Reflections from the 2014 QCEC colloquium

1. The human face of a Curriculum with a Catholic perspective

1.1. What should be the “student experience”? 

- Students need to be able to identify where Catholic perspectives fit in their world view and the reason why they are valid for a wide range of student world views.

- Students need explicit exposure to conversation about faith, life and culture.

- The curriculum of a Catholic school contributes to its purpose (mission) through the integration of life, culture and faith of its students.

- Students need opportunities to sit with mystery and wonder. There needs to be dialogue between action and reflection for understanding and commitment to progress.

- For the development of personal meaning, the explicit curriculum should allow integration, synthesis and coherence of Catholic perspectives or Catholic worldviews across disciplines.

- Students should experience inter-faith dialogue and be allowed to ask questions, experience and witness others making connections between life, faith and culture. Staff should walk along-side and invite students through story, critique and wisdom/discrimination to grow towards wholeness and engage in the questions of “who am I?” and “what is my purpose in being here?”

- Walter Brueggemann identifies the importance (i) of conserving the essentials of the community’s identity (Torah Tradition), (ii) of critiquing how the community was understanding and living those essentials (Prophetic Tradition), and (iii) of discerning how to live that identity in the here and now and as circumstances change (Wisdom Tradition). These can be aligned with “See (Torah) - judge (Prophets) – act (Wisdom/discrimination)”. Curriculum has much that is “Torah” (narrative and deductive) but also needs to be “prophetic” (inductive and critical) and involve the intentional making of meaning (discerning and praxis-orientated). Compare this also to the Transfiguration – Moses → Torah, Elijah → prophetic and Jesus → wisdom.

Effecting Catholic curriculum is not only about students and what they learn; prior to that it is also about teachers and what they know, what they aspire to, what they value and are committed to. It is also concerned with the forms of support available to teachers as they go about their vital task. All teachers are on an individual faith journey, so formation activities need to identify and cater for the different needs of teachers and be appropriate and practical. Once teachers build and develop a religious literacy capability, they will have the confidence to infuse Catholic perspectives into their class’s curriculum.

1.2 What are important elements in the “teacher experience”? 

- Once teachers build and develop a religious literacy capability, they will have the confidence to infuse Catholic perspectives into their class’s curriculum.

- In a paradigm of sharing conversation rather than controlling conversation, teachers need a repertoire of knowledge to add to the conversation. A challenge is to build this authentic knowledge base and integrate it into discipline areas’ pedagogy and content.
There is a need for the development of effective and good PD to assist teachers to teach broadly and tap into the centrality of the message of Jesus using the student’s language and modes of thinking. The task is re-conceptualisation and practical engagement with (befriending) both faith and culture.

Documents that are presented to teachers upon application for a teaching position need to be clear in terms of expectations of conduct that demonstrates Catholic shared beliefs and practices involving students, parents and the community as a whole.

2. What constitutes good practice in teaching from a Catholic perspective?

Good practice supports students to build within themselves the intrinsic motivation to be a ‘seeker of truth and a doer of justice’. There is a need to be intentional about teaching from a Catholic perspective otherwise we risk losing clarity of ‘being Catholic’.

Educating for intercultural dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in harmony for a civilisation of love (2013): The cultural and pedagogical fundamentals that make up a Catholic school’s identity is made manifest through its curriculum. Schools should bear witness by means of their own presence, as well as by the coherence between what they say and what they do.

Good practice in teaching promotes a wisdom-based society and takes students beyond knowledge to think and evaluate facts in the light of values. The process allows time for reflection, God moments and the mystical.

Avoid assumptions that all educators know exactly what is meant by the terms: Catholic; Religious dimensions of learning; Catholic Identity; Curriculum; Catholicity; Gospel Values and Catholic Worldview.

Merely inserting the words “catholic” or “gospel values” or “Jesus” at appropriate entry points can often lead to the production of resources that appear Catholic in name only.

