Child protection in independent schools

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Abstract
Given the relationship between a person's emotional development, their faith development and the experiences during the early years of their lives, it is vital for the Christian school to do all it can to ensure that students are kept safe from all forms of abuse. This paper analyses research on the psychological effects of child abuse and gives practical ideas for teachers and schools on how to protect their students, themselves, and their colleagues from allegations of reportable conduct. It considers the value of a person to God and the responsibility that sits with school staff to protect children.

Why this topic is important
Christian schools express God's love for children by enabling His invitation "Come unto Me". As a consequence, these schools make child protection a foundational element of their culture because of at least three significant observations. Firstly, children are the most precious commodity any community, including a church, has today and the most vital commodity this world has in securing its future. Damaging them potentially limits their future as well as their relationship to God and to their community. Secondly, educators recognise that staff members in independent schools are not immune to involvement in predatory behaviours towards children. Finally, school communities are challenged by William Glasser's statement made in 1997 that paedophilia was the "public health problem of the decade" (Glasser, 1997, p. 1). In 2010 the issues and stories of abuse from inside and outside the Christian sector indicate no improvement in this risk in this new century. What does God think?

What God thinks
There is no escaping the highly valued relationship God has initiated with us as human beings. Zephaniah reveals God's heart when he says: "The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." Zeph 3:17 (New International Version).

The apostle Paul further highlights our value to God when he says: "Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!)" Eph 1:4–5 (The Message).

Considering children and their importance to Him, Jesus goes one step further and actually admonishes adults to make sure children are treated in a special and caring way: "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matt 19:14 (New American Standard Version).

Nobody knows like our Creator the impact abuse has on the developing mind and emotions of the child. In considering his extensive practice of psychotherapy Erikson (1959) was able to identify 8 consecutive stages in human social-emotional development (see Table 1), and in each of these stages, abuse in one form or another will have an impact.

Building on Erikson's stages of development, Cloninger (2006) believes that rather than the stages being discrete and consecutive, "such development can be visualised as a spiral of expanding height, width, and depth as a person matures or increases in coherence of personality" (p. 2). As a person reaches

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each stage of development, they will take with them the previous stage also and continue to develop and broaden it. This adds importance to the impact teachers can have on students at each stage of development but also raises concerns over the impact abuse can have on the emotional maturity of that child.

Fowler (1981 as cited in Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener & Benson, 2006), based his faith development theory on Erikson’s stages. The moral, social and cognitive aspects of a person’s emotional development parallel their faith development. Fowler believed that faith is independent of religion as such, but it is a “person’s way of responding to transcendent value and power in such a way that the trust in and loyalty to the source of transcendence integrate our identity and give our lives unity and meaning” (p. 7). Given that faith development in students is a vital part of the program of a Christian school, it is important for teachers to realise that anything that interferes with the emotional development of the young person, will also interfere with that person’s faith development.

By studying Table 1, and considering the more negative outcome at each of the stages of emotional development, it can be found that each of these are characteristics of children who are victims of some form of abuse and they will carry these outcomes into adulthood. Mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, poor sense of identity, isolation, self-absorption and despair are found either singly or in collection in children who have suffered abuse.

As evidence of the impact of sexual abuse on children, Wonderlich (2000) reports a series of facts that confirm the impact of child sexual abuse on emotional and moral development. He reports that approximately 31% of women in prison stated that they had been abused as children. Further, it was identified that approximately 95% of teenage prostitutes had been sexually abused. Finkelhor and Browne (1986) add more specifically to the evidence in stating that: “Long term effects of child abuse include fear, anxiety, depression, anger, hostility, inappropriate sexual behaviour, poor self esteem, tendency toward substance abuse and difficulty with close relationships” (p. 69).

Parents and significant other adults such as teachers and church leaders are those entrusted with the development of an emotionally balanced child. It can be imagined how seriously God sees any act of an adult that would prevent a child coming to Him and securing their place within His kingdom (Matt 19:14).

Teachers therefore, need to scrutinise carefully their behaviour towards children and in addition be always aware of the signs that may indicate that a child’s development may have been interfered with in some way. These orientations to professional practice can firstly protect both the teacher and the children and secondly provide opportunity for referral, potentially enabling support and restoration. Being informed about forms of abuse and understanding the consequences becomes essential for current teaching practice.

**Types of abuse**

Sexual abuse is just one type of reportable conduct suffered by children. Physical abuse and psychological abuse are also damaging for children but are not considered as newsworthy by the media as sexual misconduct, consequently the community is less aware of the incidence of these forms. Historical incidents in prominent church organisations have placed sexual abuse in the headlines on numerous occasions over the last two decades, but in the eyes of child protection agencies, the other two forms of abuse are equally serious in their impact.

Research shows that combinations of any of the types of sexual abuse indicated here lead to a more complicated set of mental health issues for the victim as they move into adulthood (O’Leary, Coohey & Easton, 2010). The severity of the sexual abuse and the way it may be combined with physical and emotional abuse are indicators of the level and form of complexity of future mental health issues.

**How teachers can protect themselves and students**

It is vital that teachers do not put themselves into positions or situations where their motives or actions can be questioned. It is equally important that teachers observe other teachers and their behaviour with students.

Outside of the immediate family, teachers are the ones who spend the most time with students. This means that they are most able to notice changes in student behaviour that may indicate some form of abuse (Briggs and Hawkins, 1997). Teachers are also in a position to notice the sort of emotional malfunctions noted earlier when students are being interfered with (Finkelhor & Browne, 1986). As pointed out by Walsh, Rassafiani, Matthews, Farrell & Butler (2010), these emotional malfunctions can also include: "low self-esteem...dissociation, and self-harming behaviours” (p. 336).

Teachers can protect themselves, their colleagues and their students by observing some simple precautions. The main ones summarised below are based on the Association of Independent Schools of NSW suggested code of professional conduct (2004).

1. Teachers should never be drawn into conversations with students that include...
Increasingly schools ban teacher/student electronic contact except for academic communications that are specifically designed for that purpose.

Inappropriate sexual content or use suggestive overtones. This includes jokes and stories that are marginal in their implications. They should never discuss their own sexuality, relationships or desires with students.

2. There is very rarely a situation where it would be appropriate for a staff member to touch a child. This of course is age specific. An early childhood teacher comforting a hurting pre-school student using touch is a different situation to a secondary teacher comforting a senior student in the same way. In cases such as demonstrations in physical education, or in the application of first aid, touching may be necessary. Permission should be sought from the child however before they are touched.

3. A teacher needs to be very careful to avoid sexual exhibitionism—especially at the swimming pool, any changing room or on overnight excursions. In the same way they need to ensure they cannot be accused of watching children undress in the change rooms. They also need to ensure that students are not being exposed to the sexual behaviour of others. This includes exposing them to movies that have such scenes. Teachers should make sure they know the school’s policy on movie censorship. Most schools have a policy of not showing any movie classified higher than PG.

4. Teachers should not include students in their social networking ‘friend list’. Emailing, texting, skyping and chatting online are also activities that are considered unwise. Increasingly schools and state departments of education are creating policies that ban teacher/student electronic contact except for academic communications that are specifically designed for that purpose. As a result of inappropriate communications between teachers and students, the Queensland Department of Education and Training has created a revised code of conduct for teachers prohibiting contact by teachers with students on social networking internet sites (Ninemsn staff, 2009).

5. While the use of pornography in any form by a teacher while at school would normally be called a breach of professional ethics in the school’s staff handbook, the possession of child pornography is illegal. If found in an electronic format the school would need to provide the teacher’s computer (or ICT device) as well as the name of the teacher to the police. The way teachers use photography also needs to be dealt with carefully, especially photo opportunities at all school events, including camps and swimming carnivals. School protocols should be clear, known and adhered to.

6. Teachers know that they are not to have ‘favourites’ in their classes. This is very difficult because naturally some students are easier to relate to than others. Special attention towards certain students can however be construed as ‘grooming’. It can be interpreted by others in this way when they perceive teachers are attempting to convince the child of their ‘special relationship’, are spending inappropriate ‘special time’, giving gifts, showing favours, and allowing the student to ‘overstep the mark’.

7. Every teacher is aware that physical force used against a student, except where the teacher is trying to prevent harm or injury, is unlawful and the teacher could easily lose school employment due to a complaint of physical contact with a child. It is probably fair to say however, that not every teacher would be aware that even if a teacher threatens a student, and the student believes that physical aggression is possible, that behaviour is also reportable.

8. Also categorised as physical abuse is the area of excessive punishment or ill-treatment which also includes lack of treatment or neglect. This could be the refusal to provide first aid or transport to medical professionals if the need exists.

9. Finally there is the area of psychological harm where the words of a teacher can have profound effects on a student. This may include constant yelling, sarcasm, belittling, and the use of ‘nick-names’. If a teacher’s arsenal of student management techniques contains the constant use of any of these, there is cause for concern.

What does a ‘groomer’ look like?
Smallbone and Wortley (1999) report research carried out in Queensland amongst convicted and imprisoned child sex offenders. The participants openly reported many details that help to profile a person who is intent on grooming a child. The average age of an offender when they first offend is 31 years, 78% were Australian born who were not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders and 37% had no previous convictions. Only 19% of offenders reported their father as being affectionate. Having a violent, abusive or dismissive father was reported by 37% and 55% had themselves been sexually abused. Pornography had been used by 86%, including 10% who used child pornography.

