

Association of Catholic School Principals (ACSP) Conference 21-24 May 2019

Theme: **What Matters Most – Faith, Learning & Wellbeing**

Keynotes

Ben Walden (International Speaker in the realm of education): Henry V Inspirational Leadership – Ben, an experienced professional actor, used Shakespeare's Henry V to look at major educational leadership themes at every level of school life. School leaders & teachers need to be visible. They need to communicate vision & purpose in a way that inspires their teams & truly reflects their passion & commitment with authenticity. Brilliant presentation. I also attended Ben's workshop, which looked in more detail at a variety of aspects of leadership.

Dr Simon Breakspear, yes, we had some Shakespeare, followed by Simon Breakspear – cute eh? (Research Fellow at both NSW & Hong Kong Universities & Founder & Executive Director of Agile Schools): Agile Leadership – A presentation addressing the leadership of educational change in our very complex, compliance-heavy, high-paced world. Nothing really new but a timely reminder for us to keep our Strategic & School Improvement plans focused on a very few things. We fall into the trap of thinking that if we don't include all of the things we are trying to achieve across the whole gamut of school life, including things we are already working on from previous plans, that somehow parents won't think we are doing all we should be doing. We must remember that our Strategic & School Improvement plans are specifically for **school improvement**. So, ONE goal in each Domain each year! Yes, the rest will still happen in each Domain (Catholic Formation & Mission, Learning, Leadership and Service & Governance) – but the focus on improvement for the year will be in ONE area.

Lana Turvey-Collins: Faith & Church – One or the Other – or Both? – Lana is the Facilitator of the three-year process of listening, dialogue & discernment about the future of the Catholic Church in Australia. This presentation was a look at the progress so far of the Plenary Council – the current process by which we all have an opportunity to work toward national, significant changes in the culture of our Church. Huge numbers of submissions have been received. Pentecost marks the launch of the next stage of the process – listening & discernment – with themes for national discernment announced. This will be followed by applications & selection of Working Group Chairs and members, with one group per theme developing papers for discussion at the first session of the Council. Principals had an opportunity for further input of suggestions, concerns and advice.

Rob Edwards (Company Director in Health & Wellbeing industry): It's All About You – In the pressure cooker of our lives, many of us, at all levels in schools, forget the easy, day-to-day things to look after ourselves. This talk was excellent – very humorous & engaging – very practical! Rob would be great to bring to St Pius for a Staff Wellbeing day or for a session on such a day. He spoke about getting the small stuff right, from fitness to managing emails to spending quality time with a partner and continuing to develop professional skill sets.

Dr Donna Cross (Professor with Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences at University of Western Australia – internationally renowned researcher): *Passing 60 and not breaking the speed limit: What makes the most difference to support Principals' wellbeing?* – Research clearly suggests that educators at all levels experience higher levels of work-related stress compared to those in many other occupations. These challenges are particularly marked for school principals, with 76% of principals reporting they work more than 56 hours per week & overall reporting poorer mental health outcomes than the general population. This presentation described the general findings and recommendations for action from research conducted with principals in Western Australia from 2015 to 2018. It provided practical system & school-based actions to promote the resilience and other protective factors that can help buffer principals' stress and enhance overall wellbeing. Excellent presentation. I also attended Donna's Masterclass Workshop, which focused on how to build the wellbeing of the school community systematically, providing clear actions & practical ideas to engage the whole school community. This workshop reinforced for me the excellence of the wellbeing program for both staff & students that we have built up at Pius over recent years.

Dr Pasi Sahlberg (Finish educator, author & scholar): *Leadership for Equitable Learning & Wellbeing* – Research shows that the most successful education systems in the world are those that combine excellence & equity in their education policies. This keynote took a closer look at what we have learned about what more equitable education systems do to ensure good schooling for all their children. These lessons were then translated into practical ideas that school leaders aiming at strengthening learning and wellbeing for all students, could do. Curiosity must become the core currency in teaching and learning. Students learn by exploring, discovering, practicing and experimenting with real life. Play is critical for healthy growth & learning. Food for thought for all teachers and school & system leaders. Excellent presentation.

Overall, as always, the ACSP Conference was an extremely well-run & worthwhile event that provided current, relevant and inspiring keynote addresses and masterclasses and a wonderful opportunity for Principals to network and discuss educational issues of importance.

Bob Emery
27 May 2019