

MEDIA RELEASE

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Dictionary of Australian Catholic educators launches public lecture

Australia's only dictionary dedicated to preserving the stories of Catholic educators since Australian colonial settlement has launched its first public lecture.

The [Biographical Dictionary of Australian Catholic Educators](#) (BDACE) has published 130 fascinating biographies of lay, ordained, and consecrated men and women working in Catholic education since 1820.

The BDACE's public lecture continues the work of honouring Australian Catholic educators throughout history.

Former executive director of the NSW Catholic Education Commission, Dr Brian Croke, delivered the inaugural public lecture hosted by ACU's La Salle Academy on 14 August at the North Sydney Campus.

A tireless promoter of Catholic educator biographies and an accomplished historian of Byzantine and Classical Studies, Dr Croke was the original architect of the BDACE and the project's first sponsor.

He said the BDACE held the stories of inspiring leaders, like [Dominican priest Fr John Neill](#) who helped establish the University of Notre Dame Australia, or teacher-turned-rock star [Sr Janet Mead](#) who in 1974 released the Grammy nominated 'The Lord's Prayer'.

Not only did the BDACE immortalise the predecessors of Australia's Catholic education workforce – which totals 50,000 Catholic school teachers – Dr Croke said the project documented the history of the sector from colonial times.

However additional support was needed to ensure the project could "realise its full potential as a tool for research and a record of history".

"The BDACE needs your stories, from your school, your family, your community," Dr Croke said.

In his lecture, Dr Croke also gave a brief history of the changes to Catholic education in Australia, from the initial lay-led approach during colonial times to a dominant teaching force of professed women religious and Brothers.

Dr Croke said despite significant changes to the governance of Catholic schools, today's teachers continue the significant mission of educating all.

"Teachers make the school," Dr Croke said.

"Teachers make the difference. This project can grow if you help it grow. Looking ahead, what will your role be in preserving the memory?"

Dr Croke encouraged the audience to identify educators worth profiling, including teachers, parents, or family members of contributors.

Dean of ACU's La Salle Academy, Br David Hall, commented on the treasure trove of biographies in the BDACE, and put a spotlight on two that were emblematic of all the other biographies.

“Fr Joseph Slattery, a Vincentian priest who taught at St Stanislaus’ College in Bathurst, is credited with the first use in Australia of an x-ray for medical purposes, as well as constructing the first wireless set west of the Blue Mountains,” Br Hall said.

“Another was Noni Mitchell, a medical doctor who became a Loretto sister and who helped write the official science textbook for teachers in NSW schools.”

The BDACE is a work of ACU’s Faculty of Theology and Philosophy. The project is headed by General Editor Dr Jo Laffin and consultants Dr Anne Benjamin and Seamus O’Grady.

Read the biographies at the [Biographical Dictionary of Catholic Educators website](#) or contribute ideas for new entries at bdace@acu.edu.au.

Photos of the inaugural public lecture for the Biographical Dictionary of Australian Catholic Educators are available on request.

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