This profile of offenders represents normal Australians who became experts at grooming children. Their motivation for grooming fell into two broad categories: those who had a preference for abusing children and those who were opportunists. In a school situation, a person who is so inclined will have many opportunities to exercise their power over children, but concern should extend to all school age...
associated group activities including sport, outdoor activities, electronic gaming, religion, and cultural pursuits such as music, dance, and other arts.

As pointed out by Smallbone and Wortley (1999), it is a mistake to believe that girls are more susceptible to abuse than boys. While perpetrators of sexual abuse are 3 times more likely to abuse females, males are 3 times more likely to be abused. This is because the few serial offenders in the group were more likely to target male victims.

What observations would specifically point to an adult who may be intent on grooming a child? In the same study by Smallbone and Wortley (1999), data revealed that 67% of offenders reported their method of grooming as touching non-sexually. For 59% it was giving potential victims lots of attention while for 56% it was spending lots of time with them. A similar proportion (56%) made sure they did things that the child wanted to do.

It is the role therefore of each person in the school community to advise colleagues if, in their opinion, the colleague’s behaviour could be perceived to be inappropriate and suspect, but also to report colleagues or others if they believe a child could be at risk.

Being fair to the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator
The only fair way to deal with allegations of reportable conduct by a staff member is to carry out a thorough, unbiased investigation into the allegation. It is not fair on the student who has reported the event not to take their evidence seriously and investigate. It is possible that the allegation will be vexatious, false, or misconceived, but in some cases it may be factual. There is precedence of child abuse in independent schools and any allegation needs to be taken seriously.

A properly carried out investigation will always include a risk analysis that considers both parties, their families, the wider school family and any other affected parties. Both chaplain and counsellor help should be offered to any involved party who desires it. While a teacher may feel ‘not supported’ when the principal asks for an investigation into an allegation about their conduct, it is in fact better for them to cooperate with an investigation. When the facts are retrieved, an innocent teacher will have their name cleared. Without an investigation there will always be questions over that particular allegation.

A caring Christian school needs to have a plan of action to help with the considerable residual hurt that will be generated when a staff member is accused of some form of reportable conduct. The hurt affects the alleged perpetrator whether the allegation is fact or otherwise. The students making the claim will also experience extremes of emotion and the families of both parties may suffer trauma at different levels.

Education and communication are key ingredients in helping the parties understand the process. This education for staff may include prior information on areas of policy content, case studies of past incidents, details of the investigators, availability of the counsellor and chaplain, what the financial and employment implications may be, and what the timeline for the investigation is.

No matter what information and factual details are given, there will still be significant emotional hurt to deal with at the time of an incident. It is particularly difficult for the rest of the staff who observe what is happening, but who are not privy to the facts of the case because of privacy issues. These persons need continued understanding and should be offered counselling also.

What issues does a Christian establishment have in dealing with this?
A Christian establishment should be very well equipped to deal with sensitive and emotive issues such as abusive type behaviours. Caring should be inherent and support should be plentiful. Unfortunately however, the past indicates that institutionalised culture and traditions can cause a different set of circumstances to prevail in a Christian setting that create organisational difficulties.

There can be the tendency to minimise any initial allegation of sexual abuse or at least to trivialise the allegation and hope it will go away. There is also precedence of alleged victims being discouraged from reporting alleged assaults. There can also exist an inbuilt culture and doctrine of specific roles for the different sexes that support patriarchy.

Other relevant issues are that, in many cases, the community and even families are polarised by the allegations and sides are taken.

Any allegation of abuse is a time when leadership is tested and school morale has to be intentionally nurtured. Weak leadership and uninformed action can make these situations more difficult than they need to be. Systems and organisations are demanding appropriate behaviours in leaders and require accountability with increased expectations of informed, professional, respectful attitudes associated with just processes.

How does ‘teacher caution’ affect pastoral care
In previous decades, school administrators were satisfied to see teachers mixing with students in the breaks rather than reading the paper over a hot drink in the staff room. On reflection, the revelation
The relationship between students and teachers in Christian schools has long been a feature of the school's pastoral care program and is particularly vital for students with dysfunctional or single parent families. Education, care and mutual accountability should be optimised to ensure the safety of students and staff.

References


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of many school-based cases of reportable teacher conduct indicates the need for cautious observation of interactions and the need for careful collegial council. School administrators appreciate the mentoring roles their teachers take on in the school, but are more aware now than in the past of the potential for allegations of reportable conduct to be made. Profiling indicates that the young, popular teacher has often been the one who may have an issue with child abuse involvement, or may be the one who is the victim of a misconceived allegation.

Pastoral care needs to protect the teachers as well as the students. The caring school will keep constant reminders before the teachers of their legal and spiritual duty of care for the students, for themselves and for their colleagues.

There are many positive ways that child protection can be kept before the teaching staff. A small item on the staff meeting agenda each week as is usually done for Occupational Health and Safety, is a proactive way of addressing issues and potential issues. This would emphasise the importance of child protection and keep it before the teachers regularly rather than a single training session annually. These regular items of information could be varied and may include the following: the review of a policy, a case study, a role play, a visiting professional, or a confidential discussion of a specific student.

Though this paper highlights many of the more negative aspects of the area of child protection, it would be a disappointing outcome if teacher/student relationships that serve to mentor students academically and spiritually were in jeopardy because of over zealousness in the child protection area. The relationship between students and teachers in Christian schools has long been a feature of the school’s pastoral care program and is particularly vital for students with dysfunctional or single parent families.
Research & Scholarship

Mentoring for impact

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Abstract

School based mentoring (SBM) is an increasingly popular component of pastoral care programs in Australian secondary schools. Concurrent with growing consensus over the benefits of SBM, there is increasing recognition that the benefits of SBM can be maximised through careful programming, appropriate benchmarking and effective evaluation. Although children spend approximately 40% of their waking hours in school, and SBM is increasingly common, there is surprisingly little data available on the effectiveness of SBM. This paper reports on research into a mentoring program that links undergraduate theology students to teenage students in a secondary school. While the mentoring program was of value to both mentors and mentees, interviews with participants point to the value of aligning the program with guidelines for best practice found in the Australian National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks, 2007.

Introduction

For the purpose of this paper mentoring is defined as a range of activities designed “to provide a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee” (Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2007, p. 13). Implicit in this definition is the premise that the primary beneficiary (mentee) is a young person who is assisted through personalised guidance and support in an organised program which links them to a supportive change agent (mentor).

As the author of Boy Oh Boy: How to Raise and Educate Boys, Tim Hawkes (2001) notes that the word ‘mentor’ is used in Homer’s epic poem The Odyssey. Written in Greek, approximately eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, the poem describes the responsibility given to a nobleman whose task it was to care for the son of the great Odysseus (otherwise known as Ulysses), a hero of the Trojan War who took ten adventurous years to return to his homeland. In Odysseus’s absence, Mentor coached, guarded and guided Telemachus (his mentee), befriending the fatherless young man, sharing his wisdom to guide his ward’s career and personal development. Mentor may be seen as a wise facilitator who used both formal and informal opportunities to deliberately encourage, support and develop the potential of his mentee through a proactive, supportive relationship.

School based mentoring (SBM) activities are of particular interest to pastoral care staff, administrators and school counsellors. While the impacts of community mentoring programs are well researched, SBM outcomes are less understood, especially for mentees (Jucovy, 2000, p. 1). Research findings on the impacts of mentoring have been contradictory and public perceptions of SBM are largely informed by research conducted on community mentoring programs and a small number of SBM research projects. Rhodes (2008, p. 41) notes that, “the field of youth mentoring has taken on a public life of its own—a life that is, at times, removed from the scientific evidence”. SBM can and should be viewed as a social phenomenon that requires careful study. Despite the presumption that all SBM activities are useful, some SBM programs may be poorly planned, poorly run and may lack evidence of impact.

Especially in school settings, where most students interact with adults in a relatively impersonal context, the impact of mentoring on individuals is widely perceived to be substantial, especially when mentors adopt a non-judgemental, advocate approach that is based on a positive relationship. In one study of 82 mentor/mentee pairs, most of the 24 mentors whose match failed “had a belief that they should and could ‘reform’ their mentee” (Jucovy, 2001, p. 1). Various researchers cited by MacCallum and Beltman (1999, p. 17) suggest that youth exposed to mentoring relationships benefit in terms of school attendance, school retention, progression to tertiary study, academic performance, self-confidence, self-efficacy, motivation, relationship with peers and family, problem solving skills and role modelling. In
a study of 53 Australian pilot indigenous mentoring programs the key outcomes identified were improved school attendance, strengthened participation in school activities, improved dialogue between Aboriginal families and community, and improved connections to the broader community (MacCullum, Beltman & Palmer, 2005, p. 6).

Although SBM research is still in its infancy, common areas of inquiry include effective length of mentoring matches, frequency of meetings, training and support, characteristics of effective mentors and impact on mentees (Grossman, 2009, p. 4). Research consistently points to the importance of long duration mentoring, maximising frequency of meetings, development of an emotional bond between mentor and mentee, and utilisation of a personal empowerment approach (Deutsch and Spencer, 2009). SBM is said to enjoy particular advantages over community based mentoring programs including increased appeal to mentors (reduced time commitments combined with increased personal security), strong referral systems for mentees (largely because teachers refer students to the program), enhanced potential for cross-gender mentoring and reduced costs (Jucovy, 2000, p. 1).

