Whole School Fun

Justin with his Prep Buddy James, meeting before the Whole School Assembly

19 February 2015
We've all often heard that play is important in early childhood, but it's important for us to understand what is being learned and how that learning is occurring.

God has certainly created us wonderfully – the development of a child follows a very natural process. Children are born passionately eager to make as much sense as they can of the world around them. The process by which children turn experience into knowledge is exactly the same as that followed by scientists: children observe, wonder, speculate and question. They think up possibilities, make theories, hypothesize and then test their theories or reject them. If we attempt to control, manipulate or divert this process we disturb it; the independent scientist in the child disappears. If we fill the early years with skills that will naturally and easily come at a later age, children may miss out on building these foundational skills and lose the wonder at discovering for themselves.

Muscles in children's legs need to develop and become strong before they can balance their bodies and begin to walk. Similarly, muscles in children's arms develop and become stronger through using them; continual movements such as swinging, climbing, digging or pouring gives the children practise at skills and builds muscle, strength and vigour. Large upper arm development is required before the finer muscles in the hands begin to develop the strength to hold a pencil correctly. Foundational skills are vital for future development and skills. Ensuring children receive the right opportunities at the right time does not need to be overwhelming for adults - God created learning and development to be such a natural process that crucial foundational development, skills and knowledge can be achieved simply through PLAY.

Children in the three to eight age range acquire knowledge in significantly different ways from older children; they learn best through direct sensory encounters with the world and not through formal academic processes. What is the role of kindergarten educators and teachers in Play? They set the scene for this rich symbolic play; they stimulate and encourage; they allow time and space to follow the child's interests. They observe and help children join in. They contribute suggestions and may join in the play themselves. However they do not intervene to the extent of taking over the children's play, so as not to disturb the natural process of learning as children explore and experiment in the creation around them.

God gave all humans a desire to play. Who doesn't like to go out and follow their own interests for a while? Perhaps it's through a game of golf, or darts, or to build Lego or rearrange the furniture in a dollhouse. The play adults engage in may be different to the play of children, however it is usually a highly engaging and desirable thing to do - because we are interested in it.

We want all of our children to be confident and successful learners. Heavily structured activities directed by adults are not the most effective way to provide the learning they need. The use of work-sheets, flash cards and drill (things children are usually NOT interested in) will not encourage young children to develop the skills they need to adapt to the workplaces of the future. Play, under the guidance of highly skilled teachers and educators, can lay the foundations of skills and knowledge that children will use for further learning.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia is called ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming.’ MECS Early Years educators strive to provide learning environments that allow children to develop a sense of belonging at MECS, where they can follow their own interests and just be themselves, where the work of their PLAY is valued and recognised as an essential tool in the natural development of skill and knowledge, so that they can become the person God created them to be.

Wendy
Early Years Coordinator
Whole School Assembly

Thanks to the Senior School for bringing together our whole school assembly last Friday. This was a great opportunity for the whole school community to come together in celebration of a new year. Sometimes it is easy for the different sections of the school to just focus on their particular cohort of students. The power-point presentation of the Year 12s and Preps reminded us that we are all part of one big learning community that helps and supports one another. Our student worship band led with gusto and we look forward to them continuing in this role for the whole year as we build in opportunities for our students to participate and lead us in praise and worship. Thanks to the many parents and grandparents who were able to join us - it was a great morning!

Leaders for 2015

At this assembly we were able to present our new secondary student leaders for the year, as well as introduce Di and Karissa in their new roles as Assistant Principals. We thank both students and staff for their willingness to step into leadership roles and serve God with their talents in this area. For our student leaders, we look forward to being able to mentor and develop their gifts throughout the year.

Middle Primary Family Get-Together

Last night, the Middle Primary students and their families joined together for a fun night of ‘getting-to-know you’ activities.

A family-friendly dinner was enjoyed by all, as well as an opportunity to see and hear what happens in the Middle Primary classrooms. These nights are an important way to make sure that ‘everyone is on the same page’ at the beginning of the year. Thanks for coming along and supporting this event.

Staff Devotions

Every morning our staff meets in various combinations for staff devotions. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday we meet together as a whole staff to share God’s Word and begin the day in prayer. These devotions are led by our pastoral care groups and this year we are focussing on some of the grand themes or ‘threads’ of the Bible, such as Loving God, Seeking Justice, Enabling Healing and Showing Mercy. These ‘threads’ and many others, are also being pursued in the way we think about bringing a biblical perspective to our curriculum.

All of our staff are in a pastoral care group. The aim of these groups is to make sure that every staff member is cared for, and well supported in prayer. As with all members of our community, our staff often face challenging situations in their own life, or that of their family and friends. We don’t want this to just be a place where people come to work, but a place of love and support. Please join me in praying for all our staff that their year would be a good one in every sense!

