



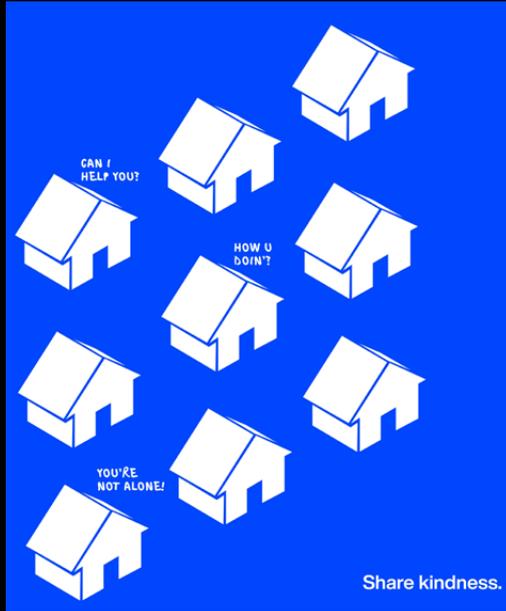
EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

the RICEAN

COVID-19 SPECIAL EDITION – SEPTEMBER 2020 – VOL 30



language and actions of hope



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A special project of the Liberating Education Team

Acknowledgement of Country

EREA acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the Traditional Owners of the land on which our schools and offices are placed. We are inspired and nurtured by the wisdoms, spiritualities and experiences of our First Nations Peoples. Together we work actively for reconciliation, justice, equity and healing

*The theme of this special edition
of the Ricean is taken from the EREA Strategic Directions
2020-2024:*

**... the language and actions
of hope will overcome
the language and actions of fear.**

*We believe that nothing is insurmountable and that we will
continue to raise our voices, shift our thinking, share our
resources and build the relationships required to teach and to
learn in the name of Edmund Rice.*

“... that you may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10)

This is a truly remarkable chapter in the story of EREA, taking place amidst the global disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. This disruption to our global community has brought with it loss of life and livelihood, separation of families, restrictions on travel and added strain on people’s wellbeing. These effects have been amplified in countries and communities adversely affected by poverty, disadvantage and inadequate government responses. Whilst it is easy to focus on the ways in which the disruption has impacted negatively on communities around the globe, it is also important to look for positive aspects of this disruption. Communities have come together to support one another, people and organisations have found new ways to connect despite restrictions, and our Common Home has been spared much of the damage caused by transport and travel as people have remained closer to home. Some have named this time as an opportunity to change direction and to work together towards a brighter future.

The language and actions of hope can overcome the language and actions of fear. In presenting these voices from across the EREA community, we are particularly conscious of the diversity of experiences across Australia and across the globe. It is important to recognise that our journeys through COVID-19 are not over yet. As we continue this journey, with its ups and downs, we look for signs of hope, we acknowledge the many challenges facing our global community, we celebrate creativity, resilience and generosity and remember the importance of care and empathy in our relationships. This edition of the Ricean is intended to record where we are at this point in our history – not a completion point.

*The publication of this special edition
has been delayed by recent outbreaks in Victoria.*

**the
RICEAN**

OUR VOICE IN LEARNING

Leaders of Learning Reflect

EREA Leaders of Learning across the country came together to share their positive experiences of online, off-campus learning. The following common themes emerged from these conversations.

The Covid-19 situation created a real sense of urgency for school communities which motivated staff to unite and respond quickly and positively to delivering quality online learning experiences for their students. There was a collective desire to experiment with new technologies, an openness to be more creative with pedagogy and willingness to take some risks.

As a result of prioritising the student's learning experience, staff were willing to try new ways to deliver lessons and work together to develop resources using digital technologies. This increase in confidence and self-efficacy resulted in more agile and collaborative school cultures and led to a shift in pedagogical practice for many staff.

"Staff challenged themselves to do the new and different for the sake of the students in our care."

Denise Lombardo - St Patrick's College, Strathfield

There was a distinct shift away from the hierarchical classroom structure during this time. The nature of online lessons enabled students to take greater ownership of their learning which, in most cases, led to more industrious, independent and resilient learners. There was an increase in student agency as they navigated new technologies and embraced alternative ways to learn.

Online learning opened up opportunities for tasks to be co-designed, activities to be negotiated and lessons differentiated. This shift in pedagogy enabled teachers to be more flexible and innovative when assessing student progress and measuring student learning gains.

"Even in isolation we have experienced a strong sense of community."

Luke Borg - St Dominic's College, Penrith

This mode of learning also encouraged trust and cross-collaboration. Two-way learning occurred between teacher-student, student-student, teacher-teacher and parent-child. It was agreed that there was an increase in positive relationships during this period. Despite the remoteness of the situation, there was a strong sense of care, compassion and connectedness between staff, students and parents.

"The disruption of Covid-19 seemed to give people who had been resistant to change and who had struggled to engage with pedagogical change permission to become learners and be vulnerable."

Carolina Murdoch - St Edward's College, Gosford

(Elizabeth Watson, Acting Director of Learning, EREA)

It was agreed that there was an increase in positive relationships during this period.

An Invitation to Realign our Expectations

A sign of hope I noticed was the first morning check in with students via Zoom. It was a pleasure to see all their faces engaging to the best of their ability in a completely new and foreign structure.

