Education Wars!

Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne has made his presence felt in the Education world as he launched a review of the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Government’s Independent Public Schools Initiative and the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG)

On 19 February 2014, Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne commented in a televised interview about the Australian Curriculum. He said a review of the curriculum was needed ‘to make sure that it’s robust and meaningful and that it’s actually imparting knowledge as well as skills to our young Australians’.

My Pyne prefers a more orthodox approach to pedagogy and has allocated over $300,000 to the review but is yet to discuss it with Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) which has just spent 6 years writing it, and are proud of the rigorous and robust process they have applied to produce the curriculum.

On 3 February 2014, Christopher Pyne, launched a $70 million Independent Public Schools Federal Government Initiative at Ringwood Secondary College. Minister Pyne said that the Australian Government’s Students First education reforms included a goal of 25 per cent of – or approximately 1500 – existing government schools to become Independent Public Schools by 2017.

As you would expect, politicians in opposition question Mr Pyne’s initiative, questioning that the initiative is more about cutting costs (Kate Ellis—ALP), and has little or no evidence to support it (Senator Penny Wright—Greens).

Just over two week later, on Wednesday 19 February 2014, Mr. Pyne announced the establishment of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG). The group was created to provide advice to the Australian Government on how teacher education programs could be improved to better prepare new teachers with the practical skills needed for the classroom. The group, to be chaired by Australian Catholic University Vice-Chancellor Professor Greg Craven, also includes Michelle Green, Chief Executive, Independent Schools Victoria. The Minister stated his belief that TEMAG is best placed to examine teacher education in Australia.

There is of course the alternate view in politics, and some criticism of vested interests and finger pointing at the teaching profession, however there is general agreement that training can be improved and a review of this training is a positive step for education.

[Information sourced with the assistance of Independent Schools Victoria]

It is frustrating that education continues to be a political football, by all parties, and is often used by politicians to score political points rather than encouraging a bi-partisan approach that could develop a robust education system where all stakeholders would benefit. I do not doubt Mr Pyne’s motivation but I do seriously question whether these current initiatives are the best we can do.

Education has been subjected to and has managed enormous change, particularly in regard to funding, educational costs and curriculum—not to mention the constant societal changes that also impact each day on the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom.
Qualities of a Lutheran School student.

Over the last 12 months we have been reviewing the Geelong Lutheran College Prospectus so that the document reflects the new and changed nature of the College. As part of the process, we reflected on the values we hold as a school and what this might mean for a student who has been educated in our school. At the end of a student’s school life, what qualities would we like them to reflect, hold and promote?

Our Lutheran schools in Geelong share their vision with all Australian Lutheran Schools. It is a vision based on the inspired Word of God and endeavours to prepare our students to live an encouraging and fruitful life. Through sensitivity to and an understanding of faith, students at our Lutheran Schools and Kindergartens:

- value themselves so that they are excited by their life journey and inquisitive about their world and its future;
- are alive to the social and inner needs of others and to injustices in our society; and
- are valued as unique and exceptional individuals who make a unique contribution to the world around them.

At Geelong Lutheran College, each student’s education is dedicated to:

- Develop **wisdom** through knowledge and learning grounded in Christian values.
- Empower students to **honor** and respect themselves, each other and their community.
- Embrace each student’s unique talents and abilities to give them confidence and **purpose** for life.

At St John’s Lutheran School a student’s education is dedicated to:

- Develop wisdom through knowledge and **learn**ing grounded in Christian values.
- Empower students to **imagine** a world full of possibilities and act with respect and responsibility to enrich the community
- Embrace each student’s unique talents and abilities to **grow** their confidence and purpose in life.
February 2014 signified an important milestone for GLC as our twelve first Yr. 12 students began their final year of schooling!

When GLC began in 2009 with 57 students from prep to Year 7, our first year 12 group seemed like a distant plan, but the reality was difficult to imagine.

Monday 3rd February was a great day for our College when the long awaited Year 12 began. Eight of the students started at GLC in year 7, and five of these came to the College from Grade Six at St John’s. There is only one student from this cohort who has actually attended Lutheran schooling in Geelong from Kindergarten through to Year 12!

Our year 12 students have been an engaging group to work with during the past five years and they have managed to adapt admirably to the constantly changing environment and structures.

It can be quite a challenge for a new school to develop a strong academic and learning culture when the oldest students in the school do not have, other than the staff, role models to look up to and to learn from. This group has always had to be the first to experience each level—from beginning high school to transitioning in senior secondary, to careers training and work experience and now to Year 12 and whatever lies beyond.

Geelong Lutheran College has certainly come a long way since the first day of school in 2008 where we had 57 students, 6 staff members, 3 classes, 2 buildings, a small playing area and a paddock full of sheep! Now, there are 380 students, 17 classes, 9 buildings, 2 full size playing fields, a smaller paddock and 52 staff!

Once the first Yr. 12 students from prep to Year 7, our first year 12 group seemed like a distant plan, but the reality was difficult to imagine.

What’s so jolly about phonics?

Last year in Prep at St John’s we introduced a program called ‘Jolly Phonics’. What on earth is ‘Jolly Phonics’, you may ask? Simply, ‘Jolly Phonics’ is a multi-sensory way of quickly and efficiently learning the alphabet. The 26 letters, in addition to 16 digraphs (a pair of characters used to represent a single sound) making a total of 42 sounds in this program.

‘Jolly Phonics’ benefits all learning styles and in particular, children who are not visual or auditory learners. Each letter has an action children can perform as they say the sound, which aids in learning the letters and sounds.

As children learn the sound of a letter, they also learn how to write that letter. This gives the benefit of tying together reading and writing.

