Being risk averse makes learning worse!

When my son Andre and I first travelled to Vanuatu in 2006 to assist with the construction of the Chapel at the Vila Central Hospital, we took a bus down town and visited the local market. Although we were fascinated by the colours, smells, sights and sounds in the market the enduring image in my mind is of a little 3 or 4 year old girl holding a 30cm carving knife in one hand as she deftly slashed the husk off a piece of fruit she held in the other!

In the *Melbourne Age on Saturday July 26* an article by Miki Perkins (p30) challenged us as parents and educators to reflect on the tension between our need to protect our children and their need to allow them to be free to grow and learn their way!

A journalist in the USA (Lenore Skenazy) debunked the myth that the world is a much more dangerous place than it was when our parents grew up and suggests that ‘if you left your child by the side of the road, you would need to wait for 750,000 years before they were kidnapped by a stranger.’ She then asks a very pertinent question, “Do you want to protect them from a crime that is so random or so rare, or do you want to protect them from getting overweight and diabetic, which is one in three children in the US.”

The article goes on to say that 25% of Australian children are considered obese and surprisingly, Australian children actually ‘get less physical activity than those in Britain, New Zealand and Canada.’ ‘Australian children are among the most ‘chauffeured’ in the world—a 2012 study found more than 60 per cent of children are driven to and from school, compared with 16 per cent in 1970.’

These are alarming statistics indeed!

Professor Tranter from the University of New South Wales blames in part the development in recent years of cities that are not ‘child friendly’ at all hence our need to control our children’s activities more closely. He feels that ‘we are at risk of losing something precious: the unobserved child.’

The risk is that although protection and constant observation of our children makes sense at the time, unless we allow them to take some risks, they are never going to learn. When they play, they learn an enormous amount!

(continued on the next page)
After submitting an application to the Block Grant Authority (BGA) for capital funding for the next stage of building works, our architects suggested that for a similar amount of money we could simply add them onto the southern end of the resource/library area instead of constructing the four modular classrooms!

The Resource building was always planned to be extended in the future to create a much bigger building for the resource/library use and this made a lot of commercial sense. Subsequently, we approached the BGA, made the appropriate changes to the proposed project and we are now waiting for final ministerial approval before the project can begin early in 2015.

Recently our College Council met to discuss future planning for the College, and in particular, looked at the scheduling of future stages for GLC. It is certainly a challenging task to predict enrolment growth accurately, be realistic about borrowings, confident about the provision of quality education with an appropriate scope and breadth, and all the while scheduling this into the daily demands of a busy and growing school environment.

Our College Council and our staff are committed to providing the best possible facilities and educational program that is humanly possible with the resources we have at our disposal. A similar planning day is scheduled for St John’s in October and will focus on future development and plans for the Newtown site.

The challenges abound!

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Studies showed that when children were allowed to play with old tyres, milk crates and 44-gallon drums with gleeful abandon researchers discovered that their squabbles reduced, their morale increased and they got a whole lot of exercise.

In her book, ‘The smartest kids in the world and how they got that way’ Amanda Ripley studied some of the highest educationally performing countries in the world and came to the conclusion that there are two ingredients to good learning and high performance in children. Children need to experience failure (take a risk) and they need to face high standards and expectations.

Parenting has never been easy and juggling the tensions between risk and safety is unenviable at best. Parents need the support of governments to provide quality open spaces and safe walkable spaces to encourage people of all ages to emerge from their homes.

The Heart Foundation is also concerned about the lack of physical activity for Australian children and their statistics show that only 1 in 5 Australian children from the ages of 5 to 17 (school age) meet the Federal Government’s guidelines for 1 hour of physical activity for each day of the week.

Today’s society is moving at a pace never before paralleled in our world’s history. All of us are trying to squeeze more into the same amount of time and we are wondering why we’re feeling so stressed. Professor Tranter feels that, ‘frenetic parents should also consider emulating their children at play. It underscores the importance of just slowing down. This is what we can learn from children, to rediscover joy in our lives.

After Elijah’s dramatic victory over the prophets of Baal in I Kings 19, God reminds Elijah that His voice is not necessarily found in violent and frenetic activity, but can also be found in a still, small voice. Just as God’s work can be accomplished through stillness and listening quietly, so we too can learn that stillness, quietness and taking time to ‘play’ are valid, valuable and actually necessary for us to be healthy human beings.

[Melbourne Age, Over-protected...why kids need more time to run and play. Jul 26. P 30.]
When Mr. Jonny Hedt joined our school staff in 2010 he was employed in a 0.6 role at St John’s with the remaining 0.4 spent at GLC. As the student population of GLC increased and they became more able to support this role financially, his role changed to 0.5 at each school. It has remained at this 50-50 split since.

It has become increasingly clear as this year has progressed that the current model of having Mr. Hedt working across both St John’s and Geelong Lutheran College in Pastoral Care is no longer sustainable. This is in part due to the growth at GLC, but also due to the increased needs and services required working with secondary students. The increase in student population, although cause to celebrate, has also meant an increase in the quantity of weekly chapels across both schools from two per week to four.

