

Quality Catholic schooling: our core moral purpose

Catholic schools exist within the Church and society to provide quality Catholic schooling¹, a 'synthesis of faith and culture'² which sees each student grow to his or her full human and spiritual potential.

The work of the school is learning, and the Catholic School supports the work of the Church as an agent of learning. The work of the Church, the development of the individual and the good of society, are promoted within a Quality Catholic School through improving learning outcomes. These learning outcomes include learning the Faith, responding to the invitation to Faith within a relationship with Jesus Christ, learning to know themselves and the persons they are created to be, learning the formal curriculum, and learning the interpersonal, intrapersonal and other skills that are necessary to be a contributing member of society and a faithful disciple of Christ.

There are five essential marks of a Catholic School³:

1. *It is inspired by a supernatural vision.* A Catholic experience of learning and teaching is the lived expression, celebration and response to the love of the risen Jesus. Learning and teaching which is characterised by the search for truth and wisdom is enlivened by the presence of the Spirit within each person.
2. *It is founded on a Christian view of what it is to be human.* The dignity of the human person is a central pillar of Catholicity. Therefore, learning needs to be rich, real and relevant. The role of dialogue and being present to the other is central to the Catholic dimension of learning and teaching and the building of new and deeper understandings.
3. *It is animated by communion, and is itself a real community.* Teaching in our Catholic schools is inclusive, acknowledges

and builds on the strengths of the learner and honours diversity. In so doing we ensure 'young men and women of character and faith whose individual gifts are nurtured to their highest potential [so that they] can contribute effectively to Church, society and culture'⁴. *In this context it becomes especially urgent to offer young people a course of scholastic formation which is not reduced to a simple individualistic and instrumental fruition of service with a view to obtaining a qualification. As well as gaining knowledge students must also have a strong experience of sharing with their educators. For this experience to be happily accomplished, educators must be welcoming and well-prepared interlocutors, able to awaken and direct the best energies of students towards the search for truth and the meaning of existence, a positive construction of themselves and of life in view of an overall formation. In the end, real education is not possible without the light of truth.*⁵

4. *A Catholic worldview is imbued throughout its curriculum.* Our Catholic worldview is the context within which we live, learn and teach. We approach learning and teaching in our schools with a Catholic imagination⁶ and a particular hope-filled view of the human person.
5. *It is sustained by witness to the Gospel*⁷. When 'learning is the work' in our Catholic schools we witness to Christ's presence in our lives and experience the reciprocal invitation to participation in the life of Christ. In this way we build the narrative of Catholicity in practice, in our schools. This is the core of our Catholic Education Framework.

About learning

When 'learning is the work' in our Catholic schools '*it awakes(s) and directs the best energies of students towards the search for truth and the meaning of existence, a positive construction of themselves and of life in view of an overall formation*'⁸.

Learning:

1. occurs in the learner's **context**⁹. It builds on what learners know¹⁰ and what they believe about themselves¹¹. It is essentially relational¹², and occurs in particular social and cultural contexts¹³. Learners' pre-existing knowledge frames their assumptions and explanations in their search for meaning. 21st Century learners¹⁴ live within a technologically-enhanced, information-rich context¹⁵.
2. is an active, lifelong and interactive process of making **connections**¹⁶ with what is currently known, and organising new learning around important concepts producing deep knowledge and deep understanding¹⁷. The connections that are made are between theory and information, between self and other, between formal curricula and real life experiences.
3. requires **metacognition**¹⁸, which is the process of self-monitoring and reflection about what and how we learn.

This allows transfer and application to new contexts, and the recognition of the limits of one's current learning. Metacognition is engaged and enhanced when learners teach others what they are learning. Assessment-for-learning works by driving metacognitive processes¹⁹.