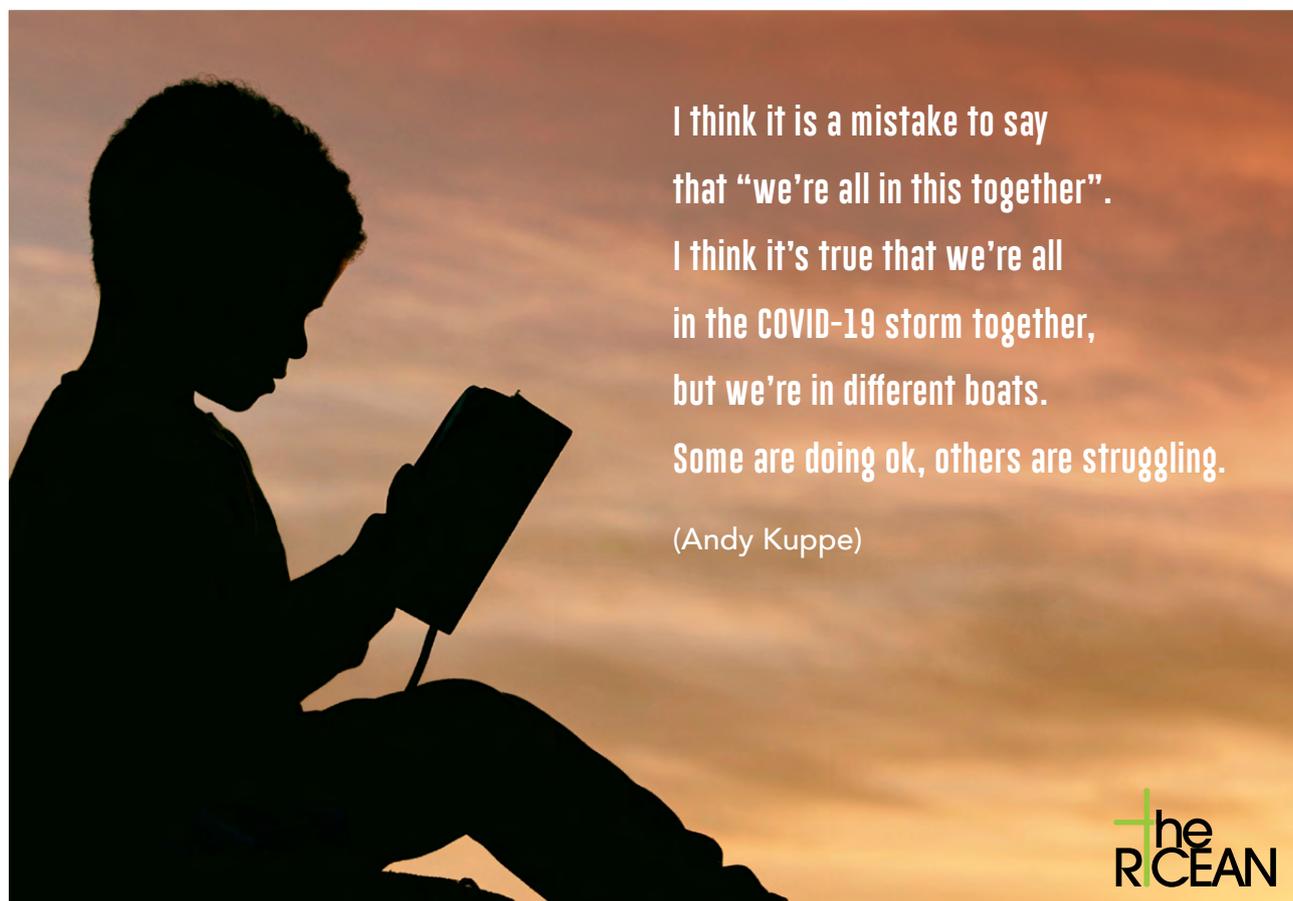
A challenge that the community faced each day during the home learning period of online learning was all teachers and parents finding new and innovative methods for providing the best possible education to students. This was achieved in various ways, using trial and error to identify the best possible means of ensuring this.

I believe a shift in thinking that took place for many teachers was the realisation that the quality and quantity of work received was going to be less than the norm during face to face learning. As teachers we needed to look at learning from the context and point of view of the students to realign our expectations.

Due to an increased workload of creating learning activities through an online format, Zoom meetings with students and an enormous number of emails from parents and students, the sharing of resources, tasks and skills made the situation easier. Splitting the creation of online learning tasks with colleagues helped take the load off. Sharing the responsibility of checking in with others and discussing how to improve our own practice was informative and helped all teachers and staff do the best job they possibly could.

One part of the home learning situation that helped deepen and strengthen relationships was that parents were much more involved in their child's education and had more contact with the class teacher. Parents and teachers were able to view the situation from the others' perspective and help to create a smooth transition to and from home learning.

(Emma Reardon, Grade 3 teacher, St Virgil's College Hobart)



I think it is a mistake to say
that “we’re all in this together”.
I think it’s true that we’re all
in the COVID-19 storm together,
but we’re in different boats.
Some are doing ok, others are struggling.

(Andy Kuppe)

Human Connection & Listening

Community culture

Nuanced leadership springs to mind when we reflect on our times during COVID. We are foremost teachers of humanity and the striving for human nature to be connected was never stronger. Our staff focused on building on our social capital – maintaining a sense of belonging, connectedness and wellbeing for our students. The disruption allowed for our staff to have autonomy over how they were to connect with their students and what would work best for them. They demonstrated creativity, agility and resilience during this time. They became listeners – listeners to their students and to each other. They demonstrated empathy and grew stronger as educators through learning from each other and developing many new skills and strategies along the way.

Re-connecting through collective efficacy and shared purpose – dialogue of hope, rituals, and yarning

Upon return we took a couple of weeks to reconnect and settle – through our rituals – yarning circles, establishing collaborative class expectations, mediation, time in the bush etc. Unfortunately, the added time away has had a big impact on our students and the staff are finding it difficult to settle some of them. Many of our students in Year 7 – 9 were actually away from school for up to 20 weeks. As a leadership team we have worked closely with staff to try and change the narrative by reminding them to be hopeful and celebrating each small success – continually emphasising the positive impact they are having on our students. Even though the increments may not seem great we continue to highlight our collective and shared purpose. Our Senior classes are going really well and the students are settled. Our staff continually amaze us with their resilience and the empathy they display to our students, in particular our most vulnerable and marginalised.

Ponder and Reflections – What aspects would we do differently?

The College developed workbooks that were sent weekly. We also had weekly phone calls to the families we could contact. However, as we journeyed through COVID more staff started connecting to our students who had devices and access via Teams, Facetime and OneNote. We were reluctant to do this due to an equity issue (Very few students had the means to communicate this way). Upon reflection perhaps we could have worked with the students that could access devices from the start. Work packages that were sent home needed to be refined and simplified focusing more on linking cultural aspects around their communities to the curriculum. Inviting Elders to share stories and sharing in rich, deep authentic cultural experiences and recognising these encounters as a vital part of their growth and learning.

(Paula Bacchiella, Deputy Principal, Edmund Rice College, Bindoon)

**We are
foremost teachers
of humanity
and the striving
for human nature
to be connected was
never stronger.**

(Paula Bacchiella)

Second Time Around

Victorian leaders reflect on a second round of remote learning

EREA Leaders of Learning in Victoria came together to reflect on their experiences with remote learning and share what had changed in their communities the second time around.

Emerging from these conversations was a common theme that there was a shift in focus from the learning material to the wellbeing of staff and students.

“Human need for safety, security and connection has overtaken the need for academic progress, providing a different perspective.”

(Christine Shannon, St Bernard's College Essendon)

To help staff continue to connect with each other, Julie Petrov from St Patrick's College, Ballarat reported that they have set up an informal forum on Teams called 'The Staffroom' where their staff can post memes, ideas and have a chat similar to the banter that would normally be occurring in campus staff rooms.

They also awarded their teachers with certificates to acknowledge the professional learning they had undertaken in preparation for online teaching and learning. ... *continued next page*



Abdul Kassem, Parade College, with the Edmund Rice Kibera Youth Group, Kenya

Second Time Around

Schools have also been very mindful of the added pressure that their Year 12 students are under.

