to their students and are prepared to negotiate with them about issues related to their learning and assessment needs.

#### **Investigation**

More than half the teachers (53%) disagree with the statement that the numbers of students in their classes are conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Almost one quarter (24%) of staff disagree with the statement that there is a culture of positive collaboration amongst the staff

### **Student Results**

#### **Consolidation**

96% of parents believe that their son is encouraged to achieve high standards at school. 85% believe that teachers provide opportunities for their son to achieve success by providing different ways of teaching and learning and 95% maintain that the school curriculum provides opportunities for their son to acquire skills and knowledge in physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

#### **Investigation.**

Four out of five parents believe that the school reporting system provides them with information that they need when they need it. However, this figure was lower in some years and warrants further investigation. (% disagreement: Y4- 39%, Y9 – 23%, Y10- 27%)

### **Comparison with the 2004 survey**

Many of the 2006 responses were similar to the 2004 results. There were very few statements where there was a decline in agreement. However, on a pleasing note, some of the areas that were identified in the 2004 survey as requiring follow up, scored higher in this year's survey including:

<b>Statement</b>	<b>2004 (%)</b>	<b>2006 (%)</b>
44. My teachers listen to what I have to say	80	84
42. My teachers acknowledge me when I am doing a good job	73	79
71. My teachers provide a variety of assessment tasks	77	82
5. My lessons are generally enjoyable	78	84
10. I do my best at school	81	85
54. When I have a task to do, I keep working on it until it is finished	73	78

A number of statements which scored low in both surveys showed some improvement in 2006

<b>Statement</b>	<b>2004 (%)</b>	<b>2006 (%)</b>
22. My marks really show what I can do	53	57
53. My teachers are fair in dealing with students	62	70
58. My teachers know how I learn best	45	50
43. I look forward to going to school	64	69
50. I have chances to help decide and plan things like school activities events, policies and procedures	46	57
48. I feel that I work better in a group than by myself	52	57
22. I find it easy to talk over problems with some teachers	59	66
<i>Some statements scored a higher negative response</i>		
26. I am bored with schoolwork	59	62
12. I find school work interesting	75	71

There was little change in some of the statements that required follow up from the previous survey. These include

<b>Statement</b>	<b>2004 (%)</b>	<b>2006 (%)</b>
39. I find that there are big sections of some subjects that I do not understand	59	53
70. I am given a chance to do work that interests me	78	78

Finally, the Year 8 (Year 9 2007) cohort which scored the highest level of disagreement across the statements in the survey. This was not the case in 2004 where the Year 8 cohort's responses were closer to the other Year groups. Some examples include

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Y8 (Y9 '07) (%)</b>	<b>Avg (%)</b>
2. I like my teachers this year	71	83
5. My lessons are generally enjoyable	74	84
12. I find school work interesting	57	71
26. I am bored with school work	70	62
53. My teachers are fair in dealing with students	57	70
69. My preferred learning style is catered for in my class	61	70
70. I am given a chance to do work that interests me	69	78
72. My teachers are enthusiastic about their teaching	64	75

## Year 12 Exit Survey

### Introduction

The survey was devised by Dr Linda Vining, Centre for Marketing Schools (CMS) and purchased by the College. Essentially the survey was conducted unaltered except that some questions that were edited to make them more appropriate to the College and some were added to capture vocational education data.

The survey has been conducted in 2005 and 2006 as the Year 12 students leave the College. This report is adapted from an original report written by Chris Morrissey in January 2007.

### The Survey

The survey contains 99 statements and open-ended responses. The statements required a response using a Likert scale of *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree*. There were also a number of open ended invitations to add statements about particular issues. In each case, extensive responses were offered by the participants.

In this report, the 2005 response is displayed in [ ] immediately after the 2006 response where there is a significant difference. The report provided here focuses specifically on the areas that relate to teaching and learning.

The College Executive recommended that a focus group be held to follow up five of the issues arising. The areas to be further explored with this group are in ***bold and italicised*** print.

### Responses to Statements

#### ***Areas of consolidation***

Once again the responses to the following statements are a good indicator of how the departing year 12 boys feel about the College:

<b>Question</b>	<b>% strongly agree or agree</b>
85. I have received a good education	95
5. The school is a safe and secure environment	93 [70]
4. The school has a caring atmosphere	93 [70]
87. I have an understanding of world affairs	87
95. I would send my child to the school	89
87. I would recommend the school to relatives and friends	89
98. The courses I studied have prepared me for life after school	87
99. I feel a sense of pride in being a member of the school	90

Other areas that were strongly supported include: the school is a happy place (93%); efforts and achievements are acknowledged (91%) [86%]; the school has a good reputation in the community (98%); in all pursuits is encouraged (93%); useful career guidance is offered (93%); life at school is busy and action packed (93%) [83%]; 93% consider that they had a wide range of positive experiences at school and 89% [94] that Year 12 has been a good year for them.

