

# TEACH JOURNAL

OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

## LEGAL

school and the law

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## EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

reconnecting students  
with their physical world

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## CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial

### TEACHING & PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

- 4 *Learning 4 life*: Experiences in 'classrooms without walls'  
**Tony Robinson**
- 8 Mamarapha: Teaching indigenous adults  
**Gordon Stafford**
- 12 Issues in studying the Bible in secondary school religion classes  
**Ray Roennfeldt**
- 17 Christian school counselling: Towards conceptualising a distinctive paradigm  
**Stephen Fyson**

### EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

- 23 School and the law  
**Peter Morey & Egbert Groen**
- 24 Justifiable or not: Developing and preserving a Christian school ethos  
**Bruce Youlden**

### RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP

- 28 Protectors or shapers?  
**Arnold Reye**
- 33 Problems arising from streaming mathematics students in Australian Christian secondary schools: To stream or not to stream?  
**Peter Kilgour**
- 38 Christian schools—a world of difference  
**Don Roy**

### REFLECTIONS, IMPRESSIONS & EXPERIENCES

- 46 'Sorry matters'—through indigenous eyes  
What does the apology mean to me?  
**Lynelda Tippto**  
The national apology  
**Lillian Geia**  
A new beginning  
**Joan Lever**  
Comment on the Prime Minister's 'Sorry Speech'  
**Marion Hastie**
- 48 *The God delusion* delusion  
**Graham Leo**

- 51 Blog of a beginning teacher  
**Braden Blyde**

- 52 A new focus  
**Peter and Glenda Roberts**

- 54 Social and health impacts of alcohol: A wake-up call for Christian educators?  
**John Ashton**

- 60 Book reviews:  
*Sex, gardening and God: Setting the values for Christian schools*  
**Robert Herschell**  
*Religious education in early childhood*  
**Elva Fitzgibbon**

- 62 Mission accomplished  
**Janita Bond & Michelle Long**

A photograph showing a man in a dark suit leaning over a young boy in a light blue shirt and dark tie. The man is adjusting the boy's tie. The boy is sitting at a desk with a computer monitor in front of him. In the background, another man in a suit is looking at a computer screen. The scene is set in a classroom or office environment.

# Ministry Of Teaching

# EDITORIAL

Wilf Rieger

**Christian schools are essentially faith-based learning communities. If I were limited to selecting only two defining characteristics of Christian schools, what would they be?**

First, Jesus is their corner-stone. And every member of the learning community represents a building block that contributes to or diminishes the authenticity of the school's mission and the effectiveness of its program. Long before social systems theory<sup>1</sup> was contemplated, the apostle Paul—using an anatomy analogy wrote:

The whole body depends on Christ, and all the parts of the body are joined and held together. Each part does its own work to make the whole body grow and be strong with love. (Ephesians 4:16, New Century Version)

In contrasting language, Nobel Prize winning Irish poet W. B. Yeats, reflecting upon the chaotic state of society in his mystic poem, *The second coming*, declared: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold". Indeed, the centre of Christian schools "cannot hold", unless Christ is *their centre*; without that centrality they will have lost their *raison d'être*.

Second, Christian schools are staffed by Christian teachers. I am convinced they play a pivotal role in Christian education; without them it is a hamstrung enterprise. I would like to propose several traits and qualities that characterise Christian teachers in their various roles. Christian teachers, I believe, are:

- **committed**—serving students, parents and the extended school community, to whom they are accountable in their ministry of teaching.
- **caring**—providing effective pastoral nurture and care<sup>2</sup>; and also seeking to develop authentic and appropriate relationships with students, parents and colleagues.
- **Christian**—having a personal relationship with their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and possessing a faith grounded in biblical Christianity, as presented in the canon of Old and New Testament Scripture. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, teachers should be able to introduce others to Jesus.
- **competent**—exhibiting proficiency in knowledge, understandings and skills, as well as in teaching-learning strategies and assessment methods relative to their specialist subject area/s. They are also able to integrate faith-related perspectives into their classroom teaching and personal lives.
- **critical-reflective**—thinking deeply about their

teaching-learning practices and willing to make changes to benefit learners.

- **collegial**—acting as team players, who promote a sense of community and inclusiveness in learning, professional and social environments.
- **creative and culturally aware**—teaching topics and subject content by engaging learners through interesting, motivating and effective teaching-learning strategies; presenting the everlasting Gospel in fresh 'packages' relevant to students who live in a post-modern world.
- **contemporary-workplace-oriented**—understanding and responding positively to the challenges of a changing society that include, among other things, legislation and directives ranging from privacy issues, child protection matters and internet filters, to accountability, documentation and allergies awareness—just to name a few. All of these impact schools.

Teachers of such qualities and stature will transform "the kingdom of nothingness"<sup>3</sup> into a kingdom of nothing less than one ruled by the principles of Him who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. These teachers will make "a world of difference"<sup>4</sup>, and contribute to building a different world. **TEACH**

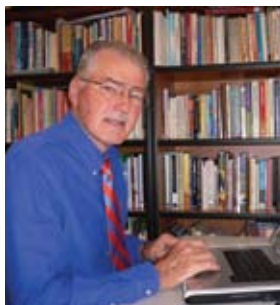
## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The theory conceives social systems (e.g. schools) as being "comprised of interdependent parts, characteristics and activities that contribute to and receive from the whole"; Hoy, W. & Miskel, C. (1991). *Educational Administration*. New York: McGraw Hill.

<sup>2</sup> One of Jesus' most severe criticisms was reserved for professionals who exhibited affective neutrality, or just common disregard for others—as made abundantly clear in the story of The Good Samaritan.

<sup>3</sup> An interesting term used by historian Manning Clark to portray sections of Australian society in the 1870s and 1890s. See Cathcart, M. (1995). *Manning Clark's history of Australia*—abridged from the six volume classic. Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books Australia, p.372, p.392.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Don Roy's article in this issue.



**Postscript**—It has been a pleasure and privilege to act as editor of *TEACH* for its first year of publication. Lana Hibbard will be taking on this role henceforth.

“The two defining characteristics of Christian schools are their Christ-centredness and their Christian teachers”

[Photography: Janet Rieger]

## Learning 4 life: Experiences in ‘classrooms without walls’<sup>1</sup>

**Tony Robinson**

Year 9 Learning 4 life Co-ordinator, Gilson College, Taylors Hill, Victoria

“This generation is experiencing a detachment and loss of connection in their relationship with the physical world”

### Introduction

The term, ‘classroom without walls’, captures the essence of the Year 9 Learning 4 life program at Gilson College.<sup>2</sup> For those teachers who have experienced the behaviour issues of typical Year 9 students and their lack of connection with the traditional curriculum, this article may come as a welcome relief. The program requires time and effort, but the rewards that flow from a well structured and implemented experiential education program more than compensate for the effort and work involved.

### The wider social context

The world of 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescents is both exciting and challenging. Never has there been a time when so much is possible, on one hand, and so many limitations on the other. They can explore every square metre of the earth while sitting in front of Google Earth, and yet are told it is unsafe to walk in the local park alone, ride their bikes without a helmet, or travel in a motor vehicle without their seatbelt on. In his book, *Last child in the woods*, Richard Louv uses the phrase, “nature deficit disorder” to describe the feeling of detachment and loss of connection this generation is experiencing in their relationship with the physical world.

Experienced teachers tend to agree that working with young people aged from 14 to 16 offers unique challenges. The physical and psychological changes they are undergoing are exacerbated by the prolonged periods they are required to spend in classrooms designed for conformity and uniformity; alien concepts to the adolescent mind! Having spent most of my teaching life of 25 years working with this age group, I can personally attest to the preceding statement. Kids in this age group are incredibly challenging to work with; however, making connections and forming relationships can bring some of the sweetest rewards imaginable.

### Experiential education—some foundational concepts

“Learning by doing” is another name for experiential education (Vadeboncoeur, 2002). While this is a valid description, experiential education has come to

include aspects of constructivist education theory for a number of reasons:

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Opportunities are nurtured, for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values (Adkins and Simmons 2004).

The traditional model of schooling is based on what Freire calls the “banking approach” to education. In this model:

...the teacher deposits information into the student, so that the student can then withdraw information when requested. Traditional education rests on the premise that the teacher has the information and imparts this information to students and then evaluates the students’ performance. By extension, traditional education is based on the teacher being in a power position in relation to the student in terms of the possession of knowledge and the evaluation of learning. This traditional approach to education can be seen across the educational process from pre-school to doctoral programs (Itin, 1999).

This has been referred to as “just in case” learning, as opposed to a “just in time” learning model, where information and understanding occur on the basis of need and interest. Although, undoubtedly, there is information we all need to know, learning *how* to learn is even more important, and of life-time benefit.

While researching the possibilities for an experiential education program for our Year 9 students at Gilson College, I came across many approaches. These ranged from the simple ‘add on’ model of outdoor education programs such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award offered in many schools, to the full-blown model of Geelong Grammar’s Timbertop. Picking my way through these, I benefited from speaking to a number of the co-ordinators and providers of such programs.

The approach we eventually decided on, at Gilson, grew out of the work of Kurt Hahn.<sup>3</sup> It seemed that a program based broadly on his four ‘antidotes’ to the six ‘declines’ of modern society’s

1 Toby—sunrise, Cathedral Range

[Photography: Tony Robinson]

youth, would be an appropriate model to follow. The aim is to provide opportunities for young people—often disengaged from the traditional curriculum, to find purpose and discover a love of learning. This occurs through experiences of life in the ‘real world’, where one is likely to get cold, wet, scratched and blistered; far from the vicarious experiences gathered from textbooks, videos and computer screens, in the typical classroom.

It is important to note that the specific experiential method chosen does not really matter. There are, however, some consistent characteristics at the core of all successful experiential education programs. Under the watchful eye of caring, interested adults, the programs should include real-life experiences that provide challenges offering success or failure, and opportunities to serve others voluntarily. It is through these undertakings that participants develop self-confidence, independence, and responsibility—qualities we would want all young people to develop.

While many such programs are aimed at disengaged and socially challenged youth, Hahn’s program was originally aimed at young people from a privileged background. A major aspect of this program is that all youth need similar opportunities if they are to better understand their place in the world; realizing and moving beyond being mere consumers and working towards an understanding of their life’s purpose.

Hahn notes six ‘declines’ of modern youth—a decline in fitness, initiative and enterprise, memory and imagination, skill and care, self-discipline, and a decline in compassion. He goes on to outline four ‘antidotes’ which have since become ‘pillars’ of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. They are fitness training, expeditions, projects, and service.

He also offers seven methodological premises that underpin the outcomes of experiential education programs:

1. Give children opportunity for self-discovery.
2. Plan for the children to meet with triumph and defeat.
3. Ensure the children have opportunity for self-effacement in the common cause.
4. Provide periods of silence.
5. Train the imagination.
6. Make games important, but not predominant.
7. Free the children from the enervating sense of privilege.

## Gilson’s Year 9 *Learning 4 life* program—genesis and realisation

Almost four years ago we embarked on a proposal for an alternative to the perceived Year 9 ‘curriculum desert’—at least in the minds of the students! Our college is situated in one of the fastest growing outer-urban residential localities in Australia. Families in the area are ethnically and economically

diverse. The families of the 69 students that have just completed Year 9 in the 2007 school year represent 12 ethnic backgrounds and most of the world’s major religions. While on one hand the challenges of such diversity are enormous, the possibilities, on the other, are extraordinary.

Reflecting on the ‘nature’ of our school, the needs of the students and the principles of experiential education, we began a process of open consultation with interested teachers. Given enthusiastic support from the head of school, the principal, and the college council, a viable wide-ranging experiential education program for Year 9 students emerged; with a five-year implementation period. The proposed program included four major components:

- Expedition learning—a bushwalking expedition to central Tasmania;
- Exploration learning—a trip to the outback;
- Service learning—a STORM CO<sup>5</sup> type trip to a Victorian region; and
- Enterprise learning—a labour intensive business venture.

There is also a spiritual dimension to the program. Through taking part in *Learning 4 life*, students are encouraged to develop a deepening understanding of the human-divine relationship—between self and the Creator, together with exploring and examining important personal qualities and values. These include participation and involvement; responsibility and reliability; initiative and integrity; and independence and self confidence.<sup>6</sup>

Gilson’s experiential education program is deliberately progressively challenging. It incorporates training and opportunities for personal growth; with the first step being expedition learning. In Term 1, various day, overnight and longer training camps prepare participants for a five-day expedition to the largely untracked wilderness of the Walls of Jerusalem National Park and the Central Plateau World Heritage Area of Tasmania. It is in this environment that each group of students, under the supervision of a teacher and also a guide, has opportunity for self-discovery by meeting with triumph and defeat through periods of silence and freedom from the enervating sense of privilege. The remainder of Semester 1 is dedicated to preparing

“*Experiencing life in the ‘real world’—where one gets cold, wet, scratched and blistered—allows young people disengaged from the traditional curriculum to find purpose and discover a love of learning*”



2 Year 9 group at Mortlake Common

[Photography: Gilson Collection]

# Teaching & Professional Practice

“*Gilson’s experiential program is deliberately progressively challenging*”

for a public presentation of the students’ learning experiences. This takes the form of an evening when each individual student is provided with a ‘space’ to display and discuss their learning in front of peers, parents, teachers, and invited guests.

A second component of the program, while not originally in the proposal, is an urban learning camp. Students from Gilson College travel to Melbourne City where they meet with students from three other Christian schools in Melbourne. Last year we had over 150 students in groups of eight to ten, completing various assigned tasks that required them to find their way to significant sites around the city. Each evening all students would return to the Melbourne Discovery Centre, where sheets were handed in for assessment and students could mix and meet with their counterparts from ‘sister’ schools in the region.

The third and final component of the program in 2007 involved service learning. For the past three years we have organised a service learning camp at Warrnambool, in south-western Victoria. While there, we have worked on various projects in conjunction with the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Warrnambool City Council. Projects included bird hides for the Orange Bellied Parrot; ocean-view walks; spotting rare and endangered birds such as the Hooded Plover; finding and documenting occurrences of rare, endangered plants; and weeding, planting and replanting native flora.

In 2007, students made a significant discovery! While searching for native orchids and the endangered Matted Flax Lilly, they found a previously undocumented species of Leek Orchid. The Department of Sustainability and Environment’s fact sheet for this plant has a picture of the students responsible for the find and a note about how a

group of students from Gilson College were involved in discovering it.

Students also participated in STORM Co type activities. These entailed face painting, ballooning, puppeteering, and clowning and magic—at local shopping centres, aged care facilities, and as part of after school care programs. In addition, we gave students an opportunity to make contact with a non-profit organisation in the local community, to volunteer their services for a few hours each fortnight. This proved to be very successful. Groups, consisting of three to five students, worked out public transport routes to help at kindergartens, primary schools, and sporting facilities, and to assist with clean-up activities at local waterways, parks and gardens. Our hope is that this will introduce the students to the whole spectrum of service learning and environmental experiences, which should impact on their values choices and character formation.

## The results

The reality is that the third year of the implementation period has just drawn to a close. We successfully survived last year with 69 participating Year 9 students and could not have achieved this without the hard work of three full-time Year 9 teachers, help from many committed colleagues and assistants, and a fully supportive college administration. The trust and support from a sometimes ‘bewildered’ group of parents and students should also receive mention.

Besides the fun aspect of the program that enables students to ‘escape’ the classroom and enjoy life ‘how it was meant to be’, there are obvious positive changes in students who participate in this program. At present, evidence is mainly anecdotal but comments such as the following are noteworthy: “These kids seem so mature. They actually seem





excited about the things they've learned at the places where they've been;" or, "What have you done to my daughter? She used to be quiet and reserved. Now, she is talkative and has opinions of her own!"

Students themselves also comment on how they have changed through the experiences they have undergone. From the query, "Can we go camping, again?" to the comment, "I'll never again go to a place where there are no toilets!" When asked whether they enjoyed their experiences, the answer is invariably, "yes". The answer is the same when asked if they would encourage others to participate in the program. And one receives an overwhelmingly positive response when students are questioned, if they would be interested in assisting future Year 9 students.

What conclusions have we reached, so far? We say with confidence that all Year 9 students change as a result of participating in this program. They grow in maturity, display more positive attitudes and behaviours, and examine or reassess their values system. However, the extent of this change, and its lasting effect, are questions that can only be answered in the long term, through more detailed research.

Would I recommend this program for your school? Probably not. However, what I would recommend strongly is a contextualised, experiential education program that is appropriate for your school's socio-economic environment. Knowing your students, parents and community is essential and all staff must be familiar with, and supportive of the program and what it seeks to achieve.

Finally, it is imperative that the school administration gives more than just tacit approval to the program, but fully and overtly supports it. Indeed, all key players must be sympathetic to the outcomes

of the program if it is to be successful. Programs of this kind will not survive, in the long term, simply on the enthusiasm of one or two committed staff members.

I am of the firm belief that all students will benefit from experiences that broaden their self-understanding and self-confidence. *Learning 4 life* provides unlimited opportunities for this to occur. Without commitment to programs of this type, Christian schools in general, and Seventh-day Adventist schools in particular will find it increasingly difficult to demonstrate their 'special character', and to fulfil the reason for their existence. Experiential education through service, enterprise, exploration and expedition is one method through which the students in our care may become "...thinkers and not mere reflectors..." of others' thoughts (White, 1903, p.17). **TEACH**

“They grow in maturity, develop more positive attitudes and behaviours, and reassess their values system”

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Coined by Marshall McLuhan almost five decades ago; see Carpenter, E. & McLuhan, M. (1960). *Explorations in communication: An anthology*. New York: Beacon Press.
- <sup>2</sup> Gilson College is a systemic school operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It provides Christian education from K-12 and is located in Taylors Hill, an outer north-west suburb of Melbourne.
- <sup>3</sup> Summaries of Hahn's philosophy and working examples, can be found at James Neil's website, <http://www.wilderdom.com>
- <sup>4</sup> Hahn proposed these in the late teens and early twenties of the last century and little appears to have changed in the past 100 years!
- <sup>5</sup> An acronym: **S**ervice **T**o **O**thers **R**eally **M**atters. See the previous issue of *TEACH Journal of Christian Education* for an article that looks at the service orientation of STORM Co programs.
- <sup>6</sup> The extent to which students learn and embrace these values is the focus of a doctoral research program currently in progress.

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- 3 Declan, Carly Smoker (teacher), and Patrick—Walls of Jerusalem expedition
  - 4 Aaron, Kevin and Richard—Warrnambool service camp
  - 5 Kara and Kimberlyn—Walls of Jerusalem expedition



[Photography: Chris Cowled]

## Mamarapha: Teaching indigenous adults

**Gordon Stafford**

Principal, Mamarapha College, Karragullen, WA

### Introduction

**Mamarapha commenced as a tertiary level initiative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministries (ATSIM). Now in its 12th year of operation, the College offers a cluster of courses: pastoral ministry training for indigenous ministers; ministry studies and health promotion studies for church members and lay ministers. The courses extend from certificate level to a four year Advanced Diploma.<sup>1</sup> The College, operated by the SDA Church, employs three full-time teaching faculty members and a registrar, complemented by sessional and guest lecturers, to cover the wide scope of subjects. These range from biblical studies, ministry, and evangelism, to home and family studies, human relationships, and life skills; as well as health, and literacy and computing skills, among others.**

“While some indigenous people seem to lack literacy and financial skills, they have other specialised knowledge”

Teaching at Mamarapha is a great privilege, but poses some unique challenges. Indigenous people are ordinary people, who share a common humanity and potential for learning with all other people groups. While some may seem to lack literacy and financial skills, they have other specialised knowledge and skills—desert survival, bush tucker, bush medicine, non-verbal communication, understanding of kinship relationships, for example. These are almost unknown in the non-indigenous population.

Aboriginal people do not comprise a single entity. Europeans trace their origins to many different ethnic backgrounds, nations and cultures; so Aboriginal people come from different tribes or clans. These are grouped under the broad categories of Murriss in Queensland, Kooris in NSW, Mardu, Wongai, Yamadgi and Noongyars in WA; there are also the Torres Strait Islanders. Originally, there were over 200 Aboriginal languages—and hence cultures, across Australia. Modern urbanisation has added an extra dimension to Aboriginal culture. Many urban indigenous people, however, have only a scant knowledge of their ancient culture and heritage.

Teaching at Mamarapha presents some great privileges as well as challenges. Most of our

students are mature adults, and come with a thirst for Bible knowledge and a sincere desire for a closer walk with God. As adults, they bring with them their own life experiences and, perhaps, the slower but more reflective learning of older and wiser heads that challenges teachers to translate abstract concepts and theory into everyday practical life, using language and terminology that is easily understood—i.e. it is not exclusively mono-cultural. Engaging in adult learning or andragogy<sup>2</sup>, *vis a vis* pedagogy, may be more in harmony with traditional indigenous learning, but it still requires students to make considerable personal adjustments, particularly for indigenous students who come to a new environment, such as Mamarapha, from isolated communities.

I would like to invite the reader on a ‘journey’ to consider some interesting ‘cultural frames’ that indigenous students bring to their education. Understanding these is essential for effectively teaching indigenous people. The ‘journey’ also helps to make sense of our *modus operandi*.

### Time orientation

‘Blackfella time’ is a commonly used term. It reflects the concept of time being a quality more than a quantity, a servant rather than a master. With Aboriginal people, along with many other cultures, the event is more important than the time at which it occurs. Thus class attendance is a desirable option, but other priorities may take precedence, such as funerals, family requests, pension day, or shopping. However, rather than using the terms *blackfella / whitefella time*, it may be more fitting to consider the concept as *city or country time*.

Subsistence hunter-gatherer economies have little need for future planning, so the idea of thinking and planning ahead is limited. Cultural attitudes to time are absorbed from the family and the social

### Mamarapha

A combination of words from Aboriginal languages of the Western Desert Region and Ancient Hebrew, meaning **God makes whole**.

environment, and this, combined with the obligations that family may bring, make any kind of planning difficult—whether it is budgeting income, meeting deadlines, managing time, planning for assignments, or preparing for an exam.

## Eye contact

Aboriginal people have often been accused of being guilty of some misconduct because they would not look someone in the face. What is not readily understood is the fact that some Aboriginal cultures show respect by looking down rather than ‘staring’ someone in the face. For others, it is a sign of uncertainty or shame; you only look someone in the face when you want to show aggression. Looking into someone’s face—particularly a white face—often will not occur until a strong bond of trust is built.

When talking with Aboriginal people, many whites have to remind themselves not to stare into their eyes, and not to misinterpret their looking down.

## Asking questions

‘Smart’ people in many Aboriginal cultures, are those who can find out what they want to know, not by asking questions but by observing closely and by reading non-verbal cues. This poses an immediate problem for the classroom, where much of the learning is conducted through question and answer.

Fortunately, most Aboriginals are generous to ‘ignorant whites’ who must ask questions. We have found that most urban Aboriginals respond well to classroom questions, but with desert people, greater sensitivity must be used. Singling out shy students for answers or tasks is best left until they are comfortable with the lecturer. Particularly with first year students, small-group questions are generally better than personal questions, for they

reduce the risk of ‘shaming’ someone who may not know the answer. Group discussions and tasks can work well, for we have found more cooperation than competition among our students.

When asking questions, teaching faculty must be aware that an answer given—particularly on sensitive issues—may primarily reflect what students think the lecturer wants, or the answer may merely convey a hint of the ‘real answer’. A “yes” answer sometimes means “no”, if the “yes” is seen to please or will satisfy the questioner. While this appears ‘untruthful’ in many western cultures, good manners are often valued above candidness or transparency regarding what one thinks or believes.

## Learning

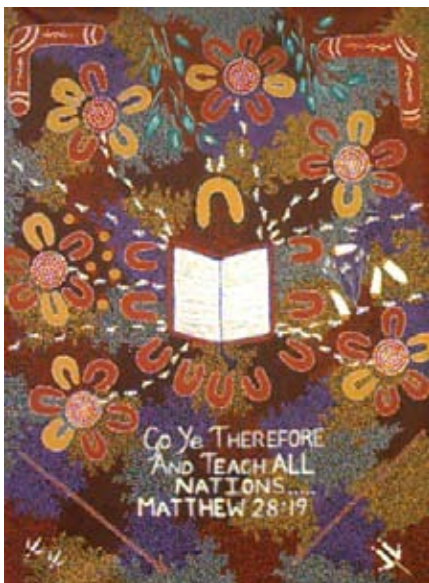
For most indigenous people, practical, hands-on learning (or learning by doing) is the best way to learn. Performing the skill, exercise, or process with students, and discussing the steps and processes is very effective and helps them to perform it themselves. This not only fits in with traditional learning styles, but also minimises literacy difficulties and classroom learning obstacles.

Storytelling is another important tool; particularly stories that students can relate to. It is easy to assume that adult students come with high motivation and good self-directed learning skills. Such an assumption, however, ignores that many Aboriginal adults bring ‘instructional packages’ with them from their schooling days that are educational ‘nightmares’. Thus, holistic learning that integrates the content material with the rest of life, makes learning meaningful and can begin to break down negative classroom images they have built up in the past. Encouragement is a very important tool for those who come from a background that is a collage

“Some Aboriginal cultures show respect by looking down rather than ‘staring’ someone in the face”

- 1 Banner painted by John and Annette Beck, with 1997 students and staff
- 2 Mamarapha College group 2008
- 3 Mamarapha teaching staff: (L-R) Michael Steed, Lynelda Tippo and Gordon Stafford

[Photography: Mamarapha collection]



	2
1	3

of failure, non-achievement, inferiority and scholastic non-performance.

Abstract concepts seem particularly difficult to master. For example, a lecturer may give the theory on sermon preparation—outlining, laying out notes, and so on, but it is when the class goes through the process together on the board—gathering ideas, formulating a structure, identifying key concepts, grouping ideas, looking for illustrations, etc. that the material begins to make sense.

The visual aspect of learning seems to be crucial—symbols, diagrams, charts, models, and so on. Thus, even the concept of layout in sermon outlines seems to be grasped quickest when the notes are on computer, and the lecturer can then go through the material with the student—breaking it into ‘visual sections’, adding sub-headings, indenting, highlighting, and bolding.