Advocacy for SBM is varied and proponents range from those who report small or moderate benefits to others who provide strong endorsement. The USA Arizona Governor’s Office for Children, Youth and Families (2005, p. 10) reported that although only 2% of Arizona’s youth were in a mentoring relationship, youth with mentors were 52% less likely to skip school, 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 37% less likely to skip a class, 32% less likely to hit someone, 27% less likely to begin using alcohol. Further, the commission posits that in the school based mentoring programs it investigated, youth were more confident, more positive about relationships and had better attitudes. Converse and Lignugaris/Kraft (2008) compared sixteen at-risk students mentored by staff to a control group of unmentored at-risk students and reported significant changes in attitudes of mentored individuals toward self, peers, teachers, and other school personnel. One study of high risk youth (often the mentees had a criminal record) found that mentoring “acted as a barrier against depression, which in turn had an effect on how the youth handled social conflicts, substance use and recidivism” (Bauldry, n.d., p. 18). It should be noted that the impact of SBM on mentors themselves is rarely researched however many researchers concur with the finding that mentors enjoy developing relationships and may experience “enhanced personal development and self-esteem” (MacCullum et al. 2005, p.6).

A study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters SBM program offered in USA schools is indicative of the benefits commonly reported for students. Researchers studied a total of 1,139 nine- to sixteen-year-olds in 71 participating schools. From this sample, 565 youth were randomly assigned to a beneficiary group from whom baseline data was collected and 574 assigned to the control group. The researchers found that mentoring resulted in improved academic performance, specifically in science and language, quality of class work, number of assignments handed in, number of serious school infractions, scholastic efficacy, and school attendance. Although there appeared to be significant benefits attached to the social connectedness provided by the mentoring program, the researchers did not discover any benefits in terms of “out-of-school drug and alcohol use, misconduct outside of school, peer and parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem” (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007, p. 68–69). Given the variation in outcomes observed for mentees in the various studies cited above, it may be that mentoring outcomes are affected by a variety of factors including mentor traits and training, the type and quality of programs offered, and the mentees themselves.

Reid (2008) notes that successful mentoring is dependent on the preparation of the program, attention to detail, and level of reflection conducted by the mentors. Training of mentors is essential. She says that if implemented well, “some learnable behaviours can improve complex interpersonal interactions. Mentoring programs do not need to rely only on participants’ instincts as they negotiate difficult social waters” (p. 52). Interestingly, Converse and Lignugaris/Kraft (2008) speculate that mentors who are more informal and playful, and rely less on planned activities or icebreakers, are more successful in establishing a mutually enjoyable relationship associated with tangible outcomes.

Hughes and Dykstra (2008) researched the perceptions university students had of the mentoring program they voluntarily participated in. Their work revealed that: “Mentors were motivated primarily by the opportunity to have a positive impact on youth through (a) being a role model, friend, source of support, and caring adult, and (b) increasing their own understanding” (p. 21). Such motivators may be congruent with those of the mentors in the study, which is the focus of this paper.

Methodology
The SBM program evaluated in this study is offered to high school mentees aged 14–16 from a Seventh-day Adventist school who are linked to a group of students from their grade level. The program operates for one semester at a time, with a goal of one 45-minute meeting per week. The program is designed to provide a structured and supportive environment for the mentees to develop their social, emotional, and academic skills. The mentors are trained to facilitate these sessions, which focus on building relationships and providing guidance and support.

“Mentors who are more informal and playful are more successful in establishing a mutually enjoyable relationship associated with tangible outcomes.”
undergraduate theology students over a period of just 10 weeks. As such this program is thought to be the only one of its kind in Australia. The mentors are typically aged between 20 and 45, are usually male, and participate in the mentoring program as a course requirement. Of the 13 mentors interviewed, the mean age was 28. The program coordinator, a chaplain at the institution that provides the mentors, coordinates pre-mentoring training totalling 4 hours. Given the short duration of the program, and the overwhelming weight of evidence collected on SBM programs, the researchers approached the task of evaluating the impact of the program with some scepticism regarding the impact on both mentors and mentees.

In the context of other programs run in Australian schools, the SBM program studied in this paper is in keeping with the descriptor provided in the Australian National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks (Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2007) which asserts that:

School based mentoring takes place at the mentees’ school either during school hours or immediately after. School based programs often target students at risk of leaving school early or who are socially isolated or failing to achieve their potential. Activities may include tutoring, career exploration, playing games or sports. The primary focus is the development of a long-term supportive relationship.

The school mentees participate voluntarily and are initially selected for program involvement by the Head of School, in consultation with staff. Some mentees are considered to be ‘vulnerable’ (from a single parent family, socially isolated or in trouble at school) while other students are referred by staff on the basis that they would benefit from social networking in order to develop leadership skills. Interestingly, the matching process utilised is very flexible. Rather than pre-match mentees to mentors, the two groups are placed in a room together, with food, and instructed to form their own mentor-mentee partnerships, typically involving one mentor and one mentee. Activities include informal discussion, review of events or happenings in the life of the mentee, game playing, singing, sports and icebreaking tasks.

Formal mentor-mentee interaction is limited to one semester of academic activity incorporating four hours of mentor training and ten weeks mentoring. The program has been offered since 2006 and currently utilises the Adventist Development and Relief Agency BSombody2Someone Mentoring Training Series resource (French & Unser, 2007). There is an expectation that mentees will benefit from the ‘connection’ achieved through improved social networking, that is “A sense of belonging; of feeling like you ‘fit’; of knowing that people know you, and believe in you” (p. 13, module 5). The mentor coordinator noted that the main goal for mentors is to “Get them focussed on the powerful ministry they can have with kids, and build their confidence. It’s a very intentional method of introducing mentoring to the SDA Church.”

The mentoring program is best seen as a loosely designed, relatively informal, short-term intervention designed to impact both mentors and mentees. Anecdotal evidence provided by school staff and mentee feedback sheets collected by the program coordinator strongly suggested positive outcomes of the program and a consequent need for review and evaluation to deepen impact. For example, all 26 (100%) mentees who completed feedback sheets in 2009 stated that the mentoring was a positive experience. However, 16 (42%) added that the program was too short.

Effective evaluation of mentoring activities usually necessitates a thorough understanding of the desired program outcomes, use of appropriate informants, employment of suitably nuanced data gathering/analysis mechanisms and ideally, comparison to a control group (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). The activities of the authors of this paper however can be seen as more in keeping with rapid appraisal techniques of data gathering incorporating a preliminary ‘case study’ that utilises coded transcripts of recorded focus group discussions, and interviews utilising the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach (Davis, 2005) in which participants identify the most important consequence of an intervention. The MSC approach requires participants in an intervention to ‘story’ the most significant impact for them. This study used no control group for comparison and took place seven months after the program ended. Rather than being viewed as a systemic attempt to measure the impacts of a program (MacCullum & Beltman, 1999, p. 17), the data gathered could be seen as an exploratory study that is best used to stimulate discussion on the need for Mentoring Benchmarks and their relevance to small SBM programs.

Results
Focus group interviews involved 13 male mentors who were randomly assigned to one of three discussion sessions of about one hour, at which time they were also invited to write an MSC statement. Individual interviews were also conducted with two program coordinators. A focus group discussion involving seven Year 10 mentees was also conducted however the number of participants was limited by the fact that some had left school, and many of those invited to participate either declined the opportunity to
meet with researchers in their lunch break, or failed to gain and submit parental consent. Fortunately a written feedback sheet had been completed in late 2009 by 26 mentees and 22 mentors (French, 2009). A thematic analysis of the coded interview transcripts and feedback sheets yielded observations from both mentors and mentees about the program.

**Mentees**

As a discussion starter the mentees were asked to respond to a simple five question survey in which each statement required mentees to respond using a five point Likert Scale where 5 was the most favourable response and 1 was the least favourable. For example, students who responded to “I enjoyed the company of the mentors” could circle 1 (not really) or 5 (very much). Table 1 shows the questions asked and the mean response score for the students. The mean response for question 1 was 4.57, indicating a very strong level of satisfaction with the company of the mentors. Evidence for a positive relationship was supported by 25 of the 26 students reporting in student feedback sheets a perception that their mentor liked them.

It can be seen from the mean of 4.43 for both questions 3 and 4 that the students involved in the mentoring program considered it to be a positive social learning experience. Students strongly recommended participation by other classes in the future (M=4.86). Feedback sheets confirmed this with all 26 mentees asserting that they would recommend it to others.

The mentee focus group discussion solicited positive responses, even though they came in short, concise sentences. The researcher began by asking the mentees if the program should happen again. The result was a unanimous “yes” from the group with one “definitely” heard. Mentees were then queried why they were so positive about the program. This brought answers of more substance including: “It was fun”, “getting to know more people”, “we learned new skills”, “helping other people out”. One student expressed satisfaction in missing a science class however noted that the mentoring sessions were deliberately rotated to minimise impact on particular subjects. Feedback sheets resulted in comments such as “It relaxes you to talk to someone”, “it was fun and it was good to meet people”, “it’s really positive”, “I made friends”, “I had something to look forward to each week” and it “takes you in so many positive directions”.

The boys interviewed tended to be very economical with their words. When asked to describe exactly what they did with their mentors, one responded, “Sometimes everyone would just play a game of footy or soccer or cricket”. Generally, they talked about the games and the music they participated in individually, and as a group with their mentors, but then indicated that they had discussed issues with their mentors and talked to them about “things that were going down”. They indicated unanimously that this was helpful for them and that their mentors were good listeners.

The boys’ ideas on how the program could be improved were also expressed with a degree of brevity. They wanted the program to continue for them and to have it expanded so that others could benefit as well, including the girls who had little opportunity to participate due to the small number of female mentors. Four of the seven focus group participants stated that although the official mentoring project had ended, they were still in touch with their mentors via email, phone or other means. One piece of mentee advice that resonated with the entire group was, “Instead of one period make it two or three”. By contrast, only 13 of the 26 mentee feedback sheets (50%) indicated that the high school students wanted more time each week with their mentor, that one hour was less than ideal.