A variety of support groups and forums have been established in many schools. Bev Pettit from Christian Brothers' College, St Kilda, gave a shout out to their Identity Team who sent cards and vouchers to all Year 12 students to help keep them motivated and connected while off campus. It was agreed that all staff and students are to be congratulated on the way in which they have navigated both modes of teaching and learning, at times having to work both on and off-campus simultaneously.

Teachers continue to work tremendously hard and their willingness and commitment to learn new skills during the first remote learning experience has resulted in them being more confident engaging with the technologies associated with delivering lessons remotely. They continue to be very agile and creative with the way they monitor students, provide feedback and share knowledge and resources.

“Relationships and staying connected has been at the forefront during ‘Remote Learning Season Two’”

*(Michelle Bishop from
St Joseph's College, Geelong)*

Schools have been proactive in responding to the feedback that they received from parents, staff and students after the first round of online learning. A consistent theme that emerged was to get the right balance of screen time. Some ways in which schools addressed that was to reduce the lesson content, adopt more succinct teacher explanations, modify assessments, shorten lesson times, meet more regularly for shorter lengths and introduce 'exit tickets' to capture understanding and learning as students left their online lessons.

“It has been beneficial to meet with people more frequently for shorter periods of time, maintaining peoples' connection to the school and to the workplace.”

(Maurice Petruccelli, Parade College, Bundoora)

Dan Brown, Teaching and Learning Manager at the Nano Nagle Flexi Schools Network (St Joseph's FLC in North Melbourne and Geelong and St Francis FLC in Hobart) shared some of the successes and challenges that the staff and students have experienced through the pandemic.

“Under normal circumstances, young people not only come to the learning centres for an education but also for supports such as breakfast, lunch and take

home dinner packs, opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities with peers, as well as ongoing support from youth workers. During this time, it has been challenging to maintain some of these supports and connections, whether that be because our young people are not able to attend due to restrictions, an increased lack of engagement or limited access to technology and internet. This causes concern among the staff caring for these young people.”

The staff across all EREA Flexible Learning Centres work incredibly hard to care for our most vulnerable young people. Despite the difficulties faced during this time, their care and commitment to maintain effective learning and quality relationships with young people has continued with vigour and determination. Staff are finding ways to be innovative and have recently supplied young people with devices and internet to maintain connection and learning.

Off-line learning has been positive for some of their young people. Students enjoy the ability to be flexible with their hours and some young mums are finding it helpful to not have to go onsite every day so they can better balance parenting and learning.

*(Elizabeth Watson,
Acting Director of Learning, EREA)*



OUR VOICE IN LEADERSHIP

Looking for Signs of Hope

Brian Schumacher, Principal – Rostrevor College

While we have a supportive community at Rostrevor College, it was incredibly heart-warming to receive words of encouragement from parents who discovered a new appreciation for the work and care of teachers. It was very encouraging to see so many people throughout the country and the world interested in the science of the pandemic and generally keen to follow the advice of experts: this might give us a chance to look again at the science of climate change. The threat of a global pandemic somehow took us beyond ourselves as we watched to see how other nations were grappling with the situation – for a moment we were capable of thinking and acting with a global sense of responsibility.

Chloe Hand, Principal – Nano Nagle Flexi Schools Network

During the COVID period I have observed many signs of hope. Our young people and staff communities have come together in ways that we have not been tested before. The amount of support, empathy and care that has been shared by families, outside services, young people and staff has been unbelievable. I have heard many stories of staff checking in with families who also showed deep care and compassion for the work of our staff members, checking in to see if they were okay, despite the fact that many of our families have been in extremely difficult circumstances during this time. We have also seen a huge outpouring of support from the wider community. One of our staff members led a drive for fundraising to be able to provide emergency relief to our families during such complex times. This initiative raised over \$25,000 dollars that is now being used to provide material aid and other resources to our young people and families.

Chris Ryan, Principal – Ambrose Treacy College

A sign of hope I have observed and experienced is the hope and optimism of young people. While the pandemic has been and will be a very challenging time, our boys have wanted to connect with each other, their teachers and their school. We have enjoyed some great fun, competitions and challenges as well as our schoolwork along the way. Seeing the boys be able to reconnect through their co-curricular activities in culture and sport and the way in which they have worked with the restrictions but gotten stuck in and had a go has been a great sign of hope for me.

Joe Zavone, Principal – St Edmund's Canberra

As we entered our remote learning environment, it soon became clear that we were about to lose that great sense of community which we see alive and well in our many celebrations at the College. Our wonderful traditional celebrations and acknowledgements of Mother's Day, Founder's Day, Easter and ANZAC Day faced a great risk. Like many other schools, we became very creative in the way we continued these celebrations and created online, digital celebrations. These were extremely successful and resulted in an extraordinary amount of feedback from our community thanking us for continuing to celebrate those important events and for including them in those celebrations (albeit in a digital format). The digital celebrations really highlighted the tangible, relational nature of the College, and gave us a significant sign of hope in that we had not lost our community despite losing its physical presence. Community is at the very heart of who we are at St Edmund's College Canberra, and the fear that this would weaken or disappear during the online learning period was certainly unfounded.

Our Voice in Leadership

Responding to the challenges

Brian Schumacher

Working out how to educate boys from remote areas and those from interstate was complex. We came face to face with the realities of the inequitable provision of internet services to regional and remote communities. Our Northern Territory boarders only returned at the start of Term Three after a term away: we fretted at being so distant from them. We were incredibly grateful to the Principal and community of Mary MacKillop College in Palmerston who welcomed our proposal to set up a Rostrevor

Class at the school where a local teacher employed by us would supervise, teach and coach the boys every day. After a few days, our boys were joined by a few other local students from different boarding schools from Adelaide and Sydney. Thus, it was our privilege to share the resource of 'our' local teacher as students negotiated the curriculum from different schools in the same classroom. Thanks again to the Principal and staff who took practical lessons and PE classes to keep the learning interesting and relevant over the term. ... *continued next page*

... how to educate boys from remote areas and those from interstate was complex.



Year 11 student Emily Romano and her daughter Gia,
St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre in North Melbourne.

What was a challenge your community faced?

Chris Ryan

We are a young school and in some ways, our systems are not as developed as some other more established schools.

Our Information Technology platform and engagement with various applications needed agile, quick and hard work when Queensland went into lock down.

Our staff, like all schools, needed to collaborate, learn new skills and commit to the unknown in a rapidly changing environment while also managing their own anxieties and families.

Our staff community were nothing short of inspirational during this time and I am grateful to them. I hope we don't have to do it again but if we do, I am confident that we will be even better at remote teaching if it is required.

Chloe Hand

A challenge that our communities faced has been the access that our young people and families have to devices and ongoing internet access. This has meant that the move to offsite learning has been challenging and that ensuring equity of access for our young people has been difficult and has taken time. Our young people have been incredibly patient as we have moved through this. For our staff members and young people, it has also been very hard to not be together at school. At Flexible Learning Centres we have a focus on relationships and being socially distant, not shaking hands and giving high fives as a greeting is completely counter cultural. Quite simply, we are missing each other and being at school!

