Editorial

Graeme Perry

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The future (like this issue of the journal) is fascinating. This curiosity could be judged as an optional justification for procrastination, but the future is thought provoking in the deepest sense. Jason Silva, speaking with characteristic rapidity on Q & A recently, quoted Freeman Dyson (cited in Saenz, 2010) to assert “in the future...a new generation of artists will be writing genomes the way that Blake and Byron wrote verses.” Condensed and encapsulated within these few words is a transformation of knowledge, of concepts of art, science, ethics and culture. His conjecture extends to humankind’s transcending of the real world into virtual worlds, controlling imaginary experiences but also a nanotechnological reconstruction of the real world, from the atomic level. “Turning into gods”, is his prediction, due to this technological transformation. Is this a Screwtape strategy that echoes an original temptation?

Assertion of knowing, and knowing good and evil, requires an understanding of mind and truth. The first domain is informed by neuroscience, a discipline from which Thompson proposes “Grey matter matters” and that classrooms can benefit by adapting learning processes to informed practice. The Christian school seeks out and shares Truth; Standish asserts and Collier defines the principal’s role. It is a Truth established by the transcendent entering the world and then accessing the minds of humankind to change their view of the world, rather than an education creating, in human minds, meanings and attitudes that transcend into personal god spaces of isolation in virtual worlds. Connectedness within a supportive school, rather than isolation, is Unser’s goal for school communities choosing to optimise opportunities for wellbeing and personal development. Beamish and Morey found parents chose participation in these tangible interactions that influence and guide their children towards values oriented lives of service. Yet some may require education that offers a second chance opportunity, alternative pathways described by Potter. Studies suggest more than a third of underperforming Year 12 students gaining entry to a degree course, can graduate, and some will outperform professionally, earlier high achievers.

In the current world, future perspectives are challenging, and starkly emphasised in under-resourced environments. A recent visit to Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG), clarified reported factors (Noble, C., Pereira, N. & Saune, N., 2011) which perpetuate a low Human Development Index (148th of 182 worldwide): increasing urbanisation, poverty, crime rates (9% of business revenue lost to crime), high exposure to violence (75% children and women experience family violence), poor adult literacy (60%), and competition to enter and complete school. Nationally only 29% of those between ages 12 and 25 years attend an educational institution and a third of all children have never attended school. None of the targets for UN Millennium Development Goals have been met in PNG. Accumulated, they form the situation that demands a “School on the dump” and invites commitments to sustained support from government and NGOs for this ‘nearest neighbour’ to develop adequately.

Will our students become immersed in an individualistic indulgent future aspiring to be gods, or will they, by choice, emerge into a Spirit formed, passionately committed God-likeness that is gifted, and lives compassionately. Does their potential, their future, fascinate and motivate you too?

References

[Photography: Glenys Perry]
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Numbers Don't Tell the Whole Story

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Research & Scholarship

Numbers don’t tell the whole story
A case study of an alternative pathway to tertiary studies

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Abstract
This case study responds to the debate over ‘toxic teachers’, tertiary entry ranking and access to university. Implications for federal and state policy are proposed. For 22 years Avondale College of Higher Education has been operating a tertiary pathway course designed to widen access to higher education for non-conventional applicants. The course, now known as the Diploma of General Studies [DGS], has been accredited as a 2-year higher education sector diploma since 1995. Thus far, just over 1000 students have spent at least one semester in the diploma. Not one has opted to complete the diploma; instead students use it as a pathway to a higher award, mostly Avondale bachelor degrees in education, nursing, arts, theology, business and occasionally science. To date, 300 former pathway students have completed an Avondale degree, and a further 250 are currently enrolled. DGS students commence with Year 12 ranks (UAIC, ENTER, TER, now ATAR) ranging from 30 or less to around 60; however, many have no rank. For those who complete an Avondale degree, there is no correlation between rank and average college grade. Those who engage with the academic program do well, regardless of their entry rank; and those who fail to engage do poorly, regardless of their entry rank. A low Year 12 rank does not tell an applicant’s whole story. A semester in the DGS pathway course can open a new world of academic opportunity. Some DGS students have gone on to complete post-graduate study. Teachers can confidently advise Year 12 students with potential, but low tertiary ranking, to consider the option of alternative pathways to tertiary studies as these can provide a positive opportunity to achieve their aspirations.

Background and context
The DGS has been offered on the Lake Macquarie Campus since the course was first accredited in 1995. Before that it operated for 4 years as a non-accredited course, inaptly called Foundation Studies. The name was inspired by the University of Newcastle Open Foundation Program (OFFP), which commenced in 1974. The purpose of the OFFP was to broaden access to higher education for mature age students (May, 2005, p. 57). In 1990 the University of Newcastle added an enabling course to increase opportunity for selected school leavers, Newstep, (Whitson, 1995). It was against this background of the need to widen access to university study in Australia and facilitate lifelong learning (May, 2005, p. 61) that Avondale introduced its pathway course.

Despite its initial title, the Avondale pathway was never a foundation course; from the beginning it was a tertiary pathway, with all entrants taking at least two units from their desired degree. The DGS is a course that students choose not to complete. Several hundred have qualified to receive a Dip Gen Studs; instead all choose to articulate into bachelor degree courses, without completing the diploma. Entrants commence the DGS on one of five paths. The entry level path focuses on generic skills such as college writing, critical and ethical thinking, and managing a study program. Students on this path take only generic units: Effective Tertiary Writing, Christian Studies I, Principles of Tertiary Learning, and Academic English. The most advanced path enables entrants to take the first four units of the degree they wish to take, while enrolled in the DGS. They sit in class alongside normal entry students, receiving no special consideration. Free tutoring is available to all students, including DGS students; however, DGS students in degree classes are treated the same as degree students. An attempt is made to notify lecturers if they have DGS students in their classes, but in some cases lecturers may not be aware of their presence. Regardless of the path they take, if they pass their four units, DGS students qualify to articulate to an Avondale bachelor degree in their second semester. Thus, the course is used as a pathway. Around three quarters of DGS students qualify to articulate to degree courses. In most cases they achieve this after one or two semesters in the DGS.
Phase 1: Pre-accreditation, 1991–1994
The initial intake of pathway students occurred in first semester 1991, with 15 students completing the semester. A similar number enrolled in 1992. These two promising years were followed by two declining years in which the intake dropped by half. In this initial 4-year phase, 47 students (25 male, 22 female) spent at least a semester in the course. Thirty-eight of these qualified to transfer to a degree course. Most (36) of these made the transfer and 23 went on to graduate with an Avondale degree, giving a completion rate of 64 per cent, being about half of the initial intake. The gender balance favoured males slightly (53:47). Most of the entrants were recent school leavers, with just 11 (23%) mature age students in this 4-year period.

Phase 2: Accredited diploma
1995–1999: Accreditation for a 2-year Associate Diploma of General Studies was achieved in late 1994. An immediate effect of accreditation was an increase in student numbers. From the 8 in 1994, enrolment rose to 23 in 1995 and 43 in 1999. The intake for the 5 years was 181, including 87 males and 94 females, with 45 (25%) of the total being mature age students. Of the 181, 132 qualified to transfer to a degree, 111 actually started a degree, and 67 went on to graduate. The completion rate (60%) was lower compared with the previous 4 years as was the proportion of graduates from the initial intake (37%).

2000–2004: From 2000, the course had a shortened name, Diploma of General Studies. Numbers dipped about 10% in the period, to 162. There were 77 males and 85 females, with 38 (23%) being mature age students. However, student completions were up significantly. Of the 162, 127 qualified, 115 started a degree and 80 continued on to graduation, for a completion rate of 70 per cent for the degree entrants. This was close to 50 per cent of the initial intake.

2005–2009: This was a period of dramatic growth, with the intake exceeding the combined intake of the previous 14 years. A couple of factors drove the growth: the arrival in 2004 of a new Vice President (Academic) and the installation of a new Registrar in 2005. The new administration instituted new processes that opened up the DGS to more students. It empowered applicants to demonstrate why they should be allowed to start. The effect on numbers was immediate. The 2004 intake had been 35; the 2005 intake more than doubled, to 77. And in 2006 it exceeded 100 for the first time. In the 5 years (2005–2009), 448 students completed at least one semester of the course, 324 qualified and 296 of these commenced a degree. By 2011, 130 of these had completed their degree. In 2012, a further 81 are still enrolled; 28 of these expect to graduate this year. It is too early to report a completion rate for the period; however, it appears likely to be around 50 per cent. Given the more open entry policy and the larger numbers, it is not surprising that this is down on the completion rates for the first 14 years of the course.

One interesting development in this period was a shift in the gender balance, which for years had favoured females by a small margin. The 2007 class of 90 included 58 females and 32 males. Then in 2009 there were 59 females and 38 males. The balance favoured females by 56:44. Several cohorts have seen around twice as many females as males enrolled.

Loss of accreditation
At the end of 2009 the DGS lost its accreditation. The panel set up by the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) to review Avondale’s accreditation application had recommended that accreditation be granted for a further 5 years without conditions, but the department rejected this advice and chose not to renew the course’s accreditation. As a concession, the 2005–2009 accreditation was extended by one semester to allow Avondale to proceed with the 2010 class (of 76) that had already been accepted. In the meantime, Avondale prepared an appeal against the loss of accreditation.
appeal was handled by a special panel, which, in the second half of the year, decided in Avondale’s favour and accreditation was restored. The only visible effect of the loss of accreditation was that there was no second semester intake of new students, as the restoration of accreditation came after the commencement of Avondale’s second semester.

2010–2012: After the interruption of 2010, caused by the temporary loss of accreditation, student uptake of the program rebounded strongly in 2011, with a near record intake of 102 completing at least one semester of the course. The course continues to attract students. Most (76%) are recent school leavers who finish Year 12 without achieving university entrance. If they do have a Year 12 rank (ATAR, OP in Qld), it is below the level required for normal entry to Australian universities and tertiary providers.

Tertiary ranking
Current debate about the importance of tertiary ranking has been triggered by a discussion paper produced at the request of the NSW Education Minister, Adrian Piccoli. The paper makes a linkage between the quality of teacher graduates and the Year 12 ranks of students applying to start education degrees, noting that applicants need to be in the top 30 per cent in literacy and numeracy to meet new national standards (Bruniges, Lee, & Alegounarias, 2012). But the paper concedes that some 20 per cent of education students (2012) have an ATAR below 60. Armitage and Browne (2012) cite the executive director of the Group of Eight research-focused universities, Michael Gallagher, as claiming that Australia was “at risk of producing a cohort of toxic teachers” as students who did not do well in Year 12 go on to become teachers. The Australian Catholic University vice chancellor Greg Craven countered the claims of Piccoli and Gallagher, pointing out that low SES students are disadvantaged byATAR scores. He said, “What really matters is the quality of a student once they have completed their university degree, not when they enter it.” This discussion and case study examines this proposition.