When asked to identify the most significant change in their lives as a consequence of participating in the mentoring program, the mentees commented that it had been simply having someone outside of friends and family to talk to. In the absence of teacher observations, infringement data, school attendance records and academic records, it was not possible for the researchers to draw any conclusions about the long term impact of the program on student academic performance or behaviour. A review of the 26 mentee feedback sheets reveals that mentees especially appreciated the opportunity to network socially (n=19), have fun (n=10), talk and have questions answered (n=8), and miss class (n=6).

**Table 1:** Mean responses from mentees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Statement</th>
<th>Mean response (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I enjoyed the company of the mentors.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I still think about my mentors.</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Having the mentors visit made a positive difference to my day.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I learned things from my mentor.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I would recommend the mentoring process for future classes.</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mentors

Given that the thirteen male mentors interviewed had all agreed to participate in the research, and were not randomly selected from the entire cohort of 25 mentors who participated in the program in 2009, it is possible that their experiences do not provide a representative sample. Indeed, mentors who had negative experiences may have excluded themselves from the research activity and both of the female mentors declined to participate in the three focus group discussions. However, given that 13 participated in focus group discussion from a total of 25 mentors (52%), the researchers are confident that the cohort is reasonably represented.

A summary of shared motivation for participation in this SBM, as offered by one mentor, suggested,

"It was more [about] just being a male, listening to them if they’ve got problems...yeah just [to] give them a bit of edification, bring them up if they are down, if they are happy see where they are at...if possible just to relate ummm, personal experience.

This holistic finding is in agreement with earlier research, supporting this as a significant motivator for tertiary student mentors (Hughes and Dykstra, 2008).

The observations below combine findings from focus group discussion, MSC statements and comments from 22 mentor feedback sheets collected in 2009. A summary of the outcomes for the mentors results in eight specific themes and a brief discussion of each follows.

Most mentors expressed moderate to high degrees of satisfaction with their participation in the program, asserting that they were adequately trained and personally enriched through their involvement. In the words of one mentor "I didn’t expect to enjoy it as much as I did, by the end of the program I didn’t want it to end". Most mentors, with the exception of one who seemed unable to find anything in common with his mentee, expressed such sentiments. A strong appreciation of the experience was revealed on 20 of the 22 mentor feedback sheets.

In focus group discussion mentors consistently argued, sometimes quite passionately, that it would be far better to match mentors and mentees over a longer period of time. All of the three mentor focus groups agreed that while the program was beneficial, greater impact would be expected through longer engagement. While one mentor stated, “I was surprised to see how much of a dent one can make in such a short period of time—the kids were very responsive”, the remainder questioned the brevity of the program. Another asserted, “Too short. By the time you build up a strong relationship it was over.”

One focus group recommended extension to at least one year, and expressed interest in matches for up to four years. Clearly, “Ten weeks is not enough to meet someone off the bat and talk about deep stuff”. From the feedback sheets, 50% indicated dissatisfaction with the short duration of the formal matching.

In focus group discussion several mentors revealed, quiet candidly, amusement over their own vulnerability and misgivings prior to matching with a mentee. Some of the older mentors had strongly doubted their ability to connect with teenagers, a sentiment shared by many of the relatively younger mentors. Several described real nervousness and fear of rejection by their potential mentees, followed by relief when they were matched. Mentors reported anxiety of different degrees as shown in the following comment, “I just thought I would be [the] last one picked. And I just didn’t think it was going to be a good experience at all.”

Mentors highlighted the need for informative matching so that mentors and mentees could form matches based on common interests. This was expressed in the statement, “I think it is just as simple as doing a basic questionnaire, just a five point questionnaire, ehm, on just their musical tastes, their sports interests, what their fields of interests are, in hobbies or ambitions”. Those who found common interests reported benefits such as connecting more easily and finding common ground for conversation, however this occurred more by chance than by design in this program.

Significantly, most of the mentors were reluctant to speculate on the lasting impacts of their activities with the mentees. No mentor interviewed described evidence of change in their mentees, perhaps reflecting the relatively short duration of the program. Indicative of group sentiment was the statement, “I felt the program was a great initiative but didn’t think the time given was sufficient to make an impact on their lives”. Impact related comments tended to focus on observations that the mentees were appreciative and could be surprisingly open, and that some formed a real friendship. This is consistent with mentee responses that identified relational outcomes without long lasting consequences apart from the establishment of some valuable friendships.

Surprisingly to the researchers, focus group discussion frequently resulted in the observation by mentors that the experience had changed their own perception of youth ministry and built their confidence in interacting with youth. Comments included “It has led to a shift in my
ministry focus” and “I felt a change in my approach to evangelism. I did not need to preach at him, but rather just to create a friendship.” At least five of the mentors explained that as a consequence of their participation in the mentoring program, their approach to running youth groups and some church activities had changed to become more inclusive and relational. A theology student stated, “This program changed my view on my future ministry where I will make children my focus”. Some mentors also acknowledged a strong reverse-impact effect as reflected in the comment “It’s like they are mentoring you rather than you’re mentoring them...like he mentored me more than I mentored him I’m sure”.

Two mentors struggled with their mentees, expressing concern that there needs to be flexibility for reallocation relatively early in the process, especially when a relationship based on common interests fails to develop or if either party feels awkward. In cases where there is “no connection with the kids” and therefore limited ability to “bring out something that was worthwhile” continuing a match may be counterproductive.

Virtually all of the mentors agreed that it was important to improve the depth and longevity of their relationships with mentees. Suggestions included allowing mentors to contact mentees out of school, exchanging phone numbers, and participating in camps or community service activities on a more regular basis. Some mentors expressed frustration that they had established a relationship over one semester, however were not facilitated to continue for a longer period. “I just found it really difficult trying to stay connected with him now that we don’t have a regular time...if it’s structured in such a way that the first semester we get to know them and get that level [of friendship] that trust is built up; and in [the] second semester that trust expanded and we could show them a whole new world about what life is all about.” In feedback sheets 16 mentors asserted that they hoped to continue the mentoring relationship beyond the conclusion date.

A commonly expressed concern was that when the program ceased there was no follow-up opportunity for mentors to contact mentees, and that the matches ended awkwardly at a BBQ. Indeed, a worry expressed was that having gone to lengths to establish a relationship based on mutual trust, the program ended with the end of the mentor’s academic semester, reflecting the needs and convenience of the mentors, rather than respect for a relationship. Reflecting on this one mentor said, “They say build this relationship up and then stop. Kind of doesn’t really present a good image to the kids.” A mentor expressed being “more intentional with the phasing out” was desirable, perhaps due to the concern that “having adults quit on them is their life story.”

All the mentors were enthusiastic about applying practical, youth ministry skills to a mentoring program that facilitated “meeting real people, meeting some real needs.” In the words of a theology student mentor who was endorsed enthusiastically by four others present in his focus group, “It was [a] crime to bring us back an hour later. It was like, leave us out there for another two or three hours, please!”

Discussion
It is difficult to estimate the number of SBM programs currently run in Australia that target youth. This is due to their diversity, geographical spread, divergent goals, dissimilar funding bases and differing levels of formality. However, those programs that are registered and tracked do provide useful insights. According to the Australian Youth Mentoring Matters report (Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2009, p.1) there were 17,607 young people participating in 106 AYM registered programs for that year. Of 146 programs whose staff completed surveys, 62% indicated that their main priority was to increase the young person’s personal growth. Not unexpectedly, most mentees ranged from 12 to 21 years of age. Almost half (48.1%) of the programs identified “at risk school attendees” as their primary target. Other significant groups include Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders (11.3%), unemployed (11.3%), and young people with a disability (9.4%).

According to the report, the role of mentors in registered programs varies according to the purpose of the program. Mentors in the AYM study do not view their primary role as academic support, sharing this view with mentors in the Big Brothers Big Sisters study (Herrera et al., 2007). When questioned, respondents in the Big Brothers Big Sisters study saw the role of a mentor as follows: provision of general support; providing career advice; improving social skills and providing support for the transition from school to work. Similar perspectives were revealed in this case study. The theology students interviewed saw their primary role as friends and advocates. Some took it upon themselves to help their student meet a goal, for example, to learn to box, to fish or to develop social skills.

The publication of the national Youth Mentoring Benchmarks (AYMN, 2007) represents a welcome addition to resources available to guide development of large, funded mentoring programs and stems from a growing body of literature. The SBM program studied here was not designed with an awareness
of the Benchmarks and is unlikely to comply with many of the guidelines due to its small size and limited resources. For example, it is unlikely that a skilled, paid coordinator will be recruited (one of the benchmarks) and as a consequence many other recommendations are not attainable. Nevertheless, the evaluation of this program and the following discussion does reinforce the importance and credibility of some of the basic guidelines found in the Benchmarks.

The SBM program reported on here has several strengths relating to the mentors. Firstly, a strong partnership exists between the mentoring coordinator and deputy principal of the school, ensuring that the mentors are well oriented and supervised. Secondly, the mentors are idealistic, community oriented theology students with a strong interest in community service and personal development. Thirdly, pre-mentoring training is provided, leading mentors feeling well prepared for their immediate role and supporting future potential roles. Finally, the matching process is flexible and allows mentees and mentors to self-select their partners. In keeping with a growing body of evidence, the mentors have been trained to be non-judgemental, informal, supportive and flexible. There is little doubt in the minds of the researchers that the program had a significant educational impact on the mentors, as expressed by one mentor who wrote in his MSC statement, “The first time I spoke to the student I mentored, was a life changing experience.”

