



## Term 2 2017

### Embrace Equip Engage Empower

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Welcome to our second **Learning Quarterly** for the year. The purpose of the Learning Quarterly is to share current issues and thinking in education, especially in the context at St Kieran's. We hope you take the time to read the various articles in this term's issue.

### LEARNING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY!

In last Saturday's *Manly Daily* there was an education article on **flexible learning spaces** and how classroom design has changed dramatically since the 1970's and beyond. No longer does the teacher stand in front of the class presenting their knowledge to the children, "filling" them with information! The role of the teacher has also changed. Classrooms look different because teaching is different. These changes, especially in technology and teaching practices have led to what is often described as **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning**.

Teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been shaped by technology and expectations from the business community. Schools are required to teach the skills required for today's workplace. Michelle Bruniges, Secretary of the NSW Department of Education (2011-2016) names four skills that are required for today's workplace; she calls them the 4Cs - **collaboration, critical thinking, creativity and communication**. She also says:

*"Our education system must equip young people with the capacity to think, solve problems and respond to and thrive within a changing society. Our challenge as educators is to ensure quality pedagogy (teaching) works within the world of contemporary students and to keep upskilling our teachers to meet these needs. With the avalanche of information available online, the teacher is now more the facilitator of learning than the holder of all knowledge. The teacher poses the questions, provides the tools and research methods, as well as delivering subject content and guidance for problem-solving in a collaborative environment".*

Classrooms are being re-designed to allow for better collaboration. The old rows of desks are no longer relevant in teaching and learning. Over the last couple of years we have explored various ways of re-designing classrooms for collaboration. Kindergarten has focused on natural learning spaces while years 5 and 6 have worked with a more open-designed space.

Technology is arguably the most significant factor impacting on teaching and learning in recent times. The pace of change in technology means that schools are constantly learning and adapting new tools to use in the classroom. Michelle Bruniges comments:

*"Our challenge is not just to harness the potential technology can offer to support quality pedagogy (teaching), but to use technology to extend learning opportunities*

*and curriculum breadth for all students. Technology is a wonderful enabler for learning and innovation, but great teachers still need to have high expectations for every student, a deep understanding of their subject content and a capacity to inspire and motivate students, just as they have done in previous generations”.*

Technology is a tool that is used extensively in classrooms but it is only that, a tool! It does not take the place of the teacher nor does it design the learning for students. At St Kieran’s we use a wide range of technologies that assist the teachers and students in their learning. The Interactive Whiteboard is a wonderful tool that can be used for group learning and allows students to demonstrate their understanding in various contexts. Laptops, desktops, tablets and smartphones are other technologies that are used widely in the classrooms.

Another shift in teaching over the past few years is in the models of inquiry used in learning. **Challenge Based Learning (CBL)** is a form of learning that is designed to present students with an issue or problem that requires them to investigate the issue, explore deeply the complexities involved and propose solutions that can be actioned. The learning is about real issues and the solutions are real and practical. At St Kieran’s we are constantly aiming to improve the learning outcomes for our students. Our aim is to **Embrace, Equip, Engage** and **Empower** our students through 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning so that they can continue as life-long learners evolving to a changing society.

## THINKING TO UNDERSTAND

A major turnaround in education during the last decade has been a greater emphasis on the **understanding** of what students are learning, opposed to simply learning “off by heart” or through memorisation. This is especially evident in the area of Mathematics in primary schools. Hand-in-hand is the attention given to the **thinking processes** that support a deeper understanding. The **Extending Mathematical Understanding (EMU)** project that takes place in the early and middle years of primary school stresses the understanding in Mathematics with students. The **Mathematical Assessment Interview (MAI)**, which all students complete early in the year, allows teachers an insight into the student’s mathematical thinking which then allows teachers to design their teaching to the student’s needs.

Edward de Bono in the early 1980s devised Thinking Hats that allow for six different ways of exploring an issue or topic. This was adapted to the education context for students to use when looking at the various possibilities on a particular topic. During the 1990s other models such as Gardiner’s Multiple Intelligence were promoted to allow for different thinking and learning styles to be incorporated in the classroom. The focus now is on students’ thinking about their own thinking! When students are upskilled to ask a range of questions that give them a deeper insight to an issue, then their understanding and the relevance becomes greater. Ron Ritchhart, a Harvard educator whose project on **Making Thinking Visible** teaches teachers about different thinking tools, describes the project as providing teachers with, “A window into **what** students understand and **how** they are understanding it”.