It can be readily seen that patience is also a very important component for indigenous learning. Many of our students initially find the classroom daunting and scary, as their education has been sketchy, their learning styles are different and, for some, English is a second language and often not understood very well. We have found it essential to be aware of the language that is used—explaining ‘big’ words, speaking simply and clearly, together with examples from everyday life. We must mentor students through regularly reminding them about assignments, frequently checking work and monitoring their progress, to ensure they are on the right track.

## Relationships

The quality of learning among Aboriginal people is related to the personal interest and rapport that teachers build with their students. Aboriginal children have sometimes defined a good teacher as “someone who likes us and is fair,” and that goes for adults as well. Induction, at the beginning of the course, begins with staff introducing themselves to the students and giving them a brief rundown on who they are; their background, family and so on. A good relationship with students at Mamarapha enhances learning and growth, encourages openness and fosters academic excellence.

Effective listening is probably the most important part of building relationships among indigenous people. Many are shy and reserved because, so often, they have felt put down or ignored by insensitive or ‘ignorant whites’. The desert way of life is much slower than the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban rush. Consequently, it is essential for lecturers to adjust their delivery to accommodate a slower pace of thinking and talking, for effective student learning and relationships.

## Decision making

Decision making usually has more to do with everyday life than the classroom; it cannot be

divorced from learning. Whereas decision making among western cultures tends to be linear, Aboriginal decision making tends to be contextual. Decisions are made within the framework of the present circumstances, the family and friends. If these change, then the decision may change.

One of the primary reasons may lie in the value that is placed on family relationships. For many Aboriginal people, the family is the unit that makes the important decisions, particularly in matters of marriage and death. The family includes aunts, uncles, cousins and other extended relatives. Any member who disregards a family decision does so at the risk of alienation or some form of censure or reprisal from other family members.

Hence, a student may decide to pursue a course of study, but then not turn up. This may eventuate when a funeral occurs; a family member needs help, or some other circumstance changes, even though all the arrangements for the study program may be in place.

While Western cultures value individualism and independence, Aboriginal cultures tend to prize family solidarity and respect for older family members.

## Spirituality

Perhaps one characteristic of Aboriginal people that makes teaching at Mamarapha so enjoyable is their spirituality. In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews, the supernatural is a crucial element, and spirituality is almost universal. In addition, most of the students that come to Mamarapha come with a desire to improve their spiritual experience, as well as their Bible knowledge. This makes the aim of helping students to find Christ so much easier, and seeing students grasp the Gospel and integrate it into their personal lives makes all the difficulties worthwhile.

## A final thought

I have tried to describe the cultural context of how we learn and teach at Mamarapha. It is both a privilege and responsibility to guide students in their quest for God and an inspiration to watch them growing spiritually as well as academically.

Recently, one of the first year students prayed at the beginning of class. In his prayer, he said: “Lord, this is the sweetest pasture I have ever been in!” For me, that one sentence made all the difficulties, challenges, and even some heart aches well worthwhile. **TEACH**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> These are nationally accredited courses; Mamarapha is a Registered Training Organisation registered in WA with the Department of Education and Training.

<sup>2</sup> A term usually connected with Malcolm Knowles, the long-time doyen of adult education.

“*Effective listening is probably the most important part of building relationships among indigenous people*”

## MAMARAPHA STUDENTS' OPINIONS

**Question:** *How does Mamarapha differ from other educational institutions?*

### Response

**Marion Hastie**  
Third Year Pastoral Ministry student



The College is unique. Students' educational levels range from very limited schooling to university level. I feel the teaching faculty aims at maximising our understanding, rather than promoting competition. This allows the students to help each other more.

It's enjoyable to study at Mamarapha, in the company of fellow indigenous students. Although, studying with non-indigenous students in primary and secondary school and in tertiary institutions helped me to cope outside my comfort zone and extend my horizons.

Our lecturers, at Mamarapha, are professional, yet warm, while subjects are biblically based and culturally appropriate. I enjoy my studies here. **TEACH**

### Response

**Joan Lever**  
Third Year Pastoral Ministry student

Spending some years at other institutions has actually assisted me in studying at Mamarapha. I learned the skill of managing assignments and practicals, and being able to cope with stress. The work there challenged me, but in a different sense, that is not easy for me to convey on paper.

Being here at Mamarapha is welcoming to the soul. You look forward to learning more about the living Christ. At other places of education, I concentrated more on getting my assignments finished on time while endeavouring to understand the information needed for assignments. Regardless of the place, I always enjoy learning, but at Mamarapha I am eager to learn more about Jesus' life and words. I want to 'soak' in as much as possible. In the past, I took a more clinical and structured approach towards

learning and I felt pressured to think mainly in terms of qualifying for a degree.

Studying at this College is more informative, friendly, and family oriented. The work is clearly explained and content more easily understood; class discussions are very informal but meaningful.

I always associated assignments in other institutions, with long, complex and meaningless words unrelated to the assignment question, but which bogged down the student. So I spent a lot of time deciphering and dissecting those 'horrible' words. Sure, they made sense when explained in some form, but because the indigenous person has 'another way' of thinking, it's like a parallel style of learning.

All the students at Mamarapha are interested in serving the Lord. There is a respectful attitude when direct and clear questions connect with meaningful answers. Elsewhere, students don't necessarily subscribe to Christian values or show an interest in anything to do with God. They mainly concentrate on getting their work done on time. The atmosphere in those places is quite different, too. Both indigenous and non-indigenous students mirror the lifestyle of the secular world. The vocabulary used is termed 'Aussie talk'. Sometimes this language creates barriers to friendship. So it's not easy to make friends with other students. I found that brainy students mostly 'look out' for themselves or their group. Whereas, at Mamarapha, 'brainies' take a great interest in struggling students and assist them to keep up to the level of the others.

Lecturers, here, also give a lot of encouragement to struggling students and help them to learn and understand difficult concepts by taking different teaching / learning approaches.

Secular institutions often tend to foster a competitive attitude. Success - a top priority, means an assignment that scores the highest mark in the class. Excessive time is put into it, therefore. So, there is also some jealousy. Sadly, many students are not interested in your wellbeing or friendship. You feel that you are on your own.

I think music really brings students together at Mamarapha. Everybody is involved in the music. There is awareness of fellow students and the effort everyone contributes—either singing or playing an instrument; for we all strive for the best outcome. Last, but most important, Jesus guides the teaching and learning that takes place at Mamarapha. That's why many students exceed their own expectations. **TEACH**

*“Mamarapha is welcoming to the soul: students are interested in serving the Lord, and 'brainy' students assist struggling students”*

## Issues in studying the Bible in secondary school Religion classes<sup>1</sup>

Ray Roennfeldt

Dean, Faculty of Theology, Avondale College, NSW

### Introduction

**The use of the Bible in Religion classes—variously referred to as Bible, Scripture, or Studies of Religion classes—in the Christian secondary education context<sup>2</sup> appears to be something that should naturally take place. However, two issues may stand in the way of biblical study actually happening. First, it is all too easy to talk *about* the Bible without really studying it in any great depth. This article attempts to provide educators with some practical suggestions regarding effective scriptural study. Second, is the problem of not knowing where to start and perhaps where to finish. What is one to do with the biblical stories that seem inappropriate for early high school students? What if the Bible teacher gets out of her / his depth and cannot deal with the questions and issues raised by queuing teenagers? How is one to deal with the considerable diversity within the Bible on many issues as well as with the vast disparity between contemporary culture and biblical culture/s? Again, I will attempt to provide some assistance in these areas.**

“How does one deal with the considerable diversity within the Bible on many issues?”

Initially, though, I need to tell you something about myself and ‘where I’m coming from’. While, not having taught at secondary school level, for many years I have engaged with students who just completed high school. In addition, I’ve spent six years training school leavers in theology, biblical studies, and practical ministry in Papua New Guinea. Still, my best qualification is that I am married to a highly effective and very passionate Bible teacher. Not a day goes by without there being at least some discussion between us on the subject of ‘Bible teaching’.

### Background factors

#### What the Bible is like

What does one need to know about the Bible if it is to be understood? Can we, for instance, use the same methods of understanding its meaning as we might use for any other piece of literature? As

I remember my own high school study of English literature, we were provided with appreciable historical background material in order to understand Charles Dickens’, *A tale of two cities*. What sort of information, then, is necessary in order to understand the Bible?

It seems to me, at very least, that the type or genre of literature determines to a great extent the way we interpret it. *Poetry* would need to be read in a different fashion to a *letter*, and the same is true for a *parable*, a *proverb*, or a *prophecy*. The complex thing about the Bible, however, is that it contains a wide variety of types of human literature as well as making some wide-ranging authority claims. For instance, 2 Timothy 3:16 asserts: “All Scripture is God-breathed” (NIV). This biblical writer is specifically referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, which of course often refer to God’s direct input into the Scripture-making process.<sup>3</sup> So, while the Scriptures were written in common, ancient, human languages, they claim to be more than human literature; in fact, this is God speaking in human voices.

It might appear that the easier aspect of the Bible for us to come to terms with is its humanity. And, definitely, it has all of the traits of human literature: sublime as well as poor literary style, simple and complex figures of speech, words whose meaning is difficult to decipher at this distance, and unfamiliar genres. But for the contemporary reader, possibly the most disconcerting aspect of the ‘humanity’ of Scripture is its cultural underpinnings. Personally, I did not fully recognise this until I ministered in a cross-cultural situation where I found myself transported back into what was more like an Old Testament setting than a western context.<sup>4</sup> It is not as if some sections of the Bible are cultural and other parts are trans-cultural and our task as interpreters is to separate the human from the divine. Paradoxically, all of Scripture is fully cultural and fully divine.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps, this is best illustrated when God most personally speaks to human beings during the Exodus. He articulates the Ten Commandments in a patriarchal place, time, and mode. Notice for instance, the reference to “manservant” and

“maidservant” in the Sabbath law. Slaves were to be granted freedom, not from slavery, but in order to keep the Sabbath.<sup>6</sup> Then, the command which prohibits coveting is written from the perspective of the man who is not to covet the property of his neighbour. Such property includes the neighbour’s wife, male-slave, female-slave, ox, donkey, or anything else belonging to him.<sup>7</sup> For some of us, (but not all) God’s Word comes clothed in a strange culture. This sharpens for us—and even more for secondary school students who are often from a different cultural generation than their teachers—the issue of the clarity or ambiguity of Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

How are we to deal with the ambiguity and variety within Scripture? An example may help us understand the issue. The New South Wales Studies of Religion Level 6 Syllabus indicates students who choose to study the Christian religion for their “Religious traditions depth studies” component may focus on sexual ethics as one of the areas of “ethical teaching in Christianity”.<sup>9</sup> Presumably, Bible teachers would want their Year 11 and 12 students to carefully examine the biblical data that range from God’s blessing of marriage and sexuality (Gen 1:27-28), to the law forbidding adultery (Exod 20:14), to statutes ‘regulating’ adultery and rape (Deut 22:13-30), to Jesus’ “You have heard that it was said, . . . But I tell you . . .” statements on adultery and divorce (Matt 5:27-32). Even a cursory examination of these passages indicates diversity and ambiguity in the biblical materials that begs for some explanation in regard to what the Bible is actually like.

### What the readers are like

So far, we have looked at what the Bible is like and how that might impact on how we interpret it. But, what are the interpreters or readers like, and do they make any difference to the meaning derived from Scripture? Previous biblical scholarship was quite optimistic that it was possible for the Bible student to approach Scripture objectively by asking what the intent of the biblical writer was in a particular passage and then assuming that we would now know the meaning (or, at least the range of meanings) possible in the contemporary setting. Current scholarship is now much more willing to admit that the readers bring their own ‘text’ to their biblical study. Let me illustrate this by two examples. The first—somewhat distant to our own context—is the fact some Christians have supported slavery while at the same time other Christians promoted the abolition of slavery. Of course, both sides used ‘clear’ biblical passages. The second, more recently, Christians on both sides of the apartheid divide in South Africa used the Bible to support their own positions. While this variation may relate in part to the already

mentioned diversity within the Bible itself, it must also stem from differences within the readers.<sup>10</sup>

What are secondary school students like? Obviously, adolescence is a period of major change and development, hence it is difficult to characterise them accurately. Solvang maintains that students finishing high school tend to be “dualistic thinkers,” “focused on self” with “difficulty thinking outside their own experiences and circumstances,” persons with “little skill and experience in critical thinking”, “emotive rather than reflective”, and able to communicate better privately and narratively than publicly and persuasively.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, this is descriptive of upper high school age youth.

Additionally, contemporary young adults might be described as *post-modern* (or *Gen-Y*). While post-modernity is a controversial concept, it seems clear people do not think (or read) as they used to do. They are more attuned to technology and “truth is stranger than it used to be”.<sup>12</sup> It is not that truth is completely relativistic, but it is certainly pragmatic. What works is deemed to be truth. Thus when generational differences are added to the ‘melting pot’ of multiculturalism, new definitions of family, post-feminism, and others, young biblical ‘readers’<sup>13</sup> come to the Bible with a new set of expectations. These demand that learning experiences will be real (credible), raw (spontaneous and interactive), relevant and relational.<sup>14</sup>

### The process of interpretation

It is the process of biblical interpretation that brings the text of Scripture and the reader together. Therefore, it is vital that we have some understanding of the kind of book (and books) we are dealing with in the Bible. The past emphasis in biblical studies has been on what the words meant in their historical and literary context, but it seems to me, an even more vital issue is what they mean applied in contemporary settings—in students’ lives. It is easy to miss the point of Scripture: “...that the man [and woman] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”<sup>15</sup>, unless its words and teachings are applied in the present.

If, so far, our understanding of Scripture has been made complex by the character of Scripture and the nature of the readers, there is help available for the Bible teacher and student. Even though it is rarely discussed in books on biblical hermeneutics, the teaching role of the Holy Spirit is highlighted in the New Testament.<sup>16</sup> Jesus clearly taught that the Holy Spirit would “teach you all things” (John 14:26) and “guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). Does this mean that the Bible teacher can relax while the Spirit does all of the work of preparation and application? By no means! After all, Jesus instructed his disciples

“**Young Bible ‘readers’ demand that learning experiences be credible, spontaneous and interactive, relevant and relational**”

to “go and make disciples” with the assurance that he would be with them “to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:19).<sup>17</sup>

## Using the Bible in Religion classes

### Desired outcomes

We have looked at what the Bible is like, what our youthful readers might be like, and how the text and the readers might interface. It is also vital to ask Bible teachers what goals they will have, in engaging students with Scripture.

The primary aim must be to provide students with opportunities to know God through Jesus Christ. In fact, while we affirm that the Bible is both human and divine, it does not actually draw attention to itself. Rather, its focus is on Jesus Christ. Jesus, himself, refers to certain people who “diligently study the Scriptures” but miss the point completely in thinking that the Bible provides “eternal life.” Instead, Jesus maintains: “These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40). The point of the Bible is not to provide interesting stories of long-gone people—although it does do that—it is to give us access to the same God who interacted with Joseph, Moses and Esther, and Daniel, Mary, Martha and Paul.<sup>18</sup> We also miss the point when we fail to confront Jesus Christ as the central character of Scripture.

The second aim in using the Bible in religious education is to provide ‘starting points’—opportunities, for *spiritual formation and personal development*. In particular, the stories of Scripture may act as resource material on which the young person might draw as he / she develops values such as integrity, service, self-control, and faithfulness. The hope is that students might begin to form personal habits of reflective reading of Scripture, aided by modern translations; with subsequent impacts throughout the lifespan.<sup>19</sup>

A third goal is to create a Christian community in the class setting. For many high school students, the Studies of Religion class may be the only ‘church’ community they experience. The Scriptures were originally intended to be read and studied in community; something that has been lost in many congregations. The original Hebrew and Christian communities were primarily listening communities rather than reading communities. For instance, most of the New Testament epistles are written to particular church communities. This probably applies to the gospels also. Creation of a classroom community will also involve the fostering of good citizenship and the valuing of diversity. The fact that the Bible does not always ask for just one answer stands as a strong basis for the value of differences of opinion.<sup>20</sup>

Providing opportunities for the formation of Christian faith, personal development, and community building are all important goals of Bible reading and study in the secondary school setting. However, how might one get to those desired outcomes?

### Methods

It seems to me that one will need a contextual entry point into Scripture. For some students who have grown up in a religious home, the Bible may be a familiar book. But, for others, it is completely unfamiliar, old-fashioned, and even irrelevant. So, we must seek means of meeting on common ground. Acts 17 provides a biblical example. Paul is in Athens and uses the words of well-known Greek poets in order to engage his audience with key Christian content.<sup>21</sup> Various entry points may be used, depending on the experience and gifts of the Bible teacher and the contemporary situation. Ofra Backenroth’s study describes and evaluates the use of art (including sculpture, diorama, painting, a play, or a video) in Bible teaching with Grade 6 Jewish students.<sup>22</sup> My wife, Carmel, regularly uses media such as contemporary, secular music and film as entry points into the biblical text. Still others have used biblical archaeology as a means to make “the Bible come to life.”<sup>23</sup> Using various contextual entry points does not mean that one uses a certain approach and then moves on to the biblical text alone. Rather, the strategy is entry, re-entry, entry, and re-entry. This allows a ‘sideways’ approach rather than a ‘direct’ approach which may sometimes seem like an ‘attack’.<sup>24</sup>

If a consistently contextual method of biblical study is used, one must provide opportunities for students to study larger rather than just the smaller portions of Scripture. This will not only enable them to gain a feel for what the Bible is like, but it will also give them experience in wrestling with and applying the text in their own situations. Key biblical passages might be committed to memory by the teacher’s use of ‘quote of the week’ on the whiteboard and (sometimes) by reading aloud.<sup>25</sup> Thus, students should have access to class copies of the Bible in modern translations.

Other more informational and imaginative means include the use of humour, music, and drama to assist in embedding the Bible into the students’ minds.<sup>26</sup> Nancy Ammerman, remarking on the necessity of memorising portions of Scripture, maintains:

... when we commit something to memory, it sinks deep and often resurfaces in surprising ways to meet new situations.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, how is the teacher to deal with the

“We miss the point when we fail to confront Jesus Christ as the central character of Scripture”



'strangeness' and diversity of Scripture? The easy answer: with some difficulty! However, I have found it helpful to think in terms of God taking account of the circumstances of His people and speaking to them in ways that they understood. So, because circumstances continue to change over time, God does not express His consistent, loving, and eternal salvation message through identical communication to all people at all times. William Webb calls this a "redemptive-movement hermeneutic" that allows the Bible student to observe the progress (and sometimes regression) in Scripture, for example, of the ways that slaves and women are treated. Such an approach allows contemporary people to make applications of Scripture that might go beyond the words, but are in keeping with the 'spirit' of the Bible.<sup>28</sup>

Keep in mind, it is probably the diversity of the Bible that makes biblical study and application so dynamic and ultimately so community-enhancing.<sup>29</sup> While this diversity might mean the teacher is sometimes 'stuck for answers' for her / his questioning students, there is nothing like the excitement of personal and group discovery, discussion, and even debate, to fire the imagination of postmoderns, even if it means admitting that some of our answers are, at best, limited and partial—for the time being.

## Conclusions

In the end, effective secondary Bible teaching is not accomplished by making it more complex. We do need to know what Scripture is like, what our goals are in teaching it, how to effectively interpret the text, and how to apply it in the lives of our students. However, it does not need to be complicated. Carol Bechtel concludes:

In teaching, true brilliance is revealed not in elaborate lesson plans, complex lectures, or sophisticated technology. Rather, brilliance shows itself in the ability to simplify the complex without oversimplifying it.<sup>30</sup>

Nothing of lasting significance in regard to Scripture, however, will be conveyed by people who are not immersed in it themselves! And, that is a good place for Bible teachers and students to begin. **TEACH<sup>®</sup>**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article was written during a 2008 research leave, funded by Avondale College and the Avondale Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> While the focus of this article is on the secondary school setting, the principles may be applied effectively at primary school level also.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Isa 66:1; Jer 11:1; Eze 38:1; and Mic 1:1

<sup>4</sup> I describe this experience in: How Melanesia shaped my

hermeneutics and theology: Some personal reflections, in Oliver, B. et al. (Eds.). (1997). *Avondale and the South Pacific: 100 years of mission*. Avondale Academic Press: Cooranbong, NSW, pp.93-105.

<sup>5</sup> Loveday, A. (2006). God's frozen word: Canonicity and the dilemmas of biblical studies today. *The Expository Times*, 117, p.241.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Deut 5:14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 20:17-18. Notice also the patriarchal hierarchy in this list.

<sup>8</sup> In the past, this has been referred to as the "perspicuity" of Scripture. A helpful introduction to this subject, from a Baptist viewpoint, can be found in Maddox, T. D. (2003). Scripture, perspicuity, and post-modernity. *Review and Expositor*, 100, 555-85.

<sup>9</sup> Board of Studies, NSW (2005). *Studies of religion, stage 6 syllabus*, p.41; available on www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance Village, A. & Francis L. J. (2005). The relationship of psychological type preferences to biblical interpretation. *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 18, 74-89; also Johnson, C. (1983). *The psychology of biblical interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>11</sup> See Sovang, E. K. (2004). Thinking developmentally: The Bible, the first-year college student, and diversity. *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 7, p.234.

<sup>12</sup> This expression is from Middleton, J. R. & Walsh, B. J. (1995). *Truth is stranger than it used to be: Biblical faith in a post-modern age*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP. Especially helpful is chapter eight (The hope of our times), where the authors refer to the living of Christianity as "faithful improvisation" (pp.183-185).

<sup>13</sup> There may actually be a greater emphasis on viewing and accessing rather than reading!

<sup>14</sup> See the research-based article by Mark McCrindle: Understanding Generation Y, available on www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au

<sup>15</sup> 2 Tim 3:17.

<sup>16</sup> Note that the popular and very helpful work by Fee, G. D. & Stuart, D. (2003). *How to read the Bible for all its worth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, has no comprehensive discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of biblical interpretation.

<sup>17</sup> Compare John 16:7-11. A balanced approach to biblical interpretation which takes account of the text, the reader, and the Spirit can be found in Pinnock, C. with Callen, B. L. (2006). *The Scripture principle: Reclaiming the full authority of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, pp.223-245.

<sup>18</sup> Notice, for instance, the recurring theme ("The Lord was with Joseph") in Gen. 39, verse 2; also 3, 5, 21, and 23. Note Fee and Stuart's discussion (ibid.) of the narrator's role of the Joseph narrative, pp.93-94.

<sup>19</sup> Note the discussion of the necessity of teaching for personal development in Adler, M. G. (2002). Why the Bible is good for children (and even for adults). *Family Ministry*, 2(16), 33-44.

<sup>20</sup> See the Pauline discussion of eating food that had been sacrificed to idols in 1 Cor 8:1-13. In spite of the initial Church prohibition placed on eating food offered to idols (Acts 15:20, 29), Paul appears to take a more flexible three-pronged stance in the Corinthian setting.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 17:23-31. The same principle of contextualisation and accommodation can also be found in 1 Cor 9:19-23.

<sup>22</sup> Backenroth, O. A. (2004). Art and *Rashi*: A portrait of a Bible teacher. *Religious Education*, 99, 151-66. He cites evidence, when "there is a shared cognitive and symbolic element between two disciplines, skills transfer is more likely to happen" (p. 153).

<sup>23</sup> Schiffman, L. (2003). Making the Bible come to life: Biblical archaeology and the teaching of Tanakh in Jewish schools. *Tradition*, 37, 38-49.

“For many high school students, the class may be the only ‘church’ community they experience”

# Teaching & Professional Practice

<sup>24</sup> This method is well-described by Reich, K. H. (2003). Teaching Genesis: A present-day approach inspired by the prophet Nathan. *Zygon*, 38, 633-41. Reich describes his approach as the kind of 'detour' that Nathan took in his interactions with King David (see p.633).

<sup>25</sup> Several strategies (for what is termed a "sacred reading", i.e. reading the scriptures together and aloud) are recommended and provided in Veling, T. A. (2007). Listening to 'the voices of the pages' and 'combining the letters': Spiritual practices of reading and writing. *Religious Education*, 102, 206-222.

<sup>26</sup> See the suggestions presented by Bechtel, C. M. (2002). Teaching the 'strange new world' of the Bible. *Interpretation*, 56, 368-377.

<sup>27</sup> Ammerman, N. T. (2007). Memory verses: Teaching children the Bible. *Christian Century*, April 3, p.10.

<sup>28</sup> Webb, W. J. (2001). *Slaves, women and homosexuals: Exploring the hermeneutics of cultural analysis*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP. Particularly, see chapter two: A redemptive-movement hermeneutic, pp.30-66.

<sup>29</sup> A useful examination of religious education teaching models and approaches—both *enfaithing* and *interfaith*, can be found in Lovat, T. (2002). *What is this thing called RE: A decade on?* Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press.

<sup>30</sup> Bechtel, C.M., *ibid.* p.377.

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# Christian school counselling: Towards conceptualising a distinctive paradigm

**Stephen Fyson**

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## Abstract

**This article proposes there are inherent core understandings in the words 'Christian' and 'school' that make this type of counselling different. The writer argues for a Christian distinctive through a critical challenge put to contemporary psychology and in reviewing 1 John 3:24-4:8. The unique character of school counselling is represented by two frameworks. These examine the direction of the counselling process and the interaction between the social ecology and the interpersonal relationship patterns of school life, from a student perspective.**

## Introduction

*Is suicide OK? A scenario:* The scene is not uncommon in a school setting. A teenager, probably between fourteen and seventeen, is sitting with an adult who has a counselling role. The youngster shares that they have been experimenting with taking large doses of readily available pain killers. Looking up at the counsellor with a hint of sadness, they ask: "Is it OK to suicide?" What should the counsellor do?

Below are some options:

- offer support to the teenager;
- ask an open-ended reflective question, such as, "How does this make you feel?"
- sit respectfully and silently to see what comes next;
- structure the next set of questions to establish what happened recently in their life;
- review the family history for any patterns of depression;
- help the teenager consider their options about the most peaceful way to suicide, if they were determined to do so;
- quickly go through a check-list of questions to assess the probable risk of their attempting or completing suicide;
- refer them to a physician to check for iron

deficiency and / or hormonal instability;

- open the Bible and teach about the sanctity of life;
- offer to pray to seek God's guidance for them;
- a combination of the above (in what order?);
- something else (e.g. referral to a specialist).