The long-term impact on mentees is less certain although all mentees did report some evidence for improved social connectedness. One review of empirical studies concludes, “Youth in one-on-one mentoring relationships of shorter duration (3–6 months) experienced no significant improvements in academic, social, and substance use outcomes” (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002, p. 4). In keeping with the Australian National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks (2007), it is recommended that the theology department providing mentors seeks opportunities to extend the length of each match to a minimum of 12 months and re-evaluate the impact on self-esteem or self worth. The Mentoring Matters National Survey Findings (Australian National Youth Mentoring Network, 2009) indicated that only 34% of registered programs report matches of more than 12 months however the common occurrence of short duration mentoring matches can be attributed to convenience and organisational constraints rather than a commitment to maximising efficacy. In the study explored in this paper, increasing the length of match with mentees was desirable for all the mentors interviewed, primarily because they believed it took some months just to establish a relationship and build trust.

In their review of 55 evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs on youth, DuBois, Holloway, Valentine and Cooper (2002, p. 1) found evidence of only a modest or small benefit of program participation for the average youth however noted better outcomes for at-risk youth. They recommended “greater adherence to guidelines for the design and implementation of effective mentoring programs as well as more in-depth assessment of relationship and contextual factors in the evaluation of programs.” Unfortunately, small mentoring programs often struggle to provide adequate administrative support. Cost implications are significant. MacCallum and Beltman (1999, p. vi) note that a large school “employing the equivalent of one person to run a program with no other responsibilities in the school may be able to maintain 50 one-to-one mentor relationships.” Most small SBM programs are run on goodwill and the enthusiasm of their coordinators. This certainly was the case with the SBM program reported on.

Conclusion

It is desirable, even for the small SBM program evaluated here, to utilise effective program design and planning, including objectives and desired outcomes necessary for the development of an effective monitoring and evaluation system. Development of appropriate policies and procedures, including an information booklet for stakeholders is desirable, as is monitoring and support for the match throughout the mentor-mentee life cycle that enables match improvement and adjustment. Help for mentors and mentees to reach closure or transition is an important need identified in this study and like all the recommendations above, should be achieved, in keeping with the national benchmarks.

Like many small mentoring programs in Australia, the SBM program reported here has relied previously on anecdotal evidence to justify continuation. Credible annual evaluation that reports substantial outcomes for mentees is likely to result in program improvement and may lead to additional program funding and replication. Grossman (2009, p. 20) points out that “not every program should conduct a rigorous impact study: it is a poor use of resources, given the cost of research and the relative skills of staff.” However, Grossman does suggest there is merit in tracking three key dimensions: youth and volunteer characteristics, match length, and meeting quality benchmarks. When interviewed, the 2010 director of Seventh-day Adventist schools noted that there is significant...
scope for an Australia-wide SBM program or suite of programs, within Adventist schools, utilising better resources, improved coordination and benchmarking for programs that already exist. This observation is likely to resonate with the view of administrators of other education systems in Australia. The researchers of this paper suggest that application of the National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks would improve the learning outcomes for mentors and mentees in the program studied. However, an abbreviated, revised benchmark document and checklist may be desirable for informal, short duration programs. Since further research is required to investigate the true impact of short-term SBM mentoring programs on both mentors and mentees, future support should resource systematic evaluation and reliable investigation of the factors influencing effectiveness. TEACH

References
Research & Scholarship

Ecclesiastes as research
Autoethnography through a rear-vision mirror

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Introduction
The Bible is a book of many surprises. Not least of these is that it contains accounts of research. In a collection of 66 books mostly in Hebrew, Greek, and some Aramaic, through more than 40 Holy Spirit inspired authors, stretching over one and a half millennia, God gives a special revelation of Himself and His purposes for humanity. The texts deal with or touch on subjects ranging from history, literature and philosophy to health and hygiene, prophecy, law, natural science and the environment; and more. Across this wide spectrum of content, no less than four distinct instances of research conducted by individuals can be identified; three in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament.

The first occurs in Judges 6, where Gideon has a crisis of faith in dealing with Israel’s enemies. To verify the divine promises he carefully conducts two simple consecutive empirical tests under identical conditions with startling results that appear to run counter to logic and naturalistic explanation. Another example is the dietary evaluation study conducted at the Babylonian court to train young men to serve King Nebuchadnezzar, as recorded in Daniel 1:3–19. Modern evaluation research literature refers to it as an "exemplary model for the utilisation of research in making educational policy decisions."1 A further example is found in the Gospel of Luke. In the introduction, the writer refers to using primary sources—eye witnesses—in his historical research, as he "carefully investigated everything from the beginning...to write an orderly account."2

It is evident from the cited instances, that research was conducted in situ to inform decision-making and as a vehicle to strengthen personal faith; also to validate the veracity of historical accounts for listeners and readers, rather than for academic purposes. A fourth example of research found in the Bible, is the book of Ecclesiastes, traditionally attributed to Solomon, which is the focus of this article.

Ecclesiastes in a general research context
There are different approaches to contemporary research. Each has its inherent strengths and weaknesses, including the ‘closeness of fit’ to the planned inquiry. A scan of the book of Ecclesiastes suggests the author is engaged in inquiry that approximates what is regarded now as autoethnography; a subcategory of ethnography, which is a form of qualitative research. The latter is descriptive; with the collected data coming from natural settings rather than from contrived or experimental ones and taking the shape of words and ‘pictures’, compared to the numerical data collected in quantitative research.

Ethnographic research is open-ended, context specific, and interpretive in nature, aiming to develop understanding rather than establish statistical relationships. Researchers seek to understand people's view of the world; "how they create and understand their daily lives"3 and what meaning people construct around life events, assuming "there are always multiple perspectives".4 Hence, "meanings and interpretations are not fixed entities".5 In their methodology ethnographers proceed inductively rather than deductively; towards theory rather than from theory, often revisiting social environments, to narrow their observations or collect additional data raised by emerging questions.

More specifically, in autoethnography the researcher is simultaneously the study’s observer and actor; discrete roles that call for an approach of conscious detachment. Researchers thus "turn the analytic lens on themselves...[and] write, interpret, and/or perform their own narratives about culturally significant experiences";6 consequently becoming the main topic themselves.

The writer’s background
Solomon was the son of King David and Bathsheba, widow of Uriah the Hittite. Solomon succeeded his father David as Israel’s king in a palace coup with the backing of the prophet Nathan, the Queen Mother, Zadok the priest and David’s palace guards. The group foiled a conspiracy headed by his older brother Adonijah and Joab, Israel’s army commander.

After the execution or banishment of his most dangerous opponents, Solomon began a prosperous and mostly peaceful reign of 40 years over a united
kingdom. The latter, in addition to the vassal states that were tributary to Solomon, stretched from the Euphrates in the north to the borders of Egypt in the south, and from the land of the Philistines in the west to the Arabian Desert in the east. Israel owed its considerable land size and power to David’s territorial conquests which Solomon further strengthened through treaties and alliances, consolidated by ‘political marriages’.

Over time, Solomon embarked on ambitious large-scale construction projects; some accomplished through conscripted labour. His greatest achievement was probably the building of the temple in Jerusalem. He also continued to build a strong army, developed a substantial trading fleet, and exploited the copper and iron mines in the south of his kingdom. From a historian’s point of view, all these undertakings, together with the inflow of tribute money, contributed to his personal power, wealth and fame as an oriental monarch; and to the stability of his rule.

Solomon’s riches and wisdom are ‘legendary’. Among examples are his accumulation of vast quantities of gold; the accolades heaped on Solomon by the Queen of Sheba for answering the hard questions put to him during her state visit; the judgement of the dispute between two women over ‘their’ child; as well as his many proverbs. Biblical history records Solomon, together with Jesus, as offering the longest and most detailed prayers of intercession recorded in Scripture; one for literal Israel, the people of God; the other for spiritual Israel, future generations of Christ’s followers. The circumstances of these two prayers, however, were in stark contrast. Solomon was officiating at a glorious public event, celebrating the dedication of the temple, while Jesus’ outpouring of concern for the spiritual and the physical welfare of his followers was made on an intensely private occasion.

The available background evidence indicates that Solomon was a high achiever for many decades. He was self-confident and proud of his achievements, but then experienced an end-life crisis that left him seriously depressed and led him to inquire into and reflect on his life experience: Wealth, fame, pleasure, power, knowledge; for what purpose and to what end? The book of Ecclesiastes is a record of this inquiry. Interestingly, his published findings were ‘peer reviewed’, Ecclesiastes being accepted later as part of the canon of Hebrew sacred writings.

The research presented
Preamble
The very title of the book—in Hebrew, *Qoheleth*—suggests the notion of a convener of or presenter at a meeting; not unlike a present-day academic colloquium. Colloquia are usually organised meetings when scholars, post-graduate students and interested persons gather to listen to someone’s perspective or research findings on a particular topic, with guest speakers often making presentations. The present article postulates that Solomon could well have been the guest presenter at such a gathering that may have included younger scholars, even his son(s).

Stating the problem
To begin his presentation, Solomon introduces himself. Then, from the perspective of the ‘natural man’ (*under the sun*) or perhaps devil’s advocate, he succinctly foreshadows the problem of the inquiry: The meaninglessness of life as the ‘bottom line’, despite all one’s hard work and toil. By implication, he poses the question: “How does one find happiness, purpose and meaning in life, without God?” Thus the qoheleth clearly identifies the research problem and its significance, and then embarks on his topic, which is both riveting and controversial.

