

# TEACH JOURNAL

OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION



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EDITOR  
Lana Hibbard  
email: [TEACH.editor@avondale.edu.au](mailto:TEACH.editor@avondale.edu.au)

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Ministry Of Teaching

# EDITORIAL

**I hope you have a good day. I hope you enjoy your holiday. People usually hope for things or events that seem likely or at least possible. When practical ways of achieving a desired outcome are exhausted, people often resort to hope. I hope I pass the test. I hope the equipment works.**

On a more formal level, hope theory involves a person's ability to conceptualise their *goals* (which act as an anchor and a way to measure hope), develop *pathways* to achieve those goals, and perceived ability to identify and develop ways to achieve goals (*agency*) (Snyder, Feldman, et al., 2002). Each of these components starts to develop in early childhood (ibid).

There are a number of reasons why it is helpful to understand students' hope levels. Students with higher hope levels are able to generate more pathways for their goals, which enables them to deal with stress more effectively, allowing them to perform better in academically stressful situations (Lopez, 2008, cited in Huebner, 2009). Higher hope is related to higher scores on achievement tests for grade-school children and higher overall grade point averages for high school (Snyder, Shorey, et al., 2002).

In addition, research has shown that the way in which people think about their goals (amount of hope) directly influences both their physical and emotional well-being. For instance, Snyder, Shorey, et al. (2002) found positive correlations between hope and self-esteem, perceived problem-solving capabilities, perceptions of control, optimism, positive affect, and positive outcome expectancies.

I hold onto a number of hopes. Many of these hopes relate to short to medium term goals for my family and myself. These are hopes that, at least in my view, are quite likely to be realised and I am continually planning and modifying pathways to achieve the goals from which these hope rise.

However, my most strongly held hopes cannot be so easily rationalised by hope theory. Although I'm not a fan of science fiction, some of the hopes I have could easily be pulled from the scenes of a sci-fi movie: the dead rising, the God of the universe visiting Earth, or an awesome God transforming human beings into His own likeness. These appear to be false hopes, hopes based entirely on fantasy. Yet I hope.

This is not a wishful thinking hope, I have full confidence that these hopes will be realised. I am certain of these hopes because of the

trustworthiness of the God who offers hope. "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:19, NIV).

As a Christian, my hope in God is related to the highest attainment (as eternal life is mine), self-esteem (due to the value placed on me by God), a sense of control (because God is the one in control), optimism (since nothing can separate me from God) and positive outcome expectancies (because God has plans to prosper me).

Because my future is secure and fully satisfied by God, I do not need to be excessively anxious. Without this hope, people tend to focus on their own problems and their own potential, which keeps them from being available to love others. Hope is the source of Christian self-sacrificing love. I don't need to engage in self-preservation or self-enhancement when God is in control. I am confident in my hope for the future, this frees me to be available to love others.

Those who have this hope are called to live it and share it with those they encounter. Christian teachers can act as path builders, directing students to the ultimate source of hope—a hope that will never fade.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13 NIV). **TEACH**

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“**Christian teachers can act as path builders, directing students to the ultimate source of hope—a hope that will never fade**”



[Photography: Ann Stafford]

## Bloggng with young students

**Kelly Jordan**

Teacher, Leopold Primary School, Leopold, Vic

**Last week one of my eight-year-old students emailed me to ask for assistance with her personal blog. In a few days, my class is skyping with a third grade class in California, USA. On any given day, step into my classroom and you'll find students independently operating the interactive whiteboard, computers and iPod touches. A further use of technology and one that's central to my students' learning is our class blog. Every day, my students and I update our blog, view and comment on other class blogs, reflect on our learning and make connections between our lives and the rest of the world. Technology is a big part of my daily classroom program and my students reap the rewards of being 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. I wouldn't have it any other way; perhaps after reading about my journey with blogging, you will see why.**

### What is a blog?

The word *blog* is short for *web log*, a website that is like an online journal. Blogs feature posts, which are regularly written, updated and displayed in reverse chronological order for readers to view and, if they wish, comment on. Anyone can have a blog, there are many different free blogging platforms available online, and there are blogs about every topic you could possibly imagine!

I team teach my class, 2KJ, with Kathleen Morris and her class, 2KM. This year we have a combined class blog, our blog address is <http://2kmand2kj.global2.vic.edu.au>. We publish about three posts per

week, with Kathleen and I taking turns to write the posts. At this stage, our students' role is to *comment* on posts, as they need to build their writing skills before they can write blog posts. Our posts generally focus on what is happening in our classroom, so we write about specific classroom activities, school events, examples of student learning, updates on projects etc. Our posts feature photos, videos, slideshows and other embedded web 2.0 applications where relevant.

### How did I get started?

I have been teaching for eight years, and while I have always had a personal interest in technology and use technology in my everyday life, my use of technological devices in the classroom extended only as far as basic programs on the computers.

It all changed three years ago when Kathleen showed me the blog she had just set up for her class. Her excitement was contagious as she showed me the various features and I began to see the possibilities of what a class blog could offer my students, their families and the community. I set up a blog for my Prep class and gradually began learning the basics, often in my own time. A few parents looked at the blog, a couple of people left comments, the kids enjoyed seeing their photos posted on the blog and I was starting to see how a blog could positively contribute to my students' lives.

Fast forward three years and I have become hooked on blogging and have instilled a passion for blogging into my Grade Two students. It is now embedded in my daily program and my students

*Fast forward three years and I have become hooked on blogging and have instilled a passion for blogging into my Grade Two students*

### 2KM And 2KJ @ Leopold Primary School

Welcome to our blog! We are the children from 2KM and 2KJ at Leopold Primary School. There are 42 of us and our teachers are Mrs Kathleen Morris and Miss Kelly Jordan. We use this space to share all the great things that are happening in our classroom. Please leave a comment!





surprise me every day with the knowledge they acquire through our blog. We have a global audience across many countries and hundreds of visitors view our blog each week.

## How do you blog?

There are many free blogging platforms available online. In Victoria, Global2 (formerly Global Student) is an Edublog campus site which is supported by the Victorian Education Department. Go to <http://global2.vic.edu.au> to quickly and easily set up a blog. Once a blog is set up, you can:

- choose a theme to personalise the appearance of your blog.
- add pages to your blog. These contain static information which readers may want to access regularly (eg. timetables, student profiles, websites to visit etc). They are usually found as tabs across the top of the blog.
- write a welcome post, introducing your class blog to the online world. Remember, each time you write a post, it will appear at the top of the blog. Any static information you want people to access regularly should be written in a *page*.

It is essential to get parent permission for all of your students before you begin the blogging journey. A great part of blogging is that you can display photos and student work but as the blog is a website available for anyone to view, parental permission is required. In my experience, all the parents have been happy for their children to be involved. (Note: you are able to control whether your blog comes up in search engines such as *Google*. I believe that a global audience is crucial to developing a successful blog so I enable my blog to show up in online searches.)

There are many new skills to learn when you begin your blogging journey. It is important to focus on learning one thing at a time; otherwise, it can seem overwhelming and unmanageable! When you view established class blogs, you will see many embedded web 2.0 applications, making it seem daunting for beginners. Start slowly and build your skills gradually. There is excellent online support at The Edublogger website <http://theedublogger.com/>.

One of the key advantages of blogging is the connections made through comments. Initially, it is important to have students and their families viewing the blog and leaving comments. This helps to attract a larger, global audience. For student learning to truly prosper, it is also important to make connections with other class blogs. The interaction of thoughts, ideas and opinions between teachers, students, their families and, eventually a global audience, is a powerful means of learning for students.

Each morning we check the comments we received on our blog overnight. This often leads to interesting discussions. For example, on a recent post, one of our students was involved in a commenting conversation with Mrs Yollis, a third grade teacher in California, USA. In their conversation, they discussed various places and attractions in America and Australia. As a whole class, we got a world map up on our interactive whiteboard and pinpointed the states and attractions in both countries. A simple look at our blog turned into an interesting and in-depth lesson about geography!

I have found that students really get into blogging when they can learn interesting facts about the lives of children in other schools. Collaborating and connecting with others enhances the blogging experience and makes it a more dynamic experience. You can begin a blogging relationship with other classes by simply leaving a comment on their blog. They might then check out your blog and comment, thus the friendship begins! An easy way to 'meet' other classes through blogging is to check out the Edublogger list <http://theedublogger.com/check-out-these-class-blogs/>.

## What are the benefits of blogging?

It was during 2010, while working in a double classroom with Kathleen Morris, that blogging really took off for me, and I discovered the huge benefits it could offer my students.

The five main benefits of blogging we have found are:

**1. Improvement in students' literacy skills:** Blogging is directly related to literacy. We begin our literacy block every day by writing posts, reading and replying to comments on our blog and learning

“*The interaction of thoughts, ideas and opinions between teachers, students, their families and, eventually a global audience, is a powerful means of learning for students*”



from other classes by reading *their* blogs and commenting. The presence of a global audience makes blogging a very authentic way to teach literacy. Through commenting on blogs, our students have conversations with educators and students from all over the world.

Observing the improvement in students' writing skills is truly rewarding. We explicitly teach about writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation, proofreading, using paragraphs, vocabulary, developing a 'writing voice' and more, through commenting on blogs. The contrast in the students' comments from the beginning of a year to the end is incredible. Below is an example of one students' writing development through commenting.

I just love being in your grade and cannot wait to learn all about aboriginals love Bianca (7.02.10)

@ Naomi,

Thank you for your wonderful comment about your years at school.

Yes, school has changed in some ways and in some ways things have stayed the same. How wonderful you were able to play the recorder.

What a messy job it would have been to clean the duster. You would have been covered in chalk dust.

School is so wonderful because of the wonderful use of computers and iPods and of course, technology.

Good to hear from you!

Please visit our blog again,

From Bianca (25.11.10)

**2. Making global connections:** As a young child, my knowledge of geography was very limited. The concept of 'the world' was quite foreign and abstract to me. Now, through blogging, my students have a

great understanding of the continents, time zones, countries, capital cities and how various cultures live. Our class has several fantastic relationships with classes in America, Canada, New Zealand, China and of course, Australia whom we *skype* regularly. The students readily and naturally make numerous comparisons between their lives and the lives of other children, thus bringing the world to life and enriching their understanding of the world in which we live.

**3. Cyber safety:** Our blog gives us an authentic context in which to learn about cyber safety. Students learn the rules of netiquette and appropriate online behaviour including the importance of not revealing personal information in blog comments.

**4. Parent involvement:** Many of my parents subscribe to the blog (an email alert is sent whenever a new post is published) and comment regularly. Blogging allows parents, especially working parents, who may otherwise feel removed from their child's schooling, to observe what is happening and interact with the classroom. The door of the classroom is now truly open; parents and family members love it.

**5. Students' technology skills:** I take every opportunity to explicitly teach skills in ICT that will help students become 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Specific skills students develop include typing, navigating blogs and websites, troubleshooting, using keyboard shortcuts, following web links, searching on Google, and using the help function in programs and websites. Last year I helped several students set up personal blogs. I taught them the basic skills to initially set up and navigate their blogs. They learned many new blogging skills independently and the quality of their blog posts was amazing. These particular students learnt how to use a variety of web 2.0 tools and attracted global audiences. Some of these students were even nominated in the 2010 Edublogs Awards. Now, these same students are teaching their new teachers how to blog!

## Global Projects

Once you have an established class blog and have made strong connections with other classes, you may wish to begin getting involved in global projects that further enhance learning. Kathleen and I, along with our classes, have been involved in several very successful *global projects* over the past 18 months. We are currently involved in two global projects.

“  
**The presence of a global audience makes blogging a very authentic way to teach literacy**  
”



[Images: Kelly Jordan]



1. Flat Stanley: After reading the book *Flat Stanley* (by Jeff Brown), we are collaborating with a class in New Zealand. Each student made their own 'flat person'. The two classes then exchanged 'flat people'. Now, our students each have a flat person to look after and are writing diaries to document what the NZ flat people are getting up to here in Australia. Soon the flat people and the diaries will be once more exchanged.
2. The Postcard Project: Over forty classes worldwide have signed up to a postcard exchange project developed by New Zealand teacher, Sarah Leakey. The postcards, which describe each student's town, are a wonderful way for students to learn about geography and descriptive writing. Read more about the Postcard Project here: <http://leakeysblog.edublogs.org/the-postcard-project/>.

The highlight of our global project experience occurred last year. We wanted to use our blog to do something that would make a difference so Kathleen created the Ugandan Global Project. Our class joined forces with a few of our blogging buddies in America and China to raise money for a primary school in Uganda by holding a run/walk. We raised a total of \$20,000, which was a phenomenal effort. (The school in Uganda is still amazed and grateful for what we achieved.) Students involved in the project learnt about life in a third world country, how they can contribute to change, and the meaning of social conscience. We formed a new blog for the project <http://ugandanglobalproject.blogspot.com/> where each class published posts about the project, and about life in their own countries.

The global projects we have been involved in have been independently organised; however, there are online organisations such as <http://www.iearn.org.au/>, <http://www.epals.com/> and <http://www.ozprojects.edu.au/> that have ideas for projects and classes you can be matched up with. It's simple to sign up and get involved.

### My top tips for class blogging

- **Start slowly**—Focus on learning one or two new blogging skills each week.
- **Make global connections**—Student learning is so much more meaningful and authentic when you interact with a global audience.
- **Reply to comments**—It is essential that you/your students reply to comments on your blog posts so that you have *conversations*. This is where the learning really comes to life.

- **Learn online**—Get involved in blogging by reading other class blogs, signing up to Twitter to learn from other teachers who blog, participating in online PD sessions, or doing your own research.

In my eight years of teaching, nothing has been as meaningful, authentic, powerful and enjoyable for my students and I, as blogging. Blogging has effectively flattened the classroom walls and opened up my classroom to the world, providing my students with endless opportunities to share, create, collaborate and connect with others. Joining the blogging world with my students has been such a rich and diverse experience. I look forward to seeing what else we can learn and achieve together. **TEACH**

Kelly Jordan  
[jordan.kelly.a@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:jordan.kelly.a@edumail.vic.gov.au)  
Twitter: @kellyjordan82

My class blog:  
<http://2kmand2kj.global2.vic.edu.au>

My blog for teachers:  
<http://teachingliteracy.global2.vic.edu.au>

“Blogging has effectively flattened the classroom walls and opened up my classroom to the world, providing my students with endless opportunities to share, create, collaborate and connect with others”



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MinistryOfTeaching

# Developing a classroom culture of thinking

## A whole school approach

**Michael Pohl**

Director, Thinking Education

**One of the primary objectives of schooling should involve the teaching of tools for life-long learning. As a result, many educators place a high priority on empowering students with thinking skills such as the ability to reason, to make informed judgements, to critically evaluate information, and to think both creatively and caringly. Immersion in high order thinking, therefore, should be an integral aspect of learning. This paper discusses the need for a framework that ensures this occurs in every classroom, every day.**

As a consultant visiting schools it became obvious that whilst they had clearly articulated guidelines and policies for a vast array of factors connected to student learning, the teaching of thinking skills across the school was a common exception. It became clear that teachers need a manageable framework for the explicit teaching of thinking skills that will equip students with thinking tools to use throughout their schooling and in the years beyond. Support for this position was enhanced by the work of Dr John Hattie and his team when they undertook a meta-analysis of research on student learning. They noted that the explicit teaching of thinking was one of only two interventions to reach an effect size of 0.8 or better, that being double the average of all interventions considered (Hattie, Biggs & Purdie, 1996).

Pohl (1997) maintains schools would benefit from having a framework for a *whole school approach* to the explicit teaching of thinking skills across the primary grades and in the middle years of schooling. This framework for a whole-school approach forms the basis of this discussion. Schools undertaking this approach devise and adhere to a prescribed *scope and sequence* for the teaching of thinking that immerses students in a wide range of strategies aimed at developing higher order thinking skills.

### What is meant by a thinking culture?

A classroom thinking culture may be best described as a supportive environment in which specific factors

work together in a synergetic fashion to bring about and reinforce the enterprise of productive thinking (i.e. in a critical, creative and caring sense).

An essential element in developing a classroom culture of thinking is the explicit teaching of thinking skills to all students. Developing a thinking culture requires teaching and learning activities that:

- empower students with the language, tools and strategies to engage in a wide range of analytical, critical, creative and caring thinking tasks;
- provide on-going opportunities for developing, practicing and refining the skills of thinking;
- provide instruction and practice in managing, organising and recording thinking; and
- assist in the transfer of skills to everyday life as tools for life-long learning.

Achieving a culture of thinking requires more than a few teachers occasionally using one or two thinking strategies as a part of their normal classroom practice. A whole-school approach that provides a scope and sequence for the introduction of thinking skills at specific year levels or across faculties has a much greater chance of success.

Developing a thinking culture within a school requires that all teachers:

- establish and use an appropriate language of thinking in their classroom;
- are familiar with a diverse range of thinking strategies; and
- make extensive use of graphic organisers to assist students to better manage, organise, record and recall their thinking.

Furthermore, within a thinking culture, it is expected that all students will be progressively exposed to a range of thinking strategies that develop their skills in a range of types of thinking, including: analytical thinking, critical thinking, creative thinking, caring thinking, responding to a wide range of question types, framing questions, using question-generating tools, using graphic organisers to record thinking and to present the products of their thinking, and making decisions and solving problems.

“  
Teachers need a manageable framework for the explicit teaching of thinking skills  
”

The scope of the modules in *Teaching thinking skills in the primary years* (Pohl, 1997) provides the opportunity for students to receive explicit instruction in seven distinct aspects of thinking (all of which are applicable for use in the middle years context).

**Six Hat thinking**—De Bono's strategy to ensure deferred judgement until the problem/issue has been considered from different viewpoints. This strategy can be applied as a shared language of thinking in junior primary classrooms.

**Extended brainstorming**—An eight-part process that goes beyond brainstorming for fluency (numerous ideas) and aims to build flexibility, originality and elaboration of thought. Thinking can then be extended beyond cognitive components to include affective components of curiosity, complexity, risk taking and imagination.

**Questioning techniques**—A pre-requisite skill for inquiry-based learning topics that require students to create their own worthwhile questions for investigation.

**Thinkers keys**—Tony Ryan's set of thinkers keys are simple but deceptively powerful thinking tools with a strong high-order and affective thinking focus.

**Graphic organisers**—Enhance retention and recall as well as provide a means for recording thoughts more efficiently.

**Bloom's Taxonomy**—This list includes the simplest form of thinking—remembering—followed by understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and finally, creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

**Planning/decision-making/problem solving**—Provides an opportunity for students to apply previously taught strategies within a framework for working with real or real-to-life problems.

Framing these models and strategies into a sequence for explicit teaching at specific year levels and/or by different faculty groups ensures that *all* students become familiar with *all* approaches to thinking in a systematic fashion. This allows senior secondary students to enter this phase of their education with an extensive range of tools, skills and strategies that enhance their ability to work more effectively and efficiently.

## Developing a whole-school approach

In developing a whole school approach, teachers decide when it is most appropriate to introduce specific strategies. Modules that introduce tools students need to revisit many times throughout their schooling should appear early within an agreed sequence. Explicit teaching of the more complex thinking frameworks and strategies should be delayed until the later years.

Although teachers will attend to the explicit skilling of students in accordance with the agreed scope and sequence for their school, they are not precluded from using tools or strategies outside of their particular year level/faculty.

There are a number of key issues to be addressed in developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking (e.g. staff training and development, tracking students' understanding of thinking strategies, and implementing indicators of successful intervention). A recent publication, *Developing a thinking curriculum at your school* (Pohl, 2007), outlines how some schools in Australia and New Zealand have tackled these issues.

## Conclusion

A culture of thinking is a double-sided coin. One side is what teachers do to develop the culture while the other is what students do within that culture of thinking. Most importantly, both occur within an environment that:

- does not see the teaching of thinking as an add-on to an already overcrowded curriculum;
- enables students to reason, think and solve problems that go beyond routine types of operation to engage in complex thinking that can be applied to new situations and unfamiliar problems;
- relates thinking and learning strategies to discipline-based knowledge;
- encourages students to learn how to learn and to become motivated, self-regulated, lifelong learners; and
- infuses thinking into every teaching and learning activity—every lesson, every day.

## TEACH

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You may contact Michael Pohl at [www.thinkingeducation.com.au](http://www.thinkingeducation.com.au) or [mpohl@thinkingeducation.com.au](mailto:mpohl@thinkingeducation.com.au)

“Framing these models and strategies into a sequence for explicit teaching at specific year levels and/or by different faculty groups ensures that all students become familiar with all approaches to thinking in a systematic fashion”



## The Transformational Planning Framework

### A pathway to holistic biblical teaching

**Lanelle Cobbin**

Curriculum Specialist, New Zealand Pacific Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

**“In the teaching of Religious Education, there is a danger of remaining in the realm of information, rather than enter the arena of formation”**

*In Miss Versteynan's infant's classroom in Wellington, the children are exploring the story of Baby Moses. They've just listened to the song 'Close to your Heart' and have reflected on the fact that, like Jocabed held Moses close to her heart while they were separated, that's where Jesus holds us while we're living apart. The atmosphere is reverent. The children are reflective as they return to their desks to draw a picture of themselves nestled near Jesus' heart. Then it begins. Jeremiah launches into a song; a personal song, a new song emerging directly from his own heart: "Jesus... I love you, You are so close to my heart". Others weave in their own little melodic compositions into a web of praise. Miss Versteynan pauses in her flurry to gather materials for the next lesson and drinks in the God-moment. Something just happened. She smiles.*

*In Miss Gibson's Yr 9 Class, the boys have begun to sit up the front. Their eyes are focused, their body-language, engaged. Questions fly (tough ones). The bell goes, but they stay, clustered around Miss Gibson's desk, peppering more questions, hungry for more. "That class went so fast Miss," declares Denzel. "Time flies when you're having fun!" she replies, gathering the resources from class. "Yeah", he says, surprised by an apparent epiphany, "I did have fun!"*

#### Introduction

**Seeing with new eyes**

**In his book, *To know as we are known*, Parker Palmer asserts that there are two ways of viewing the world—through the eye of the mind or the eye of the heart (Palmer, 1993). Our dominant choice, he declares, has been to see through the eye of the mind, a world of fact and reason.**

It [the eye of the mind] is a cold and mechanical place. We have built our lives there because it seemed predictable and safe. Today, in the age of nuclear science, our mind-made world has been found flawed and dangerous, even lethal. So we

open the eye of the heart and see another sight: a world warmed and transformed by the power of love and a vision of community beyond the mind's capacity to see. We cannot forsake our hearts and yet we cannot abandon our minds. (Palmer, 1993, p.23)

Palmer contends that what is needed is whole-sight. Either eye is simply not enough. Mind and heart must unite to offer whole-sight—"single, steady and whole" (Ibid). As we consider the pursuit of biblical curriculum that is whole and balanced, his metaphor offers some rich insight.

#### Our mission as teachers of the Bible

For the Christian educator, the formation of faith is close to our *raison d'être*. It is a mission born millennia ago by God himself in Matthew 28, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (vs. 19). This invitation launched for Christians the most momentous endeavour one can be involved in, and it is no less relevant for Christian schools. With this great commission, transformation became mission (Hull, 2006) and set us on the path of whole-sighted purpose. This pursuit of transformation through the growing of disciples has shaped Christian education. "The work of education and the work of redemption are one" (White, 1903, p. 16). Such a declaration led to Ellen White's<sup>1</sup> counsel for the teaching of Bible to "have our freshest thought, our best methods and our most earnest effort" (1913, p. 181). Knight's question a quarter of a century ago still holds relevance, "Are our instructional programs structured to reach the desired destination?" (1985, p. 175).

We live in the aftermath of an era where fact and reason have been enthroned and the *eye of the mind* has dominated. However, God doesn't want walking encyclopedias of data but faithful followers. Intellectual truth is not necessarily a catalyst for heartfelt passion for God. Information alone can create a wall rather than a bridge. In the teaching of Religious Education, there is a danger of remaining in the realm of *information*, rather than enter the arena of *formation*.

An extremely real problem here is that it is infinitely easier to develop a course of religious instruction that passes on information than to prepare one that brings a student into a personal confrontation and/or relationship with the living God. The latter, however, is the ideal that we must seek to accomplish despite its difficulties. (Knight, 1985, p. 178–179)

## What if?

In pursuit of curriculum possibilities that lead to transformation, ‘What if?’ questions need to be asked.

- *What if* we were to undergo a seismic shift in our thinking and embrace a spiritual formation approach to biblical teaching rather than simply an educational one?
- *What if* we seriously considered answers to the questions that would arise from such a shift?
- *What if* we could provide a practical tool that could hold us to account with the fusion of philosophy and practice?
- *What if* student engagement was a driving consideration in everything we planned?
- *What if* we really became passionate about moving our collective teaching to a higher plane of student engagement and ownership of learning?
- *What if* we could scaffold encounters with God?
- And *what if* we became so inspired about our new modus operandi that we didn’t see the use of such a framework as an exercise in compliance, but as a means of getting our students excited about God?

A request for resources from Adventist Educators in New Zealand some four years ago propelled the writer on a quest to consider these questions. Observation, reflection, research and prayer in the ensuing time distilled a number of key principles that helped fashion a planning framework that can offer a possible path forward in the specific pursuit of spiritual formation.

## Spiritual-formation as a driving motivation

The landscape of spiritual formation is peppered with rich definitions, emphasising the dynamic relationship Christians have with their God.