## Which foundations? Does faith matter?

The writer once put the above scenario to a group of psychology lecturers from different faculties at the same university. The topic under discussion was the role of faith (and Christianity) within psychology. Most of the lecturers held to the view that science—which they interpreted as naturalistic or empiricist science, was the only valid basis for psychology as a 'mature' discipline. So the group, including the founding professor, was asked what research evidence should inform their choice of an option, particularly option (f). Subsequently, the seminar became highly animated and, of significance, no individual could confidently provide an answer within an empiricist framework, nor was there a group consensus.

What can help counsellors decide in this situation? Should they actively move to dissuade someone from committing suicide, or simply ensure that the counsellee, having considered all options, is well supported in whatever they decide? This example may seem dramatic, but the same ethical dilemma applies in principle to many other counselling scenarios. These might range from considering sexual preferences or activity and reacting to parent / teacher discipline, to recreational pursuits involving health risks (extreme sport, alcohol and other drug ab/use, etc.); responding to peers; and the level of academic performance at school.

Preference-utilitarian ethicists, such as Professor Peter Singer would claim the choices relating to the above scenario do not matter, as long as the individual does not hurt another. But from where has that caveat even come? And how is 'hurting another' defined? The point is, any counselling that claims

“*If counselling involves 'soul care', Christian counsellors need to think through how their core faith informs their practice*”

to be based on 'objective science' is functioning at a level of relationship that is less than human. It is pretence to assert counsellors should be 'amoral' in their work, i.e. giving help with no reference to a set of ethics that transcends the situation under consideration. G.K. Chesterton made a pertinent observation:

Once people stop believing in God, the problem is *not* that they will believe nothing; rather the problem is that they will believe anything.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to an amoral stance, a Christian counsellor may want to pursue deeply the interface between counselling and theology. An internet search focussed on that interface will reveal many topical books, articles and valuable resources, for those interested in detailed discussion.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this writer contends if counselling indeed involves what Clinton and Ohlschlager<sup>3</sup> refer to as 'soul work' (or 'soul care'), then those engaged in it who consider themselves Christian, need to think through individually how their core faith informs their practice—i.e. how will they determine what is right and wrong in the face of ethical dilemmas? A reading of the canon of Christian Scripture would certainly expect it. In addition, Church history demonstrates what happens when doctrine and experience are separated.<sup>4</sup> In the counselling context, both theology and history warn us that doctrine (or ethics) without responsiveness results in harsh moralism, while responsiveness without faith-based ethics leads to emotionalised permissiveness.

Marty Lloyd-Jones<sup>5</sup> comments on this assertion and finds support in 1 John 3:24-4:8. The passage recognises that to be a Christian involves experience: "We know it by the Spirit he gave us" (1 John 3:24; NIV). However, there is also a recognition that some experiences can be misleading, and must be tested: "...do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits ..." (1 John 4:1; NIV).

Cognitive or behavioural psychologists might point out that this is a very early example of thinking that interacts with behaviour. However, this does not account for the inherently ethical nature of human life as mentioned above. Such cognitive or behavioural explanations are even more critically flawed if based on a theory of social evolution that tries to account for human ethical behaviour in terms of 'natural selection'; particularly the human behaviour of self-sacrifice.<sup>6</sup>

John, the apostle, demonstrates a deeper understanding of the human psyche. He declares that the balance between experience and correctness is grounded in certain acceptances or denials about the historical structure of life. Has Jesus Christ come in the flesh or not?<sup>7</sup> He further declares that the ultimate test of individual maturity with reference to this historical event is how we

relate to others: "Whoever does not love does not know God ..." (1 John 4:8; NIV).

## Which direction? Two proposed frameworks

The greatest challenge to Christian belief, according to Lloyd-Jones, is not complete denial of Christ, but *misrepresentations* of Christ.<sup>8</sup> A Christian counsellor thus needs a framework that affirms the centrality of acknowledging Christ as the deepest meaning of human existence.<sup>9</sup> While some secular frameworks may have something to offer, this is an important starting point that assists in evaluating whether counselling approaches take a biblical view of life and human behaviour. Lloyd-Jones comments on our human tendency to take that which should be complementary, and push it to extremes:

And thus when the whole emphasis is placed upon one or the other, you have either a tendency to fanaticism and excesses, or a tendency toward barren intellectualism and a mechanical and a dead kind of orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup>

If this notion is applied to the ethical underpinnings of the counselling situation, then one of three relational directions is being enacted each time a counsellor helps someone. There is:

1. a commitment to 'soul care', that assists someone to attain a deeper understanding of knowing and experiencing God's love, and of loving others, which means:

... seeing people's pain as a soul wound as well as a psychological disorder, at times. It means being invested in others—a caring connection with someone—rather than merely engaging in skilled talking ... We value more the impact of the character and maturity of the counsellor than what is done in terms of technique.<sup>11</sup>

2. an examination of behaviour through an individualised experience analysis that moves someone towards a relationship mode of personal selectivity (favouritism);
3. an exploration of thinking through a pragmatic framework to enhance someone's relational self-control.

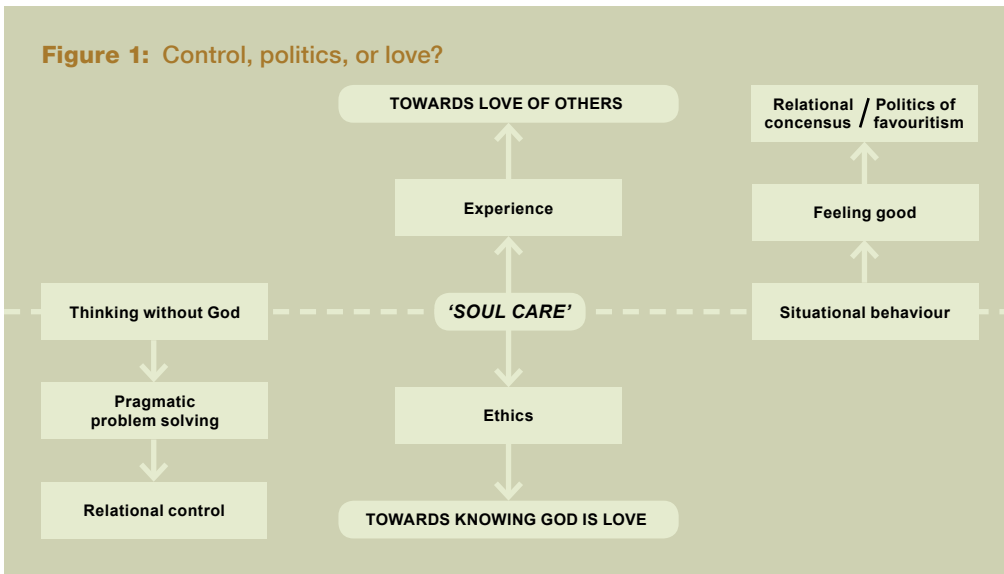
It is recognised life is not lived in discrete segments and elements of all three may 'slide' in and out of any helping situation.

The above options are diagrammatically represented in Figure 1. Also, it should be noted that this representation of the core challenge from 1 John does not deal with the implications of personal gifting or style, in terms of the communication processes during the discernment of the heart-state issues within counselling.

One could consider which schools of counselling theory fit in such a schema. For example, one may argue that person-centred theory captures much of

**'Soul care' assists someone to attain a deeper understanding of God's love, and of loving others**

**Figure 1: Control, politics, or love?**



the ‘feeling good’ aspects of counselling. Rational-emotive therapy would illustrate much of the ‘thinking only’ side of ‘soul care’. In this sense, each may be perceived as having a ‘kernel of truth’.

‘Soul care’ does entail understanding one’s emotional experiences; it also entails understanding the thought processes of a person.

However, if either of these theories or methodologies is divorced from the overall direction of the counselling (God-loyal ‘soul care’), then they run the risk of misrepresenting Christ, who enables the knowledge that God is love, and love of the other. It is not being advocated that Jesus Christ should verbally be ‘preached’ in each counselling contact. What *is* being suggested through the challenge of 1 John and scriptures such as Matthew 22:38-40, is the *direction* that any counselling takes: towards self-gratification, control of others, or love? Both experience and ethics are needed to discern this.

### A school context

The principles outlined above could refer to any counselling setting. Does the *school* setting make a difference, or can it? Surprisingly, the question is rarely considered in counselling literature. One example is a special edition of the Australian Psychological Society’s professional newsletter that looked at the role of the psychologist in schools.<sup>12</sup> This professional publication highlighted *individual* counsellors doing *remedial* psychological work with *individual* students, but there was a striking lack of consideration of the school as a community, or of opportunities for different levels of intervention along the lines of Caplan’s primary, secondary and tertiary model.<sup>13</sup> Is this a credible conception of the place we call ‘school’? Is the impact and extent of the efforts of Christian counsellors, interested in ‘soul care’,

being limited if they stay within such circumscribed parameters?

It is suggested, a different conceptualisation of ‘school’ can open up other ways of helping students understand their experiences and gain confidence in developing a personal knowledge of ‘right and wrong’, in a context of Christ-love.

### Patterns of life

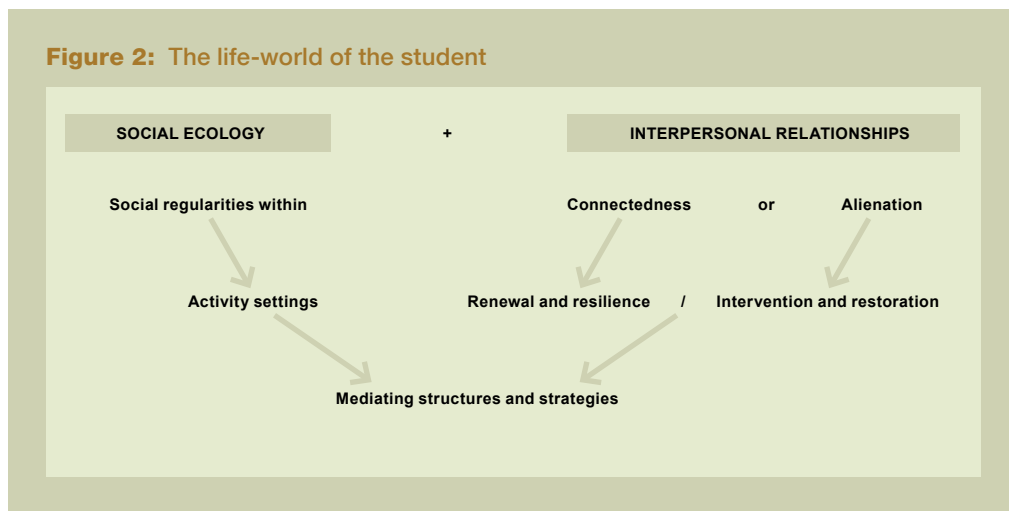
For many decades, much of the ‘art form’ of counselling has been seen in the ability of the counsellor to listen to the ‘heart of the situation’; and then finding descriptive words to help students have hope to move forward.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, counselling is discursive in mode, phenomenological in context, and analytical in the way that suggestions are made. Ultimately the counsellor is looking to describe a pattern for the person-in-relationship to their life-world, and to open up the possibility of other life-world person-in-relationship patterns.

Such a task is often restricted to focusing either on the person, tending toward a framework of individualism, or focussing on the life-world, and tending toward a framework of collectivism. Contemporary psychology also leans towards a deficit model in both modes; with deficit individualism tending towards a ‘mental ill-health’ model of conceptualisation and intervention, and deficit collectivism towards a model of ‘blaming the other’.

Figure 2 represents attempts to regain some balance within this tension. The student’s life-world is represented by a dynamic ‘social ecology’ that creates the context for inter-personal relationships. The ‘social ecology’ of that life-world is represented by the patterns of daily life (their social regularities) that are prescribed within social structures, and over which students have limited influence (their activity

“A different conceptualisation of ‘school’ can open up other ways of helping students understand their experiences and gain confidence”

**Figure 2: The life-world of the student**



settings). An example of this is the highly prescribed activity settings of the school timetable. Students have little control over times of movement, rest, work, teacher and subject, until the senior years, when students have some choice regarding the last two—subject and teacher. Students’ everyday patterns of relationship (social regularities) can thus be highly prescribed within the classroom, and to a lesser extent (but still real), in the playground.

Within their interpersonal relationships, students can demonstrate degrees of connectedness or alienation. Understanding the former assists in helping the student to grow through renewal and in strengthening their resilience.<sup>15</sup> However, understanding relationships that are alienating for students, highlights points where intervention and restoration are required.

Sergiovanni perceptively describes the interpersonal relationship patterns for students in terms of the tendency to connectedness or alienation.<sup>16</sup> Disconnected (or alienated) students tend to compensate by acting out or withdrawing. Well-connected students, on the other hand, go through more systematic growth patterns of commitment.<sup>17</sup>

The Figure 2 framework suggests that a counsellor can review the life-world of the student much more comprehensively if they consider how both the social ecology and the interpersonal patterns impact the possibility of utilising mediating structures and strategies. For example, the counsellor can review the impact of the student’s subject timetable, the enforced relationships within and without the classroom, and the patterns of friendships that help or hinder ‘soul growth’. The framework also provides a more effective means of thinking about different ways that a counsellor can relate to, and assist a student. The normal practice

of seeing the student only in the counsellor’s office, removed from a real-life context, can be complemented by connections in the playground, corridors, or classrooms. This may occur in the presence of other adults such as teachers, pastoral care staff, and senior decision makers; it may also involve other students, or partners in the school community.

Thus a much broader base of resilience enhancing and restoration strategies should be utilised, and identification of alienating structures and patterns identified. Both can be critical aides in understanding the movement to or away from receiving and giving love.

### Suicide revisited

Does the distinctive of being Christian, and of reviewing the context of school more fully, have any real impact in considering the scenario presented at the start of this article—of a teenager contemplating suicide? Let us briefly revisit some of the response options to see how these understandings may help:

#### a. Offer (and give) support

Jesus gave warm visible affirmation to many in need that He met. Paul encourages the Christians in Rome to rejoice and also mourn with others.<sup>18</sup> Thus there is biblical admonition for demonstrating the love of God, this way. Yet, what if there is constraint or a prohibition within the social and legal setting (a school policy; current child protection policy)?

Furthermore, some young persons feel alienated even by an affirming pat on the shoulder (a form of physical affirmation that is professionally inappropriate).

This brings us to the issue of discernment. We need to know what is permissible, and what is constructive.<sup>19</sup> Whatever decision is made, *broadly*

“*The normal practice of seeing the student only in the counsellor’s office can be complemented by connections in the playground, corridors, or classrooms*”

considering the setting can help; such as finding a 'safer' person to comfort the one in distress.

## b. The reflective question

The same principles apply as for (a) above. It is important to know the 'heart' of the student and the context in which one finds them to know whether this action would be provocative or helpful. In terms of 'soul care' towards love, the Figure 1 framework also reminds us to consider the direction of the questioning. Is it towards relationship control, emotional politics, or love?

## c. The other options

All of these, except option (f), can be considered in a similar way. The frameworks can help answer these critical questions:

1. What is the moral direction of 'soul care' that is being undertaken in reviewing the thinking and experiences of the individual?
2. Does the knowledge of the daily school life (the social ecology) of the student open up possibilities for engaging more than the individual counsellor in facilitating renewal or restorative support for the student?
3. Does an awareness of the levels of connectedness *and* alienation (the interpersonal relationship patterns) open up more possibilities for assisting in the growth towards love in their interpersonal relationships?

## d. Option (f)

This option is not sustainable in the Figure 1 framework, if one wants to act in the 'centre stream'. Assisting suicide is sustainable only as an ultimate controlling mechanism, or as an ultimate escape feeling mechanism. It is, literally, a death-knell to any hope of building more loving relationships.

## Conclusion - the difference sustained?

If these two frameworks are accepted as a way of conceptualising Christian school counselling, what difference will it make over time? That will depend on whether the counsellor's 'heart' is turned toward love, approval, or control; and whether the counsellor can think of action taking place outside the 'black box' of their counselling office. As a result, responses to the suicide scenario may take on a more:

- positive understanding that avoids fear or disrespect;
- perceptive reaction to the needs of the heart; and
- hopeful outlook based not merely on the counsellor's support, but also on the school community.

Finally, an exhortation from Una Collins points us in the right direction:

Let us continue to visit the experience, engage in conversation, and, especially, listen to the most vulnerable members, and we shall continue to re-define and wonder.<sup>20</sup> **TEACH<sup>R</sup>**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> G.K. Chesterton quoted in Clinton, T. & Ohlschlager, G. (2002). *Competent Christian counselling*. Colorado Springs: American Association of Christian Counsellors; see also Hare, J. (2002). *Why bother being good? The place of God in a moral life*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>2</sup> Noteworthy examples over three decades include: Vitz, P. (1977). *Psychology as religion: The cult of self-worship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carter, J. D. & Narramore, B. (1979). *The integration of psychology and theology*. Grand Rapids: Academie Books; Crabb, L. (1993). *Finding God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Johnson, E. L. & Jones, S.L. (2000). *Psychology and Christianity: Four views*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Bridger, F. & Atkinson, D. (2002). *Counselling in context: Developing a theological framework*. London: Harper Collins; Clinton, T. & Ohlschlager, G. (2002). *Competent Christian counselling*. Colorado Springs: American Association of Christian Counsellors; Dueck, A. & Lee, C. (2005). *Why psychology needs theology: A radical reformation perspective*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Puffer, K. A. (2007). Essential biblical assumptions about human nature: A modest proposal. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 26(2), 45-56; Tate, Y. B. & Parker, S. (2007). Using Erikson's developmental theory to understand and nurture spiritual development in Christians. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 26(3), 218-226.

<sup>3</sup> Clinton & Ohlschlager, p.34.

<sup>4</sup> Stark, R. (1997). *The rise of Christianity*. San Francisco: Harper Collins; also Stark, R. (2005). *The victory of reason: How Christianity led to freedom, capitalism, and western success*. New York: Random House.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones, M. (1994). *The love of God: Studies in 1 John*. Wheaton: Crossway Books.

<sup>6</sup> See O'Hear, A. (2002). *Beyond evolution: Human nature and the limits of evolutionary explanation*. London: Oxford Clarendon Press; also Machuga, R. (2002). *In defence of the soul: What it means to be human*. Grand Rapids: Brazo Press.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 John 4:2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones, p.29.

<sup>9</sup> See Colossians 1:15-17.

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd-Jones, p.15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>12</sup> See the 2007 issue of *InPsych*, 29(4).

<sup>13</sup> Caplan, G. (1964). *Principles of preventive psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>14</sup> May, R. (1967). *The art of counselling: A practical guide—with case studies and demonstrations*. Nashville: Abingdon.

<sup>15</sup> See Romans 12:1-2

<sup>16</sup> Sergiovanni, T. J. (1994). *Building community in schools*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

<sup>17</sup> Fowler, J. W. (1984). *Becoming adult, becoming Christian: Adult development and Christian faith*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

<sup>18</sup> See Romans 12:15.

<sup>19</sup> See 1 Corinthians 10:23.

<sup>20</sup> Una Collins in Collins, U. M. & McNiff, J. (1999). *Rethinking pastoral care*. London: Routledge, p.42.



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# School and the law

A column designed to review some common legal issues for private school administrators and teachers

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**Egbert Groen**

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One of the eye-catching headlines in the *Newcastle Herald*, 8th February, 2008, read: “Dreadlock Holiday”. It was designed, one would suggest, to entice the reader to continue their reading. Judging from the response to this article, in the media, over the following week, the headline fulfilled its purpose.

This news item reported that Ben, a Year 11 student, was suspended from his school—a private school, when he returned from the summer break sporting dreadlocks. The associated fracas linked to this action suggests it may well be advantageous for school administrators, once again, to review the legal issues associated with school suspensions.

According to *The law handbook*:

Private schooling is based on an agreement between the school and parents, which may indicate the circumstances in which a student can be suspended or expelled. If there is no express provision, there is an implied term that a student will not be suspended or expelled unreasonably.<sup>1</sup>

This ‘agreement’ is formalised by enrolment and signing of the enrolment form by the parent, or in case of older students, the students themselves. It is good practice, then, to include on the enrolment form statements that show the school expects the student will act in a manner that does not contravene the school’s *Student code of conduct*. Further, it is also helpful to have the *Student handbook* expand on the *Student code of conduct*, and that it is distributed to parents and students at the time of enrolment.

Because circumstances change from year to year, but enrolment is most often a once-off occasion, it would seem reasonable to issue each student with a new *Student handbook* every year.

As was the situation in the case of Ben—the subject of the newspaper article, there are many situations where the *Student code of conduct* does not directly address the situation. For Ben, the school’s hair policy did not stipulate “no dreadlocks”, but it did say that students’ hair should be neatly combed. Can one comb dreadlocks? Perhaps, to answer this question, we need first to ‘experience dreadlocks’ ourselves.

In such situations, however, what is important for private schools is that the student is granted natural justice. In terms of suspension this means, at the very least,

... that the parents and student(s) be told of the potential of suspension before it occurs; that the parents and student(s) be told of the grounds for the potential suspension; and, that the parents and student(s) have an opportunity to respond before the final decision on suspension takes place.<sup>2</sup>

This is general advice; and legal advice should be sought in relation to specific matters. It is hoped this information contributes to educators’ considerable efforts in being part of an effective and efficient administrative school team. **TEACH**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Barry, R. (Ed.). (2007). *The law handbook: Your practical guide to the law in New South Wales*. Sydney: Redfern Legal Centre Publishing, p.204.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

“Can one comb dreadlocks? Perhaps, to answer this question, we need first to ‘experience dreadlocks’ ourselves.”

Are there topics that relate to school administration and legal issues which you consider are useful and worthy of consideration for “School and the law”, in the next issue of *TEACH*? Please drop a line to the editor: [TEACHeditor@avondale.edu.au](mailto:TEACHeditor@avondale.edu.au)

## Justifiable or not? Developing and preserving a Christian school ethos

**Bruce Youlden**

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### Introduction

**Are independent or private schools justifiable or not? Do they have a role beyond providing quality educational outcomes as defined by States' Board of Studies? Why would parents choose a particular school over another, be it public or one from within the diverse range of independent schools? Is it just a simple matter of 'choice' as espoused by the previous Howard Government and now supported by the new Rudd Government, or do the reasons and justification run deeper?**

Clearly, with an increasing percentage of parents choosing independent schooling at considerable personal cost to family budgets, it would seem there are very significant reasons for the choice of schooling in Australia. The most recent census data reveal approximately two thirds of parents choose public schooling and one third (up from 29% in 1997) of parents choose Catholic or other independent schooling for their children—such as Christian Community schools, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran, Jewish, Muslim and Steiner schools.

I would like to suggest that the best thermometer of what influences parental choice of schooling is the ethos or special character of a school. School ethos evolves within a school environment in response to the school's philosophy of education and mission. The challenge for school authorities is to understand, develop and preserve it.

### School ethos

School effectiveness literature claims:

Schools have their own tone, their own vibrations and soul that set them apart. This tone or culture or ethos or climate, as it has been variously called, is a result of the way in which the individuals in the school interact, how they behave towards each other and their expectations of one another.<sup>1</sup>

As noted above, the terms *school ethos*, *culture* and *climate* have been used interchangeably and, more specifically, refer to: *norms* that inform what is acceptable behaviour; the dominant *values*

cherished by the school; basic *assumptions and beliefs* shared by the school community; '*rules of the game*' for participation and membership; and the *philosophy* that guides the school in dealing with its educational tasks, its employees (teachers, staff) and clients (students, and parents).<sup>2</sup>

Christian schools and public schools, as educational institutions have a shared ethos in many pedagogical and administrative areas. Among others, these may include:

- co-operation, purposefulness, order and pleasure in learning.
- joint planning by teachers for in-service programs.
- efficient co-ordinated planning and scheduling of learning activities.<sup>3</sup>
- staff consensus on "values for Australian schooling".<sup>4</sup>

However, in discussing the notion of 'ethos' in relation to Christian schools, I do not plan to focus on the cultural commonalities with public schools or independent schools in general. Instead, I will focus on *significant differences* that often undergird parental choice in favour of Christian schooling.

Subsequent sections of the article indicate the *scope of distinctiveness* and the inter-relatedness of key ethos elements and their practical outworking, with particular reference to the Adventist Christian school.

### Raison d'etre

The respective governing bodies of the group of schools mentioned previously would argue that the purpose or mission of their schools is to create an educational environment and develop a school ethos that reflects the beliefs and values of the particular constituencies they serve. In many instances, this would simply amount to articulating the key elements of the educational experience that gives their school a competitive edge, such as its academic standing, performing arts program, or its sporting prowess. In order to position themselves successfully in an increasingly competitive market, many schools seek to identify and highlight the niche market they have recognised and developed as their own. This then

“The best thermometer of what influences parental choice of schooling is the ethos or special character of a school”

serves to provide the basis for the culture and ethos that is developed within the school.

I would like to underscore, however, that it is the school's educational philosophy that provides the foundation and therefore gives shape to educational practice, culture and the overall ethos of the school. Conversely, the degree to which the *school ethos* reflects the mission and philosophy of the school will determine the extent to which the school fulfils its mission and can justify its existence. A school's strength should be measured by the degree to which there is harmony and resonance between its underlying philosophy of education and its operational practice.

To that end, the challenge for a Christian school is to articulate its educational philosophy and mission and to preserve its distinctive character and ethos amid the growing compliance demands of State authorities and the changing nature of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This matter is viewed very seriously by most school authorities. For example, this is particularly true of the Catholic education sector. The Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, announced in May 2007 that school leaders and religious education coordinators in schools in the Catholic Archdioceses of Sydney will have to swear an "oath of fidelity" as an expression of their dedication to Catholic teaching within their schools. Cardinal Pell expressed concerns that the preservation of the Catholic faith and its distinctive character were being diminished and that it needed to be addressed as a matter of priority.

Likewise, it is a matter of equal concern among Adventist school authorities and educators. In the context of this journal, the question needs to be put to Seventh-day Adventist schools in Australia: *Is the distinctive nature of Adventist education being compromised to the extent that the investment in these schools can no longer be seriously justified?*

In order to address the question, it is important, firstly, to understand Adventist Christian educational philosophy that gives shape to its educational practice, culture and ethos; and then, secondly, to identify the key elements and strategies considered important in preserving it.