### **Staff**

Staff willingly give their time to student activities (89%); students in need of extra help can get it (90%) [85%]; staff treat Y12 as mature young adults (89%) [80%]; staff have a positive attitude (87%) [81%]; staff assist students to reach their full potential (82%), parents can contact teachers with ease (84%); teachers provide students with good role models (80%)

### **Values**

The school encourages community service (96%) [91%]; strong moral values are a feature of the school (89%); decency and good manners are emphasized (93%) [87%]

### **Leadership**

The school teaches leadership skills (90%); there are plenty of leadership opportunities (87%); Student leaders are respected (84%); I have developed good leadership skills (85%)

### **Teaching and learning**

Students with high academic ability are extended (93%); the work is challenging in a supportive environment (89%); the school uses modern teaching methods (91%); 92% [88%] of boys consider themselves good students; students learn to work co-operatively (89%), the school is an intellectually stimulating place for me (84%)

### **ICT**

The school is a technology rich environment (94%) [87%]

### **Christian ethos:**

The Marist philosophy is clearly articulated in all aspects of school life (89%) [79%]; prayer, liturgy and social justice play an important part in school life (74%); the school has helped me understand Christian beliefs (81%) [77%]

## **Areas for further investigation**

### **Teaching and Learning**

Different learning styles are used to suit different people (32% disagree) [42%]; *students receive useful feedback about their progress (26% disagree) [38%]; discipline problems in class are competently managed (42% disagree) [45%];* opportunities exist for public speaking for all students (23% disagree) and 36% do not consider themselves good at public speaking; students receive training in organisational skills (33% disagree); time management skills are taught (36% disagree)

### **Pastoral Care**

Incidents of bullying are well handled by the school (36% disagree) [40%];

### **Christian ethos**

My faith has deepened as a consequence of being at Marist (43% disagree) [51%]

### **Staff**

I feel that staff know and appreciate my best qualities (22% disagree);

### **ICT**

The school's internet provides good access to information (61% disagree)

### **Other areas**

Another area that may require follow up is : communication between home and school is frequent (42% disagree)

### **Open-ended questions**

Participants were invited to contribute statements about other *positive* aspects of the school. Approximately 106 students took this opportunity. The following themes emerge in the comments (*% refers to the number of students who commented on this theme*):

- Family atmosphere, caring and supportive community, friendships, bonds (46%) [25%]
- Staff – supportive, dedicated, good staff-student relationships (13%) [9%]
- Well maintained quality facilities (13%) [20%]
- Provides a good education, positive learning environment (10%)
- Focus on values/ morals (10%)
- Marist/ school spirit/ pride (7%)
- High standards, focus on hard work, reaching potential (6%)

Participants were also invited to contribute statements about other *negative* aspects of the school. Approximately 90 students took this opportunity. The following themes emerge in the comments:

- Issues with teachers- individual & general (26%)
- Bullying, harassment, intolerance, 'rugby culture' 12% [20%]
- School rules- strictness, inflexibility: - driving, leaving grounds, study lines, appearance (17%)
- Assessment & reporting, studies issues- courses, workload (13%)
- Classroom discipline- lack of control, inconsistencies (12%)
- Lack of freedom (4%) [12%]
- ICT – access to internet (15%) [10%]
- Library (7%)

- Disrespect from younger students (5%)

Participants were invited to contribute statements about *how the school could better meet their needs*. Again approximately 95 students took this opportunity. The following themes emerge in the comments:

- Attention to assessment and reporting, workload, no. of courses studied (15%)
- Issues with courses- quality, availability, variety (11%)
- Better internet access, computer hardware (11%)
- It can't, keep doing what you are doing well (10%)
- Comments related to individual teachers or teachers in general (9%)
- Greater emphasis on the individual (9%)

### **Comparison with 2005 survey**

#### *Quantitative data*

In 2006 the results are similarly positive to the 2005 results offering greater endorsement in many aspects of College life. There was a significant increase in the % of boys who considered that the *environment is safe and secure* (from 70% to 93%), that the boys have the freedom to be themselves (from 75% to 85%) and that there is a *caring atmosphere* (from 70% to 93%). Once again, the staff were strongly affirmed including increased acknowledgement of staff *providing extra help for students in need* (from 85% to 90%), *having a positive attitude* (from 81% to 87%) and *treating Y12 as mature young men* (from 80% to 89%). The office staff were also recognised as friendly and helpful (from 83% to 94%).