The movement of the entire life towards God. (Maxson, 2006, p. 2)

Learning to walk routinely and easily in the character and power of Jesus Christ. (Willard, cited in Gangel, 2005, p. 154)

God getting into us and us getting into God. (Stevens & Green, 2003, p. xi)

Spiritual formation harnesses a ‘whole-sighted’ approach to a relationship with God. While there are definitive cognitive components to faith, spiritual formation focuses on the way in which objective knowing can become personal knowing (Benner, 2003).

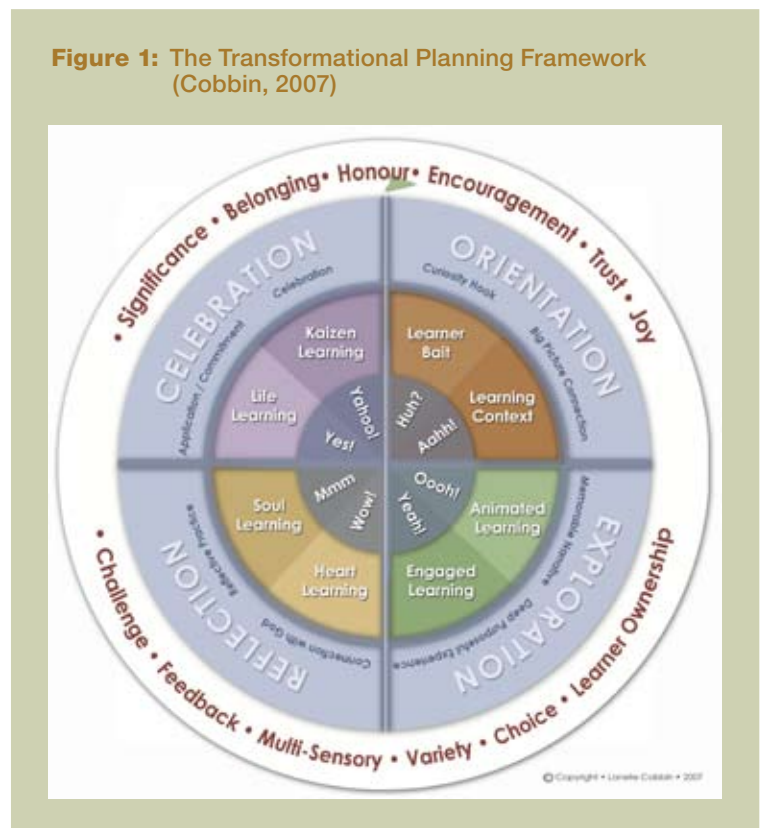
“What if we could scaffold encounters with God?”

## The Transformational Planning Framework

The *Transformational Planning Framework* (see Figure 1) offers a process the Bible teacher can follow to teach biblical content with whole-sight and integrate the principles of spiritual formation into classroom practice. It is based on concepts that a pantheon of thought-leaders in education, faith, learning theory, spiritual formation and sociology herald as important. The planning framework offers a teaching/learning trajectory that is holistic, intentionally simple and purposefully flexible, inviting rich variety to be applied at different age levels and cultural contexts<sup>2</sup>.

The *Transformational Planning Framework* invites teachers to inject components into learning experiences that will allow students to be emotionally engaged; see the big picture; respond with depth, rigour and creativity; be touched at a heart level;

Figure 1: The Transformational Planning Framework (Gobbin, 2007)



# Teaching & Professional Practice

personally reflect; intentionally worship; develop an authentic connection with God; be challenged by an obedient response; share meaningfully; and truly celebrate who God is.

## Emotional engagement: The core

Emotional engagement is at the heart of the *Transformational Planning Framework*. In each phase of the teaching process, planning focuses on what will invigorate students' engagement through positive emotional states that are reshaped with movement to a new phase. Eric Jensen's meta-analysis of brain research led him to promote the management of emotional learning states as a prominent educational priority. "Manage [learning] states well and the learning will take care of itself" (2003, p. 12). Clearly, emotions are the glue of retention.

## Learning: A focus

The second layer of the *Transformational Planning Framework* focuses on learning. Claxton's (2008) Generation 4 learning-to-learn principles inform the design of this layer in which student learning drives teachers' planning and practice. Students are encouraged to take charge of their learning journey. The focus shifts from how teachers can help students learn better, to how teachers can help students become better learners, through offering help as a 'learning-power coach'.

## ORIENTATION

### Learner Bait

(Curiosity Hook • Huh?)

*Mr Harrold enters his Year 7 class wearing military dress. Students enter to epic music and launch into the subject of the war in heaven by estimating the bleed-line of ink when dropped onto paper towel. How far can one action go? Sometimes small actions can result in far greater circles of influence than we anticipate.*

*Mrs Stanton's Year 5 class is about to explore the story of Elijah. They play a game of hoops and balls to launch the idea that we need to work with God not against Him in His plans for us.*

The purpose of the first phase in the teaching of any biblical unit is to emotionally hook students into the learning by arousing their curiosity and making them 'hunger and thirst after righteousness'.

The introduction of a lesson or new topic is a crucial phase. Brain research suggests that the brain has a high attentional bias that is especially strong to something new or novel (Jensen, 2000).

The introduction is essential for eliciting the mental state or mindset that will make the remaining minutes maximally productive. Whatever you do, don't skip this stage. (Jensen, 2000, p. 70)

Not only does this phase act as learner bait for the forthcoming learning experience, but it also serves to identify a key theme in the proposed topic. The activities will invariably be experiential in nature and involve an interactive, relational activity or emotionally engaging story. In each topic, there is a truth for students to embrace, and a Person of Truth with whom to connect. Engagement towards this end fashions this phase.

## Learning Context

(Big-picture Connection • Aahh!)

*What was God's dream for Israel? Mrs Truscott's Year 8 class contextualise their historical journey with candles. Israel was to be a shining light for God in their world. As the history is reviewed, candles are lit and snuffed out to highlight their fickle following. Mt Carmel is crunch time in light of this.*

*Meanwhile, Year 5 explore a similar concept by studying maps of Palestine to note the strategic placement of the Israelites in the then-known world.*

In many ways, biblical curriculum is an exercise in meaning-making and life-relevance. Our job is to help them discover such relevance. Religious studies lessons create opportunities for students to see the great meta-narrative, how they fit into it, and how it might help them answer the big questions of life.

When students are bored and turned off, something very wrong has occurred. A great majority of the time, that 'great wrong' is meaningless curriculum. More than 95% of the discipline problems disappear when meaning comes back into the curriculum. (Kovalik 1994, p. 52)

*Learning Context* calls us to account to contextualise the learning and offer big-picture connections. It encourages the identification of learning intentions and links between units, lessons, ideas, meta-narrative themes and prior knowledge. Topics need to be contextualised. These connections may be quite brief in nature, but they are essential to students' holistic understanding of their learning.

## EXPLORATION

### Animated Learning

(Memorable Narrative • Oooh!)

*In Mrs Butler's Year 1 class, the children are exploring*

*In each topic, there is a truth for students to embrace, and a Person of Truth with whom to connect*



*the story of Joseph. God has a plan for Joseph's life and He is weaving it together. As the story is shared, colours and textures are used to explore the emotions in the story. Mrs Butler weaves materials into hessian to represent the different moments in Joseph's life. Each one is symbolic. The children use this visual motif to offer clues to recall the elements in his story.*

*In Mr Parker's Year 2 class, a knock on the door reveals 'Peter' who dramatically shares his experience of getting out of the boat and walking on the water to Jesus.*

*Animated Learning* explores the teacher-facilitated voyage into the biblical 'story' that will form the foundation of the unit. While story is a potent pedagogical approach at any level, the preeminent role we ultimately play as a Christian teacher is to be a teller of THE story; the story of God.

Many stories within this great STORY will be celebrated within a biblical curriculum. It is important that these be delivered in a manner that is maximally engaging, allowing the narrative to be memorable. To this end, passion, energy and enthusiasm in delivery are key. Given the diversity of faith-groups found in most classes, there is a challenge to captivate those who have not heard the story before, whilst adding layers of emotional response previously unconsidered by those who are familiar with the story. There is power in story—power to engage and move students in an affective way. Teachers must harness that power.

## Engaged Learning

(Deep, purposeful experiential learning • Yeah!)

*Back in Mrs Butler's Year 1 class, children are brainstorming character qualities of Joseph as seen throughout his life. Each word is shared and justified. Pictures are drawn and are placed with the words on a visual pathway to show how Joseph's character was changing and becoming stronger with each struggle because He trusted God.*

*Students in Mrs Roland's Year 7 class are exploring heaven. Groups circulate in the classroom to read diary entries from 'Jessie' who shares insights about heaven. Information is gleaned by student-pairs and brought back to small groups for organising into a mind-map. A picture and time-line of heaven is created. God has given us enough information to dream big!*

This phase of the unit explores the student's response to the Story of God. Its defining adjective, 'engaged' invites an unleashing of inquiry-based,

thinking-driven pedagogical methods that will encourage students to 'own' the learning process. Students are encouraged to get behind the wheel of their own learning and mentally grapple with content (Sizer & Sizer, 1999); discuss it, synthesise it, make new discoveries about biblical culture; and be open to new places God wants to take them.

In this phase, teachers use their knowledge of learning styles, intelligences, and brain-compatible learning to ensure that students are challenged and fully engaged in meaningful discoveries. Learning is not the consequence of teaching or writing, but rather of thinking (McLaren, 2004). Talking is not teaching and listening is not learning. Similarly, crosswords and find-a-words do not grow faith (Schultz & Schultz, 1996). Critical thinking leads to principled reasoning that allows truth to become part of a mature faith (Dudley, 1999). Students are encouraged to own this thinking and grappling.

## REFLECTION

It could be said that the phases within the first half of the *Transformational Planning Framework* are esteemed in all good teaching practice. It is now that a transition is made from the cognitive realm to the spiritual, affective one. Here, educational concerns are strengthened by a spiritual formation emphasis. There is a movement from the eye of the mind to the eye of the heart as the elements that promote faith are brought into play.

## Heart Learning

(Connection with God • Wow!)

*Back in Mrs Butler's Year 1 'Joseph' classroom, the woven creation, now all trimmed with gold, is fashioned into a coat. Children are photographed in the coat, for God has a beautiful dream for **their** life, and He is weaving it together. They take time to thank Him quietly for this dream.*

*Meanwhile, in Mr Walker's Year 8 classroom, Moses is the focus of study. After listening to a moving song about being willing to do God's work, students select an emotion card that captures how they feel about the lyrics of the song, and share their thoughts.*

*Heart Learning* provides the opportunity for transformation to take place. Here, it is acknowledged that Truth is a person with heart, skin and lips, and that His truth can transform. The preeminent purpose in this phase is to connect students with God, and have them give Him permission to touch their hearts and lives. Gillespie speaks of the importance of such a focus.

*“While story is a potent pedagogical approach at any level, the preeminent role we ultimately play as a Christian teacher is to be a teller of THE story; the story of God”*

Men and women who teach the scriptures have a responsibility to move beyond the content and cognitive insights...beyond conceptual theology and textual exegesis to inspiration (worship, praise, gratitude, forgiveness and personal freedom). (Gillespie, 2006, p. 35)

“Inviting ‘transformational’ application rather than simply ‘informational’ application is a vital emphasis”

Awe is another goal of *Heart Learning*; it is the means by which transformation can happen. “The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe” (Heschel, cited Schultz & Schultz, 1999, p. 47). Awe provides a moment in time when words such as ‘grace’ can pierce through the mind and reach the heart. Only when the heart is touched can the life be changed from the inside out.

Stepping onto the road of Christian spiritual transformation requires an encounter with the living God. This encounter may be gradual or it may be sudden. But it will always involve a turning and an awakening. (Benner, 2003, p. 74)

*Heart Learning* creates an environment that invites such a ‘turning’ and ‘awakening’.

## Soul Learning

(Reflective Practice • Mmm)

*In Mrs Harrison’s Year 3 classroom, students have explored the gift of Canaan given to the Israelites at the battle of Jericho. It was a gift Israel was to remember. Students reflect on 10 things they think God wants them to remember and then fashion their list on a personal ‘altar’; a symbol of remembering. Lists are shared with others.*

*In Mr Kelly’s Year 7 class, students are focusing on the story of the cross. In a time of reflection, they journal their thoughts, then creatively respond to the message of the cross. Each offers their ‘response’ at the foot of a constructed cross in their classroom.*

Brain research tells us that our emotional and moral self grows in periods of quiet reflection. The Bible invites us to “be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

In authentic education, silence is treated as a trustworthy matrix for the inner work students must do, a medium for learning of the deepest sort. (Palmer, 1998, p. 80)

Personal reflection through journaling, drawing, pair-sharing, mind-mapping or responses to reflective questions are key to personalising faith and flow naturally from the connection with God that has just occurred during *Heart Learning*. Valuing time for this kind of quiet reflection is important if the learning is to

go internal and allow God’s Spirit to convict. It is here in *Soul Learning* that the fissure between the cognitive and the spiritual can be not just mended, but fused.

## CELEBRATION

### Life Learning

(Application and commitment • Yes!)

*In Mrs Ellis’s Kindergarten class, the children have learnt that Moses was a leader who served others. They select a name of a classmate and draw a picture of something that person does to serve others. They place it in a ‘basket boat’ and float it across a container of water to their friend to say thank you to them for their kindness. (Much blowing involved)*

*Back in Mrs Truscott’s Yr 7 class, student questions posed at the beginning of their ‘War in Heaven’ unit are drawn out, redistributed and answered in a sharing shuffle.*

The phases of *Heart Learning* and *Soul Learning* naturally flow into *Life Learning* with its focus on transformational application and commitment.

God’s word is not a collection of facts to be temporarily memorised. His Word is a guide for how we should live today, for how we should know Him, for how we should deepen our relationship with Him. After all, God wants us to worship Him, not His book. (Shultz & Shultz, 1999, p. 158)

“No religious truth is truly learned unless it makes a difference in one’s life” (Gillespie, 2006, p. 35). Inviting ‘transformational’ application rather than simply ‘informational’ application is a vital emphasis of this phase. Students are presented with questions such as: How does this story/passage/theme apply to my life? How will knowing this encourage me to live my life differently this recess? What does it really mean to me? There is an invitation to be “doers of the word, and not just hearers of the word” (James 1:22).

## Kaizen Learning

(Celebration • Yahoo!)

*Back in Mrs Harrison’s Year 3 class, Jericho, Israel’s wonderful new home is celebrated Jewish-style by singing ‘Hava Nagila’ (‘Let us rejoice. Let us rejoice and be happy... Awake with a happy heart!’)*

*In Mrs Truscott’s Yr 7 ‘War in Heaven’ class, students celebrate God and His victory by ‘toasting’ Him with sparkling grape juice. Each student shares something great about the qualities God has shown in this story.*

Religious Education should be the most celebrated of learning areas, for it is in this arena that things of God are pursued. ‘Kaizen’ is a Japanese word that means to honour the incremental steps toward success. Delight makes authentic learning successful.

Somewhere along the line, the academic community seems to have forgotten that one of the most important things to learn is a love for learning. Few people gain a love for anything that is marinated in drudgery. People learn more—and learn to love learning—when they enjoy the process. (Schultz & Schultz, 1999, p. 104)

Honouring the small steps within the learning process is a powerful learning tool, not only because it encourages retention through the engagement of positive emotions, but also because it associates joy, delight and fun with Godly things. The celebration may take many forms, ranging from meaningful ‘rituals’ to simple parties, but all should be authentic and full of delight. Once embedded in practice, be assured, students have been known to ask for it.

## Conclusion

The *Transformational Planning Framework* offers a deliberate way forward for religious education in Adventist schools in Australia and New Zealand. It is designed to protect us from distraction and propel us toward the goal of spiritual formation. But the power is not in the program. It never was. The power comes from God and is lived through the life and words of the teacher. In light of this, teachers, as spiritual facilitators, need to be what they desire their students to become. Teaching comes more from our ‘being’ than our ‘doing’.

The greatest thing we have to offer our people is not our education. It is not our good ideas. It isn’t even our gifts and abilities. It is the fruit of the time we have spent with the Saviour, the utterly unique and unparalleled thing that happens to us when we are simply in His presence. (Patterson, 1999, p. 52)

A life that is lived out of such an overflow allows God to do what He loves to do: pursue, connect, save, and transform.

The *Transformational Planning Framework* can be utilised to plan experiences that shape lives for God; develop tools for nurturing a robust religious belief; encourage spiritual encounters with God; and inspire these same lives to be world-changers, echoing the Great Commission spoken by Jesus Himself.

*Back in Ms Gibson’s Year 9 class, in comes Tara, (you know her, she’s the too-cool-for-school one in the third row) “Miss, last night I couldn’t sleep, so I kept reading in my Bible about Jesus dying on the cross, I just kept reading and reading, I couldn’t stop.” Ms Gibson smiles.*

**“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6 NIV) TEACH**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ellen White was instrumental in identifying many of the principles that shape the educational work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

<sup>2</sup> This *Transformational Planning Framework* is now the foundational structure of the *Encounter Bible Curriculum* being developed by Adventist Education in both New Zealand and Australia. The framework can be adapted beyond the context of religious education, for the intentional integration of faith and learning in all learning areas. Adventist Schools in New Zealand are using it for this purpose.

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“Religious Education should be the most celebrated of learning areas, for it is in this arena that things of God are pursued”



# Eternal H&S Issues

**As I write, a teacher friend of mine is driving northwards in Japan. As a young teacher in a school about an hour's drive north of Tokyo, she survived the earthquake, although aftershocks had everyone's nerves jangling. She was not directly impacted by the Tsunami and felt relatively safe on that score. Then came the news that the nuclear power station at Fukushima Daiichi was in trouble. She packed her possessions and drove south, hoping to find a safe haven beyond the threat of radiation. Now, after some days, she is heading back to attend the funeral of the principal of her school.**

Nothing quite prepares us for disasters such as the people of Japan are suffering. There are times when all the Health and Safety rules and regulations seem to make no difference, when prior planning is overturned by cataclysm, and when infrastructure simply can't cope with the demands made on it.

This is when despair stalks among the shattered buildings and crumpled cars. But it is also the season of heroes: heroes who voluntarily expose

themselves to harmful radiation so that others can be safe; heroes who open their homes to the homeless; heroes who refuse to give up in the face of adversity.

On a different level, disasters can strike our school communities with the same ferocious destructiveness. A student is murdered; a family left bereaved by a horrific accident; a teenager, loses hope and takes her own life. These events take school communities by surprise and despair stalks among the classrooms and on the playing fields. But it is also when heroes rise up. The teacher who takes the time to chat and pray with his students; the classmates who raise money; the staff who encircle a family with love and practical help are all heroes.

We never know when disaster may hit. Does your school have an emergency plan to nurture the hearts and souls of its students through traumatic times? If the Eternal Health and Safety of children is your top priority, what steps are you taking to help them ride out the difficult times and live with assurance in an uncertain world? **TEACH**

*EH&S issues* are a joint initiative between the Adventist Schools Australia Curriculum Unit and Avondale College.

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# Uncle Arthur's posthumous rejoinder<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Maxwell (1896-1970)

Author of *Uncle Arthur's bedtime stories*

## Introduction

**One person sees a vase, another sees two black faces looking at each other. Another image: Is it a fashionable young lady or an old woman? In classic figure/ground visual perception experiments, viewers' 'perceptual sets' and their personal interests, including emphasising some shapes and contours, may strengthen one 'interpretation' more than the other, according to psychologists.**

The article critiquing my *Bedtime stories*, published in a recent issue of *Teach journal of Christian education*,<sup>2</sup> appears to focus on only one interpretation, an imbalance that I believe needs addressing. I acknowledge the critique's generosity (however muted) regarding certain aspects of the *Bedtime stories* series and take note of some of the perceived weaknesses in my children's texts. Notwithstanding that Nicholls and Reynaud write from the vantage point of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and with hindsight, there is merit in scrutinising the validity of some of their arguments. Before embarking on this task, however, it seems instructive to provide some general context through reflecting and personal reminiscing.

## Context

In writing *Bedtime stories*, I have always endeavoured to affirm and promote biblical values, by challenging and encouraging children to choose the narrow and hard way that, as Jesus said, leads to life. Thus, all of the stories clearly intended to embody character-building lessons, as explained in the preface of each volume. Reading or listening to the stories was also intended to give children joy and create a sense of wonder; even lead to thinking about how people behave and how a loving God fits into the 'big picture' of the world in which children, their families and communities live. Foremost, it should be remembered that the stories were written for children and not for a deconstruction exercise.

I recognise that authors don't live their lives in vacuums. Their texts are cultural products or artefacts; i.e. they are products of particular cultural, social, political, historical and individual milieus. Authors and their texts reflect this in varying degrees (an issue my critics don't give

much attention to). I must concede that some of my stories—others would say, many—are a product of the spirit and culture of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian England; a culture in which I spent some of my formative years and which stands in stark contrast to post-modernity—the defining cultural state of contemporary society. Interestingly, a Chinese proverb reminds us that the last thing that fish discover is water; an analogical reference to our personal and collective reality that is often comprised of composite layers of unquestioned norms and cultural blind spots. I plead guilty; and it seems reasonable to claim that my critics are equally 'culture bound'.

My last book of stories was authored more than forty years ago and the world has seen dramatic socio-political, economic, environmental and technological changes since then, presenting today's children with a set of entirely new challenges. I am acutely aware that 'new wine' calls for 'new literary wineskins'. However, the principles and biblical values encapsulated by *Bedtime stories* are still relevant today.

Constructive critiques of children's literature texts should not be ignored. The *Bedtime stories* series has been seriously faulted on numerous grounds by Nicholls and Reynaud. The question is: Is the offered criticism valid?

## The use of critical literacy to view *Uncle Arthur's bedtime stories*

Critical literacy is not a discrete category of literary analysis.<sup>3</sup> It may be perceived as functioning on a continuum ranging from 'reflective-rational' to 'radical-extreme'. I readily concede the educational value, often in school settings, of examining print, visual, social and political texts with searching questions such as outlined on school education authorities' curriculum websites; for example: "Why am I/are we reading this text? Who benefits from this text? What is the text about? What view of the world is the text presenting? How do I feel about the text? How many interpretations of the text are possible?"<sup>4</sup> However, my support for such 'structuring' is not unconditional. At the core of any credible analysis, at whatever cognitive level, is the compatibility (the 'fit') between the issue(s) being investigated and the methodological approach

“The principles and biblical values encapsulated by *Bedtime stories* are still relevant today”

employed. On that basis, I propose that the validity of many of my critics' conclusions may be questioned.

In the first instance, *Bedtime stories* should be viewed, I believe, through the innocence of children's eyes (despite their naïveté) rather than through the lens of critical literacy; Nicholls and Reynaud have done the latter. While it might be asserted, they are entitled to a 'free reading'—'against the grain'—and that literary critics do not need to explain their adopted approach, Colin Greene and Stephen Holmes revealingly point out,

[M]ethodology is not an indifferent net—it catches what it intends to catch... [furthermore] socio-scientific analysis and description *are not value-neutral*, but are undertaken from a variety of committed positions, with the implicit values determining the fields of investigation *and the results*<sup>5</sup> (emphases added).

There is thus a real danger that some methodologies or approaches—notably as they become more dominant paradigms—rather than yielding significant insights merely become vehicles for driving particular agendas, embodying their own *overt and covert* perspectives. American educational philosopher Maxine Greene hence warns of the possibility of critical praxis itself being "a colonising and patronising practice [that is] distinctly male and Euro-centric in tone."<sup>6</sup>

The use of different literary lenses—particularly radical ones—results not only in different foci, but, more importantly, in different pictures of the world. What kind of worlds would we encounter if we engaged in a feminist reading of *Little red riding hood*, a Marxist critique of Jesus' parable of *The workers in the vineyard*, or a Freudian interpretation of Hans Christian Andersen's, *The emperor's new clothes*? It could be claimed that we might gain some new insights. On the other hand, a 'Freudian world' of human relations, for example, could turn out to be extremely narrow and distorted. A case in point is Mem Fox's, *Feathers and fools*—a delightful story about peacocks, swans and the horribleness and futility of war. The internationally famous Australian author of children's books, when informed that according to postmodernist critics her children's text was, "a skilful piece of propoganda for the cause of male supremacy", told *The weekend Australian* that she found this view enraging. "It just drives you mad", she said; "it really does."<sup>7</sup> It is evident that advocates of critical literacy may end up with serious 'refractive distortions' of reality, when they use the methodology as a prism through, or a mirror in which they view life.

**The use of different literary lenses—particularly radical ones—results not only in different foci, but, more importantly, in different pictures of the world**

A pertinent and severe assessment of critical literacy (targeting the radical end of the continuum) is made in an article in the *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society*:

In a work significantly titled *The limits of interpretations* (1990), Umberto Eco complained—in my view, rightly—of 'a general tendency' in recent critical studies to legitimise a 'free reading' which cedes the initiative to 'the will of the interpreters' The literary text, thus manipulated by the interpretive will, is forced to give up its aesthetic autonomy. As an example of this manipulative will, [post-modern philosopher] Richard Rorty, apparently without disapproval, refers to a critic who 'asks neither the author nor the text about their intentions, but simply beats the text into shape which will suit his own purpose'. The idiom of violence here is striking: ignoring any possibility that the text may possess a degree of objective inviolability as object-in-itself, the critic feels free to commit ideological rape, mastering the text and making it serve his/her own agenda.<sup>8</sup>

The above carries echoes from Lewis Carroll's, *Through the looking glass*:

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more or less."  
"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."  
"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "*which is to be master—that's all*"<sup>9</sup> (emphasis added).