FOCUS On... Dyslexia

Over the last two years many of the teachers and learning assistants at MECS have taken part in professional development seminars presented by Michelle H (www.michellehutchison.com.au). These seminars have focused on the practical ways teachers and learning assistants can support students who have dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling (The Rose Report, 2009). This can impact on literacy development, mathematics, memory, organisation and sequencing skills to various degrees. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. Some well-known people who have dyslexia include chef Jamie Oliver, entrepreneur Richard Branson, actress Kiera Knightly and author of the Captain Underpants series Dav Pilkey. Dyslexic characteristics are best thought of as being on a continuum from mild to severe, rather than forming a discrete category. People who have dyslexia often have strengths in reasoning, visual and creative fields.

At MECS we believe all children, created uniquely and wonderfully (Psalm 139: 13-16) need the opportunity to achieve their best. Many of the teaching and learning support strategies teachers and learning assistants found out about at the workshops have been adapted to suit individual student needs and incorporated into classroom practice. Some of these include:

- The SMART Spelling Approach (www.michellehutchison.com.au)
- Using shared texts with strong visual representations such as diagrams or mind maps.
- Breaking reading passages into manageable chunks and highlighting the most important part.
- Giving students the opportunity to listen to a text or passage being read aloud or an audio book and encouraging them to scan along the text with their finger.
- The use of text to speech software such as Natural Reader (www.naturalreaders.com) and recommended iPad Apps.

Jo Secondary Education Support Coordinator and Genevieve Primary Education Support Teacher have completed training in the assessment process, which helps to identify Dyslexia. If you would like to know more about dyslexia please contact us. There are also a number of different online resources with more information such as:

- Dyslexia Action www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/
- Genevieve Primary Education Support Teacher
MECS Notes

Congratulations to Andrew and Sam

We would like to offer our congratulations to Andrew (VCE 2011) on being selected to study Medicine through The University of Melbourne's Graduate Medicine program. This is a 4 year degree. Andrew undertook graduate studies in Science at Melbourne University and performed very well in the pre-requisite studies for Medicine. He then had to sit the challenging GAMSAT (Graduate Medical School Admissions Test) and perform at a high level in order to qualify for medicine. Andrew was motivated to study medicine after a visit to Uganda after his VCE (as part of the ‘schoolie’s revolution’) where he was made aware of the tremendous need for medical assistance by the poor of that country.

We would also like to congratulate Sam (VCE 2014) for being chosen as one of fourteen winners of the ‘Top Screen’ Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA awards). Each year, VCAA chooses the very best students in the performing and creative arts fields to showcase their work in exhibitions. Sam’s film ‘Albert’ will be featured as part of the VCAA’s ‘Season of Excellence-TOP SCREEN’ and can be viewed from 5 March – 15 May 2015 at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Federation Square. Sam studied VCE Media through Distance Education Victoria and we would like to acknowledge the valuable and supportive assistance of his teacher Jim. Sam is currently working for Indimax Productions in Bayswater.

Sam wrote, directed, filmed and produced ‘Albert’. All the actors in the film are from his family or his church and the film may be viewed online at http://tiny.cc/albertfilm

Dr Roger F
VCE Coordinator
Term 1 PT Interviews

In mid March, we will hold the first of two parent teacher interview events for all MECS parents for 2015. Over the coming weeks, you will receive more information and your log in details for our online booking system, but until then, please ensure you keep the following evenings available. Please note that Senior School interview formats will be changing and your child’s teachers will be available for one-on-one interviews for this round.

Primary & Middle School:
Wed 11 March (3:45-6pm); Mon 16 March (3:45-6pm); & Thurs 19 March (3:45-9pm)

Senior School:
Mon 16 March (3:45-9pm) & Thurs 19 March (3:45-9pm)

Autism Research

The objective of this research is to conduct cognitive and behavioural assessments of children diagnosed with an ASD after age 3 years, to ascertain the developmental progress of these children between the ages of 7-9 years. Each child’s social competencies and his/her adjustment to the school environment will also be investigated.

At MECS we support ongoing research into many areas, and as such we commend this research project for students who have Autism.

Please read the brochure sent home about this research to Year 2-4 students and respond if you would like to be a part of this research project that will contribute to our knowledge and understanding of Autism. A copy of the brochure is on the MECS website in the notices home section.

Nanna’s Frozen Berries

You are probably aware of the issue concerning hepatitis A contamination of some varieties of Nanna’s frozen berries. We would like to assure you that no one has been put at risk through this product at MECS. Within the last 4 months, frozen raspberries have been used for raspberry muffins (made by the canteen), but these did not use the brands affected by the contamination. We do have an unopened package of the Nanna’s raspberries that are being sent back to the supplier. We are thankful that we had not used them. You can rest assured that all is well for us at MECS in relation to this issue.

Prayer Chain

Are you a praying parent who would like to support our school community in this vital way? E-mail prayer@mecs.vic.edu.au and you will be added to our growing list of praying parents and receive regular e-mails with prayer needs for our community.
Term 1 Whole School Assembly

It was ‘standing room only’ at 10am on Friday morning when the community gathered for the very first Whole School Assembly for 2015. It was a wonderful opportunity to gather and commit the year ahead to the Lord.

What a blessing it was to see all students, teachers and visitors worshipping together in song under the able guidance of the Senior School Worship Band: Josh, Jono, Daniel, Sophie, Jess and Brenton.