Joe Zavone

Whilst online teaching and learning served a functional purpose of allowing education to continue while students stayed at home in times of uncertainty and crisis, it did not serve the relational or communal environments of a Catholic school. Sure we checked in with our vulnerable students through telephone calls, emails and video conferencing, but that is not the same as having the student there with you at school, making eye contact, asking the important questions in a safe environment, having that reassuring tone in your voice, knowing that security is only a door knock away. Even our most resilient students need their community around them – to be able to connect, to collaborate, to create, to communicate, to contemplate, to celebrate, to share, to learn together, to laugh together and to cry together. Our community of parents was lost to us in an online environment; the sense of partnering in a child's education was greatly lessened when parents and carers cannot physically be at the school to share time with teachers and other families.

**Ultimately, we have learnt
that the need to be physically on site
doesn't meet
the needs of every young person.**



Shifting the way that we think

Brian Schumacher

We learnt how to use Teams, Zoom and many other platforms – often at the same time. In many ways the onset of COVID-19 forced us to take a giant step forward in terms of pedagogical change. Having now experienced many new offerings of technology, we will never go back. While disadvantaged in some ways due to poor internet coverage, stringer use of Learning Management Systems along with Teams and Zoom has brought the school much closer to boarding parents. It is now much easier and more meaningful for boarding parents to have online face to face meetings with teachers when either have concerns – it makes a big difference. It also creates new opportunities to include geographically distant families into Boards and other committees into the future.

Chris Ryan

Trust and faith are the words that come to mind. I know they were always there, but the trust and faith that the parents of our community had in each other and our staff, the trust and faith shared between the boys, and staff and boys, shifted our thinking to things being manageable, workable and doable. We all opened up to a new way of being in relationship and the best of our traditional way of being and doing supported, and continues to support, our new ways of being and doing. I think that the shift in thinking is still very much in progress!

Chloe Hand

We have learnt a lot during this period about how we can work with our young people. Many young people have engaged more in offsite learning that they do when on the site at school and this means that we need to consider what best practice looks like for our young people when we return to school. We have learnt that there needs to be more breadth in what individual planning looks like for every young person. Ultimately we have learnt that the need to be physically on site doesn't meet the needs of every young person.

Joe Zavone

A significant shift in thinking came with our teachers working from home, as their professional community was no longer there in a physical sense. Working from home came with its many challenges. Teachers were working to the very best of their ability in creating a productive and effective online learning environment and communicating with parents, but at times this became a little overwhelming. What reassured our teachers was the recognition that whilst they were at home alone, they still had their colleagues and members of the College leadership team walking alongside them, being a real part of their journey, whether it be through their own video meetings, or a telephone call, or just popping into the school. Teachers by nature are a communal bunch of people. Our days have an energy which was certainly missing at home. This sense of isolation, of being individuals rather than a physical part of a professional community was a significant shift of mindset. For some teachers this was an easy adjustment, but for others it was a substantial leap of faith.

**The COVID experience
has taught us the importance of
connected community.**

Our Voice in Leadership

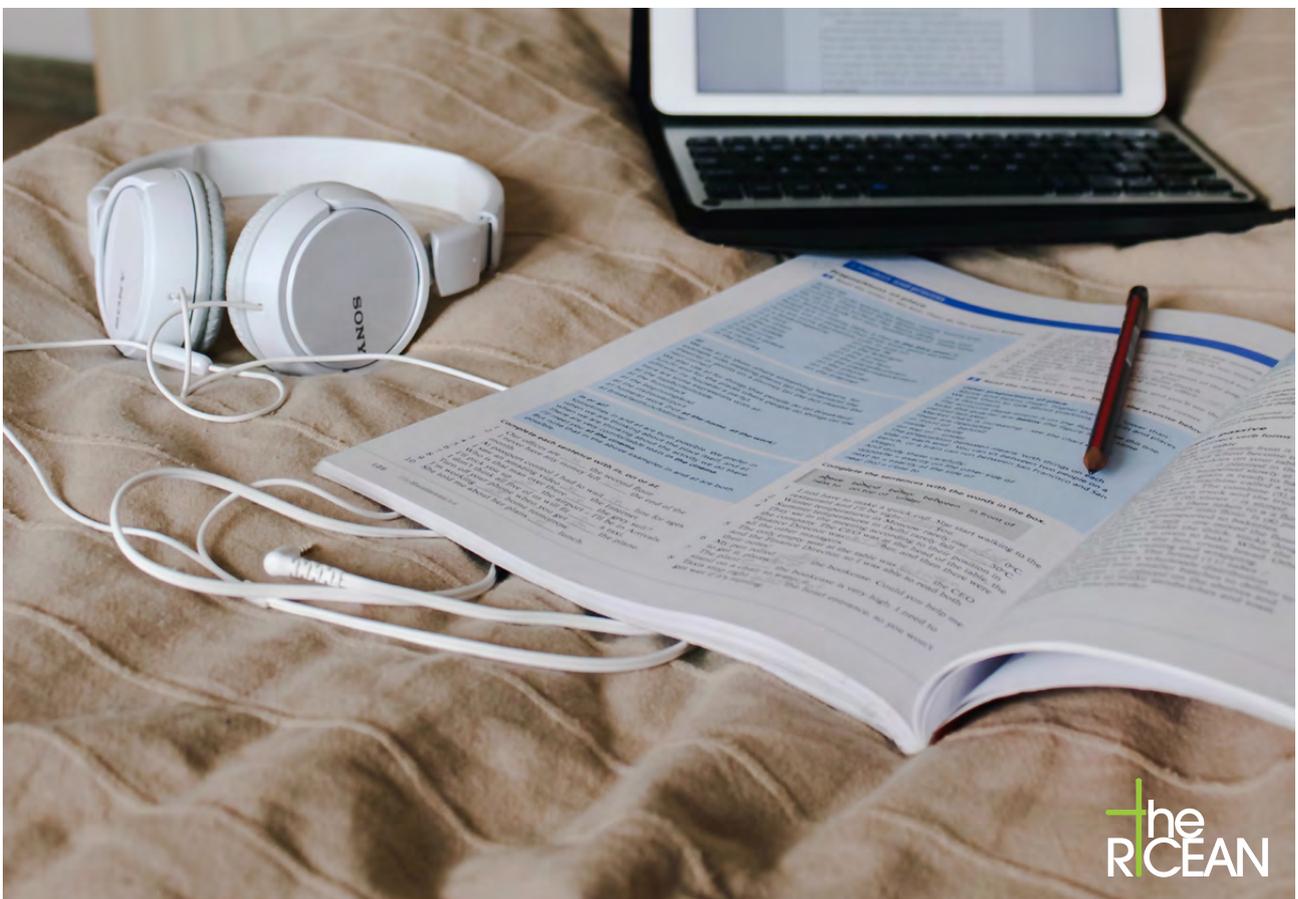
Sharing what we have

Brian Schumacher

In the Central West region, we really enjoyed more frequent catch ups via Zoom. The jokes, stories and general banter provided reassurance and a laugh when, at times, we were in the midst of making some pretty grim decisions – standing people down. I suspect that we will settle into a regular Zoom catch up as an ongoing feature of the region. Personally, I was involved in my first Principal shortlisting and appointment done entirely online. It was every bit as rewarding and thorough as the usual process. However, the distance created by Zoom made us all more conscious of the need to articulate more clearly our thoughts and concerns.