## Philosophy of Christian education

Adventist Christian educational philosophy has three major pillars, all of which are God-centric and serve as the key elements of its educational endeavour: The *Creator God* is the ultimate source of *reality*; the ultimate source of what is *true*; and the ultimate source of what is of *real value*. It is *His being* that brings meaning to the reality and magnitude of the universe and the world in which

we live, to its origins and destiny. Further, it is *His revelation* through Jesus Christ, the natural world, and the Bible that provides a framework for knowledge and understanding of what is ultimately true; and it is *His character* which serves as a basis for the values to be transmitted. While these philosophical underpinnings and assumptions serve as a foundation for Christian education in Adventist schools, it is the spiritual imperative that provides its distinctive character.

More specifically, the mission and purpose of an Adventist school is to provide a Christian learning environment which promotes the holistic development of young people; optimises the learning potential of all students; while building a community of faith and hope which seeks to know, experience and share Jesus Christ and His values.

Therefore, Adventist Christian faith, values and spiritual life are critical to the operation of Adventist schools. They should serve as the basis for its distinctive character and the ethos of the school which evolves as a result. However, it can only be fostered and preserved by an intentional and ongoing commitment to integrate it through the entire operation of the school. It will not occur automatically. Rather, success is dependent upon thoughtful effort and careful planning.

What then are the key elements and aspects of an Adventist school that are critical to fulfilling its mission and preserving its distinctive character?

## Preservation of special character and ethos

**Personnel appointments**  
The appointments of the principal, leadership team and teaching staff are critical in the first instance to developing and preserving the special character of an Adventist school. Their roles are ministerial and pastoral in the sense that they are 'called' to provide spiritual leadership to the entire school community. More specifically, they are 'called' first to demonstrate the reality and relevance of Christ in their own lives and then to inspire students and the parent community with a similar need for themselves. Of necessity they should be active members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church community who understand and accept Adventist faith and culture. Employment processes are therefore critical to this outcome.

## Curriculum and instruction

The underlying Adventist Christian philosophy and practice of education, where faith is fully integrated throughout the learning process, is important to preserving a school's distinctive character. Integration should not be a forced process but that which occurs naturally in the flow of teaching.

“  
The ministerial and pastoral roles of the principal, leadership team and teaching staff are critical in the special character of the school.”

Again, this will be largely a function of the spiritual freshness and vigour of the life of the teacher.

“*Faith is fully integrated in the learning process, largely as a function of the freshness and vigour of the teacher’s spiritual life*”

### Bible classes and teacher

Bible classes and the Bible teacher are critical to spiritual nurture and to preserving an Adventist faith environment. Bible instruction needs to be both creative and developmentally appropriate without compromising the distinctiveness of Adventism. However, the lasting impact of the class is more likely to be a function of the spiritual life and priorities of the Bible teacher. Experience also suggests that where there is a mix of faiths, there is greater respect, tolerance and a healthier level of discussion in the Bible classes. Adventist students defend their faith rather than taking it for granted, treating it with skepticism, or even with derision.

### ‘Week of spiritual emphasis’ programs

The distinctive character of an Adventist school is greatly enhanced through ‘week of spiritual emphasis’ programs. If guest speakers are particularly in tune with young people and there is widespread student involvement, the programs will contribute significantly to the spiritual climate of a school campus. Schools should not hesitate to invest in the best youth speakers available. The dividends repay outlays many times over.

### School worship

School and class worship also can be a powerful medium for developing the spiritual climate and ethos of an Adventist school. School spirituality is greatly enhanced when the relationship with Christ is central, the worship period is perceived to be relevant and stimulating, student and school concerns are frequently considered in prayer and when students are actively involved.

### School chaplains

Clearly, the appointment of full-time chaplains is a key element in fostering the distinctive character of Adventist faith and culture. It is also an important way of exploring many of the opportunities of ministry found within the school family. The duties entail the spiritual and social nurture of the student body including home visitation. Many families without a support network respond very positively to such care.

### Peer influence

Adventist young people are capable of being a very powerful medium of ministry and spiritual nurture among their peers. These young people might be shown and encouraged to take greater responsibility in befriending and reaching out to their friends who

are not active members of a faith community.

### Youth volunteer program

This program can play a very significant role in fostering the spiritual life of the school. These volunteer youth workers are able to develop a special rapport with students, in a unique way. Participation in Bible study groups and baptismal classes often becomes an ‘in thing’.

### A ‘surrogate church’

Adventist faith and culture will be enhanced when a school views itself as a ‘surrogate church’ in which the social and spiritual dimensions of campus life are integrated. By sponsoring and organising a fortnightly Saturday night social program, by incorporating the regional youth calendar, summer youth camps, Pathfinder clubs, Sabbath school and Friday night programs as an extension of the school program, Adventist faith and culture will likewise be preserved.

### Enrolment process

An Adventist school environment is greatly influenced by the type of students enrolled. It is essential that all applicants share the Christian philosophy, goals and values of the school. The admissions process needs to be thorough. To admit largely on economic grounds without due regard to the above will invariably be counterproductive.

### Student management

Expectations should be clearly defined and consistently applied. They are essential to preserving the special character and ethos of an Adventist school. In addition, they lay the groundwork in creating a suitable climate in which the distinctive Adventist values and ethos can be maintained and fostered. Specifically, in instances where disciplinary action is required, the school is provided with a unique opportunity to model the values of justice, mercy and forgiveness.

### School council membership

The preservation of Adventist ethos is also a function of school council leadership and its appointees. It is essential that members (‘church shareholders’) take their responsibilities seriously and that Adventist Church membership continues to be a necessary prerequisite for council membership. The voice of all parents and especially the non-Adventist ‘client’ may be heard through the medium of the parent and teacher association or through a parent advisory board. Such mechanisms provide the needed forum for parent voice, while protecting the interests of the church as proprietor.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the special character of the Adventist school system will be preserved and its mission better served, as schools focus on developing specific strategies that will ensure greater consistency between educational philosophy and practice, particularly in settings where the spiritual climate of schools is fostered. By so doing, Adventist schools will continue to differentiate themselves in the marketplace, justifying their existence and their contribution to the broader goals of Christian education in Australia. **TEACH**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Reid, K. et. al. (1990). *Towards the effective school*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> A paraphrase of Owens, R. (1994). *Organizational behavior in education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, p.28.

<sup>3</sup> See Reid, K. et. al., *ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> See Nine values for Australian schooling. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from <http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce.default.asp?id=9500>

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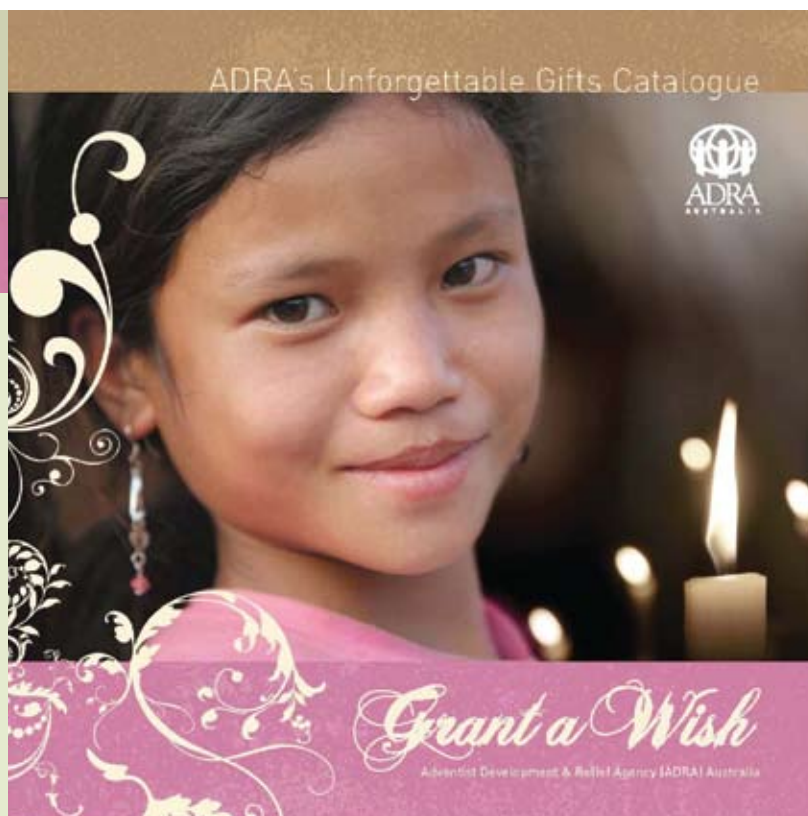
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# Protectors or shapers?

**Arnold Reye**

Author and retired educator—former teacher, lecturer, principal and system administrator

## Abstract

In the first issue of *TEACH*, Arthur N. Patrick issued a challenge to educators:

grasp the opportunity to discuss the dynamic impact that Christian education has exerted and can continue to exert upon Australian society.<sup>1</sup>

This article is one response to that challenge.

## Models of the Church

Dr Patrick has provided an excellent overview of the H. Richard Niebuhr cluster of models of Christianity's reaction to, and interaction with, its surrounding culture. Niebuhr's typology is, however, only one of a number of models of the church. Other useful models have been put forward by scholars such as Howard Snyder, Sallie McFague, Ian Barbour and Avery Dulles.<sup>2</sup> It must be kept in mind, however, that a model simulates reality, but is not reality itself. It must be taken seriously, but not literally. Models facilitate exploration of the world and help explain what we find.<sup>3</sup>

The Niebuhr typology, as described by Arthur Patrick, identifies five models. Howard Snyder, however, opts for eight models where each model focuses on sets of perceptions about the kingdom of God. He therefore postulates that the kingdom may be perceived as: future hope, inner spiritual experience, mystical communion, institutional church, counter system, political state, Christianised culture, and earthly utopia.<sup>4</sup> How the Church perceives God's kingdom will determine its structure, socio-cultural norms, and its objectives. It will also determine how the Church relates to and interacts with secular culture. For exploratory purposes the components of models tend to be discrete. In reality, however, the phenomena they describe tend to overlap. What these models have in common is that on a continuum, or multidimensional continua, they move from an exclusive stance toward an inclusive orientation.

Although he has not stated so explicitly, I sense Arthur Patrick, implicitly, would like to shepherd us away from any model of the Church that is *anti-culture* in stance and *fortress* in mentality, toward

an understanding that is transformational and conversionist. He would have us *preaching* and *living* the Gospel and seeking to influence and change culture by being involved with and in culture. This transformational model most closely identifies with the "Christianised culture" model of Snyder. He writes:

Here the kingdom is seen not merely as present, or as the inward experience of believers, but as an active, dynamic principle of social reconstruction empowered by God's Spirit. In this model the kingdom is present, not just future; social, not just individual; and material, not just spiritual.<sup>5</sup>

While many Christians, and Adventists in particular, might feel uncomfortable with this, I endorse this viewpoint. My comments will therefore address two issues: *how* might we as Christian educators reach out to the world about us, and *what* might we offer Australian society? I submit two qualifications. First, my experience has been largely with the K-12 sector of schooling and my comments will reflect that perspective. Second, it must always be remembered that the Christian school is a part of the Christian Church. The former does not have a mandate to march to a different drum beat. Church and school must walk hand-in-hand.

## How might we reach society?

Those who espouse 'fortress thinking' build walls for the express purpose of keeping other people out. While the fortress offers personal security and some wellbeing, it ignores the greater good of the greater number. More importantly, it diminishes and institutionalises fulfilment of the Great Gospel Commission. It also results in a 'product' unprepared for encountering the world. Unfortunately for fortress dwellers the occasional sorties outside tend to have little impact upon secular society. To reach those about us calls for the removal of the fortress walls and a radical change in one's thinking. Accomplishing this also takes considerable moral and spiritual courage.

A removal of walls should lead to openness; the world can see in and the Church can see out. This means that the basis of faith and one's

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belief tradition becomes open to questioning and challenge. Indeed, to paraphrase the apostles Peter and Paul, we must not be ashamed of the gospel but be ready to give informed and reasoned discourse about whom and what we believe.<sup>6</sup> This requires that the Christian home and the Christian student feel confident of their belief structures. Fear and insecurity exist within closed walls; self-confidence and assurance require open space. Sara Little reminds us that belief is multi-layered: "...it has affective (feeling), volitional (willing), and behavioural (acting) components, as well as cognitive (thinking)"<sup>7</sup>, i.e. we are what we believe. What a challenge!

Australian society is rather proud of its secular traditions. Indeed it is considered bad form to discuss religion or religious issues in polite society. It is refreshing, therefore, to note an increasing willingness on the part of the nation's leaders to declare their Christian commitment and orientation. I would argue that Christians, without taking a narrow sectarian stance, should seek elected public offices—be it at the local, state, or national levels—as worthy vocations. Furthermore, students in Christian schools should be challenged to aspire to active involvement in the decision-making processes of an Australian social democracy.

Few Christians would doubt that faith is nurtured within the context of social interaction. Too often, however, Christians have limited faith development to social settings within a particular church. Jesus, on the other hand, took his disciples into situations where they associated and rubbed shoulders with prostitutes, publicans and Pharisees; Samaritans and sinners and social outcasts. He mixed freely with tax collectors, Gentiles and poor widows. While Jesus obviously had no truck with religious, social, economic, or gender divides, he did not directly attack the structures which permitted these prejudices to flourish. Rather, he appeared to treat social structures as irrelevant and, instead, addressed the personal attitudes of his friends and associates.<sup>8</sup>

Let me provide a recent illustration. A Christian friend of mine, working in a large state education system, was appointed a district director of schools. He inherited a culture in which some regional and district conferences of school principals were occasions for the copious consumption of alcoholic beverages. My friend made no comment on this, but simply asked that the caterers also provide a jug of orange juice from which he filled and replenished his glass.

Within a short period, others in the group were opting for orange juice and the one jug was insufficient. Over time, at his district conferences, alcohol disappeared entirely and this happened

without adverse comment about drinking or censorial demeanour toward the principals. Such is the influence of the Christian who is unassumingly self-confident. Compromise or sermonising, in contrast, is the strategy used by Christians who are unsure of themselves and their beliefs.

This is not to suggest that there is nothing for the Christian to say. There is a level at which the Christian can and should offer input. We have just had a change in national government. The leader of the incoming party has declared education to be one of his prime concerns. He has promised that there will be significant change in the purposes, delivery and outcomes of Australian schooling. This provides a climate in which Christian educators may influence the direction of Australian education. The window of opportunity is small and therefore there is no time for procrastination. Furthermore, other groups with vested interests in education will ensure their voices are heard; why not concerned and responsible Christians? This leads us to the second issue: What do Christians have to offer to Australian society?

## What can Christians offer Australian society?

### A proposal

Fortunately, in this regard Australian Christians do not start from 'scratch'. Australia has a Christian heritage that is its most valuable asset. To use an analogy, the bonfire has been neglected and burnt down to a mound of smouldering coals and ashes. Rather than build a new bonfire, it is easiest to gather the embers together and pile upon those embers fresh sticks, branches and logs. Within a short while the bonfire blazes bright! Let us not, therefore, forget the embers of the past.

Australian schooling is enhanced by the contributions of countless skilled, committed and highly competent teachers. They do not need to be told how to implement the curriculum and how to reach their students. They do that now and most accomplish it well. What they need is that something extra that adds fullness and challenge to their work and, at the end of the day, makes them feel that their labours are worthwhile; something that makes them feel proud of the product of their classrooms and their schools. I believe this is what Christianity offers.

I propose four areas in which we might focus our efforts to enhance Australian society:

### A coherent world view

Every person has a world view; a framework through which their life is ordered. This framework provides a filter for what is happening in the world; it enables decisions to be made, and facilitates the individual's functioning within society. World views are developed over time as a result of life's experiences,

*This provides a climate in which Christian educators may influence the direction of Australian education*

the shaping environment, and through the influence of significant others in their lives. No two persons have exactly the same world view. In this sense a world view is individualistic. Nevertheless, when many or most of the elements of a world view are shared by two or more persons it is possible to idealise that perspective. Thus we can talk of a Christian world view with which the majority of a faith community can identify.

Put simply, a world view includes clusters of concepts which coalesce around three philosophical elements: *metaphysics*, *axiology*, and *epistemology*—our sense of reality, our authentic sources of knowledge and truth, and our understanding of what is ethical and aesthetic. Within the various Christian faith traditions there is ample scope for variance in the understanding and interpretation of these three elements. Indeed, we may find strength and vitality in this variance. More important, however, is the degree of coherence between these elements—making sense of the world view by tracing the relationships among the components and noting that they bring unity to the system. Thus a Christian who “honours his father and mother” and esteems family values cannot go out and violate either the fathers or mothers of others, or their sons and daughters. He is prevented by the coherence of his world view. In an increasingly multicultural society it is important that Christians talk and demonstrate the merit, importance and primacy in human behaviour of a coherent world view.

“Imagine the impact on Australian society if all school leavers took on a community project for a week”

### Ethical education

Several decades ago, the fad in Australian education was *values-free* teaching. This of course was self-refuting educational nonsense, for to opt for a *values-free* approach was itself a value. In the real world we cannot escape values and their transmission. The question therefore becomes: Whose / what values and who is responsible for their transmission? The assessment of American historian, Robert D. Linder, that Australia is largely driven by a hedonistic world view<sup>9</sup> is revealing, while Margaret Reeson’s comment on the qualities of the Australian character depicted in the fifteen stained glass windows at the Australian War Memorial indicates there is “...little to suggest that Christian faith has had any influence”<sup>10</sup>.

This identifies a fruitful field in which Australian Christians might indeed influence their society. Our Judeo-Christian history provides enduring evidence of the timelessness of sound values embedded in that history. That Christians have at times acted badly over the centuries is not because of faulty values, but rather a failure to live by them.

Teachers, besides parents, have a major ethical impact on young lives. A task facing Christian educators is to identify values derived from the Christian faith that do not focus on narrow sectarian interests, but have universal application—values that help create the ‘good society’. These should then be woven (as in the case of literacy and numeracy) into the entire curriculum and the culture of the school. Literature and the social sciences particularly lend themselves to the identification of values and discussion about their impact on human behaviour. Astute and perceptive teachers of mathematics, the sciences, personal development and all other subjects in the curriculum will also find scope for exploration and application. To identify and extract values from subject content does not diminish the importance of content. Rather, it enhances content and makes it more relevant to the human experience.

There is a corollary to an emphasis on ethical thinking. Thought unacted upon has no power to change behaviour. It cannot be assumed that ‘knowing what is good’ results in ‘doing what is good’. Young people must therefore be given opportunity to translate theory into practice.

Not so long ago I sat in my local church and listened to a group of school leavers report, with pleasure and enthusiasm, their experiences in service to a western Queensland community.<sup>11</sup> Their week was spent cleaning public space, painting buildings, creating gardens, installing water reticulation, organising games and social activities for the community’s children, and being a cohesive and bridging influence in a town with an acknowledged social divide. These youth bubbled with enthusiasm, for they had tasted the satisfaction of bringing joy and happiness to others. Their sense of personal worth was enhanced by their selfless contribution to the wider community.

This report would have won approval at any time. Its significance, however, was enhanced by the fact the project took place during the notorious Schoolies Week; a time when many of their fellow school leavers gained media attention for their hedonistic revelry and anti-social behaviours. Imagine the impact it would have upon Australian society were all school leavers to take on community projects for one week!

### Character formation

Leo Tolstoy made the pertinent observation:

Man’s whole life is a continual contradiction of what he knows to be his duty. In every department of life, he acts in defiant opposition to the dictates of his conscience and his common sense.<sup>12</sup>



Tolstoy had little confidence in human character. There is, however, no need to share his pessimism.

The term *character*, once popular amongst educators, has almost disappeared from the Australian vocabulary. Or, when used, it is a synonym for personality, disposition or temperament. Thus we might talk about a ‘funny’ character, or an ‘unusual’ character, or a ‘devious’ character. This usage suggests our understanding of the term has shifted from its original ethical intent. Hence there is a need to return to an understanding of *character* in its proper sense.

Les Steele defines character as,

...not only espoused virtues or mere behaviours, but the sense of self derived from our vision of Christian maturity, and it is exhibited in both attitude and behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

For ‘Christian maturity’ we may substitute the phrase ‘responsible citizenship’ without doing violence to the definition. The wellbeing of Australia is largely dependent upon the quality of its responsible citizens and therefore the development of character is of national interest. There are several things we might say about character.

First, it is not part of ‘stage theory’ as propounded by Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, James Fowler and others. The formation of character is far too complex to follow scientific predictability. Rather character development is marked by what one educator has termed “detours and deserts, wanderings and awakenings”<sup>14</sup>. It is a life-long project that is never completed but always completing.

Second, character formation is never completed in isolation. It is achieved within the context of community. In that sense it is part of ever widening concentric social circles, spreading outwards from parents through the school and other groups to the wider society.

Third, just as we draw on our community in character formation, so the characters we are forming reveal our intentions toward our community. There is a dynamic interaction or reciprocity. Our faith community is particularly important in this reciprocity. From the faith community we derive values, encounter supportive structures, and witness the example set by leaders and other significant persons. A responsible faith community also provides opportunity for children and youth to apply and practise their emerging values, make mistakes, and bring correction to their lives.

Fourth, character has to do with our whole being. It encompasses our conscious and unconscious selves—how we shape our inner self, i.e. our values, attitudes and inclinations; succinctly expressed by

Susanne Johnson:

Character refers to the most basic determination of who we are as persons. It is the language of self-identity.... Character is the content of who ‘I’ am and who ‘you’ are as unique individuals.<sup>15</sup>

Simply put, Christian teachers have a *vocation* that is much more challenging and satisfying than being ‘baby sitters’ to keep children occupied, ‘policemen’ to prevent riots, ‘caretakers’ to provide a clean and safe environment, and ‘mental hygienists’ to pacify troubled and damaged souls.

### The whole person

I have already mentioned that character formation has to do with the whole being. This brings me therefore to the fourth perspective, I believe, we may offer Australian society.

There is a need to return to the view of the learner as a whole being. Too often, students are currently encouraged or permitted to specialise early in secondary schooling. As early as 1960, the eminent educator and former headmaster of Geelong Grammar School (1930-61), Dr James Ralph Darling, warned:

... our ignorance of vast ranges of knowledge is horrifying.... There are men, there are even professional men, there are even surgeons, who glory in their ignorance of vast tracts of human knowledge, who despise Religion and History and Literature and Art and Music and Politics. On the other hand, there are classical scholars and linguists, and even historians, who pride themselves on their ignorance of the laws of the physical world. There are economists who despise History, physicists who despise Biology, physicians who despise Psychology, and practical chaps of all sorts who despise Poetry.<sup>16</sup>

Regrettably, the divide between the branches of knowledge commented on by Dr Darling is even more pronounced today. For Darling “nations live by the quality of their culture, and the culture depends upon the quality of the men and women whom it produces.” Darling therefore urged the education of the “*civilized man*” and suggested:

...the first essential quality of the civilized man: however much he may find himself compelled to specialize; he must never despise the specialties of others. It follows, then, that at least his early education must be as far as possible comprehensive.<sup>17</sup>

If an examination of available evidence supports this claim, then we should urge governments to ensure the scope and structure of the curriculum, particularly the secondary curriculum, and make

“**Character formation has to do with the whole being—there is a need to return to the view of the learner as a whole being—too often students are encouraged to specialise early in secondary schooling**”

certain all students are exposed to the breadth of human endeavour and knowledge.

A final point—Dr Darling asserted:

...a living conscience is a growing conscience, enlarging itself and becoming more sensitive as it awakes more and more to a fuller understanding and fills up in itself the great gaps in which heretofore it has failed to function at all.<sup>18</sup>

Here is wisdom, for it reminds us that the whole of civilised humankind is linked with ethical thinking.

### Implication and conclusion

I have argued the following. First, Christian educators should accept the challenge of a view of Christianity that sees Christian institutions and individual Christians actively involved in working toward the very best for Australian society. This may and should involve Christians aspiring to representative office and active involvement in the public sector. Second, the new Australian Federal Government has signalled its intention to restructure and re-energise the educational sector. This offers a narrow window in which Christians might influence the future direction and shape of education. My challenge, therefore, to the Faculty of Education, Avondale College, and other interested Christian educators, is to write a submission to the Commonwealth Minister for Education in a direct attempt to influence the future of Australian education. Third, several areas in which we might influence Australian education toward the creation of a better citizen include: the formation of coherent world views, the identification of ethical values derived from our Judeo-Christian heritage, the formation of ethical character, and a focus on the structure of education and the curriculum in meeting the needs of the whole person. This obligates each Christian, and Christian educators in particular, to formulate a personal and coherent world view, to identify key ethical values in faith and practice, to work constantly toward

character formation—personal sanctification—and to view and treat others holistically. **TEACH<sup>®</sup>**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Patrick, A. N. (2007) Christianity and a 'good society' in Australia: A first response to Stuart Piggin's Murdoch Lecture. *Teach Journal of Christian Education*, 1 (1), 45-49.

<sup>2</sup> Snyder, H. A. (1991) *Models of the kingdom*. Nashville: Abingdon Press; McFague, Sallie. (1982) *Metaphorical theology: Models of God in religious language*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Barbour, I. (1974). *Myths, models and paradigms*. San Francisco: Harper; Dulles, A. (1976). *Models of the Church*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

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<sup>4</sup> Snyder, H. A. (1991). *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.101.

<sup>6</sup> See 1 Peter 3:15, Romans 1:16

<sup>7</sup> Little, S. (1983). *To set one's heart: Belief and teaching in the Church*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> France, R. T. (1989). *Jesus the radical*. Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, p.101.

<sup>9</sup> Linder, Robert, D. Christianity and the Australian character, in Stuart Piggin, (Ed.). (2006). *Shaping the good society in Australia*. Macquarie Centre, NSW: Australia's Christian Heritage National Forum, pp.49-64.

<sup>10</sup> Reeson, Margaret. Response to Robert Linder: 'The Australian character', in Stuart Piggin, (Ed.). (2006). *Shaping the good society in Australia*, pp.65-70.

<sup>11</sup> See the articles on STORM CO by Jerry Unser and Bruce Manners in *Teach Journal of Christian Education*, 1 (1), 50-56.

<sup>12</sup> Tolstoy, Leo as cited in Dallas W. (1988). *The spirit of the disciplines*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, p.263.