Some examples of the **thinking routines** that students undertake to deepen their understanding include **See-Think-Wonder** and **I used to think...now I think**. These routines are taught to the students explicitly while being taught within the context of the topic being studied. The students are encouraged to ask “deep” questions and to collaborate with their peers.



In the next Learning Quarterly we will share the Diocesan Learning Principles which are due to be launched in the next few weeks.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING STILL.....

A rather interesting phenomenon that has increasingly developed over the past decade or so is that of school aged children having schedules that are so full that there is very little “down time”. Adults know and understand the benefits of slowing down and having time to rest and restore energy levels and this is something we need to factor into our children’s lives.

It’s not unusual to hear comments such as:

*“She’s not really good at soccer and she doesn’t really like it, but all her friends are doing it”*

*“He wants to take soccer, martial arts and also art classes twice a week. I’m not pushing him”.*

### Why is this happening?

For some families, kids may be driving the schedule because they don't want to feel left out. Some parents feel it's more productive to keep their kids constantly occupied rather than leave free time for playing, exploring, and learning on their own. They might also feel that their kids will miss out on key experiences if they aren't doing what other kids are.

But most parents usually just want what seems best for their children. Even when intentions are good though, children can easily become overscheduled. The pressure to participate in a variety of activities all the time and to “keep up” can be physically and emotionally exhausting for parents and kids alike.

Of course, organized activities and sports have their benefits. They foster social skills and are excellent opportunities for play and exercise. They teach sportsmanship, self-discipline, and conflict resolution. Most of all, they're fun! The key is to keep them that way and ensure that kids — and parents — aren't overwhelmed.

Depending on your child’s age and interests, it **is** possible to set **reasonable limits** on extracurricular activities and make them more enjoyable for all.

Here are some simple suggestions:

**Agree on ground rules ahead of time:** For instance, plan on children playing one sport per season or limit activities to two afternoons or evenings during the school week.

**Know how much time is required:** For example; Will there be time to practise between lessons? Does your child realise that soccer practice is twice a week, right after school until dinnertime? Then there's the weekly game, too. Will there be enough time left to complete some home tasks from school?

**Keep a calendar to stay organised:** Display it on the refrigerator or other prominent spot so that everybody can stay up-to-date. And if you find an empty space on the calendar, *leave it alone!*

**Try to carpool with other parents to make life easier:** Our traffic in Sydney is such that just the drive to the sportsfield can be stressful! This has positive benefits for our environment too!

**Try to balance activities for all of your kids — and yourself:** It hardly seems fair to spend time and energy carting one child to activities, leaving little time for another. Take time for yourself, to do the things you enjoy, and to spend time together as a family.

**Create family time:** If you're eating on the run every night, plan a few dinners when everyone can be home at the same time — even if it means eating a little later. Schedule family fun time, too, whether it's playing a board game or going on bike ride or hike.

**Set priorities:** School should come first. If your children have a hard time keeping up academically, they may need to drop an activity, even if for a period of time.

**Know when to say no:** If your child is already doing a lot but *really* wants to take on another activity, discuss and negotiate what other activity or activities need to be dropped to make room for the new one.

**Remember the importance of downtime:** Everyone needs a chance to relax, reflect on the day, or just do nothing.

### Slow It Down

Take a moment and think about your child's life. If it's hectic, sit down together and decide where you can cut back. If it's overly structured, set aside time to simply pause and have a break.

Riding a bike, taking a walk, playing a game, listening to music, or just doing nothing for a while can give children some much-needed downtime. And never forget how important it is for children to simply get together to play. Kids need time to just be kids.

## HSIE: GEOGRAPHY

The key learning area of HSIE, Human Society in its Environment, is broken into two strands of learning: Geography and History. Geography is “the ability to see geographically whatever we study’.

