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What I ‘C’ is a crucial tool in our schools

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Recently a colleague, Dr Drasco Dizdar stated that an authentic way of being **Christian** was to be a **critical thinker**, be **compassionate**, be **contemplative** and **celebrate**. A successful Christian teacher (and/or a Making Jesus Real (MJR) practioner) definitely needs to include these critical components in their kit bag to ensure that Jesus Christ’s message is discovered, contemplated and continually used to inspire positive actions.

Having worked for many years in primary education within government, independent and Catholic schools, I have come to the conclusion that the school communities that focus on Jesus’ teachings and/or focus on the positive values we need now in our lives, are the most successful. Yep, not necessarily those with the best NAPLAN scores!

“An authentic way of being Christian was to be a critical thinker, be compassionate, be contemplative and celebrate.”

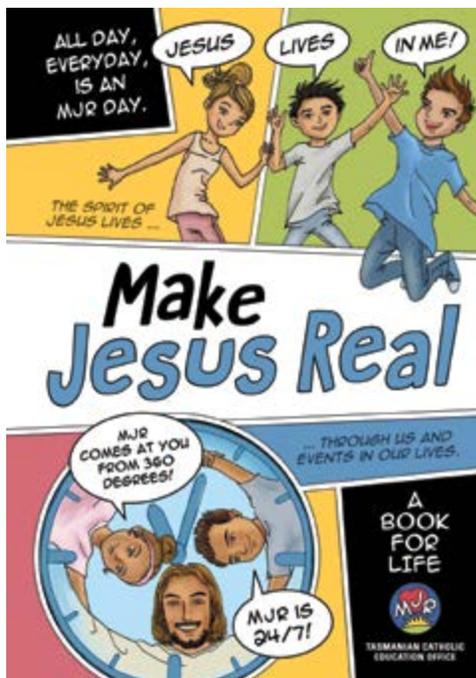


Figure 1. The MJR book resource

Make Jesus Real (MJR) is a values education resource written by Peter ‘Mitch’ Mitchell and published by Garratt Publishing. It is so much more than just 150 pages of excellent resources, it is ‘a way of life’ (nearly 6,000 booklets were sold in 2016!). ‘Mitch’ helps us to focus on ‘Jesus in the now’ and many pages help ignite conversations and dialogue that inquisitive young people are crying out for in this crazy, busy world.

Before we can *critically think*, we need to develop the *crucial* habit of *contemplation* and throughout the MJR book, and in MJR classes, students are taught to discover the power of reflection. This can be achieved by going to their ‘heart room’ at various times during the day or discovering the power of reflection after they have completed an activity. At the back of the book is a green tear-out sheet that states ‘Where was Jesus in my life today?’ A glow in the dark sticker is also available for this card and most students place this card on their bedside tables, so the last thing they see at the end of the day will be this reflective question.

Making good *choices* can be a bi-product of self-reflection and I often tell the positive story of a Grade3/4 student I taught who was extremely angry due to his parents splitting up. He was constantly in trouble, usually to do with anger management issues, and his mother was at school nearly every day. Eventually, after many meetings and some counselling sessions (including the Rainbows grief program), this student came to me and stated that “it is time I made better choices.” He consequently made such great choices that by Grade 6 his peers voted him School Captain and he showed amazing compassion by shaving his hair off in his final primary year to raise money for cancer research. Yes, this is evidence of ‘The Spirit of Jesus’ in action.

‘Mitch’ also very cleverly uses a large number of acronyms that ensure students and staff remember the crucial catch phrases that remind us of Jesus and his compassionate actions. For example, many schools across Australia have adopted the **WEST** acronym that stands for being **Welcoming, Encouraging**, able to say **Sorry** and

