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MARIST COLLEGE AUCKLAND

SABBATICAL REPORT 2013

**Authentic Catholic Education in the Marist Tradition –
How this is reflected in practices, policies and
procedures.**

Sincere thanks to the Ministry of Education for their wisdom in recognising the need for Principals to have time out from their busy positions.

My gratitude to the Board and staff at Marist College for supporting my leave, and especially Mrs Cecilia Adams for so competently taking over as Acting Principal for the term. Thank you also to the Senior Management Team that supported her and to Mrs Susan Brebner who 'stepped up' into one of the Deputy Principal's roles.

Purpose:

These precious 10 weeks enabled me to visit the places of origin of the Marist Sisters in France, further exploring the Marist tradition and the ethos and philosophy of Catholic education. I was able to spend time reading and reflecting on current educational thinking, experience the realities of secondary schooling and life in America and Hong Kong looking particularly at how they built connections with their communities. I also attended a Catholic Principal's Conference and most significantly had some 'dessert time' before returning to busy school life.

I have been Principal at Marist College in Auckland for 7 years and the ethos and philosophy of the school is based on the Marist Charism. One of the school's five strategic goals is *to provide authentic Catholic education in the Marist tradition*. For a Catholic education to be authentic an in-depth understanding of the ethos and philosophy of Catholic education is required and the Principal is expected to make this explicit. To visit the place where the Marist Sister's order began in France has provided a valuable insight that provides links to our founding tradition that can be passed on to staff and students.

Methodology

During the sabbatical I spent time at the Jeanne-Marie Chavoin Centre in Belly, France to deepen my understanding of the foundress of the Marist Sisters and the spirit of the Marist Sisters as lived today. This time at the Jeanne- Marie Chavoin Centre – a centre from which you can *'look back and look forward to the future'*. was invaluable. I also visited the Marist Sisters General House in Rome where their administration team is based. The current Superior General of the Marist Sisters is an ex Marist College student and teacher, Sr Jane Frances O'Carroll. Learning about her experiences when she was a student at Marist in the 1960s was fascinating.

I visited three schools. Firstly, Ecole Notre Dame Des Victoires in San Francisco founded in 1924 by Marist Fathers located near the financial district. In Hong Kong I spent time at our sister school Our Lady Help of Christians Siu Ming Catholic Secondary School and at La Salle College where ex De La Salle College Brother Steve Hogan is Principal.

Background

While Catholic education traces its origins back to the Benedictine Monks in 530 AD, and is still a successful model today, the influence of the various founding congregations has provided an interesting dimension to the 238 Catholic schools in New Zealand.

The Society of Mary has four branches including the Marist Fathers, Marist Sisters, Marist Brothers and the Missionary Sisters. All of the branches were convinced for the need for the education of the young. The Marist Sisters originated in France and Jeanne Marie Chavoin was Superior of the first Marist Community. These founders all had simple origins and the realities of their life was poverty, simplicity and love of work. They had a dogged determination to promote the mission of the Church and that included education young people. In Father Jeantin's words, *'Jeanne Marie possessed the qualities needed for her role as foundress: outspoken yet natural simplicity, working zeal which animated the whole community, firm ardent faith and trust that never failed'*.

Following a period of rapid development of the Catholic Church in Auckland the Catholic Parish of Mount Albert was formed in 1923. At the request of Bishop Cleary Father Bernard Gondringer arrived in 1924 and shortly after his arrival he wrote to the Superior of the Marist Sisters in Sydney '*expressing his great desire to have Marist Sisters in his Parish School*'. Pg 16 In a Hidden Manner . Subsequently, Mother Bernard and Sister Austin travelled to New Zealand and established a primary school in Mt Albert Auckland and then in 1928 a secondary school, initially called Marist Sister's College.

After the Private School's Conditional Integration Act of 1975 the Marist Sisters were involved in negotiations that concluded in 1981 with integration into the state system. The gifting of the proprietorship of Marist College to the Bishop of Auckland in 2001 marked the end of the direct governance of the college for the Sisters. Their management role also ended with the appointment of the first lay Principal, Marie Neld in 1988. However, the founding principles, ethos and philosophy of Catholic education in the Marist tradition remains the framework within which Marist College operates today.

Marist Education

Marist Education incorporates several key features. These include:

- The Gospel values, lived in the spirit of Mary found in all areas of school life including the curriculum.
- Striving for excellence in all endeavours
- Family spirit pervading all relationships, where love is evident and people dealing with each other as a family would
- A concern for education of the whole person offering a broad range of learning experiences both in and outside the classroom
- Staff building relationships with students that are conducive to their growth
- A bias towards students who find school most difficult
- A sense of belonging to a community
- Each students being valued and known personally
- A spirit of service and social justice fostering compassion and concern for others
- Contributing to the Church's Mission and reaching out to the wider community

Making connections with how this Marist heritage has influenced the ethos and philosophy of education at Marist College and then examining how it is reflected in our practices, policies and procedures has provided valuable insights. Telling the story, knowing who we are and where we come from, making the Marist values explicit and part of all we do and building powerful connections with the wider Catholic and Marist Community are the key to keeping the spirit of our founders alive.