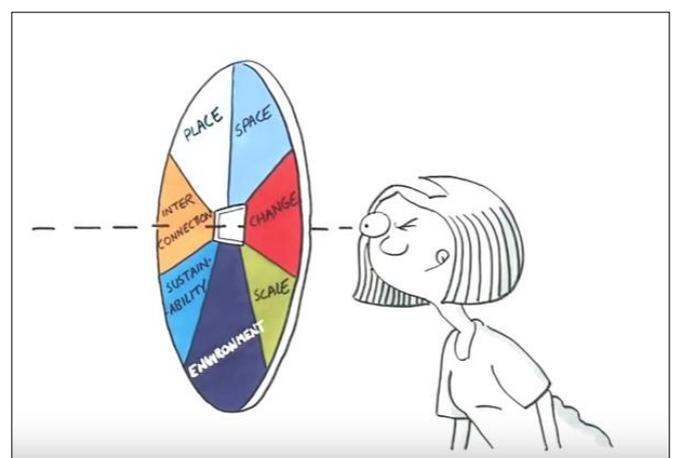
Primary school ‘Geography’ is a conceptual based curriculum that builds across the stages. Kindergarten begins with basic concepts about ‘Places’. In

Years 1 and 2 the concept is extended to ‘People and Places’. Years 3 and 4 take ‘Places’ and ‘People’ further and include ‘Environments’ and finally Years 5 and 6 study ‘People, Places, Environment and World’.

Although students study a variety of topics, all topics are viewed through the lens of: Place, Space, Environment, Interconnection, Scale, Sustainability and Change.

These concepts are explored and re visited as the children’s conceptual understandings develop. Geography is not a telling subject but an inquiry subject. Students and teachers work through an **Inquiry cycle** whereby the information is *acquired, processed and communicated* with others. The methods by which students acquire knowledge differ from grade to grade. For example: Kindy students may go to a place and draw pictures and make word lists, whereas Year 4 students would be expected to sketch a map on grid paper using scale and labels or view a place using Google maps and visual images. The emphasis is on doing and using differing methods to observe, collect, collate and make meaning from information gathered.

In Geography there is an emphasis on using **geographical tools** which also form a continuum across the stages: maps, fieldwork, graphs and statics, spatial technologies and visual





The capability for a variety of uses of Social Media has resulted in allowing anyone with internet access to interact with millions of people online. It is not necessary to be a journalist or a politician or in fact to hold any other position that was traditionally necessary to be able to distribute one's thoughts or ideas to a wide audience.

The impact of this shift in communication has, and continues to be, quite extraordinary. You will have read of a summit held in Canberra recently between politicians and leaders of our media industry. To quote our Prime Minister: *"The internet is the super platform; the hyper-platform that provided access to everybody and access to the world. What it has done, is completely change the operating environment of the Australian media."*

This is indicative of the far reaching implications of changes that are occurring and continue to unfold. All of this can be quite overwhelming for parents whose children don't *know* a world without this kind of interaction and communication. Keeping informed is key to supporting our children to be *critical* users of Social Media in particular. Social Media has many, many advantages and has made communicating very easy. It is not without its problems however. The quality of communication and the ease with which inappropriate comments can be made, relinquishing the need for any personal responsibility, are often highlighted as the main concerns of Social Media.

The Australian Parenting Website – Raising Children has published a comprehensive information sheet on Social Media. It gives an easy to follow guide on Social Media; how it works and how to be proactive when it comes to supporting your child. The sheet can be downloaded at: <http://pdf.raisingchildren.net.au/pdf.aspx>

## DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE AND SUCCESS IN YOUR CHILD

Regular school attendance is an important part of giving your child the best possible start in life. It is a parent's responsibility to ensure that regular and prompt attendance occurs. This develops positive routines and develops confidence and success for your child. You can help develop positive routines by:

- making sure they understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality
- taking an interest in their education - ask about school work and encourage them to get involved in school activities
- discussing any problems they may have at school and letting their teacher or principal know about anything serious
- not letting them take time off school for minor ailments
- where possible, arranging appointments and outings after school hours, at weekends or during school holidays will help to prevent disruption to your child's education.

This [link](#) provides further information about the legal implications of attendance for students in our NSW schools.

## "LAUDATO SI, MI SIGNORE"

### "Praise be to you, my Lord"

*On Care For Our Common Home - by Pope Francis*

Pope Francis, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, has been at it again. He has moved out of the Vatican Palace to humble hostel, he has told the Bishops to get rid of their bling, he rides the sub way, travels in a simple car and he has written three letters to each of us. In the scheme of Vatican documents his Apostolic Exhortations are simple letters to his flock and the world.

In the theme of his previous letters 'Evangelii Gaudium' - Joy of the Gospel and 'Amoris Laetitia' - Joy of Love, 'Laudato Si' – Praise be to you, My Lord, is a blunt, tell it as it is, document.

"Laudato Si" talks about living in harmony, listening to others, caring for nature and involving yourself in society and politics. Pope Francis speaks of the damage to 'Mother Earth' and the impact each of us can have in our small

