



**Term 1 2018**

## Embrace Equip Engage Empower

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The focus of this term's Learning Quarterly is primarily to do with behaviour. For the first half of the school year we are reviewing procedures and guidelines around behaviour management in line with new policies released by the Catholic Schools Office. For many years St Kieran's has used *Choice Theory* as its approach to managing student behaviour; we will continue to use this approach but will add other layers to address escalating or considerable inappropriate behaviours. Behaviour management will continue with a positive approach whenever possible.

Each one of us hopes for a successful outcome for our children at school. Success can be measured across many areas but the ultimate signs of success are children who have developed academically, physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. You can contribute to this success by working in partnership with the school and your child's teacher. Following is an article by well-known parenting advisor Michael Grose.

The Learning Quarterly (LQ) is published during Fallow Week each term. The purpose is to highlight and explore current practices in education within the St Kieran's context. It is one of the many ways we keep you engaged in your child's learning.

### **Working closely with your child's teacher this year**

*In my work as a presenter and educator I've visited hundreds of schools, spoken with hundreds of school leaders and worked with many educational innovators and researchers at the forefront of modern education. These people and experiences have given me valuable insights into what makes great schools tick.*

Strong parent-teacher relationships are one of the hallmarks of all great schools. They're a major contributor to student success. The research into schooling across the Western world reveals that positive parent-teacher partnerships are a more significant factor in student success than parent income levels or social status.

However, parent-teacher relationships require effort and energy from both parties if they are going to really benefit children and young people.

Here are five elements to guide you as a parent in forming strong bonds with your child's teachers this year:

### **1. Knowing** (building affinity)

Know – the first element – requires you to be both proactive and patient. Proactive because you need to be willing to meet and work at maintaining relationships. Patient because it may take some time to build a working relationship. For your partnership to be meaningful and successful you need to meet with your children’s teacher(s) with the goal of forming a respectful professional relationship. Share your aspirations for your child and be willing to build the teacher’s knowledge about your family.

Get to know your child’s teachers’ aspirations and gain an understanding of their approach and the focus they have for this particular year group.

Also commit to continuing to know what’s going on in the life of your child’s classrooms as well as the life of the school on an ongoing basis.

### **2. Supporting** (building trust)

Children need to know that you are fully behind what their teachers are trying to achieve if they are going to commit fully to learning. The best way to support your child’s teacher is to trust their knowledge, professionalism and experience. Avoid the temptation to question the expertise of teachers in front of students, particularly when the teachers use methods that you are unfamiliar with. Initiate conversations with teachers around methodology to give them the chance to explain the approach they are taking.

### **3. Participating** (building links to student learning)

Participation – the third element – takes into account the level of parent engagement in student learning. There’s a huge body of research that points to the correlation between parent engagement in student learning and their educational success. If you want your child to improve his learning, take an interest in what he is doing. Follow school and teacher guidelines about helping at home and attend as many conferences, meetings and events involving your child as possible. This simple strategy has a significant, long-term impact.

### **4. Communicating** (building relationships)

Life’s not always smooth sailing for kids of any age. Family circumstances change. Friends move away. Illness happens. Mental health challenges can hit anyone at any time. These changes affect learning. Keep teachers up to date with significant changes or difficulties that your child or young person experiences so they can accommodate your child’s emotional and learning needs at school.

### **5. Advocating** (building loyalty)

Advocacy – the last element – means that you talk teachers and your school up rather than tear them down among children and the wider community. Teachers hold very public positions and generally work hard to build good reputations both within their school and their wider education community. Consider a teacher’s reputation among the community and also with children when you discuss educational matters with others.

Building parent–teacher relationships doesn’t just happen. They take good will from both sides, a commitment to setting aside the time necessary to support the home-based learning tasks that are expected, and a willingness to communicate both concerns and commendations through the correct channels.

**Parent–teacher relationships – long may they prosper!**

*(Michael Grose)*

## Choice Theory

Much has been written about the benefits of managing the behaviour of primary school aged children using *Choice Theory* as the basis. William Glasser is the American Psychologist who is notable for having developed this cause and effect theory that explains human behaviour.

He believed that there were basically two types of teachers; “Boss” teachers and “Lead” teachers. “Boss” teachers were much more authoritarian in their approach to managing student behaviour. The rewards and consequences used in these teachers’ classrooms all come from the teacher. They are basically “extrinsic”. This means that student learning is primarily motivated by rewards and avoiding punishment. A “Lead” teacher bases teaching and learning on the child’s needs. Interestingly, although this theory is the culmination of more than 50 years of work by William Glasser, teaching and learning has evolved in that time to include much of what William Glasser’s theory anticipated.