<sup>13</sup> Steele, L. L. (1990). *On the way: A practical theology of Christian formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, pp.46-7.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, S. (1989). *Christian spiritual formation in the church and classroom*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, p.111.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.112.

<sup>16</sup> Persse, M. (Ed). (1962). *The education of the civilized man: A selection of speeches and sermons [by] James Ralph Darling*. Melbourne: Cheshire, pp.28-29.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

“  
***This obligates each Christian educator to formulate a personal and coherent world view, to identify key ethical values in faith and practice, to work constantly toward character formation—personal sanctification—and to view and treat others holistically.***”

# Problems arising from streaming mathematics students in Australian Christian secondary schools: To stream or not to stream?

**Peter Kilgour**

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A mathematics teacher for many years, Peter has taught in four different countries.

## Abstract

**This article focuses on selected sections of a wider research study that investigated the perceptions of students in upper, lower, and mixed-ability stream mathematics classes, regarding their classroom learning environment. The study collected data from a representative sample of Year 9 and Year 10 students, employing recognised, reliable survey instruments. The most significant finding of the study, resulting from the analysis of quantitative data, was that lower stream students not only had more negative perceptions of their classroom learning environment, but wanted less change. This negative perception is seen to be worse in Year 10 than in Year 9, particularly in terms of teacher support, task orientation and equity.**

## Introduction

Streaming students into performance levels based upon academic ability is a common practice in Australia. This practice is known as 'tracking' in North America and 'setting' in the UK and generally involves "assigning students to classes based on some measure of ability" (Harlen & Malcolm, 1999).

Numerous studies have indicated that more able students achieve at a marginally higher level when placed in an 'upper stream'. However, little research has been done investigating the nature of classroom learning environments in streamed classes *vis a vis* mixed ability classes and how this might influence student learning outcomes, particularly in 'lower streams'.

Australian Christian secondary schools and colleges tend to be relatively small and usually have a maximum of three streams. Frequently there are only two streams; consequently students are placed

into an upper stream or a lower stream. Streaming is further reinforced by policies. For example, the NSW Board of Studies has developed a mathematics curriculum that requires middle secondary students to choose a particular level.

## Review of relevant literature

Three main reasons have been given to support schools' practice of streaming:

1. It is easier and more efficient for the teacher.
2. Students are helped to reach their learning potential and feel better about themselves.
3. Streaming limits the amount of failure slower students may experience and feel (DiMartino, 2005, p.10).

Each of these points is disputed by DiMartino. He believes the benefits of streaming are questionable when overall research evidence is considered. He points to studies that have shown that it is not possible to place students equitably or accurately into groups based on ability.

Furthermore, DiMartino maintains that the research shows a lower self-esteem for students in lower streams. He sees no positive aspects in streaming and concludes that it polarises, creates elitism, sets low expectations for lower stream students as well as teachers, wastes time, and encourages 'segregation'.

Earlier research (Hoffer, 1992) supports the above viewpoint, showing that any academic gains from ability grouping are too small to be significant. Indeed, while placing students from a mixed ability class into an upper stream produces only a *weak positive* net result, placing a student from a mixed ability class into a lower stream class produces a *strong negative* result. This represents just one of many studies that suggest streaming minimally benefits the upper group, but disadvantages the

“It is not possible to place students equitably or accurately into groups based on ability”

lower group in a pronounced way. A study by Venkatakrishnan and Wiliam (2003) reports similar findings. It found that streaming has different effects on different students. In general, upper stream students did not receive a substantial advantage by being streamed, mixed ability students kept performing at their previous level and lower performing students were disadvantaged.

## Method

Data were collected to answer the main research question: What, if any, are the differences in student perceptions of classroom learning environments in upper and lower stream secondary mathematics classes?

Data came from a representative sample of Year 9 and Year 10 students (n = 581) in 36 different classes, taught by 28 different teachers, in seven Christian schools, covering four Australian states.

The students were from upper and lower streams of mathematics classes as well as from mixed-ability stream classes.

Students were surveyed using the *What is happening in the classroom* (WIHIC) instrument and a set of ten questions from the *Test of science related attitudes* (TOSRA), modified for mathematics classrooms. Participants responded to 56 items categorized into seven scales on the WIHIC. They were asked to respond to each item twice—once for their perception of their *current (actual)* mathematics classroom learning environment (MCLE), and again for their *preferred* learning environment. A sample of the questionnaire items can be seen in Table 1.

In the survey, student perceptions of classroom environment were measured on seven scales: *student cohesiveness*, *teacher support*, *involvement*, *task orientation*, *investigation*, *cooperation* and *equity*. One of the objectives of the study was to establish which of the scales most clearly differentiated lower stream students' perceptions of their learning environments from upper stream students' perceptions.

SPSS, version 11.5, was used for the data analysis.

## Findings and discussion

Table 2 shows the difference in the mean scores given to each scale by students. It is clearly evident that while the upper stream students had a more positive perception of their learning environment for every scale, the scales of *teacher support* and *task orientation* are the two scales that most clearly differentiate lower stream and upper stream students' perceptions of their learning environments. The lower mean scores (ratings on the WIHIC scales) indicate more positive perceptions.

Having established that upper stream students rate their classroom environment more positively than lower stream students, the differences between their *current* classroom rating and their *preferred* classroom rating was analysed by stream. This difference between *actual* and *preferred* MCLE scores on the WIHIC could be called 'student aspirations', because it measures the difference between what students perceive they currently have in class and what their ideal classroom would be.

Further, having shown there was a significant difference between the *actual* MCLE scores and the *preferred* MCLE scores across the whole sample, the same differences were measured after the groups were split for stream. Table 3 separates the data between upper stream and lower stream classes. It can be seen from the data that on every scale the upper stream is seeking greater changes than the lower stream.

On the scales of *equity*, *cooperation* and *teacher support*, the differences between the *actual* and *preferred* environments for the upper and lower stream were very small. For *investigation*, *task orientation*, *student cohesiveness* and *involvement*, the upper stream show a much greater difference between their *actual* and *preferred* MCLE than do the lower stream.

Given that the lower stream students perceived their MCLE to be of 'poorer' quality, it was perhaps unexpected they had fewer aspirations for change in their classroom environment than the upper stream. This may be indicative of an attitude of acceptance. Lower stream students felt this was where they belonged; this was what their stream was like; and what was the use of trying to 'climb' out of this?

There is an obvious need for educators to assess whether this is the best option for up to half of their students in a year level.

Upper stream students, on the other hand, rated their learning environment more highly than the lower stream. They appeared to be seeking greater change—excellence, than lower stream students. This could be interpreted as 'caring' more about their learning.

Further analysis of data—a comparison of scale means for upper and lower stream Year 9 and Year 10 students on the seven WIHIC scales (See Table 4), revealed an interesting phenomenon. It showed Year 9 students' perceptions of their learning environment become more favourable for upper stream students as they progress into Year 10, while becoming more negative for their lower stream counterparts. The research thus clearly indicates that the gap between students' perceptions of classroom environment in upper and lower streams widens significantly, as Year 9 students progress

“Streaming has different effects on different students”

**Table 1: A sample of WIHIC questionnaire items**

	Actual					Preferred				
	Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Almost Never	Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Almost Never
<b>Student Cohesiveness</b>										
1. I make friendships among students in this class	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Teacher Support</b>										
2. The teacher takes a personal interest in me	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Involvement</b>										
3. I discuss ideas in class	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

**Table 2: A comparison of upper and lower stream students' perceptions of their mathematics classroom learning environments**

	Stream	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Student Cohesiveness</b>	Upper Stream	1.96	0.63
	Lower Stream	2.07	0.67
	Difference	0.11	0.04
<b>Teacher Support</b>	Upper Stream	2.40	0.96
	Lower Stream	2.67	0.99
	Difference	0.27	0.03
<b>Involvement</b>	Upper Stream	2.69	0.85
	Lower Stream	2.87	0.85
	Difference	0.18	0.00
<b>Task Orientation</b>	Upper Stream	2.00	0.70
	Lower Stream	2.27	0.76
	Difference	0.27	0.06
<b>Investigation</b>	Upper Stream	2.93	0.91
	Lower Stream	3.14	0.92
	Difference	0.21	0.01
<b>Cooperation</b>	Upper Stream	2.10	0.83
	Lower Stream	2.28	0.87
	Difference	0.18	0.04
<b>Equity</b>	Upper Stream	2.00	0.98
	Lower Stream	2.21	1.03
	Difference	0.21	0.05

Lower values on the WIHIC scales correspond to more positive perceptions

upper stream n = 265; lower stream n = 215

into Year 10.

This transition trend from Year 9 to Year 10, in classroom environment perception, is clearly illustrated in Figure 1 (upper stream) and Figure 2, (lower stream) on several WIHIC scales, especially *teacher support*, *task orientation* and *equity*.

Figure 1 shows that students in the upper stream

in Year 10 are more positive about their learning on most scales of the WIHIC than their counterparts in Year 9. There has been an improvement in the perceptions they have of their learning environment between Year 9 and Year 10. (Keep in mind *lower scores* represent *more positive outcomes* on the version of the WIHIC used for this study.)

**Table 3:** A comparison of upper and lower stream students' differences of perceptions, between *actual* and *preferred* mathematics classroom learning environments

WIHIC Scales	Differences between <i>actual</i> and <i>preferred</i> scale mean scores for each stream (aspirations of each group)		Comparisons of differences between aspirations of each group
	Upper	Lower	
Student Cohesiveness	0.45	0.36	0.09**
Teacher Support	0.52	0.51	0.01**
Involvement	0.49	0.40	0.09*
Task Orientation	0.56	0.47	0.09**
Investigation	0.78	0.63	0.15*
Cooperation	0.39	0.38	0.01**
Equity	0.47	0.46	0.01

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01

upper stream n = 265; lower stream n = 215

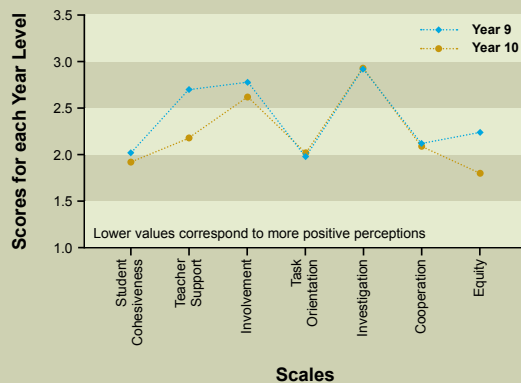
**Table 4:** A comparison of differences between the *actual* and *preferred* forms of the WIHIC for each of the streams

WIHIC Scales	SCALE MEANS					
	Upper Stream			Lower Stream		
	Year 9	Year 10	Difference	Year 9	Year 10	Difference
Student Cohesiveness	0.45	0.45	0.45	0.45	0.45	0.45
Teacher Support	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52
Involvement	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49
Task Orientation	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.56
Investigation	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78
Cooperation	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.39
Equity	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.47

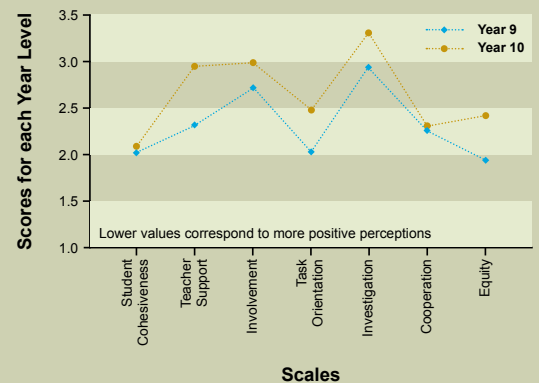
Lower values correspond to more positive perceptions

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; Year 9 upper: n = 118; Year 10 upper: n = 147; Year 9 lower: n = 97; Year 10 lower: n = 118

**Figure 1:** Comparison of Year 9 and Year 10 upper stream student scores on the WIHIC scales



**Figure 2:** Comparison of Year 9 and Year 10 lower stream student scores on the WIHIC scales



Looking at Figure 2, it can be seen that the trend is in the *opposite* direction for the lower stream students. The lower stream Year 10 students have a less positive perception of their classroom learning environment on most scales of the WIHIC than do the lower stream Year 9 students.

There may be many valid reasons why Year 9 lower stream students perceive their mathematics classroom learning environments as they do. However, that they rate them even lower in Year 10, should raise alarms for educators. In contrast, upper stream students see an improvement in their learning environments as they progress from Year 9 to Year 10.

This is perhaps one of the areas where the comment “nothing succeeds like success” carries some credence (Hirsh, et al. 2002; Alden, 1987). Students who perform well at Year 9 level in the upper stream appear to become more positive in Year 10, perhaps thinking about careers requiring mathematics and looking forward to further achievement at a higher level.

Unfortunately, it appears that the converse—“nothing fails like failure”—also applies in this instance. The results indicated that lower stream students perceive their classmates as not being able to stay on task, having less enthusiastic teachers and having a poorer attitude to mathematics than those in upper stream classes. Thus, as time passes for a student, failing mathematics as a subject often becomes a learned response. Utsumi and Mendes (2000, p.241) commented on this, when they noted:

As schooling progresses, attitudes towards mathematics become less positive, a fact that may be associated with the decrease in the understanding of the subject or of the content taught.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Several major conclusions were drawn from the study.

It is clear the study of mathematics classroom learning environments can provide teachers with valuable information about the ‘health’ of their classroom interactions that can benefit students’ learning.

The widening gap (both intra-group and inter-group) between students’ perceptions of their mathematics classroom learning environment, as they progress from Year 9 to Year 10, should ‘ring alarm bells’ for educators. The phenomenon could help explain perceived subject irrelevance and a lack of interest in learning as exhibited by an increasing number of students in Year 10. It could also explain some challenging student behaviour management issues that occupy valuable teacher

and administrator time.

The quantitative data (supported by some complementary qualitative data from small sub-groups of the study’s sample population) clearly suggest a closer examination of the practice of streaming in mathematics classrooms is needed.

It is possible an educational practice that is part of the cultural fabric of Australian schools may be causing more harm than good. **TEACH<sup>R</sup>**

“It is possible an educational practice that is part of the fabric of Australian schools may be causing more harm than good.”


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# Christian schools—a world of difference

**Don Roy**

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## Abstract

**Christian education is distinctly different from other approaches to education. But knowing what that distinctiveness is and acting consistently on it is vital, for Christian schools to be authentic and to justify their existence. This article seeks to identify fundamental premises underlying Christian education; then to establish a set of ground rules for critical discussion and the development of a model to faithfully represent that enterprise. The purpose of the model is two-fold: to capture realistically the dynamic nature or ‘special character’ of Christian schools as communities of faith, and in so doing, provide a useful frame of reference for critical review, strategic planning and renewal of schools calling themselves ‘Christian’.**

## Introduction

*Become a teacher and make a difference!* Who would argue with that? But these words on the roadside billboard promoting a career in the State Public Service evoked a string of further questions: What *kind* of difference did the promoters have in mind? And, *is* there a difference between the kinds of education offered by different agencies? *Should* there be a discernible difference? This article takes the position that Christian education should not only be distinctly different from other forms of education, but knowing what that distinctiveness is and acting consistently on it is vital for such schools to be authentic and to justify their existence. That expectation is not the exclusive domain of Christian schools however. In New Zealand, for example, it is mandatory for *every* school, both public and private, to clearly articulate and consistently reflect its ‘special character’ in all aspects of operation. So, what then makes *Christian* schools different?

## The need for critical reflection

There is no doubting the sincerity and commitment

of Christian educators. However, evidence indicates that teachers are often preoccupied with teaching resources, strategies and techniques and tend to be cynical about theoretical concerns.<sup>1</sup> Consequently their perceptions about education are often based on an eclectic collection of deep-seated assumptions and presuppositions generated from personal past experience as students, hence the adage, *we teach as we were taught*.

Also, Christian education is saturated with slogans and clichés—‘teaching from a Christian perspective’, ‘Christ-centred education’, ‘teaching ministry’, ‘redemptive discipline’, ‘a caring environment’, ‘leading students to a saving relationship with Jesus’, and so on. Yet as appropriate as these may be, many Christian educators seem to have difficulty explaining with clarity and rigour what such slogans actually mean. Arguably, we can do both better for the sake of our personal potential ministry as well as facilitating credible conversation with others of different persuasions. The power of perception and its effect on how we ultimately act is compelling reason to critically evaluate our current assumptions and understandings about Christian education.

## Defining the terrain

This article makes the primary distinction between *transcendent* and *naturalistic* forms of education. At the first level, this sets apart so-called religious schools that subscribe to a supernatural reality and religious ethic, on one hand, from secular schools bounded by a sensory reality and driven by a secular humanistic mindset, on the other. But while the first of these two categories would include religious schools such as Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Christian, etc., the interest in this article is with the Christian school sector in particular.

Obviously, within the Christian school sector there are numerous examples of contrasting expressions of faith and a *raison d’être* consistent with respective denominational identities. But those

“Christian education should not only be distinctly different from other forms of education, but knowing and acting on that distinction is vital”

”



distinctions are not pursued in this article. Rather, it argues there is a generic, definitive character for Christian schools as a distinct type, and an assumed commonality, which it seeks to articulate. With this goal in mind, I am aware of presenting an *ideal* view and that schools continually seek to develop and hone what they profess and practise. I also appreciate that there may not be total agreement with the argument developed here, but the article is offered as a starting point for a more coherent, rigorous discussion of Christian schools as a distinct group.

## Assumptions, principles and theoretical insights

### An interdependent platform

The first step in articulating the distinctiveness of Christian schools is to identify a number of foundational principles. It should be recognised, however, that these principles do not exist separately. Rather, they form a cohesive, interdependent platform to inform the discussion.

### Thinking worldwisely

It is widely agreed that worldviews reflect our answers to basic questions such as: What is ultimate reality? What is real and how did it come about? What does it mean to be human? What is wrong with us and our world? What is history, and what of the future? How do we know? What is good or bad? How shall we then live?<sup>2</sup>

For most people worldviews tend to be pre-theoretical and relatively unrefined in nature. But every individual has one, even if held unconsciously. Identifying its respective composition is a useful first step towards meaningful discussion and progressive refinement. In this discussion, a *Christian* worldview is adopted in particular and it follows that this perspective will be explicitly *biblical* in character and authority. Granted, other sources may be invoked on occasions to express particular meaning and to augment understanding, but the reformation principle of *sola scriptura* should remain a fundamental tenet. I am not speaking of a proof-text approach, but rather a macro view incorporating biblical metaphors and symbolism that help to make sense of basic worldview questions cited earlier. Like most worldviews, there is an underlying narrative quality. In this case, it is not simply a *single* narrative or mere collection of stories but a *metanarrative* or *master story* constituting a distinct *creation-fall-redemption-restoration* motif.<sup>3</sup> As such, it provides a frame of reference and normative values for Christian faith communities. This places a biblical Christian worldview in stark contrast to postmodernism and its vigorous rejection of metanarratives.<sup>4</sup> It is also out of this metanarrative

that a fundamental statement of belief is derived and articulated.

### Thinking Christianly

In the face of deeply entrenched modernity and the secular modes of thinking in a contemporary world, I advocate the adoption of what Harry Blamires labels, “thinking Christianly”.<sup>5</sup> The adoption of a biblical mindset and thinking *transcendently* sees all truth as God’s truth, thus removing the false dichotomy of the sacred and the secular. Faith, learning and practice are seamlessly and appropriately integrated. Thus it transcends a *this-world* reality by expanding horizons to an *other-world* reality, beyond the mere sensory. Elizabeth Barrett Browning reflects:

Earth’s crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; But only he who sees, takes off his shoes—The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.<sup>6</sup>

This disposition engages a reality in which it is possible to *practise the presence of God* in the context of even the most mundane of actions, particularly in service to others.<sup>7</sup> It goes beyond a humanistic view of values to become a sacramental expression of our love for God as expressed through our empathy, respect and behaviour towards our neighbour. In essence, it represents a spontaneous expression of an internalised Kingdom awareness.<sup>8</sup>

### Thinking holistically

Popular use of the term *big picture* in wider society alludes to the significance and power of holistic thinking. The Greek, *holos*, from which the notion of *holism* derives, envisages not simply a collection of elements, but a macro view or pattern with elements so intertwined and interdependent (or *integrated*), that to remove one element destroys the integrity of the whole. In other words, the whole is more than simply the sum of the parts, and the presence (or absence) of the minutest, most subtle element may be valuable and influential. Understanding the interwoven nature of those parts is vital. It is *only* when a macro perspective is adopted that any sense can be made of how spiritual activities and apparently secular subjects and mundane routines, practices and elements can coexist comfortably in a dynamic, transcendent relationship.<sup>9</sup>

### Appreciating what it means to be human

Unlike widely held assumptions of human beings evolving from some primeval state, this discussion presumes a biblical account of humans being uniquely created by God himself.<sup>10</sup> As creatures, they are seen as primarily dependent on him as the source of life, meaning, understanding and purpose in their capacity to display intelligence, decision-

“Thinking Christianly” engages a reality in which it is possible to practise the presence of God in even the most mundane actions”

making, creativity, emotion, physicality, individuality, sociality and spirituality. From this perspective, humans are ‘image bearers’, designed to reflect, in some small measure, aspects of what God is like. Further, personality is more than merely the sum of those parts. These qualities comprise an interrelated whole, ‘the human soul’, which “lives, and moves and has its being” in the Creator.<sup>11</sup>

“  
The  
Christian  
school might  
truly be  
described  
as a faith-  
oriented  
learning  
community”

### Recognising humanity’s predicament

A fundamental problem confronts every member of the human race. A rebellious choice by humanity’s primal parents severed the open relationship they had enjoyed previously with the Creator. As a consequence, they and their world were plunged into a conflict of cosmic proportions, with the capacity of their descendants to reflect the image of God well-nigh destroyed.<sup>12</sup> Despite this predicament, human nature in its very essence craves and actively seeks to be reconnected with the Creator. Thus Saint Augustine reflected: “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”<sup>13</sup> The incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are God’s response to that need.<sup>14</sup>

### Engaging the cultural milieu

Personhood is embedded in the culture, ethos, and environmental setting in which individuals find themselves. The beliefs, language, shared meanings, understandings and expressions, whether tangible and invisible, or symbolic, are embodied and expressed in the institutions, ritual, practices, objects, values and *mores* of the community. Clarke and his associates speak of:

‘maps of meaning’ which make things intelligible to its members ... not simply carried around in the head .. (but) objectivated in the patterns of social organisation and relationship through which an individual becomes a ‘social individual’.<sup>15</sup>

But in this milieu, enculturation seeks not only the construction of individual and social identity, but ultimately, cultural continuity.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, this article adopts a strong sense of culture as the overarching organiser for a model of an authentic Christian school.

With the foregoing principles and understandings in mind, we may now explore their implications for Christian education as a systematic enterprise.

### Implications for Christian education

#### The Christian school environment

Christian schools constitute communities of faith with a distinct ethos representing the culture and master story of the parent body or sponsoring agency. This community is not simply a group or structure

into which individuals fit. It is people interacting dynamically as creative agents—responding and building mental models of reality and vision that form cohesive meaning. Thus the Christian school might truly be described as a *faith-oriented learning community*.

The generic quality of learning communities as conceived by Peter Senge is especially applicable to the Christian school. Such learning communities are purpose-driven organisations,

... where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.<sup>17</sup>

The ethos of this community will be reflected in both the formal and informal program of the school. Teachers, students and others will participate in the seeking and sharing of meanings and communicating them through language, story, symbolism, ritual, standards and practices informed by a biblical Christian worldview and its implicit values. Teachers and staff will model that ethos consistently. Interpersonal relationships will support every individual in the school encouraging them to live out and share the community’s story actively and confidently. These relationships will be sensitive, accepting, inclusive, affirming and supportive of all members of that community, constantly seeking meaning, cohesiveness and *shalom*.

While the sense of community is fundamentally important, individuality and personal identity is not denied, but held in healthy tension. The approach to discipline will strive to be redemptive by engaging the will and intelligence of students in developing self-control and values-based decision making.

#### The ultimate goal of Christian education

In times past, the ultimate goal of Christian education might be typically expressed as the restoration of human beings to the image of their Maker. This is effected through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, and the balanced development of the whole person.

The sentiments of this goal statement have not changed. However, recent discussion focusing on restorative development as *spiritual formation*<sup>18</sup> adds new dimensions that are relevant to the nurture provided by the school community. It is for such reasons that Christian education is recognised as true ministry and each teacher an ‘agent of salvation’.<sup>19</sup> It is also *religion in essence* (Latin *religere*—to bind together again). Essentially, this process represents a reversal of *the Fall*, and our

fundamental need for restoration of wholeness and meaning. In adopting such a vision and mission, Christian schools seek truly to emulate the redemptive, restorative ministry of Jesus himself. That ministry also has salvific significance. ‘Salvation’ is restoration in the most comprehensive sense. As Westly explains:

Salvation in the biblical sense cannot be understood in one-dimensionally, narrow, reductionist, parochial ways. The salvation the Scriptures speak of offers a comprehensive wholeness in this fragmented and alienated life. Salvation in the biblical sense is a newness of life, the unfolding of true humanity in the fullness of God (Colossians 2:9), it is salvation of the soul and the body, of the individual and society, of humankind and the whole of creation (Romans 8:19).<sup>20</sup>

### The Christian teacher’s role

Of central importance is the role of the Christian teacher. As well as being experts in their teaching fields with ability to facilitate learning, the teacher’s role in Christian schools is more extensive and holistic.

Teaching is ‘the sharing of reality’. It entails ‘weaving connections’ between their subjects, themselves and the world; motivating students to make their own connections. So, it is reasonable to expect professional educators to be competent in their respective fields of teaching, motivating and maintaining high levels of engagement in learning in a fair, just, non-discriminatory and emotionally supportive manner. But good teachers in non-Christian settings also do that.

Christian teachers, however, are sensitive to the spiritual context, implications and connections inherent in their learning area. They are collegial, open to new perspectives, reflective and self-critical in their quest for excellence to the glory of the Creator. As people of faith and integrity, they actively model the culture, ethos and lifestyle of the school system within and beyond their own classrooms, ever conscious of the impact they have upon the unplanned learning of their students. Although specialists may take a designated role as chaplains or spiritual counsellors, each teacher will also seek to function in a complementary pastoral ministry.

