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this month's interview

ERIN WEDGE

PRINCIPAL

MARY MACKILLOP COLLEGE, BRISBANE, QLD

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A LIFE DEDICATED TO LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN.

"Change works best when people understand the why behind it, and when they're given the opportunity to contribute to the how."

For Erin Wedge, Principal of Mary MacKillop College in Nundah, the desire to teach began early.

Early aspirations and the love of teaching.

As a child, she created her own classroom settings in the backyard, gathering local children and leading lessons with chalkboard in hand. It wasn't just a pastime but the start of a vocation shaped by a deep passion for learning and a natural ability to lead.

After graduating from Australian Catholic University, Erin began her career in primary education, inspired by influential teachers from her own schooling.

Her early experiences in the classroom confirmed her belief in the power of education to transform lives. Motivated by an insatiable curiosity and drive for excellence, she quickly realised that her ambitions extended beyond the classroom, and that leadership would become a central thread in her career.

Embracing leadership: A steady ascent.

Erin's progression into leadership was both deliberate and organic, fuelled by a passion for pedagogy and a desire to influence educational practice more broadly.

This role led to a foundational leadership position at St Augustine's in Springfield, where she contributed to establishing a new school within Brisbane Catholic Education. She later transitioned into a system-level position as an Education Officer, working closely with teachers and school leaders to support curriculum design and pedagogical practice. Erin describes this pivotal phase as a period where she was not only helping to shape learning experiences for students but also mentoring educators and contributing to broader strategic conversations within Catholic education.

Following this, she held leadership positions across several schools- including a return to Nudgee College as Dean of Identity and later as Assistant Principal - Senior Years at St Eugene's. Each role added new dimensions to her leadership repertoire.

Her appointment as Deputy Principal, and then Principal at Mary MacKillop College, represents the culmination of years spent developing a leadership style centred on collaboration, reflection and purpose.

A passion for theology and life-long study.

Erin's academic journey is characterised by a deep intellectual curiosity and a commitment to continual learning. After her undergraduate studies, she pursued a Master of Education, followed by a Master of Religious Education and Theology, and later a Master of Educational Leadership.

Her thirst for knowledge also led to the opportunity to study and live in the United States which proved to be a transformative experience as she immersed herself in global perspectives on faith, education and leadership. Her theological studies were not just professional undertakings but deeply personal explorations.

For Erin, theology invites big questions such as why we're here, how we live well, how we connect with others and these reflections have informed her leadership philosophy. Her study journey was never about collecting credentials, but about pursuing meaning and bringing intellectual depth to her practice as a Catholic educator.

"You're driving curriculum and culture while also staying grounded in the day-to-day of teaching."

"My job isn't to make the difference in the classroom - it's to create the space where teachers can."

Empowering young women: A driving purpose.

At the core of Erin's leadership is a strong commitment to empowering young women. For her, the purpose of education is not only academic excellence but also equipping students with the confidence, resilience and ethical foundation to lead meaningful lives. She views her role as an opportunity to shape the future by shaping the next generation.

Erin is acutely aware of the unique challenges facing girls in today's world. From the pressures of social media to the pace of technological change, she believes schools must do more than deliver content and must aim to create safe, nurturing environments where girls can find their voice and define their identity.

"We have a responsibility to help young women navigate the complexities of a world that is vastly different from the one we grew up in," she explains. "It's about helping them become confident, self-aware and capable contributors to society."

Through strategic programs, a values-driven culture, and a focus on wellbeing, Mary MacKillop College under Erin's leadership seeks to create spaces where young women are not only seen and heard, but celebrated and empowered.

Navigating challenges with compassion and clarity.

While Erin expresses genuine joy in her role, she does not shy away from acknowledging its challenges. She describes the current educational landscape as increasingly complex, with rapid societal change, rising mental health concerns, and shifting expectations placing pressure on both students and educators.

One of her key concerns is the decline in interpersonal skills and emotional regulation-trends she believes are partially fuelled by digital overload. "We're seeing less face-to-face communication and a growing difficulty in managing emotions," she notes. In response, Erin sees Catholic schools as having a particular responsibility to foster emotional intelligence and moral development, alongside academic growth.

Another challenge lies in supporting families who are themselves navigating unfamiliar terrain. With new technologies and cultural dynamics reshaping how young people grow and learn, Erin recognises that many parents are unsure how to support their daughters. She views the school as a crucial partner in helping families find clarity, connection and confidence in the midst of uncertainty.

From middle leadership to principalship: Lessons learned.