About teaching

The purpose of teaching is to enable great learning²⁰. Teaching as an art and a science involves who the teacher is²¹ and what the teacher does. In a Catholic school, *'teachers, as witnesses, account for the hope that nourishes their own lives by living the truth they propose to their pupils'*.²² Teaching is based in the quality of the relationship between teacher and student²³, and the teacher's passion²⁴ for what is taught. It involves intuition and builds on the teacher's sense of self. Teaching involves understanding learning²⁵, strong content knowledge²⁶ and strong pedagogical content knowledge²⁷.

Effective teaching:

1. begins from the learner's **context**²⁸ and personalises the learning process²⁹ to meet the learners' needs³⁰. It acknowledges the need for a safe and supportive environment³¹. It matches learning experiences with emerging needs³², puts challenging but achievable expectations³³ in front of students and recognises both the world in which young people live and the capabilities for learning that this brings³⁴. It utilises student voice³⁵ as a means of understanding the learners' context.

About teacher-learning

'Teacher-learning' is the essential means by which teachers develop their professional practice and improve learning for students⁴⁰. Teachers-who-learn never teach the same lesson twice, but reflect on practice and theory to develop what they do⁴¹. Teachers-who-learn move through identifiable stages of development from novice to expert⁴². In a Catholic school *'it is not, therefore, sufficient to achieve solely an initial good level of preparation; rather what is required is to maintain it and elevate it in a journey of permanent formation.'*⁴³

Effective teacher-learning:

1. addresses the **context** by addressing teachers' differing needs, meeting teachers at their particular stage⁴⁴ of the professional journey⁴⁵, and building on strengths⁴⁶. Effective teacher-learning engages a variety of processes and allows for choice by teachers. Processes for teacher-learning as individuals or in groups include critical collaboration, mentoring⁴⁷, coaching⁴⁸, de-privatising practice⁴⁹, use of 21st-century learning tools⁵⁰ and individual inquiry⁵¹. It generally is most effective within the teacher's own school context⁵², enabling a focus on the particular needs of this group of students, alignment with this school's goals and collaboration with these colleagues in a professional learning community⁵³.

2. identifies the different ways in which students make **connections** between elements of learning, make sense of new learnings³⁶, and encourages students to take risks and learn from them. It sees the learner as active in the construction of knowledge, providing both depth and breadth³⁷ in exploration of learning. It provides feedback to the learner on their learning³⁸ such that the learner is engaged with the next step on the learning journey.
3. is a **metacognitive** activity, and results in the teacher's reflection on his/her own learning through teaching. Great teachers have high expectations of themselves, and are always engaged in reflection on ways to improve learning. Teachers engage learners' metacognition with high-quality feedback on their learning³⁹ and by providing them with opportunities to teach others. Teaching is made more powerful by reflection on data and appropriate action on the data.

2. is based on **connections** between well-founded theory and the teacher's own practice. It uses research rather than opinion or fashion, addresses questions with appropriate tools such as action research and uses appropriate technology for deep, rich learning⁵⁴. It enables teachers to develop and communicate a well-founded interpretation of the students' needs and their learning. It deepens content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and/or pedagogical content knowledge and in doing this develops for the professional learning community a common language of learning⁵⁵.
3. enables the teacher to reflect⁵⁶ on his/her own teaching in a **metacognitive**⁵⁷ way. The teacher identifies his/her own learning needs from consideration of the students' learning needs and learns from evaluation of the impact of his/her own practice⁵⁸. Data are used to frame questions rather than to make judgments⁵⁹. 'Data' includes but is not limited to timely, constructive feedback, learning conversations, structured reflection⁶⁰, student voice and quantitative data.