Critical theories of literacy provide us with a *socio-political* picture of the world. They appreciably draw on and have been greatly influenced by critical social theory which asserts that:

Meanings are always contested (never givens), and are related to ongoing struggles in society for the possession of knowledge, power, status, and material resources. These struggles over meaning and resources are undertaken by unequal groups. That is, certain groups have the advantage in such struggles because they have maintained control over society's ideologies, institutions, and practices.<sup>10</sup>

Central and foremost to a critical literacy reading of a text, according to Cervetti et al., are "issues of power and explicitly attend[ing] to differences across race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on."<sup>11</sup> These are regarded as indicators of systemic injustices and legitimate '*leitmotifs*' for critical literacy. Hence texts, "being products of ideological and socio-political forces, must be continually subjected to methods of social critique."<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, such an interrogative stance taken by critical literacy has been referred to as "the hermeneutics of suspicion."<sup>13</sup> Texts are thus perceived as



akin to ‘Trojan horses’ with the potential of breaching readers’ cognitive defences and either surreptitiously indoctrinating or ‘tranquillising’ them; ergo the ‘need’ for critical literacy and its taking on the role of ‘literary umpire’.

Unless Nicholls and Reynaud advocate ‘selective application’, critical literacy’s consistent acceptance and application simultaneously would also seriously undermine the truth claims of Scripture. The promise of *openness of meaning* that critical literacy offers may alternately turn into unconditional relativism and extreme subjectivity and hold all spiritual truths ‘hostage’ to context and culture. The epistemological and ontological assumptions of critical literacy are outlined in the literature:

What counts as knowledge is not natural or neutral; [it] is always based on the discursive rules of a particular community, and is thus ideological. Reality cannot be known definitely, and cannot be captured by language; decisions about truth, therefore, cannot be based on a theory of correspondence with reality, but must instead be made locally.<sup>14</sup>

## Responding to criticism

### 1. Damaging religious effects

Nicholls and Reynaud cited negative testimonial evidence, such as that from McNiely [sic]—an unlisted reference—that attributes tension and loss of confidence and faith to her interaction with *Uncle Arthur’s bedtime stories*. This genuinely concerns me. It is hoped that such experiences are rare exceptions. Given the datum of (assumedly) McNeily’s<sup>15</sup> cognitive dissonance when coming face-to-face with tragedy during her childhood, it is questionable whether her *specific* experience can be generalised to a larger population. Hence it seems ironic that the critique cites *selective sampling* as one of the shortcomings of my stories.

Almost all the feedback I have received from children and adults is very positive. The recent online comments by Summer Edward that encompass childhood memories as well as adult reflections are a typical example. She describes my stories as “didactic to say the least, but also entertaining,”<sup>16</sup> and recalls:

I particularly remember one story in which Maxwell writes about his real-life experience of being caught by an incoming tide while walking between two islands. I remember being gripped by the suspense of that story when I read it years ago... Although the books are often described as teaching “Christian values”, I reread some of the stories earlier today (found them online) and don’t find them overly indoctrinating at all. I certainly didn’t grow up in a Seventh-day Adventist home



and as a child the stories didn’t leave a very religious impression on me, although I remember that in many of the stories children would pray to be better boys and girls and the like.<sup>17</sup>

Written for children (not adults), the *Bedtime stories* give due consideration to children’s developmental stages. Developmental literature<sup>18</sup> recognises that when quality of care and maternal relationship during infancy and later childhood “inspires *trust and security*, the child experiences confidence in engaging and exploring the world”<sup>19</sup> (emphasis added). Christina Belcher, drawing on her own personal teaching experience with a secondary school class, reports that when questioned as to what the students most desired at their age, “the answer to my question was, *an adult they could trust*.”<sup>20</sup>

The texts are not about shielding children from the real world. Instead, the issue is one of *developmental and age appropriateness*. Indeed, “there is a right time for everything”<sup>21</sup>; including coming to terms with, why bad things happen to good people and similarly, why the rain is sent to fall on both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). A perusal of *Bedtime stories*—take for instance “The boy who refused a future”, (in book 22) which describes an alcohol-fuelled assault on a woman and her two young children—should reveal that I touch on poverty, disability, adversity, family dysfunction, and emotional pain, but do not *dwell* on them.

Most parents/carers (or classroom teachers) do not introduce their children to situations of distress, doubt, tragedy or seeming contradictions—whether real or imagined—at an early age. An

“The *Bedtime stories* give due consideration to children’s developmental stages”

increase in the level of anxiety may not be helpful, particularly just before bedtime. Correspondingly, airlines do not screen in-flight episodes of *Air crash investigations!*<sup>22</sup> Thus, it should not be surprising that my stories portray the world as ‘friendly’ and present God as a loving Heavenly Father who can be trusted, who cares, and is aware of our fears and human anxieties; “a god of particular providence [who] knows the number of hairs on your head,”<sup>23</sup> rather than a disinterested and cold person, far removed and disengaged from children’s everyday lives; i.e. a non-interventionist God. That decision aligns with developmental theory in general and does not rule out introducing children—*when they are ready*—to exploring cases of *unanswered* prayer. It is generally accepted that younger children, even some adults, are incapable of dialectical thinking. It “integrates dimensions of contradiction, change and system-transformation... when structures undergirding their sense of self/world coherence are challenged.”<sup>24</sup>

Further, this position is supported by psychologist James Fowler’s influential *Stages of faith*,<sup>25</sup> which, drawing on the work of Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson, posits six stages of faith. He contends that ‘stage 1 faith’, *intuitive-projective faith*, (typical of 3–7 year olds) is magical, imaginative, and illogical and abounds in fantasy, particularly about God’s power. During the next stage of faith development, *mythic-literal faith*, (typical of middle childhood, ages seven to pre-adolescence), “The individual takes the myths and stories of religion literally and believes simplistically in the power of symbols. In a religious context, this stage usually involves reciprocity: God sees to it that those who follow his laws are rewarded and that those who do not are punished.”<sup>26</sup>

Each stage has its proper time of ascendancy. For persons in a given stage at the right time *for their lives*, the task is the full realisation and integration of the strengths and graces of that stage rather than rushing on to the next stage. Each stage has the potential for wholeness, grace and integrity, and for strengths sufficient for either life’s blows or blessings.<sup>27</sup>

My critics object to a child’s simplified and unambiguous moral order in which good and bad actions are swiftly responded to. Instead, they advance their own view on how children’s faith development *should* proceed—framed within an *adult* moral universe—using, in some respects, critical literacy to underpin it. Early childhood educators would not try to overlay a child’s perception of ‘conservation of mass’ with their adult view, even though the child’s limited comprehension

does not correspond with reality. Given time and experience, however, a fuller understanding should develop.

## 2. Damaging social effects

Nicholls and Reynaud also criticised *Bedtime stories* because the text was used to justify the views of white supremacists. Such an extreme reading, I believe, is an unwarranted inclusion in the critique and requires a firm rebuttal. While my early texts in particular—including the illustrations—lack a broad multi-cultural dimension, the suggestion that my stories ‘lend support’ to racist propaganda, is clearly one of ‘guilt by association’. Using the same ‘logic’, it could be argued that John Eldredge’s book, *Wild at heart*<sup>28</sup>, is responsible for the pathological killings and horrific crimes of narco-terrorists in Mexico.<sup>29</sup> For someone to co-opt another’s text, assuming it for their own nefarious purposes, does *not* constitute a ‘cause and effect’ link. Consequently, such tenuous claims should not be given any credibility.

## 3. Author–reader concerns

Writing texts such as *Bedtime stories* involves several challenges. How should authors engender mutual trust between parents/carers and children as well as take on a mentoring role that fosters biblical values of hope, love, honesty, compassion, selflessness, responsibility and obedience etc. without being perceived as “patriarchally authoritative [and assuming] a significant God-like presence in the texts?”<sup>30</sup> The danger of being caricatured becomes obvious.

Nicholls and Reynaud suggest that my editing of stories caused confusion over objectivity by blurring the demarcation between fact and fiction. I can only respond by repeating what I have previously publicly stated. The stories that are sent to me by children are edited to reflect their personal ‘true-to-life’ experiences. Essentially, except for some enhancements of expression and structure, they are *narratives by children, of children, for children*. That being the case, it is not entirely unexpected that many may be categorised in the genre of ‘classic realism’. Furthermore, it is more common for children to relate positive prayer experiences, rather than share negative ones; a trend which I did not discourage. The following is a fair representation of my situation:

Because he was seeking to strengthen the faith of the young, he emphasised the positive. Significantly, Maxwell presented only one or two such stories in his first ten books but the number increased to nearly two-thirds of the stories in the final volumes, possibly the result of an increased response from his readers.<sup>31</sup>

“Essentially, except for some enhancements of expression and structure, they are narratives by children, of children, for children”

## 4. Simplifying the complexities of life

My critics focus on truth being a ‘casualty’ in *Bedtime stories*. As evidence, they cite examples of simplification of circumstances, presentation of a sanitised world and use of linear ‘cause and effect’ stories, in which good is rewarded and transgression punished. First, I point out that it seems an oxymoron that critical literacy, steeped in post-modernism, would entertain the notion of ‘truth’, given that by definition, “the meaning of a text [and by implication ‘truth’] is dependent on the perspective of the one who enters into dialogue with it; it has as many meanings as it has readers (or readings).”<sup>32</sup> Second, I refer back to ‘developmental and age appropriateness’ and the arguments of Ireland and Fowler to rebut the critics’ claims and their disparaging of my G-rated children’s texts. Thus, one may justifiably decide to ignore certain narratives in the book of *Judges*, overlook some details of the Passion Week, and not dwell on specifics of the punishment of the wicked in The Final Judgement. As children grow into adolescents and employ abstract thinking, they are ready to test and expand their view of the world. The Apostle Paul’s words seem fitting in this context.

When I was a child I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I became a man my thoughts grew far beyond those of my childhood, and now I have put away the childish things. In the same way, we can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see him in his completeness, face to face (1 Cor. 13:11–12, LB).

Further, it is asserted that in my role as self-appointed teacher and transmitter of truth and values, I become complicit in presenting and perpetuating a narrow perspective of life and an unjust world. To encourage children to show compassion is one thing, to sensitise them to radical suffering must wait until they are older and sufficiently mature to deal with it—emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Jill Ireland, citing Kate Legge and child psychologist Valerie Yule, agrees that youngsters even older than my target audience are overexposed to ‘dysfunctional’ life by school texts.

Young readers are faced with problems, troubles and tragedies for which no solution is offered. Her review of the books’ endings found that less than a quarter of the conclusions might be considered life-affirming. Yule’s research on reverse censorship raised the problem of authors desensitising readers and then turning up “the literary cattle prod”: The major problem is imbalance. Young people are being given too much of what is horrible and not enough of what is good...Adolescents of

previous times...have had greater freedom...to relish ideals, nobility, happiness and the human spirit that can triumph in the dust.<sup>33</sup>

But then, of course, advocates of critical literacy would have us think otherwise.

## 5. Unanswered prayer

I move on to the question of, What about unanswered prayer? Agreed; God is not some kind of ‘warm and fuzzy’ Santa Claus who is instantly ready to attend to our every whim and fancy, or as Elena King, when a high school graduate, recalls: “I mistakenly thought of God as a genie, someone who would grant my wishes when I rubbed the magic lamp.”<sup>34</sup> To reinforce a Santa Claus or a genie portrayal of God is certainly contrary to children’s long-term spiritual interests. Yet Jeremiah 29:11–13 and, more importantly, Jesus in all the four Gospels provide us with portraits of an incredibly generous God—his Father, our Father. The apostle John is equally encouraging.

We have such confidence in him that we are certain that he hears every request that is made in accord with his own plan. And since we know that he invariably gives his attention to our prayers, whatever they are about, we can be quite sure that our prayers will be answered (1 John 5:14,15; J.B. Phillips).

Jesus himself models how we are to approach our Heavenly Father in prayer. “Not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42, KJV) not only shows Jesus’ spirit of humility and submission, but also suggests that not every prayer will be answered just as we request. Children must learn, over time, that there may be ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘wait’ answers. Just as children must be able to walk before they can attempt to run, physically; so in their spiritual lives they ordinarily begin to walk by sight rather than faith, before they learn to reverse that order.

Dale Robbins proposes a range of common reasons for unanswered prayer;<sup>35</sup> extending from a lack of fellowship with God and improper motives, to wavering faith and lack of perseverance. As children mature, they begin to understand that many promises of Scripture are not unqualified and that there may be more than one answer to our (often selfish) prayers, according to his wisdom and love for us. Therefore, in the area of prayer, it makes sense to me that we do not require children to run, before they have learned to walk. Moreover, as children grow into teenagers and young adults, they begin to realise that in their prayer life it will take maturity “to seek the heart and will of God.” This often means that they, like many Christians, as Will Davis points out, will have to learn to pray for grace to prevail through the storms of life rather than be rescued from them.<sup>36</sup> To come

“**To encourage children to show compassion is one thing, to sensitise them to radical suffering must wait until they are older and sufficiently mature to deal with it**”





“Putting to the test’ children’s faith as expressed in their prayers and questioning the whole ‘enterprise’ of prayer is counter-productive to the growth of Christian spirituality”

to terms with severe distress is difficult enough for adults, let alone children. Lasting solace and comfort can only be found in Jesus, in whose crucifixion we see “God’s suffering solidarity with the world.”<sup>37</sup>

## 6. The lesson index

My critics interpret the lesson index provided in *Bedtime stories* as ‘priming’ the reader for the text, thus prescribing and limiting its reading. Nothing could be farther from the intention of the author and publisher. The index merely serves as a quick convenient user-guide (particularly for unchurched readers or new Christians) which is standard for many texts. For instance, *The teen study Bible* has on its inside cover ‘stems’ (e.g. “I like to read the Bible when I’m feeling ...”) to which teens may respond, while at the back, an alphabetical subject index gives the page numbers for topics from A to Z: alcohol; blessings; conscience; discouragement; ecology; etc.<sup>38</sup> To regard this practice as authorial manipulation, is to ‘draw a very long bow’ indeed.

## 7. Uncle Arthur as Jesus

That I become a ‘proxy’ for Jesus may be perceived as the grossest claim made by my critics. It is maintained that the assimilation of Uncle Arthur into the image of Jesus is achieved through the particular use of language and in pictorial representations that show me in an armchair—a central position, similar to one Jesus occupies in other pictures—telling a story to a small group of attentive children; some on my knees and others on the floor. It is evident that the artists, such as Harry Anderson and Harry Baerg, painted ‘communication scenes’ with respective roles

for speaker and listeners that are akin to what occurs routinely in thousands of kindergarten classes in faith-based schools, where teachers relate biblical or moral narratives to interested children. Are these educators also engaged in elevating themselves into positions that only Christ should occupy, or does critical literacy, in this instance, lead to quixotic tilting at sinister shadows and windmills?

## Conclusion

In essence, Nicholls and Reynaud find *Uncle Arthur’s bedtime stories* guilty on several counts, primarily:

- **Indoctrination**—if not, then at least colonisation—which is accomplished in the texts through exercising a power relationship over children, and controlling knowledge available to them.
- **Sanitisation**—a form of censorship—that fails to expose or acquaint young readers with the ‘dark’ side of life and, in a cowardly fashion, leaving it to existentialists.
- **Misrepresentation**—namely, “the potential effect [of Uncle Arthur’s texts] ... is to discredit faith, prayer and God”<sup>39</sup> ... in the spiritual lives of young Christians.

My extended responses to these allegations may be summarised, as follows:

First, the critics in their ideological quest to apply critical literacy have endeavoured to claim the ‘high ground’ of text analysis and evaluation. They have done this by assuming the role of “brokers of meaning,”<sup>40</sup> simultaneously and conveniently discarding or ignoring significant aspects of children’s emotional, moral and faith development—with which my stories align—in an unjustified preference for a socio-political view of the world that has its own agenda.

Second, I call into question the logic that is used to make *Bedtime stories* the basis for a specific case of racism.

Third, it is argued that the inclination, ‘prematurely’, to expose children to or acquaint them with examples of pain and suffering in texts, or in real life, is not prudent and potentially damaging.

Fourth, ‘putting to the test’ children’s faith as expressed in their prayers and questioning the whole ‘enterprise’ of prayer is counterproductive to the growth of Christian spirituality; particularly for young children. This should not negate or impair future explorations of how prayer works.

Last, I reject out of hand the motives that are imputed to me and the publishers in dealing with children. I consider the critics’ perceptions of manipulation, subterfuge, usurpation and

tampering with the truth as the upshot of employing hermeneutics of suspicion. Of course, in the final analysis, readers will make their own decision regarding the validity of my critics' case.

## Epilogue

If presented with the science fiction opportunity to rewind the clock, would I make major changes to the *Bedtime stories* series, having the benefit of Nicholl's and Reynaud's critique? The short answer is, "probably not", given the then-pervading reader cultural expectations. However, one can always learn and grow as a storyteller and connect more effectively with readers. Worthy minor changes and fine-tuning might have included: a greater 'economy' of miraculous events, unanswered selfish prayers, resilience in the face of difficulty and postponed answers to prayer. There could also have been fewer mono-cultural stories and illustrations and a better balance between 'ordinary' and 'prayer' stories.

In concluding, I want to refer to a matter where my critics and I appear to be in closest agreement. The act of offering our prayers to God, whether by children or adults, is not akin to operating a heavenly slot machine that dispenses the most wonderful variety of 'bubble gum' miracles. I acknowledge that unless children, over time, are nurtured to grow in this area, there is the real danger that they later become 'believers' who are fittingly described as, "those who treat God as their servant, rather than they being His servants. They demand of Him to do as they want and act as they think He should; they bind Him to their cause; they manipulate Him into keeping them happy, comfortable and well fed."<sup>41</sup>

Jesus challenges His disciples to a much higher calling: A rich, loving and meaningful relationship with Him—and the people who inhabit our planet—that is not linked to "His approval or His rewards but love and gratitude for all He has done and praise for all that He is."<sup>42</sup> That is the even bigger picture to which the *Bedtime stories* series, however imperfect, has been trying to contribute. **TEACH**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The writer has used the pseudonym Arthur Maxwell to give 'life' to the article. As is customary, the writer's name and autobiographical details have been provided to the editor.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholls, R. and Reynaud, D. (2010). An ideological reading of *Uncle Arthur's bedtime stories* using critical literacy. *TEACH Journal of Christian Education*, 4(1), 47–52.

<sup>3,4</sup> For example refer to <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/english/> Retrieved on January 3, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Holmes, S. (Ed.), (2008). *Public theology in cultural engagement*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, pp. 30; x.

<sup>6</sup> Greene, M. (1993). Foreword. In Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis and the postmodern*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> "Postmodern" nonsense invades Australian schools. Retrieved February 23, 2011 from <http://majorityrights.com/index.php/weblog/comments/postm>

<sup>8</sup> Cosgrove, B. (2004). Critical disinterestedness and ideological commitment: An impasse? *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society*. Dublin: Irish Philosophical Society, pp. 16–26.

<sup>9</sup> Carroll, L. (2007 edition). *Alice's adventures in wonderland; and Through the looking glass and what Alice found there*. London: Vintage Books.

<sup>10, 11, 12</sup> Cervetti, G., Pardales, M. and Damico, J. (2001). A tale of differences: Comparing the traditions, perspectives, and educational goals of critical reading and critical literacy. *Reading Online*, 4(9). Retrieved on August 20, 2010 from <http://www.readingonline.org/articles/cervetti/>

<sup>13</sup> A term often associated with French philosopher Paul Ricoeur.

<sup>14</sup> Cervetti, G., et al., op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> McNeily, L. (1996). Uncle Arthur's God and the missionary experience. *Spectrum*, 25(4), 64.

<sup>16, 17</sup> Comments posted on July 29, 2009 by Summer Edwards. Retrieved on July 27, 2010 from [http://www.well-lovedtales.blogspot.com/2009\\_07\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.well-lovedtales.blogspot.com/2009_07_01_archive.html)

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Berk, L. (2007). *Development through the lifespan*. New York: Allyn and Bacon, pp. 184–206.

<sup>19</sup> Berger, K. (1998). *The developing person through the lifespan*. Lincoln, NE: Worth Publishers, p. 199.

<sup>20</sup> Belcher, C. (2004). The dance of storytelling through picture books. In Jill Ireland, Richard Edlin and Ken Dickens (Eds.). *Pointing the way: Directions for Christian education in a new millennium*. Blacktown, NSW: National Institute for Christian Education, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1, *Living Bible*.

<sup>22</sup> A popular TV series.

<sup>23</sup> Dembski, W. (2009). *The end of Christianity: Finding a good God in an evil world*. Nashville, TE: B&H Publishing Group, pp. 8, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Basseches, M. (2005). The development of dialectical thinking as an approach to integration. *Integral Review*, 1, 47–63.

<sup>25</sup> Fowler, J. (1995). *Stages of faith*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.

<sup>26</sup> Berger, K., op. cit., p. 498.

<sup>27</sup> Fowler, J. quoted in Berger, K. (1998), p. 499.

<sup>28</sup> Eldredge, J. (2001). *Wild at heart: Discovering the secret of a man's soul*. Nashville, TE: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>29</sup> See Padgett, T. and Grillo, I. (2010). Mexico's meth warriors. *Time*, 175(25), 24–27.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholls and Reynaud, op. cit. p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> Jean, E. (1983). Uncle Arthur: Master storyteller. *Adventist Heritage*, 8(2), 23–32.

<sup>32</sup> Grenz, S. (1996). *A primer on postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ireland, J. (2004). The Christian mind and children's literature. In Jill Ireland et al. (Eds.). *Pointing the way: Directions for Christian education in a new millennium*. Blacktown, NSW: NICE, p. 66.

<sup>34</sup> King, E. (2010). I call Him *my* God. *Adventist Review*, 187(33), 23.

<sup>35</sup> Robbins, D. Unanswered prayers: Common reasons why. Retrieved August 31, 2010 from <http://www.victorious.org/unprayer.htm>

<sup>36</sup> Davis, W. (2007). *Pray big*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, pp. 93, 94.

<sup>37</sup> Bauckham, R. (2001). Juergen Moltman. In Ford, D. (Ed.). *The modern theologians*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 211.

<sup>38</sup> *The teen study Bible*, NIV (1993). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

<sup>39</sup> Nicholls and Reynaud, op. cit. p. 52.

<sup>40</sup> A term used by Klein, N. (2000). *No logo*. New York, NY: Picador, pp. 21–22. Cited in Tom Sine (2008). *The new conspirators*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

<sup>41, 42</sup> Bainbridge, G. (2009). Who serves whom? In *The Emmanuel who is God*. Alexandria, NSW: New Morning Publishers.

“Would I make major changes to the *Bedtime stories* series, having the benefit of Nicholl's and Reynaud's critique? The short answer is, 'probably not'”

## Fostering the development of empathy in the classroom

### A strategic response to the problem of bullying

**Jasmine S. Good**

Graduate student, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA

**Jonathan Fox**

Graduate student, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA

**Ronald Coffen**

Psychologist; Director, Andrews Community Counseling Center; Associate Professor, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA

#### Abstract

**This article describes the development of empathy within children and provides classroom-based interventions that will foster its development. The development of empathy is a complex process involving both cognitive and affective functioning and awareness. Various perspectives of empathy are explored including what develops, when it develops, and how it develops. Cultural issues are raised that identify variations in development based on socialisation, gender, and cultural values. Abnormal development of empathy is discussed in the form of aggression and bullying. Interventions for fostering empathy within the victim and the bully and for fostering empathy within the classroom setting are described. The article concludes by placing empathy within the context of the Christian worldview of following Christ's example and identifies the many benefits of teaching empathy in schools.**

The study of empathy development is becoming increasingly important because of the implications for educators. President Obama (see Anburajan, 2008) described the current state of the world:

I'm talking about a moral deficit. I'm talking about an empathy deficit. I'm talking about an inability to recognise ourselves in one another; to understand that we are our brother's keeper; we are our sister's keeper; that, in the words of Dr. King, we are all tied together in a single garment of destiny.

The expression of empathy is a component essential for accommodating human diversity in our

world. Because empathy development and learning culturally acceptable social skills begin early in life (e.g., Hutman & Dapretto, 2009; Sangrigoli & de Schonen, 2004) an understanding of different cultures and perspectives must also begin early and the school setting provides an ideal stage for both development and intervention.

#### Empathy

The definition used for this paper describes empathy as "the act of 'feeling into' another's affective experience" (Strayer & Eisenberg, 1978, p. 191). Empathy therefore involves a two-part process. The first part is the cognitive awareness of the internal state of another person. The second part is the emotional response toward the other person (Hoffman, 1987).

#### Stages of empathy development

Hoffman (1987) outlines four general stages of empathy development. In the initial stage, infants have no comprehension that they are separate from other people. After this stage comes the awareness that one is physically a separate entity from other people. In the third stage, the realisation of physical separateness expands to emotional separateness—awareness that other people have different feelings from one's own feelings. Finally, comes the understanding that people's identities are made up of their previous experiences. Thus, one may conclude that empathy is complex and involves both cognitive understanding and emotional processing. As children gain experiences and develop cognitively, their potential for empathy also develops.