Chris Ryan

As a new Principal, I found the support and wisdom of my EREA peer Principals and EREA Leadership invaluable through this time. The sharing of strategies, ideas, policies and practices was forthcoming and generous. I feel most fortunate to be a part of a network of communities during this time. I am grateful for the support of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. Their senior staff have been remarkable in the sharing of their expertise and advice but also their personable and relational approach has built a leadership community amongst Catholic Principals and Leaders in a way that we may never experience again.



Examples of sharing resources

Joe Zavone

In the days of preparation leading up to our period of online learning, the leaps and bounds taken in the technological skills of our teaching staff was truly amazing and a credit to all of our teachers. Not only did we have one or two key individuals leading us through the key principles and practicalities of online teaching and learning, we also had quite a number of individual teachers willing to give of their time and expertise in leading smaller learning sessions for their colleagues. The sharing of resources, the sharing of expertise and the sharing of skills led to an environment where all of our teaching staff became adept at the online learning skills in a very short period of time. This also led to a significant change in our thoughts around pedagogy. Most of us were taken out of our pedagogical comfort zone and were challenged

to think about our own pedagogy, our faculty pedagogy and our College pedagogy in a new and exciting way. Out of adversity comes opportunity, with the opportunity here being that some of us (including myself) were being forcibly pushed to catch up to contemporary pedagogy. This would have been impossible if it were not for the strong collaborative approach taken by our staff, with teachers teaching teachers and being very open in their sharing of resources, skills and knowledge.

Chloe Hand

During the COVID period we have reached out to our colleagues at other alternative environments (Government, Independent and Catholic) and have offered to drop off food and other resource packs to families who may live within our areas. This offer was also reciprocated to our school communities.

Deepening & strengthening of relationships

Brian Schumacher

In addition to the points noted above, the sudden requirement to go online prompted an urgent need for colleagues to talk to each other, share shortcuts and ideas and to look out for each other. It was one of my proudest moments in school leadership seeing and hearing this in action—especially the old guys like myself sharing their latest online learning discoveries and the passion with which they applied themselves to ensure our students were looked after. Finally, while it is a source of ongoing stress COVID-19 has burst our delusions of certainty and control—especially in developed countries. Not being able to find staple foods and toilet paper in the shops 24/7 was confronting and an opportunity for gratitude that such is not our usual experience. Even washing our hands for longer and with greater attention gave us pause to give thanks that we have fresh water and soap.

Chloe Hand

We have definitely seen examples of strengthening relationships with external organisations and community members and this has been demonstrated by the incredible amount of money that has been donated to emergency funds for our community. There is also significant strengthening in the relationships between the leaders across our sites and also staff communities within our schools. We have seen that people are checking in on each other, advocating for wellbeing support for themselves and their teams and providing regular feedback to their leaders about how supported they feel and providing feedback.

... checking in on each other, advocating for wellbeing support for themselves and their teams

Our Voice in Leadership

Deepening & strengthening of relationships

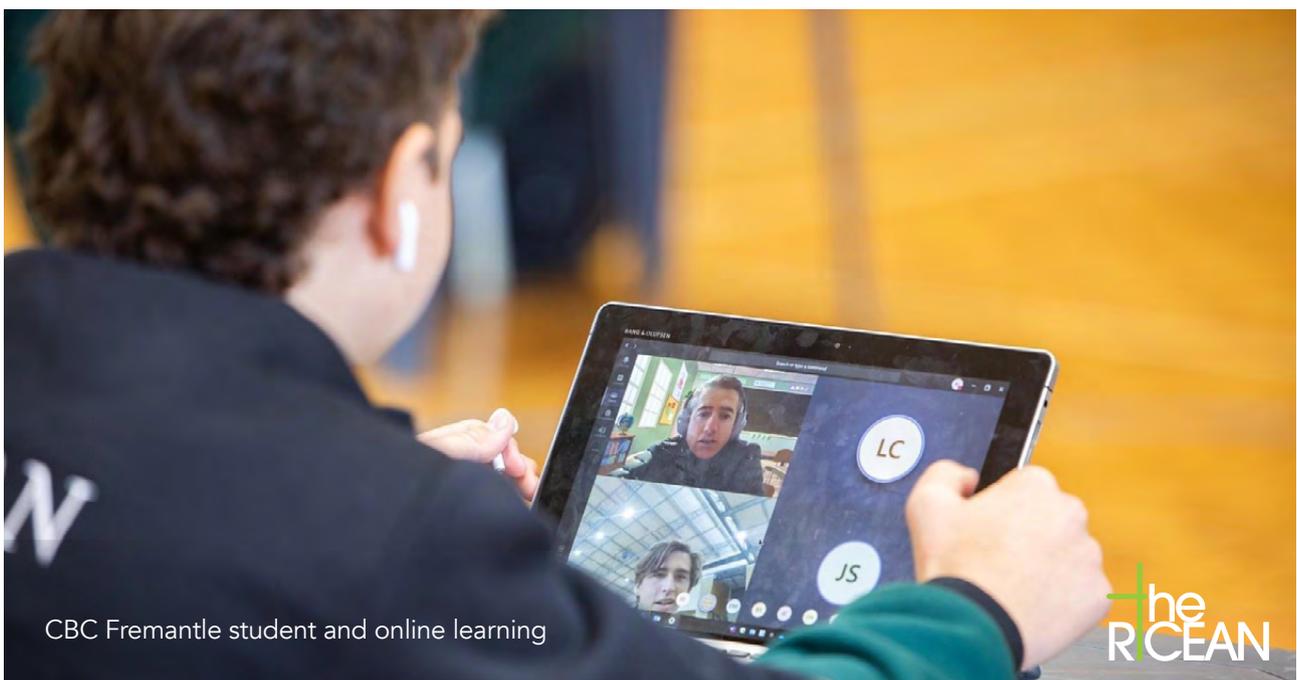
Chris Ryan

One of the many privileges of leadership is being invited into the stories of families. During this time, numerous families have needed pastoral or financial support. Families who didn't expect to need to ask and have needed to come forward. Their gratitude and graciousness has been humbling. Also, the mystery of life continues during this time and we have lost a much loved Dad, journeyed with parents battling cancer and worked with families of boys who are finding the challenges of this time very challenging for their mental and emotional health. These partnerships are the cornerstone of our school communities.