The purpose and meaning of life has absorbed thinkers over the ages, including monarchs, concentration camp inmates, philosophers and writers, among countless others. Thomas Keneally, Australian novelist three millennia removed, highlights the importance of the issue raised by Qoheleth, but in more positive terms:

> Meaning is everything and humans will never cease pursuing the question of meaning. Nor should they. Indeed, nor can they. We’re almost hard-wired to pursue the question of meaning and significance. There is no escaping it, whatever you do.12

Reviewing the literature
To review the literature is an important task for any present-day researcher. The purpose of the literature review is to create context and background as well as providing an overview and a frame of reference for the study. Moreover, it seeks to clarify concepts, often by assisting with definitions; drawing on relevant fields of existing knowledge, identifying pertinent controversies, and benefiting from previous research and what other researchers, writers and thinkers have said. Solomon, as might be expected, was made on an intensely private occasion.

At first glance, the literature search does not become a conspicuous part of Solomon’s text. However, on closer examination, it is evident that the researcher is indebted to at least one source that was readily available to him: Israel’s sacred writings. At the time these consisted of the books of *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Job*, among other wisdom literature, which the qoheleth essentially paraphrases or quotes or uses as a basis for his own sayings. Solomon was well versed in these sources and their teachings..
Table 1: Samples of Old Testament sources predating Ecclesiastes; pointing to Solomon’s possible references to, or dependence on O.T. texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts from Ecclesiastes</th>
<th>Texts from O.T. sources predating Ecclesiastes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 1:4 &quot;[Many generations pass away] but the earth abideth for ever.&quot; KJV</td>
<td>Psalm 119:90 &quot;...thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.&quot; KJV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 2:2 &quot;I said of laughter, 'It is mad'; and of mirth, 'What doeth it?&quot; KJV</td>
<td>Prov. 14:13 &quot;Of laughter I said, 'It is madness', and of amusement, 'What does it accomplish?'&quot; MLB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 3:19 &quot;For that (death) which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts...as the one dieth, so dieth the other...&quot; KJV</td>
<td>Psalm 49:12 &quot;But man with all his pomp must die like any animal.&quot; LB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 4:3 &quot;...Better is he than both they [the dead and the living], which hath not yet been [born]...&quot; KJV</td>
<td>Job 3:11 &quot;Why didn't I die as soon as I was born? Why didn’t I die when I came out of the wombe?&quot; NCV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 5:4 &quot;When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it.&quot; NIV</td>
<td>Num. 30:2 &quot;When a man makes a vow to the Lord...he must not break it.&quot; NEB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 6:2 &quot;God has given to some men very great wealth...and they die and others get it all!&quot; MLB</td>
<td>Psalm 39:6 &quot;[Man rushes to and fro]...he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.&quot; NIV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 7:7 &quot;Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.&quot; NIV</td>
<td>Exodus 23:8 &quot;Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.&quot; NIV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 8:11 &quot;It is because sentence upon a wicked act is not promptly carried out that men do evil so boldly.&quot; NEB</td>
<td>Psalm 10:5,6 &quot;...They [the wicked] always succeed. They are far from your laws...They say to themselves, 'Nothing bad will ever happen to me...'&quot; NCV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 9:5 &quot;The living know that they shall die, but the dead don't know anything.&quot; ML</td>
<td>Psalm 6:5 &quot;Dead people don’t remember you, [Lord, and]...don’t praise you.&quot; NCV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 10:20 &quot;Never curse the king, not even in your thoughts.&quot; LB</td>
<td>Exodus 22:28 &quot;You shall not revile God, nor the ruler of your people.&quot; RSV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 11:9 &quot;...walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement.&quot; KJV</td>
<td>Deut. 29:19 &quot;[A wrongdoer]...may flatter himself and think, 'All will be well with me even if I follow the promptings of my stubborn heart'; but this will bring everything to ruin.&quot; NEB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl. 12:13 &quot;...revere God, and keep his commandments...&quot; MLB</td>
<td>Deut. 4:2 &quot;...keep the commandments of the Lord your God...&quot; NIV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Moses (the Pentateuch) and a collection of writings that probably included (in part or their entirety) Job, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel 1–2, and many of the Psalms. Then there were some of the proverbs that were written for Solomon, and those by him. Table 1 indicates, to some degree, Solomon’s possible references to, or dependence on this literature.

Modern researchers normally set out their review of the relevant literature as a discrete section of their reported study. Such a separation would probably have been perceived as artificial, if not completely unknown by Solomon. A perusal of Ecclesiastes reveals that references to the literature are scattered throughout the text, as evident from Table 1, to augment the author’s argument.

Some scholars point out that the author of Ecclesiastes would also have had access to non-Hebrew writings:

Solomon had no doubt read all the ‘books’ he could find, perhaps including the rather extensive literature of his day and the wisdom literature of Egypt, already famous in his day (see 1 Kings 4:30). This conclusion is deduced from archaeological evidence of the widespread existence and use of alphabetic cuneiform script in producing, for example, Canaanite texts of mythology and poetry; and the employment of hieroglyphics to record the achievements of Egyptian civilisation. However, it appears, little is known about whether Solomon utilised such sources.
The methodology utilised
Autoethnographies are marked by both strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, autoethnographic genres are powerful, first-hand accounts. They have an authentic voice, shaped by personal experience; they carry authority. Readers are challenged to experience the worlds of the authors vicariously (as they pose questions like, “How does my experience shed light on, and offer insights about particular situations?”) and to reflect critically on their own.16

On the other hand, there is a danger of bias, narcissism,17 or that they become hagiographies. Further, these self-narratives are not created in a cultural vacuum and are, almost always, ex post facto. As in Solomon’s case, retrospection—his observations through a rear-vision mirror—may be flawed and inadequate. As Frances Foster makes clear:

Looking back is tricky business. It is seeing through time, people, events; it’s remembering subtleties and attitudes. It’s getting the facts straight, even though the facts may have little to do with ‘telling the truth’. So much depends on who does the looking back and why.18

It is thus pertinent that utilisation of the methodology maximises its strengths and through alertness, ‘pitfalls’ are avoided and its weaknesses minimised.

Some Bible translations, such as the New International Version, place Solomon’s Ecclesiastes under various linked headings. Certain commentators,19 however, divide the text according to categories into which Solomon organises his data; a practice followed in this article. The likelihood exists that originally Solomon accumulated a mass of data throughout his life, without any conscious attempt of ever planning to record, classify or ‘code’ his experience; until his end-life crisis. Nevertheless, his research question is sufficiently broad for the data to ‘speak’ to it.

Methodologically, Solomon endeavours to bring reliability to his data and credibility to their analysis through repeated observations and revisiting of particular experiences, or examining similar situations. An example of this are the data in relation to fatalism referred to in Eccl. 3:1, 8:6–7, 9:12, 10:14. Similarly, “wise” and “wisdom” occur more than fifty times, bridging different parts of the text when it is sometimes difficult to discern a systematic “unified flow of thought.”20

Also noteworthy is his use not only of extensive reflection, but emphasis on reflexivity—a change in our consciousness (in a sense a transition from searching to researching21) and how we perceive the world that can prevent us from being ‘trapped’ in it.22 Many secular persons would see this as a self-empowering act; most Christians, however, would regard it as Spirit-empowered.

Analysing the data, findings, and comments
History informs us that Solomon, in the role of data analyst, is an individual who has reached his penultimate or perhaps the last stage of his life cycle. Erik Erikson, 20th century psychologist differentiates between two possible alternative ‘markers’ that individuals may have reached at this point in their lives. It is either stagnation and later in the final stage, despair and disgust, on the one hand, or generativity and care and eventually integrity and wisdom, on the other.23 As the qoheleth presents his findings, listeners/readers become aware that Solomon is apparently trying desperately to bring order and meaning to the closing chapter of his life to avoid succumbing to ‘despair and disgust’.

The researcher does not clarify his procedural priorities in examining the data; whether on the basis of chronology, the initial directions in which the ‘weight’ of the data points, or some other logic. As he interprets the data however, in relation to what brings meaning and happiness in life, a number of potential themes emerge:

Natural science. This is a field in which Solomon has extensive knowledge (1 Kings 4:33). It is the first theme that he explores. He discerns the transience and insignificance of humankind and sees the cycles and generations of human life as a parallel to the grand cycle of nature; driven by sun, wind and water. His attempt at ‘natural theology’—the endeavour to explain reality, life’s meaning and happiness, from nature itself—does not appear to fit the data. An ‘under-the-sun’ view of the world is judged to be hebephile, futile and meaningless. Oxford professor Alister McGrath, citing medicine Nobel Laureate Sir Peter Medawar, gives credence to this outlook, in an interview with Stephen Voysey:

In his book, The limits of science, he [Medawar] says, when it comes to understanding how nature works, how the material order hangs together, science basically has no limits at all. But when it comes to questions of meaning or questions of value, it can’t answer these. Not just that it can’t—it can not.24

Knowledge and wisdom—philosophy. Next, Solomon examines the data to ascertain whether they support the thesis that this conceptualisation of human endeavour leads to meaning and happiness in life (Eccl. 1:12–18). It appears a promising premise
at first, particularly given the king’s assertion, “…I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge” (Eccl. 1:16, NIV); an assertion that is verified in 1 Kings 4:29–34. However, his subsequent findings are not as encouraging. He checks by taking into account additional data, comparing wisdom and folly (Eccl. 2:12–17), and the weariness of study taken to extremes (Eccl. 12:12).