*Empathy is the act of 'feeling into' another's affective experience*



## When empathy develops

The cognitive aspects of empathy can be broken down into three mental abilities: emotional decoding skills, understanding of emotional states, and perspective taking (Ickes, 1997). Emotional decoding or recognition appears earliest and occurs during infancy. Most research indicates that by the age of 4 months infants have developed preferences based on facial expressions. For example, infants spend more time looking at a smiling face than a frowning face, implying that prior to this, infants seem unaware of the meanings of facial expressions and thus that emotional decoding skills are not developed until face preference is observable.

**Emotional decoding.** The ability to name discrete emotions (an outcome of emotional decoding skills) occurs next at around the age of 4 or 5 years (Ickes, 1997). The first emotion to be labelled is generally happiness, followed by sadness, anger and then fear. The understanding of complex emotions such as contempt, pride and surprise come much later.

**Understanding emotional states.** Ickes, (1997) suggests that by the age of 2 years children have a rudimentary understanding of emotions and begin to talk about emotions and the actions that correspond with those emotions. From 3 to 7 years of age children develop the understanding that a person's emotions are based on that person's perspective of the situation rather than the situation itself. While at 5 years a child is only aware of one emotion at a time, by 7 or 8 years a child becomes aware of experiencing two emotions simultaneously but perceives them being of a similar valence (positive/negative), such as fear and sorrow. At age 10, a child has the ability to recognise multiple simultaneously occurring emotions.

**Perspective taking.** According to Ickes (1997), perspective taking seems to take the largest leap at the age of 3 years. At this time, a child has a strong concept of differences in desires between two people and their perspective taking utilises their understanding of others' desires to predict or interpret others' behaviours. The 3-year-old is also capable of inferring invisible states within others and themselves.

The attempt to recognise others' beliefs and cognitive patterns is more complex and develops at an older age. Generally, at a younger age, a child takes into account what a person desires in order to understand what another is thinking, whereas an older child would be more likely to consider beliefs and thoughts (What do I know? What does the other person know or think is true?) when trying to ascertain another's experience.

## How empathy develops

Various factors influence how empathy develops. As early as 10 weeks of age a child begins his or her first noticeable acts of empathy when the infant imitates his or her mother's facial expressions of anger or happiness. Mimicry is the most basic act of empathy, and continues to play an important role throughout the lifespan. It has been postulated that motor mimicry occurs instantaneously as a means of expressing likeness within the group (Hoffman, 2000). According to Hoffman (1987), mimicry of facial expressions and other nonverbal cues play a role in forming bonds between a mother and child, between friends and even between interviewers and interviewees.

Classical conditioning (i.e., learning that two things are consistently associated with each other) also promotes empathy. For instance, a child that is held close by a smiling mother feels a happy sense of safety. The child begins to associate smiling with the current happiness. Soon a smile alone from the mother creates happiness in the child (i.e., the smile becomes a conditioned stimulus; Hoffman, 2000).

Direct association is a method of empathy that occurs when one observes another person going through a similar experience and having a similar nonverbal state (Hoffman, 2000). The person then feels what the other feels, based on his or her own memory of past incidents. Barnett (1987) conducted a study assessing preschoolers' empathy toward an upset child of similar age. A preschooler's level of empathy was higher when he/she had previously had an experience similar to that of the upset child. In terms of the development of empathy, it seems useful not to discourage a child from displaying strong emotions. Lenrow (1965 as cited by Barnett, 1987) conducted a study that found that preschoolers who cried more frequently were more likely to engage in empathic responses than those who cried less. Encouraging children to display their emotions is an important part of helping them to recognise emotions in others.

Mediated awareness occurs when a person takes on another's emotional state after being explicitly told that person's thoughts and feelings. For example, Batson et al. (1996) presented stories to college students about an adolescent who hated going to school because he/she suffered through embarrassment and constant ridicule. The story told of how looking in the mirror brought about agony because of a terrible case of acne. Many of the college students reflected a high level of empathic distress after reading these stories. Women who reported that they had had similar experiences felt even greater empathic distress upon reading the story. Mediated awareness does not necessarily

“Preschoolers who cried more frequently were more likely to engage in empathic responses than those who cried less”

have to come in the form of a story; sometimes a single word such as 'cancer' can arouse empathy. In general, mediated awareness involves language which is presumed to create visual or auditory images within the observer and those images are believed to result in an emotional reaction that is empathic (i.e., similar to that of the victim; Hoffman, 2000).

The most cognitively demanding state of empathy arousal occurs in role-taking. This happens when one observes someone else and then makes that person's beliefs, values, and emotions one's own. Three types of role-taking exist: self-focused role-taking, other-focused role-taking and a combination of the two. Self-focused role-taking occurs when one places oneself in the other person's shoes. One imagines how oneself would feel in that circumstance and assumes that the other feels the same as oneself would feel (possibly an inaccurate assumption). In contrast, other-focused role-taking occurs when one tries to become the other person and imagines how another person feels in a scenario based on what is known about the other person and allows for the possibility that someone else would feel differently than oneself in the situation (a more likely scenario). Research has shown that self-focused role-taking leads to the formation of stronger emotional bonds, yet can result in the empathiser losing sight of the other person and projecting one's own thoughts and feelings on the scenario (Hoffman, 2000).

### Empathy and moral behaviour

Empathy is closely linked to moral thinking (cf., Okin & Reich, 1999). One cannot behave morally without empathy since moral behaviour is behaviour which takes the welfare of others into consideration—which is to say, moral behaviour is empathic behaviour.

Cultural factors related to moral development include variations in parenting styles, beliefs, socialisation, and customs regarding childcare. These factors constitute the child's developmental niche. Depending on the cultural ideals and taboos, moral values and developmental paths differ among children from different cultures. Outcomes from similar socialisation practices may differ for children depending on cultural factors (for example, corporal punishment tends to have a negative impact on children's moral behaviours for one cultural group but a positive impact for another (Gershoff, 2002). Some of these differences are related to the degree of individualism versus collectivism among cultures. Differences have also been found between males and females in terms of whether moral decisions are made based more on a morality of justice (it's the legal and right thing to do to maintain the social

good) versus a morality of care (it's the kind thing to do to maintain the welfare of others). Although findings vary from one study to another, it is likely that both genders use both types of moral reasoning to varying degrees.

Rather than adopt a universal expectation for how moral development should progress for all children, one must recognise the environmental and social factors unique to an individual child. Kohlberg's own notions of moral development emphasised that a child *constructs* each new, advanced stage of moral thinking based on experiences within his or her cultural context (Eckensberger, 1994).

Therefore, the teacher has an opportunity to *create* experiences that promote moral development and thus the development of empathy. For example, if a child is functioning at a level at which determination of what is right or wrong is based on whether or not she gets punished for the behaviour, the teacher could set up a classroom skit in which Billy steals Sally's favourite pencil but Billy is not caught and so is not punished. The audience of students would know that Billy stole the pencil. The teacher could create an opportunity for moral development by asking the students to discuss: whether Billy had done anything wrong; whether something is wrong if one does not get in trouble for it; how Sally might have felt about losing her pencil; and whether an action is wrong when it causes hurt to another human being (higher level of moral thought which incorporates empathy) or only when the action causes the person to get in trouble (lower level of moral thought showing little empathy). Conversely, teachers may inadvertently validate a low level of moral reasoning. For example, in some instances, a bully is not punished because the socially inept victim may have provoked the attack resulting in the view that the bullying was 'deserved'. In a classroom where teachers ignore harm, bullies, victims and onlookers may conclude that it is acceptable to physically harm a person who 'deserves' or provokes it (a very low level of moral reasoning, particularly from a morality of care perspective).

Researchers have defined two general dimensions of moral development, both of which are of interest to teachers. The first dimension consists of prosocial behaviours such as comforting, sharing, and helping (all of which involve empathy). The second consists of antisocial behaviours such as aggression (which disregards others' feelings). In dialogues about resolving moral issues, youth who demonstrated features of the positive dimension (e.g., inhibiting one's emotional reaction, unbiased consideration of problem solutions, ability to empathically consider the other's point of view)

“One cannot behave morally without empathy since moral behaviour is behaviour which takes the welfare of others into consideration”

and inhibited features of the negative dimension (e.g., blaming others, ignoring others' emotions) demonstrated higher levels of moral behaviour (Haan, 1991). The interventions discussed below emphasise this relational, interactive nature of morality and identify some ways that teachers can promote the development of the positive dimension and diminish the negative dimension. Bear in mind, however, that culture influences how a particular behaviour is classified along these two dimensions and what outcomes may be considered fair or unfair.

## Abnormal development of empathy

One example of abnormal empathy development is aggression. Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2008) describe hostility as the motive for aggression. Whereas hostility involves the *desire* to hurt someone, aggression is the explicit *action* that involves taking something, hitting or insulting someone. Various cultural factors influence the individuality and development of aggressive behaviour, the behaviours one observes and how one's own and others' aggressive behaviours are reinforced. Feshbach (1987) found that lower empathy in fathers was associated with more acting-out behaviour in their children and that lower maternal empathy was associated with both more acting-out behaviour and more internalising behaviour (e.g., withdrawal, depression, poor self-esteem, anxiety) in their children. Child abuse can also lead to behaviour patterns of aggression and delinquency. Children in abusive situations may show signs of withdrawal, low self-esteem, hostility, and aggression.

Any recurring aggressive action directed towards another is considered bullying (Olweus, 1991). Proactive bullying occurs when a student uses aggression as a means to accomplish a goal. Reactive bullying occurs when a child commits aggression as a response to another's actions (Crapanzano et al., 2010). Reactive bullying is characterised by poor impulse control and a lack of emotional regulation. It is believed that a child is more likely to exhibit bullying when he/she has temperamental traits of impulsivity and unmanageability. In general, this child is easily aroused to anger and fits of aggression (Rothbart & Bates, 1998), and shows little empathy for victims (Olweus, 1991).

## Interventions

Okin and Reich (1999) describe empathy as an innate potential within children that guides moral thinking, action, concepts of justice, and the concern for others. Furthermore, Barnett (1987) describes an optimal environment for fostering empathy as one that: (1) meets the child's emotional needs

and downplays self-concern so that one's focus is on others; (2) promotes the child's awareness and expression of a wide range of emotions; and (3) provides multiple opportunities for the child to observe his or her interactions with others while being actively responsive. However, based on research regarding aggressive, antisocial, and bullying behaviour, one sees that not every child has been given the opportunity to foster his or her potential for empathy. Thus, the following section describes classroom-based interventions for remediating bullying and fostering empathy.

## Remediating bullying

For teachers who have encountered a bullying situation, a two-fold intervention may be helpful in addressing the parties involved. The first part of the intervention focuses on the victim. Studies have shown that a victim of bullying typically has very low emotional recognition of fear and anger (Woods, Wolke, Nowicki, & Hall, 2009). The phenomenon of bully baiting, in which the child provokes the bully into action also occurs. In both cases, the teacher should make sure to avoid blaming the victim for the incident but rather speak with the child to identify more socially appropriate behaviours to use in the future to accomplish the same goal but without emotional outbursts and without provoking the bully or giving power to the bully. A second intervention focuses on the bully. Rock, Hammond and Rasmussen (2002) suggest having the bully write a paper about a time when he or she was mistreated and relate that to how the bully thinks the victim felt. After reading the paper, time should be dedicated to devising alternative ways the bully could have handled the situation. Although it may seem that empathy helps influence a bully to want to act better, findings suggest that helping a bully empathise is most effective when he or she is given ways to communicate in a healthier manner (Rock, Hammond, & Rasmussen, 2002). Discussing alternative actions to receive the desired outcome should be approached in a non-condemning manner.

## Teaching care-based ethics

Ruiz and Vallejos (1999) propose a model for moral education that promotes empathy as a teachable perspective using compassion and care-based ethics. Bullying behaviour is expected to diminish when the bully's empathy deficits are diminished through the teaching of three skill sets: (1) affective training and observational learning, (2) socio-affective experiences, and (3) social skills and moral development. Affective training involves learning to interpret and understand emotions in others through

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*A reactive bully is easily aroused to anger and fits of aggression, and shows little empathy for victims*  
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facial, bodily, or vocal expressions. Upon mastering this, one is able to feel what others are feeling. Having students observe realistic experiences that they can relate to personally is another approach that uses socio-affective experiences to foster empathy. Teachers ought to promote role-taking opportunities that engage students in identifying how others may feel, reflecting on these feelings, and finding ways to improve the well-being of others. For example, after acting out a Bible story, small groups could identify the feelings of the characters and link these to common school experiences that produce similar feelings. This could lead into a brainstorming of ways to resolve any identified problems. Empathy is also promoted when teachers model altruistic and charitable behaviours. Examples include organising a fundraiser for a local charity, participating in a food-drive, or setting up a donation box with school supplies to be sent overseas.

Finally, teaching social skills directly promotes moral and empathy development. The development of assertive behaviour (which gives equal consideration to one's own *and* others' rights), self-control (inhibiting one's response for the benefit of others), and communication skills through active listening and dialogue (which involves verbally reflecting back what one has heard the other say and is a feature of empathy) can increase empathy. Teachers may act as coaches to help students confront a problem, take the perspective of the other (even defend the other's view), and suggest alternatives to resolve the moral problem. Bullies, unlike more socially capable students, may not develop higher moral thinking and empathy without direct instruction from the teacher and a classroom environment that heightens social awareness and a shared sense of responsibility for one another.

### Method acting

Verducci (2000) suggests that the techniques actors use to portray a character can be used to develop empathy. Three specific techniques are applicable to moral education and fostering empathy in students. One technique focuses on the cognitive understanding that comes from delving into the material and interpreting clues. Reflecting on and understanding the context of the character or person is necessary for developing the 'what' and 'why' of caring empathy. For example, using a book, chapter, play, or script as material, teachers can have students think about the context of the story and character to make predictions about the character's feelings and responses to various situations.

Another technique focuses actors' (and students') attention on others' behaviours. Actor A makes

a verbal statement about what she observes in Actor B, such as "You have blue eyes." The two actors continue to use the initial statement until the internal (emotional) experience of one of the actors compels him/her to change the words or until the behaviour observed in the other actor compels a change in observation. For example, Actor A might change to, "You dislike having blue eyes", if Actor A noticed behavioural hints that this may be the case, such as the other actor looking down or using a sad tone when saying, "I have blue eyes" to reflect back the initial sentence. The repetition of the same sentence helps actors learn to attend to each other's behaviours instead of the content of the words. Attending to behavioural meanings is a core element of empathy and requires more than just decoding word meanings; empathy requires decoding meanings based on contextual cues, such as those that behaviour and voice tone suggest. Repetition exercises could be adapted to fit the classroom setting using a game-like approach whereby students attempt to communicate different emotional states using only facial expressions and body language or by using just a predetermined word ("apples") with changes only in voice tone and body language. The class could be divided into teams and students try to guess the emotion being displayed.

The third technique focuses on creating substitutions that engage the imagination. Substitution involves the process of using an experience from one's own life, which conjures an emotional response similar to that of the character's, to put oneself in the other's place. For example, if a student is sad and having a difficult day because his or her dog is sick, other students can practice empathising by thinking of a time when something or someone they loved was broken or sick, and how it made them feel. By exploring and utilising these techniques through acting, a split-self is created which enables a student to retain his or her identity while gaining a deep understanding of another's experience.

Although dramatic empathy and caring empathy have similar characteristics, they also have distinguishing ones. Verducci (2001) mentioned that caring empathisers respond *to* others rather than *as* others. Additionally, caring empathisers are more open to receive and respond to others. Verducci concludes by maintaining the value of using dramatic method techniques in schools to foster empathy because they train students to read environmental clues found in behaviour and in situations. Opportunities may be used to discuss moral and ethical implications of taking on various roles. Teachers and students should be selective in the plays, movies, and characters they chose to study and emulate.

**The techniques actors use to portray a character can be used to develop empathy**

Because method acting techniques present novel tasks that would typically be enjoyed by all students, the teacher may be able to side-step resistance that bullies might otherwise put up if they thought they were the targets of interventions. Using experiential exercises such as these, instead of a lecture or workbook assignment, can circumvent resistance and lead to learning that is more meaningful. This type of experience-based learning is more easily incorporated into one's memory and behaviour. We tend to believe what we do rather than do what we believe, so having bullies act out moral, empathic behaviours stands a good chance of promoting the development of their morality and empathy.

### Using moral dilemmas

A final intervention, proposed by Upright (2002), outlines ways to use moral dilemmas to foster empathy. Each dilemma provides opportunities for role-playing and learning how to empathise. The author describes empathy as the ability to care about someone else and understand where he or she is coming from. The first phase begins by assessing the students' current level of moral understanding. This can be done through informal interviews or by observation. Next, an appropriate story is chosen, and students are given time to brainstorm and collaborate about the details and implications of the story. After this, the story should be presented in an enjoyable and interesting way (orally, written text, the internet, a video, etc). Following the story, students are asked thought-provoking questions to encourage discussion of the dilemma. If further debate is necessary, the implications of the story may be broadened. Finally, activities may be assigned to encourage further student reflection. Any signs of moral progress should be recorded. Throughout each of these phases, role-playing is encouraged. These activities help students, including bullies, 'try on' different perspectives, and thus foster the development of empathy.

A quick application of moral dilemmas to facilitate empathy is to give students opportunities for decision making when presented with various choices. The teacher could present a brief story describing a controversial topic (e.g., minor cheating, lying to protect someone, etc.) and ask students to create a "value lineup". Value lineups involve having students physically move to one side of the room or the other or somewhere in between to represent their level of agreement with the character's actions. Value lineups can promote empathy development by helping students understand that people's beliefs, feelings, and opinions vary.

### Trouble-shooting interventions

It is possible that some students will not respond well to some of the interventions. Students may not fully grasp the seriousness of the activities of role-playing, writing moral dilemmas or method acting. Some may simply feel uncomfortable participating or engaging in such behaviour. A possible resolution may be to allow students to form groups or choose a partner with whom to practice the activities. Another possibility would be to ask senior students or parents to lead out in the various interventions in order to model empathy for the students (a suggestion made by Ruiz & Vallejos, 1999). This not only demonstrates the serious nature of the activity but may also reduce student apprehension by having someone else model the behaviour first.

### Following Christ's example

In the life of Christ, one finds many illustrations of empathy. In one such instance Jesus started to receive the disciples he had sent out to heal the sick and preach the Word. As they were returning, everything became so busy that Jesus could not even find the time to eat. He asked His disciples to come and escape with Him to a quiet place.

<sup>32</sup>So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. <sup>33</sup>But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. (Mark 6:32–34, NIV)

In this text, empathy is given as the reason for Jesus' actions. First, He became cognitively aware of the internal state of the people who had come to see Him. He understood what they needed and how they felt. Even after teaching them, He was aware of their internal state of hunger as this story ends with Jesus feeding the 5000. Next, took action because he was moved to compassion. His cognitive awareness brought about an emotional response to teach and later to provide food for the crowd. A basic Christian premise is that our actions, like Christ's, should stem from love. The emotions that promote the choice to help others come from one's capacity to empathise.

### Conclusion and implications

This paper has described the development of empathy, identified abnormalities, explored cultural variations, and presented interventions to remediate poor empathy skills and to promote positive empathy development. The interventions provide teachers with useful tools that will aid in resolving classroom conflicts, protecting against bullying, and fostering

*“These activities help students, including bullies, ‘try on’ different perspectives, and thus foster the development of empathy”*

# Teaching & Professional Practice

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The emotions that promote the choice to help others come from one’s capacity to empathise”

the development of empathy (even in bullies). Associated increases in prosocial behaviour will improve the development of healthy relationships and expand cognitive processes. Interventions targeted at fostering empathy and remediating hostility, aggression, and bullying are expected to decrease these behaviours and increase the expression of empathy. Improved empathy will socialise a generation of youth who will more likely be in tune with one another, caring, and by following Christ’s example, of benefit to those in the classroom, the school, the community, and society at large. **TEACH**

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is **character**,

and it is this

that determines destiny,

both for this life

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E White, Education p 109

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## A new framework of governance

**David Bartlett**

Partner, Resolve Consulting Group

**Paul Campey**

Partner, Resolve Consulting Group

**The task of governing a University, School or other Not for Profit organisation is becoming increasingly complex. Council members are sometimes difficult to find, are hard to get committed to doing good governance, and are often juggling multiple roles and responsibilities outside their voluntary governance position. As a result, most schools are being governed like a social club, run like a business, or somewhere in-between. We often find that most Board members end up confused about their role and how to effectively govern their organisation.**

This article presents a new framework for the governance of Christian Schools—a Community Governance Framework that centres on the key roles and relationships contained within that community. Relationships are central to the Community Governance Framework, as it is our belief that quality healthy relationships are critical to growing healthy Christian organisations. Whilst there are many similarities and familiar elements between the Community Governance Framework and other models, the unique difference is that the Community Governance Framework seeks to put all the pieces of the governance puzzle together in one place to show, in effect, what a healthy Christian school actually looks like. The framework has been developed through practical experience as consultants working with the Boards of hundreds of Christian Schools and Not for Profit organisations.

Figure 1 summarises the components of the framework and the interrelationships that exist within an organisation.

### Values, Core Purpose and Vision

A healthy Christian school has a clear understanding of their reason for being both over the longer term (Core Purpose) and within the current generation (Vision), and a clear understanding of the foundations and biblical principles under which all aspects of the organisation are aligned (Values). Simple, clear values, core purpose and vision statements that are held central to all that is done in

the organisation help maintain focus, thus enabling organisational energy to achieve maximum impact.

One of the Board's key roles is to keep the organisation accountable to its values, core purpose and vision. In ensuring that the relational linkages between the Board, Personnel, Beneficiaries and Moral Owners are strong and healthy, the Board must continually seek to focus all four groups towards the Values, Core Purpose and Vision of the organisation.

### Community

All organisations operate within community. This sounds obvious, but in the Community Governance Framework, a distinction is made between three types of community that organisations operate within: Contact Community, Connected Community, and Core Community. Issues often arise when, in making key governance and management decisions, these distinctions are blurred. Active, healthy relational community is critical to a healthy Christian School.

### Governance vs Management

The framework provides a dashed horizontal dividing line that separates the top two member groups of the Core Community (Personnel and Beneficiaries) from the bottom two groups (Moral Owners and Board). This represents a different emphasis in the leadership style of these two groups. In a healthy organisation the Personnel and Beneficiaries are accountable for and involve themselves primarily in Management, whilst the Moral Owners and Board are accountable for and involve themselves in Governance. Recognising this distinction in roles will help the organisation implement good governance.

### Moral Owners–Board relationship

The relationship between the Moral Owners and the Board is strengthened by a number of key documents, legislation and events. Referred to collectively as 'WHO sustainers', they help sustain a healthy relationship between the Moral Owners and the Board of the organisation. WHO sustainers could include the charter or articles of incorporation,

*“It is our belief that quality healthy relationships are critical to growing healthy Christian organisations”*

bylaws for operation or statements of designated authority, as well as any government legislation related to the social, economic and environmental impacts of the entity. Typically, they address sphere of influence, achievement of mission, organisational participants, span of control, and assessable responsibility.

In our experience, unhealthy school organisations often have some of the following key problems with linkages between the Moral Owners and Board:

1. The Moral Owners are the Board, or
2. The Moral Owners are asleep and the Board is very happy with this malaise from the membership, or
3. The Moral Owners micromanage the Board.

### Board–Personnel relationship

The two key groups that consultants spend most time working with in governance are the Board and Personnel. The ‘WHAT sustainers’, or relational linkages between the Board and Personnel, have been the priority of most advisors on good governance for many years now. The terminology ‘WHAT sustainers’ indicates those protocols, procedures and process responsibilities that relate to accomplishing the core business through the

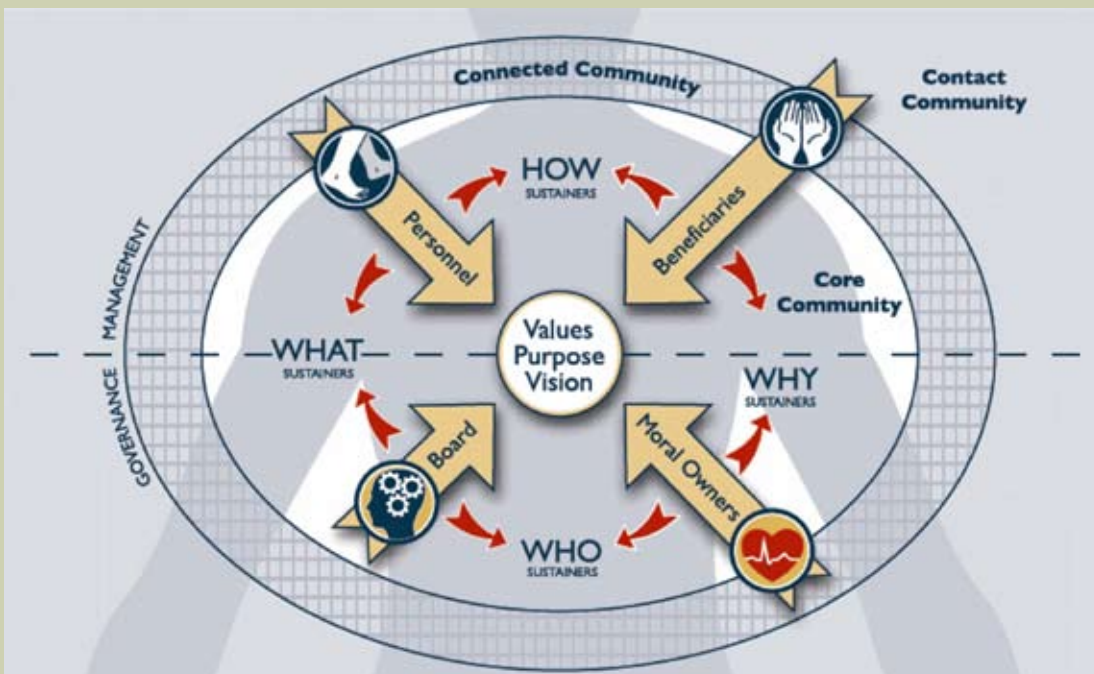
activities of employees. ‘What do we want to do to move toward achieving our Vision?’ is the question that is asked collaboratively by the Board and the Senior Executive. The outcome is often some form of strategic management plan and other processes and policies that help to sustain WHAT the institution wants to achieve.