This debate is significant for Avondale in that a steady stream of DGS students with Year 12 ranks below 60 articulate into education degrees. The question to be answered is what this could be doing to Avondale’s academic standards and perhaps more importantly whether there is evidence that professional careers are compromised? These questions can be addressed by looking at what is known about tertiary ranking in Australia and also looking at how DGS students perform at Avondale.

In most Australian states and territories, the tertiary rank is a percentile ranking of a student’s senior high school performance. Queensland does not use percentile ranking (Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre, 2012); instead, it uses the OP (Overall Position), expressed as a number between 1 (highest) and 25 (lowest). A tertiary rank of 70, which is equivalent to an OP of 14 (QTAC, 2012), shows that a student is ahead of 70 per cent of students and behind about the top 30 per cent. In NSW, theATAR replaced the UAI (University Admission Index). Because it is thought to have strong predictive value, tertiary ranking is used by Australian universities as the main selection criterion for entry to tertiary courses (Edwards, 2008, p. 289).

What tertiary ranking represents
The power of the Year 12 ranking to predict future academic success has been challenged. While there is evidence of a correlation between tertiary ranking and academic success at university, the relationship remains unclear (Magennis & Mitchell, 1998; Murphy, Papanicolaou & McDowell, 2001; Dobson & Skuja, 2005; Levy & Murray, 2005; James, Bexley & Shearer, 2009) and does not provide an absolute indication of the likely success of individual students. A report prepared by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (2010) at the University of Melbourne posits that “Some students may not demonstrate their true potential in theirATAR due to prior educational disadvantage or other factors” (p. 15). This echoed the earlier claims of Duke (2000), who sought to move beyond “the tyranny” of tertiary entrance ranking, which has as much to do with exclusion as with opportunity. Data from Victorian universities shows that many students are disadvantaged by Year 12 rank, especially those from non-selective government high schools. Government school students with a rank below 80 perform as well at university as those from private and selective schools with ranks five to ten points higher (Edwards, 2008, p. 295). There is a considerable body of literature devoted to the problems of disadvantage and the under representation of disadvantaged groups in higher education (Clarke, Zimmer & Main, 1999; James, 2000; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; West & Gibbs, 2004; Ferrier, 2006; Wheelahan, 2007; Grebennikov & Skaines, 2009; Phillimore & Koshy, 2010). It seems the playing field is not level.

Predictive value of tertiary ranking
According to Baker (2007), the Year 12 rank serves as a good indicator of success in higher education. He reports that for ranks above 80, the
relationship with first-year grades is "essentially linear." Subsequently, in a study of the performance of first-year psychology students, Roodenrys (2008) found that the Year 12 rank was "the best predictor of performance" (p. 143). Previously, Urban et al. (1999) found a clear correlation between rank and university completion rates: the higher the rank, the greater the likelihood of completion. They divided university students with a tertiary rank (less than half of all university students at the time) into 10 groups (or deciles), the top group representing the top 10 per cent and the bottom group representing the bottom 10 per cent. They found that for every decile, the Year 12 rank was a significant predictor of success or completion. The completion rate for the top decile was over 78 per cent, compared with 55 per cent for the bottom decile (ch. 3, p. 8).

Dobson and Skuja (2005) examined the literature on the Year 12 rank as a predictor of success at university, citing a 1991 study by Dobson and Sharma (1991) that found "high scores in Year 12 were a prima facie predictor of university performance" (p. 54). They cite also Evans and Farley (1998), who reported that students' ranks "appeared significant in explaining the variation in their university marks in all cases when it was the sole explanatory variable" (p. 55). McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) found that previous academic performance was "the most significant predictor of university performance" (p. 21). Additionally, Murphy, Papanicolaou and McDowell (2001) found a strong correlation for scores above 80. Their findings were based on a longitudinal study of the performance of 6,442 students in all faculties at RMIT, 1995–1997. These findings suggest that there is little doubt that tertiary ranks have predictive value.

Limitations of tertiary ranking

However, while there is research to show that Year 12 ranking has predictive value, other research shows that the predictive value of tertiary ranking is limited. As the title of a paper by Levy and Murray (2005) suggests, "Tertiary entrance scores need not determine academic success" (p. 129). McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) claim that university entry scores "explain less than half of the variance in GPA" (p. 29) at university. Magennis and Mitchell (1998) found that Year 12 rank was a poor predictor of performance in first-year students: "Low TER [Yr 12 rank] was not associated with low GPA" (abstract). Murphy, Papanicolaou, & McDowell (2001) reached three main conclusions about the usefulness of tertiary ranking: for students with tertiary ranks above 80 there was a correlation between rank and university performance; for those with scores between 40 and 80 there was no correlation; a variable correlation existed for those below 40. Further, the predictive power of the tertiary rank varied between courses: it was strongest for Engineering, Physical Sciences, Nursing and Humanities, but was weaker for Education and Health. A gender effect was also noted, where the performance of males and females was similar for those with rankings above 80, but below 80 females outperformed males. Dancer and Kamvounias (n.d.) also found evidence of a gender effect.

Coombs (n.d.) argued that while the Year 12 rank is a "probabilistic" indicator of likely success at university, it is not a guarantee. Many students with high ranks fail to complete their courses, whereas many with low ranks do well and graduate. Hence, caution is needed when using tertiary rankings to predict likely academic outcomes. Urban, Jones, Smith, Evans, Maclachlan, & Karmel (1999) qualified their finding about the correlation between Year 12 rank and university success by noting that while the rank has predictive value between high and low scores, it has less predictive value within high or low scores. Completers and non-completers are found at all levels. Thus, the predictive value of ranks is relative, not absolute. It is findings like this that prompted James, Bexley and Shearer (2009) to conclude: "ENTER [Yr 12 rank] is attributed a precision that is not deserved" (p. 1). They note that ranking is highly correlated with socio-economic status, that it is not wholly successful in predicting university performance, and that it does not measure aptitude or motivation for particular fields of study (p. 2).

Temmerman (2008) reported that the Commonwealth House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, in its 2007 Top of the Class Report, questioned the adequacy of academic performance (as indicated by tertiary ranking) as the only selection criterion for entry to teacher education courses. It argued for a broader approach that would recognise other qualities, including "a committed enthusiasm for teaching, a mindset to encourage children, a capacity for reflective and critical thinking, and broad knowledge" (p. 11). After analysing a cohort of education students studying at USQ, Temmerman (2008) found that there is a poor relationship between OP [Qld Yr 12 score] and GPA. Some with an OP of 16 outperform others with an OP of 2 (remembering that in Qld a low score is good). Temmerman (2008) insists, "This highlights the importance of personal variables such as motivation
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Table 1: Comparison of Year 12 ranks (UAI) and college grades (WAM) for 251 DGS students, 2005–2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 12 rank</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Average rank</th>
<th>Average college grade (WAM)</th>
<th>Rank/WAM correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.0076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: DGS students with Year 12 rank completing an Avondale degree, 2005–2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 12 rank</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Average rank</th>
<th>Average college grade (WAM)</th>
<th>Completion percentage (to 2011)</th>
<th>Projected completion percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and commitment to teaching, alongside academic competence” (p. 12). Some universities are now gathering data other than tertiary ranking to help select students for courses like medicine. For example, at the University of Newcastle (2011) applicants are interviewed to assess their aptitude and personal characteristics, including their ability to handle ambiguity.

Year 12 ranking and Avondale’s DGS students
An analysis of Year 12 ranking and the academic performance of DGS students after they articulate into their degree courses bears out many of the findings discussed in this paper. Of the 626 DGS students in the course in the years 2005–2011, 251 (40%) reported a Year 12 rank, mostly a UAI (OPs have been converted to UAIs in this analysis). These ranks ranged from 30 or less to 60. The results are shown in Table 1, which summarises the performance based on Year 12 ranks. The four rows show the performance for students with four levels of ranking: 30 or less, 30–39, 40–49 and 50–60. From the table it can be seen that there is a positive relationship for Year 12 rank and average college grade (WAM, weighted average mark) between the levels; however, there is no correlation for ranks and college grades within the levels. The positive correlations shown in the right-hand column of the table range from very low (0.116) to negligible (0.0076). Under the current academic rules, normal entry to the DGS requires an ATAR of 45, which is equivalent to a UAI of 40. Hence, the top two categories here represent normal entrants and the bottom two represent special entrants. The correlations in Table 1 indicate no strong relationship between tertiary ranking and college grade achieved by DGS students.

The following discussion reviews the students from each of these categories who went on to complete an Avondale bachelor degree and graduate (see Table 2). For the 55 who have already graduated, there is little variation in average college grade across the four ranking levels. The group with the highest Year 12 ranks (50–60) had an average college grade of 68 per cent, giving them a premium of just 2 per cent over the three lower groups, which all averaged 66 per cent. Even students with a Year 12 rank of 30 or less completed their college degrees with an average grade of 66 per cent, the same percentage earned by those with ranks of
The DGS students are not lowering standards; on the contrary, they are being raised to the level of normal entrants

40–49. This shows that for DGS students who complete degrees, Year 12 rank is not the determining factor. Their success must depend on other factors, such as motivation, interest and willingness to engage with their course of study [my current research is looking into this]. Nevertheless, Year 12 rank does correlate with completion rates as the projected completion rates show in Table 2. Final completion rates for these students are not yet available as 105 of the 251 students are still enrolled and have yet to complete their degrees. The second-last column shows the percentage that had completed degrees to 2011. The last column shows projected completion rates after the remaining 105 students have had time to complete. The rates range from 34 per cent for students with a Year 12 rank of 30 or less to 56 per cent for those with ranks of 50–60. Given the small numbers in the bottom group (<30), the typical completion rate for the entire cohort is likely to be around 50 per cent. This is below the completion rates recorded by students in the years 1991–2004; however, it is encouraging given the low Year 12 ranks achieved by most of these students.

As these findings show, Year 12 ranks do not tell the whole story about student potential. The Avondale experience with DGS students shows that most have experienced some kind of disadvantage that has negatively impacted their Year 12 performance and may continue to challenge them right through college. Some have learning difficulties, which in some cases were not detected at school. A former DGS student who completed his PhD this year managed to get all the way through school without being diagnosed with ADD. On a recommendation, he consulted a psychologist, learned what his problem was, and developed strategies that made his learning more effective and turned him into a high academic achiever.

The success of former DGS students completing Avondale degree courses shows that they are "up to the task". The performance of 46 former DGS students completing their bachelor degrees in the 2009 graduating class supports this claim. The average UAI for the 254 students completing undergraduate degrees in the class of 2009 was 67, and their average college grade was 70 per cent. For the 46 former DGS students in this graduating class, their average UAI was 17 points lower (50) but their average college grade was just 5 per cent lower (65%). Ranked by average college grade, the best placed DGS student achieved position 37 in the graduating class. Three DGS students had average college grades that ranked them in the top one third of the graduating class, and one third of the DGS students placed in the top two thirds of the graduating class. It follows that two thirds of the DGS students placed in the bottom one third of the graduating class. However, they were not clustered at the bottom; rather, they were spread evenly across the range, with a final group taking six of the bottom 10 places. This is evidence that DGS students are not lowering standards; on the contrary, they are being raised to the level of normal entrants with significantly higher Year 12 ranking.