There was increased recognition of the role of the College in *helping students work through personal problems* (50% to 79%) for the *role of the school in building self esteem* (from 76% to 83%).

The boys believe that *the Marist philosophy is clearly articulated in all aspects of school life* (from 79% to 89%) and there was a slight increase in the % of boys who acknowledged that *the school has helped them understand Christian beliefs* (from 77% to 81%)

The areas of concern identified in this year's survey are similar to 2005. These include significant disagreement regarding the *successful mixing of multicultural elements in the school* (27% and 29%). While there was a decrease in the % disagreeing that *different learning styles are catered for* (from 42% to 32%) and that *students receive useful feedback about their progress* (from 38% to 26%), the overall %'s remains high. Further, concerns remain in the areas of good *discipline management* within classes (42% and 45% disagreement) and with the *effective handling of bullying incidents* (36% and 40% disagreement). With respect to a *deepening of faith as a consequence of attending Marist* there was a slight improvement in disagreement from 51% to 43%.

#### *Qualitative data*

In 2006, similar comments were made to the 2005 survey. However, the emphasis was slightly different. With respect to *positive aspects* of the College, there was higher

reference to the family atmosphere, caring and supportive community, friendships and bonds (from 25% to 46%) and in appreciation of staff contributions (from 9% to 13%). References to the high quality facilities and the extensive co-curricular program were down. A focus on morals and values (10%) was included this year.

In the *negative aspects* cited, issues with teachers, both individuals and as a whole, was the highest in 2006 (26%) but not mentioned in 2005. Similarly there were increased references to assessment and reporting matters (13%) which also had the most comments in *how the school could better meet the boys' needs* (15%) In 2006, concerns about classroom discipline was mentioned by 12% but was not significant in 2005. References to strict school rules were slightly up (from 15% to 17%)' bullying and harassment was less significant this year (from 20% to 12%). Internet access remained a concern (10% and 15%)

### **What boys think of school**

A significant research project entitled *Why boys think school is a dead loss* was released in 2001. The project involved over 15 000 boys in a range of schools including government and non-government, co-ed and single sex.

In 2002, we conducted some of our own research into what our boys think of school. The sample group was 30 year 10 boys who completed a written questionnaire which was followed by a discussion.

The results:

Q1. What do you think of school ?

Rank		Score
1	Generally OK, enjoyable, fun	15
2	Sometimes frustrating, annoying, difficulty with boys who won't work, 'cool' boys	7
3	Important/ necessary for future	6
4	Good environment- friends, setting	3
	A place to learn	3

Q2. What about the work itself ?

Rank		Score
1	Interesting, fine, well suited, good range of subjects	10
2	High standard, challenging, rewarding, enjoyable	9
3	Routine sometimes frustrating, tedious work, repetitive, work for the sake of it	7
4	Excess of assessment items, too many at same time	5

Q3. How do you think that you are performing academically ?

Rank		Score
1	Doing well, happy with results/performance	16
2	Need to improve- better planning, improve study habits, better focus etc	8
3	Doing very well	4
4	Performing to the best of my ability	3

Q4. Describe the classes that you enjoy the most.

Rank		Score
1	Good teacher	6
2	Fun- joke around, light-hearted, relaxing	5
3	Interesting, range of activities, variety of information	4

Particular classes referred to (in order):

1. PE
2. RE
3. Maths
4. Multimedia
5. Science
6. Languages

(Single references to most other classes)

Q5. What makes a good teacher ?

Rank		Score
1	Sense of humour - makes learning interesting, fun, uses stories	12
2	Gives lots of help- individually, gets to know each student and their needs, interested in each student	11
3	Explains things- well, simply, clearly, more than once	10
4	Actually teaches- not just from a textbook	6
5	Able to control class	4
5	Understands student's point of view, relates well to teenagers	4

Q6. What can your teachers do to help you learn better ?

