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TEACH JOURNAL
OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

DOES MINDFULNESS HAVE A PLACE?
In Christian schools?

READING IN MINECRAFT
An alpha generation study

YOUNG ADULT CANCER NARRATIVES
Issues with voicing illness

PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS
Educational employee perceptions

Ministry Of Teaching

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TEACH is a journal that includes both refereed and non-refereed articles on various aspects of Christian education. It publishes articles of teaching and professional practice; educational administration; research and scholarship; and contains the reflections, impressions and experiences of Christian educators.

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Cover
Esther a Grade 10 student at Prescott College was a participant in creating a frog habitat

Photography
Prescott image file

CONTENTS

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Caption: David Martin, physical education teacher at Macquarie College, enthusiastically welcomes students. Photography: NNSW Adventist Education image bank.

EDITORIAL

Graeme Perry

Optimising student learning is an important goal of Christian education. It is suggested the strongest contribution teachers can make to improving student learning is to adopt a research-evidence based teaching system (The Gonski 2.0 Review, cited in Ballantyne, 2018a). In particular:

> **Pedagogical practices must be contemporary and evidence-based, and teachers must have the resources and expertise to update their methods to those practices proven effective by current research. … Crucially, schools need to help teachers seize any opportunity to work collaboratively and review their own teaching practices.**

TEACH aims to facilitate collaborative exchange of evidence-based classroom understandings, innovative practice and researched findings.

Wooton (cited in Ballantyne, 2018b) asserts the 20% of students that are disengaged in schooling are performing at levels 1 to 2 years behind peers, "What's more, our students are facing serious mental health issues, with one in seven primary aged students reporting mental health problems" (para. 5, 6)

Meta-analysis of research asserts a potential partial pedogogical solution for "mindfulness practice is associated with a 16 per cent increase in academic performance and mental health for practicing students relative to peers" (para. 8) and "strong improvements in attention, reduced stress, anxiety and depression" (para. 7).

Bree Hills in this issue (p. 4) asks, "Does mindfulness have a place in a Christian school"? Why does the question arise? Two issues emerge, firstly, "Is it an appropriate practice"? Ludvik (2017) sensitively addressed the potential perception of "pushing" specific wisdom traditions, yet formulated a neuroscience informed secular curriculum publishing *Positively Transforming Minds within Educational Systems* in 2018. The purpose was to address the second issue arising, "Is omitting mindfulness practices in schools a missed opportunity for enhancing wellbeing?" Hills also addresses this possibility, however locates 'mindfullness' within a focus "not on self or even on emptying the mind of self, but on God". She describes her school's program *Your Mind Matters*– describing observed positive outcomes. This resolution to utilise mindfulness aligns with Rhodes' discussion of Basil's willingness to draw from the education system of antiquity, compared to Titian's more conservative rejection of all non-Christian sources and their knowledge (p. 46).

Two additional articles draw on neuroscience to improve student engagement in classrooms. Kingston (p. 9) offers advice on gaining attention and also habit formation, with specific implications for practice. A 'time in' strategy for supporting challenged wellbeing in indigenous students, is recounted and recommended by Walsh and Christian (p. 14).

Enhancing wellbeing for students and staff through school restructuring that enables service learning, is explained by principal Charleson (p. 16), including impacts on happiness, intergenerational relationships and development of new (old) skills.

Evidence for effective learning from two contemporary resources—*Minecraft* as either 'out of school' or 'in school' reading support (Taylor & Hattingh, p. 29), and *The Fault in Our Stars* a cancer narrative example of young adult literature (Lounsbury et al., p. 37)—informs readers of their potential educational application and impact.

Aitchison's invitation to reflect in *As Light Lingers* models attitudes of 'mind maintenance' spirituality, essential for Christian professional wellbeing. You see, optimising student learning, that important goal of Christian Education, is moderated by the level of care achieved for our welfare as well. TEACH

> *"mindfulness practice is associated with a 16 per cent increase in academic performance and mental health for practicing students relative to peers"*

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[Photography: Glenys Perry]

Does mindfulness have a place in a Christian school? One school's experience and reflections

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Key words: Mindfulness, Christian mindfulness, wellbeing, mental health, preventative programs, attention, focus

Introduction

It is a typical classroom in an Australian primary school. The children are not at their desks. They are lying on the floor with their eyes closed. Their teacher is guiding them through a mindfulness exercise. This is a trend that is growing in popularity as schools search out ways to address the mental health issues that are increasingly impacting the lives of Australian children in negative ways.

> *Schools are increasing taking a proactive role in students' wellbeing. … Mindfulness is one strategy … with evidence of positive results*

Wellbeing and mental health of school age children have become a priority in the recent years. The challenges facing children in the twenty-first century have a variety of implications on their mental health and wellbeing. Unfortunately with the current Australian Curriculum requirements, our schools' time and resources are restricted in what they can allocate to the development of children's social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. However, with current research identifying teachers and schools as key to the identification and prevention of mental health and wellbeing disorders, schools are increasingly taking a proactive role in students' wellbeing by using positive interventions. Mindfulness is one strategy that is gaining popularity in schools with evidence of positive results for children. In this context, Canberra Christian School decided to explore the idea of Christian mindfulness, its differences to secular mindfulness, and what benefits it may bring to a Christian school.

Children and mental health

Children today live in a world that is rapidly changing, developing and growing at an extremely fast pace (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 22). Sandstorm and Huerta (2013) demonstrate how this rapid change to family structures, technologies and academic requirements places children in a challenging and stressful age and has a significant impact on their mental wellbeing.

Thornton (2011, p. 9) proposes that "an individual's mental wellbeing, whether they are an infant, child, adolescent or adult, significantly influences their ability to function in and with society". Therefore, it is very important for each child to develop a positive/healthy mental wellbeing to successfully face today's personal and social challenges. Mental health and wellbeing is defined by Wallace (2011, p. 4) as "the achievement of expected developmental milestones and the establishment of effective coping skills, secure attachments, and positive social relationships." With this definition in mind it is important to understand the challenges that children face if they have poor mental health.

In 2015 the Department of Health in Canberra completed one of the largest Australian studies into children's mental health, The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. This report provides a comprehensive picture of the major mental health and wellbeing issues that affect children today. The report states that "one in seven (13.9%) 4-17 year-olds was assessed as having mental disorders in the previous twelve months. This is equivalent to 560,000 Australian children and adolescents" (Lawrence, et al., 2015, p. 4). These mental health issues encompass areas of depression, ADHD, anxiety and emotional/behavioral problems. According to Lawrence et al. (2015) and Wallace (2011) the percentage of children facing mental health disorders has remained arguably static for the past ten years; however, the way in which mental health and wellbeing are addressed and supported has changed significantly. Schools, for example, have been clearly identified as on-the-front-line to identify and address these mental health challenges for children through their social and personal development (Thornton, 2011 p. 13); however, schools' and teachers' ability to support children in this area is limited due to curriculum requirements and an already overcrowded school timetable.

One voice speaking in favour of a more accommodating curriculum is Masters (2015), who criticizes the practice of teaching subjects in isolation with a focus on academic achievement. This he claims, reduces time available for the social, spiritual and personal development of each child. Faull (2012) agrees, adding that pastoral care in these areas is insufficient. This is a concern as it is "critically important to detect and treat mental challenges as early as possible in order to reduce the impact they can have on children during key developmental stages of their lives" (Telethon Kids Institute, 2015, p. 5). With the growing academic requirements outlined in the Australian Curriculum teachers are already struggling to find time for all of the learning, activities and assessments for each subject.

In the midst of this mental health epidemic, where problems, left unnoticed and untreated, can considerably "change the course of a child's entire life" (Telethon Kids Institute, 2015, p. 5), it is important to consider the best way to address these issues. A paradigm shift from addressing the symptoms to preventing the causes is supported by Graetz et al. (2008, p. 14) who reinforce that "intervening early to prevent or lessen the impact of mental health difficulties can result in enormous benefits to the child and family which are often sustained over time".

With the shift to preventative programs in schools there have been a large variety of approaches developed to specifically focus on children's personal, social and mental wellbeing within the confines of the school curriculum and timetable. Whole school programs with outcomes to develop students' social and emotional skills are being implemented in a range of schools (Graetz et al, 2008). One of the classroom-based skills programs gaining attention in this area is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is a program approach "that is being used with increased frequency and receiving mainstream acceptance around the world as a means to enhance both students' and teachers' wellbeing" (Albrecht, Albrecht, Patricia, Cohen, & Marc, 2012, p. 2).

Mindfulness in schools

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that focuses on being acutely aware of one's emotions and feelings and focusing on the inner self. It includes activities such as regulated breathing and guided imagery. Research identifies the following benefits of mindfulness: calmness, reduced stress and lowered anxiety levels (Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Rix & Bernay, 2014; Volanen, et al., 2016). Salzman and Goldin (2008, p. 155) add to this list with "improved attention and emotional reactivity" and improvements in some areas of meta-cognition. Unfortunately the majority of the research supporting mindfulness in schools focuses on secular schools and is devoid of any religious connection. There is some current research that alludes to spirituality in mindfulness (St. Clair, 2016), and conversely, research into ensuring there is no religious connection with mindfulness (Jennings, 2016). However, there is very limited research in relation to mindfulness in Christian schools as well as Christian focused mindfulness techniques suitable for using with children.

What is Christian Mindfulness?

The concept of mindfulness appears to divide Christians. Many Christians avoid mindfulness practices and believe there is no place for applying mindfulness in Christian schools. Their reasoning is that mindfulness requires children to empty their mind and focus internally. This practice is confirmed in Kabat-Zinn's (2003) definition of mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (p. 145). This secular definition is used as the foundation of many school based mindfulness preventative programs. Other Christians embrace mindfulness practices with no thought as to whether its core premise aligns with Christian beliefs.

> *Christian mindfulness … [is] a state of active, open, nonjudgmental attention … where the focus lies … on God*

Taking an approach closer to Calhoun's (2005, p. 114) which defines Christian mindfulness as "a state of active, open, nonjudgmental attention", what sets Christian mindfulness apart is where the focus lies. The focus is not on self or even on emptying the mind of self, but on God. Children are encouraged to direct their attention to God and fill their minds with thoughts of God. Christian mindfulness does not ask children to empty their minds but asks them to think and meditate on "God's Word, praying and asking God to give understanding by the Spirit, who has promised to lead us 'into all truth' (John 16:13)" (Koranteng-Pipim, 2009, para. 27). White (1892, p. 106) highlights the importance of the techniques of active meditation, focused thought and prayer. She explains that "meditating upon Him [God] elevates the soul and quickens the affections". The focus of Christian mindfulness is on an awareness of God and individuals' relationships with Him. Its key practices leads to attitudes of trust, acceptance and compassion towards self and others, and gratitude for the gift of God's grace (Smith, 2017). Finley (2012, n.p.) agrees, stating that Christian meditation "is always rooted in God's word, His works, and His ways; and anchored in His character, majesty, love and power." He states that biblical meditation is active, not passive, and outward,

Teaching & Professional Practice

not inward looking. “Christian meditation thus focuses our thoughts on the grandeur and greatness of God, lifting us from what is around us and within us to what is above us” (Finley, 2012, n.p.) Therefore, although the practices used for Christian mindfulness are similar in technique to secular mindfulness, they are very different in focus and attention, and as we planned our techniques, we were very intentional about making God the focus of each session.

How we implemented Christian Mindfulness

At Canberra Christian School we asked ourselves the question, Could we create a Christian mindfulness program as part of our wellbeing program? We decide we could, and we called our program, “*Your Mind Matters – Attention and Focus for the Christian Classroom*”. Initially, we trialed a daily ten minute session in two classes for ten weeks. Our aim was for children to access the benefits of attention and focus (mindfulness) practices in the secure context of Christian beliefs. Each practice and technique encouraged students to pay attention to their environment and reflect on the amazing world God has created for them as well their personal relationship with Him. We also created a poster that acted as a visual reminder to teachers and students where the focus for this program lay (see Figure 1).

Through this preventative mindfulness program the children learnt about and practiced techniques from the following areas (see Figure 1).

- God gave me Five Senses. These strategies allowed students to explore their feelings, emotions and connection to God through their senses.
- God gave me Friends and Family. These strategies focused on relationships with an emphasis on gratitude to God.
- God gave me Strength to Choose. These strategies focused on behaviour and making good choices.

This is what our Christian mindfulness program looked like. Each day, the grades 3-6 teachers led a ten minute session with their class which focused on one of the key areas from Figure 1. All of these were quiet time activities, but not all were restricted to the classroom. Each teacher chose a Christian mindfulness activity from a broad range of mindfulness activities we developed, and which were intentionally linked to God.

Christian mindfulness activities in the category of *God gave me 5 senses* included, for example, breathing exercises, nature walks, focused listening and a 5 five senses snack. In the group *God gave me friends and family*, children participated in a gratitude photo activity and other Christian mindfulness strategies designed to raise awareness of the special people God has placed in their lives. Resources including glitter jars and colouring sheets were used along with a prepared script to encourage children to focus on the area *God gave me strength to choose*.

> *At the end of the ten week period … We observed a change in our classrooms to a calmer atmosphere.*

What we observed

At the end of the ten week period this is what we observed.

We observed a change in our classrooms to a calmer atmosphere.

Teachers commented that this was especially highlighted in the hour or so after the ‘focus technique of the day’ was completed. We also noticed that students came to enjoy their quiet time.

We observed a change of perception towards Christian mindfulness.

Both teachers and students went on a journey as we introduced the ten minute sessions. One participating teacher, on commencement of the program, had significant reservations about the appropriateness and usefulness of such a program as ‘Your Mind Matters’. Her perception and understanding changed markedly by the completion of the ten week program with her stating, “*I think this term has been great for learning about Christian Mindfulness. I’m looking forward to achieving more with Christian Mindfulness next term*.”

We observed increasing engagement in Christian Mindfulness.

It was a hesitant start for both the teachers and students; however, after the first three fundamental lessons both the teachers and students were very keen to participate each day. There were two key students who struggled to engage with some of the techniques, which was insightful for the teacher as this allowed her to follow up separately and discuss any concerns the students were having. Overall, teachers remarked how engaged their students were. One student commented, “*The Christian Mindfulness program has been a wonderful blessing. I have been able to wind down in the middle of the day and let my body and mind focus on God*” while another offered the opinion that “*Christian Mindfulness is interesting and I think it’s about paying attention to the small good things and thanking God for them*.”

We observed increased awareness of feelings, emotions and relationships.

Both teachers and students highlighted increased awareness in the identification of emotions and feelings; however, teachers soon realised that some students were unable to clearly understand the impact and meaning of their emotions (specifically anger and pain). We observed that the program helped students identify their feelings and the feelings of others; however, this knowledge did not always translate to better relationships unless the meaning and impact of the feeling or emotion was explored. Overall we observed a positive increase in how students engaged with each other, resolved conflict and related emotionally. This is now an area of further investigation for both the program and the wellbeing curriculum of the school.

We observed an increase in students’ ability to refocus their attention.

When our students actively used the Christian Mindfulness techniques, there was a clear improvement in their ability to refocus their attention positively. However, it was interesting to note that during the ten weeks’ trial period the techniques had

> *Overall we observed a positive increase in how students engaged with each other, resolved conflict and related emotionally.*

Figure 1: Visual poster created by author for classroom use

not transferred into daily practice yet, as children did not use them outside of the allotted program time unless encouraged to by the teacher.

We observed a positive connection between the program and our overall focus on God.

Our teachers and students were very positive about the impact of focusing on God throughout the program. Teachers describe a heightened sense of gratitude for what God had created as well as for the people he has provided in our lives. A student said, "*I really like Christian Mindfulness because you get to be calm and reflect on the day and remember why we should be grateful to God*" while another felt that "*It really helps you notice and think about your thoughts and feelings and how they can change your whole opinion, also how you can ask God to help you do that.*"

> *when our students actively used the Christian Mindfulness techniques, there was a clear improvement in their ability to refocus their attention positively.*

What we learnt

The implementation of a Christian Mindfulness program in Canberra Christian school provided an interesting window into its potential for the support of positive mental health in a Christian classroom. We observed that attention refocus and class calmness improved. This was similar to the findings in secular mindfulness investigations (Jennings, 2016, p.176; Volanen et al., 2016). We learnt that for children to internalize these techniques and use them outside of the classroom, the program needs to be ongoing. We recognise that how we ran our program and what we discovered may not be transferable to all schools, but encourage other Christian schools to create or adapt their own Christian mindfulness activities, rather than follow a humanistic program which directs each child's attention to their inner self. By doing this we discovered that our students could benefit from the positive impact of mindfulness and focus on God's goodness, His word and His works as the source of well-being.

NOTE

If you are interested in learning more about Canberra Christian's School's 'Your Mind Matters' program and would like access to the Christian mindfulness activities they use, please go to the website www.ccs.act.edu.au/your-mind-matters/ or contact Bree Hills at principal@ccs.act.edu.au. TEACH

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Engagement and habit formation in the classroom

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Key words: attention, habits, neuroscience, pedagogy, psychology

How can teachers increase the effectiveness of their classroom practice, so that not only are ideas transferred (Perkins & Salomon, 1988), but so that students become people who shape their future and make the world a better place? This is an important question that refocuses the purpose of education and takes attention away from curriculum and outcomes to issues that have been seen as peripheral to education, such as 'learning readiness' (Schindler, 1948). The ludicrousness of the unspoken assumption that many students will simply 'suck up lessons' like a vacuum cleaner as they are presented, is thrown into stark relief.

Consequently, this paper looks at two associated topics that rarely seem to gain prominence in discussion of pedagogy: a) How to gain and maintain attention and b) How to make and break habits. It goes without saying that a lack of student attention results in poor learning. Furthermore, as many skills and thought processes are automated and habituated, rather than conscious, it is highly important for teachers to understand how to make and break habits. Recent advances in neuroscience are impacting many industries, and education is no exception. How can advances in neuroscience advance our understanding of attention, and habits?

This paper is divided into two sections. In the first the author looks at the psychology and neurophysiology of attention, and discusses some implications for practice. In the second section the author examines the psychology and neurophysiology of habituation along with some implications.

Attention

A study of attention is important for teachers because, as Bunce, Flenz and Neiles (2010) say, "A common experience among teachers is that students do not pay attention" (p. 1438). It is implied, of course, that attention is a necessary ingredient for learning. But *how* does a teacher gain and maintain attention? Sun Tzu, when asked by the Emperor of Wu to demonstrate his military skill by converting the general's harem into an army, was faced with giggles and inattention. His solution was to publicly execute two of the king's concubines as a lesson. Subsequently, he gained the attention of the concubine army and they followed his every command (retold in Pham, 2018). On the other end of the spectrum, Pavlov discovered, through classical conditioning, how a dog could be taught to salivate at the sound of a bell and Skinner discovered, through operant conditioning, how to teach a rat to press a lever in the anticipation of a reward (Floyd, 2018). Sadly, the level of complexity required from school students is much higher than simply salivating or pressing a lever, and generally speaking, public execution is a route closed to teachers so a more sophisticated understanding of attention, and how to gain attention is required.

'Attention' is a growing edge in the field of neurophysiology. One of the most recent trends is to use breakthrough medical imaging techniques in conjunction with elegantly designed experiments to identify the exact areas in which attention is taking place. Baldauf and Desimone (2014), for example, can identify the difference in brain signals for 'object based' and 'location based' attention. However, these latest insights into brain function are descriptive, and do not offer a model that can be applied to classroom practice.

> *How can advances in neuroscience advance our understanding of attention, and habits?*

We will turn our attention then, to the emerging field of 'neuroeconomics', which has roots in psychology and neurophysiology and examine the models of Klaff (2014), a professional 'pitcher' who offers deals to potential investors, who are often bored, hostile and have heard it all before. His findings are distilled in his popular book Pitch *Anything* which, although 'popular' in style, rather than academic, offers practical advice for secondary teachers, who are, in effect, having to 'pitch' ideas to fifteen year olds who are equally bored, hostile and have heard it all before.

Klaff's model is as profound as it is simple and

Teaching & Professional Practice

claims to rely on simple neurophysiological findings. Rather than trying to talk to the 'neo-cortex', through facts and data, Klaff aims his pitch at the 'croc brain' (equivalent to MacLean's, 1990; 'reptilian brain'), comprised roughly of the pons, medulla and hypothalamus. According to Klaff, if a pitcher can keep the investor's 'croc brain' attentive for twenty minutes, regardless of facts and data, the investor will be persuaded by the pitch. Klaff proposes three filters for the croc brain. If a pitcher can get through these three filters, attention has been gained. The filters are: 1. *Novelty*: Have I seen this before? 2. *Safety*: Is this a threat? 3. *Simplicity*: Is it too complicated? If the answer is 'yes' to any of these three filter questions, the 'croc brain' slides off into the water and disappears, and all attention is lost. Klaff's model, which he says is based in neurophysiology, can be confirmed through current academic consensus understandings of brain function. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in its article on 'Attention—The Neurophysiology of Attention' (2018), for example, describes how in a state of attention, human physiology responds to 'novel stimuli' (i.e. '1. Have I seen this before?') and how the autonomic nervous system (ANS) prepares the body to respond to a 'potentially threatening situations' (i.e. "2. Is this a threat?"), and there is discussion about how complex tasks are 'filtered' (i.e. "3. Is it too complicated?").

> *If the answer is 'yes' to any of these three filter questions, the 'croc brain' slides off into the water and disappears, and all attention is lost.*

Once attention has been gained, it must be kept. Klaff's neurophysiological definition of attention is simple and workable: Attention is simply a flooded balance of two neurotransmitters in the brain: norepinephrine and dopamine. Hunt (2006), offers corroboration, identifying dopamine as the 'reward' neurotransmitter (p. 4). Dopamine release is triggered when a person 'gets' a joke or a mathematics problem, or when they are given a box of chocolates. Norepinephrine (NE), on the other hand, is literally 'adrenaline in the brain' and is associated with alertness, alarm and stress.

> The functional role of NE might be illustrated by imagining the experience of walking alone in the woods... you suddenly hear an abrupt crack, the sound of a stick being broken by an unseen object moving several yards away. Immediately your senses burst alive -- your head turns in the direction of the sound, your heart begins to race..." (p. 2).

In this way, attention is kept when a person 'feels good' (dopamine) while simultaneously experiencing a measure of alarm. As complex as keeping this chemical balance may seem, Klaff explains it is not too difficult. Klaff proposes a set of techniques. One technique is 'Stacking frames for hot cognition.' Hot cognition is when people *think* they are being logical and rational, but they're being driven by emotion. In other words, the pitcher *frames* information in a series of different ways: a) intrigue frame - the deal is part of a bigger story b) prize frame - the deal is highly valuable c) time frame - the 'clock is ticking' on the deal, and d) moral frame - taking the deal is the right thing to do. A second technique Klaff suggests is the *telling of engaging narrative* which, by design (and perhaps definition) balances satisfaction (dopamine) with suspense (norepinephrine). He advocates ending the story on a 'cliff-hanger' without resolution, for maximum attention. A third technique Klaff proposes is to *draw attention to movement* - to show, for example, how accepting the deal will make a change to finances, not just referring to the finances themselves.