It can be seen that the DGS is widening access to higher education by extending opportunity to non-traditional entrants whose Year 12 ranking does not meet the entry requirements for most higher education courses in Australia. This is contributing to the Federal Government’s objective of increasing participation in higher education by young Australians (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008). The fact that no DGS entrant has opted to graduate with a Diploma of General Studies is not evidence that the course is failing. The success of the course must be judged by its effectiveness as a pathway that enables the majority of those that take it to qualify to commence an Avondale degree course. It could be noted that some DGS students choose to complete their degree at a university instead of at Avondale. After success in the DGS and perhaps after a year or two of degree study in an Avondale degree course, they find places in universities that are closer to their homes or that offer courses not available at Avondale and finish their degrees there.
This case study informs tertiary education providers and their administrators as well as other stakeholders in education, including government, parents, teachers and potential students. It is of particular interest to high school teachers who have observed the unfulfilled potential of students who, due to some disadvantage, have not been as successful at Year 12 in the tertiary ranking as they need to be. This information about opportunities can be used to maintain hope for these students, providing encouragement to consider entry through alternative pathways to fulfill their tertiary education ambitions and career aspirations. It supports those university educators asserting that the current linking of ‘toxic’ teachers or teaching to entry tertiary ranking scores is too simplistic and misrepresents the researched position.

References
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Why Did My Mentor Teacher Only Give Me a Credit?

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Abstract
The placement of pre-service teachers in schools to integrate theoretical learning with practical experience is an integral component of many tertiary education courses. Issues with both the reliability and validity of assessment grades in a workplace environment suggest a call to strengthen the level of academic rigour of these placements. In this study, professional development lecturers in one education program [Avondale College of Higher Education, NSW] constructed a standards-based grading rubric designed to assist mentor teachers assess the performance of pre-service teachers. After implementation of the rubric for two Professional Experience sessions, mentor teachers were surveyed to assess the effectiveness and usefulness of the grading rubric. Results from quantitative and qualitative data found the grading rubric to be a vital tool in the assessment process. Benefits of the grading rubric included accuracy and consistency of grading, ability to identify specific areas of desired development and facilitation of mentor to pre-service teacher feedback. This research asserts that the assessment grading rubric was a useful tool for all three parties concerned: the course supervisor, the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher.

Introduction
While the assessment of students in the tertiary setting is complicated enough to plan, administer, mark and justify, the assessment of tertiary students in the workplace while on practical placement creates a whole new set of issues.

Kegan (1994) made the insightful observation that “people grow best when they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge; the rest is commentary” (p.42). These are the types of experiences tertiary institutions desire their students to have while on placement. The question then arises as to the best way to facilitate this.

This paper reports on a study conducted into the attitudes and beliefs of onsite mentor teachers who were responsible for implementing a trial rubric to assess the practical performance of pre-service teachers while on placement.

Also reported in this paper is a theoretical platform for the practical assessment process, common thought on practical assessment found in the literature, and the history of how this research became an area of interest.

Issues identified by the authors in the practical assessment area mostly revolve around the lack of control tertiary staff have over the way mentor teachers administer the assessment regimes.

Why did my mentor teacher only give me a credit?
The lonely task of grading your pre-service teacher

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• The mentor teacher may both feel intimidated by the student and give a higher grade than deserved, or they may discourage the student with an undeserved poor grade for their stage of development.

• Tertiary institutions generally have no authority over the mentor teachers on location but rely on their support and cooperation to train the next generations in the profession.

• Some tertiary institutions have not historically provided the mentor teachers with the tools to carry out an objective assessment.

The depth of this issue became apparent during debriefing sessions with a group of pre-service teachers after a professional experience placement. Many of these pre-service teachers were either elated at their grade because it was significantly better than last time, or really discouraged at their low grade, given their excellent previous grades. Pre-service teachers reported some mentor teachers quickly and randomly ticking boxes on the last day of placement.

It is for these reasons that it could be argued that workplace assessment supervisors should only be required to grade the pre-service teachers’ performances ‘satisfactory’ or ‘not satisfactory’.

Foundational assertions for this research were:
• That excellence can only be aspired to when levels of performance are identified in the student.
• That mentor teachers have been expected to provide a grade with no real guidance or scale to use.
• That if the validity and reliability of the assessment process were to be improved, a scale needed to be provided.

A rubric for assessment of pre-service teachers was consequently developed. This paper reports on responses to a survey designed to measure attitudes mentor teachers have towards the use of the rubric.

What research is saying

Equipping pre-service teachers with the skills and confidence they need to function in a classroom requires collaboration between the training institution and mentor teachers. The worth of workplace experience as a complement to more theoretical coursework is well documented (Pungur, 2010; Billett, 2009; Gowing, Taylor & McGregor, 1997). While Professional Experience placements offer a balanced practical component to teacher education courses, the associated assessment process is somewhat challenging. Assessment may be impacted by variables including the diversity of school demographics and localities, and schools adapting to different assessment criteria and expectations from different tertiary institutions (Sadler, 2009a). A further significant variable is the status of mentor teachers. This can range from two to forty years of experience (See Figure 1) and extend from classroom teachers to department coordinators, assistant principals, and in the case of smaller schools, teaching principals. The position and experience of the mentor teacher also impacts on both understanding the mentoring/assessment process, and the time available to administer it. To complicate the process further, the assessment process is sometimes shared between two mentor teachers. This occurs either because of job sharing or in the case of high school teachers, mentors in two teaching fields.

Considering potential variables, Sadler (2011) claims that the consistency of individual assessors cannot be relied on in practice. This view is supported by Tillema (2009), who found considerable variation in how mentor teachers carried out assessment of pre-service teachers, both in relation to the perceived purpose of assessment and the criteria used. Yet, if assessment of pre-service teachers is to be useful, both inter-consistency and intra-consistency are essential (Sadler, 2009b).

To grade or not to grade?

The assessment practices of universities vary in regard to pre-service teachers on school placements. Anecdotal evidence pointing to the challenges of attaining consistency across a range of external assessors has resulted in some institutions adopting a pass/fail paradigm. Supporters of this assessment model claim that this is the fairest form of assessment given the complexity of different locations and assessors.

Not all research supports this paradigm, however. Tillema (2009) asked three categories of participants in a Professional Experience program (university supervisors, mentors teachers and pre-service teachers) to prioritise perceived problems in the assessment of pre-service teachers. Out of 13 identified problems, the “Lack of guidelines and grading rules for assessors” ranked at number one for top priority, level of agreement and congruence with a 95% certainty that this result did not occur by chance (p. 161). This clearly indicates that all three groups (university supervisors, mentors teachers and pre-service teachers) experienced a measure of frustration when there were no clear assessment guidelines. From this and other research (Blanton, Sindelar & Correa, 2006) it becomes evident that grading criteria are important because “they have
Rubrics can provide formative assessment by providing pre-service teachers with a clear picture of their interim skill set, this assists mentor teachers in giving helpful and specific feedback.

Rubrics as an assessment tool
Having established the importance of a grading system for professional experience placements, this review focuses on the assessment tool. A variety of assessment methods have been used to assess practical components of higher education courses. These include observation and note taking, checklists, continuums, journals and rubrics. The last of these is the assessment tool under investigation.

Reddy (2011, p. 84) defines a rubric as an “assessment tool that is used to describe and score observable qualitative differences in performances.” Walvoord (2010, p. 18) additionally states that “the rubric is a format for expressing criteria and standards.” It is these characteristics that make rubrics suitable for the purpose of grading professional experience placements.

The use of evaluation criteria emerges in the literature as an important point in teacher education as a study on assessment by Pindiprolu, Lignugaris/Kraft, Rule, Peterson, & Slocum (2005) points out. This study concluded that the increasing demands on pre-service teachers to meet performance based criteria highlighted a need to develop effective scoring rubrics. Also supporting the need for criteria are the supervisors, mentors and pre-service teachers in Tillema’s (2009) study, who ranked ‘Not having clear criteria in appraisal’ in fourth place out of 13 identified problems in assessment of a practice teaching lesson (p. 161). There were several other problems identified in Tillema’s (2009) study that could be addressed by the use of a common grading rubric. These were ‘Using different appraisal sources/information’, ‘Conducting a supervision conversation’, ‘Maintaining supervision standards’, ‘Giving directions for future learning’, ‘Giving feedback to students’ and ‘Alignment in ratings among assessors’ (p. 161). In each of these instances a grading rubric could provide both a common language and rating scale that would not only provide criteria standards but also offer a starting point for professional conversations between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher.

Reddy (2011) introduces a note of caution to the use of rubrics in a higher education setting. This relates to the nature of the rubric, its construction and implementation. Problems occur when performance descriptors lack clarity, inconsistency exists in descriptors across levels and rating scales are mismatched to descriptors. Also noted is the preference to train assessors by offering opportunities for debate and discussion about the rubric, providing practice opportunities, and giving assessors pre-marked samples as a reference (Reddy, 2011). While this may work in a faculty or department, it is not traditionally feasible when the mentor teachers who will be assessing pre-service teachers are widespread geographically. A further challenge is to create an assessment tool that is detailed enough to accurately measure performance yet does not discourage mentor teachers from using it because it is time intensive.

Rubrics do more than provide clear criteria and descriptions of desired performance for summative assessment. Rubrics can provide formative assessment by providing pre-service teachers with a clear picture of their interim skill set and as Taylor (2007), points out, this assists mentor teachers in giving helpful and specific feedback. This has a positive effect on student professional experience learning.

Using rubrics for the assessment of practical tasks is beneficial for all participants. Pre-service teachers benefit from the detailed descriptors’ support of increased understanding of assessments and are able to build on their performance and improve. Mentor teachers find it easier to assess their own effectiveness and give helpful feedback, and university supervisors are informed about the effectiveness and quality of their course (Reddy, 2011).

Aligning assessment with course objectives
The importance of assessment which informs course structure and content should not be overlooked. With the move towards Graduate Teaching Standards, there is a need to combine assessment with course outcomes. Several authors on this topic speak in favour of the alignment of assessment with course objectives. McCarthy, Niederjohn and Bosack (2011) present a case for embedded assessment which allows “faculty to take an active and intentional role in specifying student learning and determining whether students meet specified criteria” (p. 81). Biggs (1999) takes the argument one step further, stating that desired learning and understandings will occur when all course components are aligned. Consequently,
mentor teachers should be assessing pre-service teachers according to course objectives, rather than according to their own personal opinions. The grading rubric referred to in this article is an attempt to bring school-based assessment into alignment with evidence-based assessment practices, thus validating the assessment process.