Rank		Score
1	Explain things more	9
2	Provide more individual help, set work at my pace	8
3	Make classes interesting, relevant, fun, different	4
4	Include talk, discussions- use less handouts and texts	3
4	Know their subject and communicate it well	3

Chris Morrissey  
February 2003

## ACTAP Results

<b>Combined Data</b>	<b>2005</b>		<b>2006</b>		<b>2007</b>	
	<b>t-Test Value</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>t-Test Value</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>t-Test Value</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b>Year 5</b>						
Reading	2.3	+	1.6		3.7	+
Writing	0.6		2.8	+	-0.3	
Spelling	2.2	+	1.9	+	2.8	+
Number Sense	4.6	+	2.9	+	3.5	+
Measurement & Data Sense	3.9	+	3.4	+	2.9	+
Spatial Sense	4.6	+	3.9	+	3.5	+
Numeracy	5	+	3.7	+	3.7	+
<b>Year 7</b>						
Reading	3	+	-1.1		1.8	+
Writing	4	+	-4.2	-	0.4	
Spelling	5.4	+	2	+	4.2	+
Number Sense	5.3	+	-0.7		4.4	+
Measurement & Data Sense	3.9	+	1.9	+	5.2	+
Spatial Sense	3.3	+	1.1		5.6	+
Numeracy	4.7	+	0.8		5.7	+
<b>Year 9</b>						
Reading	3.3	+	-0.3		2.8	+
Writing	-0.6		1		-0.5	
Spelling	1.5		2	+	-1.6	
Number Sense	9.1	+	4.1	+	6.4	+
Measurement & Data Sense	6.8	+	3.7	+	7.7	+
Spatial Sense	7.6	+	3.5	+	6	+
Numeracy	8.9	+	4.1	+	7.3	+

ACTAP results present both actual data of individual performance and a comparison of how the boys perform against their peers in schools across the ACT. This data is used by the College to gain an insight into the general performance of students in a given year and as they progress through the College.

The table on the previous page lists the data from three consecutive years, 2005 – 2007 inclusive. This data lists the t-Test Value and then the significance of this. A t-test assesses whether the mean score of a sub-group of students (in this case the Marist College Canberra cohort) is significantly different from the mean score of the entire group from which it is drawn. Mean scores are 'significantly different' if the difference is so great that it is highly unlikely it can be attributed to chance alone.

The College t-test value shown in the table is calculated from the College Mean, the System Mean, the College Standard Deviation and the number of students in the College group. If a plus (+) sign is shown in the Significance column, then the College mean is significantly higher than the system mean for that strand. If a minus (-) sign is shown in the Significance column, then the College mean is significantly lower than the system mean for that strand.

In general students at Marist College Canberra are performing significantly better than students in other schools in the ACT. This is indicated by the majority of strands which have a (+) significance across the years shown. The exception to this appears for the writing and spelling strands where the students are performing in many cases below or near the ACT mean. It is apparent from the comments of teachers that there are concerns for a number of boys with their low ability in Reading & Writing and more work needs to be done to identify these boys. This should then lead to specific learning and teaching strategies to improve students' ability in these key areas.

## Research Evidence

### *Learning Communities*

Conventionally, many schools focus on the content of learning. In a learning community, learning focuses on the process as well as the content and product. Learning how individuals, teams and organisations learn, and critically reflecting on the processes of organisational improvement, become essential components of daily work practice. (NSW Department of Education and Training 2005). Building learning communities requires us to redefine our mental models of teacher, parent, principal, leader and student and the relationship between them.

As we explore the role of learning communities, we need to balance with this ideal the knowledge of who or what has the greatest impact on a student’s learning. Hattie (2003), in looking at student variance from a range of research and student results has concluded the following:

Home	5%
Peers	5%
Schools	5%
Principals	5%
Teachers	30%
Students	50%

If we were to take this information alone we would question why we need to be concerned with developing and sustaining a learning community. However there are many who detail the importance of supporting and enhancing teaching through collaborative approaches. The establishment of “... support programs at the schools would benefit not only new teachers, but all teachers in schools striving to improve ...” learning and teaching (Moore-Johnson et al 2001). Dinham (2007) also reveals the “... role played by learning communities and educational leadership in creating environments where teachers and students can learn and teachers can teach.” In addition:

Learning achievement increases when schools retain an educative rather than an administrative focus, with high expectations for learning outcomes supported by quality pedagogies and opportunities for self-assessment and continuing professional development. Strong leaders may also ... make the physical environment of the school exciting and welcoming (Teaching Australia, 2007).