Increasingly, Boards that have adopted some form of governance approach have tended to delegate varying degrees of authority to their CEO to manage the day-to-day operations of the organisation, while they attempt to focus on governing the organisation. This style of governance relationship between the CEO and board is only one of a number of tools necessary for a healthy relationship between the board and their personnel.

A danger can be that Boards develop an over reliance on their CEO/Principal which results in Boards possibly abdicating their responsibility rather than delegating it. There is a need for Boards to strengthen the relational linkages between themselves and their CEO in appropriate ways to enable them to govern their organisations in a healthy way that respects the authority of the CEO, but maintains the clear leadership and authority of governance within the Board. The Board also needs to have relational links that correctly value personnel

“A danger can be that Boards develop an over reliance on their CEO/ Principal which results in Boards possibly abdicating their responsibility rather than delegating it”

**Figure 1: The Community Governance Framework**



“Maintaining a connection to the WHY question will help a Christian school maintain its ‘saltiness’ as a Christian ministry over the long term”

and provide each with the motivation to optimise accomplishment of a shared vision and goals.

### Personnel–Beneficiaries relationship

Day to day management of a school rests with the Personnel of the organisation. They manage the organisation in relationship with and to the Beneficiaries who receive the services and/or goods of that organisation. A healthy organisation will develop strong ‘HOW sustainers’; relational linkages between Personnel and Beneficiaries. These linkages not only focus on strengthening the management issues associated with operating the organisation, but also focus both groups toward the Vision, Core Purpose and Values of the organisation. All client relationship functions, including greeting, meeting, informing and advising, servicing, billing and maintenance of client satisfaction, need to be monitored and optimised.

At this point it may be helpful to note the difference between a ‘WHAT sustainer’ and a ‘HOW sustainer’. Using policy development as an example, many organisations start the journey by trying to develop a Board policy manual, but instead of seeing Board policy development in terms of the broader missional, ‘WHAT are we going to do’ question, most Boards end up trying to write ‘HOW is the ministry delivered’ type policies. This will not work because the Board is, in this case, creating a policy for a relationship it does not take part in (Personnel and Beneficiaries). Boards should therefore create macro, big picture, guiding policy over management in the areas of Board process, executive boundaries, mission and the Board/CEO relationship, and leave ‘WHAT’ policy development to management. Management, in turn, can create its policies and submit these for approval by a Board whose role is to measure these policies for consistency against their stated Board policy.

### Beneficiaries–Moral Owners relationship

The fourth relational linkage is that between Beneficiaries and Moral Owners, the ‘WHY sustainers’. This linkage is quite restricted, noting that Beneficiaries typically move to become Moral Owners through a process of membership application and approval (usually by the Board). During the formation stage of a new organisation, the Moral Owners respond to the WHY question, establishing the organisation in response to an identified need for services or products; in the case of the Christian organisation, this is through a clear calling from God. This Core Purpose and Vision needs to remain connected and sustained, able to bend and respond to changes in mission (the things

we do in response to our Vision), and even allow for a new Vision to be adopted as time progresses in the life of an organisation. Maintaining a connection to the WHY question will help a Christian school maintain its ‘saltiness’ as a Christian ministry over the long term.

The Board, having been delegated governance responsibility to act on behalf of the Moral Owners for their interests as per the objects in the organisation’s constitutional documents, should plan for the long-term sustainability of the membership of the Moral Owners group. Observers are currently noticing a general trend toward a decline in the numbers or involvement of Moral Owners. This presents a serious concern for the long-term survival of any school organisation. Preventive maintenance of the Moral Owner base is necessary. Students in Christian schools need to be transitioned into this domain while in the school so that they identify with the school values and visioning. Leaving the school creates the need to maintain attachment through a variety of alumni oriented activities as well as past staff functions. Effective governance will also involve previously untapped commitment by clarifying and publicising ‘causes’ and ‘concerns’. Proactive action may attract convicted persons for potential inclusion and thus increase participation in the community of Moral Owners.

### Conclusion

Over time, referring to the Community Governance Framework can help a Board determine its areas of weakness or exposure and provide priority areas to be worked on in a strategic planning context. The framework also provides an easy to use, ongoing tool to perform a health check for the Board, to make sure that the organisation’s vision and mission are not being compromised over time. It also helps to minimise distractions and keep a strong focus on what is truly an important part of organisational community—relationships! **TEACH**

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# Spirituality in educational leadership

## Engaging with the research

**Alaster Gibson**

Lecturer, Bethlehem Tertiary Institute, Tauranga, New Zealand

### Abstract

**This article reviews eight research studies from literature that focus on spirituality in educational leadership. The discussion will be of interest to educational leaders across a range of sectors who intentionally value spirituality within their professional practice and institutional cultures. Spirituality is understood in the literature as a complex and contested phenomenon, the meanings of which may be shaped and reshaped by diverse perspectives and experiences. Spirituality includes personal, social-cultural and transcendent connectedness, meaning making about life and living, and a desire for greater authenticity, resulting in consistency between people's beliefs, moral-values, attitudes and their actions. Readers are invited to reflect on their personal meanings and practice of spirituality in their leadership in the light of the research findings.**

### Introduction

International academic literature on various aspects of spirituality within education has emerged relatively recently, over the past two decades. It has focused on topics such as matters of the heart, having a high moral purpose, and the importance of values and care of people in education. Some writers have used words like sacred, faith, divine, soul, spirit, spiritual and spirituality in discourse on school-based education reform (e.g. Dantley, 2005; Du Four, 2004; Flintham, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2000; Noddings, 1998; Palmer, 2004; West-Burnham, 2002). This growing body of literature has contributed to what some claim is a shift in emphasis from what schools must do to what school communities must be (Creighton, 1999). Most of this literature engages with spirituality in education from non-religious, humanist, secular perspectives (e.g. Jones, 2005) with some including sacred perspectives, a term that has transcendent meanings but is not limited to any one religious narrative.

The role of spirituality in principal leadership and its influence on teachers is under-researched both in New Zealand and internationally.

There is relatively little empirical work and nothing which gives attention in depth to the significance of spiritual experience in educational leadership. (Woods, 2007, p. 135)

From an American perspective, Ramirez (2009) says in her doctoral literature review, "The literature is quite limited in terms of clear cut examples of what spiritually-centred leadership looks like in practice" (p. 4). Furthermore, Mulford and Edmunds (2009), in their extensive review of research to determine the best conceptual models for successful school principalship, cite the American Educational Research Association's task force for the development of an agenda for future research on educational leadership.

The authors [Leithwood and Riehl, 2003] point out a number of aspects of school leadership that have not been the subject of much formal research and/or that are drawn from other paradigms and are not addressed in their analysis. These aspects include moral and spiritual dimensions of effective school leadership. (p. 20)

Tisdell (2003) recognised this gap and proposed an explanation.

Perhaps the prior silence on the topic of spirituality in areas of academic research is due not only to the difficulty of defining spirituality, but also to the ambivalence of many who work in the academic world that has emphasised rationality and the scientific model for most of the 20th century. (p. 25)

### Spirituality and its contribution to organisational transformation

Malone and Fry (2003) from Tarleton State University undertook a quantitative field experiment in their local central Texas school district to "determine if there was a relationship between the qualities of spiritual leadership and teacher organisational commitment and productivity" (p. 5). Their intention was to engage with two schools in the difficult task of organisational transformation in which significant changes would be made to the workplace "environment, vision, goals, strategies, structure, processes and organisational culture" (p. 6).

*"Spirituality is understood in the literature as a complex and contested phenomenon, the meanings of which may be shaped and reshaped by diverse perspectives and experiences"*



Underpinning their method were Senge's (1990) five disciplines of learning organisations and Fry's (2003) theoretical work on spiritual leadership as a causal model for organisational transformation. This model was linked to intrinsic motivation theory and incorporated a number of concepts including "vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival" (p.8). Malone and Fry (2003) explain the practical meaning of some of these concepts.

Creating a vision wherein leaders and followers experience a sense of calling in that their life has meaning and makes a difference; establishing a social/organisational culture based on the values of altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others. (p.8)

This research was based on the belief that spiritual leadership could positively contribute to the needs of school personnel. They believed the practice of spiritual leadership could develop in people a sense of calling and membership leading to greater congruence in terms of their shared vision and values, as well as improved individual, team and organisational empowerment. In summarising their research design and results, Malone and Fry (2003, p.2) say,

*The school which reported high levels of vision and altruistic love also indicated high levels of commitment, motivation and retention of staff*

Our field experiment initially examined 229 employees from three elementary and one middle school to test and validate a general casual model for spiritual leadership, employee spiritual survival, and organisational commitment and productivity. A one-year longitudinal field experiment was then conducted with two of the original schools with an OT [organisational transformation] visioning/ stakeholder analysis intervention, performed in one school with the other as a control. Initial results show strong support for the model and the intervention.

A closer examination of their results shows the school which reported high levels of vision and altruistic love also indicated high levels of commitment, motivation and retention of staff. The other school, which lacked vision and love, experienced a noticeable deterioration in its organisational culture. This school was marked as "a very intimidating, conflict ridden environment" (p.16). In a subsequent report, the principal of the first school said, "Everything we did as a campus was a result of the campus mission and values which was a direct result of our work with the spiritual leadership theory" (Malone & Fry, 2003, p.16). However, in their conclusion, the researchers concede, "The conceptual distinction between spiritual leadership theory variables and other

leadership theories and constructs must be refined" (p.18). Secondly, they point out that although there was evidence validating value-based leader behaviour having positive effects on "follower motivation and work unit performance" (p.19), more research is needed in terms of linking spiritual leadership to such effects.

### Key points for reflection

Which practical aspects of educational leadership described in this first example of research by Malone and Fry (2003) do you identify with in your own practice? How do you promote a sense of calling, membership and shared values within your organisation? What might 'altruistic love' look like and sound like in your leadership context? What effect do you perceive your spirituality informed leadership values are having on your organisation's transformation and effectiveness? How do you know and how might you find out?

### Spirituality and its relationship to key leadership practices

Another quantitative study of interest is that by Wellman, Perkins and Wellman (2009), assistant professors from Northwestern State University, Los Angeles. They researched the question, "What is the relationship, if any, between educational leaders' spirituality and leadership practices?" Spirituality was defined as an 'independent variable' (p.2), and measured by the inventory on spirituality which was developed by Rayburn and Richmond (2003). This inventory included three subcategories called caring for others, transcendence, and seeking goodness, truth and forgiveness. Five leadership practices were selected based on the work by Kouzes and Posner (2003). These were described as, "challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modelling the way, and encouraging the heart" (p.2). Together these five practices were identified as the dependent variable. The data was gathered from a survey of 71 participants out of 100 randomly selected, Texan school principals (35 females and 36 males) during 2004–5. The data was analysed using several statistical operations.

The findings yielded, statistically significant relationships between spirituality as measured on the inventory on spirituality and the five leadership practices. More specifically, the findings showed a relatively strong relationship between spirituality and modelling the way; a significant relationship between spirituality and inspiring the way; a strong relationship between spirituality and challenging the process; a moderately strong relationship to

enabling others to act; and a moderately strong correlation between spirituality and the leadership practice of encouraging the heart. Furthermore, there was a stronger effect between the horizontal or interpersonal dimensions of spirituality and leadership than the transcendent dimensions.

In the discussion of the findings, the authors say, “The results of this study revealed that spirituality and good leadership practices are correlated at a very significant level for the participants in the survey” (p. 3). In their concluding remarks, the authors indicate that an empowered spiritual, scholar-practitioner might be an ideal blended form of leadership, because “spirituality is having an anchor that provides the courage to do that which is right for others in a manner that is caring, just, equitable and democratic” (p. 3).

These findings are important for educational leaders. Firstly, they show an empirical link can be established between a particular construct of human spirituality and educational leadership praxis. The findings suggest that this link can be positive, and complementary alongside ‘good leadership’. Further reading revealed that the inventory developed by Rayburn and Richmond (2003) intentionally excluded religious dimensions of spirituality which were placed under a separate list. The research does not explore the subtle, context specific ways that spirituality works within school leadership praxis, and the specific ways that teachers and their teaching might be affected. This research identified the prevalence of certain practices but I am curious as to why the participants practiced them. I also wonder whether in fact spirituality can be neatly made into an ‘independent variable’ from leadership practices such as inspiring a shared vision and modelling the way.

### Key points for reflection

In reflecting on this research by Wellman, Perkins and Wellman (2009) it is important to note that spirituality correlated highly “with good leadership practices” (p. 3). It suggests that effective spirituality needs to go hand in hand with competent leadership. How relevant do you perceive your spirituality is to ‘modelling the way’ which was one of the leadership practices identified in this study? In what ways do you intentionally blend or integrate your personal meanings of spirituality into the daily life of your educational leadership? Explore keeping a weekly journal in which you record critical incidents that demonstrate your pursuit of the characteristics of spirituality mentioned in this research such as goodness, truth and forgiveness.

### Importance of spiritual experience in educational leadership

A third study, also from England, was conducted by Woods (2007), an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, who examined, “The importance of spiritual experience as a phenomenon which enables leaders to be better resourced internally and find deeper meaning, and to provide evidence of the significance and influence of spiritual experience for educational leadership in schools” (p. 135).

This empirical research gathered data from surveys from 244 primary, middle and secondary school head-teachers within three local education authorities (LEAs) in England, with a response rate of 43%. Of this sample, 54% of the head-teachers came from non-denominational schools, 45% from Church of England and Catholic schools and 1% from Jewish schools. The self-identified religious beliefs of the head-teachers in the sample were reported as 76% Christian, 15% agnostic, 5% atheist and 4% described as ‘other,’ which was consistent with the religious demographics of the total head-teacher population within the three LEAs. 49% of the participants identified the importance of spirituality as very important personally, 36% of some importance, 8% of little importance, and 6%, not important.

The research also obtained further interview data from 7 of the head-teachers who were selected by theoretical sampling (Silverman, 2001). This sample included 2 agnostics, 1 atheist, 1 humanist, and 3 with Christian religious beliefs. There was a balance of male and female head-teachers and type of schools. Spirituality was perceived to be ‘very’ important to the atheist, one of the agnostics and two of the religious head-teachers and of ‘some’ importance to the others. All seven of these participants affirmed that they often had been conscious of and perhaps been influenced by some power, whether God or not, which may either appear to be beyond their individual selves or partly, or even entirely within their being.

In summarising her findings, Woods (2007) identified that spiritual experiences vary widely in intensity and frequency and are “not confined to religious believers” (p. 151). Furthermore, Woods says that spiritual experiences of the type that “appear to connect with some spiritual power, enhance capacity for practical action and increase ethical sensitivities and orientation are widespread among headteachers” (p. 143). The findings also suggest that spirituality contributed in a variety of ways to head-teachers’ resources and to the way they “imbued spirituality in their

“*Spiritual experiences of the type that ‘appear to connect with some spiritual power, enhance capacity for practical action and increase ethical sensitivities and orientation are widespread among head-teachers’*”

role” (p. 143). Spirituality in the majority of these head-teachers was perceived to contribute towards shaping, sustaining and informing their outward action. Approximately two-thirds of the participants disagreed that spirituality was an “entirely private matter” (p. 149) having nothing to do with their job as head-teacher. 46% of the 244 head-teachers were of the view that spirituality was a natural dimension of school leadership, 30% were uncertain.

Underpinning this research was the theoretical work by the American humanist, psychologist, and philosopher William James and Sir Alister Hardy, a former professor of natural history at the University of Aberdeen. Hardy (cited in Woods, 2007, p. 65) viewed, “the human capacity for sensing the spiritual” through the perspective of a Darwinian theory of evolution, he argued “against purely materialistic interpretations of Darwinian natural selection”, and said that “it is not valid to conclude that man’s spiritual side is simply the superficial by-product of material processes” (p. 65).

Although Woods (2007) believes there is substantial evidence for the existence of spiritual experiences (e.g. Hay & Hunt, 2000) she also cautions that, “it is important not to make simplistic associations between spiritual experiences and attitudes and attributes of leadership; spiritual experience is not the only factor to influence attitudes to spirituality and leadership” (p. 136). In her literature review, Woods (2003) acknowledges that the reality of spiritual experience is contested by a range of arguments which include the subjective nature of people’s claims and their lack of consistent confirmability. Other arguments discussed by Woods are socio-cultural explanations and reductionist arguments. This latter argument holds that people’s assertion of spiritual experiences can be explained “more plausibly by reference to natural (and often pathological) factors” (p. 77). In the conclusion of her discussion on these arguments Woods (2003) says,

We are dealing with a legitimate phenomenon, that is, there are scientific grounds for concluding that what are studied as spiritual experiences indicate a phenomenon of some sort that can be taken to exist. (p. 78)

### Key points for reflection

In considering Woods’ (2007) research, can you describe any spiritual experiences in your leadership practice? How do you perceive they have influenced your leadership? Do you agree that your spirituality contributes to shaping, sustaining and informing your leadership actions? Explain.

### Spirituality as the core of the person who leads

A fourth example of research acknowledging spirituality in educational leadership is the ethnographic study of a principal by Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell and Capper (1999), academic researchers based in two universities in Wisconsin. Their qualitative study focused on a female principal of a special education school in a Midwestern city in the United States. The context of their inquiry was inclusive education (equal opportunities for children with disabilities) and in particular, empowering principal behaviours.

The research method incorporated a longitudinal approach, gathering data from interviews and surveys over a fifteen-month period, and involving over thirty participants including teachers, special education teachers, teacher aides, parents, children, and administrators. The findings affirmed the importance of the principal stimulating on-going responsive critique by staff of their practice while at the same time developing a supportive, just and democratic school environment in which such reflective practice was able to operate safely. The authors also cite a statement from the principal, who said, “Spirituality is the core of my leadership” (p.203), suggesting that it was both a significant and integral part of her personal self and professional practice, working from the inside, out.

Empowering principal behaviours are under-girded by a spirituality grounded in six beliefs: valuing personal struggle, recognising the dignity of all people, blending the personal and professional, believing people are doing their best, listening, and dreaming. (p.203)

These findings suggest that in this case, spirituality in educational leadership was perceived as highly integrated. This may explain some of the challenges acknowledged in the two previous research reviews in terms of identifying spirituality as a singular causative effect in leadership. Furthermore, these concluding statements link spirituality with beliefs that inform professional practice. That is, they acknowledge the importance of cognitive predispositions and that externalised professional leadership practice is informed by what the leader believes about people and the best ways to work together to achieve shared goals. Another significant finding was the importance of the degree of congruity between the principal’s stated beliefs and observable behaviours. The authors assert the effectiveness of spirituality in the principal’s leadership and her influence as leader were linked to this “integrity” (p.205).

“*Spirituality in educational leadership was perceived as highly integrated*”

## Key points for reflection

Having read the review of the research by Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell and Capper (1999), in what practical ways might spirituality reveal itself in your daily leadership life if spirituality was at the *core* of your leadership?

## Linking spirituality with sustainability and replenishment in educational leadership

The fifth example is a study in the United Kingdom by Flintham (2003), an experienced secondary school head-teacher, consultant and research associate of the National College for School Leadership. This study had six aims, three of which are particularly relevant to this discussion.

To describe the perceived individual spiritual and moral bases of headship across a range of head-teachers: To codify identified strategies for individual head-teacher sustainability and replenishment: To consider examples of how spiritual and moral leadership is displayed by reflection on critical incidents within leadership stories. (p.4)

This research was a qualitative inquiry involving a cross-sectional sample of twenty-five serving head-teachers from a wide variety of primary and secondary schools from within the geographical region of Devon to Durham, Lancashire to London. The sample included fourteen male and eleven female head-teachers who had a wide range of experience. The participants worked in eight church schools, thirteen secular schools and four described as 'high ethnic'. The schools varied in student roll size from 60 to 1600 and were situated in a variety of contexts including poor inner urban areas, and more affluent suburban and rural areas. The research method focused on a single, semi-structured and open ended, hour long, face to face interview with each of the head-teachers. A key focus was to draw on participants' recollection of critical incidents and their reflection upon these to illustrate their responses to the questions (Flanagan, 1954). The data derived from each head-teacher was therefore personalised and not triangulated by any other data gathering instruments or other personnel from within their respective schools.

Flintham draws a useful but debatable distinction between spiritual and moral management and spiritual and moral leadership. He says that within the English educational context spiritual and moral management might include religious education and citizenship in the curriculum. Whereas, spiritual and moral leadership he believes is "concerned with the often intangible aspects of interpersonal engagement and quality of relationships" (p.3). He

also explains that this spiritual and moral leadership can be particularly tested by external pressures and yet, "is preserved by a clearly articulated structure of moral and ethical values" (p.3). He sums up this difference between leadership and management as "the difference between being and doing" (p.3), which I believe oversimplifies and dichotomises what are essentially, two highly integrated aspects of educational leadership. Flintham's post-structural conceptualisation of spiritual and moral leadership is clearly articulated.

[It] does not have exclusively religious connotations or linkage to a specific set of beliefs. It is based on a wider concept of 'secular spirituality': whatever it is that gives the individual their foundations of ethical behaviour and bases of belief. (p.3)

The main findings of this study showed the presence of diverse "faith perspectives and belief systems" (p.6), which reflected the pluralistic English society and cross sectional research design. It also affirmed his pre-supposition that "spirituality is accepted as a common human phenomenon which includes but is not defined by organised religion" (p.8). He also believed the findings justified the use of "secular spirituality" underpinning the research. The head-teachers' value systems guiding their moral and spiritual leadership were divided into categories including egalitarian, vocational, and Christian perspectives, with some of the participants identifying with more than one of these. The egalitarian value system was described as "a belief in the essential goodness of humanity" and was identified by just under a quarter of the participants. Over 60% of the head-teachers cited "a Christian value framework as influencing their professional practice" (p.9), more than twice as many as the number of church schools in the study. One head-teacher in a non-church school was reported as saying, "I will share my personal faith but not evangelise. I believe in parity of esteem for all faiths; this is the safe place for spirituality" (p.9).

Another aim of this research was to inquire into how these head-teachers engaged in replenishing and sustaining their moral and spiritual leadership. Ten participants discussed how they drew upon their own core beliefs, six head-teachers (not all from church schools) explained how their reservoir was sustained by "an active Christian faith". This number was less than half of those who had previously cited a Christian value framework as underpinning their leadership. Participants also cited a wide range of networks that contributed to their overall resilience. In terms of critical incidents where their reservoirs for moral and spiritual leadership were perceived

“*Spirituality is accepted as a common human phenomenon which includes but is not defined by organised religion*”



to be drawn upon, the results were grouped around three categories namely, community tragedies, personnel problems and organisational crises.

### Key points for reflection

In considering the research by Flintham (2003), can you describe some critical incidents where your spirituality in leadership was tested by external pressures? How do you perceive your spirituality contributed to your sense of sustainability and replenishment?

### Spirituality related to educational leadership style

The sixth example of research into spirituality in educational leadership is a study by Walker and McPhail (2009), from Morgan State University, Baltimore, who explored “community college president and chancellor perceptions of the phenomenon of spirituality and the role of spirituality in their leadership style” (p. 321). Fourteen participants with diverse cultural, gender, age, and experience demographics were selected from various geographic locations within the United States. Their selection was also based on their “interest in the topic of spirituality”; however, this interest is not elaborated upon in the article.

The findings included religious and non-religious definitions of the phenomenon of spirituality. Most of the “religio-spirituality perspectives”, a term identified in their literature review (Moran & Curtis, 2004), were described as a “belief in a higher power, specifically God, for meaning-making, guidance, protection, decision-making, and a personal journey that leads to a core of central values” (p. 326). Some of the findings describe non-religious perspectives, for example, one participant emphasised “ethical behaviour” (p. 327). The findings also describe the ways in which participants expressed spiritual qualities in their work. These included their values and beliefs, community building, creativity and communication, and that centre of servant-leadership. All participants, “regardless of race or gender, indicated that spirituality plays a role in the work of community college leaders” (Walker & McPhail, 2009, p. 331).

In terms of what that role meant and how spirituality influenced the leaders’ respective organisational cultures, the findings report that the participants believed they “symbolically shape organisational culture and spirit by influence through empowering others, ceremonies, acknowledging faculty and staff, and staff development and relationships with students” (p. 338). This research also describes spirituality in educational leadership

as connected to participant’s self-reflexive thinking, their sense of wholeness, their boundary setting and balance in life, and their focus on being authentic, resilient and remaining connected to others. It also highlighted that for many of these participants their spiritual practices included the “prioritisation of faith, beliefs and values” (p. 338).