The use of valid, standardised assessment criteria generally supports a consistent and fair assessment system. What remains unanswered is to what extent the use of a standardised assessment tool can assure uniformity of assessment across all mentor teachers who participate in the professional experience program and also their affective response to implementing it.

Methodology
A cross-sectional survey instrument was constructed to determine how workplace supervisors used the rubric provided. It also collected their opinions on its ease of use, its accuracy and its effectiveness. Demographic data sought included length of teaching experience in years and qualifications of placement mentors/supervisors.

The survey featured both closed- and open-items exploring assessor value of the grading rubric. The closed items used a five point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. The survey face-validity was ascertained by iterative consultation with teacher education academics. Any comments on review of the surveys were absorbed into the survey content.

Qualitative data from the survey was aligned with informal or unsolicited comments received by the authors.

Analysis of results
Responses from mentor teachers to the survey numbered 112. This represented a response rate of 30%. From the survey, key information was collected, collated, and is outlined graphically below along with qualitative data for each item.

The mentor teachers’ years of experience are illustrated in Figure 1. It is clear from the chart that there is a wide distribution of years of experience, and all age groups are represented.

Figure 2 shows the perceived ease of use of the rubric and Figure 3 indicates the percentage of respondents who believed that the rubric provided an accurate assessment of pre-service teacher performance.

While the survey data showed that mentor teachers found the rubric easy to use and accurate (Figure 3), the qualitative comments collected in the course of the research implied it improved assessment accuracy, and that these two outcomes were very closely linked.

Each of the following comments by mentor teachers shows how the elements of ‘ease’ and ‘accuracy’ are placed in the same category.

"I found the rubric essential for my final assessment of [pre-service teacher] and it made it incredibly easy to identify her exact level of achievement— in fact I felt that it was almost too quick and easy to use so I was able to spend more time and effort on my written comments for [pre-service teacher]."

"Makes assessing students a lot simpler and clearly defines to them areas that they are achieving well in and areas that need improvement."
The rubric clearly states the levels students can obtain and therefore gives them key performance indicators on which to focus.

I have found using the grading scale/rubric easy to follow it allows you to make/give a grading instead of relying on your own judgment.

I love the grading/rubric as I was able to clearly identify what marks that the students I was working on should receive. I found it also very beneficial in being able to use the right words in being able to properly articulate my observations. I have kept a copy for personal reference.

The data indicates a strong agreement that the rubric does in fact simplify the task of assessing the practical performance of pre-service teachers.

There were a small number of mentor teachers who disagreed that this is the case. It appears that this was based on the length of time it takes to do the assessment thoroughly using the rubric compared to the less structured way they had completed it in the past.

Further comments from mentor teachers added depth to the idea that the process of using the rubric increased their confidence in the overall process of assessment and it justified for them the grade they allocated. Two such comments follow:

- It gave me confidence to give the grade I did because I knew my PT (pre-service teacher) had covered the requirements.
- My staff had already determined the grades we were awarding without looking at the rubrics—however the rubrics provided not only confirmation of our decisions but also focused discussion when determining the grades to be awarded.

Apart from the assessment benefits of using the rubric, the survey asked the question as to whether it may also be utilised as a tool to enhance pre-service teacher learning.

Figure 4 indicates that there is agreement that the use of the rubric does help pre-service teachers learn. The mechanism at work is that the pre-service teacher can use the rubric as an indication of the standard expected for each graduate outcome and plan how they are going to achieve them. They may even seek advice as to how they can do better so as to achieve the standards.

When the mentor teacher is reviewing the performance of the pre-service teacher with them at the end of the professional experience placement, the standards can again be used as the basis for the evaluation process and valuable learning can occur.

The following comments from mentor teachers illustrate the pre-service teacher learning that they believe occurs while using the rubric:

- Feedback and discussion—verbal and written is valuable for student learning.
- The grading scale also allows me to give the student specific feedback that relates to their course.
- The rubric provides a target for the students to know what they could/should be aiming for.
- The rubric states clearly the various levels that students can obtain and therefore gives them key performance indicators on which to focus.
- The grading is incremental and allows students to see what they need to do to advance to the next level.
This research hypothesised that the use of the rubric may result in the mentor teachers thinking a little more carefully about the whole assessment process for their pre-service teacher (Figure 5). The survey asked this question and around 75% of the respondents agreed that using the rubric as a basis for assessment of their pre-service teacher had caused them to think more about the assessment process, and probably think more carefully (see the following comment). Figure 5 illustrates this response.

The following comment is indicative of several that showed how much the mentor teachers relied on the rubric in the assessment process:

*We have discussed the rubric many times, particularly when trying to come to a decision about [pre-service teacher’s] professional conduct and teaching practice... and [mentor teacher] kept referring back to it to help her assess [the pre-service teacher’s] performance... and to confirm her decisions.*

**Discussion**

Both the quantitative and qualitative data showed that the inclusion of the grading rubric with the pack of materials and resources sent out to the mentor teachers has been a popular strategy. The results are very comprehensive and the authors believe this is the case not only for the reasons surveyed and reported above, but because the grading rubric has filled a vacuum and given mentor teachers a tool to complete a task that has historically been approached in a somewhat random manner.

In addition to comments relating to their own situation, mentor teachers were able to see a wider application of the benefits of a grading rubric. Some teachers felt the rubric would improve inter-consistency. One typical comment stated, “*it seems like an instrument that will develop a level playing field for you.*” Other teachers saw its application as a diagnostic tool, not just for the pre-service teacher, but for course content and structure, with one stating that it could “*identify areas of weakness within the student/cohort which need to be addressed.*” There were also teachers who appreciated the fact that pre-service teachers were being assessed against teaching standards, and that it was “*scaffolded to the New Scheme Teacher requirements.*” Some mentor teachers from states other than NSW, however, saw this as irrelevant to their situation. With the implementation of National Teaching Standards in 2013, the rubric will be redefined according to the graduate level of the National Standards, thus addressing this problem. Each of the above points highlights an issue raised in the literature (Sadler, 2009a; Cochrane-Smith & Fries, 2002; Sadler, 2011; Tillema, 2009) and affirms the decision to move to a grading rubric for assessing pre-service teachers.

It is important to recognise that this study revealed a small number of perceived issues relating to the rubric. Criticisms from mentor teachers pertained to the construction of the rubric, in particular the lack of clarity in performance descriptors (“*Grading is important, however the examples supplied seem a little complicated/cumbersome*”), and mismatched rating scales to descriptors (“*I feel that some of the distinctions between the levels were ambiguous*”). These comments were in line with the cautions by Reddy (2011) in regards to the development of rubrics. The grading rubric is continually being refined in response to these observations.

Despite some minor criticisms, it appears that the overall impact of introducing the grading rubric was one of relief and perceived support for mentor teachers, pre-service teachers and college supervisors. Other phrases used by mentor teachers included:

*Great help, gives all teachers common ground, it was a helping guide, I hope other universities adopt this practice, it allowed me to sort my thoughts, it allowed me to focus on judgments that were relevant, it helped them identify their ‘next steps’, it provides language and details.*

**Conclusion**

Historically, the practical assessment of pre-service teachers in the school setting has presented many issues. These concerns have usually been focussed...
The introduction of the grading rubric has empowered mentor teachers to assess confidently while encouraging pre-service teachers to attain pre-determined levels of competence around questioning reliability and consistency in the way mentor teachers have allocated grades to pre-service teachers. The mentor teachers have felt under-resourced to decide on a grade, the pre-service teachers have been bewildered by the inconsistencies in the way they have been graded and the college supervisors had not adequately addressed either of these situations.

The authors believe that the rubric has achieved a satisfactory balance between providing adequate outcomes for assessment and not being so onerous as to discourage the supervisors from using it. This style of assessment is built on sound theory. It accepts that it is unfair and unreasonable to ask anybody to grade anything without valid criteria from which to work.

The introduction of the grading rubric has empowered mentor teachers to assess confidently while encouraging pre-service teachers to attain pre-determined levels of competence. It would be overstating the use of the grading rubric to say it had eliminated inconsistencies, but the appraisal and level of acceptance of the rubric initiative suggest that with continued assessment, review and development the rubric will continue to provide an effective means of assessment of pre-service teachers in the workplace.

References


1-1-2012

Email from Asia (September)

David Arthur

International School

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Do you still get excited about starting a new school year? (Maybe if you don’t, perhaps it is time to give it away and do something else!) It could be the fulfilment and challenge that comes with new subjects and new responsibilities, meeting up with returning students and old friends on the staff, or meeting new staff and students, or just continuing to do something you love doing; perhaps all of the above.

After a long holiday, mostly abroad, it was time to get down to business again. Graduates from last year began dropping in for advice on what to do next, especially if their results were below their expectations. New students came to chat about subject choices and beyond. Our counselling office was a hive of activity for the first few weeks, then it began to settle a bit, and finally those of us in the office who are part-time teachers felt able to give our full attention to some ‘real’ teaching. Along the way newly arriving teachers at the school became new friends, and we helped with their orientation to school and city.

The exciting thing is that now the Fellowship of Believers has grown—indeed the group has doubled in size! We have met new people—real, down to earth, born-again people who came from different parts of the world to this place. It leads us to remind ourselves that it was not an accident that they ended up here; in fact it had been a long time in the planning. They each had an inspiring story to tell. The interesting thing was how we found out about them. In each case it was a ‘chance’ meeting or a tip-off from someone. Our hope is that more will be added to the group as the year progresses.

As often happens, graduates from former years call in during their summer holidays and give an update on what they have been doing since their student days. They are all grown up, even more independent and self-assured than before, and we enjoy a deeper relationship. Although in my situation of teaching senior students, it was never really like teacher-student, but rather more like a coach-athlete. Here are a few of their stories.

Anita* bounced into the office one day and it was obvious that something had changed. One of the last times I’d seen her was when she was very dejected over missing out on her ‘dream school’, and having to settle for a less desirable alternative. But this time the beaming face betrayed her—it was not like that now. She told me how she had become a believer during the year, and we agreed that it was providential that she missed out on the original dream. We chatted for some time about life’s purpose, how we only see part of the big picture and if we had full knowledge, our choices might likely be very different. We were humbled to consider the thought of a Master Plan for each of us. So exciting! Tiffany* graduated, went on to study at a prestigious foreign university, and then returned to a banking career. One day we were chatting about life issues and priorities, and she told me that after looking around her and seeing the burned out, frazzled hulks of the young (usually male) career bankers who seemed to spend most of their lives working, she had stopped trying to climb the corporate ladder. She had rebalanced her life so that what was really important to her now commanded most of her time. It all sounded so refreshing, yet so unusual in our very materialistic environment. Committed to what really matters. So exciting!