Finally, of note is Klaff's claim that due to brain chemistry, a flood of norepinephrine and dopamine can only be maintained for about twenty minutes, which means that the brain can only sustain attention for a maximum of about twenty minutes. This is corroborated by Souza (cited in Bunce et al., 2010)

> Sousa suggests that students' processing of information during a lecture is dependent upon their motivation. The more motivated students pay attention longer than the less motivated. He suggests that unmotivated students pay attention for an average of 10-20 min. (p. 1438)

Bunce et al. discovered, through clicker training, that student attention "alternates between being engaged and nonengaged in ever-shortening cycles throughout a lecture segment." (Bunce et al., p. 1442).

Implications for the classroom

A teacher can apply these concepts about attention in the classroom in the following ways:

a. ***Observe the physiology of students*** to see which ones are at attention, which ones are 'sliding away into the water' like crocodiles, to avoid the lesson, and which ones are over-anxious. For example Young, Wu and Menon, (2012), identified 'math anxiety' as the dampening effects of stress on the prefrontal cortex.
b. When possible, ***apply Klaff's three filters*** by using novelty that is non-threatening and simple, to gain attention - not just at the beginning of lessons, but throughout. (Frustratingly, the author has discovered through professional practice that many students who complain of boredom are so habituated to 'normal' classroom routine that any change is threatening and is thus the trigger for more complaints.)
c. ***Use stories*** to balance dopamine and norepinephrine, and thus keep attention. Stories from the teacher's own life work well, as do short videos from the internet, excerpts from novels etc. As a corollary to this, frame information using 'hot cognition.' For example, tell students that learning long division will help them one day escape from a prison camp. It's not true, of course, and no student would believe it, but the intrigue frame creates attention.
d. Don't be afraid to ***'play' with students*** with various games that balance reward and stress. The author recently told a sleepy Year 9 male, "What would it be like if the assessment notification was like a court summons? If it doesn't touch you, then you don't have to do it!" The author then approached the sleepy male, who suddenly jumped up from the desk and ran around the room, happily eluding contact for the next three minutes. It's the most energetic thing he's done in a year!
e. ***Plan lessons to the 20 minute window***, being aware that students will, just like adults, 'vague in' and 'vague out', and create a contingency plan for them. Bunce et al, with regard to maintaining attention, recommends the use of "student centred pedagogies" (p. 1442).

Habit formation

Before exploring the neural basis for habit formation, it is worthwhile laying a foundation of the psychological understanding of habits. According to the American Psychological Association, a habit is "a well-learned behavior or automatic sequence of behaviors that is relatively situation specific and over time ... is performed with little or no conscious intent" (https://dictionary.apa.org/habit). The common understanding of habits, based on the work of surgeon Maxwell Maltz (cited in Clear, 2018), says that it takes "21 days to lay down a habit" (para. 6). This, however, is a misquote. Maxwell Maltz' actual observations on surgical patients were that it took at least 21 days for patients to get used to their new body, such as becoming used to seeing their new face, or coming to grips with a phantom limb (para. 3). More recently, Philippa Lally (para. 15) saw that it actually took, on average, 66 days to form a habit.

Before we tackle the neurophysiology of habits, it is worth mentioning John Boyd's short yet seminal military paper on 'Destruction and Creation' (1976), as it will become relevant in the light of the neurophysiology. Boyd's model is that all thinking is either creative (inductive) or destructive (deductive), and the fighter pilot who can more quickly adapt to a change in situation through destroying old ideas and creating new ones is more likely to survive.

Brain science has demonstrated that habit formation is associated with creation of physical structures in the brain - 'neural pathways'. A neural pathway is formed when neurons connect to enable an electric signal to be sent from one region of the nervous system to another. Leaf (2013), in explanation of her 'detoxing the brain' process, explains how 'active reach', or consciously dwelling on a new idea results in observable physical changes in the brain. As a person dwells on a thought over a period of around 21 days, there are 'bumps' that form on neurons (around 7 days), that grow into 'lollipops' (around 14 days) and then mushrooms (21 days) (p. 153). In other words, as a habit forms—as automisation takes place, the *mind* is actually determining the physical structure of the *brain*.

Voges, Muller, Bogerts, Munte and Heinze (2013) interrupted brain patterns of alcoholics by implanting small electrical devices and broke alcohol dependency. Researcher and journalist Charles Duhigg (2012) in his book, *The Power of Habit*, claims that when the device was activated the participant lost their craving for alcohol. However, four of the five subjects in the experiment relapsed because the drinking was associated with other cues, such as stress or loneliness. Yet through therapy that taught them new routines for coping, all subjects experienced dramatic success (Duhigg, 2012). What is interesting to note here is that serious habitual problems like alcohol dependency, while they have their own addiction chemistry, are reinforced through secondary cycles of cue/response/reward that can be addressed.

> *it takes an enormous amount of willpower to build habit cycles from scratch, yet it is relatively easy to intentionally modify a habit*

Duhigg (2012) explores a three part model of habit; a cycle of 'cue', 'response' and 'reward'. He shows that it takes an enormous amount of willpower to build habit cycles from scratch, yet it is relatively easy to intentionally modify a habit by identifying the cues, *changing the response*, and receiving a similar reward. His description of the case of 'Mandy', a chronic nail biter who received treatment at the Mississippi State University counselling centre is highly useful in seeing, in practical terms, how habits can be reshaped. The first stage of her habit reversal training was to identify triggers immediately prior to biting her nails. For her it was a sense of tension, or a little pain. Duhigg claims, that it is usually hard to 'see' what triggers habits, as triggers have become so much part of what seems 'normal'. She also identified the reward, a brief sense of completeness. In the next step, Mandy carried around an index card and made a mark every time she felt the trigger. In a week, it was 27 times. In the third step,

Teaching & Professional Practice

> *many students who are seen as 'difficult' do not learn the content of a lesson, but [rather] the personality of the teacher*

Mandy learned a 'competing response'—to grip a pencil or put her hands under her legs. To give an equal reward—a sense of completeness, she put a checkmark on a card every time she was successful in using this competing response. After a month, her nail biting habit was broken.

Implications for the classroom

Maddox, Forte, Boozer (2000), identify three dimensions of learning readiness: emotive-attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioural. The variables, such as 'willing to function in partnership' are skill-based rather than knowledge based, and are habitual in nature, cued and rewarded. It becomes clear from reviewing the literature on habit formation that habituation plays a significant foundational role in education. Firstly, the repetitive, timetabled nature of schools lends itself to automatic, and often misplaced, habituation. Think, for example, of the students who are habituated into filing into class and 'switching their brain off' when they hear 'the bell' of instruction from a teacher. The author posits that many students who are seen as 'difficult' do not learn the content of a lesson, but the *personality* of the teacher. In other words, the cue may well be the teacher's mood for the day, the response may be to 'look busy' or to 'play up', and the reward may be either to be spotlighted by the teacher, or to be ignored. If this is the case, then it follows that there may well be times when a teacher is trying to put a stop to poor student behaviour but in fact the *teacher is inadvertently reinforcing* the behaviour by supplying a cue. It also follows that many *teachers are habituated into poor habits* by students. Consider, for example, the teacher who is too afraid of an emotional outburst from a certain student, so will respond to a cue, such as 'head down, disengaged' by going to the other side of the classroom. The teacher's reward is a peaceful lesson.

Consequently, the author posits that the reason why there is a perceived disconnect between mandated content and student interest has a lot to do with habits. Thus, teachers who want to make significant, lasting change in the lives of their students must address students at the habit level. The 'Golden Rule of Habit Formation,' as described by Duhigg is a touchstone for professional teachers: To change a habit, retain the cue and the reward, and change the response. This means the teacher needs to:

a. Identify existing rewards
b. Identify the response they want changed, both in them and the student, and to invite students into the dialogue
c. Take time and expend effort to utilise habit change techniques in the classroom.

Leaf's "21-Day Brain Detox Plan" is another practical resource that can be readily adapted to the classroom to teach students how to gain control of their habits. The process parallels the Habit Reversal Training (see above) and involves breaking down toxic thoughts and creating healthy thoughts in their place. However, putting it into practice necessitates carving out time from content to let students work through the process.

Conclusion

Through laying a foundation of psychological understanding of attention and habit formation, and then exploring recent neurophysiological advances in these areas, a number of practical suggestions have been shared to inform teachers as to how they can enhance their practice enabling improved student learning. Rather than just delivering curriculum, educators can engender real and lasting change in their students' intensity of attention, positive habitual responses and ultimately successful achievement.

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Jotham Kingston is a secondary teacher at Kempsey Adventist School and pressed states, "I have spent years building a diverse range of skills and knowledge because I love learning and challenges. I highly value the skill of listening, and helping other people with their life goals. I am, they tell me, an 'outside the box' thinker, which means I think deeply about goals and purposes, and I'm a fast learner.

One current project is developing a practical business course for entrepreneurial teens, 'This Is Awkward'. I'm working on a few other agricultural startups as well and I presently enjoy landscaping with my backhoe.

Time-in or time-out? Dealing with stress-related reactions of indigenous students

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"Come here. Let's regulate your body. Let's get your physical body calm, and then let's talk through the process of what occurred,"

Working for the wellbeing of indigenous students can be challenging, especially when a difficult home or school situation rouses them emotionally to the extent that it impacts their capacity to engage in learning and/or appropriate social behaviour. Joyanne Walsh, who has worked with indigenous children in her previous school as Dean of Student Wellbeing, and current school as Principal has found that the concept of 'time-in' works well.

Most schools are familiar with the concept of time out. With time-out, children are given time alone to think through their actions. "Time-in really is the opposite of time-out," says Walsh. Instead of isolating the child, he or she is invited to spend time with a trusted adult with the express purpose of helping them regulate their body. This then allows them to deal with issues causing the stress in a positive and rational manner. It's about saying, "Come here. Let's regulate your body. Let's get your physical body calm, and then let's talk through the process of what occurred," says Joyanne who also uses several strategies prior to the time-in strategy to enable the best possible outcome. Some of the strategies she uses come from the Berry Street Educational Model (https://www.childhoodinstitute.org.au/focus-areas/berry-street-education-model), an organisation committed to the wellbeing of children and adolescents suffering from chronic stress or trauma.

First, says Joyanne, "I build trust through relationships." This can be a slow process and requires making time to get to know the child, and more importantly, for the child to become comfortable with the support adult. This process is best built with indigenous students through connection to family members. If the teacher or support adult knows mum, aunty, grandparent or uncle, this creates a sense of belonging and a safe place for the child. From this safe place, a relationship is more easily established.

Second, Joyanne teaches children how their brain functions in conjunction with their emotions and their body. This involves a basic understanding of the limbic system and the role of the amygdala in moderating emotions. The students learn what is going on inside their body; the things beneath the surface that no one can see. This may be, among other things, an accelerated heartbeat or a prickly sensation. Knowing the basics of brain function and physiology helps students understand why there are experiencing these biological responses. Once a child has this basic understanding, Joyanne is in a position to say to the child, "You just had an amygdala high jacking," rather than, "you just had an explosion." This no-blame statement allows the child to process that physical sensations are the body's response to stress. This knowledge is more likely to result in acceptance by the child that he or she needs help and therefore a willingness to have some time-in.

While time-out is an accepted strategy used widely in schools, time-in appears to work better for indigenous children because time-in happens in community. This is very important for indigenous students. Leaving them alone to think about their behaviour does not help them regulate their physical state. Being with someone else who is calm and is prepared to wait is a better option.

Once the time-in session has begun, Joyanne uses strategies to help the children regulate their body. Physical activity such as running is useful, so are repetitive physical actions such as bouncing a ball. The wellbeing space at the school where Joyanne worked as Dean of Student Wellbeing had rocking chairs for that purpose. Sometimes Joyanne uses weighted blankets to help regulate the physical symptoms of stress. The wellbeing room offers a calming, non-judgemental space. Joyanne adds, that on occasions, some children will arrive at school in high states of stress saying as they get off the bus, "I can't go to school. I have to go to wellbeing."

At the school where Joyanne worked as Dean of Student Wellbeing, indigenous students were learning to value rather than resent time spent with the wellbeing team, and knew they would find someone there they could trust. Once the physical distress was alleviated, Joyanne says, the students were more ready to talk through their situation. This meant that entry or re-entry time into the classroom was reduced. Although these strategies apply to any child who is distressed to the point of experiencing physical reactions, it is important to note that time-in works best when a relationship of trust has been built. Strategies are useful, but wellbeing is something that needs to be built into the culture of the school, and building healthy relationships is a part of building a healthy school culture. TEACH

Figure 1: Melissa Garlick interacts with a primary school student Mahteece Holten at Kempsey Adventist School. Photography: NNSW Adventist Education image bank.

"students were learning to value rather than resent time spent with the wellbeing team, and knew they would find someone … [to] trust"

Author information

Joyanne Walsh was born and bred in Port Macquarie, and returned in 2019 as principal of the Port Macquarie Adventist school. She has 23 years' teaching experience, having spent the last 14 years in a variety of roles at Kempsey Adventist School from teacher to school coordinator, deputy principal, and most recently, the dean of student wellbeing. Joyanne enjoys discovering how each child learns best. "I have a passion for kids having opportunities to learn in different ways—children learning beyond what they think they are capable of."

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Frog ponds and baby beanies: How one school fosters student and teacher wellbeing through connecting with their community

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The Context

It is Tuesday afternoon at Prescott College, a Seventh-day Adventist high school in an inner suburb of Adelaide. Students and teachers are packing up their books, pens, computers and folders. But next, some are gathering garden tools, others are setting up a puppet theatre and still others are tuning up musical instruments. Students and teachers are all engaged in purposeful activity. It is service learning time, a program that fosters wellbeing for both students and staff.

> *a healthy lifestyle and ,,, positive psychology practices … enhances student wellbeing significantly*

A focus on wellbeing

The concept of wellbeing is not new, but with increased rates of teenage anxiety and depression in Australia (Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, 2015), wellbeing is high on the agenda of most schools. The term wellbeing has several facets and contains elements of contentment, happiness and health, particularly mental health. It involves a growth mindset and is also linked to resilience and grit (Ryan & Beamish, 2018). This article briefly explores what one positive psychologist, one wellbeing and lifestyle researcher, one leading Australian social researcher, two Christian authors, and the Bible have to say on the topic of wellbeing, and then evaluates one school's service learning program using these ideas.

A pioneer in the field of positive psychology is Martin Seligman (2010, 2013) whose work identifies several mind-sets and human behaviours that contribute to personal wellbeing. These include positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Seligman's PERMA model has gained traction in education, and has informed multiple publications of recent research, including that of Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan & Kauffman (2017, 2018); Kern, Waters, Adler, & White (2015), Khaw & Kern (2015) and Morton, Hinze, Herman, Kent, Beamish, … Przybylko, (2017). Morton and Hinze (2018), in working with tertiary students, found that using an activity-based intervention that targeted a healthy lifestyle and the positive psychology practices promoted by Seligman, enhances student wellbeing significantly. Australian social researcher and commentator, Mackay, in his books *What Makes Us Tick* (2010), and *The Art of Belonging* (2014) elaborates on some of the same themes. Additionally, Christian writers, including Weber (2010) and White (1903) advocate for a similar model, but approach it through the lens of Christianity, therefore, adding another dimension to wellbeing. Finally, the Bible itself addresses the important area of human flourishing, or wellbeing.

Positive psychology and wellbeing

Optimism is an important attribute of wellbeing. Seligman (2010) has conducted clinical trials using activities as simple as writing down three things that went well each day and learning to speak positively. He has found that these practices cultivate positive emotions. Weber (2010, p.132) also recognises this connection and believes that "those who flourish have the capacity for positive emotions." Morton (2018, p. 3) further elaborates on this idea, reminding us that "feelings follow focus", and White (1942, p. 286) gives this advice. "Instead of thinking of your discouragements, think of the power you can claim in Christ's name. Let your imagination take hold upon things unseen. Let your thoughts be directed to the evidences of the great love of God for you." These ideas are also supported by King Solomon who recognised that, "a cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22, NIV).

Engagement is another important attribute that contributes to wellbeing. Seligman (2012) describes engagement as total absorption in activities, an attribute that Csikszentmihalyi (1997) calls *flow*. Flow is a state in which a person is totally immersed in what they are doing, usually an activity of their choice. The Bible encourages this state of total engagement, urging that "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10, NIV). Obviously, for wellbeing, the idea is to be engaged in positive activities such as learning a new skill, taking up a hobby or reading a good book.

One does not need to visit positive psychology to find support for the idea that healthy relationships add quality to life. From a Christian perspective, the trinity is the epitome of relationships; God, who is three in one. This theme continues through the Genesis account (Genesis 2:18), and we see the results of broken relationships with others and with God in the biblical metanarrative. Weber (2010) reminds us that "our relationship with God and others is what life and love are all about. If we don't have love, we cannot thrive or flourish" (p.79). Relationships signify an authentic connection with others; the knowledge that someone will be there for us. In Christianity, this is the saving relationship with Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Relationships may be fleeting or longstanding. McKay (2010, p. 151) identifies the need for relationships as "the desire to belong" and claims that "our default position, as humans is together, even for those of us who also cherish time alone". Seligman (2010) agrees that positive relationships are crucial to wellbeing and Hinze and Morton (2018) identify that not only building relationships, but repairing them through the act of forgiveness is a contributor to wellbeing.

McKay (2010, p. 128, 130) leads into the next attribute of wellbeing by calling it "the desire to be useful" and claiming that "altruism is one of the most attractive characteristics of humans." Seligman (2010) calls it accomplishment; the sense that one has done something worthwhile, a feeling of success. White (1903, pp. 8, 262) on this topic, states, "A Christian reveals true humility by showing the gentleness of Christ, by being always ready to help others, by speaking kind words and performing unselfish acts," and also points out that "success in any line demands a definite aim." The ability to set goals and achieve them fits with this attribute.

Live a life where you learn to think positively, engage in worthwhile activities, build positive relationships, engage in acts of service for others, and you begin to come near the point where you find meaning in life. Christians believe that connection to God brings meaning to life. Service to others also gives meaning to life. White (1903, p.13) in speaking of Christian education claimed that "it prepares the student for the joy of service in this world." However, the importance of finding meaning in life is not limited to Christian authors. McKay (2010, p 67) identifies meaning as "the desire for something to believe in". Everyone wants to live a life with purpose. Everyone wants to believe their life has meaning. Schools that demonstrate a passion for participation in community programs and events are setting an example for their students of what it means to live with purpose.

> *Schools that demonstrate a passion for participation in community … are setting an example for their students of what it means to live with purpose.*

One school's wellbeing program

Prescott College is a small Adventist high school in Adelaide. The support for service learning, that is, community engagement without expectations, began at Prescott College with a single Storm Co. trip (Service To Others Really Matters) that one of the teachers ran with a group of students. Peter Charleson recognised the value of students serving communities and the Storm Co. trip became an annual event. Over time, Charleson, in his role of principal, began to think that he wanted to extend service learning opportunities to every student and teacher and began to search for ways to offer service learning opportunities as part of the regular school program. In collaboration with the College spiritual committee, he devised the service learning project described below. The purpose of the program is twofold: to involve the whole school in an intervention that promotes personal wellbeing, and to connect in positive ways with the community in which the school is situated.

The service learning initiative at Prescott College is conceptually based on Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" and operationalised through the following vision, mission, and values statements:

Vision — Every student developing talents and interests that create a better world for others and increased wellbeing from finding the joy in service.

Educational Administration

Mission Leading students to find joy and purpose in regular service to others without expectation of reward.

Values Prioritised values are

Community—We celebrate the strengths of others, including those we serve, recognising that when we give our best for others, there are no losers.

Faith—We hold Christ's example as the ultimate act of service and act as a reflection of Him and fulfilment of His call to be His disciples.

Creativity—We seek to find creative solutions.

> *Bunnings provides the resources, people in the neighbourhood provide the location, and the rest [frog habitat] is done by 'student power'.*

While the logistics of running a school-based service learning program in the community may appear daunting, Charleson maintains that if you believe in something, you can find a way to make it happen. The service learning program at Prescott College occurs in fourteen week blocks (approximately) each semester and has replaced the afternoon sports program that normally ran during that time, (a reorganisation of the curriculum allowed the sporting opportunities to be facilitated in another way). The program runs for Years 7-10 and almost every teacher is involved, either leading or facilitating a group. Community volunteers with expertise help where needed. Each group is designed so that students can make a contribution to their local or church community. Students are able to choose a group that appeals to them and/or where they feel they have skills. Students also have input into what their projects will be and how they will take them to the community. The service learning projects include some of the more traditional ways that schools interact with the community as well as some innovative ideas.

Teams are comprised of a group of students with a teacher or community volunteer to facilitate. Up to ten groups may operate in any given service learning block. The diversity of opportunity for engagement can be seen in the broad spectrum of activities that the school offers its students.

The environmentalists

This group partners with a local Bunnings store to install and landscape frog habitats in the local neighbourhood. Bunnings provides the resources, people in the neighbourhood provide the location, and the rest is done by 'student power'. Once the habitat is created, frogs are reintroduced. The students created their first frog habitat on the school grounds, and then moved into the neighbourhood. There arwe also plans to partner with the local council to create frog habitats in public spaces.

Prescott College Grade 10 student Maddie Hann creating a frog habitat. (Photo credit: Prescott image file)

The artists

This group of budding artists contracts themselves at no cost to create artworks such as backdrops for local church events, the school's Week of Spiritual Emphasis and Storm Co. At the Adventist church convention this year, some backdrops in the meeting venues were planned and painted by this group. This has created a sense of community with the Adventist church in South Australia.

The puppeteers plus

The puppetry team make puppets and prepares short shows for pre-school age children. They also tell stories and help with arts and crafts. Across the road from Prescott College, there is a kindergarten and there are several other day care centres in the neighbourhood. It is in these centres that the puppeteers find an enthusiastic audience.

The front yard clean-up gang

Some children choose to spend their group time outside doing volunteer work in the front yards of neighbouring houses. Taking their cue from television programs like 'Backyard Blitz', Prescott students work under supervision to do yard and garden maintenance such as rose pruning and leaf raking for elderly and other residents in need of a helping hand.

The creative arts team

While many Christian schools operate various music ensembles that assist in worship at community churches, Prescott College students are also planning to work on a repertoire of music so they can go carolling in shopping centres closer to Christmas and be involved in other Christmas community events.

The gardeners

One enthusiastic group of students have been creating a kitchen garden on site with plans to extend this to growing seedlings in order to make these freely available for the local community in time for the spring growing season. They are also planning, long term, to partner with the local council to create community gardens.

The knitters

The maternity ward staff from a local hospital are the grateful recipients of baby beanies, made with love, for their premature babies. Students are developing their knitting and crocheting skills at the same time.

The chefs

The Adventist church in Adelaide operates an ADRA (Adventist Development & Relief Agency) café. This café provides wholesome food each Thursday evening to homeless and low income people. A group of students have completed their food handling certificates and spend Tuesday afternoons cooking, pre-preparing and freezing food for the café.

Prescott College Grade 10 students Duksak Lal (left) and Nazia Hussaini cooking for the ADRA Café
(Photo credit: Prescott image file)

The companions

One group of students have learned how to play games like Chinese checkers and each Tuesday they head out to local retirement homes to play a game or two with the elderly residents. This program is not limited to games, but may also involve reading to the residents or just having a conversation.