I found it interesting that the findings included the presence of spirituality in what the authors call, “proudest accomplishments” and “moments of disappointment” (p. 332). This extended upon Flintham’s (2003) findings which tended to focus only on spirituality as a source or reservoir of hope and strength within negative and difficult aspects of educational leadership. I was curious to note the way the article by Walker and McPhail (2009) referred to religio-spirituality which provided an inclusive recognition that spirituality, for some people, can have religious meanings connected to a higher power and specifically to God. I also noted in the findings the importance of critical reflection in assisting the leaders to maintain authenticity and relational connectivity with others in their professional practice.

### Key points for reflection

In reflecting on the research by Walker and McPhail (2009) how do you feel spirituality contributes towards your engagement in self-reflexive thinking, boundary setting, work-life balance and desire for integrity in your leadership practice?

### Spirituality in the daily praxis of educational leadership

Another important study on spirituality in educational leadership is the doctoral thesis by Ramirez (2009). Her qualitative, exploratory case study, focused on spirituality in the praxis of four elementary, public school principals from Texas, Northern Virginia and California. Prospective participants were identified through a nomination process in which her colleagues suggested the names of educational leaders who “appeared to lead through spirituality” (p. 58). Selection was made to provide a range of demographics. The participants conceptualised their spirituality as socially constructed, separate from religious institutional frameworks and connected to diverse sources.

Integral to her research methodology was the testing of eight out of some forty-two key concepts in Houston and Sokolow’s (2006) theoretical framework, *The spiritual dimension of leadership*. The eight concepts emphasised leadership intention and attention, recognition of uniqueness of gifts, gratitude, uniqueness of life lessons, a holistic

**“I also noted in the findings the importance of critical reflection in assisting the leaders to maintain authenticity and relational connectivity with others in their professional practice”**

perspective, openness and trust. The research method included gathering data from three semi-structured one-to-one interviews, a focus group meeting and electronic and written journal documents. Two of the research questions were, “What are the lived work experiences of principals that provide evidence of spirituality?” and “How do principals perceive the meaning of spirituality in their work?”

The most critical finding was the need for and practice of openness. Connected with this practice were in-depth reflection, self-awareness and relationship building. Another key finding was that all four participants used what Ramirez calls, “a spiritual filter as a basis of decision-making and as an informed framework for their leadership” (Ramirez, 2009, p. viii). This notion of a spiritual filter was described as going inward and being reflective, listening to an inner voice as participants ran situations through it, “seeking guidance, direction, and peace, all the while adding the lessons learned to their cache of wisdom” (p. 111). Also of interest was the inclusion of negative effects of leading through spirituality, which were described as “misunderstanding and stereotyping, attacks on leadership style, increased vulnerability, isolation, and over-whelming self-imposed pressure” (p. viii). The positive effects attributed to spirituality by participants’ were that they derived strength, courage, wisdom, and stability, and an increase in relational skills.

### Key points for reflection

Considering some of the findings of Ramirez (2009), in what practical ways do you perceive your spirituality contributes towards relationship building in your educational leadership? Do you agree that your spirituality acts as a spiritual filter when engaging in decision-making? Explain. From your perspective, is your expression of spirituality in leadership sometimes misunderstood? Why do you think that is so and what practical action could you take to improve the situation?

### Spirituality as a dimension of principal’s ‘way of leading’

The final example of research into spirituality in educational leadership that I have included in this discussion is the work by Dixon (2002), for her Masters degree in Education through the University of Waikato in New Zealand. Her qualitative case study involved five principals with diverse demographics, who were working in public, state primary schools in the Waikato region. The focus of her inquiry was whether these five principals had

explicit philosophies of education and leadership, and whether spirituality was part of the principals’ way of leading. If so, what impact did these issues have within their schools? Spirituality is understood in this study to be inclusive of diverse perspectives including cultural and transcendent views. She recognised the issue of power inherent in spirituality to either “liberate or violate” (p. 37). That is, it could be both positive and negative as a contributing factor of leadership influence.

Her findings revealed that all five principals “acknowledged an aspect of spirituality within their leadership” (p. 182) and several embraced theistic perspectives. Spirituality in principal leadership was described behaviourally in terms of relational connectivity, respect, care, equity, sensitivity to diversity, and making a conscious effort to “speak and act on the outside in ways that were the same as the truth they knew on the inside” (p. 184). Importantly, according to Dixon, issues such as personal motivation, balance in life, workplace resilience, and having an attitude to serve and value each person were found to be identified by the principals to their spirituality or spiritual beliefs. Unfortunately, the scope of her thesis precluded gathering data from the staff at these five schools to “obtain their perceptions of the impact of their principals’ philosophies” (p. 189). There was also an absence of comment on possible contextual factors that might mediate the integration of spirituality into workplace practice.

### Key points for reflection

Based on Dixon’s (2002) research, do you agree that there is power inherent in spirituality in leadership to either violate or liberate? Have you ever encountered experiences of this? How do you ensure that your spirituality in educational leadership is not used in abusive ways? What checks and balances do you have to ensure your spirituality is expressed in appropriate, inclusive and safe ways within your organisation?

### Conclusion

This paper has discussed eight examples of research related to spirituality in educational leadership. The findings raise a variety of important issues relevant for leaders, their practice and their effectiveness within their organisations. Each example of research has been practically applied by way of key points for the reader to reflect on. The intention has been to stimulate critical consideration of personal meanings of spirituality and how these might contribute to such things as building collegial relationships, resilience and organisational

“*The positive effects attributed to spirituality by participants’ were that they derived strength, courage, wisdom, and stability, and an increase in relational skills*”

“  
In this way spirituality might become more intentional and authentic, residing at the core of the person who leads and their leadership practice.”

effectiveness. In this way spirituality might become more intentional and authentic, residing at the core of the person who leads and their leadership practice. **TEACH**

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# The other hat

## Teaching discernment in the twenty-first century

**Beverly Christian**

Lecturer, School of Education, Avondale College, Cooranbong, NSW

### Introduction

**The 21<sup>st</sup> century is placing new demands on teachers and schools. Children are growing up in a society that is characterised by exponential change, escalating social issues and ever-changing technology. Because of this rapidly changing culture, our students will face challenges that do not currently exist, when they reach the workplace (Davies, McNulty & Maddox, 2011). These factors have shifted the perceived necessary skill base from knowledge based to thinking based skills such as creativity and flexibility. One area of education that is continuing to receive attention is the area of critical thinking, or mental flexibility (Davies et al., 2011). This article explores one model of teaching mental flexibility and evaluates its effectiveness for teaching discernment in a Christian environment.**

### Discernment

Discernment is a word that is not widely used in society at large. An internet search of discernment brings up over two million entries (Google 2,790,000); however, it is interesting to note that most of these occur within the context of either Christianity or other religions. Dictionary definitions largely support this link to Christianity, citing discernment as a term used by Christians that describes the process of discerning God's will for one's life (Wikipedia). Yet, like most words, there is more than one nuance to the meaning. It is also defined as "the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure" (Merriam-Webster OnLine). Some Christians may equate the two, as the amount of literature on discerning God's will suggests that this is not a clearly defined area of Christian living. For the purpose of this article, a broader and simpler definition, based on Brown (1990) has been adopted. This definition has been chosen, in part, because it is readily understood by children as well as adults. Discernment is the ability to recognise and choose the best in life (Brown, 1990). This definition appears to suit the common usage of the word more precisely although

it poses problems of its own. What comprises recognition? Does choice demand action or is it merely the mental assent to a principle or idea? How can one determine what is 'best', and is what is best for one person also best for another?

### Influence of post-modernism on thinking skills in the curriculum

As educational practice is impacted by society, it is important to discuss what comprises post-modern attitudes and thought. There is no simple definition for post-modernism; however, it can be described as "a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices" employing concepts such as difference and similarity, repetition and hyperreality "to destabilise other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

It is the concepts of epistemic certainty: knowing about knowledge, and univocity of meaning: constant and ultimate truth, that are of particular interest to Christian educators who teach thinking skills in the context of Christian belief. This belief subscribes to the idea of ultimate truth and the recognition that what is good when "human knowledge tends to be socially conditioned" (Rosado, 1996, p. 33) is an important issue for Christians who view God as the source of knowledge and absolute truth.

Marsh (2007) maintains that even when it comes to theology, most young people will be influenced by the society in which they live through enculturation by the media. Furthermore, emotions often take a leading role when making choices. One doesn't need to look further afield than the celebrity pages of the media to determine that emotions underlie many of the choices that are both modelled to teenagers and practised by them. Choice, for many young people living in the twenty-first century, is the freedom to take or leave an ideology, practice or belief. The choice may take the form of mental assent and may or may not lead to action. More problematic; however, is the meaning of 'best' when applied to the idea of making choices. Post-modern thought by its own definition rules out the possibility of the superlative, leaving only comparatives so therefore

*“Choice, for many young people living in the twenty-first century, is the freedom to take or leave an ideology, practice or belief”*



'best' is an individual perception with no univocity of meaning, and in the extreme, it doesn't exist at all as everything is relative and there can be no best, only degrees of better, based on individual perception.

Although post-modern attitudes may cast a pall of doubt over the univocity of meaning, it is important to recognise that the skill of being able to shift gears when thinking, to deliberately change perspective, to view the world from another vantage is an important and necessary skill. Research by Beyer (2008, p. 229) supports the benefits of learning critical thinking with a study identifying that direct instruction in thinking skills can significantly encourage students to become more effective thinkers. One Christian writer (White, 1952) speaks of the importance of teaching children "to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts" (p. 17).

Most thinking skills programs offered in schools promote mental flexibility as a way to develop critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision making. Programs available to schools include CoRT (Cognitive Research Trust) (de Bono n.d.); H.O.T.S. (Higher Order Thinking Skills) (Pogrow, 1995); Odyssey of the Mind (Micklus & Micklus, 2003) and Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick, 2009). These and other programs are widely used in schools.

Critical thinking has become an established academic discipline that focuses on decision making based on examining information and ideas from multiple perspectives. (Matthews & Lally, 2010, p. 169)

Not only is critical thinking gaining ground, but moral thinking is back on the classroom agenda with open discussion about the introduction of ethics classes (Compass, 2010). It is interesting to note that educationalists such as Gardner (2008) are including ethical thinking in their lists of essential skills for the twenty-first century, and placing the responsibility for developing it with teachers. Lucas and Claxton (2010) have introduced the term 'ethical intelligence' and claim that "true intelligence is not morally neutral" (p. 55). In addition, they point out that "believing something does not necessarily mean that you will put it into practice" (p. 154) and offer the observation that beliefs and good intentions do not necessarily translate into action. This presents a real challenge to Christian educators who believe that discernment is about belief which is confirmed by action.

While there is some common ground between ethical thinking and the Christian view of discernment, there are also gaps. Ethical thinking revolves around what is socially and morally acceptable; while a Christian perspective of discernment steps beyond social mores, and

exercises a belief that God is the absolute source of morality. Ethical behaviour deals largely with the impact of individual and/or group behaviour on other individuals or groups; discernment includes ethical behaviour but also challenges individual behaviour that impacts on self only. Ethical behaviour focuses on practises that minimise harm to and destruction of human life; while discernment is applied more broadly to every aspect of life. For Christians, discernment is important because it helps determine life direction. All young people are faced with choices that impact their wellbeing and happiness. Choices range from personal clothing styles to lifestyle habits and career options. How they make those choices is the theme of this discussion.

## Discernment and Christianity

Christians regard discernment as an integral part of their spirituality. Most view the action of discerning God's will for their lives and living accordingly as a personal responsibility. Yet this has not always been the case. Historically, the Christian church had an authoritarian approach to discernment. Consequently, it became the conscience of the people, interpreting scripture and moving beyond doctrine to establishing standards for its members relating to how they should live their lives. These standards of behaviour were then adhered to, sometimes rigidly, sometimes reluctantly, and often blindly, with no understanding of the rationale behind the ruling. This approach to discernment was evident in varying degrees in all protestant denominations. While many Christians today support a personal application of principles, there are still some who cling to the clerical collar to reveal God's will for their lives.

There are dangers in adopting this approach. First, people are human and their ideas fallible, so standards for Christian living may change as those in authority change, or they may be biased by the perspective of church leaders. Secondly, changes in culture may bring about a shift in standards, which in turn may legitimise certain behaviours previously eschewed on the basis of Biblical principles. In addition to causing tension when this happens, Christians may start to question the validity of other more important aspects of the Christian faith. Thirdly, behaviour without belief is hypocritical, and impacts not only on Christians but on those they interact with in their everyday lives. The greatest danger; however, as Bailey Gillespie (1996) points out, is that preoccupation with church standards has the potential to take our focus off what really matters—the saving Grace of Jesus Christ.

In response to the controlling attitude to church standards of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a

“  
**For Christians, discernment is important because it helps determine life direction**”

period of silence on the issue. This could, in part, be due to the fear of offending fellow-Christians, and of being labelled legalistic, but after some years of silence on this matter, Christian writers are again authoring books with intriguing titles such as *Bulls, bears & golden calves* (Stapleford, 2002), *Rich Christians in an age of hunger* (Sider, 2005), *What's a Christian to do with Harry Potter* (Neal, 2001), *Theology goes to the movies* (Marsh, 2007) and *Shall we dance: Rediscovering Christ-centered standards* (Case, 1996). Each of these books attempts to clarify and establish a Christian position on matters such as finance, poverty, literature, the arts and a variety of lifestyle issues.

Enforced sets of behaviour, history indicates, are not the answer to teaching discernment, yet students are faced with so many options that it would be negligent to not offer some guiding strategies for making wise choices in a society which places everything into question. Consequences of poor choices may have far-reaching effects; therefore, educators need to explore ways of helping future generations think christianly; to operate out of a Christian worldview. One role of teachers is to equip students with the tools to make their own decisions, and then to trust them to make those decision wisely. As already established, thinking skills are widely recognised among educators as tools that may assist in this process.

## Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats

This article examines one critical thinking model and explores its application to teaching discernment. Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats (2000) were first introduced to schools in the 1980s and have been widely used for over 25 years both in education and the corporate world by companies such as Seattle-based Boeing's Rocketdyne Division and Hewlett-Packard (Suzik, 1999). These hats or thinking tools represent an intentional approach to teaching thinking skills which is both simple and effective (Sunderland, 2000). De Bono claims that there are three difficulties individuals face when confronted with an issue, idea or problem.

1. They rely on gut feeling, emotion and prejudice. This clouds their perspective.
2. They feel a sense of helplessness. They don't know where to start so they never begin.
3. They experience confusion because they try to think of everything at once. Their minds become chaotic because their thoughts have no clear path (de Bono, 2000).

In an attempt to address these road-blocks to thinking, de Bono's straightforward yet highly effective Six Hats method focuses on parallel

thinking which enables individuals to separate logic from emotion and creativity from information, resulting in increased thinking efficiency. The Six Thinking Hats also promote mental flexibility by using a multiple perspective approach. While this method has proven successful in the corporate and educational world, the focus of this article is to examine the model against a Christian view of discernment. In de Bono's model, each coloured hat is indicative of a type of thinking: positive, cautionary, factual, creative, evaluative and emotional. The following section will briefly describe each hat and its thinking style.

## Overview of the Six Thinking Hats

As previously stated, each of the six coloured hats is a metaphor for a thinking style. With this method, only one hat can be worn at a time, although this may happen in quick succession. This method is most commonly used in a discussion of an issue, dilemma or problem where all participants wear the same hat at the same time, but is also used by individuals for their own clarification. There is no set order for using the hats, although the white or red hats are a good starting point, yellow and black usually follow each other and green and blue are often used after the other hats.

White hat thinking focuses on the facts. It requires an individual to take an objective look at a situation. This is in contrast to the argument habits of Western society, which "prefers to give a conclusion first and then to bring up the facts to support that conclusion" (de Bono, 2000, p. 27). White hat thinking encourages an objective look at all available information. As gaining a multi-perspective view is important in this model, focusing on the facts is a neutral and emotion-free place to start a conversation that has potential for disagreement.

Red hat thinking allows individuals to acknowledge their feelings on an issue without being required to justify their opinion. Emotions are important, says de Bono (2000), but by themselves they are not a sound basis for making decisions. As educators, it is important to recognise that young people will have strong feelings about issues and to give them the dignity of respecting their feelings, which, after all, are a created part of who they are.

The yellow hat is the optimistic hat. This thinking hat concentrates on positive judgement, and asks what is good or right about an idea or concept. It focuses on the benefits and forces individuals to examine the inherent 'good' and value in an idea (de Bono, 2000). Yellow hat thinking is easiest to do when putting forward one's own ideas, but takes practice to apply it to the ideas of others. As such,

“*Students are faced with so many options that it would be negligent to not offer some guiding strategies for making wise choices in a society which places everything into question*”

it is valuable in helping students to develop a multi-perspective approach to an idea, issue or problem. As value or benefit are not always obvious in a given situation, yellow hat thinking also draws out the best in an idea (de Bono, 2000).

In contrast to the yellow hat is the black hat. This hat is concerned with caution. It considers “risks, dangers, obstacles and potential problems” (de Bono, 2000, p. 88). It may be used to ask what is wrong with a particular idea, and, de Bono (2000) claims it is the dominant thinking style of western society. He warns against the overuse of this hat as it has the potential to create negative emotions through association. The yellow and black hats combined encourage multi-perspective thinking.

The green hat stands for creative thinking. It searches for alternative ideas and generates new concepts and perceptions by cutting across existing thought patterns. This ‘outside-the-box’ thinking is important as it can grow new ideas out of the black and yellow hat perceptions and is the basis for innovation and development (de Bono, 2000).

The blue hat is the control hat. It may be used to plan, to focus on particular areas, to determine the questions and to summarise or review. It is the blue hat that draws all ideas together and asks, “What more thinking is required?” or “What action should be taken?” (de Bono, 2000).

When used together, these six thinking styles promote mental agility and are a valuable resource for teaching young people to think about issues, ideas and behaviour using a multi-perspective approach. However, from a Christian perspective, it could be suggested there is a missing element, which may be represented by the ‘other’ hat, designated in this article by the colour purple.

### The other hat

There are two arguments for the inclusion of a purple hat, both relating to the yellow and, more specifically, the black hat. The first argument for another hat is found in the lack of a reference point in de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats process. On what do individuals base their caution or their certainty? The yellow hat asks what is right or positive about a particular idea and the black hat asks what is wrong, or what cautions should be observed, but we are left asking, “Who decides what is wrong and what is right?” An important aspect of a Christian worldview is the belief that knowledge and the ability to know anything at all has its origins in an all-knowing God. God is the reference point for the knowledge of what is right wrong (Sire, 1990). This is where the purple hat fits; purple because it is the colour of royalty and therefore fitting for the King of the Universe from whom Christians derive their

very identity. The purple hat is the valuing hat, the ethical hat, the discerning hat which asks, “How does this idea fit with my understanding of the world?” For Christians, the purple hat provides a reference point, a certainty of knowing. It provides an opportunity to keep beliefs, and ultimately actions, consistent with a Christian worldview.

The second argument for the inclusion of a purple hat relates to the choice of colour. In western civilisation ‘black’ is commonly associated with the dark side of life, with wrong, with that which is bad or evil. Children are exposed to a plethora of movies, songs and literature that consolidate the idea that blackness somehow equates with something evil. Every family has a ‘black sheep’. If you do something wrong, you get a black mark against your name. Days remembered for something catastrophic are given the nomenclature ‘black’ as in ‘Black Tuesday’, October 29, 1929 when Wall Street crashed and ‘Black Saturday’, February 7, 2009 during Victoria’s deadly bushfires. In western literature and movies, villains traditionally wear dark colours while heroes and heroines shine in white; witches are shrouded in black while good fairies sparkle with light. It is not the point of this article to argue over the political correctness of this cultural stereotyping, but to point out that students are somewhat conditioned by society to this point of view. De Bono (2000) himself introduces a cautionary note over the use of the black hat. He points out that this is the hat which alerts us to dangers, difficulties and potential problems (de Bono, 2000). He acknowledges that this hat can be misinterpreted as the ‘bad’ hat, rather than being the careful and cautious hat which was its original intention. It is this misperception that validates the second reason for the inclusion of another hat. Instead of asking, “What is wrong, or with what caution should I approach this idea, belief or practice?” the purple hat allows us to ask “How does this idea, belief or practice measure up against God’s plan for our world, humanity, the environment, or my life?” This converts the perception of discernment from a negative process to a positive one.

An additional observation on the colour purple is that it is a combination of red and blue. By taking the metaphor one step further, it can be argued that the purple hat sums up thinking on an issue and sets future directions (the role of the blue hat) while operating out of an emotional love response to the Lord Jesus Christ (the role of the red hat).

Christians who adopt or teach de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats approach need to remember that this process makes no allowance for a reference point. A reference point is crucial to the Christian worldview which is found in God and His goodness.

*The purple hat allows us to ask ‘How does this idea, belief or practice measure up against God’s plan for our world, humanity, the environment, or my life?’*

God's goodness means then, first, that there is an absolute standard of righteousness (it is found in God's character) and, second, that there is hope for humanity (because God is love and will not abandon His creation). (Sire, 2004, p.29)

Christian educators may find that purple hat thinking is a useful tool to purposefully guide children and teenagers to begin operating out of their worldview.

### Using the purple hat to teach discernment

The following three step approach may be helpful to Christian educators who wish to assist children and teenagers in developing discernment in their lives. These steps are: ask the right questions, find the right timing, and use appropriate sources of information.

#### Ask the right questions

Often Christian parents, educators or pastors attempt to help a child or teenager be discerning in relation to a particular high risk behaviour or idea by asking, "What is wrong with this idea, practice or concept?" In other words, they use black hat thinking. While this questioning has its place, the use of all the hats and especially purple hat thinking creates affirming links to a Christian worldview and builds on the positive rather than the negative. Purple hat questions may include: "How does this idea fit a Christian worldview?", "Will this practice contribute to the joy that God wants me to experience in my life?", "Is this idea consistent with biblical teaching?" or for younger children, "Is this how God wants me to live?" and even "What would Jesus do?" Although it may not be possible to use purple hat thinking all the time, it is a proactive method of helping young people to live a life consistent with their belief system, one of the issues facing the Christian church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Poe (2004) surmises, "We tend to ignore the philosophy or the worldview, out of which we operate, largely because we have grown so accustomed to it" (p. 22). Barna (2003) adds weight to the argument for purple hat thinking.

Without application, a worldview is simply the intellectualisation of reality—a head game we play that has no bearing on who we are, what difference our life makes, or how we relate to God. (p. 182)

Purple hat thinking encourages people to view life and its choices in terms of their relationship with God, and to act accordingly. It gives individuals a reason to believe or reject an idea, and to behave correspondingly.

A cautionary note must be added here. Purple hat thinking without a love relationship with Jesus will

be ineffective. True discernment is a response to that relationship: it is not a formula to be applied that will turn out Christian clones. Therefore, how Christian educators go about it is of utmost importance.

#### Find the right timing

In matters of discernment, teaching needs to be proactive, rather than reactive. Because teaching discernment often touches a raw nerve in children and especially teenagers, sometimes certain big questions are left to spiritual osmosis, with uncertain outcomes. One way to counteract this is to find the right timing. Often questions, discussions and education programs are left until a time of crisis, when emotions are running high, hormones are pumping and the heart and mind are not receptive. Asking pertinent questions well before (preferably), and long after emotionally charged moments is more likely to elicit rational responses, assist in clarification, and promote ownership of values and beliefs. Christian educators may help prepare their students to make life choices before they are caught up in the power of peer pressure, before they find themselves in compromising situations and before they no longer want to listen. Teachers can offer students opportunities to practise their responses in role play, voting, ranking and moral dilemmas (Larson & Larson, 1996) before acting them out in reality. They can also provide time for consolidation and clarification of what really matters in life. Purple hat thinking will assist in this process.

Children can begin learning discernment at a young age. Asking questions relating to all areas of their lives can help prepare them for future scenarios. A child who has learnt to ask herself the right questions in little matters has a greater chance of being discerning in significant areas. Children who are given opportunities to think through their values and beliefs and make decisions based on them are more likely to follow through with those decisions as they grow and face similar situations in the real world. The danger is that too little may happen too late, leaving the church to wonder why Christianity is having so little impact on how its followers live their lives.

#### Use appropriate sources of information

There are many quality educational programs available to assist in teaching appropriate life skills. However, teachers should apply some purple hat thinking to educational programs to ascertain their consistency with Christian beliefs and values, and recognise the limitations of educational programs in teaching discernment. Educational programs often focus on teaching content in the hope that information will change behaviour. As Hopkins, et

**“Children who are given opportunities to think through their values and beliefs and make decisions based on them are more likely to follow through with those decisions as they grow and face similar situations in the real world”**



**“In reality, information may have minimal impact and needs to be accompanied by opportunities for students to explore ideas, think through alternatives and reach their own conclusions within the framework of a nurturing Christian environment”**

al. (2007, S70) point out, “There is little evidence to suggest that information dissemination alone is a successful strategy for preventing high-risk behaviour among adolescents.” In reality, information may have minimal impact and needs to be accompanied by opportunities for students to explore ideas, think through alternatives and reach their own conclusions within the framework of a nurturing Christian environment.