### The formal curriculum

A biblical view of knowledge recognises both a supernatural and a natural order where God is acknowledged as the ultimate, essential source of all wisdom and virtue. Thus true knowledge is more than a body of factual information and marketable skills to be transmitted, learned, reproduced and applied. True knowledge encompasses cognitive,

experiential, emotional, relational, intuitive, and spiritual elements functioning as an interrelated whole. Christian education seeks to restore factual information to its true meaning—a way of knowing God and His creation. Thus Christian school community members should be acting responsibly as disciples, servants and stewards to one another and the created environment. The commonly viewed distinction between the sacred and secular is artificial and false. All truth is part of God’s order, and His presence can be recognised and practised in even the apparently secular and mundane aspects of life. Acquisition of true knowledge leads to understanding that is manifested in wisdom, integrity, appropriate action and worship. True knowledge is active by nature—‘knowing’ *is* ‘doing’, and ‘knowing’ comes *through* ‘doing’.

Christian educators recognise and respect the place of the traditional disciplines—fields of study or areas of learning that link with respective syllabus subjects in the curriculum. These form part of the human quest to explore, discover, understand, test, and communicate knowledge and understandings. Thus, curriculum subjects may function either as ‘windows’ through which to see, or ‘windows of opportunity’ by which to act. As ‘windows’, they provide scope to perceive and understand something of God and His activity as reflected through the created world, the Bible and the Cosmic Conflict, and to develop an appreciation for Christian heritage. As ‘windows of opportunity’, they also motivate response, application, expression and practice which are conducive to community building, citizenship, social justice, and stewardship of the environment and resources, in ways that are consistent with biblical values. These values are sometimes described as ‘Kingdom’ values because of their foundation in the New Testament account of Jesus’ life and teachings. Therefore in planning the formal curriculum, a balance is sought between spiritual, intellectual, physical, social and emotional understanding.

### The nature of learning

Christian schools seek to provide a learning environment that is rich, meaningful, and spiritually and culturally sensitive. There is effort to make connections between the student and the subject matter, between the head and the heart, and to facilitate the development of ‘maps of meaning’ in the minds of the students. There is also sensitivity to the culture, typical methodology and skills of the different learning areas and where they fit within the larger scheme of learning. Teachers recognise and follow opportunities to explore new spiritual insights and understandings, both planned and incidental, and encourage personal decisions and commitment in students.

“*Christian teachers actively model the culture, ethos and lifestyle of the school system, seeking to function in a complementary pastoral ministry*”

Pedagogy acknowledges and affirms the diversity of intelligences and gifts shared among learners. It promotes excellence in all facets of development. Teachers generally function as facilitators and mentors for students, in an interactive and emotionally supportive manner. Students, on their part, will often work in collaborative, cooperative learning and peer-sharing settings in a wide range of activities, both within and beyond the school.

## Towards a model of the Christian school as a faith-oriented learning community

### An overview of the model

At risk of reductionism and oversimplification, I have constructed a model to represent what a community of faith might look like and how it might function. In developing this model, I have borrowed Parker Palmer's idea of the "spaces" that he argues are indispensable to effective learning.<sup>21</sup> The conceptual possibilities of the 'space' metaphor are helpful in defining boundaries for the contributing elements, while on the other hand it allows openness for thoughtful, creative choices of action within that space. Thus it is consistent with the way God created us in His image. It also recognises those facets of 'being human' that come into focus when seeking the kind of restoration discussed earlier.

The arrangement of those spaces seeks to show their interrelatedness in the cultural context in which they are embedded. The model depicted in Figure 1, clusters them into three basic groupings—the *cultural context*, the *learning environment* and the *spiritual connection*, and the relationship between

them. It is important to note that, because the model is essentially holistic, the qualities of school life *outside* the classrooms will influence the ambience and quality of the learning environment existing *within* them. Conversely, the quality of learning in the various fields of study will both augment the quality of life in the school and its functioning. Ultimately, it will impact behaviour and practice beyond the school community, into the future. The fundamental *interrelatedness of these three clusters* is depicted, in Figure 1, by the arrow linkages.

### The cultural context

As discussed earlier, it is culture that gives meaning and the Christian school is a site where everything is an expression of its distinct culture. As a community of faith, its vision, sense of mission, practices and structures are intended to provide a sense of meaning and identity for its participants.<sup>22</sup> As such, it bears a striking similarity to the dynamic character of the New Testament *koinonia* or *fellowship*.<sup>23</sup> Both reflect a clear tradition based on a biblical worldview and master story.

Sometimes these cultural expressions and practices are visible in the regular patterns of behaviour initiated and promoted in the school and classroom as part of daily life and interaction, in times of formal prayer and devotional sharing or study and social interaction. On other occasions, they are reflected in subtle nuances that are nonetheless significant. Examples of these shared meanings, practices and procedures are:

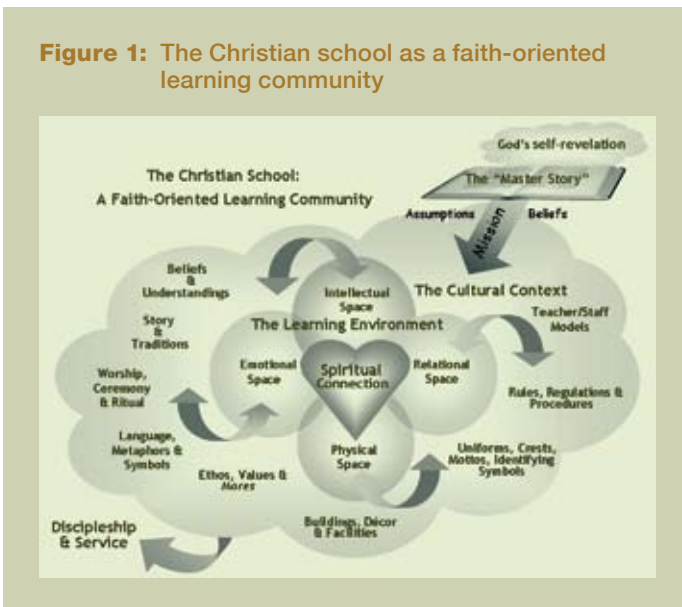
- a biblical Christian orientation that is reflected in the *foundational beliefs and understandings*;
- the cultural *master story and traditions*; the quality of *language, metaphors and symbolism*; and, the *Kingdom ethos, values and mores*;
- spiritual formation intentionally encouraged in *worship practices, ceremonies and ritual*;
- identity and belonging in the community is reinforced in the *uniforms, mottos, crests and identifying symbols*;
- *buildings, decor and facilities* are tangible expressions of values and priorities embraced by the school;
- *rules, regulations and procedures of management* seek to be sensitive, supportive, fair, just and restorative in the spirit of the example and teachings of Jesus;
- most important, *teachers, staff and administration are supportive models* of the culture.

### The learning environment

This domain accounts for the conditions that support learning. Learning is much more than a cognitive

“The Christian school is a community of faith that bears a striking similarity to the dynamic character of the New Testament fellowship”

**Figure 1: The Christian school as a faith-oriented learning community**



exercise that focuses on information transfer and reproduction. It also occurs in the cultural context and is sensitive and responsive to the characteristics of human nature, as discussed earlier.

**Intellectual Space**—This dimension of the learning environment refers to the way we tend to think about teaching and learning in a pedagogical sense—subject content, concepts, the students, and teaching and learning strategies. Schools are about learning; consequently pedagogy is of major importance. It is also a significant point of engagement between teacher and student.

Traditionally, students expect teachers to teach. However, revitalised teaching and learning consistent with community building calls for a reorientation towards a rich, learner-centered pedagogy. It adopts diverse techniques promoting reflection, creativity, collaboration and decision-making and the engagement of students as agents of their own learning.<sup>24</sup> Such attitudes and behaviour on the part of teachers towards students respects the make-up and potential of human nature as created in the image of God.

**Emotional Space**—This dimension refers to the ambience throughout the school and classrooms. Because the ‘climate’ supports or inhibits learning, its importance cannot be overemphasised.

In essence, a safe, caring, supportive environment inspires assurance and confidence. Subject information, guidelines, expectations and procedural items are clearly organised and communicated to minimise confusion and anxiety. Students are more likely to be creative and take calculated risks if their responses are viewed with sensitivity and are affirmed by their teachers and fellow-students alike. A teacher’s ability to recognise signs of personal difficulty, confusion, frustration or interpersonal tensions, and the ability to deal with them constructively, is of paramount importance and embodies grace.<sup>25</sup>

**Relational Space**—Interpersonal relationships between teachers, students and peers—both inside and outside the classroom, complement the emotional space in the impact on the quality of learning. In the Christian school, a pervading ethos of *agape*, mutual respect and acceptance emulates the way Jesus modelled and related to others as people of value. This ethos also reflects the active presence of ‘spiritual gifts’. Students respect teachers who, appropriately, have distinct roles and responsibilities. Conversely, positions of authority will not be abused by teachers. Rather they will be infused by a sense of empathy, respect, humility and service.

**Physical Space**—This fundamental part of humanness supports or inhibits the way we function in all other facets of our being. The importance of the physical dimension and its relationship to mental and spiritual vigour cannot be ignored. Energy and personal vitality are seen as being directly related to our personal capacity to function optimally in all aspects of our humanness, not only in our capacity to perceive and understand, but also in the quality of how our characters are expressed. This dimension also recognises the importance of the wider physical environment and practices that support and impact on the physical, and, in turn, the other dimensions.

### Spiritual connection

In keeping with the ultimate goal, the heart of the model focuses on a sense of the transcendent in response to personal restlessness, and a craving for meaning, fulfilment, and *shalom*. For Christian teachers, the *spiritual dimension* is always a reality and an opportunity to practise the presence of God, even in apparently secular subjects. It need not necessarily be overt or directly connected to the content of the subject. Recognition of our students as fellow creatures in the image of God, and relating to them accordingly, is truly sacramental (Matthew, 25:40). For example, the Carmelite monk, Brother Lawrence, practised the presence of God through the washing of ‘pots and pans’ and serving his brothers.<sup>26</sup> It is also true in teaching from a Christian perspective. Whatever is done to foster deep connection, meaning, and purpose in the lives of students is truly spiritual, where God is truly present.

There will often be what I like to describe as ‘serendipitous moments’ when inspired, unplanned insights emerge from something being studied. Or, an incident may have nothing directly to do with the subject matter but, nevertheless, it enriches the moment being shared.

Such moments are memorable, and bonding. Sometimes they will be the product of a Christian teacher’s systematic practice, but on other occasions they will be a spontaneous manifestation of the faith, grace, and integrity of the teacher flowing into and enriching the learning community to the glory of God. The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, describes such moments as “theophanies”, i.e. points at which humanity experiences “a meeting and encounter with the living God.... incarnately, in the concrete places of this life”.<sup>27</sup> Following after Buber, Westly describes such “theophanies” as:

rare and privileged moments when without warning Love (God) breaks through and makes its presence felt, revealing as it does the real meaning of salvation / reconciliation, and calling each one of

“For Christian teachers, the spiritual dimension is always a reality”

us out of our individual concerns, out beyond even our own small communities to a world that awaits 'salvation'.<sup>28</sup>

These meetings and encounters with the living God in the context of the Christian school are incarnate in a personal sense. In ministering to their students, Christian teachers meet our Lord Jesus in spirit and in truth and a sense of restored wholeness and *shalom* prevails—a world of difference. Thus, in both the widest and narrowest sense, Christian teachers are ministers of restoration. As such, they themselves, as faithful disciples, 'image' the purpose of God in Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

“**Christian teachers are ministers of restoration; Christian schools are educational faith communities where members experience a life-transforming encounter with Jesus**”

## Conclusion

This article set out to identify fundamental premises underlying Christian education, and then to establish some ground rules for critical discussion and the development of a dynamic model of Christian schools as faith-oriented communities.

Should Christian educators find that the article, indeed, has provided a useful tool—a frame of reference, it will have made a modest contribution to the renewal of Christian schools in being educational faith communities where members experience a life-transforming encounter with Jesus. **TEACH<sup>®</sup>**

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# introducing

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## ‘Sorry matters’— through indigenous eyes

### What does the apology mean to me?

**Lynelda Tipppo**

Assistant Director, Mamarapha College, WA

Well, personally, I feel like a weight has been lifted off me. However, I believe that many of our people who were taken away feel it much more than I do. At this moment, I think especially of my mum. She was taken away from her mother at a very young age. She was only six or seven years old and put on Palm Island with her sister and brother; she couldn't speak a word of English. That must have been a very traumatic experience for any seven-year old. My mother speaks of the time when they (she and her siblings) were in the police watch-house waiting for transportation to Palm Island. Her memory of this time is in her own words: "We were crying and asking the police if we could see our mum and they told us that we will see her in the morning. But she never came."

You ask the question: "What does the Apology mean to you?" The word *apology* means to express one's regret or sadness over a wrong that has been done, and when that expression comes in the form of sincerely saying, "I'm sorry", then it actually carries a lot of weight. For the government to acknowledge the wrong that was done, and express regret for what happened (although it occurred many years ago), saying "sorry" will put Australia on a path that, hopefully, will heal some of the hurts and pains suffered by many of our people.

It has been put to me on quite a number of occasions that peoples from other nations have gone through similar sufferings and experiences. So what makes the indigenous people of Australia different from them?

I would like to make a comparison between this kind of thinking and the case of a person with counselling needs. If the person went to visit a counsellor because they were suffering from some painful past experience, they would expect the counsellor to spend time helping them deal with it. If, on the other hand, the counsellor felt that others were going through the same kind of suffering and told the counsellee so, would the

person be helped? Would the person feel they have been understood? Would they feel that they have been heard, at all? No. One would think not.

Non-indigenous Australians must come to understand that, just as every person who sees a counsellor has their own particular pains and hurts, so too, each nation's people have their own shared hurts and pains that must be addressed by those who were responsible for having inflicted them upon others.

For my mum, the past could never be erased from her mind. But she harbours no bitterness, because she has accepted Jesus Christ into her life and has forgiven those who enacted such laws in this country. Her perception of all this: "I would never have known my Saviour, Jesus Christ."

For the many who do not know Jesus Christ, I pray that they will find healing through Kevin Rudd's stand, and saying: "I'm sorry". **TEACH**

### The national apology

**Lillian Geia**

Fourth Year Ministry Student, Mamarapha College, WA

On Wednesday, 13th February, 2008, at 9am, the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, delivered a national apology to the *Stolen Generations* of this country. The words spoken were like a cool ointment on an open wound. A wound that runs deep for so many families who were affected by the removal of their mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, brothers and sisters; families that were divided and broken 'for their own good'. It brought many to tears as finally the head of the Australian Federal Government publicly recognised:

... the pain, suffering and hurt, the breaking up of families and communities, the indignity and degradation inflicted on a proud people and culture.'

For me, the apology was from the heart, it gave acknowledgement, and respect to our people and I felt a deep sense of relief. It was a long

“  
Each nation's people have their own shared hurts and pains that must be addressed”  
”



time coming; maybe a case of *too little and too late* for some. But the public acknowledgement of past wrongs committed against the first nations of this country, spoken not only to a national but an international audience, shows that this government is genuine in taking forward steps in uniting this country by reconciling indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

It may not be easy because the wounds of oppression, segregation, and degradation run deep and will take time to mend, but the apology started the healing process and this can only happen when the past is confronted. Then *all* Australians can move forward together. **TEACH**

\* Quote from the Prime Minister's speech.

## A new beginning

### Joan Lever

Third Year Pastoral Ministry Student,  
Mamarapha College, WA

Mr Rudd won the hearts of indigenous Australians when he said “sorry” on nationally broadcast television in Parliament House, Canberra.

History was made as he said the word *sorry* six times in an effort to embark on a new beginning. I would say that the Prime Minister of Australia and his government had the courage to promise this event, and then actually ‘stage’ it successfully.

It was, indeed, a spiritual healing for many indigenous Australians and presented an opportunity for genuine reconciliation, of sharing suppressed emotions and grief, and extending forgiveness to the nation. This event marks a turning point in history and will assist in building a bridge of hope and togetherness for Australians.

After this historic, symbolic event should come a more practical and beneficial demonstration, i.e. compensation for the *Stolen Generations* and institutionalised children of indigenous descent. This action would provide concrete evidence of the government's sincerity, culminating in a satisfying ‘in-depth-reward’ to the ‘sorry story’—its implications and all that it stands for. I believe that Mr. Rudd and his government will continue to acknowledge and pursue this future action, because they have a heartfelt yearning to do the right thing, in the spirit of what Australians call ‘a fair go’.

Thank you Mr. Rudd (and your government) for the courage you have shown on *Apology Day* and giving indigenous Australians a brighter and more secure future.

## Comment on the Prime Minister's ‘Sorry Speech’

### Marion Hastie

Third Year Pastoral Ministry Student,  
Mamarapha College, WA

There is a consistent and strong emphasis on accountability in Australia. Hence indigenous people have always been publicly held accountable for their actions, whether as organisations, public figures, or private individuals.

Over the years, it seemed to indigenous people that accountability was a ‘one-way street’. Non-indigenous people appeared to remain unaccountable for past mistreatment of indigenous people. Whilst there was proud acceptance of their forefathers’ accomplishments, they distanced themselves from their forefathers’ actions of removing children from their indigenous families. This attitude avoided being accountable. As long as accountability was one-sided, indigenous people found it difficult to ‘move forward’, as many non-indigenous people expected.

It took a ‘big man’ like Kevin Rudd to say the long-awaited word, *sorry*. So simple, yet so powerful! My mother and father were taken off their parents. They were ‘part-Aboriginal’ (a word we don’t use today). One of the beliefs was that part-Aboriginal kids had ‘white’ blood in them and therefore were capable of being educated. Both my parents are deceased, but when I heard the Prime Minister's words I could not stop the tears from flowing, and my body shook from the deep sobbing. It was overwhelming for someone to acknowledge what was done to kids like my parents, and say, “sorry”.

A lot of people took comfort from these words. However, I am here at Bible College because I want to tell my people that *long-lasting* comfort comes from One greater than the Prime Minister. My parents, who were raised on a SDA Christian Mission, received comfort a long time ago from the heavenly *Comforter*. Although they were separated from their parents and did not have the same ‘rights’ and ‘freedom’ as other Australians they were taught of God, who could give them long-lasting comfort. When they left the Mission they wanted to tell others of a God who gives love, peace, joy and comfort to people who need it, just as they needed it. Did they minimise or dismiss their painful experience? No! They acknowledged it for what it was, but also realised from what they went through, that there is a living, loving God—the Great Physician who can heal all! This is what they taught to their eight children. And this is what we want to pass on as well! **TEACH**

“It was a spiritual healing for many indigenous Australians—an opportunity for reconciliation, sharing suppressed emotions, and extending forgiveness”

1 John Murison,  
former  
Mamarapha  
student

[Photography:  
Mamarapha  
collection]

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## *The God delusion delusion*

**Graham Leo**

Principal, Emmanuel College, Gold Coast, Qld

### Background

**Whilst I was on sabbatical leave and studying at Oxford, in 2007, I heard from friends and family that there had been quite a lot of exposure in the TV media in regard to Richard Dawkins' latest book, *The God delusion*. Dawkins, at Oxford, holds the interesting post of Professor of Public Understanding of Science.**

“*Dawkins' assertion is just that—an assertion; it is not based on evidence*”

One of my course lecturers was Professor Alister McGrath, who holds the post of Professor of Science and Religion, at another Oxford College. McGrath has written a number of books in response to Dawkins' books about religion. Two of these include a response to *The God delusion*, called *The Dawkins delusion*, and an earlier one, *Dawkins' God: Genes, memes and the meaning of life*.

In one of our classes we examined Dawkins' book, and given the amount of interest in Australia, I thought it might be worth writing something for publication in my school newsletter.<sup>1</sup> Most of the material for this article is drawn directly from Professor McGrath's lectures.

### Introduction

*The God delusion* is a long book, and it is impossible to consider all of it in a short article. At the risk of over-simplifying, Dawkins basically offers four key arguments against religion—not just Christianity, but any faith-based religion. In this article I will attempt to offer a response to each of those four points. Dawkins is a scientist—a biologist—and he is clearly well-trained in the scientific method. Arguing and drawing conclusions based on evidence and facts is his stock in trade. Keep this in mind as we review his arguments.

### Key arguments

It's all childish ...

Dawkins' first argument is that all religion is infantile. A belief in a God of any kind is as foolish as believing in the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus. It is like sucking a dummy.

When I was six years old, I probably believed in both of these characters. So did most people, to some degree. However, by the time I grew up, I lost faith in these, but I did see fit, as I grew older, to put my faith in God. In fact, it would be easy to make a very long list of highly intelligent people, including

many scientists, who were atheists in their youth, but who have since turned to a belief in God.

The simple response to Dawkins' accusation is that the evidence suggests that religion is not an infantile response for many people, but in fact a mature response to a lifelong consideration of the real world. People of all backgrounds make this deliberate, mature response—scientists, historians, artists, musicians, lawyers, and so on. There is no hard evidence that can be adduced to this claim of infantilism. Dawkins' assertion is just that—an assertion. It is not based on evidence. Any evidence that is available points us to the opposite conclusion—Christian faith is likely to be a serious, thoughtful, logical and deliberate choice.

### How could anyone believe that?

His second major argument is that all religious faith is irrational. Belief in God, according to Dawkins, just doesn't make sense in a logical and orderly world of facts and reason.

Dawkins' greatest difficulty here is that his own position of atheism is just as much a faith as any religion—Christianity, Islam or whatever. We all live in, observe, and react to the physical world, to other people and to the universe in general. In response to this whole-of-life experience, we form a set of opinions about what it all means and where the world came from and how best to live in it. To respond by saying: “I believe that God made this world and has an interest in it and me”, is to make a *faith statement* about this existence. But, equally, to respond by saying: “I believe that no God exists and that there is no meaning or purpose to life other than what I can make or find for myself”, is also a *faith statement*.

Dawkins suggests that only irrational people would believe in God. Sensible people, people who think, would have to conclude that God does not exist. This is almost his entire argument. If you are a believer, you obviously are not capable of logical thinking. It is difficult to square this kind of claim with the very large number of scientists and philosophers (all presumably rational people) who are also Christian believers.

*The God delusion* was published in 2006. In the same year, Francis Collins also published a book titled, *The language of God: A scientist presents evidence for belief*. Francis Collins was the Director of the Human Genome Project (the project which

spent several decades mapping the human DNA). Collins is a convinced Christian. Is Dawkins seriously suggesting that Collins is an irrational person? It is hard for Dawkins to sound plausible to anyone who does think, when his arguments are so easily controverted by simply pointing out that a large number of people who clearly do think—and even think within the same discipline of science as Dawkins does—have seen reason to commit their lives to God.

## What are the limitations of science?

The third major argument concerns the question of faith and proof. We cannot prove that God exists. Any serious theologian knows this. Dawkins, however, pretends that the reverse is true—that you *can* prove that God does *not* exist, i.e. that a rational man can walk through the world and consider the universe and gather sufficient evidence to form a reasonable conclusion that a supreme being does not exist. But he offers no evidence!

Even assuming this man knew what he was looking for, what God looked like and where he could be found, to come to the conclusion that Dawkins does without evidence is certainly not science, whatever it is. This is very important to understand. It is central to this debate. Dawkins is presenting his *religious* beliefs—that there is no God—and he is asking us to believe them, because he is an eminent Oxford *scientist*. This is not an argument about the evidence; it is an argument about which faith to adopt in the face of the evidence—the faith of ‘no God’, or a faith ‘in God’.

C. S. Lewis (another Oxford academic) wrote that whilst you cannot prove God’s existence, you can find plenty of what he calls ‘clues’. The whole of life offers such clues:

- the presence of love and goodness in the world;
- the universal sense of right and wrong and justice, even if we don’t always agree on the details, or practise it well;
- the considerable historical evidence of Jesus Christ and his life and death and resurrection;
- the logical structure of the world, and the fact that ‘it works’.

These are just some of the ‘clues’ that, taken all together, point towards the likely existence of a God. They are not proofs, but for Lewis, as ‘clues’, as pointers, they offer substantial reason to believe.

Dawkins does not present any proof or ‘clues’ for his position. He merely sneers and makes fun of all religious positions. As a scientist, he must understand the importance of evidence and proofs, and it is fair to ask why he is not presenting proofs and evidence if, in fact, they exist. It is this lack of proof that many atheists (there has been some coverage of this here and in the USA) are somewhat embarrassed about Dawkins’ book. They feel that

it offers such a poor attempt at any proof, and is so obscured by hatred and sarcasm that it is not actually helpful to their cause.

Science has definite limits to its field of enquiry. It cannot form conclusions about historical events, for example. It is not equipped to make judgements on religion or the future. It can only deal with events or data in the present (generally laboratory events) or past events which can be replicated through experiment. Respectable science acknowledges this.

Dawkins is trading on his expertise as a *biologist* to make judgements on *theology* and *psychology*. Unfortunately the person in the street is too often intimidated by those credentials to question his expertise in this area. As a result, they accept his ‘story of faith’, assuming it is really a ‘scientific and reasonable conclusion’. For example, in his book he describes religion as “a virus of the mind”. This instantly creates a negative picture for us—viruses are nasty things that make us sick, destroy our computers, and multiply and infiltrate places where they are not wanted. But this term that sounds scientific is actually a meaningless term. No-one has seen a virus of the mind. You can’t examine it. It is not a term used elsewhere in scientific literature. It is a clever debating trick to say something that sounds scientific and hope that no-one will be game to examine it closely and find it to be false.

In an earlier book Dawkins invented the term *meme*. A gene transmits information from generation to generation. Dawkins said that a *meme* transmits beliefs and other irrational ideas. No-one has ever seen a *meme*. No other scientist in the world believes they exist. Dawkins has invented the term to describe a process. In *The God delusion*, he refers again to *memes*, but this time in a way that assumes their existence and scientific verification. He has been attacked for this by his colleagues in scholarly circles, but the ordinary reader assumes that this is real science.

Since he cannot prove his claims about God by any accepted means known to science (or the rules of historical enquiry, or logic), Dawkins has invented a pseudo-science to try to add credibility to his faith position. This is not robust argument or defensible logic and the fragility of his position is lost to most ordinary people, who assume that since he is a scientific expert, he must know what he is talking about.