Supplementary data (Eccl. 9:10, 13–16) point to mortality, among other determinants, limiting human wisdom, the latter being also emasculated by individuals’ social status. These data only confirm some earlier impressions. He concludes, “For the more my wisdom, the more my grief, to increase knowledge only increases distress” (Eccl.1:18), a view annexed ‘down the centuries’ by Goethe’s Faust, a universal figure, who laments that he is no wiser after having studied philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine and theology. Similarly, some modern thinkers contend that while human minds are responsible for remarkable achievements and advances, they are also answerable for the problems which have resulted.25

**Hedonism.** Then there are data that, for Solomon, seem to point to pleasure as an organising theme (Eccl. 2:1–11, 18–26). His gratification of every sensory desire, pleasure for its own sake, seemed to weigh heavily on Solomon’s mind. His excesses and addiction to pleasure seeking, however, leave him feeling jaded, empty and dissatisfied. Even the pleasure gained from his hard work and achievements generate loathing. He dismisses hedonism as, “…a chasing after the wind…” (Eccl. 2:11, LB), but does not propose asceticism as an alternative. Instead of the life of having pleasure, he points to the pleasure of having life.

**Materialism.** Wealth and material possessions were some of the defining characteristics of Solomon’s reign. Numerous passages (Eccl. 2:4–6, 8; 5:9 – 6:12) deal with the topic. Solomon was probably the richest king in antiquity, as he had accumulated vast treasures. The question may be posed whether he was the owner or the prisoner of his riches. Unlike his contemporaries, Egypt’s pharaohs, who believed in taking their earthly ‘stuff’ with them to their pyramid graves, Solomon perceived a different reality: “People come into this world with nothing, and when they die they leave with nothing. In spite of their hard work, they leave just as they came” (Eccl. 5:15, NCV). He would have removed from any of his fourteen hundred chariots the modern bumper sticker that purports, “The one who has the most toys when he dies wins.”

Solomon’s disillusionment with materialism providing significant meaning to life is still echoing in the 21st century:

> Happiness is the single commodity not produced by the free market economy. Worse than that, when we are happy, we don’t feel the need to buy anything…We must come to the realisation that to have is not as important as to be.26

**Fatalism and deism.** Who or what controls the future? This becomes an interesting question for the researcher in organising his data (Eccl. 3:1 – 4:16). There is a glimpse of an emerging counter-narrative (to that of the ‘natural’ man) in the famous verses that instruct us, there is a right time and season for everything under heaven, and by implication, that time is a precious commodity for which we are accountable—God having ‘planted eternity’ in human hearts. Like Solomon, we, living in the age of the nanosecond, on a planet a billion light years distant from some stars in the cosmos, come to the realisation that God exists outside time. And we apprehend Him not as some super version of a time-lord, but the Lord of Time.

Solomon’s temporary ‘optimistic’ interpretation of data, however, gives way to his former acerbic scepticism. He notes the unfathomableness of God, the finality of His actions, with humans not really in control: “All things are decided by fate…there’s no use arguing with God about your destiny” (Eccl. 6:10, LB). Indeed, the monarch considers that humans have no advantage over animals; all have the same destination, death and the grave. His acute awareness of the scant remaining years of his life only deepens his despair. In contrast to Job (Job 19:25–27), Solomon does not express a hope in the resurrection. He observes inevitability about many things in life.

Alternatively, on occasions, time and chance apparently do appear to govern people’s lives (Eccl. 9:11). God doesn’t seem to play an interactive role in His creation, allowing rampant oppression, and not meting out swift justice; where “…some of the good die young and some of the wicked live on and on” (Eccl. 7:15, LB). Unconvinced by the explanatory logic of fatalism and deism, Solomon’s interpretation of data shifts to a different, ‘higher’ category.

**Religion and morality.** Having ‘raised the bar’, Solomon finds that data (Eccl. 5:1–7), however, point to a prevalence of ritual worship—typified by routine temple sacrifices, devoid of the Spirit—and the thoughtless mouthing of pious promises that lack commitment. One is seen as empty, the other foolish.

Further findings are presented in Eccl. 7:1 – 12:9. Many are given in the form of wide-ranging aphor-
isms and maxims, including some enlightened interludes, as well as in revisiting themes that he had explored previously, e.g. wisdom, human mortality, death, the inequalities of life, and our limited understanding of the Creator God. Scanning a concordance will quickly reveal the impact of the Pentateuch, Psalms and Proverbs on Solomon’s thinking in these later passages. He notes the flawed nature of humanity, recommends making wise choices, including cooperating with civil authorities and see-saws between powerful spiritual truths such as God’s final justice (Eccl. 8:12), and his own nagging doubts—why bad things happen to good people (Eccl.8:14). He finishes by admonishing the young to value their youth and the opportunities before them, because serious mistakes have long-term consequences and ultimately God will call us all to account. Whether morality for the young or old, it is also found to be hebel. Then Solomon gives a lyrical description of the aging process, including a reminder of his own condition and the limited choices now available to him. Having dealt with the main themes that have emerged from the data, it seems worthwhile to engage in some further discussion of Solomon’s research findings.

So far, many of the findings have really been a rejection of the dominant values and the culture of the court over which Solomon presided for almost 40 years. The court epitomised the hegemonic socio-economic, political, military, and religious ‘parties’ that controlled the kingdom and determined social relations. Customs, mores and ‘maps of meaning’, to a large extent, were mediated by the court—the king, his courtiers, officials and representatives. The observed oppressive and disabling social structures were evidently of Solomon’s own making and/or that of his administration. Over time, Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh had been relegated to a tenuous status through the growing alliances with surrounding nations. The aging king comes to the realisation that he and his advisors were thus instrumental not only in leading the nation’s decline into decadence, but in shifting the hub of Israel’s spiritual orthodoxy.

Solomon leaves us to speculate regarding the precise catalyst that precipitated his sudden critical reflection on the past. Importantly, in the end, he is unable to integrate his data into an overarching explanation that brings together the disparate pieces of the research study. Significantly, also, he is unwilling to make the blind irrational leap of faith into the philosophical abyss that twentieth century existentialists such as Jean-Paul Satre made and commit to a position that asserts, the ultimate meaning of life is meaninglessness. A life that is not grounded in the Creator God does not appear to make sense to him. So what does the researcher conclude?

Conclusion

In view of the data, Solomon rejects the ‘foreign’ values adopted by the court. The dominant lifestyle and the activities that were a product of these values did not liberate him; in fact they seemed to have accomplished the opposite. He is now ready to give what is required of a credible research study or dissertation—provide a clear, succinct answer to its central research question, based on the findings. He shares it with his listeners/readers: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man” because God will hold everyone accountable for all their actions (Eccl. 12:13, KJV).

The implications of the conclusion are completely clear to Solomon’s audience. The king’s voice is raised in warning so that future generations might be saved from similar bitter experiences. Thus the book of Ecclesiastes furnishes the reader with instruction, unlike “certain books [that] seem to have been written...merely for the purpose of letting us know that the authors knew something.”

Solomon has presented his conclusion, but the research process has also raised more questions than he is able to answer. In relation to this, he doesn’t make any recommendations for future research, but leaves the possibility open.

Postscript

In the New Testament, Jesus points a rich young man, who is also searching for meaning in life, in the same direction as indicated in Ecclesiastes. “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Math.19:17, MLB) and if he wanted to be complete, he is challenged to change his priorities; to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Jesus. It is worth noting that in Solomon’s conclusion, ‘duty’ is in parentheses, added by translators. The same notion, that commandment keeping motivated by a love for God comprises “the whole of man”, is expanded by Jesus’ conception of completeness: loving God and our fellow humans with all our being.

In Israel’s history, obedience to God’s commands resulted in freedom from slavery and oppression. Obedience brought liberty on an individual and national level, as well as the physical and spiritual. Most Christians would contend that Solomon developed a new consciousness through responding to the promptings of God’s Spirit. The ‘retrieved memory’ of revealed Hebrew sacred writings, comprised of such ‘cultural artefacts’ as, the bestowal of the Decalogue, the curses and blessings on
Mt. Gerizim, and the memorial stones taken from the Jordan River, that spoke of Yahweh’s trustworthiness, also is likely to have contributed to Solomon’s ‘about-turn’ in his sunset years and ultimately to the restoration of his relationship with God. TEACH

Endnotes
5 Ibid.
8 See 1 Kings 8:21–53 and John 17.
9 Horn, loc. cit.
10 As suggested by Ecclesiastes 12:12.
14 Horn, loc. cit.
19 Lee, loc. cit.
25 Johnson, loc. cit.
27 A reference to the BBC TV series, Dr Who.
29 Ibid., pp. 18–19.
Reflection on a secure attachment

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Relationship provides the grounds for our continued existence. Supportive relationships based on protection and comfort in times of distress provides optimum foundations for individuals to grow and learn. Crucial relationships in early years are usually between the child and parents and can also be between the child and other significant caregivers. John Bowlby (1969) studied and researched early relationships to formulate attachment theory. Bowlby identified four attachment styles. Progress in scientific fields has supported Bowlby's theory. Neuroscientists have been able to observe the brain's wiring and development. There is correlation between attachment style and brain development.

Caregivers are significant in a child's life, it is these relationships that a child depends upon. The relationships will form the basis of the child's growth and character. The earliest relationships are the beginnings of attachment, a theory developed by John Bowlby, and described as a "biological drive that encourages proximity to a caregiver and provides the young child with protection from danger" (Wilson, 2009, 23).

When a parent cannot be present in a child's life for a specified period, a child will need to develop an attachment with his or her caregiver. Secure attachments are vital for healthy growth and development.