The internet specialists

This group has started their own YouTube channel on how to keep your internet banking secure. In addition, they plan to partner with the local council and advertise for people who need help with computers to come to the school on Tuesday afternoons where an enthusiastic team of students will be waiting to troubleshoot and give help.

Is the effort really worth it?

While this program was not specifically designed around the wellbeing attributes listed earlier, it is interesting to note that it ticks many of the boxes. The service learning opportunities work towards student and staff wellbeing in the following ways. Teachers and students choose their groups based on their interest. This triggers positive emotions, which may last as the project develops and the students focus on helping others. Reflecting on what went well in each session may add to the feeling of positive emotions. Since students are engaged in an activity of choice, they may not only feel positive about it, but are more likely to be engaged in it, especially if they are involved in planning and leading out in the project. When they are engaged, they are more likely to learn and practice new skills or further develop existing skills, and this leads to a sense of achievement. Furthermore, when effort, perseverance and creativity are praised, in relation to the product or the person, a sense of accomplishment results that is tied to a strong sense of self-esteem. Responses supporting self-esteem can be authentic and affirming of relationships. These develop as students and staff work alongside each other to achieve a common goal. Also, depending on the service learning activity, there may be opportunities to develop appropriate relationships with community members who live in the neighbourhood, guide by casual supervision and advice. Finally, because the students and teachers are serving 'real' people in a 'real' community, they develop a sense of meaningful purpose, that is identified in their personal vision, mission and values for this project, and most importantly operationalised.

> *The maternity ward staff from a local hospital are the grateful recipients of baby beanies, made with love, for their premature babies.*

Teachers and students debrief in their groups at the end of the fourteen week block. They discuss their challenges and accomplishments. Their success is celebrated and where needed improvements are planned. Ways of taking their service to the next level are explore, and they anticipated how they may contribute in the next round of service learning opportunities.

Charleson sums up by saying, "Service Learning at Prescott College is only in its infancy and the teachers and students are still feeling their way. However, both the students and the teachers are finding the time valuable and there are encouraging signs in the outcomes. The quotes below from a student and a teacher indicate that we are beginning to meet our objectives for the program."

> I like service learning because you get to do the things you love and give back to the community at the same time. You don't need anything in return to feel happy. (Ty, a Year 9 student).

> Service Learning has provided an opportunity for me as a teacher to do something that is completely out of my comfort zone. Creating a Knitting Project has fostered intergenerational relationships between students and our 'expert' helpers, allowed for students to learn a new [old] skill outside of this technological age, whilst growing an opportunity to bless our hospitals with knitted goods. At first, students are reluctant, but once they get the hang of it, they relax and enjoy the challenge and appreciate the fact that the little they do can actually make a world of difference in someone else's life. (Jane Talamaivao, Teacher).

"At first, students are reluctant, but once they get the hang of it, they relax and enjoy the challenge and appreciate … they … make a world of difference in someone else's life."

Committed to optimising wellbeing within our school community, our school finds this curriculum component increasingly successful in achieving both measurable tangible outcomes as well as the integrated components of "a good life". TEACH

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Current and ideal performance appraisal: Employee perceptions in an Australian faith-based education system

TEACH[R]

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Key words: Teacher appraisal, teacher evaluation, school leadership, faith-based education

Abstract

This article discusses performance appraisal in an education system context. With teacher quality key to improving student performance, school education systems must consider the role of performance appraisal on both teacher and principal development and improvement. This article describes the perceptions of employees within a faith-based education system as to current and suggested improvements in performance appraisal processes. This study utilised a qualitative approach for research design, adopting semi-structured interviews to collect employee perceptions. The employees indicated mistrust in the present performance appraisal processes, noted inconsistent use of performance appraisal, identified a need for evaluator training, and suggested the use of both an internal and external person in the evaluation and development space. These faith-based education system employees indicated that a district wide approach to the performance appraisal process, with flexibility at the local school level, would be beneficial for both the respective schools and the education system.

Introduction

Research consistently shows that effective teachers are the key to improving student performance (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Ferguson & Ladd, 1996; Hattie, 2002; Haycock, 1998; Jensen & Reichl, 2011; Maharaj, 2014; Nye, Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2004; Rice, 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Whitehurst, 2002). It would appear then, that ensuring teacher quality and implementing strategies that enhance teacher development is of fundamental importance in any educational setting.

This would suggest there is still a place for effective performance appraisal in the education sector. However, as Smith and Kubacka (2017, p. 3) state, "Teacher appraisals, traditionally an instrument for continuous formative teacher feedback, are increasingly morphing into summative tools for high stakes accountability purposes". Reports from the Australian education sector have identified that "Australia's systems of teacher appraisal and feedback are broken" and in dire need of being addressed (Jensen & Reichl, 2011, p. 3). This echoes sentiments expressed globally that teacher appraisal systems are in need of being reformed to improve instruction by enhancing teacher development and quality of performance (Donaldson, 2009; Papay, 2012; Weingarten, 2010).

Performance appraisal is defined as "the ongoing process used for identifying, measuring and developing an individual's performance in accordance with an organisation's strategic goals" (Elliot, 2015, p. 102). This definition highlights three major components of performance appraisal: identifying, measuring, and developing educational performance. Unfortunately, it appears that the developmental component of performance appraisal, is given little or no weight in this process by school-based educators.

This research project explores educator's perceptions of performance appraisal systems within a faith-based school education system. The effective implementation of performance appraisal within a specified context needs to start with a comprehensive understanding of these educator's perceptions of the performance appraisal system. A better understanding of the evaluation and leadership development views of staff within this specific education system is required if a rational case for improvement of this practice is a desired outcome.

"Australia's systems of teacher appraisal and feedback are broken"

Educational Administration

Research in this domain is limited in that it is more often based in the Canadian and American contexts, rather than that of the Australian school context. More significantly, in the review of the school-based performance appraisal literature, no Australian faith-based education system studies were found. A gap in the literature has emerged, and a need for further research accessing the appraisal practices of the faith-based education context exists.

Literature Review

The terms *performance appraisal and evaluation* are often used interchangeably within the literature. The literature identifies a long and tumultuous history with regards to teacher performance appraisal, characterised by mistrust of teacher evaluation processes. Peterson's (2000) extensive literature review of over 70 years of empirical research on teacher evaluation concluded:

> Seventy years of empirical research on teacher evaluation shows that current practices do not improve teachers or accurately tell what happens in classrooms…. Well-designed empirical studies depict principals as inaccurate raters both of individual teacher performance behaviours and of overall teacher merit. (p. 18)

Seventy years of … research on teacher evaluation shows that current practices do not improve teachers or accurately tell what happens in classrooms

More recently, Dandala (2019, p. 8) suggests that "The lack of enthusiasm among teaching employees can be interpreted as a token of distrust in the [teacher performance appraisal] process".

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2013, p. 17) notes that "Combining the improvement and accountability functions into a single teacher-appraisal process is not straightforward". As outlined by Papay (2012), while developing an evaluation system that can assess teacher performance accurately is important, if teacher evaluation is to benefit students, it must promote continuing teacher development. Evaluation processes that improve teacher instructional effectiveness are the aim, meaning more emphasis must be placed on the feedback component of performance appraisal and the ability of the process to drive continued instructional improvement. Yet studies of teacher performance appraisal tend to downplay the ability of effective appraisal to improve teaching practice, rendering one of its most important elements as a side component, often not followed up on, communicated or actively encouraged.

As far back as the early 1970s, Wolf (1973) reported that teachers felt:

> that current appraisal techniques fall short of collecting information that accurately characterizes their performance. They perceive the ultimate rating as depending more on the idiosyncrasies of the rater than on their own behaviour in the classroom. As a result, teachers see nothing to be gained from evaluation. (p. 160)

Many similar concerns have arisen over the years relating to the appraisal of teachers. Papay (2012) stresses that one typical concern relating to standards-based observations is that prior prejudices may subconsciously limit the effective evaluation of classroom teacher practice. Another relates to the lack of training many performance appraisers have had. Yet another suggests teacher performance appraisal, if not seen to be implemented appropriately, can represent a disturbance to school organisational climate (Dandala, 2019). Badly designed evaluation processes, and reports of little or no meaningful feedback (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009) also regularly appear in the educational appraisal literature. The opportunity for appraiser bias is a well-documented concern in the performance appraisal process, yet Papay (2012, p. 129) notes that "Limiting bias in standards-based observations presents challenges because such observations rely on human judgements".

Literature from the United States context identifies a number of education districts making use of a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program as part of their appraisal and teacher development initiatives (Johnson, Fiarman, Munger, Papay & Qazilbash, 2009). As Johnson et al (2009, p. 4) note of the PAR program, it is "a program to improve teacher quality by having expert teachers mentor and evaluate their peers". The program utilises Consulting Teachers (CT) who conduct formal observations, keeping detailed records of teacher performance. This allows these CTs to provide support which will assist these classroom teachers in meeting teaching standards as established by the local school education district. It is well established in a number of districts nationwide, and has had significant success in the teacher development area.

The literature around teacher evaluation mentions a number of different time frames in which performance appraisal is identified to take place. Derrington and Campbell (2018) note in one US state that prior to 2011, principals were expected to evaluate each teacher once in every five years. The implementation of new policy in the 2011-2012 year meant principals were expected to then evaluate each teacher in their school on a yearly basis. Maharaj (2014), examining Ontario Canada's teacher performance appraisal, recommends that teachers be evaluated every two years.

Teacher performance and evaluation policies on a worldwide scale notes that numerous differences in implementation practice exists (Barzano & Grimaldi, 2013; Derrington & Campbell, 2018; Flores & Derrington, 2015; Larsen, 2009; Mango, 2013; OECD, 2013; Zhang & Ng, 2017). However, the most frequently utilised appraisal process remains observation-based, which is widely regarded as the best, given it provides the only setting in which all aspects of teaching can be observed (Dandala, 2019; Donaldson, 2013; Murphy, Hallinger & Heck, 2013; Zhang & Ng, 2017). It is through classroom observation that the evaluator can best take on an understanding of teacher effectiveness, as it allows physical classroom environment, student engagement and teacher standards of conduct to be considered (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Zhang & Ng, 2017). While researchers encourage the use of multiple appraisal instruments, seeing this as having advantages over a single evaluation source of data, there are a number of other appraisal methods that are being used in various places. These include teacher self-assessment, student surveys, teacher portfolios, measures of teacher's content knowledge, teacher interviews, parent feedback, student performance, and more recently, value-added models as a means of evaluating teacher effectiveness (Attinello, Lare & Waters, 2006; Danielson, 2011; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Hallinger, Heck & Murphy, 2014; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Murphy et al, 2013; Peterson, 2000; Stronge & Tucker, 2003).

It would seem appropriate that for school leaders to develop staff, oversee and lead school improvement efforts, they too should be the subjects of performance management processes. In the past two decades the role of school administrator has changed significantly. The performance appraisal of school administrators is now more important than ever. However, Normore (2004, p. 288) identifies that "administrator evaluation has remained substantially unchanged" and are still clearly ineffective, focused on accountability requirements and not administrator growth and development.

Hall (2008) posits that leadership development should be every leader's responsibility. He suggests that every administrative and supervisory job description should have leadership development as an essential job function, and the results of this should be included in performance appraisals. Other researchers such as McKinsey and Company (2010) support the idea that school leaders should be effective developers of people, arguing "High performing principals focus more on instructional leadership and developing teachers ... their ability to coach others and support their development is the most important skill of a good leader" (p. 7).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative orientation adopting semi-structured interviews to collect data and adopts grounded theory for the analysis of these interviews. The study is directed by the following research question:

> What are the perceptions of those working within the private faith-based education system, relating to the role and process of the present performance appraisal system, and of potential future improvements?

The data for this study was collected as part of a larger research project exploring the perceptions of elements of school leadership development held by those working within this faith-based education system. Approval was granted to approach employees within a particular district of this education system. Data was also accessed relating to the perceptions of a number of system administrators. Interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting at a number of school locations, with the interviews lasting approximately 30 – 40 minutes in duration. The interviewees provided written consent for the interviews to be audio-recorded. Twelve employees, from seven of the ten schools within this education system district, were invited to participate in the open-ended interview process, and all agreed to be involved in this research study.

The interview data was first transcribed from the audio recordings, and then subjected to grounded theory processes—an inductive process, "based on concepts that are generated directly from the data" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 411). This allowed the textual data to initially be broadly coded, then these codes were refined into a smaller number of categories, and finally, these categories were mapped into substantive themes (Byrne, 2017).

Results

There was a general perception amongst all interviewees that at the present time, an ad hoc approach to performance appraisal exists in this education system. As one notes, "*I don't think that there's a consistent appraisal tool used across the region/district. I think every school is responsible for its own staff appraisal*". This has partly contributed to employee perceptions which lack in confidence and support for performance appraisal in this education system.

One consistent aspect of performance appraisal in this education system, however, is that employees fear the process because it has been used in the past to emphasise teacher ineffectiveness, rather than emphasising the benefits of what effective performance appraisal can offer. This sentiment is

I don't think that there's a consistent appraisal tool used …. I think every school is responsible for its own staff appraisal

Educational Administration

strongly expressed in quotes such as:

> I think there's also a massive fear with appraisal in our system. There's a fear that any weaknesses will be used and exposed as an opportunity for questioning employment and it's always said that it's not, but, in my experience of what I've seen, it is used often down the track as a piece of evidence to terminate someone's employment".

Appraisal done well would address this significant concern, and initiate a culture change relating to performance appraisal that respondents see as vital.

Interviews with present school principals made it abundantly clear that no performance appraisal processes for school leaders are currently in place. One experienced school principal, when asked whether leadership development should form part of the performance appraisal of school leaders, stated,

> I haven't had a formal appraisal ever. I've done a lot of appraisal of those below me, but I've never had it and I think that is one of our weaknesses. I think we need that and I would value it, but it [performance appraisal] sort of gets up to a point and then it falls away. (Principal 1)

Asked the same question, another principal stated,

> I think we all have to be open to appraisal and we all have to be open to feedback about where we're heading and what we're doing well and what we're not doing well, but also, what we're doing for the future of our school. Are we forward thinking? Are we identifying people that are the layers in our leadership system in our school? (Principal 2)

These comments clearly indicate that school leaders are open to being appraised and are open to what it could mean for them in their leadership roles.

Concern was also raised regarding the ability of the evaluator to accurately and fairly assess the teacher's performance. Quotes such as,

> I also think in general with appraisal there is a fear amongst staff that sometimes the people appraising them don't necessarily have the skills to assess how they're going in a fair or relevant manner…. So there is a big fear there…

highlight that for a number of teachers there remains a question as to how well trained and objective the performance appraiser may be. Additionally, it was identified that "*personality clashes*" between the teacher and the appraiser could exist, and there were concerns from interviewees about this.

there's … a massive fear … that any weaknesses will be used and exposed as an opportunity for questioning employment and it's always said that it's not,

While the literature regularly utilises examples of education context performance appraisal systems making use of student data, those interviewed were quick to dismiss student input in the teacher appraisal process. One teacher noted that in their experience, something as mundane as "*the kids were hungry before lunch when they filled out the survey*" could skew student-based feedback in the appraisal process. These teachers appeared content for appraisal to continue being carried out by classroom observations, self-reflections of teaching and in many instances, principal involvement either by classroom observation or formal discussion. However, it should be noted that there was very little acceptance of current appraisal practices, but rather, a certain reluctant acceptance of the appraisal process as a compliance issue that left very little room for optimism around its use or benefits to them as classroom practitioners.

A key concern identified by staff in this research study questioned whether the school principal should be assessed on their ability to develop leaders in the school setting. Comments such as "*My observations tell me that most leaders want to protect their throne of power and keep a good distance between them and all of the potential threats….*" and "*I think things like their job security and seeing people that could come through as a threat and so on could actually be factors*" suggest that a number of teachers are sceptical about the willingness and desire of some principals to grow the capacity of their school leadership colleagues as a cohort. Others expressed a desire to see leadership development taken ownership of at the local district level, one stating,

> I think it's something that the [educational entity] needs to take charge of in the way of professional development. I think it would be cheaper to do that. I think our leaders in our schools have already got a lot on their plate

raising an important question: Whose responsibility is it for the development and growth of leaders in this faith-based system? Indeed, many interviewees felt it could be the domain of the individual, the school and its leaders, as well as the education system's responsibility, suggesting some ownership of this is required at each of these levels.

Additionally, it was perceived that implementing an appraisal system on a systemic level, would help to assist system staffing, and could be used to help identify, and evidence leader readiness. Again, the challenges of this were noted, with system-based administrators asserting that with the national education entity having no real executive authority over system districts, rolling out such an appraisal system on a education system level would be difficult.

These employees perceive that improved performance appraisal would ideally enable potential leadership candidates to state their merits with respect to available leadership positions, envisaging that effective performance appraisal can support their suitability for leadership positions. They perceive that this use of appraisals can only be effective if there is a consistent, ongoing and regular performance appraisal process within the school setting. Comments such as,

> I think that's where first of all the personal appraisals, that are done each year, or at least, should be done each year by the leaders in the school to identify what an individual teacher's strengths are, then looking at those strengths and seeing how they can be utilised, then I guess I imagine it being a bit like a pyramid where those names would then be passed on to the principal of the school, or the education director, where we would say 'these are the skills that we have in our schools in this [district], how can we utilise these skills as a system?'. And then, passing that on to the [organisational administrative level] so that there's, that identification process, and then also asking people, 'Are you interested?'

provide a picture of how these employees see the potential for effective performance appraisal to tie into both leadership identification and leadership development.

It was clear that these employees saw the potential of effective appraisal processes for this faith-based education system. An education system administrator at the national level stated,

> I've just been jogged here, we were talking about the strategies that are being used, to encourage people to come into leadership; the appraisal system that we have, is being used to greater or lesser effect in different places. I believe there is huge potential in an effective appraisal system, prompting people into leadership, prompting them to focus their skills, so appraisal done well will be a great source of support for that. (System Administrator)

This evidences a number of benefits that an improved appraisal process could demonstrate as organisational improvements achieved.

Discussion

Teacher perceptions identified some frustrations with the current performance appraisal processes they see taking place in their schools. These findings support the notion found in the literature that teacher appraisal procedures and their results have become ineffective compliance measures which have lost their meaning and intended purpose (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel & Rothstein, 2012; Derrington & Campbell, 2018; Murphy et al, 2013; Weisberg et al, 2009; Zhang & Ng, 2017).

Additionally, by implementing effective performance management practices and regular performance appraisal, a significant opportunity exists to begin identifying high calibre individuals who can be added to the talent pool of future potential leadership candidates and thus made eligible for intentional preparatory professional development opportunities. It was further seen that school administrators particularly, need to have appraisal take place, with potential benefits identified as a result of this.

While no consistent appraisal mechanism exists in this system, it appears commonplace in the literature for school systems, or districts at the very least, to utilise common practices. Interestingly, the most recent education system company strategic plan states their desire for the current timeframe to be a time for new beginnings, stating "This document seeks to start the 'wind back', a 'going against the trend' by seeking to actively pursue a de-escalation in the apparent compliance arms race currently in vogue inside the education sector…..This changes now in <location>" (Faith-based School Company, Strategic Plan, p. 8). This faith-based education system district realises that,

> Operationally, the … schools of the faith-based district are advantaged when they work together as a system, in alignment and in direct partnership: like 1 school with [multiple campuses]. Not homogenised, but in harmony with the collective mission: locally relevant and corporately aligned. (p. 8)

Given this, it would appear to be an appropriate time to consider performance appraisal practices at a systemic level, given the ad hoc nature of the current appraisal systems identified to be in use by interviewees in this study.

While the ideal is to generate a nationally consistent appraisal system across regions, the current structure of there being nine education companies presents a significant challenge to the development of a widely utilised, consistent appraisal system. The national head office of this faith-based education system has no real governance authority to generate 'buy in' to such an appraisal system,

This document seeks to start the 'wind back', a 'going against the trend' by seeking to actively pursue a de-escalation in the apparent compliance arms race

Educational Administration

while ineffective teacher appraisal efforts are often chalked up to flawed appraisal instruments, the real concern is primarily organis-ational, rather than technical

meaning each of the nine respective education companies would not have to make use of such a system, decreasing the likelihood of successfully implementing a consistently used appraisal process. Politics have long been identified as an organisational context element arising in educational performance appraisal, with Zhang & Ng (2017, p. 199) stating that a "sophisticated political understanding of how to structure the development and implementation processes to optimise the support of various stakeholders" is required to implement an effective appraisal system. Other studies have identified the role of politics also, indicating that effective appraisal systems need to be both technically sound as well as politically viable (Bridges & Groves, 1999; Kyriakides & Demetriou, 2007; Stronge & Tucker, 1999).

It is important to note that while ineffective teacher appraisal efforts are often chalked up to flawed appraisal instruments, the real concern is primarily organisational, rather than technical. McLaughlin and Pfeifer (1988) assert that the most critical obstacles to effective teacher appraisal tend to be teachers' and administrators' attitudes toward one another, the role feedback plays in the process, and the purposes of appraisal. The egalitarian culture of schools, what Donaldson (2013) called the 'culture of nice', also limits the effectiveness and use of performance appraisal, due to evaluator's reticence to give critical feedback or rate poor performance. Literature identifies that some principals, the most common evaluators of teacher performance, remain unwilling to identify teachers who are not meeting appropriate teaching standards (Johnson et al, 2009). There may be value in having external evaluators take part in the appraisal process, working alongside the principal.

While we have focussed on elements of performance appraisal, it is important to keep in mind that teacher evaluation allows another component of performance appraisal to surface – that being teacher improvement. One of the key purposes of teacher evaluation, as outlined by Papay (2012, p. 133) is to "improve instruction by developing teachers' instructional capacity and effectiveness". An emphasis on the feedback provided to teachers would allow teachers this opportunity, by identifying areas of strength in their teaching practice, as well as areas that need improvement, so initiating conversations around professional development needs at individual or school levels. Papay (2012) asserts, "The evaluation system can and should be seen as a professional development tool and should be evaluated on its ability to raise instructional proficiency and student learning" (p. 133).

Not a single interviewee indicated that change would not benefit the performance appraisal process utilised in their education setting. These findings raise a number of questions that are important for system and school improvement. Where is the vision for where performance appraisal could go and how this education system could benefit from it? What stops us considering what it could become in this faith-based education system? What if this faith-based education system better encouraged our teachers to become leaders, and our leaders to grow more leaders? Is there currently another need higher in priority than to be developing leaders, when this faith-based education system, like other education systems globally, is experiencing a leadership crisis? (Bennett, Carpenter & Hill, 2011; Williams & Morey, 2015; Williams & Morey, 2018). What if this education system stepped out in faith and embraced honest, professional conversations, acknowledging it needs to create a new culture that reconsiders the purpose of this education system, and prioritises the growth and development of both teachers and leaders? Would appraisal still be perceived as "*a dirty word*" then?