Narelle spoke about the importance of having strong foundations. She used the analogy of the building of a sailing boat; a good boat builder takes a lot of time and care in the construction of the hull of a ship, for it is the construction of the hull that will determine if the ship can weather any storms. This was linked to the parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7. We were challenged to consider what we were building our lives on.

Our year level and tribal student leaders for 2015 were commissioned through prayer and were encouraged in their appointments and responsibilities for the year ahead.

We gained a snapshot of the Year 12 and Prep buddies for the year and said an early goodbye to the doe-eyed Preps as they were guided by the Year 12s back to their classrooms.

Colin gave some renewed insight into the reasons for and the meaning of each of the tribe names with a little Walpiri lesson in correct pronunciation.

And I, in my new position as Assistant Principal Secondary, had the privilege of keeping our audience engaged by bringing it all together. Never had I pictured that my role as Assistant Principal would involve being dressed in a hard hat, hi-vis vest, workboots, swimming cap, flippers and goggles all in one day.

What a blessing it is to be part of this community, so varied in its events and activities, yet united in purpose. I look forward to next term’s Whole School Assembly when we can all gather together again.

Karissa
Assistant Principal Secondary
Term 1 Whole School Assembly

Student Leaders

Cycle A
Jemimah
Daniel

Cycle B
Erin
Cooper

Year 9
Beth
Josh

Year 10
Ellie
Josh

Year 11
Jessica
Ethan

Year 12
Hannah
Joel

Wirri
Jordan
Jemima
Bec
Sam

Warlpa
Indy
Luke
Shannan
Ryan

Warlu
Ben
Jeneba
Courtney
Aaron

Walya
Jake
Emily
Asha
Justin

Tribe Meanings

The art panels now decorating the outer wall of the Gym have been created to demonstrate the enduring connection between the MECS community and our friends, the Warlpiri community at Yuendumu.

Each of our sport tribes’ names is a Warlpiri noun from the natural environment. The artworks have been selected to both reflect the sports tribes’ colours and convey a Jukurrpa that has some sort of relationship to the names.

Wirri
Wirri primarily means watercourse, gully, though it can refer to water. The blue panel, Ngapa Jukurrpa (Water Dreaming) by Shorty Jangala Robertson, depicts flood waters with curved lines.

Warlu
Warlu primarily means fire. The yellow panel, Warlu Jukurrpa (Fire Dreaming), is by Paddy Japaljarri Sims (1916 – 2010). The curvy lines depict the fire and flames spreading out across country. The Warlukurlangu art centre at Yuendumu is so named because of the community’s location in Fire Dreaming country.

Warlpa
Warlpa means wind or turbulent air. The white panel is another Ngapa Jukurrpa (Water Dreaming) by Shorty Jangala Robertson. It uses short bars to depict cumulus and stratocumulus clouds.

Walya
Walya means soil, sand, earth or land. The red panel, Pikilyi Jukurrpa (Vaughan Springs dreaming), is by Mary Napangardi Butcher. The painting evokes an image of the dry cracked earth.
MECS COMMUNITY NOTICES
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Homework Club
As of February 18, a lunch time homework club will be operating on Wednesdays in the Media Centre for all Middle School students. The Education Support Teacher will be there for guidance and feedback on homework tasks and assignments needing to be completed. All Middle School students are welcome to attend.

Ileana
Secondary Education Support Teacher

Hay for Sale
Good quality, ‘clean’ pasture, small square bales. $8/bale. Available now from Gladysdale (about 35mins from MECS, towards Warburton). Delivery possible at additional cost. Phone 5966 6059 or 0490 464 852.

Free Desk
Solid antique style desk (very heavy), 1600mm wide, 980mm deep, 800mm height.
Lovely old desk no longer needed.
Phone Nicola 0438 330 095 if interested.

Year 9 Project Help Needed
For one of our Year 9 projects, we are collecting items at the main office to help homeless people. Items such as;
- Winter Jackets/beanies/scarves
- Toiletries (e.g. toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, women’s sanitary items, etc.)
- Blankets (good repair)
- Canned goods (e.g. tomato soup, baked beans, etc.)
All items must be nonperishable, clean, in good repair and unused.
With our thanks,
Year 9 Students

Wandin Book Launch
The Wandin and District Historical Museum Society invite you to the launch of our new book: ‘Great Courage and Initiative’ - the Heroic Life of George Ingram VC,MM.
Sunday March 29, 2pm, Mont de Lancey Historical Homestead, 71 Wellington Rd, Wandin North.

First Working Bee
This Saturday 21 Feb, 7am-1pm
BBQ Breakfast

Notice details:
- Year 11 & 12 SAC Dates
- Kindergarten Hoodie Form
- Grandparents & Friends Day Invite (Spares in Office if needed)

Primary School GTs (assemblies) this term:
Week 5: Monday, 2 March SPUDS
Week 8: Monday, 23 March MPW
GT begins at 9am in the PUMP room. Parents are welcome to attend.

Primary School Grandparents & Special Friends’ Day
Thursday Mar 5, 9-11am