Observation
This observation was taken at a preschool between a child, identified as Tom (age 4), and myself. Tom arrived at preschool early that day; I arrived ten minutes later. The observation began when Tom noticed my arrival and our interactions lasted for 45 minutes.

Tom runs across the playground and takes hold of my hand. I squat down to his eye level and say, "Tom you're here already."

Tom nods and tells me that he will be running at athletics after school. I reply that Tom is a fast runner and that he should have fun. Meanwhile another child is anxious about his parent leaving. I tell Tom that I will hold his hand while I help Carl say goodbye to his mum. Tom holds my hand while I support Carl and his parent. When Carl is settled, Tom looks at me and points to the obstacle course set up in the playground.

I ask Tom if he wants to play there. Tom says that he does and I invite Carl with us. I walk to the obstacle course with Tom and Carl holding a hand each.

I sit in the middle of the square shaped course. Tom and Carl utilise the equipment and have brief conversations together. I smile as they go past; they each smile back and look occasionally to see that I am watching.

Carl moves away.

A parent approaches me and I stand up to interact. Tom stops playing and watches me. After two minutes, the parent leaves and Tom points to another activity and says, "How 'bout we go there." During the conversation with the parent, I offer to watch her toddler who is on the obstacle course while the parent does some business in the office.

I tell Tom this and suggest that he goes to the preferred activity and that I will follow him shortly. Tom continues on the obstacle course. When the parent returns, Tom asks, "Can we go there?"

I walk with Tom to a construction activity, sit with him and initiate a conversation about Tom's dog who visited preschool yesterday. We share this topic of conversation for three minutes and then Tom asks me, "Lynn, can we make pikelets because we didn't make them at home?"

I reply that we can make pikelets next time that Tom comes to preschool. I tell Tom that we need eggs to make pikelets and that we don't have any today, however, we are making fairy bread as we are having a party for our intern's last day.

Tom continues playing with construction materials, singing to himself. Other children arrive and Tom has a brief dialogue with these children and listens to me as I talk to the others as well.

Tom then asks, "Should we play there?" meaning at gigantos blocks. I move with Tom and sit nearby talking with other children and to Tom. He enquires if morning tea is ready and I inform him that it will be ready soon. We discuss Tom's age and birthday.

Tom pushes a child who knocked his construction over. I kneel down and ask the pushed child if they are okay. I ask Tom to use his words to the other child and model the words for him.

Tom continues to play and interact with other children. Tom sees the morning tea trolley arrive and goes to wash his hands for morning tea.

I stay behind.
Throughout the observation, Tom demonstrates a secure relationship style as “he investigates from a dependable foundation” (Thornton, 2009). My arrival at preschool coincides with the arrival of many families as it is the start of the regular preschool day. Although Tom has been playing without obvious anxiety, my arrival signals a reunion of a child/adult friendship and perhaps, at that moment, he may feel socially insecure with the influx of many people. He responds by running towards me and taking my hand.

Linden (2006) suggests that forming attachments is a process and not a single event. An infant from birth is reliant on an attachment figure to feed, soothe and comfort them. Michael Rutter’s (cited in Linden, 2006) research demonstrated that infants and children can form many attachments, the key is the development of an emotional rapport.

Tom and I have known each other for nine months. When Tom’s mother would leave Tom at preschool, I would be in their presence to support this critical time of anxiety for Tom. Our rapport is obvious as Tom goes out of his way to acknowledge my arrival and I acknowledge that he has arrived first. We also are able to link past experiences, e.g. Tom’s dog visited preschool the day before and plan new adventures e.g. fairy bread making and pikelet cooking.

Phases of attachment
Bowlby’s (cited in Berk, 2009) ethological theory of attachment is a four phase process. The phases describe the emergence of attachment relationships from birth to the child’s fourth year of life.

Tom, aged 4 years and one month, is currently at the final stage—formation of a reciprocal relationship. As evident throughout the observation, Tom has developed language skills and uses these for interactions with an adult and peers. He has developed a sense of confidence that his attachment figure will be available and attentive in times of need.

Separation occurs eventually between Tom and I when Tom chooses to leave me to go and have morning tea. He recognises that I will still be in the playground and that he can return if he needs to.

As Tom has moved through these stages, he now has, as Bowlby describes, an internal working model, which is a vital part of personality and will guide all future close relationships (Berk, 2009). The internal working model develops a set of expectations about the availability of attachment figures, the support that they will provide during times of emotional need and interactions with the carer (Kelly, Zuckerman, Sandoval, & Buehlman, 2003).

Attachment styles
Tom displays a secure attachment style. This is evident by his strong physical connection (holding hands and staying close by) to the carer, and by his ability to explore the surroundings, in the caretakers presence, interact with his peers and make independent decisions as highlighted by his decision to go for morning tea.

Not all attachments are seen to be secure. Gerhardt (2004) describes an avoidant attachment pattern as one where the child has to suppress his feelings. The child may appear calm, however, the heart rate and automatic arousal are too high (Gerhardt, 2004). This style of attachment may develop for children whose carers have difficulty noticing and regulating their own feelings (Gerhardt, 2004). On reunion with a parent, these children may observe the parent, but stay physically away (Thornton, 2009).

Some children exhibit a resistant or ambivalent attachment style. This style emerges when parents are not consistent in their reactions to a child’s feelings. Gerhardt, (2004) states that these children keep their feelings close to the surface. On reunion with their parent they may cling, protest, and fail to return to exploratory play.

Children exhibiting disorganised attachment may be fearful, strongly avoidant and show mixed emotions on reunion with a parent (Kelly, Zuckerman, Sandoval, & Buehlman, 2003). These children may have been subjected to trauma, parental bereavement or disturbed parenting styles.

Neuroscience
Our brains are a living system that relies on interactions for survival (Cozolino, 2006). Secure attachments, as Tom displays, are critical for our brains to develop the pathways we need to understand the social world, the rules of relationships and to gain strength from the pleasure of healthy physical interactions (Downey, 2007).

Cozolino, (2006) suggests that our brains are also capable of adapting to unhealthy environments and to inappropriate interactions. The result is, however, an impeded development later in life.

Brain growth is at its most rapid in the first months of life, up until five years. It must be nurtured by nurturing adults. Cozolino (2006) states that early relationships impact on the physiology and functioning of the brain. Emotionally stimulating interactions generate brain growth. Soothing an infant enables the child to develop a biological framework for dealing with future stress (Downey, 2007). This capacity to regulate our emotions and reactions is built in the early years and is known as ‘affect regulation’.

Attachment difficulties lead to prolonged stress and result in neural loss throughout the cortical-limbic circuits (Cozolino, 2006). This is known as ‘affect dysregulation’. Emotional states of
hyperarousal (reactive, alarmed) and dissociation (numb, inattentive) follow which are painful and uncomfortable (Downey, 2007).

Tom displayed one instance where his behaviour may reflect hyperarousal—when he reacts quickly to push a child over. I feel, however, that he responded in this way as the words to use were not forthcoming quickly enough. Tom would have been disappointed that his work was damaged. I was able to acknowledge the problem, model a caring response to the pushed child, and support Tom in the words to use for the next time he experiences a similar situation. This technique is based on Vygotsky’s model of play and learning (Berk, 2009). These strategies also support Bandura’s social learning theory where children acquire knowledge and skills through observational learning (Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne, 2007).

The hypothalamic-pituitary axis in the brain modulates our reaction to stress by secreting cortisol and other hormones. The vagal system regulates the response to threat. When someone is traumatised or neglected emotionally, the chemical reactions in the body and brain can be switched on as if they have never been switched off, thus, a minor instance can cause an overreaction (Downey, 2007). It is therefore crucial that children’s emotional and social development is supported from birth.

Relationships in childcare
It is essential for adults working in childcare to foster emotional rapport with children. “The most important thing, 95% of the job, is to develop warm, trusting relationships with the children and to do that you must make yourself available, interested, and involved” (Lady Gowrie Child Centre, 2006, p. 4).

This happens as a reciprocal relationship throughout the observation with Tom.

To enhance attachment development, a child must feel a sense of belonging to the early childhood service they attend. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory depicts the child developing in a complex dynamic system of relationships affected by many environmental influences (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2000). Therefore, the bond between culture, community, school, family and child must be solid. Throughout the observation, Tom and I make continuous links to the environments that provide resources for Tom.

For children to prosper in an early childhood service they must feel safe and comfortable. As theory shows, children can only explore if they feel secure. This means children need to be given time to separate from parents. A warm caring adult should be present at this time. This adult should then stay with the child for as long as the child needs. The child decides when they feel in a state of equilibrium and the child takes the initiative to move on.

Conclusion
The essential nature of relationship is asserted by Malaguzzi (cited in Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002) who believes “there is no possibility of existing without relationship. Relationship is a necessity of life” (p.65). For optimum brain growth the relationship between carer and child must be responsive, consistent and warm, so enabling emotional and social development to prosper.

The Early Years Learning Framework of Australia (2009) supports the notion of belonging being integral to existence. The Framework states that belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become. Tom shows that he belongs to a service that has fostered a strong reciprocal attachment; he is flourishing in this environment.

In a responsive childcare environment, a child who is experiencing a secure relationship style with their family will have their notions of feeling good about themselves complimented. Children with attachment styles other than secure at home can still develop secure attachments with service staff. Secure attachments are paramount for the child’s optimum development as this is the period of greatest growth and change. **TEACH**

References

**“The most important thing, 95% of the job, is to develop warm, trusting relationships with the children and to do that you make yourself available, interested, and involved”**