## Isn’t religion to blame for so much of the violence in the world?

Dawkins’ final argument is his claim that religion produces violence. Of all his arguments this is the only one that really needs serious defence. A skilled Year 11 debater could have come up with all of the above arguments. But in this modern world, it does seem as if religion might be guilty of producing violence. Look at Ireland in the 1970s and

“Available evidence points to the opposite conclusion—Christian faith is a serious, thoughtful, logical and deliberate choice”

# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

“It is a clever debating trick to say something that sounds scientific and hope that no-one will be game to examine it closely and find it to be false”

80s. Look at Iraq, especially where an American president claims to have heard God tell him to go to war. Look at the Islamic terrorists bent on killing as many people as possible in order to win the favour of Allah. This argument is serious and needs to be addressed. The good news is that it can easily be addressed with a little thought.

First, there is a strong counter-argument that atheism (Dawkins' preferred religion) is also guilty of violence. One would only need to look at the great atheistic communist experiments in the USSR, in China, or in Cuba to find ample evidence that violence was a close partner of atheism. Science itself, since this is Dawkins' field, is not immune from the charges of violence as a bedfellow. It was medical doctors who perpetrated some of the worst horrors of the Nazi camps, conducting experiments on children and Jews and gypsies to see the effects of acid, of gas, of exposure to freezing temperatures, of injections of water into the bloodstream, just to name a few. There are ample surviving records of their experiments, to show the evil they performed with methodical precision. It is science that has helped to create the weapons of mass destruction of the second half of the 20th century.

Deeper thinking and a closer examination of the evidence might show that it is not the presence of religion that provides the causal link to violence, but rather the presence of human beings in just about any activity that can be named. The worlds of business and commerce, sport and leisure, art and music, even of academia, all have their stories to tell of human violence. Violence accompanies human interaction in every known sphere, including religion.

A second major defence to Dawkins' accusation is that if you look carefully at Christianity over the centuries, you will actually find a good deal that is at the opposite end of violence. In the middle of wars, it was Christians (and some non-Christians too, of course) who were building hospitals and helping to alleviate suffering.

Who has not heard of Mother Theresa and her work among lepers and the desperately poor? The Red Cross was originally a Christian organisation, hence its name. It was Christians who commenced Trade Unions to create better conditions for workers in the coal mines. Christians led the fights against slavery, child labour, and against oppressions of many kinds. Admittedly the Church of the day did not always support them, but those at the forefront of many peaceful and peace-making movements were often people driven by their Christian convictions.

The final rebuttal to this argument is to look at Jesus Christ himself, the founder of Christianity. Jesus was a revolutionary who was not known for his violence. The worst thing he did was to tip over tables, twice, to protest against unfair profiteering.<sup>2</sup> His whole life was given to doing good. He was at

the *receiving end* of much violence, but he himself was a man of peace and was universally acclaimed as being such. He encouraged his followers to copy his example. The fact that we sometimes have not done so has less to do with the faith we profess than the characters that we bring to that faith. What sounds at the outset to be a strong argument for Dawkins turns out to be a false target.

“... The conclusion of the matter...”<sup>3</sup>

Dawkins has not presented a reasonable challenge to the Christian faith despite the efforts of the media to promote it. As was the case with Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci code*, any person who wants to attack the Christian faith will find that people who do not think deeply are easy prey. For people who think, who are willing to do the intellectual exercise of engaging with angry opponents of Christianity, there are ample points of argument. There are also more than sufficient examples of influential and intelligent people who have chosen Jesus Christ as their adopted exemplar.

*The God delusion* can easily be used to delude people. Its final success may well turn out to be different from what Dawkins intended, however. It just might drag the whole question of faith out into the open, and cause more people to think about it than before. Certainly Christians need not worry that it raises even one single point of reasonable argument to cast doubt on their faith.

It is not that there are no difficult points for faith. Of course there are. We struggle with questions of poverty, of power, of conflict, of environment, of government, just to name a few. If God were so simple that we could all understand him perfectly, he would not be God at all. The really surprising thing is that Dawkins in his anger and cynicism has simply not dealt with any of the really hard questions. We will continue to deal with them, as Christians who honestly engage with ideas.

Logic and reason that are subjected to the authority of God are still logical and reasonable, in fact, even more so. As time goes on, we will continue to find helpful answers to some of these hard questions. In the meantime, we will continue to place our trust in Jesus Christ, who is the visible representation of God to humankind. He alone offers genuine peace and genuine answers to the big questions of life. Dawkins is just a distraction from the real game, and we ought not to let him distract us too much. **TEACH**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Much of this article first appeared in Emmanuel College's Newsletter.

<sup>2</sup> See John 2:15; Matthew 21:12

<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV.

## Blog of a beginning teacher

**Braden Blyde**

Secondary teacher, Prescott College, SA

**As I write, week seven has all but come to a close. I am doing the calculations; seven out of eleven weeks for Term 1. Three more terms and my first year is complete—that's about 17% of time gone by.**

Why am I counting thus already? Well, at this stage, keeping my chin up is the best thing I can do to keep my head above water.

Walking into the classroom for the first time as a real teacher was both a liberating and a 'melancholy' experience. I was liberated by the lack of glaring supervisors' eyes, but unnerved by the sudden sense of responsibility and finality.

I am a teacher! Now, how do I teach?

Four years of tertiary study should have been enough—it 'sure' felt enough. But this assumption, as I already knew, was all but false.

Assumptions are the bane of beginning teachers, I've discovered. In conversations with various members of my graduating class it soon became apparent that what they had assumed about their role, what they had assumed about their students, and what people had assumed about them, has contributed to numerous and challenging difficulties. Simple things such as: Who does 'what' during playground duties? Where are the



OHP transparencies stored or what is proper roll marking practice? These sometimes seem to fly by the radar.

Sometimes, there are more serious matters. For instance, finding out who has special needs in your classroom, where the first aid kit is kept or what the State Government's assessment policy is.

We assumed that our teacher education and training might be enough, at least, to get us by. But, I quickly realised that we continually need to learn and in more than one area; particularly in an unfamiliar city and state. Away from family and familiar faces, a support network is needed, but oh so hard to initiate. A clear set of goals helps to define direction, both inside and outside the classroom. A lot of the challenge is keeping the emotions on a steady course.

But it's not all bad. In fact, the majority of it is good. Teaching is living up to its challenging, yet rewarding promises. Seeing kids smile or 'switches' being flicked in their developing minds is definitely all it is cracked up to be; discovering and honing your own instructional style is motivating—and the pay cheque is a nice little bonus too.

So what is the point of this *beginning teacher's blog*? While the blogosphere may be littered with information from whinging, whining and generally self-obsessed characters, I hope these observations and reflections are a little more embracing. For the seasoned professional much of what I have said is likely to be a faint and distant memory; for the academic, perhaps 'fodder' for your next lecture. But like a cool southerly on a hot summer day, I hope it may in some way be refreshing.

Being a new teacher is a lot like being a child in a toyshop. It's full of bright, shining packages of various shapes and sizes, each with the promise of endless fun and fulfilment. But some toys are a little too old for you, some too expensive and some—well, just too high on the shelf.

There are things you want to achieve in the wide-eyed wonder (and bleary-eyed bamboozlement) of your first term. My guess is that some of these toys you once looked up at, you've grasped and opened. I also guess that many of the toys you dreamt about in your first year of teaching—your plans and your dreams, have been left on the shelf.

Maybe it is time to revisit the toy shop. Now that you've grown professionally and have more money in the bank account, reach a little higher and further. Maybe all it needs is for you to connect with a beginning teacher, share their pains and passions for a moment. They will appreciate your concern and while they may still be 'novices', you might learn something too. **TEACH**

“*Maybe it's time for you to revisit your dreams*”

[Image: Avondale College collection]

## A new focus

### Peter and Glenda Roberts

Peter is Coordinator of the 'Off-Campus Teacher Education Project—Vanuatu' at Fulton College, Fiji; Glenda is Lecturer in Education Studies for the project. Both educators recently retired from Macquarie College, Wallsend, NSW.

#### 'Sea change'

**Have you ever wondered what happens to retired teachers? After so many years of experience and accumulated knowledge it is mind boggling to imagine them just disappearing from the scene of action they've been a part of for so long. When we found ourselves considering retirement it was with the same fear many had already voiced to us—"What will we do with ourselves?"**

There was one possibility, among others that we considered: re-visiting and helping out in mission schools, where we had first begun our teaching careers. We didn't have any firm plans, apart from some needed rest and relaxation. We concluded that while we certainly needed a *new focus*, we were unsure how to discover just what this might be. A close friend was the one to help us find it.

#### A turning point

We were visiting Tony and Laurel Hay at Fulton College, Fiji, in April 2006. Tony, the principal, made us aware of a need. Despite advances, there were still many village schools in developing countries that had teachers with little or no training. He referred to the many untrained teachers—they number in the hundreds—serving in Seventh-day Adventist schools in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. Knowing of our teaching background in Pacific island schools, Tony asked Peter for some help in writing a proposal to offer initial training to these teachers in a summer school mode. Successful completion of the program—three summer schools (one month per session), delivered as an off campus course from Fulton College—would lead to a *Certificate of Teaching Practice*, a qualification that was met with considerable enthusiasm. With acceptable results the trainees would gain one year's credit for Fulton College's Diploma of Primary Education course. The proposal was approved by mission administrators, Fulton College (Fiji), and Pacific Adventist University (PNG).

Where and how do we begin? This would be the first of many challenges.

#### Planning and implementing the program

**Location**—Initially, it was thought that the program might be started in the Solomon Islands but Jose

Seth, the Vanuatu Mission Education Director, very quickly 'put up his hand'. After a brief visit with him in Port Vila, in April 2007, it was decided to offer Session One of the program to sixty Vanuatu church school teachers in July of that year. We left for Australia to prepare, then returned to begin the program.

**Preparation**—We consulted with experts, wrote courses, created workbooks, constructed assignments and tests and recruited teachers. The courses offered for that first session were: Philosophy of Christian Education, Education Studies I, Curriculum Studies I—Bible, Reading, Basic Skills English and Professional Practice I. Each course covered 20 hours of class work. Everything was carefully prepared for an island school situation, and despite our familiarity with this context, we were put to the test.

#### The first summer school

**Challenges**—There were four lecturers at the July session and all had Pacific islands experience. Hazel Eaton had taught in Fiji and the Solomon Islands, while Dawn Hankinson had previously delivered in-service courses in the Solomon Islands. Both shared their expertise in Curriculum Studies—Reading. This proved to be quite a challenge as the trainees had no access to published reading schemes which are an essential part of the reading program in Australian and New Zealand schools.

Glenda lectured in Education Studies and Basic Skills English; Peter was kept busy with Christian Education and Curriculum Studies—Bible. Both of us had teaching experience in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands and had the advantage of having been teacher educators at Sonoma College (PNG) in the 1980s. Despite our backgrounds, there were times when we needed to slow down our presentations, simplify our vocabulary and adapt tasks that did not quite fit local situations. Jose Seth proved very valuable for explaining difficult concepts the students had not previously encountered.

**The learners**—There were 63 teachers in total (three turned up unexpectedly), who completed four weeks of intensive study in July. Their ages ranged from 18 to 47; their educational backgrounds mostly from Year 10 to Year 13, with two educated to Year 8 and one who finished school at Year 6. The majority of them were 'volunteers' and often gained their posi-



# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

[Photography: Peter and Glenda Roberts]

ition as teacher because they were the best educated in the village. Their working conditions are basic and resources taken for granted in New Zealand and Australian schools, are mostly non-existent.

**Progress**—The task of teaching such a large group was a little daunting, but the challenge became quite easy because of the trainees' 'thirst' for knowledge. A tremendous rapport began to develop (on an individual and group basis) between trainees and lecturing staff. By the second week we all felt very much at home with each other. At the end of the first summer school, the trainees returned to their schools 'armed' with long-term assignment work and a desire to implement the principles and skills they had learnt. We returned to Australia, tired, but elated at the program's success, and determined to prepare a session for January 2008 that would equal the first.

The next five months passed quickly and we repeated the preparation process. We also sent first session reports to students, with copies going to Fulton College. We also did some fund-raising 'back home'. The funds allowed us to buy a small supply of simple, easily transported teaching resources for the trainees, and some library books for the Epauto Seventh-day Adventist High School, at Port Vila, where our training sessions were held. (After several years of operation the school still lacked an adequate 'working' library, so Glenda had helped the librarian sort piles of donated second-hand books which had sat in boxes and on dusty shelves for some time. She accomplished this during any available spare time between session lectures, and had promised to begin cataloging during the next visit.)

## The second summer school

**We succeed despite the weather**—January in Port Vila is wet season with hot, sticky days and visiting cyclones. We experienced both situations while conducting session two. It was the air-conditioned accommodation that we returned to each evening that kept us going. (Some nice cafes and restaurants also helped!) At times the trainees struggled to concentrate in the oppressive heat, especially in the afternoon sessions, but they kept up the pace simply because there was so much to learn.

A total of sixty teachers returned for the second session which is a good retention rate. The great rapport developed in July continued. Once again, there were four lecturers from Australia: Cheryl Lis (Curriculum Studies—English); Kerrilynne Campbell (Curriculum Studies—Mathematics); Glenda (Study Skills and Education Studies II) and Peter (Christian Beliefs, Professional Practice I and II. He also co-taught Education Studies II.). It was a first-time Pacific islands teaching experience for Lynne and Cheryl. While initially hesitant, they displayed lecturing skills and produced workbooks that were exceptional. Lecturers based their materials on the

Vanuatu Unified Primary Curriculum as well as their wide knowledge as experienced practitioners.

**Quality of work**—The efforts of the trainees, their enthusiasm for the program and their excellent results were a constant encouragement to us. It was interesting to note that most had improved tremendously since the first session. They were getting the idea about study methods, applying themselves effectively and were quite willing to approach lecturers when the need for clarification arose. It was evident that a number of academically gifted trainees had the potential to do further studies after completing this certificate.

## Completion

**The finishing line is in sight**—The third and final session is scheduled for January 2009. The trainees have their diaries to complete and we have the whole preparation process to repeat. Ideally in the middle of this year, Peter should visit as many schools as possible with island education supervision personnel to observe the trainees in their classrooms. Unfortunately, the remoteness of many of these little schools, as well as budget constraints means that this might not be possible.

The sixty teachers are keen to complete their study requirements and are looking forward to their last session, followed by a simple graduation ceremony. Already, there is another group of sixty keen for training if another round could be offered.

Teachers in Solomon Islands villages are clamouring for a similar program and would like the opportunity to attain a *Certificate of Teaching Practice*. Possible sources of funding for a Solomon Islands program are currently being explored.

## Reflection

We have certainly discovered a new focus—one that allows us to share our teaching skills and experience. Despite the program keeping us very busy, we still we have time for gardening, fun with grandchildren, travel, and even the occasional morning or afternoon nap when it is needed. We have also been reminded once again that in relation to education we live in a 'lucky country' compared to those in the developing world. It is not only satisfying and exciting but also a blessing to share one's knowledge, skills and expertise with Christian teachers who are keen to improve their teaching, as they endeavour to serve the Lord in their local island schools. **TEACH**

Readers interested in helping to provide teaching resources to island church schools or who might like to volunteer for a two-week lecturing session in primary curriculum studies can contact Peter at: [robertsaust@aol.com](mailto:robertsaust@aol.com)



## Social and health impacts of alcohol: A wake-up call for Christian educators?

**John Ashton**

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John is co-author, with Newcastle University Professor Ron Laura, of *Uncorked: The hidden hazards of alcohol*. Warburton, Vic: Signs Publishing, 2004.

### Cultural Contexts

#### Introduction

**Australian culture is saturated with rituals involving the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Examples range from teenage birthday parties and Schoolies Week rites of passage, to nation-wide Melbourne Cup and New Year celebrations. A classic illustration was provided by the Sydney Morning Herald the day after the 2007 Melbourne Cup was run. On page five, a large coloured photograph depicted a well dressed man lying on the rubbish-strewn turf. A woman was standing over him, a glass in one hand, and with the other, pouring the contents of a bottle into his mouth. The caption read: “Champers [presumably Champagne] on tap.”<sup>1</sup>**

Such embarrassing alcohol-related behaviour by adults, is mostly ignored by the community and sometimes even accepted and affirmed in the context of festivities. Similarly, it appears binge drinking and demeaning behaviour by young people under the influence of alcohol are largely tolerated, although recent media statements by politicians—the Prime Minister being foremost, health officials, researchers and public commentators may signal a change in public perception.

#### Mixed messages

Alcoholic beverages on a wine list are commonly associated with fine dining and sophisticated social evenings. The Bible even has accounts of the use of wine—at the Wedding Feast at Cana, at the Last Supper, and Paul's advice for Timothy to “...use a little wine...” for the relief of a digestive ailment (1 Tim 5:23). While there may be some debate regarding the nature of the wine consumed (fermented or unfermented) and whether drinking of alcohol is *explicitly* forbidden in the Bible, it is incontrovertible that drunkenness and dissipation

are clearly condemned in both the Old and New Testament. For some years now, the medical profession, also, has given comfort to our alcohol embracing culture by cautiously affirming that a glass of red wine a day may improve cholesterol profiles and help protect against the development of heart disease.<sup>2</sup>

Preparing young people to live Christian lives in a secular society whose social norms are interwoven with ritualist glass-/ bottle-/ can-in-hand activities, poses a serious challenge in terms of our duty of care as teachers and parents and what to teach about alcohol. Given the paucity in some state syllabi, much more could be done in the curriculum area. For example, in Personal Development, Health and Physical Education or similar subjects, there should be substantial and thorough treatment of *the inter-relationship between levels of alcohol consumption and violence, abuse, general negative risk-taking behaviours such as those involving motor vehicles, non/prescription drugs, sexual behaviour, and self harm*, among others.

Is there room for a pluralist view about alcohol in Christian schools and homes, or is there a basis for a definite view encouraging abstinence? An examination of some of the available facts about alcohol may help us to make an informed decision whether to consume it.

#### Marketing alcohol

Advertisements for beer and alcohol are everywhere in Australia. They are on television, in magazines and on billboards, while many films portray drinking alcohol as part of everyday living for all adults. We are getting a powerful message from these cleverly designed inputs—drinking alcohol is a wonderful part of life. And if you are not doing it, you are foolishly missing out and not part of the ‘in crowd’.

The large manufacturers of alcoholic beverages spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year

“Is there room for a pluralist view about alcohol in Christian schools and homes, or is there a basis for abstinence?”



researching and producing the images and messages that will best persuade us to buy their product. Their bottom line is to increase sales and thereby increase the profits to shareholders. It is difficult to see how the Federal Government's recently announced \$50 million alcohol education program will make any significant difference to the volume of alcohol consumption, given the 'flood' of alcohol advertising by the industry, which is estimated to outspend the government by a factor of ten to one.

Some of the cleverest and highest paid minds in our country are employed to convince young people in particular, to start drinking alcohol. Manufacturers know that many people, once they start, will be alcohol customers for life and that means more sales, and more profits.

Alcoholic beverages marketing campaigns have been highly successful. For example, in Australia between 1993 and 2001, alcohol consumption in the general community increased by 10% over and above the already high levels.<sup>3</sup> Young women were particularly targeted by the alcohol beverage industry in the early 1990s. Through promoting discounted drinks for women and the development of fruit juice and cordial mixes to appeal to the female palate, female drinking rates have soared. The Women's Health Australia Study of 1996 found that of the 14,762 women surveyed (aged 18-23 years), 70% reported engaging in binge drinking, with 25% doing so weekly. Only 9% of the young women surveyed said they were non-drinkers.<sup>4</sup> During a decade of aggressive advertising, the alcohol industry successfully converted tens of thousands of young women to become drinkers. Most of these women then went on, by choice, to drink at levels that were harmful to their health, but which resulted in increased sales of alcohol and more profits for the industry.

## The physiological effects of alcohol

### What happens to the alcohol?

Of the alcohol consumed, 90-98% is oxidised to acetaldehyde (five times more toxic than alcohol) and 90-95% of that has to be detoxified in the liver by converting it to acetate (found in vinegar). It is not surprising that drinkers have the highest incidence of liver cirrhosis.<sup>5</sup> Of the remaining alcohol, 1-5% is excreted in urine and 1-5% is exhaled through the lungs—hence the breathalyser test for drinking.

### Intoxication

When we drink alcohol it is absorbed directly through the stomach and intestinal wall into the bloodstream. It induces a greater level of intoxication in women than in men due to men possessing a higher percentage of water in their bodies (resulting

in more dilution of the alcohol). For example, for the average male, one hour after drinking three glasses of wine, his blood is likely to contain about 0.05% alcohol. Women, however, will reach this peak level in a shorter time and women mid-cycle or on the contraceptive pill in an even shorter time, making them more vulnerable than males to the effects of alcohol.

### Some serious health effects

Alcohol reacts with a number of the functions of our reproductive system. For example in males it inhibits testosterone production. In older men it causes impotence. It has been known for years that alcohol consumption causes impotence in men and delayed orgasmic response in women.<sup>6</sup> However, the alcohol industry has cleverly diverted attention from this fact by capitalising on our natural interest in sex and the role that alcohol can play in seduction by reducing our inhibitions. By using ads for alcoholic beverages which imply an association with sexual prowess, our attention has been diverted from the impotence effects. This further illustrates how our thinking and our behaviour can be manipulated by clever strategic marketing.

The feminising effect of alcohol has also been known for many years.<sup>7</sup> Alcohol stimulates conversion of testosterone to oestrogen and for men who drink heavily this can lead to feminisation as they get older. Yes, contrary to what the alcohol advertisements would have us believe, the more alcohol a man drinks the less of the maleness hormone, testosterone, a man's body produces. In fact, alcohol stimulates the liver to produce an enzyme that converts the male hormone testosterone to the female hormone oestrogen.<sup>8</sup> This is why males who drink heavily can develop 'breasts', lose hair and develop feminine patterns of fat deposition.

### Alcohol and pregnancy

When a pregnant mother drinks, her baby is also exposed to the alcohol. Maternal alcohol consumption during pregnancy can lead to diminished muscular and nervous development and changed facial features. Alcohol consumption during human pregnancy can lead to the symptoms of foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) in the child. These can include malformation of organs including the heart, central nervous system, genitals and the brain.<sup>9</sup> For nearly 20 years FAS has been recognised as the leading cause of intellectual impairment in Western culture.<sup>10</sup> In some communities maternal alcohol consumption is so common that these changed facial characteristics of the baby are considered normal. Melbourne Professor Jon Currie, heading a

“Our thinking and behaviour can be manipulated by clever strategic marketing”

# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

committee of medical experts analysing scientific research from around the world, recently stated:

We know alcohol is a toxin and we cannot find a limit at which it is safe during pregnancy, because even at relatively low levels there are still some studies showing developmental changes.... Not drinking provides you with the safest option.<sup>11</sup>

Test studies on rats and other animals have shown that maternal alcohol consumption can produce abnormal (feminised) sexual behaviour or impaired sexual ability in male offspring that is possibly explained by a testosterone mechanism.<sup>12,13</sup> This has potentially serious implications for men whose mothers drank alcohol during pregnancy, especially during the first trimester of pregnancy. Despite a number of research studies reporting the feminising effect of alcohol, this topic is rarely mentioned in the media.

Men who consume alcohol may also contribute to deformed offspring. As far back as the early 1930s—in a handbook for mothers and mothers-to-be titled *All about the baby*—a paediatrician observed that children of alcoholic fathers often showed various signs of both mental and physical degeneracy. She hypothesised this could be explained on the basis of the effect of alcohol in the blood on the sperm of prospective fathers.<sup>14</sup> Sixty years later, the Boston University School of Medicine reported to the American Association for the Advancement of Science that paternal exposure to alcohol had been found to affect the growth and development of the baby.<sup>15</sup>

Both animal and human studies have shown that alcohol can damage male sperm, decrease sperm count and cause testicular atrophy.<sup>16</sup> Studies using rats found that animals allowed to drink alcohol freely had smaller testes and degenerated sperm ducts which produced sperm with significantly reduced mobility and fertilisation rate.<sup>17</sup>

## Effects on the brain

Alcohol can cause premature ageing of the brain and reports of brain damage in social drinkers are not uncommon. By middle age, even moderate drinkers have been found to have measurably atrophied brains. Alcohol induced brain damage is reported to develop faster in women, which again emphasises the increased vulnerability of women to harm from alcohol.<sup>18</sup>

## Effects of alcohol on the heart

Promoting the heart health benefits of alcohol is another aspect of the alcohol industry marketing strategy. We regularly read articles in newspapers and magazines extolling findings of how beer and

wines—particularly red wines, protect against heart disease. While in the context of very moderate drinking, these claims are probably true, similar heart-healthy benefits may be gained from drinking grape juice from dark purple grape varieties, according to Mayo Clinic cardiologist, Dr Martha Grogan.<sup>19</sup> *The benefit is not attributed to the alcohol* (ethanol), but to resveratrol, a substance in the seeds and skin of the grapes. The claims regarding the benefits of consuming alcohol (in various forms) are thus severely weakened. Furthermore, these claims are being subjected to closer scrutiny in symposiums and by researchers. A recent meta-analysis of 54 studies concluded:

The studies judged to be error free found no significant all-cause or cardiac protection, suggesting that cardiac protection afforded by alcohol may have been overestimated.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, there is little doubt that habitual heavy drinking damages the heart muscle and leads to increased risk of heart disease. Similarly, the risk of hemorrhagic stroke grows with increased alcohol consumption.