Recommendations

This research study strongly identifies that a mistrust has developed over time about the purpose and use of performance appraisal in this faith-based education system. Any attempt to return performance appraisal to the tool that provides so much organisational and individual benefit, starts and ends with gaining the collective 'buy-in' of staff. Eliminating much of the subjectivity and potential for bias that currently exists would be a crucial first step. In considering elements of implementing an evaluation program, Papay (2012) recognises that this would be contingent on developing a high-quality, standards-based appraisal system with clearly defined rubrics that identify what constitutes success against these standards. Those tasked with the role of evaluating teacher performance must be well trained, knowledgeable about effective practices as defined in the teacher and principal standards, and be able to evaluate observed practices to determine how well teachers are meeting these standards.

The teaching standards most commonly referenced by employees in this research project were those of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). These standards have particular relevance because not only are they representative of the Australian education context, they also include professional standards for both teachers and school principals. The development of these standards was informed "by extensive research, expert knowledge, an analysis and review of standards in use by teacher registration authorities, employers and professional associations across Australia, and significant consultation" (AITSL website). Staff interviewed in this research project importantly identified that in addition to these teacher and principal standards, there would need to be added standards relating to the special character of this faith-based education system. This was seen by staff as the preferred initial consideration with regards to the development of an effective performance appraisal process in this education system. Rieger (2011, 2017), referencing the National Professional Standards for Teachers and Principals, has proposed, for faith-based schools an additional domain "Teaching Ministry" and provided specific profiles of standards and descriptors potentially informing appraisal system development. Utilising a standards-based appraisal system was also identified as likely to help eliminate any criticisms that evaluators are not knowledgeable with regard to grade level or curriculum subject area.

Based on the findings of this study, it recommended that school principal appraisal be implemented, highlighting the AITSL principal standard of 'developing self and others', given there exists a responsibility to lead and build leadership capacity in the local school context. It is recommended that a high-quality evaluator at district (conference) level be developed who is capable of making defensible assessment and judgements about the capabilities of the teacher and administrator, independent of them as an individual, based on the developed standards-based appraisal system. This individual would be solely responsible for the appraisal of the school principals in their conference, and also oversee the proposed teacher evaluation process. They would receive substantial training on the teacher and principal standards and how to evaluate staff against these, with emphasis placed on how to encourage and develop teachers and principals on how to improve their practice.

Additionally, identifying a number of 'lead' teachers within this education system, as defined by the AITSL standards, who could be trained as evaluators would aid in the appraisal process for classroom teachers. These lead teachers, ideally known as respected and expert teachers, would be provided release time from teaching and would take on a caseload of teachers in their geographic area, but external to their own school setting, who they would be responsible to mentor, assist and appraise. These lead teachers would observe classroom teachers, alongside the school principal, and provide detailed feedback on teaching practice, as well as offer support that they believe would assist them in meeting the standards as set out in the appraisal system. They would also keep detailed records about each teacher's performance, completing reports and documenting each teacher's progression towards or meeting of the identified standards. Completed reports would be discussed with the individual teacher and then presented to the relevant administrators at school and district level. This may assist in the identification of future potential leaders where identified strengths indicate a potential for effective placement in administration. Adding to an identified pool of talent in this way while providing development and growth opportunities, ensures investment in the next generation of leaders, and assists in education system sustainability.

While a corporate education system approach is being recommended (and which appears consistent with the directive of this educational district), it is important to note that local variables must be able to be taken into account in any recommended or implemented performance appraisal system. It is recommended then, that key components of an effective appraisal system might guide, rather than mandate, an approach that fits the context of each individual school. Goe, Bell and Little (2008, p. 48) note that "Given that teacher contexts vary widely, it is essential that local input is considered when decisions are made about what to prioritise in a composite measure of teacher effectiveness". Such an appraisal system has the potential to serve the two main objectives of effective performance appraisal: teacher accountability for professional practice, as well as incorporate teacher development and growth. TEACH

Staff interviewed … identified that in addition to … teacher and principal standards, there would need to be added standards relating to the special character of this faith-based education system.

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Reading in Minecraft: A Generation Alpha case study

TEACH[R]

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Abstract

This qualitative case study reports the Four Resource Model (FRM) reading practices used by a Generation Alpha while playing the game Minecraft. The FRM skills of code breaker, text participant, text user and text analyst were investigated through data generated by observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews and a researcher reflective journal. The data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Four key themes emerged: language and articulation; social and mentor integration; real-world connection; and, parent and child viewpoints. Across these themes the FRM reading practices are being used by this child to make meaning while playing Minecraft. This game presents a multimodal text which this child is able to successfully navigate while designing and creating a digital story in virtual spaces.

Introduction

We live in an age where there are rapid developments in technology that force us to adapt. Reading and verbal communication appear to be constrained as communication and language needs are expressed in and through devices instantaneously and in an abbreviated form, often using only a touch-screen device (McDonald's Australia, 2017; Watt, 2010). Children are growing up in a digital world that is "infused with technology from the prenatal stage" (Merchant, 2015, p. 3). Access and use of technology devices at home has increased (Clark, Twining & Chambers, 2014). Another interesting point is the increase in use of downloaded applications available through online stores, App Store or Google Play etc., at both home and school (Clark, Twining & Chambers, 2014).

Across society, age groups are classified by their generation. Of particular interest for this case study is Generation Alpha. This age group represents those children born since 2010, which is also the year of the first Apple iPad (Apple, 2017). Generation Alpha have lived surrounded by technology and gaming. Generation Alpha are the first generation that have lived exposed to an advanced technological environment. Bliton (2013, p. 1) reports that parents provide their children with a tablet device so that the children are "occupied for an hour so [they – the parent] can eat in peace." A paradigm shift is taking place focusing on what children do with technology and not the reverse (Kervin, Verenikina, & Rivera, 2015). There are technology and multimedia skills within the twenty-first century which contemporary society encounters (Seely-Flint, Kitson, Lowe & Shaw, 2014). As part of these changes learning within the classroom needs to be relevant and connected to the student's interests and experiences outside of the classroom (Acosta, 2016; Bearne & Reedy, 2018).

> *A paradigm shift is taking place focusing on what children do with technology and not the reverse*

This means then that pedagogy should be evolving and changing to societal and cultural needs (Acosta, 2016; Bearne & Reedy, 2018). Education implemented in the classroom a hundred years ago focused solely on rote learning and memorisation which is no longer the only approach needed to meet the needs of today's student (Shaffer, Squire, Halverson & Gee, 2004). Cash (2017) states that current pedagogy still appears to utilise memorisation and factual teaching. We are in a digital age where schools need to provide current equipment and digital learning experiences (Burnett, 2016) and incorporate multimodal literacy (Bearne & Reedy, 2018). However, learning is not limited just to the classroom. Children learn in various contexts and this study aims to investigate the literacy learning happening outside of the classroom in the home context.

Research & Scholarship

Literature

Literacy is a term that is shaped by cultural, social influences and ideologies (Seeley-Flint et al., 2014). Multimodal literacy includes visual literacy skills which cover both print and digital literacy (Harvey, 2016). Harvey highlighted that there is limited research into literacy studies and education noting that the challenge exists in providing experiences that include today's innovative literacies. This is evidenced by the increase of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) within the classroom where teachers are expected to utilise the multimodal tools available to enhance pedagogy. Leu, et al. (2011) acknowledge that new literacy skills are needed when using ICT where, for example, reading comprehension includes more than just the orthographic or print-based reading. This means that students need technology and literacy competence for multimodal practices.

> *"new literacy skills are needed when using ICT … more than just the orthographic or print-based reading … students need technology and literacy competence for multimodal practices."*

According to Gee (2003) games present the user with semiotic domains and new literacies. Video games utilise multi-modality through words, representations, diagrams and visual symbols to communicate specific meanings. Research for game play has focused on the negatives effects of video games, such as addiction, violence and depression; however, there are researched positive effects on the cognitive, motivational, social and emotional domains of the player providing a balanced perspective (Granic, Lobel & Engels, 2014). Our modern world uses various modes of language communication and digital reading where individuals are required to understand and have knowledge within a diverse range of semiotic domains. Between each genre language dramatically alters, which can present a wide spectrum of literacy and learning experiences and this is prevalent to gaming as well (Gee, 2003). Daniels, Brooks, Babson and Ritzhaupt (2010) make an interesting point that gaming is not bound just to the device or the application as it is played, but also includes social engagement.

Opportunities for literacy interaction exist for the gamer within semiotic social spaces; through interactions with others who play; informative books or videos; and interactive online worlds and spaces, both within and outside of the game (Daniels, et al., 2010). Videos on YouTube or Twitch provide resources for gamers world-wide to learn more about the game, enhance their techniques, mimic the creativity of others or share their own work within the game with others. Lastowka (2011) reports that Minecraft does not provide assistance or direction for gamers; however, a search in 2017 on YouTube using the term "Minecraft" revealed 174 million videos showing YouTube is an external tool and resource for Minecraft gamers. Previous research on Minecraft and learning shows that YouTube is a valuable learning resource (Niemeyer & Gerber, 2015; Nebel, Schneider & Rey, 2016). Using YouTube to learn helps gamers to interact with digital tools and create prototypes for diverse audiences, thereby providing opportunities for motivation, tips and stimuli for gaming beginners, aiding them in their experience (Niemeyer & Gerber, 2015; Nebel, Schneider & Rey, 2016).

These online digital environments enable groups of people with similar interests to communicate, develop and connect, thereby promoting and enhancing their learning through informal experiences (Daniels, Brooks, Babson & Ritzhaupt, 2010). Although the study by Daniels, Brooks, Babson and Ritzhaupt (2010) was limited in size it does highlight the need for investigation into the connection between technology and literacy models. Bebbington (2014) specifically states that this type of investigation needs to take place, particularly in regards to the development of reading, again highlighting the gap that exists in the literature. For this study Minecraft was chosen as the application to be connected with the literacy model.

Minecraft is a three-dimensional Lego-like game released in 2011 which has since become one of the most globally used applications with more than 21 million copies sold for mobile devices (Nebel, et al., 2016). It was ranked as the top downloaded, paid application in 2017, by both the App Store and Google Play (Apple, 2017; Google, 2017). This game provides opportunity for the player to create and discover using a simulated landscape. The player explores, builds and learns strategies of survival while playing, through a trial and error process (Dezuanni & O'Mara, 2017). Younger children are reported using laptops, game consoles, and touch screen devices for gaming (Bearne & Reedy, 2018; Burnett, 2016; Kervin et al., 2015; Merchant, 2015). Increasingly, this application is being implemented in classrooms (Bos, Wilder, Cook & O'Donnell, 2014); however, there is limited research or knowledge on the impact that this application may have on a child's literacy development, particularly their reading practice (Neumann, 2016: Neumann & Neumann, 2014). This study aimed to address this gap, investigating one child's perspective of reading elements used when playing Minecraft. It was important in this investigation to interpret the perspective of reading from the child's understanding in relation to gaming using Minecraft, hence the research question: *What facets (if any) of Luke and Freebody's Four Resource Model emerge whilst a seven-year old interacts with the popular application Minecraft?*

For this study the Four Resource Model (FRM) by Luke and Freebody (1999) was selected as a simple framework to identify reading roles. The FRM provides four reader roles (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Serafini, 2012), namely:

1. Code breaker – decoding textual meaning
2. Text participant – engaging understanding proficiency
3. Text user – exhibiting pragmatic competence
4. Text analyst – modelling critical expertise

The FRM was selected as the academic model because its theoretical framework and contemporary educational use is flexible and appropriate for the new technological age (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Serafini, 2012). Also, it can be applied to multi-literate contexts across all reading ages. Reading abilities range from foundational to competent. The FRM allows for four significant literacy practices to be addressed concurrently, scaffolding literacy help and the teaching of reading skills (Jaeger, 2017; Simandan, 2012). The four reader roles or practices, as listed above, are the methods effective readers use when engaging with texts.

Each of the **four reader practices** are important for the reading process. The first practice of **code breaker** is where the reader examines the structure and features of the text. Research shows that this practice includes: knowledge and understanding of the alphabet and the letter/sound relationships, connections with spelling, sentence structure, punctuation and grammatical awareness, as well as knowledge and use of intonation (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Simandan, 2012). Luke, Woods and Dooley (2011) stress the need for twenty first century readers to be able to engage with and use written and visual sources, such as lexicon, icons, orthography and hyperlinks, accurately when reading and managing screens. Derouet (2010) and Luke, Woods and Dooley (2011) agree that twenty first century learners as visual code breakers need to also recognise that position and viewpoint significantly influence meaning. These readers need to be able to interpret and encode multimodal texts regarding contextual influences (Simandan, 2012) thereby implementing visual literacy regarding the use of line, colour, style, position, viewpoint and the relationship between visual and written source to interpret the meaning. Much research has been done in the area of deciphering words (Drewry, 2017; Jaeger, 2017; Luke, et al., 2011; Neumann & Neumann, 2014; Simandan, 2012). Further research covers visual cues, auditory codes and multimodal application (Drewry, 2017; Serafini, 2012; Simandan, 2012); yet, little has been done on code breaking in social and cultural contexts (Drewry, 2017).

The second FRM reader practice is that of **text participant**. This skill is a semantic practice which expects the reader to make meaning by reading, interpreting, comprehending and evaluating symbols and visual features in both print and digital texts (Serafini, 2012). Research in this area focuses mostly on text comprehension (Fawcett, 2014) where the reader had to actively participate, make connections, collaborate, interact with others and produce evidence (Seely-Flint, et al., 2014). Across this reader practice there is little proof of research into the reader's perspective. The third FRM reader practice is that of **text user**. Within the FRM the expectation is that readers will expand their understanding, both tacit and explicit, via external resources. Within this skill the reader accesses other sources to enhance and grow their knowledge base. This means that the reader goes beyond the current text and utilises other resources to enhance their learning. The fourth FRM reader practice is that of **text analyst**. For this skill the reader performs critical thinking where they problem solve, make judgements and express themselves more extensively (Cooper, Robinson, Slansky & Kiger, 2018). A text analyst identifies what is important in a text or story and evaluates the story, for example, making predictions and/or decisions about the story.

Derouet (2010) used the FRM as a framework for analysing and discussing picture books across years three and four of primary school. The Derouet study showed the benefit of using the FRM for both verbal and visual modes emphasising the link in current education and the focus on multi-modal texts. Simandan (2012) supports the use of the FRM to record the strengths and weaknesses of literacy learners. The FRM is valued for its holistic application and capacity to conceptualise all literacy elements simultaneously, which can be applied to a host of teaching and learning contexts (Drewry, 2017; Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2013). The pervasive nature of literacy means that it is everywhere. This permeation of literacy provides a diversity of contexts and genres resulting in no single approach to teaching literacy. The FRM is a framework that includes sociocultural models, the authentic life-long learning experiences, as well as new literacies (Drewry, 2017; Seeley-Flint et al., 2014).

The focus of research using the FRM in education is generally analysed through educator perspectives, adult assumptions and questions that inhibit a child expressing their perspective (Arthurson & Cozmescu, 2007). The voice of the child in research is often sparse, with most studies utilising "adult-centric lenses" (Harris, 2017, p. 22). Harris (2017) highlights that children are vital informants and provide unique, holistic and precious input that can significantly impact decision-making.

> *"The FRM is valued for its holistic application and capacity to conceptual-ise all literacy elements simul-taneously, … applied to a host of teaching and learning contexts"*

Research & Scholarship

> *children are vital informants and provide unique, holistic and precious [research] input that can significantly impact decision-making.*

It is exactly because of these reasons that this study has been conducted to investigate a seven year old's perspective on what facets of FRM reading practices they use when playing Minecraft.

Method

This qualitative case study drew on data collected through semi-structured interviews, observations and researcher reflections of one seven year old Generation Alpha. This methodology was chosen so that qualitative data could be analysed, interpreted and used to describe the case study (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Punch, 2014). Ethical clearance was obtained from the Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. The child and their parent selected for this study are extended family members of one of the researchers, which although convenient, meant that the researcher's presence in the home was not unusual providing a known, comfortable, regular occurrence where a prior relationship was already established with the child and their parent. In addition, this ensured that the participants' schedule, routine and normal behaviour continued throughout the data collection phase. Criteria were also used in selecting the participant to combat bias. This meant that the participant needed to be interested in gaming, be from Generation Alpha and the researcher needed to observe and interview the participant in a natural environment. Using an existing relationship provided rigour and trustworthiness to the data as a result of the natural setting. Throughout this process participant anonymity was ensured as it is crucial that they cannot be identified.

Data was collected in 2017 over a three month period which included observations and semi-structured interviews at the home of the child and their parent. The researcher reflections were recorded over the three month period. The data was coded using interpretative phenomenological analysis (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006) to evaluate the data, code the data into themes and interpret these into a report for the findings. The reliability and trustworthiness of the data was ensured by using both member checking and data triangulation.

The researcher's reflective journal created transparency in the research process exposing opinions, feelings and thoughts which shaped and informed the investigative process. The semi-structured interview of the child included questions such as:

What are you doing?
What do you have to do?
What is happening?
Do you play other games?
Did you have to learn something to do that?
How did you know what to do?

In addition to these questions the researcher was able to ask,

Can you explain? or
Tell me more …

The semi-structured interview for the parent included questions like:

Tell me about the child's technology usage?
How long has the child been playing games?
Does the child ask anyone questions about the games?
How much do you know about it?
Explain that some more for me.
What do you mean by that?

The participants' responses were audio recorded and transcribed prior to the coding and interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study. Firstly, this was a single case study based on one child using anecdotal evidence and so cannot be generalised. Secondly, the family members could have felt compelled to participate even though they did not want to, which might have skewed the data. In order to address these limitations, it was important to remove all aspects relating to demographics and identifiable characteristics throughout the reporting of this investigation. The researchers included the family in the planning, organisation and scheduling of the data collection period. Across the data collection and analysis stages the family and two researchers were part of the triangulation process thus ensuring the rigour and integrity of the data.

Findings and discussion

Across the data four key findings emerged: language and articulation; social and mentor integration; real-world connection; and, parent and child viewpoints. Each key finding will be presented below.

1. Language and articulation: during the observation and semi-structured interview the child repeated words, expressions and specific terminology when discussing Minecraft. The child used multiple fillers and interjections when speaking, for example, *like*, *oh* and *so*. These fillers and interjections disrupted their speech impacting on the flow of their language highlighting issues with their literacy skills particularly in regards to verbal communication and their ability to explain effectively. Interestingly, the parent revealed that (child's name) *is only at an Early Stage One level*, which would be three years below their chronological age. This means that although this child is seven years old they are already performing below age in reading. This is a significant factor for this study and reveals that this child, although functioning at a foundational reading level, is still able to apply reading skills within Minecraft.

   The repetition of words confirms this foundational level of reading and communication. Repeated words included *you*, *see*, *look* and *here*. These words appeared throughout the transcript, for example, …*so this is how you like create a world. So you go on here. Look you go up to here. See, create new world*. Over and over the child repeated words exposing their use of visual language and their preference of learning through a visual mode. This was confirmed by the parent who stated that (child's name) *is a visual kid and loves Lego*. Although there are concerns regarding the child's literacy skills there was much evidence of the child explaining, reasoning, describing, comprehending and sounding out which are all code breaking reading practices. Examples of this are when the child was sharing elements of the game: …*you can use different texture packs. Umm, different packs they have different blocks. There is like millions of them. It is like these texture packs so you can go to any like you can change your world*. Another instance was during an explanation of using the controller, …*oh, you just press this button here. But in different controllers. I will show you if you get like a PlayStation or something…and how to delete them you just press umm this. You press it again, like two times to get out you just press circle*. The child demonstrated critical thinking and an example of this is when they shared their preference for playing Minecraft on a PlayStation, …*because it's more easier, uh and the iPads harder. It glitches a lot that's why it is bad.*

   There were numerous times where the child experienced difficulty in pronouncing particular words. When unsure of how to enunciate a word, the child would sound it out. Often this resulted in the child separating the word into identifiable sound groups, for example, *I went on add a l-a-y-er, or …like up-d-a-t-ed, and …this is how to crac, cr-ou-ch. This is how to crouch.* Interestingly, the child sounded out the word and then repeated the sentence correctly showing their understanding and knowledge as a FRM code breaker of the letter/sound relationship and sentence structure. Although the child has literacy constraints they are not intimidated by new or unusual words in the game. The child said, *I know what they are because they have their nametags on. So, like if I forget one you can just look on the nametags*. This demonstrates that the child has implemented strategies for comprehension and memory together with resources to assist them while playing Minecraft demonstrating their text participant skills. There was a game update during the data collection phase and the child used prior knowledge and comprehension to ascertain the different elements, stating, …*is there anything new about this one? No. But there is something new about that. Oh! Nothing is new here. Ah, these aren't new. Oh, these are new! Oh, these are so good!.* This again demonstrates the child as text participant using visual cues and knowledge. Another point noted in the data analysis was that the child often articulated their thoughts aloud, asking questions and answering these same questions. Across this key finding while playing Minecraft the child was continuously reading and using information whether it was digital, spoken or visual to complete tasks.

> *the child was continuously reading and using information whether it was digital, spoken or visual to complete tasks.*

2. Social and mentor integration: the observations and field notes show that Minecraft has aspects of guidance and collaborative play. The child's sibling, who is three years older, was in the lounge area during data collection. The child often used their sibling as a source asking them questions regarding the game, for example, (sibling's name), *what does this say?* and (sibling's name), *how do you do this again?* In addition, the child regularly made statements to the sibling and in general using the term *we* (used thirty nine times). It appears that the child and their sibling engage with Minecraft together where the sibling is a source and mentor for the child. The child confirmed ownership of a Minecraft book which they have chosen not to read or reference. Rather, the child stated that they regularly use YouTube to learn about Minecraft, *I learnt them when they went on the first thing of Minecraft when I watched a video*. It was identified that the child used DanTDM, a Minecraft streamer, on YouTube

as a resource to build and develop their knowledge and skill in playing Minecraft. This confirms previous research that YouTube is used as a learning tool (Niemeyer & Gerber, 2015; Nebel, Schneider & Rey, 2016). The use of this resource provides the child access to verbal and visual modelling strengthening this reader as a text user.

Throughout the data collection phase with the child, they continued to play Minecraft and at times would model components of the game and share what they considered as important and relevant information for the researcher in playing Minecraft. There was evidence of the child sharing only aspects they considered appropriate for a first experience when playing Minecraft thus demonstrating scaffolding. When the researcher asked a question about a certain play the child replied, *I will tell you one day.* Perhaps avoiding the need to answer the question or not wanting to overload the researcher with too much information during the first session. The child did question the researcher whether they had any tips for playing Minecraft. This shows an openness to learning and especially learning from others.

> *The child appears to exhibit substantial knowledge of Minecraft despite their reading struggles. … [which] do not … impact the child's interest and desire to learn*

The child did acknowledge that on Minecraft there was the option where *you can write words, but only on the computer* communicating via instant messenger with others around the world. Again, this demonstrates that the child is aware of the social aspect of Minecraft and the options of connecting with others who play Minecraft. According to the parent, the child will talk about Minecraft to anyone who will listen. This confirms what other researchers found about gaming, not being bound just to the device or application as it is played (Daniels, Brooks, Babson & Ritzhaupt, 2010). It was also revealed by the parent that the child usually plays the game with others. This was confirmed when the researcher was interviewing the parent and a friend joined the child playing Minecraft. Social interactions and engagement with multimodal elements also form part of the FRM text user role.