Joe Zavone

It is a fascinating irony that relationships were strengthened at a time when most of our students were not physically at the school. The following feedback from a parent sums up beautifully how relationships were not only maintained but were indeed strengthened during this most important time. "My wife and I just want to drop you a quick

line to say how impressed we have been with the school's move to online learning. The teachers and support staff have done an amazing job moving to this new, different and difficult mode of delivery. The boys are still adjusting but the transition has been great, and they appear to be keeping up with their learning. It is great that you are following their previous timetable as this brings some much-needed discipline into their day. My wife is a teacher herself and I work in IT so we have quite a bit of exposure and understanding of the challenges that you have faced. We are very appreciative of the effort you & and your staff have made to provide continued education for our boys during these unusual times. The quality of the interface, regular communication and even phone calls from staff to check how everything is progressing demonstrates a professional and engaged school. Thank you! Your teachers have done a fabulous job establishing a rhythm and finding some semblance of normality and social cohesion; vital for teenage boys. Thanks for maintaining the Eddies spirit.



OUR VOICE IN THE CHURCH

Emotional and Spiritual Connection

The Church, as a community of believers, exists to continue the historical work of Jesus, in living and proclaiming the Reign of God. Expressing God's unbounded love and compassion is a gift it offers to the world. As part of this community, EREA exists to both draw from and contribute towards this mission. During term two, we spoke to Identity leaders around the country about how they had been able to maintain a sense of connection in the middle of remote learning.

Our voice as church is never stronger than when faced with adversity and often the most visible sign of this solidarity is witnessed in the form of community presence. However, a direct consequence of COVID has been the limiting of possibilities for school communities to come together to express their unity, particularly during significant sacred occasions and moments of reflection. This has meant that seasonal and festive celebration (e.g. Easter,

Edmund Rice Feast Day), ritual and prayer are being re-imagined and expressed in ways that, while respecting physical distancing, give the community a renewed sense of emotional and spiritual connection. Technology, creative planning and relational collaboration isn't just offering young people a means to continue their learning; it also enables them to stay connected to their peers, their teachers, their community and their faith.

As we engaged in conversations with our Identity Leaders around the country, we heard them say:

"A number of significant community celebrations have been live streamed via Facebook and other media platforms. Parents have demonstrated greater interest and connection with the spirituality or faith dimension of the school via these on-line offerings, highlighting the importance of providing opportunities for broader family engagement with the spiritual life of the school."

"This has been a time of reconnecting people with their faith. A period of urgency and uncertainty has been opportunity for re-connection with spirit and soul of community as people seem more open to spiritual and religious dialogue and reflection during moments where the presence of Mystery and the unknown are more evident in our lived experience."



Our Voice in the Church

As we engaged in conversations with our Identity Leaders around the country, we heard them say:

"This has been an experience of chaos and uncertainty. However, in the midst of everything there has been a realisation that no one person has all the answers. Every staff member has something unique to offer. In many ways it has been a test of our faith in one another."

"It's been important to integrate images of the school into on-line rituals and prayer reflections as a way of connecting people back to the heart of their community, which has been well received by students, teachers and parents."

"For many of our young people this has been their first experience of any significant disruption in their lives. Participation in activities devised to show support for community workers has been undertaken with increased empathy and care."

"The COVID disruption seems to have heightened people's awareness of the sacred within the ordinary. Simple things, like greeting your mates, hearing laughter, kicking a ball, even talking with teachers, all previously taken for granted, now seem to be appreciated so much more."

"What I have witnessed is an increased sense of gratitude and humility; young people for teachers, parents for the school community, teachers for the efforts of families. There is just a greater sensitivity to and appreciation of one another."

"The school-parish partnership has found new expression with the school providing resources for streaming and recording of Parish Masses, development of a web page, and sharing school resources to support the Parish community."

Exploring Hope

Hope locates itself in the premise that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty there is room to act. When you recognise uncertainty, you recognise that you may be able to influence the outcomes – you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists adopt the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting.

(Rebecca Solnit, 'Hope is an embrace of the unknown')

[Through the events of Easter] we acquire a fundamental right that can never be taken away from us: the right to hope. It is a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism; it is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement, uttered with an empty smile. No! It is a gift from heaven, which we could not have earned on our own. Over these weeks, we have kept repeating, "All will be well", clinging to the beauty of our humanity and allowing words of encouragement to rise up from our hearts. But as the days go by and fears grow, even the boldest hope can dissipate. Jesus' hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because even from the grave he brings life.

(Pope Francis, Easter Vigil Homily, 11 April 2020)

Hope is not based on whether the evening news is good or bad on a given day. The daily news, as we know, is better on some days and worse on others. If we hope or despair on the basis of whether things seem to be improving or disintegrating in terms of world events, our spirits will go up and down like the stock market. Hope isn't based on CNN, or any other network. Instead, hope looks at the facts, looks at God's promise, and then, without denying the facts or turning away from the evening news, lives out a vision of life based upon God's promise, trusting that a benevolent, all-powerful God is still in charge of this world and that is more important than whether or not the news looks good or bad on a given night.

(Ron Rolheiser)

Like a new flame [the] Good News [of the Resurrection] springs up in the night: the night of a world already faced with epochal challenges and now oppressed by a pandemic severely testing our whole human family. In this night, the Church's voice rings out: "Christ, my hope, has arisen!" (Easter Sequence). This is a different "contagion", a message transmitted from heart to heart – for every human heart awaits this Good News. It is the contagion of hope: "Christ, my hope, is risen!".

(Pope Francis, Urbi et Orbi Message, 12 April 2020)

Our Voice in the Church

Reflections on the Identity Leaders On-line National Gathering

This year, the national Identity Leaders' Gathering took place on-line, due to the disruptions that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed upon people's capacity to be with one another physically. Whilst people missed the opportunities to catch up over a meal, or between sessions, they greatly valued the opportunity to connect with likeminded colleagues and friends. Even though we were maintaining physical distance, we were still able to co-create a space where we could reflect upon our identity as Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition and the action that this calls us to in building a better world for all. This was certainly not a "virtual" conference. Belden C Lane provided a mantra for our journey with the statement, "Getting to where we need to go often means finding a new language for where we've already been." It seems that the

new language also included a "new" medium: remote conferencing!

We began our time together by grounding ourselves in the current reality, where our national response to the threat of COVID-19 has required us to stay at home – or at least to remain within our state boundaries. This did not stop us from looking at the bigger picture through the lens of an Integral Vision. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis speaks of a single crisis facing this planet that is both environmental and social in nature. The pandemic that we are all facing adds another level of complexity to this situation, but any strategies for a solution "demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature." (LS 139)



Our Voice in the Church

Reflections on the Identity Leaders On-line National Gathering

Another aim of the gathering was to listen to people whose experience and identity are representative of the diversity present in our communities and to share stories that open us up to the ways in which we can use language to empower and include. Participants reflected that this provided them with an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which they use language to “reach out to people”. This is extremely important “if we as the face of the Church, are to remain relevant to others.” Others reflected that this encouraged them to take risks in nurturing a Liberating Education. It encouraged a focus on moving from seeing our work as “Guarding the Museum” to “Nurturing the Garden that we Grow.”