Reflecting on her leadership journey, Erin holds a deep respect for the role of middle leaders within schools. She refers to these positions as "the backbone of the school", requiring individuals to balance operational responsibilities with strategic influence. "You're managing up and down," she explains. "You're driving curriculum and culture while also staying grounded in the day-to-day of teaching."

Her own time as an Assistant Principal across various contexts proved invaluable, allowing her to develop a nuanced understanding of leadership in action. These roles, she suggests, are ideal training grounds for future principals, providing the space to experiment, reflect and refine one's leadership identity. They also highlight the importance of adaptability, empathy and thoughtful decision-making-skills that now serve her daily in leading a whole school community.

Leading through change with vision and inclusion.

For Erin, leadership is inseparable from change. Whether initiating innovation or responding to external demands, she believes that leaders must approach change with clarity, inclusivity and humility. Her method is anchored in building consensus, inviting collaboration, and respecting the wisdom within her team.

"I'm not interested in authoritarian leadership," she reflects. "Change works best when people understand the why behind it, and when they're given the opportunity to contribute to the how." Even when system-mandated changes arise, Erin is intentional about inviting staff into the process. She strategically identifies early adopters, includes critical voices, and facilitates open dialogue to ensure genuine buy-in.

Her approach demonstrates that effective leadership is not about imposing directives, but about cultivating ownership and collective momentum. "It takes time," she acknowledges, "but the results are stronger, more sustainable and more aligned with the values of the community."

“It’s not about being the smartest person in the room, it is about utilising the wisdom in the room and building others up.”

Finding balance: Health, support, and self-awareness.

Balancing the demands of school leadership with personal wellbeing is an ongoing challenge, but one Erin tackles with intention. She prioritises physical health, regular exercise, sleep, and time with her family. Even short moments of downtime whether that be swimming, walking, or catching up with friends are vital in helping her recharge and stay grounded. Erin also places immense value on her support network.

Her College Leadership Team is a trusted circle that helps her remain focused and reflective, while long-standing friendships with colleagues from previous roles offer both perspective and encouragement. She refers to this network as her “cheer squad” which is a concept she actively shares with students to help them understand the importance of relational support.

“I often talk to the girls about who’s in their cheer squad,” she says. “Leadership, like life, isn’t something you do alone. You need people around you who share your vision and can challenge and support you along the way.”

Advice for aspiring leaders.

When asked what advice she would offer those considering leadership, Erin is clear: invest in relationships. For her, leadership is fundamentally relational-it’s about trust, communication and empowering others to thrive. Without authentic connections, even the most well-intentioned initiatives are unlikely to succeed.

She also highlights the importance of emotional intelligence. “Self-reflection, self-restraint and humility are critical,” she says. “You need to be able to manage your own emotions, adapt to different personalities, and let go of ego. It’s not about being the smartest person in the room, it is about utilising the wisdom in the room and building others up.”

Erin encourages aspiring leaders to engage with both theory and practice, taking inspiration from leadership literature while remaining grounded in the realities of school life. “I’ve always loved reading leadership books and then asking myself, how could this work in my context?” Her approach is one of curiosity and experimentation, always driven by a desire to grow and serve.

Supporting and retaining teachers.

Teacher wellbeing and retention are top priorities for Erin and her leadership team. She recognises the increasing administrative burden and emotional load carried by educators and is committed to reducing this where possible. “Whatever we can do to give teachers time back, we will do,” she explains.

This includes creative scheduling solutions such as repurposing assembly time for planning and investing in targeted support such as planning days with Education Officers.

More broadly, the approach is relational and responsive. Rather than issuing blanket policies, Erin and her team seek to understand individual needs and collaborate on solutions.

“It’s about working with teachers, not over them,” she notes. “They are professionals, and they know what they need. Our role is to listen, support and advocate for them.” By fostering a culture of trust and professional respect, Erin aims to ensure that teachers feel valued, empowered and energised in their roles.

"Leadership, like life, isn't something you do alone. You need people around you who share your vision and can challenge and support you along the way."

What are you most proud of?

"I'm proud of my family and really proud of the school. I'm proud of the girls and what they do. All of those things fill my bucket. I am probably most proud of that sense of community.

I'm proud of the work that we've done as a leadership team to really build community. I just feel that there's been a lot of good work in recent times and we are starting to see the fruits of that work at the moment.

I am also proud of the way we are able to influence and shape the young girls in our care.

We strive to create a generation of girls to know that they have a voice and that they are seen and they are heard - they can be empowered and they can be bold and hopeful in their future."

MARY MACKILLOP COLLEGE

Erin Wedge is the Principal of Mary MacKillop College, Brisbane, QLD