After an extensive review of the research literature pertaining to alcohol and heart health, researchers at Heidelberg University recently warned that a regular daily administration of alcohol should not be recommended and educating the public that alcohol be used as a coronary therapeutic agent would create more damage than benefit. Any recommendation for alcohol to be used as protection against heart attack and ischemic stroke has the potential to cause damaging effects on various other organs.<sup>21</sup>

## The alcohol-cancer relationship

Even moderate drinking can significantly increase the risk of cancer—particularly breast cancer, in women. A multitude of studies have now confirmed that alcohol is either a carcinogen (cancer causing agent) or cancer promoter. In 2006 the International Agency for Research on Cancer estimated that world wide, there were about 389,000 cases of cancer attributed to drinking alcohol each year resulting in around 233,000 deaths. Among women, breast cancer comprised 60% of alcohol-attributable cancers. The report's authors warn that the burden of alcohol-associated cancer appears to be substantial and needs to be considered when making public health recommendations on alcohol drinking.<sup>22</sup>

## ALCOHOL AND THE COMMUNITY

### Drink driving

We are well informed about the link between alcohol

“**Researchers recently warned that educating the public that alcohol can be used as a coronary therapeutic agent would create more damage than benefit**”

and road accidents with Government sponsored campaigns and advertising to reduce drink driving. However alcohol still takes its toll. In Australia, each year about 400 people die and around 8,000 are hospitalised as a result of excess alcohol consumption. The financial cost to the Australian community of the hospital care alone for this particular alcohol caused trauma is estimated to be in excess of \$1.3 billion.<sup>23</sup>

## Alcohol, violence and crime

Alcohol consumption is a contributing factor in many violent crimes. It has also been linked with atrocities, according to former UK army officer Paul Wenck, who actively served in Northern Ireland, the first Gulf War and did peace keeping in Cambodia. For instance, there is evidence large-scale war atrocities committed in the Balkans and south-east Asia were 'alcohol fuelled', with perpetrators having been plied with liquor prior to the events.<sup>24</sup>

However, one of the most devastating aspects of alcohol use relates to its role in terrible crimes against women, especially rape and domestic violence. Alcohol is involved in approximately 55% of rapes and 50% of violence against women. The Australian Institute of Criminology survey of women in 2004 found that 29% of those surveyed reported that they had experienced physical or sexual violence before the age of 16 years. The 2005 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey found 1.47 million Australian women, i.e. 19% of all women aged 15 years + had experienced sexual violence, and 2.56 million Australian women, i.e. 33% of all women 15 yrs + had experienced physical violence.<sup>25</sup> On the basis of calculation, these statistics suggest that alcohol has been a major contributing factor in violence against more than a million Australian women.

In a survey of more than 2000 American couples, rates of domestic violence were almost 15 times higher in households where the husbands were often drunk as opposed to never drunk.<sup>26</sup> Recent U.S. Department of Justice statistics give a similar picture of the involvement of alcohol in intimate partner violence. Two-thirds of victims abused by a current or former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend reported that alcohol had been a factor and about half of alcohol-related violence incidents reported to police involved current or former spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends of the offenders.<sup>27</sup>

Alcohol is not the *only* factor contributing to domestic violence, but it is involved as a *major* factor, acting as a powerful non-inhibitor by unlocking deeper feelings and frustrations. Strong evidence for the non-inhibiting role alcohol plays in domestic violence comes from a 2003 study by the Research

## Some effects of alcohol

- **Alcoholic drinks induce changes in mood; they also produce physical effects such as loss of coordination....**
- **Alcohol relaxes people's social inhibitions, but it is addictive; dependency on alcohol can seriously affect people's personal and professional lives.**
- **Prolonged consumption of alcohol is a cause of cirrhosis of the liver.**
- **The evidence that alcoholic drinks are a cause of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, and larynx, oesophagus, rectum (men), and breast is convincing.**
- **They [alcoholic drinks] are probably a cause of liver cancer, and colorectal cancer in women.**

World Cancer Research Fund / American Institute for Cancer Research (2007). *Food, nutrition, physical activity, and the prevention of cancer: A global perspective*. Washington DC: AICR, p.157.

Institute on Addictions at the University of Buffalo. The study of 270 men, with a predisposition for physical violence towards their female partners, found that on days when the men drank alcohol they were eight times more likely to be violent towards their partners compared to the days when they had no alcohol. Moreover, on days of heavy drinking, i.e. drinking six or more drinks within a 24 hour period, the chances of any male to female partner violence was 18 times higher compared to days of no drinking.<sup>28</sup>

## Alcohol and the socialisation of men

The tradition taken up by many men of drinking alcohol with mates has fostered a culture where male conversations and jokes in the workplace and pub regularly portray women as dumb, inferior and stereotype sex objects. Alcohol fuelled conversations of this kind deny women's legitimate feelings, can have a powerful influence on the attitudes of men towards women and sadly, as revealed by statistics, millions of women suffer as a result.

## Alcohol and sexual behaviour

One of the results of more women drinking alcohol is the alcohol - sex connection. Alcohol reduces a woman's inhibition, and can be used by both men and women to facilitate casual sex before marriage.<sup>29</sup> This practice exposes young people to the very high

“*One of the most devastating aspects of alcohol use relates to its role in terrible crimes against women*”

risk of contacting the insidious disease *chlamydia trachomatis* (CT), a sexually transmitted disease which can have no obvious physical symptoms and yet can have very serious long term consequences, if left untreated. Young females are particularly vulnerable to an ascending infection which can result in pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) which in turn may lead to tubal infertility. The disease can also make men sterile.

“  
I believe there is a very strong case for Christians to set an example by choosing not to drink alcohol”

The so called ‘Safe Sex’ education programs have encouraged responsible young people to use condoms for sex outside marriage. However the term ‘Safe Sex’ is in many ways misleading. For example, research studies suggest that condoms offer relatively little protection against the spread of CT, which in part explains why *chlamydia* infections have continued to rise to epidemic levels.<sup>30</sup>

A 2007 report for health professionals published on Medscape warns that currently, in the United States, more than 50% of all young adults aged 18 to 25 years have caught at least one of 25 types of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The most commonly reported STI is *chlamydia*, with three million new cases diagnosed annually in the U.S. When left untreated, *chlamydia* infection increases a female’s risk for pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), ectopic pregnancy, infertility, and HIV infection. Up to 75% of females and 50% of males exhibit no obvious symptoms, with 30-40% of all sexually active females reported as being infected with the disease. If left untreated, 40% of these females will develop PID, and 20% of those will then become infertile, while another 9% will develop life threatening complications during pregnancy.<sup>31</sup>

The incidence of infection is also increasing rapidly in Australia where, between 2000 and 2004, known *chlamydia* infections more than doubled with over 35,000 notifications. The largest increase in rates of infection has been in women aged from 15 to 29 years.<sup>32</sup> These young women are paying a high price for the casual sex promoted in magazines, films and videos.

Very few Australian teenagers would realise before they choose to go out and party, get drunk and have sex, that even if they use a condom, there is still a relatively high chance of becoming infected with disease, and that in the future they may end up being unable to have children. The care and treatment of these diseases that may extend into adulthood place a considerable burden on the public health care system. This is an example of a large social and financial cost, which is not usually included in the figures for the overall cost of alcohol to the community.

## CONCLUSION

In this article I have attempted to illustrate how, in the big picture, when alcohol related health costs are totalled, the harm of alcohol abuse in the community is staggering. As Christians we are called to care for our community—to pursue wellbeing and peace. Alcohol consumption is a major source of emotional pain, sorrow and violence, as well as personal harm. The financial and healthcare burden imposed on the community is enormous. I believe there is a very strong case for Christians to set an example by choosing not to drink alcohol. It would be tragic if our example of drinking alcohol unwittingly encouraged others to take up drinking. Alcohol is an addictive drug and no-one knows beforehand whether they or their friends will become alcohol dependent.

For a large proportion of the population in general, and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander indigenous communities in particular, alcohol is a curse and it is no surprise that the Bible records God’s hatred for drunkenness and associated lifestyles (Galatians 5:19-21). I made the decision not to drink alcohol when I was 14 years old and, since then, have never drunk an alcoholic beverage. I choose not to support an industry that in my view, facilitates so much long-term misery and harm in the world. Salvation Army Major Mike Coleman presents us with a timely challenge:

...let’s wake up to the facts of what’s happening. As a society we have educated ourselves about tobacco and all the culture changed. Now it’s time for alcohol to go under the microscope.<sup>33</sup> TEACH

## Endnotes

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### Sex, gardening and God: Setting the values for Christian schools

Leo, Graham (2007). Macquarie Park, NSW: Christian Schools Australia.

#### Robert Herschell

Dean & Postgraduate Studies Coordinator, School of Education and Humanities, Christian Heritage College, Mansfield, Qld

This intriguing text is a 'must read' for educators especially for Christian educators who are intent on developing authentic, responsive, transforming approaches to values education in their schools.

As one engages the text, it becomes a very enjoyable, though sometimes challenging, read. Leo has a compelling style that entices readers not only to think widely and deeply about the values issues he raises, but also to do something about them in their educational settings.

Some of these issues are:

**Context of the text:** In the current educational debates, especially about *character education* and *values education*, it is imperative for Christian educators to engage with the significant questions and investigate their underpinning theologies and philosophies. Also, it is important for staff and students in learning organisations and communities to examine policies, programs and practices that lead to dynamic and life-long values education outcomes. Design, development and ownership of a values education framework are matters taken very seriously by the author.

**Foundations:** The biblical analysis in which Leo has engaged while preparing this text is significant, detailed and compelling. Widespread use of the Scriptures, with extensive use of quotations, is a valuable base for the conceptual structure underpinning his proposals.

**Stakeholders in the text:** While there are many sub-themes and dimensions to the text's thesis, it is significant that parents, families, and communities of learners play a central role. Schools alone cannot plan for and engage in quality values education programs unless families are networked into, and connected with the learning community in which they and their children are participants.

**Significance:** This volume will inform, enlighten and provoke the reader to take

concerted action in the values education domain. While too often values have been left to the hidden or implicit curriculum, Leo challenges educators to raise the level of their engagement. It is a challenge that should not go unheeded in educational learning communities.

**Warnings:** Values education is a very problematic enterprise—What values? Whose values? How designed? When and where embedded? For what purposes? With whom? With what implications and outcomes? Optional or compulsory? Explicit/overt or implicit/hidden? The conceptual and strategic approaches to personal and community capacity building in learning organisations are 'not an easy row to hoe'. Leo alerts readers to potential pitfalls and issues that might bring about one's demise, or minimise the effectiveness of one's programs and practices. His experience and advice is extensive, helpful and encouraging.

**Engaging the text:** A key feature of Leo's text is the inclusion of three strategies to focus the reader's attention. These are his:

- regular use of significant quotes in text-boxes;
- inclusion of 'self-analysis' activities; and
- 'questions for schools', which are helpful devices to assist readers to engage with and go beyond the mere reading of the text.

**Concerns:** Leo, as an *agent provocateur*, purposely 'stirs the pot'. He wants readers actively to pursue issues that arise from his interpretations and proposals. He doesn't expect readers merely to accept his views or interpretations. He therefore acts as a critical friend and mentor to encourage, guide and provoke *action* in values education matters rather than get mere passive *agreement* with his constructs.

**Textual controversies:** Not everyone will agree with Leo's approaches to values education. He does not have a 'one size fits all' approach to this curricular issue. Indeed, his purposes are to entice readers to design, develop and implement their own approaches and strategies for promoting values education.

**Provocations via the text:** The author's experience encourages a 'hands-on' approach to values education. He encourages educators to build learning communities that are well-informed, well-framed, uniquely designed, diversely programmed and critically reviewed on a regular basis. For example, he supports handling *paradox* through engaging in diverse, personal and professional development programs.

**Proposed use:** The volume provides exceptionally valuable foundations. Leo proposes eight values for learning organisations and educational communities to engage with, and dynamically design and promote comprehensive

programs that will enhance values education in Christian schools and assist with the transformation of students' lives.

I commend this engaging text, but warn that it will provoke readers seriously to reflect on, and then initiate actions that will renew programs and improve practices in values education in schools.

TEACH

## Religious education in early childhood

Grajczonek, J. & Ryan, M. (Eds.), (2007). Brisbane, Australia: Lumino Press.

### Elva Fitzgibbon

Lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Avondale College, NSW

This is a thought-provoking book by scholars and practitioners. They present research, current issues, and opinions from new perspectives, to encourage and provoke discussion and reflection among early childhood educators in religious education settings.

The spiritual and moral aspects of a child's development is an area that is often neglected by early childhood professionals, either through ignorance or for fear of inadvertently interfering in matters best left to the family and 'experts'. However, the recent growth of preschools attached to faith-based schools has challenged educators in this sector, to cater for the *holistic* development of the very young children in their care.

Children's development of spirituality is dealt with in the book's first section. I was fascinated with Robert Coles' work who investigated the perceptions of children in three world religions: Islam, Judaism and Christianity, and those from a secular background. Theorists David Hay and Rebecca Nye opened my eyes to entirely new ideas, while James Fowler's theories on the stages of faith development and Brendan Hyde's chapter on the pedagogy of the spirit were insightful and challenging. Vivienne Mountain's contribution on "Prayer and young children", Ann Troutdale's discussion of the "Interplay of stories, imagination and children's spirituality", and "Children in the book of Mark" by Joyce Mercer, provided much interest and information.

The second part of this book is devoted to practitioners' views and work-practices. Ideas presented clarify and extend children's religious experience through process drama, story telling and children's literature. I enjoyed the discussion

encouraging and reinforcing the "I wonder..." factor in children's thinking, as they experience Bible stories and relate faith to themselves.

There is also a thorough discussion of teachers' roles in fostering and modelling a spiritual life; teaching and learning theories as applied to religion; the value of classroom support systems and positive interaction; and gender issues. Chapter 14 gives a variety of descriptions of classroom interactions between teachers, students and peers that make intriguing reading, as a range of religious topics are covered.

Importantly, the role of family and community in a child's religious life is not neglected. A very realistic portrayal of contemporary family life and the dynamics affecting the child and school are ably presented by Elizabeth Anderson. Some of these dynamics are the pace and stress of modern family life, a sense of alienation from the churches, and the complexity of a secular and pluralistic society. On the other hand, she underlines the sense of community, identity, and security that a religious faith can bring to a family; especially the children. These qualities are further affirmed in Maurice Ryan's essay, "Contexts and partnerships", where the writer invokes the familiar image of 'It takes a village to raise a child' and considers the spiritual implications.

Demonstrating that there are contrary positions on the value of religious education, the editors have included a critique by Roger Marples. In his chapter, "Against faith in schools: A philosophical argument for children's rights", he argues forcefully in favour of letting children grow naturally in a spiritual sense, without too much adult intervention (reminiscent of the old values-free education argument?) and discusses equity issues, public funding and the right of the child to choose and be autonomous in their own faith. He makes some interesting points in areas that are often open for debate. The reasons given why parents, in the first place, often choose faith-based schools surprised me.

The reader can't help getting involved with this book. Although some parts may not appeal to, or be relevant to particular faith traditions, there is still plenty to challenge and stimulate one's thinking because it raises a range of current topics and educational issues that apply to *all* Christian schools.

The book is well planned and constructed, but documents in the last section lack sufficient general interest and could be scaled back.

With faith-based schools in Australia steadily growing, this is a timely and relevant book and I believe that the editors have achieved their stated aim of provoking discussion and reflection. TEACH

## Mission accomplished

**Janita Bond & Michelle Long**

Avondale BSc / BTeach (Secondary), and BEd (Primary) graduates who taught for 12 months in a refugee camp in Mae Ramat, Thailand, as overseas mission volunteers.

Their diary entries are continued...and concluded.

From: Janita Bond & Michelle Long  
[mailto:janitamisha@hotmail.com]  
Sent: Sunday, 19 August 2007, 12:48 PM  
Subject: Daily life and life stories

Dear All,

We thought we were going to get a flood on the weekend of August 11, as there was steady rain and the creeks in town rose rapidly. However, the anticipated flood didn't eventuate. Nevertheless, some of the creeks washed out the bottom story of some nearby houses. Maybe next time we'll be luckier!!

Last Thursday, during T5 Maths, I (Janita) noticed one of the girls crouched under her desk. It didn't take me long to realize that she was blowing her nose on the floor. We've become quite accustomed to this type of behaviour as only the occasional Karen person will use a hankie and, as yet, we are still to see one use a tissue. Burping and breaking wind are regarded entirely different here than in Australia. Burps and wind are to be freely released into the atmosphere. Better out of the body than in!! This can cause us to giggle, especially when we hear a series of 'noises' emanating from one person in a short period of time, or in what we consider to be a completely inappropriate place, e.g. church.

(It seems strange to a western mind, but it may be equally incomprehensible in an oriental culture for a person to clear one's nose of mucus and muck, wrap it in white cloth or tissue, and then keep it in one's pocket—perhaps for days!!)

Traveling home that Thursday afternoon, we met an ex-student of EVA on the songthaew. It was interesting chatting to him. I had taught him for the first few weeks of school in June and then he had disappeared. Other students said that he'd gone home to help his parents. The story he told us was that he wanted to go to school, but didn't have the money to pay his school fees (900 Baht, or AU\$30). He had planned to work over the school holidays to earn this money but his plans had fallen through. His family couldn't provide the money, as his parents and younger siblings (he hasn't seen them for six years) live in Burma and his older brother lives illegally in

the United States. His brother literally 'jumped ship' in the US, six years ago. The student has applied for resettlement in America and is hoping to leave sometime in the next month and a half. He will be travelling by himself and hopes to catch up with his brother. Imagine having this as part of your life story! We wonder how many other students there are that wish to attend EVA but are unable to pay the fees.

Today we attended a different Adventist church in the camp. We really enjoyed talking to the people there that could speak English (limited or advanced). One of the students from school invited us over for lunch. It was delicious as always. Janita is slowly becoming accustomed to eating chicken and fish. We were also asked to do a special item for the youth program in the afternoon. We decided on a song that they had never heard before. However, after listening to us sing it through twice, the guitarist and pianist had it 'down pat'. It was amazing.

Reuben has been having an interesting time at Helen's recently. One night, about a week back, one of the boys, Kyet Noe (pronounced Jano), was in Reuben's bedroom when he suddenly announced, "I'm going to sleep with you tonight". Reuben, shocked at this statement, replied that there wasn't much room on the bed. Jano explained this was no problem for Karen people, as within their culture they are very comfortable with touching between persons of the same gender. Reuben countered that it was a problem for him!! Despite this, Jano did sleep with him that night. Fortunately the bed must have been a king-size single, as Reuben said there was ample room. Since then, Jano has slept with Reuben a few times because Jano gets bitten by bugs that are in his bedroom. This incident illustrates how well Reuben gets on with the boys at Helen's. It is incredible to see them together. The boys treat Reuben like a respected older brother.

Tomorrow is Reuben's 19th birthday. We are planning a birthday party at our house. Helen has bought a cake, and we will have a few games and activities with the kids. Two of the students that live with Helen also have their birthday on Monday; however it's hard to know whether to celebrate them as they are not their actual birthdays. Many of the





# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

students have no idea when their birthday is, or exactly how old they are; it's not really important in their culture.

Well, we hope that all is going great for you. We're sure that you are having adventures too. Our prayer is that God will be with you.

With love,  
Janita and Michelle

From: Janita & Michelle  
[\[mailto:janitamisha@hotmail.com\]](mailto:janitamisha@hotmail.com)  
Sent: Sunday, 7 October 2007, 3:21 PM  
Subject: Light and weighty matters

Dear Everyone,

Wow! October! Where has the year gone? Our time here has gone amazingly fast and Mae Ramat has become home for both of us in every respect. The last couple of months have passed quickly with school filling up much of the time. This coming Thursday, end of semester exams begin at EVA. Exams will run for one week, followed by a ten-day holiday. Exams have already finished at Mae La Klo, with the Thai school now on holidays for three weeks.

We are looking forward to the soon arrival of visitors. Reuben's family, as well as Janita's sister, will be visiting us during the holiday period. We have booked a trekking tour for three days to Thailand's biggest waterfall. We also aim to head down south to the beach, which is about ten hours travel from here!

Last week we went into Mae Sot to finish paying for this tour. In the office, where we had to wait, we saw a set of large scales. Asking permission to weigh ourselves, we decided to check if the small bathroom scales at home were correct. Michelle hopped on first and was happy with the result. Then I (Janita) hopped on and my eyes nearly popped out of my head: 92 kg!!! After a few seconds of shock I decided to get off and try again. As I was getting off, I noticed that Michelle was trying to hold back laughter. She had put her foot on the back of the scales!!! After punching her a few times on the shoulder, I hopped back on the scales, discovering that my weight was normal after all. Thank goodness!!

Last week I bought a small, new motorbike. This will give us more freedom and the opportunity to experience more of what Thailand is like. Unfortunately it is taking longer than expected to get a Thai motorbike licence. Before going to the licencing office in Mae Sot, I (Janita) visited the police station in Mae Ramat to find out what was required. The first visit was an adventure, because I went without a translator, expecting at least one policeman / woman to speak limited English. "Hello,

how can I help you?" they asked. This was a great start. Unfortunately, they couldn't speak much else. After having most of the police staff called into the office to try and understand what I was asking, I decided to leave and find a translator!!!

With Paw Kyar (one of Helen's girls) as a translator, things went much more smoothly. The fun and games continued though, as different officers kept asking for more documents. I will get the licence though, eventually!! Once I have it, many adventures await us! It will be handy having a motorbike as we will not have to rely so much on local songthaows for transport.

At the moment we have both caught the flu. This was kindly passed on by students who are constantly sneezing and sniffing right next to you. To be on the safe side Janita got a blood test to make sure it wasn't malaria as she had spent a very uncomfortable night with chills, a mild fever and a headache. We've just had a lot of rain plus high humidity which has brought out the 'mozzies'.

On September 29, Janita celebrated her 23rd birthday. She received four birthday cakes, three of them Karen style—made of sago and coconut milk, and one a Thai mock-cream cake. We had lots of fun fellowshiping with friends and EVA students.

This week we had a lovely surprise in receiving a letter from Carly Fletcher, Carla Ansell (who is now volunteering in Cambodia) and her sister Marissa; a parcel from Lisa Fletcher; a parcel from home and three copies of *TEACH* magazine from Wilf Rieger. We keep saying that we are truly the most well-looked-after volunteers ever. We appreciate these kind thoughts so much. We love hearing about your news and what has been happening in your lives. Each of us is on a journey that is both rewarding and exciting, and it's just nice that we can share with one another.

Well, that's about all our news. We hope that those of you who are finishing College this year will be conscious of God's presence and peace, as you make decisions regarding next year.

With love,  
Janita and Michelle

From: Janita & Michelle  
[\[mailto:janitamisha@hotmail.com\]](mailto:janitamisha@hotmail.com)  
Sent: Monday, 19 November 2007, 9:59PM  
Subject: Treks and goodbyes

Hi Everyone,

Finally, after two weeks, the internet is functioning again. In the meanwhile, life has been hectic here and is not due to settle down for at least another week.

October and what we've had of November have

[Photography: Janita Bond + Michelle Long]



# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences



been great. It was fantastic to spend the October holidays with wonderful visitors—Renee and Reuben's family. The holiday began with a trip to an isolated beach near a famous Thai cave. Trekking, elephant riding and rafting to Thailand's tallest waterfall finished the holiday off nicely. We have many pictures that hopefully, one day, we can share with you all. We enjoyed having a full house again and were glad to share a little of what we have come to think of as 'home'.

It is now time for Michelle to head back to 'good old Oz'. So this week is becoming a week of good-byes. It will be hard for her to leave, because many friendships have been formed. Despite Michelle going home, we will still operate our joint email account as we will be travelling together next year and would like to share our adventures with you. So please keep writing. In turn, your experiences are always read with much interest.

Just this past weekend was memorable, with the most interesting picnic either of us has ever attended. It has shown us that little, unexpected things sometimes happen. Ask us, in person, for the details. The picnic itself was wonderful and helped

us get to know the students better.

Michelle's end note: I want thank you all from my heart for the support, encouragement and prayers that you have given to both of us over the year. We cannot express how much your kindness has meant to us and I hope that one day we may also have the opportunity to do the same for you. Please continue to pray for Janita (who'll stay on longer). It will be a little different without me here; a little quieter! Thank you, once again, and I pray that God will continue to be your strength—always. We're signing off now.

With our love and prayers!!

Janita and Michelle TEACH



[Photography: Janita Bond + Michelle Long]

## Epilogue

Janita has completed the 2007/08 school year at EVA. She plans to spend at least one more year teaching there, enjoying the interaction with people from different cultures and the many adventures to be had. Michelle has happily settled back into Australian life. However, little excuse is needed to pack her bags and head back to Thailand and the surrounding countries for a little more exploring!!

## Get Involved In

### Long Term Ventures

You generally spend over 3 months away from home. Your assignment is usually overseas. A variety of roles like youth workers, teachers and Bible workers are offered. You could do this during your gap year.

### Short Term Ventures

You generally spend less than 3 months away. Your assignment can be local or overseas. Roles like fly'n builds, fly'n preach are excellent ventures.

### StormCo

You generally spend up to two weeks away on community service in a local neighbourhood. You come back feeling invigorated!

### Local Initiatives

Sometimes local churches initiate ventures which are special. Adopting a local community could also be attempted.

*Give us a call and discover the beginning of an adventure which will not leave you unchanged!*

# All that's missing is You!



Go on...  
**Make a Difference**  
ADVENTIST VOLUNTEERS

## Adventist Volunteers

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# TEACH JOURNAL


online

www.ministryofteaching.edu.au

Ministry of Teaching    Teacher Stories

Pathways  
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Marvin Anderson    Click to Play



"Any moment in my classroom could be that single turning point for a student."

MinistryOfTeaching



## faculty of education

*...it's more than a career...it's a calling.*

### courses & options

### postgraduate

#### Bachelor of Education

- Early Childhood
- Primary
- Secondary
  - Home Economics / Design & Technology
  - Personal Development, Health & Physical Education
  - Information Technology

#### Master of Education

- Master of Education (Hons)
- Master of Education (Research)
- Master of Leadership & Management

#### Bachelor of Arts / Bachelor of Teaching

*Major teaching fields*

- English
- Geography
- History
- Mathematics
- Music
- Religious Studies
- Visual Arts

*Minors*

- Biology
- Communication
- English
- Geography
- Graphic Design
- Information Technology
- International Development Studies
- Mathematics
- Music
- Religious Studies
- Visual Arts

#### Doctor of Philosophy

#### Bachelor of Business / Bachelor of Teaching

*Major teaching fields*

- Accounting
- Information Technology
- Management
- Marketing

*Minors*

- Accounting
- Economics
- Information Technology
- Legal Studies
- Management
- Marketing

#### Bachelor of Science / Bachelor of Teaching

*Major teaching fields*

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Food & Nutrition
- Geography
- Information Technology
- Mathematics
- Physics

*Minors*

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Food & Nutrition
- Geography
- Information Technology
- Mathematics
- Physics

contact the  
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