The second half of the day provided space and opportunities to share projects, questions and stories around the work of Identity and Mission. Participants appreciated the connection that our online platform provided despite the physical distancing, allowing them to “breathe the same air as those that share the passion for this work.” They also appreciated the opportunity to “disconnect from the day to day to just listen and be part of the conversations that took place.”

Our Identity Leaders left the day feeling “energised and inspired”, having experienced “a sense of

unity and further passion for the importance of language and inclusivity in our schools.” Even though restrictions in some states were minor, participants also left with a feeling of “empathy” for and “solidarity” with those whose lives had been more deeply impacted by the pandemic. Another leader summed up the day in this way:

I am part of a network of people trying to find voice among our respective school communities for ever deeper identity, charisma, formation alignment in deliberate and tangible way that ensure ‘information’ has some chance of becoming ‘transformation’.

Looking forward, our leaders recognise the place that technology can play in networking, collaboration, co-creation and easing the burdens that these activities place upon the earth. We are learning a lot about how to operate in this space and the generosity and energy with which people engaged has helped us to explore new ways of working. Whilst many missed being physically present to one another and the spontaneity that this can generate, participants were overwhelmingly unanimous in affirming the place of remote gathering in supporting our collective mission.

The pandemic has brought us to a crossroads.

We must use this decisive moment to end our superfluous and destructive goals and activities and to cultivate values, connections and activities that are lifegiving. We must examine our habits of energy usage, consumption, transportation and diet. We must eliminate the superfluous and destructive aspects of our economies and nurture life-giving ways to trade, produce and transport goods.

(Pope Francis, World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 1 Sept 2020)



OUR VOICE IN THE WORLD

Advocacy in the time of COVID-19

Advocacy, as a sign of hope, is important within our schools but will look different in each state of Australia. Currently, our country faces several challenges in the spread of COVID-19. Hope is experienced differently in many communities and everyday life has forever changed.

Previously, hope took the form of people being able to dream about their future but now people are confronted by questions of survival. For many, there is uncertainty in their relationships, their employment and their own well-being. Hope, in times like these, must be presented regularly for the health and strength of the people. In Australia, hope was expressed in our leadership and the strength of our government to act decisively; with lockdowns and financial support, such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker. Impressively, many countries, like England, provided moral support for healthcare workers at the coal face of the pandemic by highlighting their courage and bravery. Nationwide, people clapped as the sun rose to show their appreciation. Healthcare workers were motivated to continue the fight against the worst of the pandemic. Worldwide, there was a strong initiative to discover an effective vaccine, so that all people could be protected. The World Health Organisation has led this effort and continuously held large online meetings, with updates posted online. For me, these are signs of hope.

The many challenges faced during this time were significant. Isolation from loved ones, especially if they are at risk or living in nursing homes. As a student, I found isolation a debilitating experience, felt through the shift of learning towards online learning. It served as a reminder of our basic need of human face to face contact. Initially, I welcomed the break and felt it was merely a holiday. However, as time went on, I realised that isolation deprived me of my humanity; only desiring to speak with all of my friends.

In some ways, advocacy was compromised through the inability to action our visions. COVID-19 affected our ability to gather due to social distancing and strict hygiene practices. The pandemic created new challenges for our advocacy groups because we were more wary of the impact of COVID-19. Just as advocacy was starting to emerge as an important focus at my school, COVID-19 changed the fundamentals of engagement. Meeting online can become a procedural meeting, whereas advocacy face to face enflames a movement. Advocacy in person, is a conversation between passionate individuals, uninterrupted by formalities and procedure. This forum creates energy as a movement. Technology, however, has created an opportunity to expand our communications with other advocates. Technology has unlocked the potential of communicating with others over long distances and has become easily accessible. Advocacy, during COVID-19, has opened a new world where more people are included as a voice for a larger movement.

Initially, I realised that the pandemic was a foreign invader that caused anxiety on many levels, but especially health issues. I realised that I had to effectively plan every aspect of my life, from hygiene to mingling with the general public to making sure I had the necessary medication for my health. At my school, hand sanitizers were installed everywhere, COVID-19 protocols were presented on screens, assemblies and co-curriculars were cancelled, all while being bombarded with social distancing measures. Now, these changes are the new norm. I know these actions must not create fear for advocacy but should, rather, inspire new ways of thinking to advance ourselves and those around us.

(William Hambidge Hay – Student, Christian Brothers' College, Adelaide)

Our Voice in the World

Creating an Ecosystem of Care - Caring for our One Common Home

When we look across EREA, it seems as though grace has been at play. While recent disruptions have cast their shadow, it appears as well that this experience has led us to a re-cognition of the beauty of our planet and what it provides – the interdependence we share with all life in a living system that sustains all beings. What is stirring is a revitalised commitment to the protection of our one common home – to advocate and care for it, to learn about it, to connect to it and most importantly, to love it. What follows is an overview of this movement – which, while underway for decades, has reached a new stage. Could it be the Spirit ushering us and moving through us? Is this the shape of the shift in thinking we are being called to live out?

“A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.”

(Ls 202)

Shifts in Thinking and Sharing of Resources

A significant shift was evident in the conversation held at the National EChO across EREA Community of Practice Gathering in May, where an emerging recognition of an ‘ecosystem of care’ was being named as a way of responding to the social, ecological and health consequences of the pandemic. As named in the meeting, such an ecosystem would respect science, value simplicity and be guided by what is essential.

These same sentiments, were echoed in the recently released EREA Climate Change Interim Statement.

This sense of a shift in thinking similarly informed at the “Attending to the Disruptions – Bringing an Integral Ecology to Life” workshop, where members of the EREA Ecological Sustainability team, joined with educators and young people from several schools along with staff from Jesuit Social Services.

A more localised embodiment of a shift in thinking is reflected in a recent initiative at St Virgil’s College Hobart that came out of the community’s desire to find a way to care for self, each other and their place during the disruption of Term 2.

Signs of Hope

Like many schools across EREA, Rostrevor College is creatively participating in this groundswell of caring for our common home, launching recently its War on Waste initiative. Led by young people of the community, it is designed to tackle “indifference and a throwaway culture”.

Finally, in a show of ‘ecological creativity’ young people from St Joseph’s College Geelong celebrated World Environment Day by getting in touch with their local ecosystems and channelling the vision and voice of Sir David Attenborough.