3. Real-world connection: Minecraft is comprised of boxes, objects and situations that allow players to create real life connections. The child was apologetic when destroying an animal for resources and survival within the game, for example, *I am so sorry, donkey.* At one stage during the data collection phase the child decided to make a friend. They built a virtual person and then began addressing them saying, *hi, he is saying hi!* Within Minecraft players creatively and critically design and plan a *digital story* based on their *interest*. Players create homes, safe spaces and other places that they virtually inhabit as part of their "*life*". Creating a meaningful and unique story means that the creator is making meaning and participating in text, which are both FRM reading practices. Players use comprehension to learn the game features, implement strategies and utilise prior knowledge. The child appears to exhibit substantial knowledge of Minecraft despite their reading struggles. These challenges do not appear to impact the child's interest and desire to learn through Minecraft as an application. This behaviour and skill links with the FRM text user who is connected to the multimodal text through interest, proficiency and both cultural and social experience strategically utilising virtual literacy occurrences and texts. The fact that Minecraft provides socially appropriate practices connecting the child through life experiences means that it meets the dimensions of the FRM. Players in Minecraft construct rare and customised experiences through the simulated landscape—manipulating fictional space using basic semiotic hyperlinks, relevant game orthography, unique lexicon, icon reading and the ability to manage, read and navigate the screen location. These are all aspects of the FRM code breaker reading skill.

The parent reflected that the child almost lives in the world. Like if you spoke, *you wouldn't get a response. You can see it in (name of child's) eyes, like [name of child] is still in the game even when away from it.* Interestingly, the child overhead this comment and agreed, *yeah! You just saying you're in your 'game world'*. This concept contributed to the viewpoints expressed during the data collection.

4. Parent and child viewpoints: Each of these viewpoints were key contributors to the attitudes displayed as well as to the actions taken and observed. Firstly, the parent, as shown above, has a strong view on gaming and stated that (child's name) *is restricted more in school than during holidays and would prefer* (child's name) *outside than on anything.* In regards to Minecraft the parent stated, *I just can't stand the movement. I don't like it at all.* When the researcher commented that the game has peaceful music, the parent said, *it is about the only good thing you can say about it.* Clearly, the parent is not favourable towards this application later stating that Minecraft *has nothing to do for the mind. I don't see how it helps them at all.* Despite this viewpoint the parent still allows the child to play Minecraft.

Throughout the data collection phase the child was clearly passionate and knowledgeable regarding Minecraft. Although the child has learning difficulties they pursue the game and learn new ways of doing aspects within the game. The child revealed that they used cheats in Minecraft showing that although they make mistakes in the game they can reverse the mistake and correct their attempt without penalty. This is clearly a chosen scaffolding tool that the child uses to improve their skill and understanding within the game. Across the data this is how this child learns. This process of mastery helps students re-evaluate their decisions and improve.

The child prefers concepts to be modelled allowing them to visually perceive what they need to do and then attempt it. The child finds it easier to demonstrate what needs to be done, instead of verbally explaining within the game, which in no way hinders the child's ability to continue playing and problem-solving. The child confidently and comfortably uses the digital tools available for exploration, trial-and-error and in order to continue when they are stuck in the game. These actions present a child who is comfortable problem-solving when needed, displaying the FRM text analyst skill. Throughout the data the child used expressions, emotions and a tone that showed they were engaged in the activity. Participating in the game was a joy and delight for this child who passionately demonstrated self-awareness and connection with the game. Further, the child did not get distracted by various noises while playing Minecraft.

Conclusion

Across each of these four key findings the child as code breaker, text participant, text user and text analyst used the reading practices to make meaning of the game and its multimodal texts, successfully playing and creating within the available virtual spaces. Table 1 shows the FRM reading practices evident in each of the key finding areas.

Although these four key findings highlight the positive reading practices used in Minecraft, there are a number of significant elements from within the FRM missing. These missing elements pertain to foundational readers and include:

- correct pronunciation guidance and assistance within the game to ensure accurate semantics and graphophonics for the reader as code breaker; and,
- fundamental explicit teaching of reading skills, for example, phonological awareness, syntax, spelling, etc.

Table 1: The FRM reading practice in each key finding area

Key finding area	FRM reading practice
language and articulation	code breaker text participant text analyst
social and mentor integration	text participant text user text analyst
real-world connection	code breaker text participant
parent and child viewpoints	text participant text analyst

> *Although these four key findings highlight the positive reading practices used in Minecraft, there are a … significant elements from within the FRM missing.*

These missing FRM elements perhaps have not been a factor in the design of the game and we would suggest that Minecraft introduce them to enhance its potential as a serious game. More research into the FRM and Minecraft is needed to unpack more than one child's perspective. These perspectives could include those of teachers, parents and various aged students. Further research is needed into whether Minecraft impacts student's comprehension, verbal literacy development or reading accuracy. Another area for investigation is the 'restarting' ability of the game and the impact this could have on the real-world experience of children who make mistakes which cannot be reversed. Research into the impact of targeted, interactive, reading video games on improvements in code breaker skills for children who struggle with reading in the early years of schooling, is recommended. We believe that future research needs to be conducted into the educational and literary benefits of the use of Minecraft in the classroom. TEACH

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We believe that future research needs to be conducted into the educational and literary benefits of the use of Minecraft in the classroom.

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Teaching YA cancer narratives: The Fault in Our Stars and issues with voicing illness

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Abstract

Increasingly publishers are promoting illness as a commodifiable literary product. There is now a wide range of autobiographical and fictional texts that explore life-threatening illnesses from the embodied perspective of protagonists. This trend is also evidenced in the content of young adult literature where concepts of the diseased self, agency and mortality are explored. The aim of this paper is to provide some background context on illness narratives and offer a close reading of the young adult text, *The Fault in our Stars* by John Green, in order to highlight important issues such as the accurate and realistic portrayal of cancer, particularly in the lived experience of adolescent readers. It is anticipated that this discussion will allow classroom teachers to engage more fully in conversations about text selection and content, and the ways in which literature can advance realistic representation of illness that previously have been culturally taboo.

Introduction: Teaching Cancer Narratives

> "When you learn your life is threatened, you can turn toward this knowledge or away from it. I turned toward it"
> (*Intoxicated By My Illness*, Anatole Broyard)

The following paper provides key insights into the burgeoning field of autopathography and illness narratives. Increasingly publishers are promoting illness as a commodifiable literary product. There is now a wide range of autobiographical and fictional texts that explore life threatening illnesses from the embodied perspective of protagonists. This trend is also evidenced in the content of young adult literature where concepts of the diseased self, agency and mortality are explored. Such thematic focal points invite English teachers to further examine this narrative shift and to critically engage with the ethical stance of a text, and the ways in which illness is legitimately and accurately portrayed.

The central aim of this paper is to provide some background context on illness narratives and authorial motivation in using writing as a means to reduce marginalisation and stigma. Importantly, we offer a close reading of the young adult text, *The Fault in our Stars* by John Green (2012), as a

we anticipate … teachers can engage more fully in conversations about text selection and … which literature can advance realistic representation of illness that previously have been culturally taboo.

Research & Scholarship

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strategic means to reflect on important issues such as the accurate and realistic portrayal of cancer, particularly in the lived experience of adolescent readers. By exploring these ethical issues we anticipate classroom teachers can engage more fully in conversations about text selection and content, and the ways in which literature can advance realistic representation of illness that previously have been culturally taboo.

Illness narratives

In the opening pages of his autobiographical text *Intoxicated By My Illness*, Anatole Broyard (1993) highlights the impulse to write about illness rather than suppress his response to a cancer diagnosis: "when you learn your life is threatened, you can turn toward this knowledge or away from it. I turned toward it" (p. 3). His confession is indicative of an observable narrative shift in contemporary writing, as Schultz and Holmes (2009) point out, where "cancer exceeded its discursive boundaries as a biological entity and became the focus of intense cultural interest" (p. xi). They posit that the "shifting relations between patients and medical practitioners 'helped promote …' the flowering of cancer narratives" (p. xi). Increasing emphasis on the autonomy of patients and a "resistance to the authority of the medical gaze or the inhumanity of medicalized settings" (Shultz & Holmes, 2009, p. xi) has also motivated marginalised subjects to take up speaking positions.

These increasing accounts of authors telling personal experiences are often called autopathographies. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins (1999), in her foundational work highlighted one of the primary functions of writing this kind of genre: "patients not only restore the experiential dimension to illness and treatment, but also place the ill person at the very centre of that experience" (p. 128). She also observed that this mode of narration not only situates illness, and its treatments, within the author's life, but also links them with "the meaning of life" (p. 128). As a cancer diagnosis can be destabilising and the invasive treatment dehumanising, autobiographical writing offers an opportunity to counter this sense of fragmentation through authoring/producing a coherent and manageable text.

In looking at the ways in which such stories about illness are variously structured, sociologist Arthur Frank (1995), in his influential text *The Wounded Storyteller*, offers three classifications of illness narratives. Firstly, the "restitution narrative" (pp. 75-96) has at its structural base the movement from illness back to restorable health. There is a sense in which the "happy ending" drives and shapes the text. Then there is the "quest narrative" (pp. 115-136), which does not necessarily promise a neatly resolved health outcome, but focuses on the way in which difficulties are approached and suffering confronted with a view to important life lessons being learned along the journey. The third form of illness story, the "chaos narrative" (pp. 97-114), as Frank indicates, is the most difficult to tell, and the most difficult to listen to (or read). This is because it is "the anti-narrative of time without sequence, telling without mediation and speaking about oneself without being fully able to reflect on oneself" (p. 98). This kind of narrative is founded on the anxieties, and melancholia, that so often can be produced when the prospect of recovery is rendered impossible by chronic or terminal disease.

While we acknowledge we have by necessity over-simplified Frank's narrative classifications here, even a rudimentary understanding is helpful when talking about the structural techniques frequently employed by a story teller who wishes to communicate an illness experience. However, sometimes a single text may simultaneously be shaped by all of the multivalent trajectories of "restitution", "quest" and "chaos".

Because, as Frank (1995) testifies, an illness diagnosis can be disruptive and the intrusive treatment dehumanising, autobiographical writing offers an opportunity to counter this sense of fragmentation through authoring/producing a coherent and manageable text. And, as Roscoe (2016) highlights, these kinds of illness texts are increasingly popular with readers because "… we are drawn to human stories of adventure, suffering, loss and other examples of extreme experience and emotion, and to stories that allow us to vicariously experience various aspects of the human condition" (p. 68). While such stories engage audiences, Ann Jerecic (2012) highlights "Such an approach to personal narrative is, however, out of step with mainstream literary criticism, which has not, by and large, recognized the significance of the work performed by such texts" (p. 3). While the academy may be reluctant to privilege the work of personally mediated stories on illness, popular audiences place value on such texts.

Part of the appeal these human stories have for readers can be inextricably linked to the status of a text's perceived authenticity. When an illness narrative is a first-hand account of a patient's lived experience of illness and its treatment, the text is often privileged as an agentic and therapeutic work, and its veracity remains uncontested. As Couser (1997) notes, works of this kind typically perform the work of "recover[ing] variously dysfunctional bodies from domination by others' authority and discourse ... [and thus] convert the passive object into active subject" (p. 291). In underscoring why he believes such texts have value, Frank contends that "Through their stories, the ill create empathic bonds between themselves and their listeners" (Frank, 1995, p. xii).

Messaging the real

Health communication has often utilised reason based approaches within messages on the assumption that a more informed and knowledgeable individual will take note of the message. This approach, based on the Health Belief Model (Rosenstock, 1974, p. 330) has been challenged more recently by the expansion of testimonial stories on illness experiences. It is apparent that for many the experience of illness and the consequent interaction with the health care system brings an undeniable urge to search outside the medical boundaries for more (Broom, 2005; Kivits, 2004; Nielsen, 2010). Dolce (2011) identified two strong themes driving such individuals. Firstly, there was considerable disenchantment with the interactions with health care providers and secondly frustration with the health system. In embarking on this search individuals will quickly become exposed to numerous narrative style sources of information written outside a biomedical framework. In the case of cancer, narratives have become a common outlet for individuals. Given the rising popularity of this style of communication, it has been compared to an instructional style and it is clear that the narrative approach connects better with an audience (Kreuter, Holmes, Alcarez, Kalesan, Rath, Richert, … Clark, 2010).

One might question to what extent fictional works or illness narratives impact the health of the wider community and whether accuracy in fictional work is therefore a concern. This is not a recent issue given that in 1904 the Journal of the American Medical Association published an article titled "Medical errors in fiction" decrying the inaccuracies in fiction when describing medical scenarios (Journal of the American Medical Association, 1904).

The experience from the field of mental illness gives solid evidence of the persuasive and negative influence that inaccurate and distorted messages lead to. For instance, Wahl (1995) identified examples of the numerous ways mental illness was depicted in negative ways in various media, including that orientated to children and youth. This has been a concern that many medical professionals have held because of such stigmatising leading to negative views, fear and prejudice. Byrne (1998), a senior registrar in psychiatry, lamented the ways misinformation in the media perpetuated what he labelled "the spurious association between all mental illness and violence" (p. 176). This groundswell of concern in the community and medical profession, led to the Royal College Christmas Lecture for Young People being orientated to this topic with the debate titled, "Mental Illness and the Media". Bolton (2000) in this address expressed this well in relation to other unacceptable forms of stereotyping observing, "Racism and sexism are unacceptable, but we lack an equivalent term for the prejudice which surrounds mental illness" (p. 345).

Wahl (2003) later took the analysis further and particularly examined children's media for ways that this depicts mental illness to children. He identified numerous examples of messages embedded in television, movies and books, of negative stereotypes and misinformation that perpetuate incorrect messages that are ultimately detrimental to health. Examples given come from the *Harry Potter* series where an escaped prisoner is identified to the young wizard as mad and a danger to anyone who crosses him, and the *Green Lantern*, where a character called Nero starts out in a psychiatric facility with an illness then this is linked to his villainous behaviour (Wahl, 2003).

These occurrences are not isolated to a brief period of time, but extend across decades and have perpetuated considerable inaccurate information. Klin and Lemish (2008) identify a number of examples where negative influences arise and this again included the genre of fiction. This negative framing as identified by Sieff (2003) influences public opinion and attitude not just in adverse ways, but often in durable imprints that are difficult to amend. Sieff indicates that this is particularly related to the way cognitive models of framing are postulated to work. Stories are the basis for understanding events, and for storing information, which when stored in this form become easier to retrieve as the items are linked, and subsequent recognition of elements of this framing triggers associations. In regards to the impact of a story, Caputo and Rouner (2011) in studying the effects of stories related to mental illness, found that the genre of a story, whether fiction or non-fiction, did not affect the impact in situations of familiarity with illness. What was key, was the relevance of the story to the individual and then regardless of the genre, the reader was more likely to be transported into the story, then experiencing less social distancing and greater involvement in the story.

There are a number of calls for medical fiction to be careful with the depiction of illness. Collee (1999) argues that there is a delicate trade-off between an accurate but bland story. Scenes involving suicide are especially seen as problematic, but he argues against a type of censorship for such activities, identifying a difficulty in determining where to draw

Racism and sexism are unacceptable, but we lack an equivalent term for the prejudice which surrounds mental illness

Research & Scholarship

a boundary given similar concerns with violence, or unsafe sex amongst others. Charpy (2014) identifies a particular concern with fiction that is written by authors that have a background in medical care because of a perception of the work having greater authenticity, given the professional knowledge and experience of the author. Robin Cook is a particularly prominent figure in this category given his training in medicine. This perceived authenticity lends greater credibility to the text and this, combined with the seemingly detailed accounts of medical procedures and treatments, draws the reader in. Belling (2010) focuses especially on a Robin Cook novel, *Coma*. This text, with its detailed and graphic portrayal of the supposed advances in technology bringing about the dilemma of treating a person with a functioning body, but with a limited functioning brain, gave the public an insight into the notion of re-defining death. It was seen to spur an unaware public into a bio-ethical debate about death and end of life, but came with a dark side of a "sinister subtext of conspiracy, profiteering, and murder" (Belling, 2010, p. 450), thus creating a heightened anxiety regarding personal safety in hospital environments.

"Does this text voice illness, fictional or not, in a way that creates agency and empowerment for the reader?"

Fictional pathography and *The Fault in Our Stars*

While fictional pathography might create an empathic and authentic bond between an ill narrator and the reader, we acknowledge that imaginatively rendered texts might raise and compound further ethical questions about authorial motivation, and the reliability of truth telling. By way of exploring such writerly and readerly tensions we will look at Green's (2012) *The Fault in Our Stars* and consider some of the key questions the text, and its representation of a teen cancer experience, raises.

Green makes it clear *in his author's note that The Fault in Our Stars* is "a work of fiction", that he "made up" and that he believes that any attempt to see it as factual attacks "the very idea that made up stories can matter" (Green, 2012, author's note). While it appears that he is referring to the fictional nature of his characters, the nature of the statement would suggest that he believes a fictional account of illness to be accountable only in so far as it is it true to its characters. If this is true, then it would appear he has not attempted to create an accurate cancer narrative, but rather a coming-of-age young adult novel that uses cancer to create drama and the high-stakes of near death experience. The main characters, Hazel and Augustus, are recovering from cancer – thyroid in Hazel's case, with a satellite colony in her lungs (p. 5). Augustus has lost his leg to osteosarcoma (p. 11). The story follows their love, resistance to love, and their desire to find both a place and an identity outside of illness. Hazel is terrified she will die and hurt Augustus, ironically failing to see that it is Augustus whose cancer has recurred. The two meet at a cancer survivor's support group that Hazel openly despises. They find in each other their intellectual and emotional equals – both approaching their cancer experience with mordacity and a vaguely implausible philosophic eloquence. Fiction it may be, but it also positions itself as a pathography and thus it presents to an audience, in this case an audience generally too young to be intimately acquainted with cancer, a narrative of illness that will be their first and, in some cases, only experience with a cancer journey.

The text raises a constellation of questions: Does it matter if a piece of fiction represents illness in a fictional way? Can't a story be just that – a story? Why shouldn't a work of fiction manipulate an experience to heighten drama and to work more fluidly within the parameters of the narrative? We would posit that taking into consideration literary integrity and medical and psychological perspectives, it does matter. While there is room to creatively manoeuvre any lived experience within fictional frames, readers increasingly have come to expect more from fiction in terms of depictions of race, of gender and of disability – why would we expect less ethical alignment with reality from an illness narrative?

As interrogators of the *The Fault in Our Stars* we are interested in several questions. Does this text voice illness, fictional or not, in a way that creates agency and empowerment for the reader or does it advance the cliché that proximity to death creates profundity? Is it helpful for teenagers to see characters who are so eloquent in their storying of illness or does it create a false sense of the attractive and articulate nature of the cancer patient? Most importantly we ask of the text, does the voice actually advance an understanding of illness or simply present an emotional melodrama where young adult cancer patients are defined by their cancer and the experience of the disease becomes their entire world?

The cancer narrative in *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012) is presented intellectually – as perceived and understood by its well-read, mature and verbally dexterous protagonists. They are witty and caustic in the way they discuss their illness – at once claiming to be more than their cancers, and yet joking about survivor's "cancertastic pasts" (p. 5) and the "cancer perks" that regular kids don't get (p. 23). Hazel is flippant about her side-effects – the chipmunk cheeks and the fact that she was "veritably swimming in a paralyzing and totally clinical depression" (p. 4). The pair speak in metaphors and use ancient Greek terms for complex emotional issues – "But of course there is always a harmatia and yours is that oh, my god, even though you had freaking cancer you give more money to a company in exchange for the chance to acquire yet more cancer" (p. 20). "It's a metaphor," he said. "You choose your behaviours based on their metaphorical resonances… . I said" (p. 21).

Hazel and Augustus get to know each other to the backdrop of a mutual friend losing his eyesight to cancer and Hazel's own hospitalisation due to the complications of her illness. Hazel's desire to spare Augustus pain causes her to attempt to end the relationship before it can become serious, but Augustus persists and the two of them embark upon a quest to meet Hazel's favourite author – the writer of a 'cancer book' himself – *An Imperial Affliction*. The two fall in love, make love and in the end, despite their desire to be more than, and outside of their own cancer – it is the cancer that not only brings them together, but ties them together beyond death. In Augustus' words – they leave "scars" on each other (p. 311).

Green (2012) has called the book a "story about dying teenagers", one that he tried to keep both funny and romantic in the hope that would not become "too wrenching" (Talbot, 2014, para. 15). The story is heavy, difficult and often dark, and it feels like there is little hope in any of the cancer narratives presented within the text – even the survivors have broken spirits and cannot engage meaningfully with the world. *The New Yorker* describes it as flying in the face of "the notion that romance, particularly about teenagers, has to be straightforwardly aspirational" (Talbot, 2014, para. 13). What it also flies in the face of, however, is the fact that a cancer narrative needs to be grounded in a realistic experience.

Reader reception

Teen cancer survivor S.L. Huang (2015) describes her response to *The Fault in Our Stars* as being one of frustration: "The fact that it claims **not** to be a 'cancer book' is all the more frustrating when it's pretty much the canceringest cancer book ever to cancer-book" (para. 2). She claims the poor understanding of cancer patients and repeated inaccuracies are both monotonous and strangely boring. "There's certainly an argument to be made that some people somewhere will react to paediatric cancer the way Green's characters do. But that argument feels flimsy to me" (para. 6). Huang particularly dislikes the fact that Green's characters first claim to be more than their cancers, and then prove the opposite through their choices and words:

> Most saliently, all of Green's characters have lives that revolve entirely around their cancers. This is the most troubling aspect of the book for me. Despite their proclamations to the contrary… the characters are shown to have nothing in their lives that isn't about their cancer. Even Hazel's reading choices and Gus's videogame-playing are reflections of their reactions to cancer. (para. 9)

In further critiquing the way in which *The Fault in Our Stars* depicts cancer patients as particularly profound and wise, Huang (2015) describes being "exhausted by both Hazel and Gus's existential ridiculousness" (para. 17). Cancer, she explains, never made her profound – just angry. None of the other cancer patients she encountered spoke with the level of eloquence or understanding that Green's characters display – they were, in Huang's own words, "just kids" (para. 19). Others have echoed her view, one teen reviewer suggesting that the problem with

> indicating that your characters are intelligent by giving them all the voice of a 30-year-old Yale English Lit major who is trying to impress a date, is that it is not great writing. It is mediocre writing that tramples and ignores and substitutes any genuine character voices with your own… Hazel is John Green. Augustus is John Green. Hazel's mom and dad are John Green. Isaac is John Green. (X, 2012)

Author Tim Challies (2014) further critiques the novel as having "characters who have the philosophical background, verbal expression, and vocabulary of people much older than them" (para. 7). English author Mal Peet (2013) suggested that much as he "would love to meet teenagers such as Hazel and Gus" he fears he never shall "for surely such erudite, witty, philosophical, generous, courageous and doomed young people never walked the earth, let alone Indianapolis" (para. 6).

