

The Role of You Can Do It! Education In Serving the Mission of Catholic Education*

Michael E. Bernard, Ph.D.
Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia
Founder, You Can Do It! Education

The Second Vatican Council (1965) in its *Declaration on Christian Education* focused the mission of modern-day Catholic schools on the teaching of faith and the promotion of faith learning that is lifelong and life-giving. Of particular challenge in this mission is the role of the Catholic school as a place of integral education of the human person. The challenge of developing the human spirit is of utmost importance for Catholic schools in aiding the purpose of Christian life. It is the process of becoming fully human and fully alive that enables Jesus' mission to be fulfilled. In essence, Catholic Education is wholistic and seeks the integral formation of the entire person.

“The person of each individual human being in his or her material needs is at the heart of Christ's teaching: that is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.” (Pope John Paul II)

Christian Education is developmental and takes into account the gradual changes and growth people experience. Christian Education is social and is focused on the common good of society including the exercise of personal responsibility for the well being of the human community. It provides education that supports the full development of the child ensuring a balance between individual and societal needs.

St. Irenaeus, (200, AD) said that the glory of God was man fully alive. Christ was a man fully alive, aware, and able to look at and seek reform of the society in which he lived. Fully alive people are needed to continue His work. Catholic Education needs fully alive and fully human people to witness to and continue His work.

What is You Can Do It! Education (YCDI)?

Mission Statement

You Can Do It! Education (YCDI) is a philosophy, pedagogy and a set of programs that have as its' mission the fullest development of the human potential of all people. YCDI has been developed by Dr. Michael Bernard, a university professor and educational psychologist for over 20 years who has written over 30 books and who has worked throughout Australia, New Zealand, Spain, France, England, Wales, Canada and the United States. In working with young people, YCDI seeks to assist school, home and the community to lay the following foundations that foster the process of the gradual unfolding and development of the human potential.

Development of The Five Foundations

Confidence: having the belief in oneself that in face of new, challenging and difficult tasks and circumstances, one is more likely to be successful than to fail; being prepared to try and not be afraid of making mistakes or what others might think; accepting oneself in the face of setbacks and difficulties; being prepared to meet new people and to participate in activities where one might not be immediately successful.

Persistence: in the presence of difficult tasks and activities, expending sufficient energy and not giving up until one has achieved one's personal best and accomplished one's goal; understanding that in order to achieve success, sacrifices sometimes have to be made in the short-term; appreciating that the accomplishment of one's goals generally results from one's own efforts rather than forces beyond one's control.

Organization: having a purpose to be the best one can be; recognizing the importance of setting goals that are big in the long-term and realistic to accomplish in the short-term; appreciating the value of one's time and planning its use so that one has enough to accomplish one's goals; valuing the importance of knowing exactly what is expected of one in terms of school work and other obligations and when the obligations have to be accomplished; appreciating the importance of keeping track of one's important belongings including school and work supplies, important books and papers; and having them available when needed.

Getting Along: resolving conflicts successfully without becoming overly angry; working collaboratively; respecting important school and home rules; making and keeping friends; having social interest including being tolerant and not judging others who are different and helping others who are less fortunate.

Resilience: knowing how to stop myself from getting extremely angry, down, or worried when something "bad" happens. It means being able to calm down and feel better when I get very upset. It also means being able to control my behaviour when I am very upset.

A set of 12 positive Habits of the Mind have been enumerated that help nourish and support the development of these 4 Foundations: Accepting Myself, Taking Risks, Being Independent, I Can Do It! Giving Effort, Working Tough, Setting Goals, Planning My Time, Being Tolerant of Others, Thinking First, Playing By the Rules. Being socially responsible.

Elimination of the Barriers that Block the Development of Human Potential

YCDI's work is also based on the view that extensive human misery, suffering and social injustice is rooted in negative dispositions of people that manifest themselves in irrational and negative attitudes and beliefs that give rise to what are called the 4 Blockers. YCDI's seeks to eliminate the 4 Blockers that put people "at risk" and prevent all forms of spiritual and cognitive-affective-behavioral growth: Low Self-Esteem/Anxiety, General Work Avoidance, General Disorganization, Rebelliousness/Anger.