In the interests of ensuring that the needs at St John’s and GLC are being met, we need to have a member of staff dedicated solely to the wellbeing of the students and the mission and ministry needs at each school. In order for this to be most effective and to minimize the extra-curricular time demands e.g. camps, concerts, meetings, parent evenings etc., Mr. Hedt will be employed in a full-time capacity solely at GLC and a new person is to be employed at St John’s.

Throughout this process, it has also become clear for the need of a ‘name-change’ to delineate this role from that of a School Pastor. The Pastoral Care Coordinator will be now know as the ‘Wellbeing Coordinator’ whose primary role is the social, emotional and psychological wellbeing of students.

Our Lutheran Schools in Geelong are committed to the wellbeing of our students and their care.
Further Thoughts...

Faith... what is it?

In Hebrews 11 we are reminded of the wonderful faith of our ancestors – people like: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Moses, Joseph, Job, Rahab, Ruth, Gideon, Samson, David, Samuel, Mary & Joseph, Paul… there actually are so many it would really take too long to recount them all.

What I would like to do though, is to tell you of another ‘faith’ story. This story is not exactly true, but it is well-grounded in truth... unfortunately events like these happened time and again and there were many examples of faith just like this one.

The book is called Uncle Tom’s Cabin and is the story of Tom, a slave in the United States of America’s Kentucky in the 1850’s. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote this book a few years before the American Civil War (which erupted after the fall of Fort Sumter in April 1861). Her book is acknowledged in the Congressional Library in Washington as one of the books that made America, and at the time, caused quite a sensation giving the fledgling abolitionist movement credibility and support. Her book was the best selling novel of the 19th Century, selling 300,000 copies in its first year in the US and over 1 million in Great Britain.

Tom, the character of our story, is a gentle man with a loving wife, four young children and dearly loved by all, especially George, the young son of his Master Mr Shelby. His benevolent owner, however, decides to sell him at market because the farm’s finances aren’t going too well—you know, a couple of bad decisions, the crop didn’t come in quite like expected, and then of course, the expense of upkeep on the expected lifestyle of a plantation owner in the South.

Tom’s family are of course broken hearted when they learn that Tom is going to be sold. Although Tom is fearful that his new owner will be brutal, he is blessed to be bought by a gentle and caring man in Louisiana, Master St Clare, and is quite well off for the next few years. Unfortunately, things change dramatically when Master St Clare is accidently killed in a bar-room scuffle and as a consequence, Mr St Clare’s slaves get taken to the market to be sold.

Tom’s fortunes take a huge change for the worse. He is bought by Master Legree, a mean and poor-spirited property owner who buys his slaves and works them to death... or beats them... or mistreats them... or all three. As a result, the overworked fellow slaves that Tom finds himself with at this property are mistrustful and selfish.

Tom has a beautiful faith in his Lord Jesus, but his new master is a proud and selfish atheist! It doesn’t take long before Legree sees something in Tom that he cannot reach, control or remove. Tom is beaten brutally time and time again until even he reaches a point of bitter despair.

Tom’s despair is beautifully portrayed by Ms Stowe on Pg. 449-450 of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’:

When a heavy weight presses the soul to the lowest level at which endurance is possible, there is an instant and desperate effort of every physical and moral nerve to throw off the weight; and hence the heaviest anguish often precedes a return tide of joy and courage. So was it now with Tom. The atheistic taunts of his cruel master sunk his heart; his soul was wound up in sharp pain; and, though the hand of faith still held to the eternal rock, it was a numb, despairing grasp. Tom sat, like one stunned, at the fire. Suddenly everything around him seemed to fade, and a vision rose before him of one crowned with thorns, buffeted and bleeding. Tom gazed, in awe and wonder, at the majestic patience of the face; the deep, pathetic eyes thrilled him to his inmost heart; his soul woke, as, with floods of emotion, he stretched out his hands and fell upon his knees, -- when, gradually, the vision changed: the sharp thorns became rays of glory; and, in splendour inconceivable, he saw that same face bending compassionately towards him, and a voice said, “He that overcometh shall sit down with me on my throne, even as I also overcome, and am set down with my Father on his throne.”

Tom never loses faith in his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ despite the constantly present evil dangers he faced and endured from morning ‘till night! This hope, this conviction, this holding to the promises given in the Bible are quite impossible for us to comprehend in our increasingly secular world with its emphasis on facts, proof and iron clad legally binding guarantees.

What then, is faith? In Hebrews 11:1 Paul said, ‘Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.’ Faith, by its very definition, does not require or rely on proof. Once something is proven beyond all doubt, faith is no longer required. At this point faith disappears and reality and proof become the god that is admired and valued.

This is why we remember and revere the people I mentioned at the beginning. They trusted the promises of God. In Hebrews 11:39 it says: ‘Not one of these people, even though their lives of faith were exemplary, got their hands on what was promised’.

What a testimony!