‘Jolly Phonics’ scheme can sound-out words they encounter by “blending” together the letter sounds. They will also be taught techniques to learn tricky words that can’t be sounded out.

After ‘Jolly Phonics’ they will progress onto more sounds and rules, for example the ‘ea’ sound. They will learn that not only does it say ‘ea’ in eat, it also says, ‘ea’ in head and ‘ea’ in break.

Initial testing results from last year’s prep class indicated positively that the ‘Jolly Phonics’ program had made an effective difference to reading skills with a significant improvement in numbers of children reading at or above level 15 at prep level in 2013. (The reading benchmark at prep is level 5!) Although it is early days yet and further data over time needs to be evaluated, initial indications are exciting.

Hand in hand with the ‘Jolly Phonics’ program, the teachers have introduced ‘Jolly Grammar’ systematically throughout the school. The teaching is also multi-sensory, active and progresses through the activities and levels at a challenging pace.

The most dramatic improvement for the students will be in writing as they learn to spell, punctuate more accurately, use a wider vocabulary and have a clearer understanding of how language works.

[Kirsteen Byrne, 2013]

Q: What is the significance of the church season of Lent?
A: Lent is the church tradition of celebrating a fasting period of 40 days before Easter.

Lent is the season 40 days before Easter (not counting Sundays) and is preceded by Pancake Tuesday, Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) or Carnival (Farewell to Meat) where people traditionally used up rich foods or meat before the fasting period of Lent.

The first day of Lent is Ash Wednesday. It derives its name from the practice of placing ashes on the forehead to remind us of our mortality and as an outward sign of repentance to God. Often, the palm fronds from Palm Sunday of the year before are burnt and the ashes used for this ritual.

The Bible does not command us to celebrate Lent but part of its purpose is to remind us of the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert before the beginning of his public ministry. The tradition of observing Lent began as far back as 330AD and served as a time of repentance and self-denial, and also as a time of instruction in preparation for becoming a member of the church.

Today we retain Lent to serve as a wonderful opportunity for Christian Renewal and to remind us of the Passion (suffering and death) of Jesus. These days, of course, it is a voluntary practice.
My youngest brother has blonde hair, blue eyes and looks nothing like me (much to his relief even still!). To this day, when I introduce him to my friends and acquaintances for the first time, they look at us disbelievingly as if expecting some sort of an explanation. There are quite a number of adoptions in my extended family and in my childhood, I thought it must have been the same for everyone and never questioned it. As far as I was concerned, that's what families were made of!

My older brother was already part of our family before I was born and I have no other concept of my family without him in it. I was already ten years old when my younger brother David was born and I remember him as a tiny little baby laying in a bassinet. David’s mother (my Mother’s youngest sister — also adopted!) and father didn’t get along too well and not long after David’s first birthday they separated and were later divorced.

David stayed with his mum for a while, then with our grandparents, then with our Aunt and Uncle, then back to our grandparents until finally, by the time he was two years old, our parents realised it couldn’t go on this way and they said they would take him and adopt him.

The day he arrived at our house was a beautiful spring day and when he and his mum arrived, David toddled off and explored this new and interesting place. His mum brought in his belongings: a couple of toys, his teddy (Golly) … and his cot.

When Davy-Joe, as he came to be known, first arrived he played happily until it was time for his mum to leave. It was then he realised he was about to be left behind yet again. His lips dropped, his face puckered and he began to cry. Brokenheartedly, and between his sobs, he asked for his bed. That was all he wanted. Not his mum or dad, not even a cuddle, just his bed. When he realised it was in our house and set up ready for him to sleep in, he relaxed and began to play again, perfectly happy.

Davy-Joe was such a happy little guy and in the coming years he fitted perfectly into our family, just as if he had always been there. He had a home, and we had another brother! What struck me the most about Davy-Joe though, was his complete faith that he would be cared for and loved.

He wasn’t worried about the future; he wasn’t even worried about his mum and dad. As far as he was concerned everything was taken care of — he had his bed and he had faith that he would be well fed, well clothed, well looked after and well loved.

A childlike faith is truly a special gift. A childlike faith to trust that God loves us and cares for us. In Chapter 10 of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus becomes quite indignant when he learns that the disciples are keeping the children from him. His message to us is quite clear, children are welcome in the presence of God — but more than that, they also serve to remind us that our salvation doesn’t require Doctorates, or years of study, great maturity, unerring logic, a brilliant scientific mind or a convincing argument — it simply requires faith.

God’s grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn’t come from anything you do. It is God’s gift. It is not based on anything you have done. [Ephesians 2:8-9]

Let The Children Come In!

There’s something quite nice about children. Every family should have one or two
They’re such a fine race
When they’re kept in their place:
Say, the playground, the park or the zoo.

In his place, a child’s quite delightful,
Full of fun, a most interesting buddy.
But his yearning for action
Can cause a distraction
When he has invaded the study.

The office is no place for children.
They foul up our work with their fun.
So we make it a rule
That they must go to school
So their elders can get something done.

Some children came searching for Jesus.
His friends were distressed and inclined
To think: "Oh, how terrible
To have a fresh parable
Suddenly slip from His mind!"

So they tried to get rid of the children
Surely no major disgrace,
Protecting their Master, From certain disaster.
By keeping the children in place.

"Let the children come in!" shouted Jesus,
Then he said something frightfully odd:
"They are bearers of grace,
And their ultimate place
Is right smack in the Kingdom of God."

Well, the place of a child is the Kingdom.
That’s what Jesus carefully taught.
So, the last time you did
Play some ball with your kid,
You were closer to God than you thought!

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