Christian mentors are a second source of information, offering support and a safe place for the exchange of ideas. Hopkins et al. (2007) promote the building of healthy, safe relationships with non-family adults or “caring others” as a strategy to promote resilience, which in turn has links with lower incidences of at-risk behaviour. Brooks (1994) has observed that children with at least one caring adult who accepts them unconditionally are better equipped to deal with problems and are generally resilient. Rice (1994) cites an older study where it was found that caring Christian adults who were willing to share both their life and Christian experiences were very influential in the lives of adolescents.

When significant adults model purple hat thinking in their own lives and are prepared to discuss their ideas and listen to the ideas of others, it may help young people clarify their own stance on issues. This points to the importance of involving children and teenagers in multi-generational worship and social activities where they can form strong friendships with significant adults as well as their peers.

The third source of information for Christians is the Bible. While it is important to encourage the practice of consulting the Word of God in all areas of life, it is also important to exercise some restraint in how the Bible is used. Proving a particular point using obscure and random texts is unlikely to convince a reluctant teenager, and may ultimately do more harm than good. It must be remembered that the Bible is a guide to affirm and strengthen faith; not a weapon to beat Christians into submission. Far better is a holistic purple hat approach founded firmly in the grace of God’s goodness and His desires for His children. The Bible serves another purpose in this discussion. It affirms individuals that they are loved unconditionally and that God calls them his children. This belief may also help young people develop a sense of worth and identity; a genuine high self-esteem. Several studies (Hopkins et al., 2007; Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger et al., 2003; Lilja, Larson, Wilhelmsen et al., 2003) support the notion that genuine self-esteem is one factor in preventing at-risk behaviour and promoting resilience, both which are linked to the ability to make wise life choices.

## Conclusion

De Bono’s Six Thinking Hats approach to problem solving is an effective tool for Christian teachers. This approach encourages careful examination of different perspectives, which may promote a clearer understanding of issues. Christian teachers could also consider the inclusion of the ‘other’ hat, the purple hat, to provide a spiritual reference point for thinking and to encourage students to view discernment in a positive light, rather than relying on more negative black hat thinking. Purple hat thinking, combined with judicious timing, supportive mentors, and reliable sources of information, including the Bible, may promote positive attitudes and lead to prudent life choices. Christian educators have the responsibility to engage their students in a variety of thinking styles, and whatever the model used, they can adapt it to include thinking christianly. It should be recognised, however, that thinking skills cannot replace a relationship with Jesus Christ. Ultimately, it is from a love relationship that wise choices will be made. Christian pastors, teachers and parents can purposefully build on this relationship to help young people learn discernment so they can live inside and outside their churches, homes and classrooms with integrity. **TEACH**

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“Christian teachers could also consider the inclusion of the ‘other’ hat, the purple hat, to provide a spiritual reference point for thinking”

## Developing a faith-based education

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**Barbara Fisher**

School of Education, Avondale College

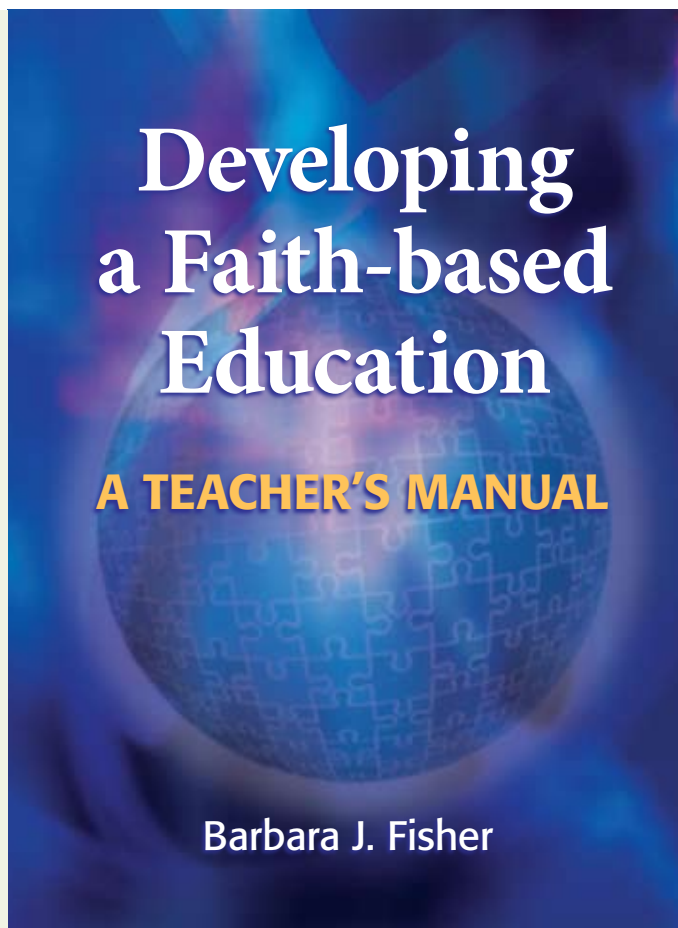
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# Joys, tensions and issues

## Special needs provisions in an Australian, Christian, education system 2009/2010

**Marion Shields**

Lecturer, School of Education, Avondale College, Cooranbong, NSW

**This research project investigated the current provisions for students with special needs (SWSN) in a national, Australian, Christian school system (49 schools) during 2009–2010. Most respondents were the designated special needs teachers in those schools; however, in some of the small schools the principal also carried this role. In addition to the quantitative data reported via questionnaires, respondents were able to comment on relevant issues and possible solutions, as they perceived them. Issues and tensions included managing limited funding for SWSN in non-government schools; a lack of appropriate qualifications for staff who worked with SWSN; enrolment of SWSN and a changing school profile; lack of networking and sharing between the schools in the system; and diagnosis for students with special needs. Results indicated that 16% of the students had special needs, 28% of the schools did not have any designated special needs staff, while a further 36% did not have qualified staff in this role. The paper includes discussion of the evidence-based issues facing these schools and the system, together with a number of recommendations for improvement.**

*“Inclusion is recommended as the best educational provision for students with disabilities, primarily to combat discrimination”*

### Acronyms

DDA	Disability Discrimination Act, Australian Federal Legislation of 1992
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, now known as the Australian Human Rights Commission
IEP	Individual Education Plan/Program
LST	Learning Support Teacher
SWSN	Students With Special Needs

### Historical Introduction

In the latter half of the twentieth century, an important societal shift began to take place as researchers such as Bank-Mikkelsen (1969), Nirje (1970) and Wolfensberger (1972) began to

advocate for the inclusion of people with disabilities into society and a lifestyle as close as possible to normal, which they called normalisation. At the same time, many parents in America, Europe and Australia began to advocate for increased educational and lifestyle opportunities for their children with disabilities (Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2009).

In the United States, legislation was enacted to support this concept with Public Law 94-142—the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. In the United Kingdom, the Warnock report was released in 1978 and these policies and legislation set a benchmark for the rest of the world to support and protect children with disabilities. Australia followed this trend in 1992 with the federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which “makes it against the law for an educational authority to discriminate against someone because that person has a disability” (HREOC). The DDA addresses the enrolment, curriculum and school programs of students with disabilities in Australia today.

In 1994, an international conference to discuss children with special needs was held in Salamanca, Spain. Organised by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the conference produced the Salamanca Statement, signed by over 90 countries, which recommended inclusion as the best educational provision for students with disabilities, primarily to combat discrimination.

Over the last 25 years or so, state education systems in Australia have increasingly including students with special needs. As these students have moved into regular classes or special education units within regular schools, teachers have adapted lessons and increasingly differentiated their teaching to accommodate the educational needs of these children and provide them with a relevant education. Although the DDA (1992) has helped to expedite the process of inclusion in state schools, some church-based and other non-government education systems have been slower to provide this service.

Meanwhile, non-government, evangelical Christian schools began to grow rapidly from the 1960s as parents observed an increasingly secular influence in public schools. These parents wanted schools where their children would be educated with a similar worldview and values to their own (Stymeist, 2008). Today, many Christian parents who have children with special needs want a Christian school environment as well (Zehr, 2005).

Funding the education of students with special needs is an important and difficult issue. In 2009, the NSW government inquiry into the provision of education to students with disabilities or special needs recognised the funding pressures.

The dramatic increase in the number of identified students with disabilities or special needs in recent years...along with the move towards greater inclusion...places a growing pressure on available government and non-government education resources including funding. (NSW Government, 2010)

Christian Schools Australia (CSA) is a peak group serving the needs of Australian independent schools with a commitment to religious freedom, choice and equitable funding. In 2009, CSA issued a position paper regarding funding for students with disabilities.

Additional funding available to students with disabilities in non-government schools is vastly disproportionate to that available in government schools. CSA's research found shortfalls of up to \$20,000 per student with disability. Their position is that: 'the additional funding allocated to meet the specific needs of students with disability should be the same irrespective of their choice of school'. (O'Doherty, 2009)

Integral to the support of SWSN are designated Learning Support Teachers (LST) (who may have different nomenclature in different systems). Their role has broadened over recent years from working individually with SWSN, to include support to classroom teachers with included SWSN by providing advice as well as individualised and group teaching; identifying SWSN; organising diagnostic assessments; writing or assisting with writing of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs); liaising with external agencies, including government and Independent Schools' Associations for funding and support; keeping records; and liaising with parents (Forlin, 2001). This multi-faceted coordinating role supports both the SWSN and classroom teachers, as well as school administration.

### Aims of the study

This study was conducted within a church-based education system during 2009 and 2010 to gain an

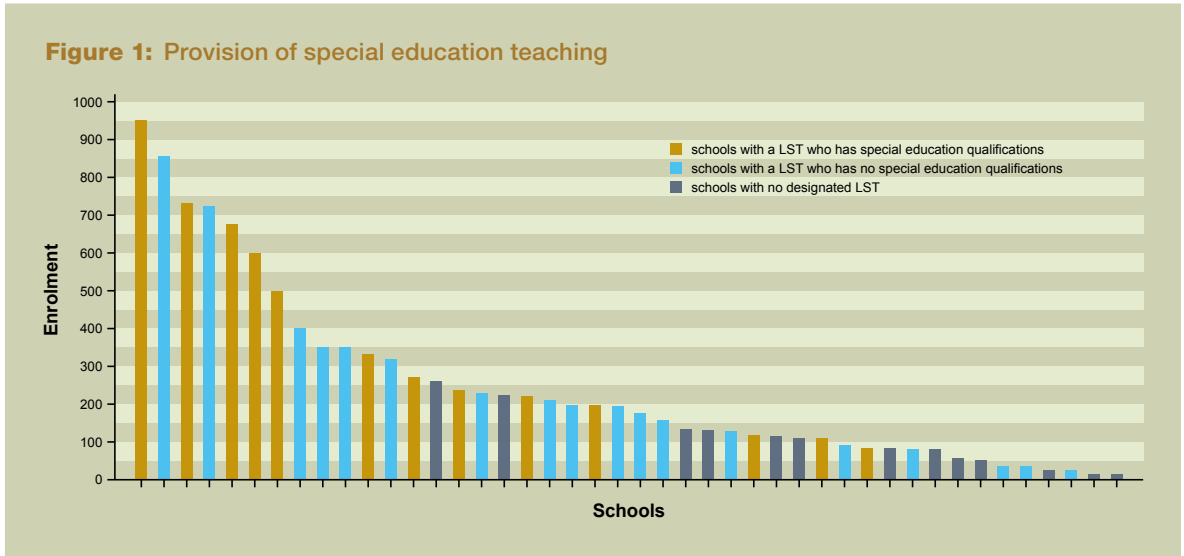
**Table 1: Total school enrolments, enrolled students with special needs, and the latter expressed as a percentage**

Enrolment	SWSN	%
950	219	23
856	77	9
732	71	10
724	59	8
676	102	15
600	10	2
500	200	40
400	77	19
350	84	24
350	31	9
332	64	19
320	41	13
272	22	8
260	17	7
237	102	43
228	60	26
224	37	17
220	44	20
210	12	6
195	15	8
195	9	5
193	43	22
176	63	36
158	36	23
134	5	4
130	11	8
128	45	35
118	21	18
115	32	28
110	18	16
110	16	5
90	24	27
84	8	10
84	4	5
80	8	10
79	17	22
57	4	7
51	3	6
36	12	33
35	14	40
26	3	12
26	6	23
14	3	21
13	4	31

“Funding the education of students with special needs is an important and difficult issue”



**Figure 1: Provision of special education teaching**



understanding of current provisions and the issues involved in accommodating students with special needs. The study investigated:

1. The extent to which students with special needs were included in the system’s schools.
2. Whether the individual school had a designated learning support teacher, and his/her qualifications for this role.
3. The key issues in providing an education for included students with special needs, in system schools.
4. The perceived relationship between the school’s Christian ethos and the special education program.

“28% of schools indicated that they did not have a full-time or part-time teacher designated to care for students with special needs”

### Method

A letter of explanation, together with an invitation to participate and a detailed survey (with both open and closed type questions) was sent to the principals of all of the schools in the system (49) with a response rate of 44 (90%). Reasons for non-participation included school closure, two amalgamations, and a change of principal in three very small schools. Actual respondents were the special needs teachers, except in small schools where the principal carried this role.

### Results—Quantitative

The total school system population of approximately 11,000 students included approximately 1753 (16%) with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities who required additional assistance to undertake an education. Classification was based on formal, external testing, or informal classroom-based assessment by the special needs teacher. Table 1 displays the

enrolment for each individual school, the number of students in the school with special needs and then this number expressed as a percentage.

As can be seen from Table 1 there was a wide range in size of school enrolments from small one-teacher schools (which were mainly in rural locations) to several schools of over 500 students. Further, whilst all schools reported having SWSN enrolled, some schools had a substantial proportion of students with special needs while some had far less. Of the 1753 students with special needs identified in this study, 313 (18%) had Individualised Education Programs (IEPs) and 659 (38%) received government funding towards their special needs education.

The allocation of a LST teacher to support SWSN was investigated, along with the qualifications of these teachers (see Figure 1). Of the 44 schools returning completed surveys, 12 (28%) indicated that they did not have a full-time or a part-time teacher designated to care for students with special needs. While it can be seen that seven of these schools had below 100 students enrolled, three had over 100 students and two had over 200 students. Sixteen schools (36%) had appointed a teacher to teach/supervise students with special needs. However, these teachers did not have any special education qualifications. Thus, a total of 28 of the system schools (64%) had either no LST or an unqualified LST to oversee the education and management of SWSN.

### Results—Qualitative

The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to comment on their perspectives regarding special education in system schools. Thirty-seven schools

responded to this invitation. The key themes from these responses are outlined below and supported by quotes from respondents.

**Funding**—Sixteen of the 37 responding schools (43%) commented that:

- There was a disparity between funds available to support students attending government as opposed to non-government schools.

*We are unable to afford the special needs teachers and aides. We are in desperate need of these specialists in our schools but it always comes down to the holy dollar!!*

- They believed that financial support for programs and staff for students with special needs was very low on the system's priority list.
- When finances became strained, disability support was the first program to have cost cuts.

*I am a very frustrated learning support teacher who has had her teaching time cut in half because of the school's financial difficulties.*

**Isolation/sharing/networking**—Fifteen of the 37 responding schools (41%) commented on this issue:

- Respondents reported that there was very little communication between system schools, and schools tended to work in isolation.

*Due to our schools being isolated, there is minimal sharing between schools.*

- There were no organised support groups in the system.

*Each school appears to work in isolation.*

- Organised networking and sharing were perceived to be extremely valuable.

*It would be good to network with other system schools re special needs.*

*Networking/in-service/newsletter would be a great help.*

**In-service training**—Ten of the 37 responding schools (27%) commented on:

- The lack of training in special needs education and the need for regular in-servicing in this area for classroom teachers.

*Too many children needing extra assistance; too little inservicing of teachers in this area.*

- The lack of special education qualifications for those designated to oversee special needs programs.

*I would like to see some ongoing in-servicing for special needs teachers.*

- Six commented on their heavy reliance on the various Independent Schools' Associations for this provision.

*AIS here is excellent and that is who we use most of the time.*

**Perceived lack of support**—Six of the 37 responding schools (16%) specifically mentioned a lack of systemic support:

- The respondents commented that they believed the lack of information, inservicing and networking indicated a lack of interest in and support for special education within the system.

*Absence of any support from the system to date.*

*I am not aware of any networking, inservicing, etc run by the system.*

*I would like to see Special Needs given a higher profile in the system and the school—more respect, credibility and impact.*

*There is a lack of credentialed and experienced/ passionate staff to drive the special education program.*

**Christian ethos**—Thirty-four of the 44 schools (77%) responded to the question: In what way do you feel the Christian ethos of your school affects the special education program? All of the responses were extremely positive and focused on the value of each child, with comments such as:

*We care for each individual and seek out their strengths. We teach that God loves unconditionally.*

*It is infused into everything we do.*

It is interesting to note that of the 44 respondents to the survey, 22 were Learning Support Teachers and 22 were principals. However, in the mid-sized schools (enrolment: 50–500), the role of the LST is often part-time (one or two days per week), leaving the principal to frequently carry some of the tasks. Thus, the findings reflect the perspectives of both teachers and administrators.

## Discussion

### 1. Enrolments

As noted in Figure 1, the proportion of SWSN enrolled at the participant schools varies considerably. This study reported that a total of 16%

“**The respondents commented that they believed the lack of information, inservicing and networking indicated a lack of interest in and support for special education within the system**”

“It is well recognised that qualifications and ongoing professional development opportunities are required for these teachers”

of students in this system's schools had special needs, compared with 12% in NSW government schools (NSW Government, 2010) and 14% in NSW Catholic Schools (Catholic Education Commission, NSW, 2010).

What are possible reasons for these school and systemic differences?

**Perceived level of care**—Christian schools are perceived as offering a higher level of care.

*Our Christian ethos is shown in our caring and parents of children with special needs tell me that is why they chose our school. (Respondent)*

Another respondent reported a parent's comment that “compassion and tolerance appear far greater in a Christian School”. Stymeist (2008, p. 7) reinforces this perception.

*Many experts believe that the percentage of students with special needs is higher in private schools...parents of children who struggle in school perceive that smaller class sizes, noted care and concern for students can do a better job for their children.*

However, in another study, Ramirez and Stymeist (2010) reported that some Christian parents who are discouraged from enrolling their child with special needs in a Christian school do not persist as they believe it is un-Christian to do so and they are also afraid that their child will not be treated with kindness.

**Diagnosis**—Given the lack of designated support staff and lack of special education qualifications, it is quite possible that some SWSN have not been identified. Further, testing and diagnosis can only be conducted with the approval of parents and some parents are reluctant to have their child formally 'labelled' with a disability or learning difficulty.

One respondent (the special needs teacher) reported that her principal had asked her to “limit the success of her program, so as not to encourage too many children with special needs as their enrolment was changing the profile of the school”. It appears that this may not be an isolated case as Shaywitz (2003) reported that school administrators sometimes feared the development of a good reputation for working with children with special needs as it might lead to a reduction in enrolments of high ability students.

## 2. Lack of qualifications

Learning Support Teams and teachers are described by the General Purpose Standing Committee No 2 (2010) in NSW, as key to the provision of adequate

support for students with special needs. In addition, it is well recognised that qualifications and ongoing professional development opportunities are required for these teachers. “Teachers need ongoing professional learning opportunities inside and outside the school to maintain effective inclusive teaching practices” (Ashman & Elkins, 2009, p. 100).

In this system study, sixty-six percent of the schools did not have a staff member with special education qualifications designated to support students with special needs.

*Little or no training makes this a very difficult area to manage well. (Principal of a small rural school)*

In his 2005 study of faith-based schools in 10 mid west counties in the USA, Eigenbrood also found teachers in the support role without the appropriate specialised qualifications. Hodgkinson and Vickerman (2009, p.86) noted the problems associated with the lack of qualified LSTs within UK schools.

*As far back as the Warnock report (1978) the distinct lack of specialist training has been raised as a potential barrier to the successful implementation of special education...and most recently (2004) successful practice is again being inhibited by the same issue.*

## 3. Networking and professional development

There is an absence of sharing, networking and collegial support in the area of special needs for many of the schools in this study. This is exacerbated by a lack of systemic support from state or national levels.

The respondents recognised the need for sharing and professional development for all staff working with SWSN.

*If other schools are anything like ours then all teachers would benefit by learning about programming and teaching for children with special needs. (Respondent)*

Research by Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) demonstrated that half (49%) of the regular teachers in their study felt the need for specific training if they were to include children with special needs successfully. Pudlas (2004) proposed that if teachers are challenged by the diversity of their students, their own lack of training and perceived lack of support, it is likely that their professional efficacy will suffer and they model a negative attitude towards these students.

## 4. Funding

As noted in the literature review, funding is both an important and difficult issue. The shift in educational

policy and legislation has led to increasing numbers of students with special needs enrolling in regular schools—government or non-government. A report by the Australian Education Union (2010, p. 2) confirmed the funding difficulty.

There is clear evidence over a long period that the level of resources and funding required to ensure quality education for disabilities/special needs is inadequate with negative consequences for students, families, teachers, other education workers and schools. While there have been significant increases in funding for students with a disability or special needs by governments, it has not been sufficient to ensure the resources necessary to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of students with an identified disability and increasingly complex disabilities.

The Australian Education Union (2010, p. 3) argues that generally “private schools enrol less than half the percentage of students with disabilities than do government schools”. However, in the case of the schools in this study, there were higher percentages of SWSN enrolled than in either government or Catholic schools.

## Conclusion and recommendations

1. There is a need for active lobbying by parents, teachers, school administrators and system administrators for funding to be attached to the student rather than the school. Given the higher enrolment of students with special needs in this system than in state schools, this is a critical issue if the students are to receive an adequate education and the teachers are to provide for their needs.
2. The profile and value of education for students with special needs within the system needs to be enhanced through the appointment of a system special education coordinator. This role could include advocacy, policy development, facilitation of collaborative networks, and delivery of in-servicing and professional development.
3. This study has provided considerable evidence that special needs staff feel isolated from each other in this system. Regular online-conferencing could address both the issue of isolation and that of regular in-servicing.
4. Increased support (and funding for release time) is needed to upgrade both classroom and support teachers' qualifications in the area of special needs.

Systemic improvement is possible, providing the stakeholders: teachers, ancillary staff, parents and administrators, are willing to work together and want to see improvement. **TEACH**

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“Regular online conferencing could address both the issue of isolation and that of regular in-servicing”



## Building relationships outdoors

**Daniel Muller**

Mathematics Teacher, Gilson College, Taylors Hill, Vic

“Some students realise, for the first time, that their teachers are real people, that they enjoy many similar hobbies, and that they were also young once and have made mistakes in their past”

**Relationship is a powerful concept when exploring human connectedness. The spouse, friend, mother and child are examples of relationships in which there is mutual care for the other and a desire for optimal outcomes for the other. This reciprocal relationship also applies to the classroom. Teachers care about and desire optimal outcomes for their students, however, without an established relationship, students may not reciprocate the same level of care and desire for positive outcomes.**

The Learn4Life (L4L) program at Gilson College deliberately sets out to create a context that is conducive to relationship development. The program aims to develop self-confidence, independence, and responsibility by engaging students in real-life experiences of success, failure, challenge, and service. The program is implemented through three components: expedition learning, service learning, and urban learning. It has become evident to me that those students willing to form relationships with teachers and peers enjoy increased growth from the program. In my experience, the students who lack these relationships are less able to explore some of the learning intentions of the program.

L4L has provided me with an ideal environment in which to build relationships with my students and to facilitate relationship building between students. Taking students to wilderness settings and asking them to complete tasks that are outside their comfort zone, creates opportunities for bonding

that would not be possible in a classroom setting. Experiences such as watching a sunrise together, tending an injury, or collaboratively planning worship experiences allow students to view their teachers in a different light. Some students realise, for the first time, that their teachers are real people, that they enjoy many similar hobbies, and that they were also young once and have made mistakes in their past.

Most students want to get to know their teacher better but lack the opportunity to do so. For me, relationships have been established during the L4L program by listening to what students want to say, showing care and empathy for individuals, discussing a common interest, or simply asking, “How are you?” each morning.

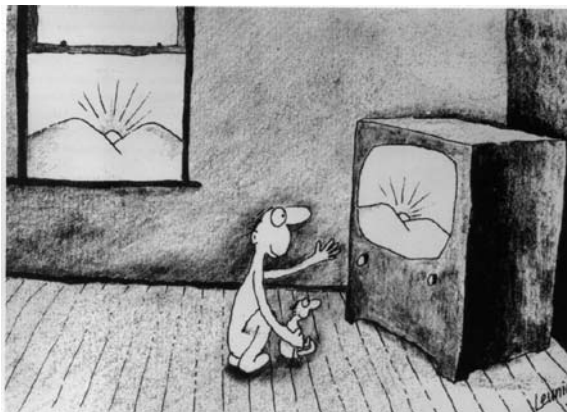
### Developing teacher–student relationships

Mutually respectful student–teacher relationships are central to improving educational experiences in the middle years. Much research continues to confirm, teachers relating well to their students remains one of the most significant factors in generating positive academic and social outcomes. (Pendergast & Bahr, 2006, p.211)

I have seen this dynamic at work in my Year 9 classroom.