Problems arise when religious concepts and ideas are forced into subject areas in the name of integration with little regard for the integrity of the academic discipline itself. Rather, it is important to identify various program areas that can act as natural pathways to examine a Catholic perspective.
The Catholic character of the curriculum can be seen as:

- **separation** - The study of religion or religious experience is offered as a separate course of study with the primary goal of religious literacy, formation, explicit religious materials
- **permeation** – The Catholic character of the school’s culture and community permeates the learning experiences of the students and focuses on the social environment as a school wide task rather than a subject specific task.
- **integration** – Broad areas of study are brought together from the traditional subjects to address themes, skills, and role performances in a meaningful way. Learning occurs in a holistic fashion that brings about a critical perspective. However, this is difficult because it shifts away from subject matter to focus on the connections, relationships and life problems experienced in a complex world.

A transdisciplinary approach might work better in primary/middle school settings, however, senior students require discipline-based ‘specialists/experts in order to ensure authenticity in making links between the disciplines and the Catholic identity.

**Curriculum maps** are used to plan how content and skills in curriculum are aligned to the RE and family life programs.  
**Catholic critical literacy** examines the belief and value messages within texts and their use of language in order to position readers/viewers in certain ways

**Criticality** requires one to be moved to DO something, whether that something be seeking reason or seeking social justice

**Critical pedagogy** involves changing thought and practice together - they fuel one another

**Processes** to assist students to look beyond the surface are:

- a questioning pedagogy
- an inquiry process – fertile questions
- action learning – something that leads to MORE
- group tasks – collaborative work
- real connections to community – outside source
- relational and dialogical pedagogies
- allowing and knowing different perspective and interpretations of viewpoints and opinions
- KNOW the ‘surface‘ to move beyond
- start with the students’ questions and their personal experiences, reflections and actions.
3. How can our Catholic identity positively influence the implementation of the Australian Curriculum?

Clear communication is required about Catholic identity and the intentionality of maintaining, or strengthening Catholic identity within the context of the school community.

Tasmania CEO has expanded the general capabilities beyond the secular by including a *Wisdom* Capability and using *Catholicity* as a Cross-curriculum priority in their implementation of the Australian Curriculum. Their Key Learning Areas are informed by Catholicity in a way that strengthens the mandate of Catholic schools to be both intrinsically good schools and at the same time distinctly Catholic. The learning experienced through the subjects taught provide opportunities to develop the gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Discernment, Understanding, Knowledge, Piety, Reverence, Awe and Wonder.
Two Catholic educational institutions that have made significant attempts to link the Gospel and the school curriculum through the subjects taught are Fordham University in New York, and La Salle College Green Hills in Manila.

Introducing Catholic perspectives is not just about content but about pedagogy and methodology. Schools need to provide students with opportunities to become thinking, discerning practical people who can make sense of their world and who are growing towards wisdom and grace.

A Sense of the Sacred identifies a set of key concepts: The Sacramentality of all Creation (awe, wonder, ecology ...), Human Dignity (identity, respect, social justice ...), Communion (community, belonging, love ...), Reconciliation (forgiveness, understanding, restorative practices ...), and Tradition (culture, scripture, narrative ...).

Catholic schools do not simply “adopt” secular curricula prescribed by government, but enrich them through the wealth of learning and human and divine wisdom that flows from our Catholic faith, and from the variety of other faiths and spiritualities that are part of the heritage of our students who are drawn from such a variety of cultural and faith backgrounds. On the relational-affective level, schools develop attitudes and ways of talking about others, teaching the students to respect diversity and take different viewpoints into account, cultivating empathy and collaboration. Ontario’s ‘Catholic graduate expectations’ provides a useful model.

We are called to read the Signs of the Times. Catholicity opens us up to the Mission of God in the world, enacted through the school’s mission and reflected in the school’s programs.

Catholicity provides answers to the ultimate source questions related to development of the whole person by including the spiritual aspect.

Catholic Identity can enrich our understanding of the application of CCPs and GCs - these can become anchor points for cross discipline discussion and curriculum planning.

General capabilities are the place to start as they already encompass aspects of a catholic identity and Catholic understanding of life eg personal and social competency and empathetic understanding. Content then becomes the means to this end.

Being explicit with Catholic perspectives brings the families and community into the school and takes school life out into the community. This is a vision of a lifelong learner that goes beyond their time in our schools.
4. How does teaching a Catholic perspective within the explicit curriculum remain authentic to Catholic faith while acknowledging the life-world in which staff live?