A set of 12 negative Habits of the Mind have been found to feed the 4 Blockers: Self-Downing, Needing to Be Perfect, Needing Approval, I Can't Be Bothered, Giving Up, Having No Goals, Planning Time Poorly, Being Intolerant of Others, Acting Without Thinking, Being Intolerant of Limits, being socially irresponsible.

Goals of You Can Do It! Education Programs

1. Developing school-wide culture of success and social-emotional-behavioral well-being
2. Implementing of student personal development curricula that eliminate 4 Blockers (negative Mindset) including irrational, negative Habits of the Mind and the development of the 4 Foundations including rational, positive Habits of the Mind.
3. Classroom-teaching-learning that infuses foundations for success and social-emotional-behavioral health into academic curriculum.
4. Parent education programs that present to parents directions they can take at home to support their children's success and social-emotional well-being.
5. Learning mentoring programs that target specific children with large educational needs and which develop their foundations for success and social-emotional-behavioral well-being.
6. Early childhood curricula that instills in young children the Habits of the Mind and 4 Foundations that support the development of their full potential.

Catholic Education and You Can Do It! Education

Over the past few years, Catholic educators, dioceses and Catholic Schools throughout Australia, New Zealand, Spain, France, England, Wales, Canada and the United States, have broadly supported YCDI.

In New Zealand, the National Coordinator of Catholic Education, Brother Pat Lynch, has endorsed YCDI as helping fulfill the mission of Catholic Education. In Australia, numerous dioceses (e.g., Broome, Perth, Cairns, Brisbane, Bendigo) have turned to YCDI as a pedagogy that helps them fulfill the mission of Catholic Education and, in particular, meet the growing pastoral care needs of young people today. In Spain and the Canary Islands, You Can Do It! Education resources have been translated by educators at the Colegio Montserrat in Barcelona and YCDI programs have been adopted in a number of schools run by the Missionary Daughters of the Sacred Family of Nazareth. In England, many individual Catholic schools are participating in YCDI training in order to introduce aspects of YCDI's philosophy, pedagogy and programs at primary and secondary schools. In France, the Lasalle brothers Teacher Training Institute in France supported training of its' professors in YCDI. In North America, Catholic schools are just beginning to discover how YCDI functions to fulfill the mission of Catholic Education.

The Many Functions of You Can Do It! Education in Catholic Education

The Role of the Family is Empowered

The role of the Catholic school is to collaborate with parents, the children's first and continuing teachers, in the Catholic education of their children. In YCDI, beginning with the pre-school years and earlier, parents are provided with educational programs, guidance including parenting skills for developing home environments that support and nurture children's development and emotional well-being. Specifically, parents are guided in basic principles of parenting that research indicates as promoting the full development of their child. Those same principles can be used by parents to assist in promoting the spiritual development of their children.

YCDI's parent programs provide an opportunity for parents to learn, change and develop healthy relationships with their children. For some, the positive dispositions taught in YCDI's parent education offer hope and the opportunity to change the negative cycle in which they are caught.

The Role of Teachers in Catholic Education is Strengthened: Integration of Academic and Pastoral Care Function of Teaching Profession

The Catholic teacher in a Catholic School is this witness to children in the "precious time of childhood." This is the time for when the foundations are laid for the way children view themselves as learners, as achievers, as group members, as people...to achieve this teachers must have faith in themselves, in all children, not just the high-flyers, and in their ability to make the changes that matter. Their practice must rest on a clearly articulated set of values and beliefs –about children, their needs and the best way to meet those needs.

The extent to which the Catholic school achieves its' purpose depends chiefly on the role and success of teachers. The relationship between the teacher and student is of enormous importance. YCDI strengthens teacher-student relationships including communication and respect. It does so through its' unique pedagogy including the tools and values teachers offer students throughout the ethos of the school and classroom.