Just recently Lydia* came after one of our Economics classes, bubbling over with some news. During the holidays she had been for a short service trip to one of the poorest countries in the world, following in the footsteps of that well known lady who spent most of her life looking after the poor in one of the big cities there. With great excitement she told me about her experience, and how deeply she had been affected. Her new appreciation of the plight of so many others once unknown to her has changed the course of her life, and it will be extremely interesting to keep in touch with her in the future. So exciting!

And so the routine work of school is accomplished, but more importantly, lives are influenced, and by more people than before. We talk one-to-one with students and stand before our classes with a different attitude compared to most of the other staff. We realise that what is happening here is about the supernatural, the eternal. It’s not just about exams, books, theories and subject matter. Far from it. The fortunes of individuals, families, the school, the country, maybe even the world could be changed by a student sitting in our class.

We’ll keep you ‘posted’ on developments. TEACH

*Pseudonyms
School and Home School

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Hi, my name is Rachel Rankin. I’ve been home schooled for my entire life, until this year when I decided to go to school. You know, it was kind of an extreme challenge, a radical experiment to discover whether school was like it’s supposed to be in the movies. I wanted to see if I could do it and also to make lots of friends.

These thoughts are about my experience of school and how it compares to home school. Please note, that these are my personal opinions, so you don’t have to agree with me, but this is what I think.

The first thing I must say is that there are pros and cons to both home school and school. Yet, they are very different in lots of ways.

When I attended school, I soon realised that school was not like the movies at all! One of the biggest things in coming to a new school was my being ‘the new girl’. So, that didn’t make it easy to break into the already existing friendship groups; and my coming in half way through high school didn’t exactly help. But I made some breakthroughs and I now have the social life at school that I missed at home. When I was home schooled I saw my friends only a few times a week for about an hour each time, as opposed to all day, five days a week. I have really enjoyed getting to know some really cool people at school who will be friends for a long time to come.

Academically it wasn’t too difficult to transfer from home school to school, although there was a lot more homework involved in school. In some subjects I was ahead of my class, while in others there was work that I had to catch up. The work wasn’t harder; there was just more of it.

The biggest adjustment I had to make was the amount of homework that I had to do in order to complete the assigned work. When I was home schooled, most of the time I finished schoolwork by lunch time. It almost seems that you go to school to find out what you have to do at home. Now that I am at school, much of my free time seems to be taken up by homework.

In home schooling I had more freedom, learning the stuff that I wanted to learn and that which interested me. At school I am told what I’m required to learn, without my input. While there are some topics that really interest me, there are others that I find less motivating.

At school it’s important that you can work the ‘system’. When I was home schooled the only deadline for tests and exams was my understanding of the subject. The important thing was to master the particular topic before we moved on. You learn what you need to know to pass the exams at school, instead of what you want to know. You give the teachers what they want from you. Also, there is a limit to expressing my own ideas, thoughts, or opinions. This seems to be how one survives in the system and how you get a passing grade, because it is the grade you get that counts as much as who you are becoming as an individual.

The teachers who love their students and their job really demonstrate the quality of teaching and learning at school. They are teachers who are passionate about their subject areas and about what they are teaching. They are not burnt out and they haven’t lost their passion for what they had in the first place or for what they are doing now. These teachers are really cool and they have inspired me to do more with my life; they neither think that school should be a police state nor do they publicly humiliate students. I never struggle to understand these teachers and I always respect them.

It’s not impossible that you can become just a number in a school’s system. And I understand why, because there are a lot of people and you need to keep track of them. For someone coming from a home school environment some of the weightings given to certain school rules seem rather unusual: “Don’t eat in the bathrooms” and “Keep the top button of your shirt done up”. I had difficulty with why they seem to care more about uniforms and bathrooms than the students. Again, I accept that, for part of the reason is that there are lots of students and not many teachers. When you are at home it’s just you and you parents. You know your parents; they love you and you love them.

In view of everything that’s happened this year, I think that doing Year 10 at school has been a really worthwhile experience. There have been many ups and a few downs, but it has been a lot of fun. What’s next in God’s plan for me?

After successfully completing my experimental year of school, this girl will need to decide which continuing, educational ‘road’ to take. Will 2012 have been more than just a ‘school gap year’ on life’s exciting journey?
1-1-2012

The School on the Rubbish Dump

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Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

The school on the rubbish dump
A view from the far side

Ken Weslake
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When thinking of children on rubbish dumps, what locations spring to mind? Most would think of some places in Asia or South America and associated Aid organisations that have helped make us more aware of the plight of these children. Yet such a situation exists even closer to home.

At Baruni, on the outskirts of Port Moresby, PNG, some 3,000 plus people exist. Many of these families are displaced from other provinces in the country and lack any educational opportunities.

Meet Ogasta Daniel. She is a Christian lady who runs Daniel School. For many years she has felt a burden for these children and so two years ago commenced her own school. She has not only taught them but fed them as well when possible. Initially the class met under her house, but now through the generosity of Food for Life an NGO, is able to operate with basic shelter and supplies.

Ogasta shares details of just four of her 30 plus students. Her grammar may not be the best but the messages are clear.

First child – There are too many of them in the family, both parents are unemployed and uneducated. They live a very poor life, have torn clothes and looks sick and sad always. He and his other brothers and sisters plus their father they collect empty containers and sell them while their mother sells scones, lollies and other little stuff from the stores just to feed her family. Have no proper housing and sanitation plus water.

Second child – Parents remarried and too there are too many of them in the family. Aunt and uncle take care of him but because they have children of their own. It’s hard.

[Photographs: Dennis Perry]
Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

**Third child** – He comes from a family of 6 children. Father works as a security guard and gets little which can’t last until the next pay. He and his brothers and sisters haven’t been to school and they all don’t look too good with their health and their living conditions too. They have torn clothes and sores all over, sad looking faces.

**Fourth child** – His parents are HIV positive. They are both still alive but sick. His aunt takes care of him. Her husband is working and they have children of their own and they feed and clothe him.

While providing an education within a first world context is demanding and very stressful, having to provide education to students operating at the lowest levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is no less challenging or demanding. Port Moresby is claimed to be one of the worse cities in the world to live. Couple this with poor parent literacy (UNESCO, 2011), little security, and a lack of resources, then teachers like Ogasta become almost saint-like. TEACH

Reference
1-1-2012

Egyptian Learning Curve

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Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

Egyptian learning curves

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Travel is fun isn’t it? We all have big dreams about travelling to distant foreign and exotic lands. For some it may be to Paris or Rome, others it may even be to the Opera House. We all have our places that if we were given the opportunity we would dream of going. I want you for a second to imagine an exotic place you have visited. (If you haven’t travelled much think of an exotic destination you have always dreamed of going!) Can you remember what the people were like? What did you eat? How did people respond to foreigners? Was the Exchange Rate in your favour? Now imagine if you lived in that country for a year. You were totally immersed in that culture, away from family and friends, away from the comforts of home; simply because God placed a call on your heart to do the work that is needed. Welcome to the life of volunteer service learning.

My name is Herbert; I am 21 years old and am currently studying theology at Avondale College of Higher Education. I have just come back to Australia from being a volunteer at Nile Union Academy on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt. You may be asking why Egypt? It’s actually a funny story. My passion is to do music ministry, and I was procrastinating from doing a Systematic Theology essay one night and for some reason during my ‘study break’ I came across the South Pacific Division’s Volunteer website (www.adventistvolunteers.org). I searched through the calls and saw a Worship Leader position, and before I knew it I was in Egypt!

Nile Union Academy is a Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy in a town called El Gabal El Asfar just on the outskirts of Cairo. We have 135 students half being Egyptian, half being from South Sudan. Egypt’s population is just over 81 million people, and the population of practicing Adventists are just over 500. It’s illegal to proselytise so the School is Egypt’s primary source of evangelism.

Egypt was very different to what I initially expected. For starters the pyramids are grey not golden. There was a lot more trash than I expected, there are places in the world that have worse traffic than Sydney during peak hour, and Cairo is much hotter than I expected! But more importantly Egyptians are some of the most beautiful and friendliest people I’ve ever met in my life.

My job was to be a PE Teacher and the Music / Worship Leader for the campus. I have never taught a class in my life. I hate sport. I was always chosen last for the sport team. Was I in way over my head? You bet I was! I did not feel prepared at all. I felt that I would be the worst teacher in the entire world.

I’m going to share some of my experiences as a teacher. Most teachers have four years of training to learn how to be a teacher. I had three days. I tried to prepare my classes. I asked other teachers how to teach. I even tried positive thinking by telling myself I knew what I was doing. Nothing could prepare me for what came ahead though. The first day of class came. The students lined up. I ignored my fears and went with my gut. I told the students to run laps! See, I learnt a valuable lesson that day. The trick to teaching is to act as if you know what you’re doing even if you have no clue.
Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

Days went by, weeks went by, and months went by. Each day I had a better idea of what I was doing. Each day I trusted in God who alone could have gotten me through. The end of semester eventually arrived, and it was time for the Teacher Evaluations to be filled in by the students. Mine essentially said, “Learn to teach”. I laughed it off, and thankfully, by God’s grace, I did a much better job in the second semester.

I did have some positive experiences, however. I was a worship leader for the campus so this meant I ran all the music services. I taught four music lessons a day, taught choir at night time, and ran other leadership classes teaching the students how to be a good leader.

Being a volunteer teacher means that people don’t expect you to be the perfect teacher; the more important factor is that you’re present. During my spare time I invested in building relationships with the students. When you take time to get to know your students it’s surprising how forgiving they can be in the classroom.

I grew so much from this experience. It challenged me in ways that I never ever imagined I would be challenged. I learnt not to feel sorry for the students when I disciplined them, and learned not to ‘people please’ by changing the grades of the whole class so that one student wouldn’t fail! But most of all I learnt that trusting in God is the only way you will get through. Take it one day at a time. When you feel as though you can’t take another step, God gives you the strength just to put that next foot forward.

I will always remember my time in Egypt. Please join me in praying for Nile Union Academy in its changing and challenging context. And if God asks you to ‘volunteer’, choose to ‘grow’ by following His lead. TEACH

I learnt not to feel sorry for the students when I disciplined them, and to not ‘people please’ by changing the grades of the whole class so one student wouldn’t fail!

Below: Herbert Bergmann in ‘custom’ dress
New Perspectives on Anglican Education: Reconsidering Purpose and Plotting New Directions

Phil Fitzsimmons
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BOOK REVIEWS

New perspectives on Anglican education: Reconsidering purpose and plotting new directions

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Arising out of Archbishop Peter Jensen’s challenge to a group of Anglican educators collectively called the Anglican Education Fellowship (hereafter termed AEF) to produce a book that begins to answer the question, ‘What is Anglican Education?’ this ninety-nine-page paperback could easily have been entitled ‘What is Christian Education?’, or ‘What is Australian Education?’ While relatively short in length, it packs a significant educational punch in that it forces the reader to confront the most basic of praxes linkages, that of conjoining personal ideology, knowledge and practice through deep reflection. However, it also seeks to make these connections at the systemic level. In a time of systemic flux within the Australian educational context as a whole, and the specific discussions concurrently being undertaken by academics, school administrators and teachers in regard to values, identity and connectedness Cairney, Cowling and Jensen’s (2011) book is both refreshingly timely, honest and educationally poignant.