This sense that the characters are "more than" and even "better than" the average teenager, makes their response to their illness and mortality an unattainable one. The characters show maturity and understanding beyond the believable for young people who have had fractured education and low levels of socialisation, and this in turn portrays an experience that is not grounded in the realities of either cancer, or the experience of the teenager with cancer. This dichotomy between lived experience and the written one means that myths about death and profundity and "specialness" are perpetuated. Author Mal Peet (2013), describes the text as "faster off the mark and quicker on its feet than deep thought. The problem with smartness is that it tends towards aphorism" (para. 8).

That adolescents suffering with cancer will be grappling with the bigger existential question of

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Research & Scholarship

life, death and meaning while going through an endless round of tests, scans and treatment, is a largely unfounded assumption. Such an assumption ignores developmental theory which suggests that life tasks differ throughout life and that these are chronologically ordered (Erickson, 1950). The depiction of adolescents who process trauma like a self-reflexive adult becomes somewhat implausible in this text, and the expression of strong emotion (which adolescents often exhibit) should not be confused with the more sophisticated existential inquiry portrayed in *The Fault in Our Stars*. This is not to say the text was not loved by its readers, the majority of whom were participating in the cancer experience vicariously.

In an episode entitled 'Books that Transport You' which aired on ABC's *The Book Club* panellists were asked to recommend a work that fulfilled this brief. Well-known comedian Kitty Flanagan offered *The Fault in Our Stars* as her choice, noting "... this felt like a worthy text". Comparing the female protagonist in Green's text to her own teenage self, Flanagan moves towards self-flagellation:

> .. oh, god, I should have been nicer, I should have been better. Maybe it's because if you have a terminal illness you have to get your house in order and you have to be a little more grown up about things so therefore she was obviously a more astute and aware teenager than I ever was... .
>
> (Flanagan, 2016)

there is, within this genre … created for marketing rather than readership – a strong bias towards the white, literate and socio-economically upper middle class

This notion of a "worthy" text can in part explain why the book was on the best-seller list for over 120 weeks and was made into a successful motion picture (Talbot, 2014). And amongst the community of teen cancer survivors Green has had his supporters. In one online fan meet-up, reported by the New Yorker, a fifteen-year-old girl, also an osteosarcoma sufferer, told Green that he had done "an amazing job of capturing the fear, the humour, and the real pain of being a teenager with cancer" (Talbot, 2014, para. 68). But, this does not appear to be the experience of many of the readers with a lived cancer experience. Journalist Tanith Carey (2013) is far harsher in her critique, describing the text as "mawkish at best, exploitative at worst" (para. 1). She sees this as more than a problem of their representation as remarkable teenagers. To Carey, the greater problem lies in the teen cancer experience being bled to provide dramatic tension and its development into a "sick-lit" genre with blurbs that "trip over themselves to promise their books will drive readers to tears or leave them devastated" (para. 12).

The representation of teens not as they are, but as they would "like to be seen" could be seen as problematic if seeking to voice a realistic and empowering cancer narrative. For example, the erudite philosophies and high-level vocabulary of the main characters in *The Fault in Our Stars* limit the audience of the book to a subset of younger readers who have had the advantage of access to education, literacy and books. Wolf, Coats, Enciso and Jenkins (2011) describe the YA readership as a "privileged subset of a much larger group" (p. 23) and Garcia (2013) agrees – there is, within this genre generally created for marketing rather than readership – a strong bias towards the white, literate and socio-economically upper middle class (p. 19). This group of readers is not representative of those who have faced youth cancer, as cancer amongst teenagers is not linked to socio-economic factors and crosses borders of race and literacy (Clegg, et al., 2009). Cancer is not choosing white, upper-socioeconomic kids with strong family support structures, higher IQs and access to both quality education and cutting-edge cancer treatments. *The Fault in Our Stars* is speaking to a cancer narrative different than that lived by most patients, a dramatic, romantic and deeply philosophical one. The result is an entertaining and moving story, but not an empowering narrative about the nature of the teen cancer experience. As survivor Huang (2015) laments, "I do not exist to be *your* tragedy. I do not exist for you to find special meaning in your life. I do not exist to teach people lessons or to give people feels" (para. 41).

The notion that teens can not only articulate their response to cancer with the precision of Hazel or Gus, but also respond to death with a profundity and existential awareness at the level Green demonstrates, is somewhat problematic. It suggests that, while the characters have been disempowered by their physical bodies, they have compensated for this with an evolved, and quite unlikely, level of intellectual acuity. The cancer patients of *The Fault in Our Stars* are depicted as either simpering survivors who cannot find an identity outside of cancer (as epitomised by the leader of the group therapy sessions) or they are the judgmental, snarky and formidably cerebral battlers. The text seems to suggest that the closer one comes to death, the more articulate and sagacious one becomes – particularly embodied by Gus. For the vicarious cancer-free reader, this may not at first seem paradoxical – what does it matter if the cancer experience is expressed realistically, if it is expressed in a dramatic way? But for the cancer sufferer or survivor, this advancement of cliché leads to a narrative that is at best misrepresentative and at worst misleading.

Other young adult fictional pathographies

Several other fictional pathographies have emerged in the young adult space in recent years, though none as popular in terms of sales as *The Fault in Our Stars*. These texts vary in their approach to illness, some tackling the grit of everyday physical illness head on and other taking a more metaphorical approach. Jenny Downham's (2008) *Before I die*, is an intricate exploration of the physicality of cancer. Downham says of the character in her book with terminal cancer,

> I wanted the reader to inhabit her body … in the hope that they would have both a visceral and an emotional response. If Tessa's body does the talking—If the reader experiences a lumbar puncture or a haemorrhage with her—then it inevitably pushes the reader closer to the physical self. I wanted to achieve an immediacy between the body's decline and the words Tess uses to describe what's happening to her.
>
> (New York Times, 2007, para. 10)

While Downham (2008) claims to have consulted oncology staff to keep the story medically factual, she is quick to point out that her plan was never to write a 'medical story', something that mirrors Green's own claim (*New York Times*, 2007). However, her story involves such an intimate portrait of cancer that it will likely be read as a potentially real, lived experience by her readers. Her character, Tess, is not as eloquent as Hazel or Gus, but is just as poetic, expressing herself in rich imagery:

> when I die, I'll return to dust, glitter, rain.... I want to be buried right here under this tree. Its roots will reach into the soft mess of my body and suck me dry. I'll be reformed as apple blossom. I'll drift down in the spring like confetti and cling to my family's shoes.... In the summer they'll eat me
>
> (Downham 2008, p. 283)

However, there is something of Tess that is simpler and less contrived that the characters of *The Fault in Our Stars*; she is not waxing philosophic, but rather expressing clearly a desire to live, something that can be understood on a level than transcends a cancer diagnosis. Tess is not an unrecognisable character – too smart and too witty. She is every teenager facing the things that scare them most – "I want you to be with me in the dark. To hold me. To keep loving me. To help me when I get scared. To come right to the edge and see what's there" (Downham 2008, p. 256).

Patrick Ness' (2013) *A Monster Calls* does not explore cancer realistically as Downham or Green do, using instead the fantastical metaphor of a monster to unlock the grieving and fear response in a stoic child dealing with his mother's cancer. The reader is distanced from the character with cancer, exploring instead the emotional response of the loved one. Illness is the ominous presence in the story, but not the focus. Alice Kuipers' (2008) *Life on the Refrigerator Door* creates a similar distance between the character of Claire and her mother Elizabeth after her mother's cancer diagnosis and eventual death. They communicate via post-it notes on a refrigerator which makes the book an emotional journey about illness, goodbyes and grief rather than one about cancer itself; in fact, even Elizabeth who is an obstetrician-gynaecologist appears to have very little knowledge of breast cancer.

Issues with fictional and inaccurate pathography: Bibliotherapeutic use of literature

Of course, books about teen cancer are not only read by the teen cancer patient, in fact the larger part of the audience will be those with no experience with cancer at all and therein lies the dilemma for the educator. Is an inaccurate pathography, even a fictional one, providing students with a false narrative and understanding of illness, something that will affect how they themselves respond to illness in their own lives or in the lives of others? What is the responsibility of the educator to look for accuracy in a fictional pathography?

In an essay titled "Reading for Life" Martha Nussbaum (1990) notes that "People care for the books they read; and they are changed by what they care for - both during the time of reading and in countless later ways more difficult to discern" (p. 231). Nussbaum's comments on reading also suggest something of a bibliotherapeutic process where, as Briggs and Pehrsson (2008) highlight, books function as "a mechanism that assists with making meaning from life experiences, draw[ing] upon characters or information to expand worldviews and to assimilate new knowledge" (p. 37). This bibliotherapeutic relationship to texts indicates something of the multimodal nature of literature that is able to excite "the imagination so that readers recognise *actual* worlds and, simultaneously, create *possible* worlds" (Hodges, 2010, p. 65). A reader might seek to employ *The Fault in Our Stars* in this expansive way to understand a cancer diagnosis and treatment, reflecting not only on "what *is* or what *was*, but also asking what *might* be" (Hodges, 2010, p. 65). However, while *A Fault in Our Stars* might function in a therapeutic way for some readers, it could easily problematise realistic understandings of the actual and possible worlds for other readers.

This is where a new issue could manifest itself as a potentially troubling one - the relationship between helper and sufferer. Those who have read stories of cancer, but not lived it, are more likely to base their interactions and beliefs about cancer on

An unrealistic portrayal … an inauthentic picture … may result in an incongruence between what the helper believes versus the … actual lived experience.

Research & Scholarship

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the stories they have heard. Carl Rogers (1992), one of the founders of humanistic psychology, identified unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence as the key conditions that must exist for a therapeutic encounter to be successful. An unrealistic portrayal of the experience of the adolescent cancer sufferer, provides an inauthentic picture. This may result in an incongruence between what the helper (be they nurse, social worker, psychologist, counsellor or any other professional that may be involved in assisting the teen with a cancer diagnosis) believes is occurring versus the actual lived experience. Introducing elements not likely to be present in a lived journey gives an unhelpful bias to the person interacting with the person experiencing cancer. This may have implications for communication and behavioural interventions. In the case of family, friends and other non-professionals involved with the adolescent, their skewed perception makes it more difficult to provide empathy. Empathy by its very definition necessitates congruence (Rogers, 1975) and can be hindered by a glamorised or sensationalised portrayal of what it means to receive a terminal diagnosis. As the cancer experience already involves a lot of interaction with professionals who are administering treatment from a position of authority, it is important that those who are to provide emotional support come, as far as is possible, from a place of 'not-knowing' and thus being willing to listen and journey *with* the adolescent cancer patient. Such a relationship requires humility and congruence, resulting in the formation of an empathic connection. The creation or promulgation of stereotypes does not aid in this already complex endeavour. Thus, if this text is used in an educational setting, it seems essential that this consequence of the glamorisation of the cancer journey be enunciated clearly. Teens need to be able to journey with other teens in a congruent and empathic fashion.

Conclusion

While these are very different approaches to representing cancer as a subject, or even as a background catalyst, what does appear to be consistent across teen cancer narratives is death. Cancer equals death for most of the characters it touches, something that creates a sense of doom around the disease that simply does not reflect the medical facts and feels contrived to create melodrama and emotion. This is not to say the texts are without merit, it is just to suggest that this merit does not extend to the illumination of the real, lived experience of illness that Frank (1995, 2013) discusses in *The Wounded Storyteller*. Those pathographies, which allow the cancer patient a voice and a bond between themselves and those who read their stories, enable the ill both a sense of connection, and ownership over their bodies and illnesses, and these are reliant upon the veracity of the text. The fictional pathography has no such need for truth or to provide a voice for the ill and can be exaggerated, changed and made eloquent for the sake of appeal to an audience. This, in turn, creates a sense that those with an illness will behave, speak or connect in a way that may not be authentic. The truth-tellers may not be as verbally dexterous as the fictionally ill and their narratives slower and less dramatic. In the case of *The Fault in Our Stars*, Green has created characters with dramatic illnesses, false cures and an understanding of self and existence that is at odds with their life experience and education. As teen cancer survivor Huang puts it – the books uses cancer as some sort of lens for the meaningfulness of life (Huang, 2015). Rather than telling a cancer story in a way that illuminates the illness experience, *The Fault in Our Stars* uses cancer as a way to create tension, fear, drama and eventually tragedy. It is cancer as plot device, rather than cancer as the catalyst for works that might allow for a greater understanding of illness and the ill. This usurping of the patient voice is an important issue for the educator to consider before using a fictional pathography as a text set for teenagers – is the text enhancing their understanding of illness and providing an accurate empathetic response? Or is the text providing an unrealistic and false narrative that does a disservice to the lived experience of their peers? The true, lived pathography will provide the teenage reader and student with a greater knowledge of their world and the experience of those around them. TEACH

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> *Teens need to be able to journey with other teens [cancer patients] in a congruent and empathic fashion.*

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Tatian and Basil: Differing views regarding the pagan educational system of antiquity

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Key words: Basil of Caesarea; Christian education; church history; paideia.

Abstract

Advanced education for Christians of antiquity was only available through schools which used classical Greek methodology. This included literature, poetry, and philosophy closely tied to polytheistic and pagan traditions. Christian families and leaders at that time had to consider the spiritual implications of participating in such a system. This article contrasts the opinion of Tatian with that of Basil of Caesarea regarding Christian participation in pagan education.

Basil and Tatian had similar ascetic views, yet they differed on this issue. Tatian believed Christians should not take part in pagan education. Basil believed that Christians could benefit spiritually from this education if they experienced it selectively and wisely. It is concluded that Basil's view is the wiser choice.

> *"a cultural dilemma … classical education, logic human philosophy, and polytheism; … [or] , Christian learning, faith, divine philosophy, and the true God"*

Introduction

Stories of Christian young people having their faith challenged at university (or before) abound in our day. For this reason, many parents and other spiritual leaders wrestle with how to counsel their children and other students in regard to higher education. This problem is not new, however. I will explore a similar conundrum that was faced by Christians in antiquity.

The only opportunity for advanced education during the first few centuries of Christianity was schooling in the classical Greek tradition. This included quite a bit of pagan and polytheistic material. Not all Christians agreed on whether or not to partake in this form of education. Tatian of Assyria expressed his negative ideas about pagan education in *Oratio Ad Graecos*. On the other hand, Basil of Caesarea wrote one of the most important treatises on the positive aspects of pagan education for Christians, *Ad Adulescentes.* The purpose of this article is to compare Tatian's view with that of Basil, simultaneously comparing the reasons behind each view as well as potential outcomes of each, to demonstrate that Basil's generally represents the better course of action. This is accomplished by comparing relevant passages in *Oratio Ad Graecos* with *Ad Adulescentes*; while pointing out the importance of the positive arguments in the latter.

Background of the problem

For ancient Christians, advanced education could only be obtained by paying to attend pagan schools. This type of education was necessary for those seeking high-level careers in politics or advancement in the military (Schlager, 1991, p. 38). In addition, Christians needed this formal training to engage in apologetics and theology (Weltin, 1987, p. 13). Therefore, families with means who wanted their sons to be educated had to send them to schools that essentially espoused false gods.

This was not a small problem for Christians in antiquity. Dimitris Alexandrakas describes it, "Christians were caught in a cultural dilemma. From one side, classical education, logic, human philosophy, and polytheism; from the other, Christian learning, faith, divine philosophy, and the true God" (Alexandrakas, 1994, p. 287). Furthermore, the problem persisted until the seventh century when a Christian culture based on the Bible became dominant (Liebeschuetz, 1995, p. 193).

Roy J. Deferrari and M. R. P. McGuire in translating Basil (1934) declare that "…no one of the Fathers has expressed himself as opposed without compromise to pagan literature in its entirety" (p. 368). Bakke (2005) asserts that with two exceptions all the leading theologians from the second through the fifth centuries who discuss this matter held that the Greek classical literature (and by extension the classical education) was valuable to Christians (p. 212). Of course, this only represents opinions for which we have records.

Therefore, families who looked to church leaders for opinions on this matter might hear somewhat different opinions. According to Bakke (2005), the opinions of the early church fathers regarding the classical system of education fit into three basic positions. First, Christians should withdraw completely from the classical education. Second, while there might be spiritual dangers inherent in this education it is necessary, and Christians should participate, cautiously. Third, this education is a positive experience (p. 203). Tatian will first be examined as a representative of the view against the classical educational system and then Basil as a representative in favor of it.

Tatian's background

Not a great deal is known about Tatian. Matthew Crawford (2016) explains that putting together much uncontested information about him and his work is difficult (p. 544). His precise date of birth is unknown but he lived in the mid-second century (Koltun-Fromm, 2008, p. 1). By his own testimony, Tatian was born in Assyria (Tatian, trans. 1982, 42.1) and received a thorough Greek education (Tatian, trans. 1982, 35.1, 42.1). Further, Tatian was a pupil of Justin Martyr who, after Justin's death, became a teacher of Christianity in Rome (Crawford, 2016, p. 542). Irenaeus (Irenaeus, n.d., para. 1), Clement of Alexandria (Clement, trans. John Ferguson, 1991, 3.81.1-3.81.3), and Eusebius (Eusebius, trans. Christian Frederick Cruse, 1955, 4.29) indicate that Tatian began teaching heresy later in his life. However, Crawford (2016) offers plausible arguments against some of these judgments (pp. 545-570), as does Naomi Koltun-Fromm (2008, p. 3).

One reason knowledge about Tatian is limited is that little of his written work has survived. Only one of his written works is available intact, one other has come down to us in pieces (Foster, 2008, p. 107). The rest are lost except for a few fragments quoted in other ancient sources. The two we have are *Oratio Ad Graecos*, an apologetic work, and the *Diatessaron*, a gospel harmony used among churches that spoke Syriac (Koltun-Fromm, 2008, p. 2). No original *Diatessaron* manuscripts are available, but the work is quoted in enough other ancient sources to enable a partial reconstruction of it (Foster, 2008, p. 110).

Oratio Ad Graecos

Oratio Ad Graecos provides the scanty evidence accesible regarding Tatian's views against classical education. This tome is not primarily designed to address the issue of pagan education. Rather, it is an apologetic work in response to claims by the Greeks of superiority in culture, theology, and philosophy (Foster, 2008, p. 107). Further, it is an attempt to call Christians to separate themselves from Greek culture. In this regard, Allan T. Georgia (2018) says Tatian's,

> legacy is a passing vision to a version of Christian communities that did not pursue legitimacy by appealing to existing cultural values, but rather sought to turn over the tables of the cultural marketplace and establish something else, something other. (p. 219)

It is apparent, therefore, that as Tatian lambasts Greek philosophy and literature he is exhorting Christians to separate from them; including Greek educational settings.

The work is not very systematic. Foster (2008) describes the overall content asserting, "The structure of the work is a mixture of theological reflection, combined with strong polemical attacks... The impression is that the work is spontaneous rather than planned" (pp. 109-110). Therefore, this discussion will not try to organize the whole piece, but simply mention themes and passages pertinent to his view of education.

It is worth noting that Tatian indicates that he received a classical Greek education (trans. 1982, 35.1; 42.1), which lends credit to his opinion of the Greek ideas he criticizes. One theme in *Oratio Ad Graecos* important to the Greco-Roman educational system is Greek philosophy. In chapters two, three, and 25 Tatian soundly ridicules the philosophers and their teaching. Another pertinent theme is Greek religion, which he derides in chapters eight through to ten, and 21 to 22, by calling the Greek gods demons and pointing out the atrociously immoral acts they were known for. Tatian clearly has no respect for these two pillars of Greek culture—their philosophy and religion. It is easy to surmise that he would abhor an education that involved the study of these fields.

Literature was another important aspect of Greek culture and education. He addresses this in chapter 26, which contains the clearest statement against the pagan educational system. Tatian criticizes Greek literature comparing reading it to wandering in a maze. He ridicules the Greeks for thinking that they have more wisdom than others and blames this attitude on those who teach literature. Essentially, he says these grammarians have no wisdom and pass their foolishness on to others. Therefore, he has, "abandoned you and cut off contact with you; we follow God's word" (Tatian, trans. 1982, 26.3). Thus, Tatian declares a distinct

> *"Tatian indicates that he received a classical Greek education … which lends credit to his opinion of the Greek ideas he criticizes."*

Research & Scholarship

separation from Greek *paideia* [Gr: education] (Bakke, 2005, pp. 203, 204).

Tatian's work illuminates much that is immoral and false in classical Greek philosophy, religion, literature, and poetry. He is correct to recognize that falsehood does not come from God and Christians should be wary of it. The benefits his solution to avoid it completely would bring, can be questioned though,

There might be some Christians who would be tempted into sin by exposure to such material and certainly, they should avoid it for the sake of personal holiness. Yet for other Christians, abstaining from classical education would reap no spiritual reward. Those Christians would be less prepared apologetically, they would have no practice in connecting the virtues in Greek culture to Christian virtues. Further, they would be less prepared for the job market. Basil's work will demonstrate his opinion there are spiritual benefits that accrue to Christians who participate in Greek *paideia* with specific goals in mind.

pagan works are only worthwhile to the extent that they help one achieve eternal life

Basil's background

Basil of Caesarea was born approximately AD 330 in Caesarea, Cappadocia to a devout Christian family. He was educated in rhetorical schools in Caesarea, Constantinople, and Athens. He is remembered as an orator, theologian, ascetic, and monastic. In 370, he became bishop of Caesarea. Further, he is known as a very important defender of orthodoxy against the heresy of Arianism. Basil's writings were influential in the defeat of Arianism at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, only about two years after his death (Basil of Caesarea, 1991, pp. 12, 13).

Basil was himself a product of the Greco-Roman educational system. Jacob N. Van Sickle (2014) tells us Basil spent several years in Athens obtaining the best classical education possible at that time. However, soon after returning home Basil experienced a transformation of sorts in which he saw that the truth of God was much more valuable than all his learning (p. 14). Yet, his learning eventually became valuable in his gospel ministry. For example, Basil was able to use his own education to train people regarding the flaws of secular wisdom and the reasonableness of the Bible (Hildebrand, 2014, p. 38). Furthermore, Kiriatlis (2010) asserts that Basil's understanding of Greek culture and scholarship enabled him to explain the Trinity in a meaningful way (pp. 74-75), which allowed him to explain the gospel in a way that was understandable and effective for his cultural and historical context.

Ad Adulescentes[1]

Ad Adulescentes, the most well-known of all Basil's works (Basil, 1934, p. 371), is a very clear statement of his thoughts on pagan education. A brief review of the literature related to this work follows, then a discussion of Basil's themes in the address. Sherman Garnett Jr. (1981) examines the treatise from the standpoint of the way in which Basil guides the young men. Garnett seems to be impressed with what today might be called Basil's age-appropriate education. Ultimately, Garnett values Basil's role in the life of the students. He believes that the students will be able to make use of pagan poetry and philosophy because of the instruction Basil has provided (p. 223).

Robert E. Winn (1999) expresses the notion that even a passing reading of this document shows, "Basil's overwhelming concern is promoting a virtuous life" (p. 293). This is clear from the statements Basil (1934) makes. For example, he tells the youth to read poetry and if the poet recounts deeds of good men, then the readers should copy those deeds (4.2, pp. 387-389). However, a desire for these young men to grow in virtue surely cannot be the sole reason that Basil writes as his opening sentence begins, "There are many considerations which urge me to counsel you, my children…" (1.1, p. 379).