The life world of our staff is very secular. Teachers are comfortable talking about social justice issues but prefer to leave Jesus out of the conversation. With this in mind, engagement with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is an excellent starting point for reflection and personal witness.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching are highlighted in formal documents of the magisterium and have foundations in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures. These additional notes are from the research of Prof. Peta Goldburg:

- **Foundation document** *Rerum Novarum* (On Condition of Labour) Pope Leo XIII 1891; Key ideas:
  - Destitution of the masses and the wealth of a few ➞ just distribution of wealth;
  - Decline of public morality
  - Workers exploited by greedy employers ➞ concept of a just wage;
  - Public authorities not protecting the rights of the poor ➞ right for workers to form unions

- **Pacem in Terris** Peace on Earth (1963); Developed in context of post-WWII; Cold War; Berlin Wall; Cuban Missile Crisis; Pope John XXIII to ‘men and women of goodwill’:
  - acknowledge and respect rights of others (#30)
  - collaborate mutually (#31)
  - act for others responsibly (#39)
  - preserve life and live it becomingly (#42)

- **A Call to Action** *Octogesima adveniens* 1971, 80th anniversary of *On the Condition of Labour* Pope Paul VI emphasised role of individual Christians, calls for political action as well as economic action to address concerns of 1960s and 1970s:
  - elderly, people with disabilities, and those marginalised by society
  - discrimination because of race, religion, culture, gender and colour

- **On Human Work** *Laborem exercns* (1981), 90th anniversary of *Rerum novarum*; John Paul II highlighted:
  - the obligations that employers should have towards their workers
  - meaningful work for people with disabilities
  - strong statement about underemployment, unemployment and the rights of migrant workers

- **Quadragesimo Anno, Reconstruction of the Social Order**, 1931, in midst of Great Depression, warned against the excesses of both capitalism and communism; “It is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice …
to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them. (#79)

- The Hundredth Year (since *Rerum Novarum* Centesimus annus, *John Paul II*, 1991; Addressed concerns of technology; importance of people over machines and focused on democracy and social conflict: *Love for others, and especially for the poor, is made concrete by promoting justice.* (#58)

  *A change of mentality is needed, no longer seeing the poor as a burden, or as intruders trying to profit from others, but as people seeking to share the goods of the world so that we can create a just and prosperous world for all.* (#28)

- Caritas in Veritate (Love in Truth); *Pope Benedict XVI*, 2009, relationship between human and environmental ecologies; links charity and truth in the pursuit of justice, the common good, and authentic human development.

CST Major Themes

1. Human Dignity
2. Community and the Common Good
3. Rights and Responsibility
4. Option for Poor and Vulnerable
5. Participation
6. Dignity of work / Rights of workers
7. Stewardship of Creation
8. Global solidarity and development
9. Role of government and subsidiarity
10. Promotion of peace and disarmament

CSTs need to have a physical presence in all areas of teaching and learning. These principles regulate the *relationality* of social groups, ‘from the close and immediate relationships to those mediated by politics, economics and law; from relationships among communities and groups to relations between peoples and nations’ (*CSDC* n. 161). The themes of the *common good and participation* have implications in the provision of staff formation aimed at increasing appropriate participation of all staff in the common good of the school community.

“Catholic schools are at one and the same time places of evangelization, well-rounded education, inculturation and initiation to the dialogue of life among young people of different religions and social backgrounds.” *John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 102, cited in Educating to Intercultural Dialogue, n.17.

“... the prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community.” *The Religious Dimension of the Catholic School*, n.26
Professional development is required for CSTs to have meaning for teachers. Professional learning starts where teachers are at and supports teachers to embed these explicit Catholic Social Teachings in the pedagogy and planning of teaching and learning.

Staff formation assists to increase participation of staff in the mission of the school. Refer also to the QCEC Policy, *Formation of Staff Members in Catholic Schools in Queensland* (2010).