While obviously focussing on Anglican education, as indicated each of the five chapters opens critically reflective doors for focussed discussion for both Christian educators and those engaged in government systems. It should be noted that the primary aim of the text is to only encapsulate the driving questions and forces that commenced the AEF discussions, and does not seek to provide full and explicit answers. However, this book is one of those rare compendiums of thought that compresses the initial processes necessary for a particular organisation to redefine itself through a balanced sense of meaning-making, while simultaneously engendering a platform that ‘telescopically’ offers positive potential directions for an entire array of educational systems at local and national levels. While having a prime focus on how this book relates to Christian education, this review will also touch briefly on where this text intersects with secular education. In line with the underpinning ideology of the text and the process which brought it to ‘print life’, these comments will be in the same modality of reflective questioning that are strategically placed in each chapter of this book. It should be noted that these points are the ones that personally challenged me, and that there are so many pivotal needs and issues pointed out in each chapter that it is impossible to cover each in the brief of a book review.

Cairney and Dowling’s initial chapter is an important springboard for the ensuing chapters. As they focus on ‘understanding the what, why and how of education’ they not only summarise the central questions of who is education for and what schools should be about but also commence the discussion on a raft of key points including the contested area of ‘values’. Through brief links other critically related issues are also dealt with, such as what motivates individuals, the facets that are privileged in education, the possible role of faith in teaching and the links between these issues and a Bible based curriculum. Interesting, but albeit far too short references are also made to notions of connecting interdisciplinary facets of excellence to education, humanities innate desire to learn and the role of the Christian teacher. As they briefly bounce amongst these points, these authors are also refreshingly honest in that they note that the Bible offers “little direct reference to education.” Indeed, they are also candid when they comment that there is “difficulty in finding Biblical guidance for many of the questions” that guided the AEF group. This point alone makes this text a stand-out document in a theological publishing world containing Christian texts purporting to be the crystallisation of Biblical truth and definitive direction. This facet alone could, or perhaps...
should be the reflective capstone element for all Christian educators and their students. In responding to this challenge in the final pages of this chapter there are numerous components that could form discrete book chapters themselves. However, to summarise several key pages, I found their contention that Christian education should be restorative, transformative and based on dialogical relationships is applicable to all classrooms and education systems. In a time of universal application of the axiom “if you can’t measure it it’s not valuable” this book as a whole challenges this reductionist and economic rationalist position, and asks educators at all levels and in all systems to extend the restorative-transformative connection by asking the rudimentary questions, “What is spirituality?” and “Where does it fit in education?”

Bryan Cowling’s second chapter circles back to the notion of foundational elements by clearly grounding the inception of the New South Wales education system within an Anglican organisational framework. Again, following the threads of critical appraisal developed in the previous chapter, Cowling notes that this system was deeply rooted in diversity, which is couched as a positive force. Through a carefully crafted set of ‘frames’, the concept of diversity as a whole is then discussed in regard to how it has worked its way within Australian society in regard to employment, ethnicity, multiple realities and as an anti-religious worldview. While Cowling comments that diversity as a national meta-narrative could lead to the possible fragmentation and dissipation of Anglican education, this chapter contends that confronting this concept is vital as a component of identity formation. On a wider scale the actual place of religious education within the Australasian socio-cultural framework needs to be dealt with through honest and robust discussion. He ends with the reoccurring theme that to exist in a society underpinned by diversity, and still be relevant in today’s society, education systems need to be personally and collectively transformative. I was left wondering how this could occur. Cowling’s comment that “questions big and small are the stuff of education” left me wondering if our schools have tended towards becoming factories where administrators, staff and students have become ‘replicators’ of a fictional past or a false present, instead of taking on board new research related to learning so as to generate a relevant future?

In many ways chapters three to five continue to focus on the challenges of the first two, taking up the more practical but still deeper issues of the nature of the fallen human condition and how this nature as learner relates to the Creator-Redeemer. The possible centrality of a soteriological, Christological and genuinely Bible-centred approach to teaching, form the core elements of these last chapters. Embedded within are numerous reflective caveats not the least of which are the imperatives that such a learning system should be one in which values are not ‘watered down’, the concept of learning as community is a fundamental given, and an integral component of all aspects of the system is transformation. An interesting and cutting-edge line of thought in these sections, is the concept that the process of narrative as a fundamental human and Biblically based approach is the optimal platform for learning that could meld these together. This concept of narrative as an ideal approach is in my opinion a critical aspect worthy of much more focussed consideration by all educators. The critical question remains as to what could this look like as a meta-narrative and in all aspects of the education spheres?

This text is designed to challenge the status quo of one organisation. System priorities might preclude every key facet being included. As I see it, several key elements have been somewhat glossed over. These include the concept of socio-emotional learning, the nature of spirituality and the notion of what constitutes a genuine learning community. Notwithstanding these personal reactions, this text is ahead of the educational thought and practices of Christian education systems and is a ‘must read’ for all those involved in these organisations. As I have clearly indicated this text is also a critical reflective read for non-Christian systems, and in particular Jensen’s final words in chapter three in which he notes the “tendency of institutions to become morally complacent.” Is this a key problem for Australia and all of its educational institutions? TEACH
The Intolerance of Tolerance

Arnold Reye
The intolerance of tolerance


Arnold Reye
Retired Teacher and Educational Administrator

Once upon a time, according to D.A. Carson, the value we call tolerance was defined as recognising differing beliefs and practices and allowing or permitting those beliefs and practices to be held or conducted without interference or molestation. Today, says Carson, the definition has changed to include the notion that all differing views are of equal value. That change, declares Carson “is subtle in form and massive in substance.” His book, therefore, is an examination of the theoretical and practical implications and tensions between what he terms the “old tolerance” and the “new tolerance”.

Implicit in the new meaning is that all beliefs and practices are equally true and valid. The “old tolerance” was understood in a limited legal sense. For example, Christians would staunchly argue the rights of religious minorities before the law. The “new tolerance”, however, goes beyond this forensic perspective; it includes a social acceptance of difference so that in a multicultural society people of different ideologies or ethnicity should co-exist and feel comfortable. For example, if a minority objects to the singing of Christmas carols or a flag raising ceremony at school, then these practices should cease in deference to the minority. The rule is, no one should be offended. To argue to the contrary is perceived as intolerance and this has become the greater sin. In consequence, truth becomes muted.

For Carson the nub of the issue is truth. He argues that under the old understanding of tolerance there were three assumptions:

that there is objective truth and it is our duty to pursue it; that we have the right to express our understanding of truth and to disagree sharply; and that the discovery of truth is achieved through free inquiry and the open and vigorous exchange of ideas. In contrast, the new definition sees no hierarchy of truth. Rather, “all opinions are of equal value, ... all worldviews have equal worth, ... all stances are equally valid.”

Unfortunately, the new tolerance has become part of what Carson calls our plausibility structure, that is, it is accepted into our structures of thought without question or challenge. As a consequence it influences thought and behaviour in our social institutions such as health services, schools, churches, media, and law makers. It makes it difficult to discuss in public views on such issues such as marriage, abortion, discrimination, homosexuality, religion and religious proselytising, in fact any issue of a moral or values nature. To speak out from a religious perspective is to invite the label ‘fundamentalist’ or the epithet ‘intolerant’.

Understandably, Carson draws most of his case studies and illustrations from his North American social context. He does, however, cite an interesting Australian example. The Australia Institute is reported to have issued a report titled Mapping homophobia in Australia. One finding was that 62 percent of evangelical Christians are homophobic. This finding was based upon an agree / disagree response to the statement: “I believe that homosexuality is immoral.” To agree meant a homophobic stance. Carson points out “there was no moral engagement with the complexities surrounding human sexuality, but merely a label used to brand an entire class of people with the supreme shame: intolerance.”

This book has been written from a theological-philosophical perspective. Reading can be heavy going at times, but it is well worth persevering. It is a reminder that unless, even at the individual level, we are cognisant of and responsive to the insidious nature...
of the intolerance of tolerance, even in our democratic society, our individual rights will be progressively eroded. Carson issues a wake-up call.

Carson has provided this reviewer with a prism through which to analyse and understand some of the important issues currently reported in the media. For example, on the day of writing this review, Brisbane’s daily newspaper carried a report that the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples wants the Federal Government to (1) fund a national racism re-education program; (2) legislate to allow third parties to sue people for racist behaviour; and (3) to agree that all levels of government seek the prior consent of Aboriginal people before making laws and policies that affect them. The writer expressed a concern that it is assumed Australia is a racist country, and that Section 18C of the Racial Antidiscrimination Act—‘the hurt feelings’ test—makes it an offence to express anything “reasonably likely in all circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate” because of racial origin or ethnicity. The article correctly points out that “in any vigorous debate, people’s sensitivities are likely to be bruised but under 18C to utter anything that may ‘reasonably’ offend someone is to risk being hauled before the court” and labelled a racist. Australia has its own bag full of examples of the intolerance of tolerance.

Carson, of course, was not writing specifically for educators. What he has argued, however, does have important implications for Christian teachers. At one level we must be continually on guard against new tolerance thinking in our own decision-making and policy development. We must avoid passive acceptance of new tolerance outcomes from legislators, pressure groups and strident minorities. We must effectively argue the deficiencies and arrogance of new tolerance thinking and arguments—what Carson calls its moral and epistemological bankruptcy. We must be true to our own understanding of truth and be equally rigorous in examining, evaluating and modifying our belief structures.

At another level, we should educate our students to think, both deeply and spiritually, about the great moral and ethical issues of our times. We should provide our young charges with the skills and framework in which to carry out this evaluation. We should provide forums in which issues might be discussed and argued and thereby demonstrate the true meaning of tolerance. And, we should provide our students with a clear and unequivocal Christian worldview; that perspective that gives cohesion and consistency to thought and action. TEACH

1 Mike O’Connor, ‘Hand in hand we are up in arms’, The Courier Mail, 13 August 2012.
The 5 Levels of Leadership: Proven Steps to Maximize Your Potential

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Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

The 5 Levels of Leadership: Proven steps to maximize your potential

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John Maxwell’s *The 5 Levels of Leadership* is a practical guide to leadership in any context. Although Maxwell often dips back into his experiences as a church leader in order to provide examples, his principles are applicable in most leadership situations; whether in the educational arena, corporate world, or religious sphere.