This snapshot of ecological care, the cause for much hope, is powerful evidence that EREA and its school communities are responding to Pope Francis’ claim in *Laudato si’* that, “A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.”
(Ls 202)

*(Luke Edwards,
Education Officer, EREA)*

EREA Climate Change Interim Message

Crossing the Threshold – Climate Change and COVID-19 June 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call to humanity, inviting us to respond to the other 'crisis' that is impacting our very home; a foundational crisis which has already devastated the lives of many species, many peoples, many landscapes, many waterways and many livelihoods. On June 1, 2017, Principals and Ecological Educators from across EREA made a commitment to 'life in solidarity with all life on this fragile planet'. Five years after the publication of *Laudato si'*, we have arrived at a threshold moment.

Our world has paused, shifted and changed these past few months in ways we are yet to understand. We have learnt how to connect while being physically distanced. We have learnt how much we need to connect with the world around us. We have been enlightened by how the earth heals us, holds us and sustains us. And yet, we've also come to understand that our interconnectedness results in vulnerability. We are being called to live simply, so that all may simply live.

What do we now know? Normal was not working. We are guests, not masters. We should continue listening to the scientists. Our economy is at risk when the climate is out of balance. There is a 'radical interconnectedness of all life, where genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from mutual support, justice and faithfulness to others.' (Ls' #70)

This time has been full of challenge – for learning spaces, for working spaces, for home spaces. We have learnt that we are adaptable, that we are flexible, that we can take up new ways of operating in this world, ways that have less impact on others, and on the earth itself. And yes, we have learnt that we can change our lifestyles for the good of those whom we'll never meet.

At this threshold moment, we have an opportunity to allow our new knowings to shape the new 'normal', to begin to create a new future. A future that recognises that absolutely everything is God's creation – is an expression of love. A future that recognises that if we don't act now to think, live and work differently, our interconnectedness will create increasing vulnerability and devastation.

This current crisis reinforces just how unequal the impacts are globally, nationally and locally. The same people who are most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are those who are most affected by the climate crisis. As Edmund Rice people, we are called to walk with them, to be prophetic in naming the injustices and to seek change in the structures that create and maintain them. And as Edmund Rice people, we are called to live this through the way we operate our schools, the way we engage with our communities and the way we seek to reach out beyond the school gates.

**A future that recognises
that absolutely everything
is God's creation
– is an expression of love.**

Now is the time to re-double our efforts, to be envisioning innovative and creative ways of living for a more sustainable future on the back of our pandemic experience. Now is the time to do things differently, to think differently, to listen differently – to our earth and each other. To put care for 'our common home' at the centre. And to lead others to cross the same threshold.

(With thanks to the EREA Climate Change Statement Reference Group)

4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



OUR VOICE IN THE WORLD

OUR GLOBAL SCHOOLS

● Closed

● Partially Open

● Open



NORTH AMERICA

● Canada – Partially Open

● USA – Partially Open

SOUTH AMERICA

● Uruguay – Open

● Argentina – Closed

● Bolivia – Closed

● Peru – Partially Open

EUROPE

● UK – Partially Open

● Ireland – Open

At the height of the pandemic in April, over 1.6 billion young people were not able to go to school in person. Every Edmund Rice school across the world has had to move to remote learning, ranging from online, using WhatsApp to complete closure. With many schools remaining disrupted, the opportunity to connect through our global network of Edmund Rice Education Beyond Borders has enabled solidarity, collaboration and the sharing of resources.

State of Schools as at 20th September

50% students out of school globally

Source: Unesco September 2020

ASIA
● India – Closed

AFRICA

- West Africa – Partially Open
- Kenya – Closed
- Tanzania – Open
- South Africa – Open
- Zambia – Partially open
- Zimbabwe – Closed

OCEANIA

- Australia – Partially Open
- New Zealand – Open
- PNG – Open

FINAL REFLECTION

Testing Our Resilience

COVID-19 is testing the resilience of every single person, but the young are faced with particular challenges at pivotal stages of their lives.

As a first-year principal of a Melbourne all-boys' school I have seen first-hand – and I'm sure many parents of school-aged children reading this will have seen it too – the strain lockdown is putting on the mental health of students.

It is draining being in front of their screens all day, and then there's the lack of work divide between before school, school itself and after school. Year 12s in particular are struggling with what is already a stressful year, even without adding the extreme uncertainty coronavirus has brought to their young lives.

It's only natural that they are asking themselves "will I be able to find a job after school?", or "is my choice of university subjects the right one in a COVID-normal world?" they will find themselves in, or "will I ever get to go on that long dreamed of gap year overseas?"

On top of that, many teenagers have been laid off from their casual jobs that gave them a sense of freedom, or a parent has lost their job bringing financial pressure to the household. And of course, they can't see their friends in person, which is probably the hardest part to cope with in this strict Stage Four lockdown we're now in.

All of this added anxiety is being manifested in poor sleep routines and lower motivation levels for many students. Tragically, there was a case recently at another Victorian school of a 15-year-old student who committed suicide and his parents have talked about whether lockdown and isolation may have played a role. They may never know.

It is incumbent on all of us in the privileged position of caring for children - principals, teachers and of course parents – to ensure we do everything to give them the tools to not just cope with these new COVID challenges, but to make them stronger and more resilient to cope with all challenges life throws at them.

At my school some of the practical things we are doing include maintaining a routine with timetabled classes, regular visual tutor check-ins, including learning activities

that don't involve screen time like cooking, technology design and fitness programs.

We are also running student workshops on mental health, including coping strategies, warning signs to look for and resources and contacts to get help. Getting regular feedback from parents and students about what is and isn't working is also helpful.

I think it is a mistake to say that "we're all in this together". I think it's true that we're all in the COVID-19 storm together, but we're in different boats. Some are doing ok, others are struggling.

It is important to reach out for help, without any sense of shame. And we have to go out of our way to offer, because many of us are not good at asking for help.

Probably the best two pieces of advice I have received were in this last week. I was given a little book which has a short reflection for each day of the year. Monday's was one from St Francis of Assisi: Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible. I think that's the best advice I have been giving students, staff and especially parents.

At the start of the year, if I had suggested to parents that their sons would be schooled at home for most of the year, they would have shouted, "Impossible!" And yet the focus has been on doing what's necessary today, not thinking too far ahead.

The second piece of advice came from an old photo of three of Australia's greatest scientists: Oliphant, Florey and Hancock in April 1948 overlooking the construction of what is now the Australian National University. They had lived through WW1, the Spanish Flu, the Great Depression and WW2, but dreamt of a better future and went about building that.

Hope. I want that for my students, especially my Year 12s. I know that we will come out the other side. It will get better. Much better. The necessary and possible things we are doing today will build an impossible and better future.

Andy Kuppe, *Parade College, Preston and Bundoora.*

This first appeared as an opinion piece in the Herald Sun.



*Edmund Rice Education Australia
offers a liberating education, based on a gospel spirituality,
within an inclusive community
committed to justice and solidarity*



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