Specifically, by showing students how personal and interpersonal attitudes and competences contribute to their academic achievement, emotional well-being and social relationships, teachers are assisted in YCDI in infusing the religious dimension in all aspects of school life.

Teachers in Catholic Education also see YCDI as part of accreditation for religious education.

Pastoral Care in Catholic Education is Supported

Pastoral Care in Catholic schools assists every member or group in the school community to develop his/her potential. YCDI as a pastoral care approach is committed to students' development as fully integrated people. YCDI adds to existing Pastoral Care programs, structures and specialist personnel by providing an array of objectives and competencies that are necessary to ensure that the specific pastoral needs of those in the community are met in a systematic fashion.

In a Catholic context, particularly for children with low self-esteem, it would be much more difficult to develop their faith. By teaching Accepting Myself as a value in its' pastoral care program, YCDI helps children experience their dignity as people and accept that they have God given value and meaning.

The Spiritual Ethos of Catholic Schools is Extended

One of the differences between Catholic education and Public education systems is the importance of the spiritual in addition to the academic, emotional and interpersonal in the development of the whole child. The 4 Foundations taught in YCDI show that the wholistic development of the child cannot be confined to specific subjects or areas in the school, but must permeate the culture of the school. This agrees with the understanding of Catholic education as enlivening the whole culture of the school in developing the child's innate potential.

The Curriculum of Catholic Schools Is Enhanced

In Catholic Education, the curriculum is viewed as the sum of the school-directed experience of students. The curriculum needs not only to promote academic learning (e.g., literacy, numeracy, technology) but should be informed by principles of Christian love, to serve the variety of student needs and abilities of students in a Catholic School setting. YCDI's student development curricula affords students the opportunity to acquire life skills, attitudes values and beliefs that will assist young people's academic success as well as their social-emotional well-being.

The Mission of Catholic Education in Helping Those Less Fortunate and Needy Is Assisted

The Catholic school is a school for all with special attention not reserved to Catholics only but to those who are weakest. A values education such as provided in YCDI may be the only hope for children who come from home backgrounds without proper shelter, safety and nourishment. Development of faith without proper values, such as those taught in YCDI, is very difficult.

The Mission of Catholic Education in Helping Marginalized Families Acquire Social Capital Is Aided

The Catholic school desires to be seen by marginalized families not only as in essence the face of Christ for the whole community, but also as a safe and welcome haven for helping their children adjust to the prevailing social milieu. Catholic schools attempt to meet marginalized including immigrant family's need for the transmission of culture as well as of faith by offering an education not only based on Christian values but one which strives for the wholistic development of each young person. YCDI assists Catholic schools in helping these families and their children acquire the life tools necessary for success in school and beyond as well as for sound social-emotional development.

The Mission of Catholic Education to Serve One Another Better, to Improve Society and Help Address Injustice Is Assisted

In helping children be all that they can be enables Catholic schools realize its mission of social justice. YCDI helps to heal and liberate a person to transcend themselves by eliminating negative dispositions that result in poor psychological health, disaffection and under-achievement and by developing positive dispositions that promote success and social-emotional-behavioral well-being. YCDI helps nurture 'right-mindedness' by providing all members of the community with the tools for seeing and making life the way it can be. YCDI, in helping people develop their intellectual and reasoning capacities opens up their capacity to love and be loved; to free and be free.

“We cannot grow spiritually if we ignore our humanness, just as we cannot become fully human if we ignore spirituality.” (Jean Vanier)

* This document prepared with the advice and guidance of: Kerry Bird, the Diocese of Cairns, QLD; Dr. Margaret Carter, Educational Consultant, Brisbane Catholic Education; Kath Heagney, Principal, St. Mary's College, Broome, Western Australia; Kate Haydock, University of Notre Dame (Australia) - Broome Campus, Western Australia; Sister Mary Elizabeth Galt, Department of Catholic Schools, the Diocese of Los Angeles, CA, USA.