Be aware of the ‘Catholic club’ effect (Catholics know and the others don’t). Provide support and resources to assist with inclusiveness. Invite teachers into the journey and provide realistic opportunities for teachers to ‘make sense of it’. We need to share knowledge (eg through newsletters) about liturgical seasons, gospel readings etc. Use mentoring to form a feedback culture where teachers know, think and talk about the CSTs. These professional conversations will provide teachers with the meaning making and language around how this connects to our Catholic identity and provide opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own beliefs and approach.

5. Catholic perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Spiritualities

The message of Vatican II was clear - the Church should not force an alien culture on anyone, but rather should recognise what is already there. *The work of inculturation will usually be done by those to whom the new forms for expressing the substance of the faith are co-natural, “part of their own cultural patrimony”* (Francis George commenting on the General Synod 1977).

“The Church invites you to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to your Aboriginal minds and hearts.” (Pope John Paul II, Alice Springs, 29th Nov 1986)

Catholic education supports and assists students to identify and express their Aboriginal heritage and Torres Strait Islander heritage through the ACARA Cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. However, how can the taught curriculum emphasise the junctures with Catholic beliefs and traditions.

There exists such an obvious connection between Aboriginal spirituality and Torres Strait Islander spirituality and Catholic spirituality and this requires celebration.
The foundational dimension of spirituality is the sacredness of the human person and the profound dignity and respect that is owed from one to another in relationship. Such is the Catholic perspective on Aboriginal spirituality and Torres Strait Islander spirituality. Ideally, it is a humble dialogue that assumes value in the other, complementarity and a willingness to be changed. Ideally, it extends the circle and empowers others (subsidiarity).

Catholic perspectives need to move from what we think we know to what is known by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. This can be achieved through authentic dialogue. The taught curriculum requires links to the rituals, traditions, stories, ceremonies and rich resources already available. These can be used to better promote and support the interrelatedness of culture and faith. The formation of staff could include the understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spiritualities and culture appropriate for their region.

6. What needs to be done to support implementation of the Catholic perspective?

Now is a good time to infuse the curriculum with a Catholic perspective given the work being done with the Australian Curriculum and the move of Year 7 to secondary:

- Relationship with the Australian Curriculum is important
- General Competencies and Cross-Curriculum Priorities provide opportunities for an interdisciplinary approach, particularly in the primary school
- Infuse Religious Education and its well-developed resources to enrich other curriculum areas in relevant and appropriate topics
- Avoid forced links that turn people off and become formulated and transparently problematic
- Develop a common language (CSTs) as a basis for curriculum conversation.

Integration of Catholic social teaching is evidently ‘doable’ but introduce Gospel layers to supplement the human rights action/experiences?

Provide clear understanding of theological bases, including:

- formation of a pedagogy that can be adapted to each school (critical rather traditional)
- evaluation of how this pedagogy is implemented in the day to day life of a classroom
- the effectiveness of delivery and learning.

Ensure that a catholic perspective in the curriculum is integrated into policies, role descriptions, performance reviews, school review processes etc...
Raise awareness of ‘catholicity’ in all we do. Supplement this with the formation of staff and the development of an understanding of contemporary theology with an explicit shared language.

The induction of new staff needs to cover a whole of school approach and identify the professional learning required. Formation expectations need to be embedded in role description.

More professional dialogue and development is needed to support indigenous pedagogies and indigenous spirituality for ALL teachers.

Accessibility of formation resources could be provided through a variety of options (online, face-to-face, whole staff, invitational). Identify the essentials and the appropriate processes (journey, dialogue …).

Draw on what is being done and identify and make a start with the talent we have. Catholic schooling Authorities could sponsor research, writing, resourcing and action-reflection projects.

It is always good to start small and build on success by linking any project to the Formation and ECSIP initiates already underway and provide quality support (theology) and resources so that they can shine the light on the way forward. Good practice must go beyond social justice and address contemporary Catholic social teaching in the curriculum; good role modelling and examples of how this can work; and map what is already happening across the explicit curriculum.

Teachers are the human face of Jesus every day for our students. Support them in this role through sharing good practice where educators come together.

Use action research on the disciplines to engage practitioners in practical ways to infuse Catholic social teaching into the explicit curriculum, but find an organic rather than forced way to implement.