Arthur G. Holder (1992) believes that the focus of the argument is not whether or not Christians should study in the pagan schools, because it is already a given that they must do so in order to be educated people. The focus of the article, he explains, is on practical application. Basil wants the young men to understand precisely how they can benefit from their secular education. He wants them to know what they must do in order to receive positive spiritual benefits from the Classical education (p. 401).

Bernard Schlager (1991) also points out the practical nature of what the address is saying. He notes that, according to Basil, eternal life is the objective for Christians. Therefore, pagan works are only worthwhile to the extent that they help one achieve eternal life (p. 44). Surely, this is the attitude one would expect from a pastor.

Benjamin D. Wayman (2016) used "Address to Young Men, on How They Might Derive Benefit from Greek Literature" to contrast the views of the Roman emperor Julian[2] on education and its purposes, with those of Basil. Wayman describes Julian's view of the educational system as one that was very connected to the religious and moral views of Roman culture. Julian essentially saw the role of education as being to form young men into good, pagan citizens of Rome. He even wanted the schools to be places where Christian children became converts to paganism (p. 254-255).

Conversely, one might expect that a church father would see the educational system's purpose to be about converting pagans to Christians. However, that is not what Wayman describes. He writes that for Basil, Greek education does not offer full-fledged moral training. Rather, it provides "literary and philosophical training and even preliminary moral instruction" (Wayman, 2016, p. 257). Basil, he explains, would consider the grammatical, rhetorical, philosophical, and moral education only as an addition to the religious instruction Christians received at home and in the church. For Basil the role of Greek education in spiritual formation is minor (p. 257).

Before Deferrari and McGuire translated and published this address of Basil (1934), they furnish some of their thoughts on it. They conclude that Basil's thinking in regard to the pagan classics is, "the most enlightened and well-balanced of his time" (p. 370). They add that Basil is very aware of the dangers present for Christians in pagan literature, yet he does not condemn the whole for the sake of the bad. Therefore, they explain, Basil advises the study of pagan Greek literature for ethical reasons rather than aesthetic or scientific. The reason to study this material in Basil's mind is to learn to practice virtue and to prepare the students to understand the Bible. At the same time, Basil clearly appreciates the positive things found in pagan Greek literature (1934, p. 371-372).

Ernest L. Fortin (1996) takes a fairly critical view of Basil's teaching in this address. He claims that when Basil used references to classical Greek texts that he frequently twisted the words or meanings of the authors (p. 137). Fortin believes that Basil did so in an attempt to, "blind him [the student] temporarily to the true nature of the objectionable parts and thus prevent him from seeing in the text at hand anything that might be construed as a serious alternative to his faith" (p. 143). In other words, Fortin did not consider Basil to be in favor of pagan education therefore, he was trying to inoculate students against it.

The authors discussed have somewhat different views of this treatise. However, except for Fortin, they do not directly contradict one another; rather they speak to different aspects of the address. The following examination of the text itself, looks for answers to the question, What value does Basil perceive exists for a Christian to participate in the pagan educational system?

The letter has ten sections which Holder (1992) has demonstrated divide into three main parts. Chapters I-III make the claim that reading Greek literature can have value. Chapters IV-VII set out a principle that can guide Christians as they read pagan literature. Chapters VIII-X challenge the students to grow in virtue as a means of preparing for their future lives in eternity (Basil, 1934, p. 401-402). Within this organizational framework, there are several prominent themes. One theme Basil communicates is that pagan literature can be valuable for Christians. Another is that true value is found only in things which profit one's eternity. A sub-theme to that idea is that true virtue provides profit towards eternity. A final theme in the work is that Christians should be selective in their dealings with pagan works by accepting from them only useful material.

Basil is very aware of the dangers present for Christians in pagan literature, yet he does not condemn the whole for the sake of the bad.

Basil (1934) opens by saying, "There are many considerations which urge me to counsel you, my children, on what things I judge to be best, and on those which I am confident, if you accept them, will be to your advantage" (1.1, p. 379). By claiming that acceptance of his advice on dealing with pagan writings would be to the students' advantages, Basil shows us that there is something valuable here if the pupils will learn how to 'mine' it out. This notion that the pagan corpus can be valuable is highlighted throughout the letter as Basil repeatedly tells the young men to take what is useful from the non-Christian authors. For example, chapter IV says, "But that this pagan learning is not without usefulness for the soul has been sufficiently affirmed…" (4.1, p. 387).

Basil's skill as a rhetor is evident as he instructs the young men that true value is found only in things that prepare us for eternity. Chapter II declares,

> but our hopes lead us forward to a more distant time, and everything we do is by way of preparation for the other life. Whatever, therefore, contributes to that life, we say must be loved and pursued with all our strength; but what does not conduce to that must be passed over as of no account. (p. 381, 382)

Clearly, Basil wishes the students to spend their lives on pursuits that have eternal significance and as will become apparent he believes that the classic Greek poetry and literature can be among those.

Concomitant to the notion that only eternal things are of true import is the notion that Christian

[1]The full title of this address is "To Young Men, On How They Might Derive Profit From Pagan Literature." But this shorter name, Ad Adulescentes, seems to be commonly used to identify the treatise.

[2]Identified as Julian the Apostate by Christians, due to his rejection of an early life of Christian education and practice for Neoplatonism and subsequent governance to endeavour to establish Hellenistic polytheism as the state religion.

virtue helps prepare one for eternity. Beginning in chapter V, Basil (1934) stresses this notion of virtue through much of the remainder of the treatise. The chapter begins:

> And since it is through virtue that we must enter upon this life of ours, and since much has been uttered in praise of virtue by poets, much by historians, and much more still by philosophers, we ought especially to apply ourselves to such literature. For it is no small advantage that a certain intimacy and familiarity with virtue should be engendered in the souls of the young, seeing that the lessons learned by such are likely, in the nature of the case, to be indelible, having been deeply impressed in them by reason of the tenderness of their souls. (5.1, p. 393)

Basil goes on to reference Greek poets, authors, sages, and mythological characters that demonstrate or praise ideas regarding virtue. It is very important to him that the young learners aspire to seek virtue in the pagan material they will interact with.

The last big idea that Basil (1934) stresses to his readers, deals not with if they can benefit from secular education, but how they can do so. In fact, this work asserts this is his thesis as he closes the introductory chapter by stating,

> that you should not surrender to these men once for all the rudders of your mind…rather, accepting from them only that which is useful, you should know that which ought to be overlooked. What… these things are, and how we shall distinguish between them, is the lesson which I shall teach you from this point on . (1.2, p. 381)

“you should not surrender to these men once for all the rudders of your mind…rather, accepting from them only that which is useful,”

Essentially, Basil’s lesson in how to benefit from pagan education is a lesson in being selective. Basil exhorts the young men several times to accept (by putting into practice) only what is useful from pagan poetry and prose, but to reject (or ignore) what is not (Basil, 1934, 4.1, p. 387; 4.3, pp. 389-393). Again, what is useful according to Basil, is whatever deals with virtue and prepares them for eternity.

In summary, the themes present in *Ad Adulescentes* show us Basil not only as a scholar and rhetor, but also as a pastor. It is clear from the address that Basil is well versed in pagan literature. However, it is also clear that Basil has spent time thinking about how exposure to this material might affect a Christian spiritually. Essentially, this letter is pastoral counseling for young men on how they can participate in secular education while gleaning from it that which would edify them spiritually rather than hinder them. Basil expects that young men who follow his teaching will come away from contact with pagan education more virtuous, better prepared to understand scripture, and more focused on eternal things. Basil’s reasoning and expected outcomes to students demonstrates the superiority of his position compared with Tatian’s.

Conclusion

Tatian of Assyria and Basil of Caesarea, though separated by almost two centuries, were wealthy, well educated, ancient Christians who both believed that Christians should live quite separately from the world. Yet, they held opposite opinions regarding Christian participation in pagan education. This paper, argues that Basil’s view was generally more beneficial to Christians of his time. It does so by comparing his view as presented in *Ad Adulescentes* with Tatian’s view articulated in *Oratio Ad Graecos*, simultaneously evaluating likely outcomes to demonstrate the better position. Basil clearly demonstrates how young Christians could reap eternal benefits from such an education. Moreover, his use of this education in his own ministry proves the veracity of his claims.

Basil’s method offers a great opportunity for current application in the pastoral ministry of churches. Families today face a similar challenge in regard to education. Not all Christians can homeschool their children or alternatively enroll them in private schools with religious affiliation. Through avenues such as family ministry, children’s ministry, and youth ministry churches can include ‘curriculum’ that trains young people to benefit from secular education rather than suffer. Following Estep, White, and Estep’s (2012) recommendations churches could develop theology based materials that would help students develop their relationship with Jesus while preparing them to deal with secular academic ideas (p. 61). TEACH

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The writer's labyrinth: A reflection on the principles of academic writing - I

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Just as the labyrinth walker has no other decision to make other than to keep walking, so with the writer–– the writer must let the process of writing be their guide.

Writers-rest and renewal

It couldn't have been more idyllic. A large red-brick, country cottage quietly tucked away on the edge of the woods – blue sky–white clouds– moss green grass, and great friends. A writer's retreat: a rest from the rest of our busy lives. I have defected from my family, found a community and completely ignored housework! *The Huffington Post* and I agree. I found that I had followed their advice before I even knew about it. Writing is work. Yes, writing is work. I always knew this but wasn't really committed to it as one should be with real work.

As I gaze out the window from my writer's spot, I see a field of grass, tall trees, flowering plants and a friendly deer who ventures out daily thinking she is alone while her babies hide in the bushes nearby. She can trust the writers in this hidden world. Even serious writers are allowed special interruptions. Some distractions must be given our full attention. I saw the beautiful, bold mother deer and stopped to wonder. But I didn't see the labyrinth. It was there, between myself, and the beautiful trees: between myself, and my writing. It was hidden.

Writer's labyrinth

Labyrinths are like puzzles. A labyrinth is described as 'an ancient symbol used as a spiritual tool for prayer and meditation, healing and transformation'. Just as the labyrinth walker has no other decision to make other than to keep walking, so with the writer—the writer must let the process of writing be their guide. An article, book, poem, narrative, biography, research study develops according to the conventions of the labyrinth you choose. There are many different kinds of labyrinths, but the way of the labyrinth applies to all. It will not be a straight path you will move forward and back and around, in and out, until you reach the end – an open space of reflection and contemplation. It is here that you will celebrate a successful ending to your journey with friends who have travelled with you.

Walking the labyrinth as an outer journey can awaken one's soul to the realisation that we are connected to nature, to other walkers and to the creative centre of our being, and our universe. The way is not perfect. There are many turns that seem to lengthen our journey. If we relax and let the patterns lead us along the way, we connect with deeper things within us and more meaningful things without. We slow our steps. We contemplate, reflect and we pray. We become aware of deeper life meanings. We take the time to listen inwards, outwards and upwards.

The writer's voice

I soon realised that no journey
carries one far unless,
as it extends into the world around us
It goes on an equal distance into the world within us.
– Lillian Smith (cited in Quotes, n.d.)

Nuanced stories interrupted with commas and conventions, form like the musical scores of a grand march, or the soft sounds of symphonies and lullabies. Like thumbprints in the hands of a detective, our written words disclose our identities to discerning readers. A writer's purpose and motivation is exposed as issues of justice and injustice reveal the inner and outer worlds of self and others.

Writers, musicians, dancers and artists begin their creative journeys during childhood. I was four years old when I first became aware of the magic of writing. It was my older sister who got to ride the red school bus to a faraway place where pencils of all colours decorated clean white pages. My sister's mark making had talking power. I wasn't allowed to use her pencils but I found a way to create magic with 'talking patterns' of my own. I made circles, dots, lines, crosses and wiggles upon clear cold windowpanes as I watched the school bus arrive and disappear down the road. Mondrian masterpieces and Mozart concertos emerged, as I breathed child-sized puffs of warm misty air into empty spaces exposing clear snail trails where my fingers had danced on glass. Silently traces of me –my imaginings, my mark making emerged as scribbled stories for the world to see.

In reality my world was small. But the old tin mailbox – always on sentry duty beside our lonely, dusty road – caused the mailman to stop and deliver letters and packages. My mother would smile or weep as she devoured the interesting marks on tissue thin, white pages. Treasured messages from friends and family in far away places brightened my mother's life. My four-year old heart slowly formed a deep awareness of the power of the written word. I saw this in my mother's eyes – my mother's heart. Hearts and souls bleed through ink like invisible writing on transparent glass. If I could write like this I could create magic to warm my mother's heart.

As the years passed, seated for hours behind wooden school desks I developed my skills as an imaginative writer. The words 'she has a good imagination' appeared on my school reports more than once. Etched on my memory is a one-line comment on my fifth form high-school report – 'Kaye has a talent for writing'. ''Mr Bun' read one of my stories out to the class once, as an example of excellent writing and it felt like a moment of emerging fame to me. The moment when you are especially acknowledged for something you love doing can be a moment when excellence and greatness is born!

Now that I am an educator of teachers, I have the task of writing at least two academic articles for publication every year – this is part of my job description. How do academic writers preserve style and voice? I like my words to sing and shout, and to pray and whisper silently. Can I still be me, in the carefully constructed and conventionalised world of academic writing?

Writers cast their own imaginings into everyday scenes, future worlds, and bygone days as gifts to readers. The authentic writer doesn't write just with words and conventions but with heart, soul and mind, creating and recreating new possibilities and exposing hidden truths. The space between the writer's heart and the heart of the reader is bridged in silence. Thoughts transmit like telepathy along printed lines carrying unwritten meanings. A writing persona reveals whether the writer is being true to self or a hidden other. How do we bring our true self to the task of writing?

Why do I write and what is my purpose for being? What moves me and makes me brave enough to expose my inner world and why should I do it? What do I have of value that I can offer the world? Whose lives deserve to be in print for the inspiration of others? What journey have I taken that has gifted me with enough wisdom to contribute to the worlds of others? Why should I care so much? Writing can literally be choosing to enter a war: a war that can be won or lost with words. What would leave me with deep regret if I died never having tried to achieve it?

Writers give voice to others

Obedience is an unpopular word nowadays,
but the artist must be obedient to the work,
whether it be a symphony or a painting,
or a story for a small child
– Madeliene L'Engle
(as cited in Daire, 2007)

As writer and speaker I believe God has gifted me with opportunities to be a voice for young children. As their advocate, it is my intention to develop platforms

Image: Walking the rose granite, Chartres Cathedral labyrinth replica in New Harmony, Indiana. Photography: Christina Rutz

Like thumbprints in the hands of a detective, our written words disclose our identities to discerning readers.

Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

where children's voices can be heard. I need to develop creative confidence in the Creator's gifts. When we set out to speak on behalf of voices not heard we can be like Malala Yousafzai (2014) who said, "I'm not a lone voice. I am many."

Loris Malguzzi, a renowned educational leader of the Reggio Schools in Italy at the end of last century, alerted the world to the multiple ways young children express themselves as learners. Self-expression is important to each of us but especially to children whose voices are just emerging. A young child speaks in many languages. Respectful listening enables children to develop their sense of self and express wonder. I view listening as a teaching strategy and a principle of learning. Listening with intention to understand and welcome each child's unique expression. Listening to children is a gift of compassion enabling teachers to advocate on their behalf as we make their voices visible to others.

Through a poem that has come to define the Reggio Approach to early childhood education, Loris Malaguzzi, a renowned Italian educator (cited in Early Learning and Kinder, n.d.), spoke of and for all children within this excerpt.

creative confidence is believing in your ability to create change in the world around you.

The One Hundred Languages of Children
No way.
The hundred is there.
The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred, always a hundred
ways of listening
of marvelling, of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream."
(Translated by Lella Gandini)

This poem has been the centre of a new labyrinth of learning: opening to the minds of educators and families throughout the world the multiple pathways that children create, invent and dream. We can learn so much from them as teachers, co-creators and writers. Their journey and their stories need to be shared for the benefit of everyone.

A writer's bank – creativity - a cure for writers' block

practice, practice, practice — C.S. Lewis
(Cited in Azquotes, n.d,)

10,000 hours of practice — Michael Gladwell
(Gladwell, 2008, p. 35)

A vocabulary search for 'writers' bank' brings up 'writers' block' as the nearest thing to what I am trying to define. Sometimes the best way to define something is stating what it is not. A writer's bank is all about words, words and more words. Not just any words but words the writer assigns value to. Words categorised into useful, usable and reusable lists, called word banks. Good writers bank words – in notebooks. Quotes, ideas, references, summaries are kept on file for later use. Writer's banks help us to avoid writer's block ("Which is an inability to remember or think of something you normally can do; often caused by emotional tension").

I find myself sitting right there beside the wall of doubt attempting to write. But I am suffering writer's block. "What's wrong with you?" my kind friend asks as she finds me procrastinating again checking face-book, reading a new book, checking my phone. "How come you can't see it? I do – others do." "You keep saying that, but I feel like an imposter!" Like a thief finally cracking a code my kind friend pounces, "It's a real thing – that's a real condition – it's called the imposter syndrome. You've got to build a bridge and get over it!" Finally, she has permission to pronounce a real diagnosis for my puzzling hesitancy to step into the pending greatness she imagines for my future. "We spoke about it in class today". (Guess I missed that part—I must have been procrastinating somewhere).

I have found it helpful to have a diagnosis. I know what I am dealing with now. But it is not like having a headache where you take pain relief and the headache is gone. Imposter syndrome is feeling like an imposter when you are not! That's the best part of the diagnosis, feeling like you are, but you're not. I am not an imposter as my kind friend assures me. It is just a syndrome! Imposter Syndrome is not so simple to 'get over' and many great writers have suffered from it. Maya Angelou (cited in Richards, 2015, para.7) testifies to this; "I have written eleven books, but each time I think, 'uh oh', they're going to find out now. I've run a game on everybody, and they're going to find me out". Who would have thought the great Maya Angelou would have had such self-doubt.

A dictionary definition (reference needed) claims – (states, proposes) – that, 'imposter syndrome (also known as imposter phenomenon or fraud syndrome or the imposter experience) is a concept describing high-achieving individuals who are marked by an inability to internalise their accomplishments or a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud". This is encouraging – I might just be a high achiever. So what do I plan to do about this? This imposter may reappear on frequent occasions hence my need to be forearmed and prepared.

Creative confidence is an idea promoted by Tom Kelley (a partner) and David Kelley (founder) of IDEO—a global designer company. They assert, creative confidence is:

> believing in your ability to create change in the world around you. It is the conviction that you can achieve what you set out to do. …this self-assurance, this belief in your creative capacity lies at the heart of innovation. … Creative confidence is like a muscle—it can be strengthened through effort and experience,
>
> (Kelly & Kelly, 2013, paras. 4, 5)

IDEO aims to help creative people through the process of "design thinking". I like to relate this design thinking theory to writing. The four steps are: inspiration, synthesis, ideation/experimentation, and implementation. Writing seems to fit these four steps very well. The IDEO team describe this process as innovation and claim that the creative process, (as with the writing process) may cycle through many iterations before the process is complete (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). This process looks a lot like labyrinth walking to me.

I have contemplated C.S. Lewis's thoughts on the creative process. He "described writers who saw their creative capacity in light of their unoriginality. The writer lives, moves, and has their being in creativity. But how a writer views creativity greatly determines how they see their role as a writer and how they see their art" (cited in Latta, 2016, p.166). I find the true source of the creative process by reflecting upon God as Creator in nature and through His Word. It is an honour to be an active participant – to experience the gift of being caught up into the co-creative act of writing with the Author of our origins – the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. TEACH

It is an honour to be an active participant … being caught up into the co-creative act of writing with the Author of our origins

To be continued - Part II included in the next issue.

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On teaching the history of the Holocaust: A view from the United States

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Keywords: Holocaust, history, education, memory

Abstract

Teaching the history of the Holocaust is certainly complicated in a number of educational settings. However, in the attempt to make the Holocaust relevant we are all susceptible to glossing over key historical facts. Since we live an age of some anxiety over the future of Holocaust memory and Holocaust education, educators should teach Holocaust history without flattening it, providing an approach that wrestles with the specificities of the Holocaust and contextual factors in the lives of individuals.

> *why did so many professing Christians … across Europe, … actually participate in the genocide, said nothing, or refused to help their Jewish neighbours*

Introduction

I am not an Australian. I am not formally a historian of the Holocaust. I am an American Christian graduate student who occasionally teaches the history of the Holocaust, Holocaust literature, and films about the Holocaust. I know little about how the Holocaust is taught in public or private schools in Australia. However, I try to stay abreast of global dialogues regarding Holocaust education due to my position as project manager of Holocaust Denial on Trial (HDOT, www.hdot.org), an educational site about Holocaust denial and an online archive for the English libel suit *David Irving v Penguin Books and Deborah Lipstadt*. I have been following recent policy changes in Australian Holocaust education keenly.

According to recent articles about teaching Holocaust history in Australia, it seems that there is an uneven interest in teaching Holocaust history, as well as delayed implementation. A 2014 article from the Salzburg Global Seminar succinctly states that "The varying depth of teaching about the Holocaust raises the question about the willingness of teachers to educate students about the Holocaust to a sufficient level" (Yilmaz, 2014). Though this article was published in 2014, more recent articles indicate an ongoing anxiety in America and Australia regarding the public's knowledge of the Holocaust and Holocaust history in the classroom. Educators and scholars in the United States still struggle with a similar unevenness as that which Australian classrooms experience. That is to say, the issue is still not resolved in America, despite Americans' notable interest in the Holocaust. A recent survey suggested that the American populace has very little knowledge of historical facts about the Holocaust while still considering Holocaust education important (B. Katz, 2018). A recent SBS article interviewed on-the-street Australians and representatives of Australian Jewish organizations. What these interviews hint at, non-systematically and non-scientifically, is that on-the-street Australians knew some key facts about the Holocaust, but interviewees claimed that they did not learn much about the Holocaust in school. Likewise, Jewish organizations feared that a more systematic survey of the Australian populace would reveal critical gaps in knowledge of Holocaust history (Baker, 2018). Some of the latest statistics from Europe generally indicate even worse knowledge of the Holocaust, Jews, and Judaism (Greene, 2018).

My own understanding of Holocaust history was uneven in school, where we devoured the memoir of Corrie ten Boom (*The Hiding Place*, 1971), the Dutch Christian woman who aided in the rescue of Jews from the Nazis and their collaborators during the German occupation of the Netherlands. The Nazis and their Dutch helpers caught her and her family, sending them to various concentration camps. Several of her family members died as a result. On the flip side, as constructed by Corrie and the book's editors, *The Hiding Place* retreats from key facts and tensions related to the history of the Holocaust. For instance, why did so many professing Christians in the Netherlands and elsewhere across Europe, including Germany, actually participate in the genocide, said nothing, or refused to help their Jewish neighbours in need?