So to define a learning community we could draw on Kilpatrick, Barrett and Jones (2003) definition:

Learning communities are made up of people who share a common purpose. They collaborate to draw on individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities. The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created.

One of the outcomes from a learning community is the development of a term that captures the essence of what we should aim for, that of pedagogic capital (Munro 2007). This is knowledge about how a school will do its core work of facilitating students' learning. It is about developing a code of teaching practice which specifies the key characteristics of pedagogic practice that is *shared and practiced* by staff. Change can only occur in the school if it develops its relevant corporate knowledge about pedagogy.

### **Leaders of a Learning Community**

Leaders need to draw on contemporary research on educational leadership to explore theories and practices to lead learning communities. First and foremost in this it is important to recognise that educational leaders cannot mandate nor develop learning communities. They can however create a school which promotes and supports the notion of staff working collegially.

As leaders they need to make a difference. Robinson (2006) has identified from a range of educational research seven key things that must be done in our schools to provide effective educational leadership.

1. Establishing goals and expectations
2. **Participating** in planning, coordinating and improving teaching and learning
3. **Participating** in teacher learning and development
4. Reviewing student progress
5. Ensuring an orderly and caring environment
6. Strategic resourcing
7. Fostering a learning organisation

In addition to this, Mulford (2005) has identified that distributive leadership provides the basis for collaboration and successful school reform. As a result of this we can then define the role of school leaders in the following two groups:

### **School Leadership**

- Leads school level professional learning & works with middle managers
- Values and vision with high expectations
- Build professional learning teams
- Build capacity for improvement, evaluation & data gathering
- Invest in staff development
- Foster collaborative professional learning

### **The Middle Leaders**

- Vision of outcome in student and teacher terms
- Provide instructional leadership for professional learning
- Scaffold, coach, demonstrate
- Trial new teaching procedures in action research
- Collate new learning outcomes
- Changed practice



- Development of pedagogic capital that is based on professional dialogue
- Encourage a positive focus on learning
- Whole faculty/team approaches allow pedagogic knowledge to be shared & mapped into practice
- High expectations are set by teams

For the leadership to support a knowledge network in a school environment one model is the provision of time for the team to meet formally as part of a school's usual routine. At Marist College in Canberra we have based some of our learning and teaching developments around the use of knowledge networks. Marist is a Catholic congregational boys school catering for students from Year 4 – 12. With a student population of 1600 students and teacher FTE of 110, knowledge networks are essential for us as we embark on an ambitious strategic plan. This plan is boldly titled *Taking it to the Next Level*. In this plan there are four priority areas, one of which is titled 'A Leader in Learning' (Marist College Canberra, 2007).

An example is a small project based on improving literacy for boys through the use of ICT and the *Success for Boys Professional Development Program* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2006). In this project we have research based evidence from a number of sources which indicate that we have some issues with literacy for boys within the College. We have been successful in obtaining a small grant from the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program.

Staff were invited to participate in this project and we selected five teachers who will research, undertake professional learning, plan, design, implement and evaluate some curriculum developments that will then lead to a larger implementation of this, eventually across the college from Years 4 – 12. The primary use of the grant in this case is to provide teacher release time to enable this 'knowledge network' to increase the collaborative capacity of the group. This structure also provides a more transparent approach to an educational project and for the use of expert support in a more focused manner than is always possible.

Loreto Normanhurst have adopted a creative approach to developing and supporting knowledge networks from a whole school approach. When we look at whole of school budgets we expect to see that somewhere around 70% - 75% of our total operating budgets are spent on salaries. Loreto have been offering what they refer to as the 'Loreto 5' since 1999 (Degenhardt, 2007). This an annual application-based professional development process within the school is provided to support a particular knowledge network. In this model:

The school's overall staffing is increased by one FTE to enable five teachers each year to work together, with expert support and 0.2 release time over a full year. The focus of the shared work is determined by the school. This process not only increases collaborative discourse and makes teaching a more public activity but it requires teachers to submit an application and undergo an interview process, all of which increases their levels of reflection on practice. (Degenhardt, 2007, p12)

In the first six years of the 'Loreto 5' the focus of the school was on incorporating ICT into learning and teaching. The various knowledge networks that existed during this time worked on a combination of pedagogy, information literacy and specific ICT skills (Degenhardt, 2007). Through

this time staff have worked on projects of their own choosing and then created a web-based unit of work for students. These units could then be used by others in their faculty. The outcome of these six years of work is a school which is highly advanced in this area with a great many excellent digital resources now available for all faculties and many areas of school life.