Engaging with Whanau/ Families

The second focus was linked to another Strategic goal and that was to visit schools with special Catholic character to observe how they *ensure educationally powerful connections between students, staff, families, whanau and community*. In observing ways of engaging with whanau/families to improve student outcomes and build community we will help inform best practice for Marist College.

Promotion of the Christian imperative to be welcoming, of service and engaged with the community to ensure student success is very much part of the way we do things at Marist College. However, there is still work to be done in this area.

Because our students come from all over Auckland we have no natural geographical community as schools with zones do. This means that we have to focus on opportunities to help the community gather. Successful strategies include having 6 whole-school Masses each year where the community is invited, and an annual Family Festival in March.

New ideas about how schools make connection between students, staff, whanau and community will hopefully lead to greater engagement by students at school. Following my visits to the schools in San Francisco and Hong Kong and further reading I came to the following conclusions:

- Parent involvement in mentoring programmes
Research shows that parent involvement is associated with more effective mentoring programmes. (See *Improving Education Outcomes for Pasific Learners*). One off programmes have generally been found to be ineffective while focus within existing structures and programmes

much more effective. This year we have introduced a new Pasifika mentoring programme for year 7 & 8 students. Previously our programmes have started at year 10 and have had little parental involvement. The evaluation of this new programme will provide valuable base-line data to assist with the development of the programme

- The alumnae played a significant role at the three schools I visited. The past students were involved in an on-going way to make new families feel welcome, helping with fundraising for special projects, celebrating special events, maintaining archives, arranging events such as sports
- The power of slogans highly visible around buildings telling the story of the school and reinforcing key values
- Displays of the life of the school past and present
- Formalised arrangements with local businesses to mentor or partner students
- Opportunities to bring parents into the school. The success of two recent initiatives confirm that this is a powerful way to build connections with families. *"I marvelled at the crowd that arrived at the school gymnasium, when, within only 24 hours notice we were able to stage a game with the Samoan representative netball teams. Parents, friends and past students flocked to watch. How did they know it was happening I wondered? On Wednesday night parents, siblings and students piled in to watch the dance show case, which presented work from Years 10 to 13 Dance and Year 12 media. The message I take away from this is that when an opportunity presents itself to come and share our students' work and talents, you'll be there."* Cecilia Adams, Marist College Newsletter August 9, 2013.

Professional Reading

The sabbatical was also a chance to catch up on professional reading and have time to reflect on current educational thinking to inform the up-coming round of strategic planning. It is an iterative process thinking about what we learnt from the *Best Evidence Synthesis* and the way we continue to embed the fundamentals of the New Zealand Curriculum. The focus of my reading was looking at ways to build

learning capacities and how best we prepare students for life in the 21st Century and an uncertain world.

Reseachers like Guy Claxton and his work on Building Learning Capacities, Rosemary Hipkins and her continuing work on key competencies, David Perkins, *Making Learning Whole – the Seven Principles of Teaching*, Art Costa Habits of Mind, Rachel Bolstad and Jane Gilbert's report *Supporting future orientated learning and teaching – a New Zealand perspective* have provided insights into ensuring the continuing success of students at Marist College and the attitudes required for a 21st century workforce. Many questions have been raised in my mind. For example the challenges raised by Andreas Schleicher, Special Advisor on Education Policy to the OECD Secretary General about 'Excellence and Equity'. As a Catholic school this poses the question of what we are doing to achieve equity for all. Furthermore his view on improved educational outcomes, based on countries that have greatly improved, supports that of John Hattie and other researchers such as Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves. The quality of teaching and teachers and leadership in schools makes the most significant difference to student outcomes.

Some key themes were evident in the literature.

- 21st century skills require developing the capacity to learn
- It is possible to develop intelligence and help young people get smarter
- The brain needs to be exercised and developed and students taught how to learn
- Students not only need the capacity to learn but the confidence to do so
- Students should be encouraged to make links with prior knowledge and other situations
- Partnerships with the community are important where learners work with real challenges in a range of real world contexts
- Learning should be continuous and life-long
- Quality teaching and teachers and effective leadership make the most significant difference to student outcomes

In Guy Claxton's view that persistence, resourcefulness, collaboration, resilience, the ability to be reflective, curiosity, the ability to balance imagination with thinking clearly in a disciplined way are some of the key skills. He suggests that the way to develop these skills is to build 'learning fitness'. This includes:

- The way we talk in the classroom. Focus on how the students are learning and what they are finding difficult. Have discussions about what helped students overcome difficulties
- What teachers have on the wall should include work in progress, drafts and evidence of progress as well as the final product
- Emphasis on building mental capacity and skills not just completing tasks and learning facts.

Conclusion

This sabbatical was a wonderful opportunity to step outside the usual routine of a Principal's role and take time to consider global and historical perspectives. The collegiality of the teaching profession and the sense of belonging to a wider Catholic Community that was evident in my travels are special.

It is an exciting time to be a Secondary School Principal in New Zealand. We are appointed to deliver the very best possible student outcomes and qualifications in a way that is student-centred. At the same time being future focused and developing key competencies that prepare students for life and work in the 21st century is important. As a Catholic school this must also be within the framework of our Marist heritage with a sound understanding of who we are and where we come from.

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