The five levels of leadership are so logical and self-explanatory that I was asking, “Why didn’t I think of that?” However, the effort required to move from one level to another is far from simple. First, the kind of leadership that comes with position (or rights) where people follow you because they have to. Second, the kind of leadership that comes from permission (or relationships) where people follow you because they want to. Third, the kind of leadership that comes with production (or results) where people follow because of what you have done for the organisation. Fourth, the kind of leadership that comes with people development (or reproduction) where people follow because of what you have done for them. And fifth, the pinnacle of leadership (or respect) where people follow because of who you are and what you represent.

I found two sections of the book worth the price of the whole book. Maxwell’s “Insights into the 5 Levels of Leadership” (pp. 11–20) are helpful to anyone leading or aspiring to lead. Here, you will discover that leaders don’t leave one level behind for another; that not everyone will see a leader as being on the same level; that leaders on the highest levels will find it easiest to lead; that the higher the level, the harder it is to rise to another level; that slipping back down levels is easier than going up; and that the levels cannot be climbed alone. Put bluntly, leadership development is hard work! So, why not just relax and stay where you are? In fact, for a leader to fail to grow limits the potential for her/his organisation and people to grow.

If wanting to know what your own level of leadership is, then Maxwell’s chapter on “Leadership Assessment” (pp. 21–35) will provide some enabling tools. The first step involves a self-assessment instrument; the second, an instrument that provides insight into your interactions with those who report directly to you; the third, an instrument that allows an assessment by each of your team members; and fourth, a brief guide to putting the whole profile together. It is obvious that the instruments are not scientifically designed and that they will only provide genuine insight into your own leadership style and level if responded to honestly. But, perhaps honesty—in regard to oneself and in relationship with one’s team members—is one of the real keys to successful and development leadership.

This book should not be the only one you should read on leadership. You will also want to delve into authors who will provide specific assistance in areas such as dealing with conflict resolution, strategic planning, and time-management skills. But, even so, Maxwell provides simple (but not simplistic) principles for the leadership journey. Do his principles cohere with Jesus’ maxim, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35, NIV)? Well, you’re going to have to read the book and decide for yourself. **TEACH**
Give Them Some Truth

James Standish

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It was John Lennon who sang passionately “Just give me some truth, all I want is the truth”. It didn’t seem too much to ask. And you have to give credit to a man who chased everything, from tripping on LSD to transcendental meditation with the Maharishi, in order to discover his truth. But in the end, it seems his worldview was hopelessly muddled. In “Give peace a chance”, he sang against faith; in one of his final songs, “Grow old along with me”, he sweetly sang “God bless our love”. So what was it? A material world without God, or a spiritual world with Him? Or did he live in a world where both contradictory truths could coexist, simultaneously?

It is, I admit, unfashionable to talk about the idea of truth at all. Our liquid modernity is all about multiple paths, personal truths that have no external calibration, different ideas of right and wrong of equal value, coexisting mutually exclusive small truths. Truth, they say, is the first casualty of war—and the idea of truth was the first, and most profound, casualty of the Western cultural revolution of the ’60s—the results of which continue to reverberate.

When my spouse, Leisa Morton-Standish, was working on her PhD at the University of Maryland, she had a professor who very proudly announced that he no longer saw right and wrong—just shades of grey. I wonder what shade of grey the Holocaust was in his mind? How about the 9/11 terrorist attack, 7/7 or Bali bombings? I suppose they would be fairly dark shades of grey? What about child molestation or rape, cannibalism or slavery, torture or persecution?

As absurd as the “shades of grey” approach to truth may be when applied at the margins, it is necessary if we abandon the concept of truth. Because if we admit some things are wrong, it implies some things are equally and unequivocally right. And the idea of a truth that transcends personal experience or cultural prejudice is an anathema to those dedicated to dismantling the old paradigms of western society—specifically the Christian paradigm.

And they’ve done a fabulous job in their quest. At the conclusion of the London Riots of 2011, Britain went through a period of intense soul searching. Why did people from all backgrounds join in the rampage of theft and destruction? Many possible causes were provided, but chief among them was the widespread abandonment of the idea of right and wrong—the idea of a truth that transcends the moment or the individual.

Similarly, the sexual anarchy that has become endemic in the western world is based on a simple idea—as long as people want to do it, it’s fine to do. Of course, the subsequent explosion in sexually transmitted diseases, unstable family structures, abuse of children (which is particularly prevalent when the man in the house is not the father of the children), and the other tragedies that have followed have destroyed millions of lives and sapped the strength of our society. But what’s odd is that even though these results of bad—dare I say wrong—behaviour are readily critiqued in polite society, the sexual anarchy that ensures the devastating outcomes is, for many, beyond reproach.

But not everyone has bought into this brave new liquid reality in which truth regarding anything other than physical reality is not only elusive, but non-existent. Not everyone believes all moral codes are equally valid. Not everyone has adopted the intellectually sloppy practice of proclaiming mutually exclusive claims to be simultaneously equally valid. Not everyone believes that every question of morality and spirituality floats within an amorphous grey mist. Some of us still believe in a knowable right and wrong, an immutable guide to morality, that spiritual and moral truths are the most important truths of all, and their understanding and following is our guide.

And that is the primary reason I, as a parent, turn to Adventist education, whether it is primary, secondary or tertiary. The moment Christian education loses its unique worldview, it loses its reason to exist. When it embraces its essential defining character, it is irreplaceable.

That isn’t to say that as a parent I want my children inculcated in a simplistic worldview that fails to present nuance, complexity, argument and counter argument. A rigorous education requires the development of complex analytical thinking. And that can only be done by exploring the questions, the strengths and the weaknesses.
However, in the Adventist setting, this exploration must occur within the context of the Christian paradigm, just as the exploration in secular universities occurs unquestionably in a materialist paradigm. If I wanted my children exploring complex questions within a materialist paradigm, I’d save myself the money and send them to secular settings. We sacrifice not because we want simplicity, therefore, but because we want the complexity of life to be explored from a Christian perspective, within the Christian paradigm.

Of course, we are not just looking to Christian education to provide perspective; we are also looking for two other critical aspects. The first is a quality academic experience. The second is a nurturing, individualistic environment.

I must admit to being a bit of a fatalist when it comes to academic performance. I was shuffled through nine schools during my K–12 education. To make things a little more complex, those schools were in five nations on three continents. This rather incoherent education apparently didn’t disadvantage me tremendously, if at all. And I suppose it may have enriched it.

I received my MBA from the University of Virginia’s prestigious Darden Graduate School of Management and later, graduated from one of the best law schools in the US, with honours. I suppose I could have done better academically if I’d gone to elite schools, but I somewhat doubt it. The kids I knew in Adventist schools who were motivated and had academic ability, did as well as you’d expect them to do—lawyers, doctors, academics, business people, and so on. I am, therefore, not a believer that the school makes an enormous difference in the academic/career trajectory of students.

My ideal education in primary school would involve competent teachers ensuring basic skills—reading, writing, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division—and then lots of time to explore anything else the student likes. It would involve absolutely no homework—as studies suggest it’s a waste of time and it makes life miserable. And, most importantly, it prevents kids from doing what they do best—playing, exploring and imagining.

The future belongs to those who can think creatively—think Steve Jobs—not to those who can replicate accurately—think factory workers. The world is wide open for problem-solvers and big dreamers. I hope my children will be able to experience that in their education.

Along with that, one of the greatest strengths of Christian education is that the schools tend to be smaller. As such, students don’t generally get lost in the crowd. That is a feature that I appreciated as a student, and one that I now greatly appreciate as the parent of students. I appreciate that all the teachers at my girls’ primary school know their name. I appreciate that children from the lowest to the highest grades all know each other. No-one is a nobody. Every individual counts. May it ever be so in Adventist education. Education on an industrial scale is not superior to a hand-crafted product.

Before closing, it’s worth noting that it is critical that all schools take into account the reality of two career families. It would be helpful, for example, if schools offered popular activities as an after school option—swimming, gymnastics, music lessons, ballet, soccer, a foreign language, etc—to alleviate the burden on working parents. In addition, such programs may attract children from the community and should be profitable. For example, my children currently attend an after school French program and an after school ballet program at the Anglican school near our home. But it is so much easier for working parents when after school programs run at the school. The same goes for vacation care programs.

Conclusion
I am not only satisfied, I am delighted with the education my children are currently receiving at an Adventist school. The school has a great Christ-infused culture, the academics are solid and it provides a wonderful, nurturing environment. I’d be even more delighted if they outlawed homework! I wish every child in the world could experience the kind of education they are enjoying.
Too Busy Not to Play

Julie Weslake

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Too busy not to play

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Parents' lives today are very busy and many complain about being time-poor. Society seems to be addicted to busyness, with people out of breath trying to catch up and keep up. Busyness even seems to be a symbol of success, but what is the price and who pays it?

Stress, tiredness, and burnout take a personal toll on busy lives, but the greatest effects of busyness is on the lives of families. Families can easily become too busy to play with their children, too busy to build quality relationships with them, too busy to be available and affirming. If parents are not careful, they can achieve both teaching and ministry success but leave their families fractured and fragmented.

Parents long for their children to have a lifelong, saving connection to God and His church and they hope to leave a spiritual legacy of faith. Busyness however has a huge impact on children's spiritual development as it prevents parents from spending time with their children. "As parents we must realise that when we play with our kids today, we are earning the right to shape their values tomorrow. Children are more likely to embrace the values of someone they love and enjoy than someone they don’t" (Bruner & Stroope, 2010, p. 100).

The years before the age of fourteen are very important as they are the years where spiritual identity is formed. It is when worldview is formed and when life-lasting values, attitudes and beliefs are put in place. George Barna in his research found that if people do not embrace Jesus Christ as Saviour before their teen years the chance of their doing so at all is very slim (Barna, 2003, p. 34)

Be available and affirming
Parents who want to be the primary faith developers of their children need to slow down and become very intentional about building relationships. They need to choose to connect with their children. This heart connection is so important that it is worth fighting for, both to get it and to maintain it. For faith to develop children need to receive unconditional love in a relationship that is trustworthy, open and honest.

A qualitative Adventist study conducted in Australia by Dr David McClintock explored the experience of faith transmission across generations. It noted conditions that appeared to lead to successful faith transmission and conditions that may lead to the rejection of personal and corporate faith. One of his ten major findings was that strong family faith traditions and good relationships within the family provoked positive memories and were great vehicles of ensuring maximum faith transmission. He found that families who managed to transmit faith had open, supportive communication with a sense of relational nurturing (McClintock, 1997, pp. 3–19).

Case study 1
During childhood Kathleen barely got to know her dad. A successful professional, his long hours and business travel kept him away from home during the week. His church activities consumed his weekends. His heart was right but his schedule was full. Consequently he had little relationship with Kathleen during her critical childhood years.

Later during adolescence, Kathleen struggled with low self-worth. But since no foundation of trust had been built between them, she never shared these feelings with her father. Between acne, roller-coaster emotions, and boys, she could have used a daddy's hug. And he would have given it to her had she invited him into her world. But she didn't.