In her research on Holocaust education in an American public school (10th grade) and an American Christian fundamentalist school (8th grade, private), Simone Schweber found that teachers in these seemingly opposed settings can actually show profound similarities in their approach to the history of the Holocaust. Indeed, she finds that the schools' approaches and goals were fundamentally divergent. The instructor at the Christian school, on the one hand, emphasized the religious self-fashioning of its students by reading a Christian redemptive memoir (*The Hiding Place*). The public school addressed the Holocaust and its significance through the break down of prejudice. Despite their divergent emphases and readings, Schweber finds that both the public school and private school universalized the Holocaust's meaning in ways that obscured the history of the Holocaust. They ignored the contextual realities of victims, bystanders, rescuers, and perpetrators, among others. She states:

> [In these classes] J*ews were displaced, cast aside from the prominent role they played in Holocaust history.* (S. Schweber, 2006, p. 29, Italics mine, inserted text mine)
>
> [Both showed] similarities of dejudaization, narrative emplotment, instrumentalization of otherness, and treatments of historical information. Forced through the narrow funnel of reflexive affirmation, Holocaust memory in both classrooms was sweetened for easy ingestion, stripped of its horror, impotency, grandeur, and contingency. For both sets of students, then, *the Holocaust occurred in a world where actors act autonomously, unrestricted by historical forces, where individuals always triumph, redeemed through or despite their suffering, and where the plotline always ends well.* (S. Schweber, 2006, p. 30, Italics mine, inserted text mine)[1]

The private school and the public school flattened the history of the Holocaust and failed to create an environment where students could wrestle with the specificities of the Holocaust and contextual factors in the lives of individuals. While students in both settings might have learned about faith or "Others", they never really tackled the historical realities of what happened, to whom, and why.

I should provide some caveats to Schweber's research and my reference of it here. I am in no way suggesting that all schools necessarily teach the Holocaust the same way or can even avoid overarching master narratives. Schweber even notes the fact that, in reality, no instructor can teach the Holocaust without some approach and desired outcome; definitely age and stage should be considered when communicating horror, suffering, and murder. I also am not trying to overextend the two specific classes Schweber analyzed by claiming that they are definitively indicative of Holocaust education in general or in other settings. Schweber herself is smart enough not to overextend her method and results. Rather, I reference Schweber's findings as a cautionary tale of how seemingly divergent approaches to Holocaust history can slide into decontexualizing events and lived experiences. In our desire for particular outcomes and application of history, we should all as educators consider how we might fall prey to historical oversimplification, decontextualization, and the overextension of certain Holocaust narratives.

As Australian schools continue to grapple with the history of the Holocaust and wrestle with its educational outcomes, as we do in the United States, teachers should consider long and hard their approach to and treatment of the historical record. Educators across the globe should consider the call of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: "Failing to contextualize the groups targeted by the Nazis as well as the actions of those who resisted can result in the misunderstanding or trivializing of this history. Relevant connections for all learners often surface as the history is analyzed" (USHMM, n.d.). May we not be or grow complacent, rather continue to self-examine and self-critique our approach to the history of genocide. TEACH

> *we should … consider how we might fall prey to historical over-simplification, decon-textualization, and the overextension of certain Holocaust narratives.*

[1] One can see similar work by Schweber here: http://dm.education.wisc.edu/sschweber/pci/cv2011-1.pdf

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From a dream to reality

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The Tutroadshow provides teachers with professionally prepared teaching and learning activities mapped to the Australian curriculum

Keywords: archeology, biblical history, Egyptology, sensory learning, Tutankhamun

Ancient Egypt still casts a binding spell over all who encounter it. Its scale is epic both physically and metaphysically. Buried beneath millennia of sand's time its mysterious allure has drawn men like Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon deep into its heart. Much is now known about this ancient civilisation, its might, renown, culture, science and devotion to gods both fearsome and unpredictable. Yet there is an important understanding-void yet to be filled.

The Tutankhamun Roadshow travelling exhibition has been designed to take the breath-taking wonders of the ancient's civilisation and make it accessible to students across Eastern Australia.

Importantly the convincing evidence of Biblical historicity found in the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery is brought to vivid life with many artifacts, thousands of years old, on display. Students can actually hold significant pieces of the ancient world in their hands and be truly inspired through this tangible contact.

Just three years ago Dr Wayne French had a dream to take his artefacts from Israel and Egypt, especially the dazzling life-size replicas from the tomb of the boy-king Tutankhamun, and create a mobile museum that would demonstrate that God has been part of this world for thousands of years, generation after generation. Ancient Egyptian history is now accessible in schools across Australia, courtesy of this mobile museum - **This dream is now a reality!**

The Tut Roadshow is a purpose-built semi-trailer that will bring the wonders of Ancient Egypt into schools and community centres up and down the East Coast of Australia, particularly in rural areas. The Tutroadshow provides teachers with professionally prepared teaching and learning activities mapped to the Australian curriculum requirements. The presence of this purpose-built semi-trailer at the school creates an exciting educational buzz across the campus that motivates both interest and engaged learning.

During the Tutankhamun Roadshow experience, participants move through three theatrettes, all equipped with state-of-the-art multimedia displays and glass cabinets housing the ancient artefacts. Described as a "sensory learning experience", objects are able to be held and examined, all relating to with learning resources and materials provided for teachers/students. School teaching and learning resources have been mapped to the Australian and NSW curriculums.

The mission of the Tutankhamun Roadshow is to:

- To provide Biblical archaeology focused teaching resources to high and primary school teachers to implement in the modules on Ancient Civilizations for students, especially in years seven and eleven.
- To showcase archaeological artefacts and stories from ancient civilizations that highlight that the God of the Bible continues to engage in human history on a personal, national and global level.

Just recently the Tutankhamun Roadshow visited the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Australia in Canberra, who said:

> This is a world class educational and audio-visual experience that I would highly recommend to any student or Egyptian History enthusiast to see this amazing state-of-the-art display. Its educational value is undeniable and will undoubtedly imbue any student with a deep curiosity and passion for learning about history and archaeology.
>
> Dr H E Mohamed Khairat

The Tutankhamun Roadshow uses modern technology - video animation, switchable glass, new AV technology and apps to reveal the technology of the ancient world. Ancient Egypt's technology, architectural prowess and artistic skill, made evident in the display, remain unrivalled even today. Considering they were built some 4,000 years ago, many of these structures remain a source of engineering awe. This use of technology to achieve 'wonders of the world' has captivated many students and teachers.

Teachers reactions to the Tutankhamun Roadshow included:

Figure 1: Visitors engaged with the multimedia display

The Tutankhamun Road Show recently visited our Taylors Hill Campus and it certainly made an impact. The semi-trailer is an impressive unit from the outside, but it's the inside that captured our students' imagination. If you can't get to the Middle East, then bring the marvels and surprises of ancient civilisations to your students via the use of modern technology and an amazing collection of artefacts.

Dr Wayne French's knowledge and passion combined with his private collection brings the experience alive and will allow students to go on a journey that will both educate and inspire.

Mark Vodell, Principal of Gilson College

This program was an innovative and immersive way of bringing to life the story of Tutankhamun and piecing together Egypt's history. As a teacher I enjoyed it and my students did too."

Karina Parker, History teacher

The content is both engaging and informative. It specifically aligns with the Stage 4 History syllabus for NSW.. We thoroughly enjoyed it and would highly recommend it to other schools.

Lisa Luchow, History teacher, Year 7

What a fantastic presentation. The kids were engaged and interested in the presentation. The use of movie, artefacts and personal presentation had the children guessing and wanting to know more.

Koren White, primary school teacher

Thanks for bringing History to life!

Cathy Culgate, student

this exhibition … demon-strate[s] STEM within current information transmission and the in construction of a mobile exhibition space.

Elements of this exhibition provide opportunities of demonstrating STEM within current information transmission and the construction of a mobile exhibition space. It links cultural experience with STEM providing a motivated engagement in learning about applied STEM knowledge.

This exhibition provides a unique school-community interaction interface that incorporates the present within ancient and futurists perspectives. TEACH

Author information:
Wayne French is the recently retired chaplain of Avondale College of Higher Education who willingly shares from an extensive career in youth leadership and ministry.

Editor's Note
Plan to have the Tutankhamen Roadshow enhance your students' learning experience. For more information or to make a booking contact Wayne French

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Lingering in the Word: Author's take on how daily Bible reading can change lives

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Nina Atcheson is the Adventist Identity Officer for Adventist Schools Australia. But she is also a writer and now published author. In the lead up to the launch of As Light Lingers, she answers questions from **Nathan Brown** about her new book and how spending time with the Bible can change our lives.

Figure 1: Nina with husband Matt

Tell us about your day job.
I've spent the past 10 years writing and training teachers in the secondary Encounter Bible Curriculum. This role is focused on supporting leaders and teachers in the areas of spirituality, curriculum and culture.

What inspired you to write As Light Lingers?
Through conversations with people of all ages in different countries, I was struck with how apathy and life's busyness too often rob us of meaningful time in God's Word. I've felt it myself, and I believe this breaks God's heart because He wants to connect with us.

> *"apathy and busyness too often rob us of meaningful time in God's Word. I've felt it myself and I believe it breaks God's heart because He wants to connect"*

How can spending time in the Bible change us?
Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me!" (John 5:39, NLT). Basking in God's Word changes us because when we come in prayerful humility, we can know Jesus personally. Truly abiding in Him can change everything about our lives—our attitude, conversations, dreams and plans for the future.

How is your approach to Bible study influenced by your understanding of how we learn?
As an educator, I know we're more likely to be impacted by something when we reflect, write, discuss and share our discoveries with others. Writing slows down our thinking and allows us to better process what God's Word is speaking into our lives. We're also more likely to recall something we've written down.

What does your daily Bible reading and study look like?
Every evening before I fall asleep, I ask for God to wake me up the following morning because He knows how much time I need to spend with Him. I always journal the message I find, along with my response to God. It's incredible to look over past journals and re-read how God has spoken so clearly through His Word.

What suggestions can you give for getting into a good Bible-reading habit?
It's easy to feel spiritually empty and a bit powerless when it comes to meaningful Bible study. While commitment and variety are key, finding time is probably the greatest challenge many of us face. I regularly covenant with God and ask Him to grow my desire to deepen my walk with Him and to remove that barrier of busyness.

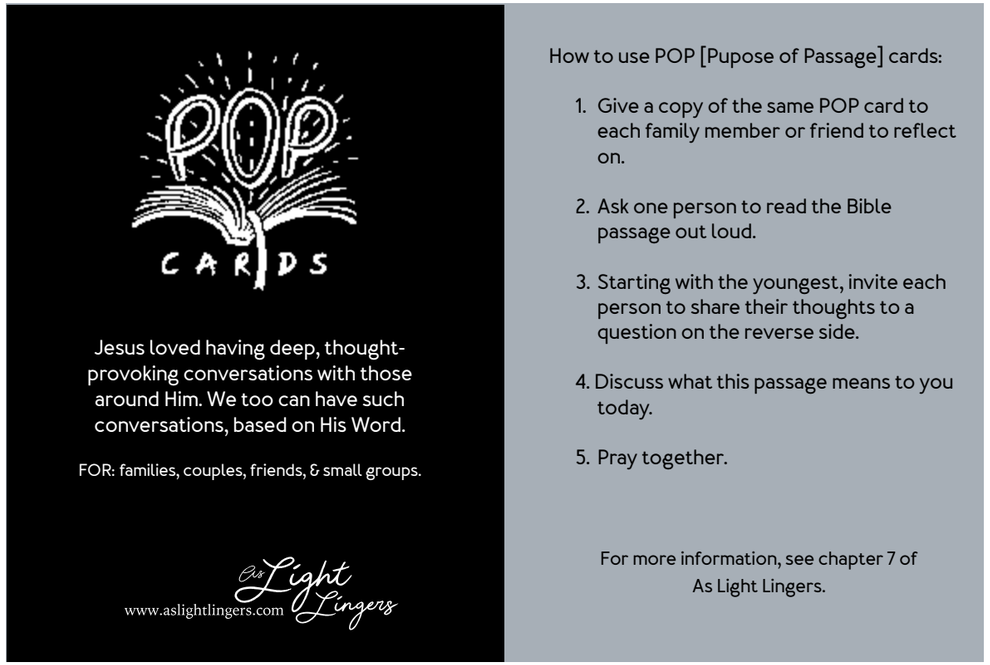

Figure 2: Suggestions for using POP Cards [Copyrighted, supporting resources used here by permission.]

What is your number-one tip for a healthy devotional life?
To personally take time to respond to Scripture, since God's Word is alive and active. It's sharp, in that it cuts to the point and speaks to our souls (see Hebrews 4:12). If I don't allow this living Word to speak into my life, it won't. Intentionally giving God my time and coming with a humble, open heart, ready to listen and respond, is essential.

How has the message in this book impacted your family?
Not only has sharing what we study deepened my marriage but modelling simple strategies to my children is visibly growing their relationships with Jesus. In addition to personal Bible study, we also dig deeply into God's Word together as a family, which has added richer conversations to our home.

What has been the initial reaction to As Light Lingers?
People of different ages and stages in life have been sharing how this book is challenging and equipping them to grow in their relationship with God. I'm in awe at how and where He is taking this book and continue to pray it will bless anyone who needs to hear this message. TEACH

> *"Not only has sharing what we study deepened my marriage but modelling simple strategies to my children is visibly growing their relationships with Jesus."*

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Nathan is Book Editor at Signs Publishing. He is a former magazine editor, a published writer and an author or editor of more than a dozen books. He is also a co-convener of Manifest, a community exploring, encouraging and celebrating faithful creativity.

Editor's Note
As Light Lingers can be purchased from Better Books and Food, any Adventist Book Centre, and on Amazon Kindle. Further information and opportunity to contact the book author is available at www.aslightlingers.com

POP cards, authored by Nina Atcheson with design by Elissa Webb, can be purchased from Better Books and Foods, Cooranbong, or directly from the book's website.

Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

BOOK LAUNCHES

A triumphant trilogy: Launch of final story in David series reveals young adult's biggest decisions

David's Triumph (3rd in the Series)
Watson, B. (2018) Warburton, Vic: Signs. pp. 249.
ISBN 192504484X

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"Real men lead by living with resilience, integrity, self-control and knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses"

An Avondale lecturer's third and final book in a series telling the story of a boy and the challenge of adolescence launched recently.

Dr Brad Watson first introduced readers to David Matthews in *Finding David*, a schoolyard story dealing with bullying, romance and a mysterious family tragedy. The *David's Revenge* sequel tackled rescue, relationships and revenge in an action-packed adventure. Now *David's Triumph* completes the series with a story of shattered hope, love, loss and finding the strength to carry on.

"*David's Triumph* resolves some of the issues and questions that have existed throughout the series," says Signs Publishing Book Editor Nathan Brown, who launched the book with Watson at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in southern Queensland's annual camp meeting on September 23. "Some readers will be looking to complete the series, but as it's now nine years since the first book, we hope a new generation of readers get to know David and his friends."

David ages by a year in each book. As he grows, so do the issues confronting him. Will he give up on his best friend? Will he betray his girlfriend? Will he give his life to God when God is allowing someone he loves to die?

The questions might be familiar, particularly if you are a teacher of a young adult—momentum has been building, particularly among Seventh-day Adventist schools in Australia, for investment in the wellbeing of students. So, Watson believes the timing of the launch means *David's Triumph* could again be included—the church in Australia funded a chapter-by-chapter teacher resource for *Finding David*—as a wellbeing resource. "More and more research is telling us young adults are becoming lonely and suffering from epidemic levels of depression and mental illness," he says. "Their relationships are breaking down and they lack community. Many struggle with feelings of isolation and anxiety. Social media seems to be part of the problem."

Sports such as surfing, mountain biking and triathlon are key parts of the David stories. "I've tried and liked all of them, even though I'm not good at any of them," says Watson, Senior Lecturer in International Poverty and Development Studies at Avondale College of Higher Education. "They're metaphors for life. We all have races to run. The point is finishing well and learning that the outcome is less important than our attitude."

A strong look-out-for-your-mates message is not only core to the series but also to one of the stories in *David's Triumph*, which comes from Watson's own life experience. "I fell into a 'hole' while canyoning with friends in the Blue Mountains," says Watson. "Somehow, I became pinned between the wall and a boulder. If I'd fallen further, I could easily have died on the rocks below. It was that close. I broke my shoulder, so it took several hours to get out of the canyon and back to the car, with a lot of help from mates. It made a big impact on me and I decided to include that story in the book."

Watson would become a mentoring advocate, running a RiskMEN group while teaching at high school. "Real men lead by living with resilience, integrity, self-control and knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses," he says. TEACH

Editors Note
Website: http://absentmindedprofessor.avondale.edu.au/books/davids-triumph/

All books in the series are available from Adventist Book Centres in Australia and New Zealand, or Koorong at www.koorong.com/search/product/ davids-triumph-03-in-finding-david-series- brad/9781925044843.jhtml

BOOK REVIEWS

Anzac Spirituality

Reynaud, D. (2018).
North Melbourne, Vic: Australian Scholarly. pp. 370
ISBN 978-1925588750

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This book by an Avondale academic revealing the Anzac's deep but concealed interest in spirituality is world-ranking research, says the historian who launched it.

Anzac Spirituality by Associate Professor Daniel Reynaud explores the spiritual beliefs and experiences of the Anzacs largely through their own words—Reynaud read the diaries and letters of more than 1000 soldiers of the First Australian Imperial Force. In light of Anzac becoming the spiritual core of what it means to be Australian, the book asks, "What of the spiritual core of the Anzacs themselves?"

This "capstone" of Reynaud's research—including a doctorate in Australian war cinema, the recovery and reconstruction of Australia's first Gallipoli movie and a biography of Anzac chaplain William "Fighting Mac" McKenzie—"supplements an expanding literature on the religion of World War I soldiers," said Dr Geoff Treloar at the Sydney launch this past Tuesday (April 10). The book not only takes its place alongside seminal works such as Michael Snape's *God and the British Soldier*, Jonathan Ebel's *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* and Richard Schweitzer's *The Cross in the Trenches* but "shows how to take the subject forward."

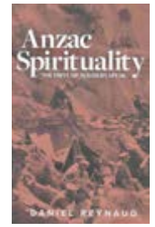
Treloar compared *Anzac Spirituality* with "outstanding" Australian contributions to the religious history of the Great War, namely Colin Bale's *A Crowd of Witnesses: Epitaphs on First World War Australian War Graves* and Michael Gladwin's *Captains of the Soul: A History of Australian Army Chaplains.* "I really appreciate it for its qualities as a work of history and its value as a resource for understanding a truly important aspect of our past and its meaning for the present."

Reynaud invited Treloar to launch the book in the latter's roles as Director of Learning and Teaching at Australian College of Theology, which hosted the launch, and as Editor of *Lucas*, the journal of the Evangelical History Association of Australia.

Treloar read the book's thematic chapters in sequence "and they seemed to get better as I worked my way through. I do not mean to say that the quality of the writing and analysis improved with each successive chapter; I mean only that the subject became more and more gripping." He noted a movement in Reynaud's structuring of the book, "from the official to the unofficial, from the compulsory to the voluntary, from the outward to the inward, from the orthodox and defined to the heterodox and inchoate." It seems, he said, "a method for establishing the truth, for getting at the reality, of the spirituality of the men."

And it is the men we observe, he added. "This concentration on the rank and file is unusual in the literature on the religion of Great War soldiers. It is much more common to focus on the officers and the chaplains." Treloar felt a sense of connectedness with the soldiers, particularly one of who is the brother of his grandfather. John Linton Treloar would become the foundation director of the Australian War Memorial. "I never met him," he said, "but there is a certain familiarity in the words quoted extensively from his war diary. . . . I was glad of the opportunity to get to know him."

Treloar described *Anzac Spirituality* as being "grounded in research that is enterprising and comprehensive" and Reynaud's assessment of that evidence as "judicious, neither exaggerated nor triumphalist." He commended Reynaud for not using "the historiographical obsessions of our times [gender, race and sex]" as "lenses through which to construe the data of the past in



"[Anzac Spirituality is] grounded in research that is enterprising and comprehensive."

the interests of present day preoccupations."

Reynaud's colleague Tony Martin, Head of the Discipline of Humanities and Creative Arts at Avondale College of Higher Education, trialled a new selling technique at the Lake Macquarie launch on Thursday (April 5). He asked all attendees to hold a copy of the book and to study the cover image—a photograph of members of the 4th Brigade attending a church service in Reserve Gully on Gallipoli. The "horrendous" conditions—"the almost vertical face of crumbling dirt and rock"—in which the men existed shocked him. "And yet hundreds of soldiers sit quietly through a church service, many seemingly lost in their own thoughts." But even with the subject matter of the photograph being filled with such pathos, "it still seemed to me to be a century-old image of long-dead soldiers involved in an almost forgotten war. That was until I started reading Daniel's book."

Martin then read excerpts from the diaries and letters Reynaud includes in *Anzac Spirituality.* Look back at the photograph on the cover, Martin said. "Is it starting to change?" "The brilliance of this book is not simply its exploration of unexpected spirituality in the AIF. For me, it lies in the intimate and often raw honesty of the soldiers' writings. I felt a profound sense of privilege to be included in their confidence."

Martin said he now reads the cover image differently. "I no longer see an image of a bygone war. I see young Australians—brave, terrified, bewildered. I feel their fear and, unexpectedly, I hear their prayers." TEACH

As Light Lingers: Basking in the Word of God

Atcheson, N. (2018).
Madrid, Spain: Safeliz,
ISBN 978-84-7208-669-2, pp. 105.

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In her recent book, aptly named *As Light Lingers: Basking in the Word of God*, Nina Atcheson follows many other Christian authors in tackling the topic of how to study the Bible. Atcheson has written this book in a refreshingly honest and sensitive manner. There are many books on how to study the Bible, but I found a number of features set this book apart.

Rather than just being another 'how-to' book about Bible study, Atcheson deals with real issues people face when committing to a habit of Bible study, and guides the reader with a gentle urgency that compelled me to keep reading to the end of her book. I found it to be compact and readable with an additional bonus of push out Bible study bookmarks and *Purpose of Passage* cards on the final pages, along with instructions on how to use them. The tone of the book is both inspirational and encouraging. I resonated with the concepts in this book, and found myself accepting the challenge to deepen my relationship with God by basking in the Word of God.

The book commences with issues of motivation, roadblocks to Bible reading, and the power of studying the Word of God. The following chapters present a selection of practical ideas to assist the reader in developing sustainable habits of daily Bible study. In these chapters, Atcheson draws on her personal life, sharing examples and anecdotes from her own experience. She also broadens her audience by including ideas for whole family Bible study and devotes several pages to ideas for helping children develop age appropriate Bible study skills. The book concludes with a challenge to renew a relationship with God through meaningful Bible study.

If you want a book to help refresh your relationship with God or engage your family in Bible study together, this book is for you. If you are looking for ways to help young children and teenagers develop authentic Bible study skills, then this book is essential.

I put books into three categories: books that I don't finish, books that I read once and books that I read, keep and refer to or re-read regularly. Nina Atcheson's book fits into the latter category and will be an invaluable addition to a home or school library. TEACH

As Light Lingers can be purchased from any Adventist Book Centre, including from Better Books and Food, Cooranbong, NSW, and on Amazon Kindle. Further information and opportunity to contact the book author is available at www.aslightlingers.com.

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