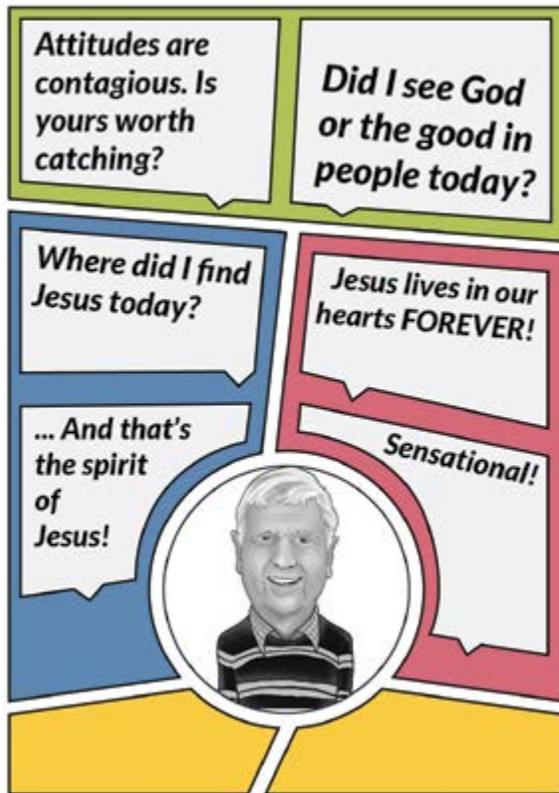


Figure 2. 'Mitch' (pictured) states a crucial component of MJR is to constantly remind the students and staff that they can see or create 'WGMs' - Walking God Moments. By constantly naming these special moments and highlighting them—our school has a special 'Dob in a Good Deed' Award—therefore everyone sees 'The Spirit of Jesus' (SOJ) at work.

Thank you. Plus it is important to remind those in our communities that attitudes are contagious, to look out for the goodness in others and to be a 'grinner and a winner not a moaner and a groaner'. The booklet also stresses that by forming positive habits of smiling, hi-fiving, thumbs up, winking and encouraging, students and staff can achieve amazing things for themselves and those around them?

So what are some of the effects an MJR approach can have on a person, a class, a school and/or a community? At the end of a recent two day, MJR Interstate conference, some participants stated:

- MJR is a deliberate way of being—actions, opening our hearts to Jesus.
- MJR—it's not just in school, taking it home to parents and the community is just as important.
- It allows kids to take Jesus and their faith into the playground and their lives.
- MJR is a perfect opportunity to be God's

hands on earth.

- Faith is a really important part of catholic (all embracing) schools. MJR has opened my eyes to see it. It's very real and it's about living it yourselves.
- MJR allows us to infuse Religion and the faith message in all subject areas.
- There is a deep connection with Jesus that can be developed through MJR.
- We are not just the face of Jesus, we are the vessels for the Spirit of Jesus (SOJ) and we can show that in our everyday lives.
- Through MJR we can engage all children, regardless of their faith, with their spirituality.
- It is easy to see the spirit of Jesus in others but we need to encourage the children to see the spirit of Jesus in ourselves as well.

Yes very powerful and deeply meaningful statements! So why are the 'MJRers' and their messages gathering momentum throughout Australia? Simple—it's because the students, staff and parents relate to the MJR core themes in their everyday lives. A group of teachers and students gathered in 2015 to review the booklet and they identified the following core themes of Making Jesus Real:

- Identifying the Spirit of Jesus and positive attitudes—God's Holy Spirit is expressed in Jesus, in our spirit, in class spirit, in school spirit—so lunch and recess can be crucial times to identify and highlight SOJ moments.
- MJR highlights attitudes similar to The Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12) e.g. be humble, be a peacemaker, be just
- WEST behaviours linked to Sacraments: Welcome (Baptism), Encourage (Confirmation), Sorry (Reconciliation) Thanks (Eucharist).
- Greet, Treat, Speak—GTS message in love, the Commandments, even at the Last Supper
- Givers and Takers, Moaners and Groaners - (sometimes we need a wake up call).
- God Moments—e.g. prayer and the wonder of creation.
- MJR is 24/7 and a 360 degrees viewing (coming from all angles).
- Close connection to the Pope's teachings.
- Reflection, prayer and self evaluation—e. g. attitudes, choices.