Classrooms are very different places in 2017 to what they were twenty, even ten years ago. A teacher who implements principles of *Choice Theory* to manage student behaviour manages to create a learning environment where student needs are met. This teacher is sensitive to the needs of all students yet sets up a learning space conducive to excellent learning and best opportunities for personal development. Choice Theory supposes that all behaviour is driven by a need. The main needs are; survival, belonging, power, fun and freedom. These needs can be met when the following occurs:

- Survival needs are met when the school environment is kept safe and free from personal threat; when structures are in place that support a calm and orderly learning environment.
- Students sense belonging when they receive attention from the teacher and others, participating actively in class events including decision making activities. The sense of belonging occurs when there are strong and supportive relationships between student/teacher and student/student.
- Students sense power when the teacher asks them to participate in making decisions about their learning. When students are able to set goals and reflect on their own learning they feel more empowered and in control of their learning trajectory.
- Students experience fun when they are able to work and talk with others, collaborating and engaging in interesting activities, sharing their ideas, skills and capabilities.
- Students sense freedom when the teacher creates a learning environment where decision making is an important part of learning. This is about students having ownership in their learning.

When *Choice Theory* is implemented within the classroom, students should have an active role into how and what they are taught. The teacher should structure learning around what drives the students to learn. Class meetings or community circles should be held regularly and within these meetings, students share their thoughts which in turn provide great insights for the class teacher into student thinking and student needs.

Much of what has been described here is the ideal classroom structure for learning in today’s world. Flexible learning spaces, decision making in learning, collaboration, discussion, all these aspects of learning work together to develop a self- motivated learner who is able to rely on his/her own ability to work collaboratively, considerately and positively, rather than only relying on external factors such as rewards and/or consequences. This is not to say that Choice Theory does not support rewards and/or consequences. The difference is that rewards should be used prudently and consequences should be decided on collaboratively.



Should anyone wish to read up further on the main principles of *Choice Theory*, we suggest visiting the following site: <https://wglasser.com/our-approach/choice-theory/>

## Treat Others the Way You Would Like to be Treated

“Treat others the way you would like to be treated” is phrase often used in discussions with children. It is an adaption of Luke 6: 31 “Do unto others as they would do unto you.” Basically the teacher is trying to help the child see their dealings with other children and adults from the other perspective and encourage empathy. Teachers try to help the student see the consequence of their actions and develop an understanding that every student has the right to feel happy, be included, be spoken to politely and be safe. Just like they would like to be treated. These ideals form the basis of our school policies and find their origins in Genesis.

These simple sayings are based on the premise that **each person possesses a basic dignity that comes from God**. The Christian concept that all people are made in the likeness of God come from Genesis “**God has imprinted his own image and likeness on human beings**” (Gen 1:26-27). This implies that human beings, created in the image and likeness of God have by their very existence, an inherent value, worth and distinction”.

*Daniel Groody “Globalization, Spirituality and Justice.”*

For these reasons St Kieran’s Mission and Vision Statements, our Behaviour Guidelines, and all school documentation have at their core the dignity and respect of each individual. Our Behaviour Guidelines based on Glasser’s *Choice Theory* works towards developing the student’s capacity to make wise choices that enhance the dignity and respect of each and every child, teacher and parent in our school.

Catholic Social Teaching also seek to build upon the ‘inherent value, worth and distinction’ of each person. These social teachings are articulated as the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and include:

- **Respecting the Life and Dignity of the Human Person**
- **Working towards a Common Good**
- **Subsidiarity**- enabling less fortunate to achieve through their own decisions
- **Solidarity**- supporting others

At St Kieran’s we strive to teach and support Catholic Social Teaching. These principles are taught explicitly through our Mission modules of learning. More importantly these concepts are caught / learnt by students through the modelling of their families and teachers. *Choice Theory* is yet another process whereby the daily choices made by students can be viewed through the lens of Social Justice. ‘Treat others as you would like to be treated’ works extremely well here.

The Australian Jesuits offer a rich resource to start exploring Catholic Social Teaching. It outlines the four principles, and offers examination and reflection on each of these key principles.

<http://www.faithdoingjustice.com.au/docs/FourKeyPrinciplesOfCatholicSocialTeaching.pdf>

### Let us pray ...

Creator God, Your image is alive in every human person giving to each of us an inviolable **dignity**.

Create in us a desire to act in **solidarity**, an energy to work together and a willingness to share with others our time, our energy, our skills and talents and our wealth.

As we share and enjoy the fruits of your creation,

restore in us your vision of a world made whole, and inspire us to commit ourselves to the **common good**.

Gracious God, give us ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to love,

so that we reflect you in our way of life, and in our choices, words and actions.

Jesus is the good news to the poor.

As his followers, may we recognise the call to be the same.

Amen

Prayer from <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/social-teaching>