Endnotes

- ¹ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977)
- ² Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977 #38-43)
- ³ Miller (2006)
- ⁴ Catholic Bishops of NSW and the ACT (2007)
- ⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education (2008)
- ⁶ Greeley (2000)
- ⁷ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1982)
- ⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education (2008, #2)
- ⁹ Bransford et al, (1999, p14-16)
- ¹⁰ Bransford et al, (1999, p79-82)
- ¹¹ Hattie (2003b); Marsh & Hau (2003); Marsh & Rowe (1996); Marsh (1990)
- ¹² Day (2004)
- ¹³ NSWIT (2005, 2.3.5)
- ¹⁴ Treadwell (2008)
- ¹⁵ Bransford et al. (1999, Chap 9); Heppell (1993a, 1993b); Tapscott (1998)
- ¹⁶ Bransford et al, (1999, p16-17)
- ¹⁷ Amosa et al. (2007)
- ¹⁸ Bransford et al, (1999, p18-19, 95-98); Gore (2005)
- ¹⁹ NSWIT (2005, 3.3.6, 3.3.7, 3.3.8, 3.3.10)
- ²⁰ Hattie (2003a, 2005); Gore (2005)
- ²¹ Palmer (1999) and Day (2004)
- ²² Congregation for Catholic Education (2008, #38)
- ²³ NSWIT (2005, 7.3.4)
- ²⁴ Day (2004)
- ²⁵ NSWIT (2005, 2.3.1-2.3.4)
- ²⁶ NSWIT (2005, 1.3.1, 1.3.3)
- ²⁷ NSWIT (2005, 2.3.5, 2.3.6, 3.3.4, 3.3.5, 3.3.6)
- ²⁸ Bransford et al, (1999, p19-20)
- ²⁹ NSWIT (2005, 4.3.4, 5.3.1, 5.3.2)
- ³⁰ NSWIT (2005, 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 4.3.4)
- ³¹ Gore (2005); Bransford et al (1999, p131-154); NSWIT (2005, 5.3.1, 5.3.3, 5.3.2, 5.3.4)
- ³² NSWIT (2005, 2.3.3, 2.3.4)
- ³³ NSWIT (2005, 3.3.1, 3.3.2)
- ³⁴ NSWIT (2005, 1.3.4, 4.3.5)
- ³⁵ Groundwater-Smith (2005); Marsh (1987); DeCourcy (1995); Flutter (2007)
- ³⁶ NSWIT (2005, 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3)
- ³⁷ Bransford et al, (1999, p20)
- ³⁸ Harpaz (2005b)
- ³⁹ Hattie, J. (2003a, 2005)
- ⁴⁰ Timperley et al (2007)
- ⁴¹ Schuille et al (2007)
- ⁴² NSWIT (2005); Kugel (1993); DeCourcy (1995); Bransford et al, (1999, p31-50)
- ⁴³ Congregation for Catholic Education (2008, #23)
- ⁴⁴ Senge, P. (1990, p174-204; Senge et al. (2000)
- ⁴⁵ Cohen & Heppell (2002); Kugel (1993)
- ⁴⁶ Joyce & Weil (1992)
- ⁴⁷ NSWIT (2005, 1.3.2)
- ⁴⁸ NSWIT (2005, 6.3.2, 6.3.3); Costa & Garmston (2002)
- ⁴⁹ Gore (2005); Timperley (2007)
- ⁵⁰ Moyle (2007); Heppell (1993a); Heppell & Ramondt (1998); Cohen & Heppell (2002)
- ⁵¹ Fraser & Petch (2007)
- ⁵² Robinson (2007); Timperley (2007)
- ⁵³ Dufour et al (2006); Chapman et al (2005); O'Donovan (2007); Higgs-Horwell (2007); Crow (2008); Timperley et al (2007, p201-202); Garmston & Wellman (1999)
- ⁵⁴ Moyle (2007); Owen (2007)
- ⁵⁵ Harpaz (2005a, b and c)
- ⁵⁶ NSWIT (2005, 6.3.1)
- ⁵⁷ Gore (2005); Education Queensland (2002)
- ⁵⁸ Timperley et al., p.
- ⁵⁹ Waddell & Lee (2008)
- ⁶⁰ Eddy (2007, 2008)

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