Also this meeting reiterated the need try to teach like Jesus did—for example he used parables and sometimes *challenging* stories from daily lives. Many MJR teachers use stories, images and whatever is near and current, including Internet and YouTube,

“*Through MJR we can engage all children, regardless of their faith, with their spirituality.*”

to emphasise a point. A perfect example of this is the “Catching Kayla” YouTube that clearly teaches about not giving up (NGU) and don’t take for granted (DTFG). Other inspirational people that the students relate to are Nick Vujicic and (<https://www.facebook.com/NickVujicic/>) and Turia Pitt (<http://turiapitt.com>). Teachers also strive to catch the God moments in the classroom, in the playground and outside our school communities often by noting or exclaiming “there’s the Spirit of Jesus” (SOJ). At St. Brigid’s Catholic School at New Norfolk, Tasmania they have a ‘Dob in a Good Deed’ award based on identifying the ‘SOJ’ moments in their community. Some examples may be as simple as informing a teacher about a special moment in the school ground, but there have been many touching moments from outside our school, in the community. A person, not connected to our school helped a student who was being hassled by another person. He stepped in and solved a potentially awkward situation so he was sent a ‘Dob in a Good Deed’ award, and he was stoked!

Many other schools in Australia have found ways to positively present the MJR message. St Andrew’s Primary Catholic School in N.S.W. has extended the WEST message to WESTIE which stands for Welcoming, Encouraging, able to say Sorry and Thank You plus being Interested and Enthusiastic. In 2016 St Andrew’s created a school theme of ‘See the Extraordinary’ in ourselves, others, and in the environment around us. This theme was designed and created in *collaboration* with the students, staff and community, and is steeped in MJR philosophy—that Jesus was (is) extraordinary.

So in summary

What is MJR? It is a school-based values education project, a philosophy for a whole school, instilling a positive culture based on the Gospel values. Rather than just being a Grade 5/6 teaching focus, it is fast becoming a strategy for the whole school. Peter Mitchell, in 2017, will have another resource for Grade 3 or 4 students called ‘The Spirit of Jesus’. These are a number of simple lessons trying to *connect* the students to Jesus and His beautiful stories and actions. The Kinder—Grade 2 teachers in Tasmania, are also developing resources called ‘My Friend Jesus’.

It is now my privilege to teach and promote the MJR message all over Tasmania and to many ‘mainlanders’. I am inspired by the students and staff, who continually find unique ways to connect the MJR philosophy to their Religious Education (RE) curriculum. One example is that a large number of teachers are integrating MJR philosophies within their RE planning as units such as *Jesus, Prayer and*

Christian Living— concepts that blend beautifully together. Also we are finding crucial connections with many other subject areas and especially to occurrences in students’ daily lives. It is amazing to hear how many past students still have their MJR book and/or the ‘Where was Jesus in my life today?’ green card, who revisit their journaling with fond memories.

Remember your positive attitude is contagious, so why not **Cs the moment** and further investigate how this marvellous resource can help you, your students and your communities connect to Jesus.

LIVE Jesus in your heart ---- FOREVER!

Biographical Note:

Marty Ogle has taught in Tasmania, The Northern Territory – Bathurst Island & Darwin, Western Australia – Perth & Kalgoorlie, New South Wales and The Philippines. He has been Principal, Assistant Principal (RE & Teaching) and is currently the Tasmanian State Project Officer: Make Jesus Real (MJR). He can be contacted at marty.ogle@catholic.tas.edu.au or by contacting the Tasmanian Catholic Office on 03 62108831.

Editor’s Notes:

1. Marty would like to thank Peter ‘Mitch’ Mitchell, Tony Brennan, Dr Drasco Dizdar and Garratt Publishing for their valued input into this article.
2. The ‘Make Jesus Real’ booklet can be purchased from garrattpublishing.com.au
3. Marty advises there will be a National 2017 MJR Conference on the Gold Coast (4th - 5th May 2017) and that a new website shares resources and updated information about MJR (www.makejesusreal.com.au).



Figure 3: Marty Ogle with students from Sacred Heart Primary School Launceston

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