I recall a student in my Mathematics class who resisted authority and did not like to be told what to do, especially by a young teacher for whom he had no respect. For the first few weeks of school, we regularly clashed on issues such as homework and punctuality. Then he found himself in my group for a six-day wilderness experience in Tasmania. As we trudged through the wilderness, with its hardship of rain, leeches and mud, the group of twelve city boys bonded with each other. I too, was able to use the setting to form relationships. I came to realise that simple tasks such as treating scratches and bites, having regular worship time, allowing the students to take leadership roles, completing challenges as a group, and debriefing after each day’s walk, all helped me to foster a relationship with the students. In turn, the students had an opportunity to experience a different side of me as their teacher. They began to realise that I genuinely wanted to help them and that I have feelings too.

At the first Math class after our return to school, the formerly belligerent student greeted me with a



[Cartoon: Michael Leunig]

handshake such as you might see rappers greet each other with in a gangster movie. As we moved into class, he told me he hadn't completed all the work set before the camp, but that he had tried. We weren't clashing any more. I attribute the change in that student to the time spent together in a different context, and to the care I showed in strapping his twisted ankle each night while away. This 'hard nut' is now in the school choir and visits me for regular chats. He has changed his whole attitude to life, which has in turn, changed his view about the genuineness of teachers; he now understands that we care.

The concept of relationship is important if teachers want to reach their students, but the L4L program also aims to influence the attitudes and relationships between students and their peers.

## Developing student–student relationships

One year later, I was back in Tasmania; this time leading a group of girls from a range of social and cultural backgrounds on a six-day expedition. The first day required a long 9-hour walk, in rain and then darkness. Along the way, I observed the emergence of a group hierarchy and formation of sub-groups. Following a severely cold and frosty night, the first challenge of day two was to work together to cross a stream. In the two hours it took to cross the stream, I saw outstanding examples of teamwork; however, the segregation remained.

As the morning progressed, I was at the back of the line with two girls, each from very different social groups but both were struggling to keep up. I started a conversation in an attempt to lift the mood. When we caught up with the group for lunch, the two girls chose to sit together. I quietly observed the development of this unlikely relationship; they were sitting by themselves, talking and laughing as if they had been friends forever. This new environment, together with the joys and challenges it provided, had given these two young people an experience neither they, nor I, will ever forget. The new openness shown by these two girls spread to the rest of the group. They each came to realise that they were all going through the same trials and tribulations.

## Relationship as the foundation for instruction

I have come to see that forming real relationships with my students is a key to not only prepare them for life now, but also for life eternal. Jesus made time for building relationships and often used relationships as a basis from which to give instruction. He humbly washed the feet of His disciples and ate with them before revealing more

of himself and of God's mission (John 13–16). He took the time to break down cultural and spiritual barriers between himself and the Samaritan woman at the well before teaching her about God's kingdom (John 4). In order to have the most positive impact on students, teachers need to work on relationship building. Using Jesus as their example, teachers are called to walk with them, talk with them and tend to their cares. This places teachers in the best position from which to give instruction.

Jesus used the outdoors extensively. As he walked, he was able to develop a relationship with his disciples and they grew to know him. Teachers need to get to know who their students really are, and use this information to initiate meaningful interaction. A foundation for trust and respect can be built in this way.

The outdoors provides opportunities for students to share their life story, see their first sun set, eat burnt food, or sleep in a tent. These joys and trials open a window through which teachers can gain a better understanding of their students. Students also have an opportunity to see how teachers and peers deal with adventure and adversity. Although relationships with students can be formed in a four-walled room, the largely untapped setting of the great outdoors offers rich and rewarding relationship building opportunities. **TEACH**

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“*I have come to see that forming real relationships with my students is a key to not only prepare them for life now, but also for life eternal*”



[Photography:  
Peter Beamish]

## Essential skills and attitudes for principals in developing countries

**Tim Scott**

Education Superintendent, Cambodia Adventist Mission, Cambodia

**Many years ago, I was approached about teaching in a remote location in a developing country. As a young man, I was adventuresome and brave, so I accepted the job as the teacher and principal in a one-teacher school in the Mission Field. Now, nearly forty years later and with many more experiences in other schools and Missions, I would like to encourage those who might have a desire for adventure and excitement to consider teaching or administration in a developing area.**

*Taking a leadership position in a developing country where the culture is usually significantly different to the home nation requires leaders to approach their tasks in new ways*

There are many opportunities; the Adventist Volunteer Service website is a possible source of positions. (Volunteers are often given stipends so you don't have to be independently wealthy to take a job overseas) There may be positions available within your own area or state but if you feel that you have something to offer others in education, you want to be appreciated by students and parents, or you just want a change of scenery, consider the possibility of overseas work or a small school within your own area.

Administration is likely to be part of teaching overseas (or in small schools), especially when local staff may have limited education or experience. Foreigners are often considered experts in everything because they have seen more of the world and have likely experienced more educational opportunities as well as technology. The developing

world is fast catching up with technology, but in many countries, the foreigner is expected to have more skills and abilities than local workers.

The primary skill required for administration in a developing country is leadership. Leadership styles will likely change according to time and place, and develop with experience. Administrators usually lead based on their experiences when they were teachers and rarely will the theories learned in college courses or advice found in literature be cited as reasons for what they do (Dailey, 1983). Taking a leadership position in a developing country where the culture is usually significantly different to the home nation requires leaders to approach their tasks in new ways.

The easiest and most common mistake managers make about their leadership style is to assume that an effective style in one situation will be effective in another situation. (Dailey, 1983, p. 79)

What are some of the skills and attitudes necessary for working in such locations? Combining my experience as a teacher, vice-principal, principal, and education superintendent in both Africa and Asia with findings from literature, this article discussed the characteristics required by those working in an educational administration role in a developing country.

**Vision:** Administrators need to have vision in order to lead others. If a vision statement is not available, new administrators should develop one, along with a strategic plan, as a matter of priority. Innovative and visionary goals can be implemented and achieved with careful planning. In developing countries a vision of a school similar to one in the developed world may not be realistic. However, a vision of a school where the students grow in their relationship with the Lord is never unrealistic.

**Leadership style:** There are two key theories regarding workers and management. Theory X proposes that most workers feel negatively about work and thus will try to avoid it whenever possible. It is assumed that workers are not very intelligent, thus they can be easily lead. However, the manager must closely supervise them and they must be forced to do their work. The workers do not have any responsibility for making decisions because they



[Photography:  
Tim Scott]



# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

want to be told what to do (McGregor, 1990a as cited by Kowalski, 2003).

On the other hand, Theory Y, states that negative ideas and feelings about work are due to the workers' past experiences. This theory argues that with proper motivation and rewards, most workers in an organisation can be highly committed to the organisation's objectives. The workers actually seek and will accept responsibility if the organisation's conditions are favourable towards this (McGregor, 1990b as cited by Kowalski, 2003).

Administrators, according to Theory X, are highly directive, autocratic and very task oriented. Whereas they are more flexible according to Theory Y as they try to balance work tasks with personnel relationships. Theory Y requires administrators to empower employees by giving them a degree of autonomy whilst achieving organisational goals (McGregor, 1990b as cited by Kowalski, 2003). In today's society and workplace, Theory Y is more conducive to the leadership of modern workers. However, according to the author's experiences and observations in both Africa and Asia, Theory X style of leadership remains both dominant and desired by most local personnel. Empowering local workers can be implemented gradually as one job of a missionary is to find someone local to be a future replacement.

**Instructional leader:** Within the school, the principal is perceived as the instructional leader. This role is likely to include tasks such as performance reviews, communication of new methods or strategies, mentoring, modelling, and staff professional development. The principal is the cheerleader and motivator: praising past efforts, recognising difficulties and problems, encouraging and inspiring teachers to achieve their utmost as the school year progresses.

Sharing expertise in teaching methodologies is always a positive aspect of a principal's role. In many developing countries, teachers have not learned to teach problem solving, logic or cooperative learning techniques.

**Decision maker:** To be an administrator is to be a decision maker. Making decisions is a skill that requires deliberation of the available information and alternatives, whilst recognising that the information is often incomplete. Due to conflicting interests both inside and outside the school, it is difficult to eliminate bias from the process. In some cases, leaders must be flexible when additional information is made available. Decisions seen as ethical and fair will usually have the support of both superiors and subordinates. Understanding the culture of others and not being dogmatic in solutions to problems is helpful for maintaining good relations. (Saying "this is the way we do it in my country!" is not a good tactic.)

**Listener:** The ability to listen to others is a valued skill in a leader. Effective organisational change and the building of consensus towards organisational goals can be achieved through shared decision-making. However, this calls for careful negotiation in cultures where leaders are expected to possess the knowledge and skills to make decisions and manage a successful initiative.

**Disciplinarian:** In many cases, the principal is responsible for dealing with the major discipline issues that occur within a school. Resolution usually requires face-to-face meetings where both verbal and non-verbal communication take place. It is essential that the principal be conscious of how culture, context, and use of 'jargon' are likely to impact on a given situation.

At times, the principal is required to respond to the inappropriate behaviour of employees. Ignoring improper conduct is often perceived by subordinates as condoning the action. Privately addressing the person/persons involved usually has a greater impact than making a general announcement or giving a public reprimand.

Time and schedules are often thought to be unimportant in many cultures. Giving gentle reminders and encouragement regarding promptness has lifted standards and brought improvement in schools where I have worked.

**Communicator:** Successful communication requires an understanding of cultural expectations. A leader may intentionally or unintentionally, send verbal or non-verbal messages that result in subordinates feeling defensive or criticised. A climate of mistrust may develop, rendering successful communication with employees near impossible in the future. An administrator, just as a teacher, who can show others that they love them and want them to improve and grow, will be appreciated and forgiven for most errors of culture.

Experienced principals are well acquainted

“*An administrator, just as a teacher, who can show others that they love them and want them to improve and grow, will be appreciated and forgiven for most errors of culture*”





# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

**“Innovation and flexibility are required in order to achieve goals and fulfil the mission of the institution”**

with the community. They utilise parent–teacher groups for advice and counsel. Businesses, law enforcement agencies and other educational institutions should also be consulted when necessary. Knowing how much is useful to be communicated and when the communication is best to take place are important.

**Technology user:** Computer skills in today’s world are vital for administrators. However, in developing countries, subordinates may not have access to computers. The use of this technology may then be misunderstood or felt to be a way to keep subordinate workers restricted or controlled. Providing opportunities for employees to gain technological skills maintains a positive atmosphere towards its use and benefits the subordinates.

**Delegator:** Administrators should not do work that is the responsibility of others. When asked to do tasks that are not part of their sphere, they need to be able to refuse with decisiveness and direct others to fulfil the responsibility.

Leaders must be visionary. Innovation and flexibility are required in order to achieve goals and fulfil the mission of the institution. In this role, administrators should seek continual growth and development both personally and professionally. The intrinsic rewards that are often cherished by those in teaching positions in developing countries are also available to administrators. **TEACH**

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## Teachers as miracle workers?

**Ken Weslake**

Assistant Education Director, South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

**It always amazes me that in just over four or five hours by jet from Sydney or Auckland one can be visiting a classroom in a developing country that seems to be ‘a whole world away’ in operation. I was first confronted with this difference in the early 1980s as a schools’ supervisor and pilot for a Seventh-day Adventist Mission in Papua New Guinea. I was on my way to Rakamanda in the Enga Province and called in to a small bush school at Tomba at an elevation of nearly 3,000 meters. The school was one of the poorest I had ever seen and yet, I was to discover, not unlike so many others. The floor was dirt; the students had no books or pencils. The teacher’s desk was an old electric stove with the elements gone. I noticed that each child had brought to school a piece of pit-pit stalk and later watched them using this as a pencil to write in the dirt on the floor. They had no other resources and yet, in spite of this, they could read and write and weren’t too bad at math either.**

Amazingly, in some parts of the Pacific, not much has changed. I recently flew into Karamui, located some 20 minutes flight south of Goroka, in the Eastern Highlands of PNG. There I met students who had walked for seven days to attend the school. Their teacher had a B.Ed. degree and when I asked her why she was working in such an isolated community rather than in a better equipped town school she simply said, “This is where the need is. These students really need me and this is where God wants me to be.”

I talked recently with a teacher who has 180 students in her class! She divides her school into three rooms and moves from room to room on a 20 minute rotation. I asked her if she ever got discouraged to which she replied that she often

went home discouraged and cried. I asked what her husband’s reaction to that was and she replied: “He just says, ‘Let’s just keep working until Jesus comes and then we can take a rest!’”

She isn’t the only teacher with a large class. I know of another in Western Province in the South West of PNG who has 200 students. Last year I visited a large primary school in Honiara, Solomon Islands with an average class size of 70 students. I also visited a school in Lae, PNG in 2009 with 400 students, all smartly dressed in blue uniform. Last year their roll was 750 with no increase in classrooms or teachers. At this same school, in 2008, one of their security guards was murdered at the school gate as children were preparing to head home for the day. Violence in broad daylight is part of everyday life for many children in PNG.

Some scenes are quite unexpected. For example, the school at Enekis in Tana, Vanuatu, a bush school with over 100 students and a gruelling three hour’s walk from the end of the road, has a beautiful campus overflowing with happy children. Not far from the school, under another thatched roof, is a flat screen monitor and out under a nearby coconut tree is a small Honda generator. These village folk have purchased this resource for the school. When I asked what educational DVDs they had, they proudly showed me Rambo, Charlie Chan, and the Terminator! They had no other educational materials. No wonder the kids enjoyed school!

On more than one occasion, while visiting a remote school in Vanuatu and also in the Solomon Islands, a villager has turned up and asked if we knew about another school just over the mountain there, or down the river, “long this way”. Village parents value education, though they are most likely illiterate themselves. They often build a simple school and conscript one of their young people who

“*This is where the need is. These students really need me and this is where God wants me to be*”

[Photography: Ken Weslake]





# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

may be lucky enough to have completed Grade 6 to be the teacher. It is estimated that in the Solomon Islands alone some 25% of the teaching force could be untrained. Vanuatu figures are similar.

There are many boarding schools across the Pacific. Most of them offer a standard of accommodation that is better than in the village, but some struggle. Dormitories are often old and dilapidated and in urgent need of repair. At Kwataparen in Vanuatu, girls have to bathe in a makeshift enclosure made from sticks and plastic sheets. The boys' accommodation is deteriorating badly due to the school's close proximity to the sea and salt air.

By Western standards there are few schools in the Pacific that would be judged to be well equipped. The further one travels away from the major centres the less equipped and resourced they become. But what impresses me is that in spite of the lack of resources—no library books, no text books, barest of furniture, to say nothing of the absence of computers, interactive whiteboards and data projectors—the students still succeed in numeracy and literacy. Their teachers are nothing short of committed, faithful, miracle workers.

So, if ever you, as a teacher, are tempted to complain about your lack of reliable technology, or your large class, or your old textbooks that needed updating five years ago, just remember that less than a few hours travel time away are teachers and students who would think they had arrived in heaven if they had a quarter of what we so often take for granted in our schools here.

We can be thankful for all the blessings that God bestows on us. We do not have the overwhelming educational needs that some of our Christian colleagues have to deal with in developing countries on Australia's and New Zealand's doorstep. Should our arms merely be folded in gratitude or is there

a nobler, more generous and practical response open to us? Who knows what miracles YOU can achieve? **TEACH**

Ken Weslake can be contacted at [kweslake@adventist.org.au](mailto:kweslake@adventist.org.au)

“  
***Their teachers are nothing short of committed, faithful, miracle workers***  
”



[Photography:  
Ken Weslake]

## Peer support

**Craig Young**

Religious Studies Teacher, Peer Support Coordinator, Avondale School, Cooranbong, NSW

**Peer Support is a program that has been developed by Peer Support Australia ([www.peersupport.edu.au](http://www.peersupport.edu.au)) and has been implemented in Australian schools for the past 30 years, and at Avondale School for over 20 years. The purpose of Peer Support in secondary schools is to help the Year 7 group adapt to secondary school by intentionally connecting them with a chosen group of Year 10 or 11 Peer Support Leaders.**

Avondale School has recently trialled several potential improvements to the implementation of the Peer Support program: a) the timing of Peer Support Leader training; b) including Peer Support Leaders in the Year 7 Outdoor Education program; c) scheduling all Peer Support sessions concurrently each week; and d) combining the debriefing and briefing of leaders in one session.

The training and selection of the Peer Support Leaders took place during the final week of school for the Year 10s. This worked well as teaching and the School Certificate examinations had finished, so we were able to set aside two days for the required training. Eight teachers facilitated and modelled the Peer Support activities, and gave input into the selection of the leaders, who were then notified in their end of year report packs and given a certificate from Peer Support Australia. The evaluation surveys taken at the end of the two days revealed that staff and students felt it was a fun and purposeful way to end the school year. Our experience this year has shown the value of early training, staff and students were well prepared to engage in the Peer Support Program.

The Year 7 Outdoor Education Day was held in a local park in the third week of Term 1. Peer Support groups consisting of 8–10 Year 7s and 2–3 Peer Support Leaders engaged in a range of team building activities facilitated by staff. It was a full day of building relationships, playing, learning and enjoying each other's company. Staff and students almost unanimously commented that it was a positive way to launch the Peer Support program and introduce the leaders to their groups.

The in-class program began a few days later utilising the activities and resources outlined in the manual. The weekly sessions were timetabled concurrently but during a different class period each week so that the students (as far as was possible) did not miss the same subject each week. This

arrangement has resulted in less disruption to the school program.

The Supervising Teacher Feedback Proforma (from the manual) was used in order to provide timely feedback about the level of preparedness of the leaders, the group dynamics, and how the sessions went in general. This information was used in a debriefing session with the Peer Support Leaders the following day during lunch. This time was also used to brief them on the next week's session, which was emailed to them a week in advance in order to prepare. The manual suggests separate briefing and debriefing sessions, but the one combined session proved better for the Peer Support Leaders. These debriefing/briefing sessions were vital for monitoring and addressing challenges and sharing positive experiences. Challenges that surfaced included difficulty keeping the lively Year 7s on task, and managing a talkative or non-cooperative group. (It was delightful to see them experiencing first hand the joys and challenges of teaching!)

### Conclusion

My experience with Peer Support at Avondale School has been very positive and I would encourage schools not offering the program, to consider its implementation. It has been gratifying to see the Peer Leaders take on the leadership mantle. Admittedly, some leaders didn't keep their commitment to attending the debriefing sessions or preparing as well as they should have, and some Year 7s needed to be 'encouraged' to cooperate. However, judging from the feedback received from the Year 7 students, the Peer Support Leaders and staff, the Peer Support Program is a worthwhile inclusion in our Special Character schools because it supports and enhances many of the values we espouse and contributes to improved relationships, which seems to me to be the essence of Jesus' teachings. **TEACH**

*“The program supports and enhances many of the values we espouse and contributes to improved relationships”*



[Photography: Craig Young]



## BOOK REVIEW

### *Friendship on fire*

Danielle Weiler. (2010). Glen Waverley, Vic: Sid Harta Publishers.

#### Denise Brown & Jessica Foster

English teachers, Carmel Adventist College, Carmel, WA

School captain, Daisy Brooks, had high hopes for her final year in high school. She soon realised that life does not always go to plan. Tensions develop in her relationships with teachers and students alike. How will she relate to opposition from fellow students, pressures from never-ending deadlines and the handsome stranger who has intercepted her world?

Daisy loves life and wishes to live it to the full but she is often unprepared for the situations life is pushing her into and she struggles with clear decision making. Her warm, caring nature contrasts with her quick, sometimes difficult to control temper. Through the year, she discovers much about friendships, relationships and first love.

Tugs of war and tugs of love exist side by side and Daisy is pulled in many directions as she tries to negotiate between fantasy and reality. Friendships she thought were stable falter and new ones develop. Constantly intruding into her busy life is the realisation that life is changing; she is changing. She is aware of her impending adulthood with its rights and responsibilities.

Not all of Daisy's decisions are wise and she is tempted to believe that she has ruined her life forever. Her much-loved grandmother is able to reassure her and give her a gentle nudge into the right direction.

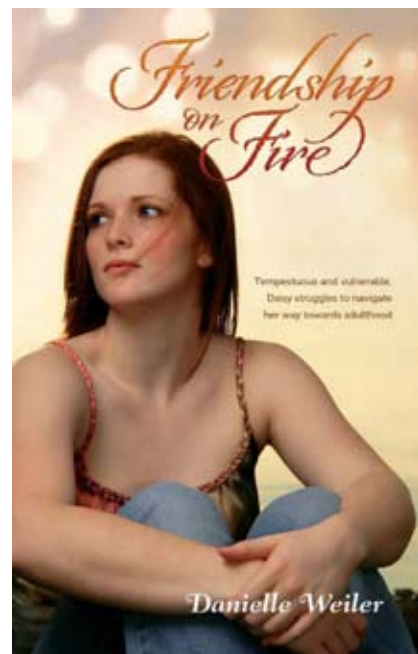
*Friendship on fire* is written with Australian teenagers in mind. The author has a sympathetic, tolerant attitude to her characters as they develop through the novel. The book is an excellent medium for investigating personal values. Themes of identity and belonging, trust and betrayal, relationships and friendships,

character development and life philosophies may all be considered when reading/studying this book. Students will be able to identify with the characters and think seriously about the choices they make, the relationships they are involved in and the ability to start again after mistakes. Such wisdom is a much desired trait for young readers.

Year 12 students, who have read this text, commented, "The characters were believable and realistic and it was refreshing to read a text with values that weren't shoved down your throat." They believed that this style of writing gave credibility to the themes.

*Friendship on fire* is a welcome change to the subtle and not so subtle inclusion of the supernatural into young adult fiction. It is about real life situations with real life characters. It is recommended for secondary school study and the author has written a comprehensive, flexible teacher's program that can be adapted for Years 9–12.

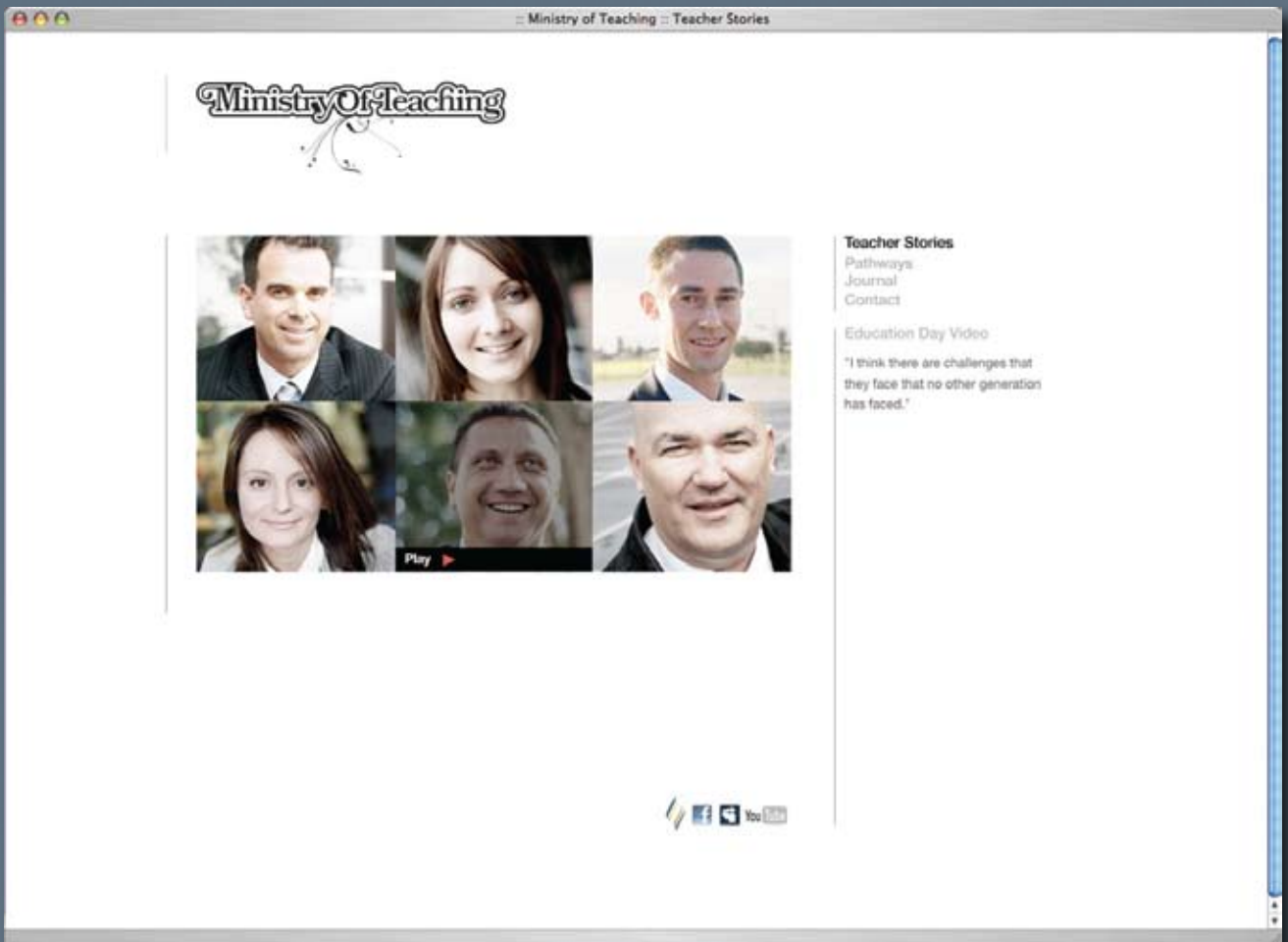
Author, Danielle Weiler, also writes a blog at [www.danielleweileronline.com](http://www.danielleweileronline.com) and can be contacted there regarding her novel. [TEACH](#)



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