### ***Improving the Middle Years of Schooling***

There have been many studies conducted and research reports produced which talk of the need for improving the middle years of schooling for students. In many cases a school's response has been to adopt a structure where this group of students, typically Years 5 – 8 or thereabouts, have been grouped together in a 'Middle School'. In late 1999 the Middle Years Research and Development Project (MYRAD) was begun in Victoria.

MYRAD took the form of both a research and a development project. As a result it can provide both:

- research information about students in their middle years of schooling and how they experience this as well as about the teachers and school leaders who inhabit this world
- signposts for schools aiming to enhance a students' experience in the middle years of schooling

When looking at change in the middle years of schooling it must be recognised that it will take three to five years of focused planning and implementation to enact change in the middle years environment (Russell, J., 2003). The type of change cannot be narrowly focused as it must be about fundamental reform and whole school change.

The context in which we are operating in today's globalised knowledge society has significant implications for education. Beare (2001) suggests young people will be in a twenty first century workplace which will require:

- high connectivity, high demand for teamwork
- integration of expertise with blurred and changing divisions of labour
- knowledge at the forefront – constantly changing, not confined by subject boundaries, no longer guaranteed by formal qualifications

It must be recognised that students are acute observers of their own educational experience and are able to report on the characteristics that assist them in their learning (Ruddock, Day & Wallace, 1997). The characteristics that are required are (Russell, 2003):

- school goals that are clearly stated and honest
- a sense of belonging
- relationships between teachers and students that are fair, friendly, informal, caring, supportive, respectful and valuing of others
- student participation in school decision-making
- work worthy of effort rather than routine, trivial or superficial
- content that is meaningful, significant and part of the real life of young people

- learning and teaching practices that are challenging, active, deep, thought-provoking and cooperative
- decision making about the curriculum content, process of learning and assessment that is influenced and owned by students

Many students are telling us that they are not engaged in the current educational environment which has been created for them. The MYRAD project suggests that middle years reform can have effects far beyond the targeted middle years. This reform is considerable and must encompass at least the following areas (Russell, J., 2003):

- teaching and learning practices in the classroom/learning situation
- teacher learning
- curriculum and assessment
- school culture and valued learning outcomes
- school organisation for learning
- leadership learning and development

“If young people are to remain in education, if they are to experience enjoyment and engagement in their learning, if they are to develop the skills, strategies and dispositions needed for satisfying lives in a globalised, knowledge society, then we must take seriously the need for reform in approaches to schooling and to learning in the middle years.”

Russell, J., 2003, p 3

## Appendix

### Learning and Teaching Survey Statistics

	<b>Number of Respondents</b>				
	<b>248</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>282</b>
	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>All Junior School</b>	<b>Senior School Years 9 &amp; 10</b>	<b>Senior School Years 7, 8 &amp; 11</b>
<b>Note:</b> All questions listed are those used in the Teacher Survey. Other surveys had a similar question but with a wording consistent with the survey group.					
<b>I provide a variety of learning opportunities within a stimulating environment.</b>					
Agree	95%	96%	93%	83%	87%
Disagree	5%	4%	8%	18%	13%
<b>I am familiar with a range of learning styles.</b>					
Agree		100%			
Disagree		0%			
<b>I use a wide range of appropriate resources to assist students with their learning.</b>					
Agree	92%	96%	94%	78%	74%
Disagree	8%	4%	5%	23%	25%
<b>My students have access to guidance from teachers other than myself to assist their learning. eg other teachers in the year level or department.</b>					
Agree	82%	79%	89%	72%	81%
Disagree	18%	21%	11%	28%	19%
<b>I am able to cater for the different needs of my students.</b>					
Agree	81%	92%	94%	78%	87%
Disagree	19%	8%	6%	23%	13%
<b>I pay attention to what is happening in class most of the time.</b>					
Agree			93%	86%	91%
Disagree			7%	16%	9%
<b>I do my best in most classes.</b>					
Agree			99%	86%	93%
Disagree			2%	15%	7%
<b>I regularly upgrade my pedagogical skills through professional training and development.</b>					
Agree		74%			
Disagree		26%			
<b>My teaching practice is supported by critical reflection and an understanding of effective practice and current research.</b>					
Agree	89%	93%	92%	76%	80%
Disagree	11%	7%	8%	23%	19%
<b>I use assessment and tracking of student learning outcomes to evaluate, and refine teaching programs.</b>					
Agree		96%			
Disagree		4%			

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