By the time Kathleen was in high school, the tension between her and her father was thick. Whenever he led the family in prayer or read a short devotion, her body stiffened. As the family marched dutifully into church behind her father, the deacon, Kathleen felt sick to her stomach. Every fault in his life was magnified for her and profound disrespect burned in her heart. "What a hypocrite!" Kathleen thought. Mr ‘Holier than thou’ thinks he can cram religious garbage down my throat.

When she left home as a young adult, she left the faith of her family as well. Despite her father’s best intentions and diligent efforts to instil Christian values, those values didn’t take. Kathleen rejected them, not because they were bad, but because they were his. Kathleen needed more than mere knowledge of her father’s faith; she needed a relationship with her father’s heart. (Bruner & Stroope, 2010, p. 91)
Be attached
Neufeld and Mate in their book *Hold on to your kids*, talk about parent/child relationships in the context of attachment. They found that the influence that we have on our child is dependent on the attachment that they have with us. “For a child to be open to being parented by an adult, he must be actively attaching to that adult, be wanting contact and closeness with him” (Neufeld & Mate, 2006, p. 6).

Attachment is one of the major developmental tasks of infancy and this will usually evolve into emotional closeness and intimacy. However, this later emotional closeness is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain as today’s strong peer culture is undermining this intimacy and not reinforcing the parent child bond.

Parents do not intend to completely give up their influence to the influence of peers, but unless they are proactive in forming a secure relationship they may find that even their young children are following and internalising values from their peers. Neufeld and Mate suggest that the relationship that we have with our children, must be our highest priority and that parents need to establish daily rituals that become quality times of connection especially after periods of absence.

Be authentic
Faith is caught as much as it is taught so parents need to have a vibrant and authentic faith. Majorie Thompson says that children need to see their parents setting aside time for prayer, worship, reflection and open discussion about issues of faith. Families are to be the body of Christ (Thompson, 1996).

Parents are even more important than what is happening at church in the shaping of faith. Christian Smith states: “The research is clear; if you want to know what the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents will look like in the future, then, look at the religious and spiritual lives of their parents today” (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 26).

Ivy Beckworth in her book *“Postmodern Children’s Ministry”* agrees that, “If the child’s parents and caregivers show that listening to and following God’s story is a priority for them, then the child will model those attitudes. If the important adults in the child’s life practice the spiritual disciplines, worship God and make time to care for their own souls, then the child will find ways to mirror these behaviours in their own life” (Beckworth, 2004, p. 53).

Parents want their children to gain and retain a living faith but current statistics reveal that somewhere between 60 and 90% of children currently attending church programs are going to leave the church. Mark Holman quotes research by David Kinnaman who found that the reason that young people were leaving was hypocrisy. Why? It seems they were raised in an environment where Christianity was practised and expressed primarily at church and not at home. Christianity was something that their families put on one day a week, but when they went home there was no faith talk, no prayer, no Bible reading and no Christian living (Holman, 2010, p. 28, 29).

Case study 2
Becky, a 21 year old university student, had grown up knowing that her dad attended church services regularly. What she didn’t know was that he began most days by praying and reading his Bible at 5.30 in the morning, while it was quiet and still in the house, before heading off to work. One day Becky got up early to prepare for an exam she had later in the morning. She discovered her dad at the kitchen table reading his Bible. She was greatly surprised, although she had wondered why the Bible always rested on top of the microwave. Now she knew, and that moment touched her life in ways that her dad’s routine attendance at worship service had not.

The Christian faith gained new vitality for her as she witnessed in her dad a commitment to living and growing in his faith in a way she had never known before. In that early-morning discovery, two worlds were bridged together. Later, as she reflected on that moment, in a university course exploring the connection between church and culture, she concluded, “I think I’m going back to church”. (Anderson & Hill, 2003, p. 106, 107)

Faith is too important to be kept simply between God and yourself. For faith to have the power to transform the lives of children it needs to be lived out in the open and not only behind closed doors.

Establish spiritual routines, rituals and worship traditions
Children’s spirituality experts, scripture and recent empirical research, all support the fact that basic spiritual routines, foster spiritual development in children. Rituals are simple spiritual routines that are intentionally repeated until they become part of the everyday life of the family. There are natural times in the child’s day as described in Deuteronomy 6:7 that build faith such as when the family get up, sit at home, walk along the road and lie down. Parents need to form morning time, meal time, drive/walk time and bedtime routines of praying with their children, reading scripture and Bible stories, talking about their faith and sharing faith stories. These
A growing faith is associated with involvement in service with persons who are from different cultures and life experiences.

Routines provide times for intimacy, teaching, discussion and informal dialogue. They provide times for giving affirmation, and modelling authenticity. Sabbath and Friday night provide wonderful opportunities for rich spiritual family experiences and rituals. They are great times to be present with God and to be present with one another. Many parents do not use this time well. They allow worship days to be time in which church programs separate them from their children. Worshipping with children is one of the most meaningful and relationship building activities parents can do. It builds a shared faith that creates great spiritual discussions and conversations and puts the family on the same spiritual page.

Holly Allen emphasises this in her insights from both literature and recent research. She highly recommends that families need to actively participate in intentional intergenerational faith communities. Children not only have the benefits of worshipping, learning and praying alongside their parents, but they also get to observe and interact with other adults, teens and children and be an intimate part of the conversations, worship and prayer. “The children (in her studies) who met regularly in intergenerational small groups, referred to prayer significantly more often than did the children from non-intergenerational settings” (Allen, 2012, p. 216).

Parents often look at worship from the consumer worldview of “What’s in it for me?”. They allow churches to convince them that their children are a distraction to others in worship. They are led to believe that children are too young for intergenerational worship. Trecceka Okholm disagrees and writes that “Children between age five and eight can show the most interest in learning about how and why we worship. Also, waiting until a child reaches junior high age may be late for the most meaningful and inquisitive encounter” (Okholm, 2012, p. 13).

Be an inside out family
Children’s faith will be more resilient, and meaningful if families turn themselves inside out in service to others. Diana Garland found in her “Service and Faith” project that children who get involved with their families in a calling larger than their own daily life develop what Diana calls “sticky faith”. They develop a “faith that helps them stick to the church and to their beliefs into young adulthood, when their contemporaries are abandoning the church in droves” (Garland, 2010, p. 11).

Diana’s study showed that those families involved in service to their community reported that they prayed, attended worship services and gave significantly more (financially) than those not involved in service. She found that a growing faith is associated with involvement in service with persons who are from different cultures and life experiences. Also, that although faith can grow in one-off service opportunities, that Christian faith is strengthened much more in activities that allow people to build long term relationships e.g. the week by week delivering of meals to frail elderly people.

A Search Institute study of Protestant congregations also found that involvement in family service projects during childhood and adolescence has a powerful impact on young people’s growth in faith (Roehlkepartain, Naftali, & Musegades, 2000, p. 21). Merton Strommen writes that “adults who can remember as a child (aged five to twelve), doing something for others with their parents, show significantly higher faith scores than those who cannot remember being involved in this way” (Strommen, 1993, p. 70, 71).

Assess your busyness
Marilyn Sharpe writes that parents should sit down and carefully assess their busyness. She makes the following good suggestions (Sharpe, 2012):

- Take a look at what currently fills your time.
- Decide what you will continue to do.
- Decide what you will no longer do, and bow out as gracefully as possible.
- Do this “time audit” regularly.
- Talk as a family about what you value and how what you do with your time reflects those values.
- Place family time and Sabbath time on your calendar…and protect it.
- Focus on those things that really, really matter.
- Enjoy your time together.

Highly successful pastor, Andy Stanley realised that there was just not enough time to do everything each day. He assessed his busyness and made a courageous decision to put his family first. He writes that he had seen too many families sacrifice themselves under the guise of doing God’s work. He acknowledges that it is difficult to get a work family balance because “if we stayed at work until everything was done we would never go home and if we stayed at home until everything on the ‘to do’ list and everybody’s love bucket was overflowing we would never get to work.”

He established a daily routine with his family that enabled them to get the support and care that they needed. He still works a 45 hour week, but he no longer prays that God will care for his family while he does God’s work. His prayer to God as he walks away from consuming ministry to spend time with
his family is: “Lord, feel free to build whatever church you can build with 45 hours of my time” (Stanley, 2003).

Faith is built in the context of relationship and thus parents have the greatest potential to build faith and monitor its development. Children need parents who are intentional about creating time to play and have fun, to worship together, to serve together, to enjoy their children and for their children to enjoy them. They need parents who are not too busy to play!

There may not be time for everything—even for all the teaching and ministry that need to be accomplished, but parents must NOT be too busy to have time for their children.

References
Grey Matter Matters

Andrea Thompson

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The brain is extremely complex. The brain has the amazing ability to reshape and reorganise its neural networks, depending on increased or decreased use, making it malleable or ‘plastic’. This plasticity allows for incredible changes to take place, which were once thought impossible. This article explores current research in this area and offers brain compatible strategies that teachers can employ in the classroom to make learning more efficient, to raise student achievement, and to facilitate a healthy learning environment.

Christians have long agreed with the Psalmist that humans are “so wonderfully complex” (Psalm 139:4 NLT), yet it is only comparatively recently that advances in neuroscience have allowed researchers to observe how complex the human brain actually is. The intricacies of the brain point to a super intelligence far and above ours, who with knowledge beyond human understanding, created us with astonishing brains. Brains that can love, feel, respond, reason, compute, remember and worship the One who created us. Does anything else compare with the complexity of the brain? Humanity was created in the image of God, and consequently possesses an intricate mind. We are creative, intelligent, able to think morally, and respond appropriately. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14 NIV).

How the brain works
The brain is made up of a complex ‘wiring’ system that involves hundreds of billions of nerve cells, called neurons. Neurons carry electrical signals through the brain, and to the rest of the body by ‘firing’ their own electrical signal to the next neuron. “Each neuron typically will make 1,000 to 50,000 connections with other neurons, and it is the development of these new connections that represents brain growth due to plasticity” (Trachtenberg et al., 2002, as cited in Willis and Kappan, 2008, p. 4). According to MacDonald (2008), there are tens of trillions of connections between neurons. “It’s for this reason that the human brain is sometimes described as the most complex object we’ve ever discovered in our universe” (MacDonald, 2008, p. 18). When we remember that “God’s intelligence is the basis of human intelligence” (Sire, 1977, p. 35), the complexity of the brain is not surprising.

The brain’s ability to rewire
Our brain has been designed by a loving God, with the ability to change its own wiring to make it more efficient. Neuroplasticity is the word that describes the brain’s ability to rewire and can be defined as the “genetically driven overproduction of synapses and the environmentally driven maintenance and pruning of synaptic connections” (Cicchetti and Curtis, 2006, as cited by Willis and Kappan, 2008, p. 4). The brain’s plasticity allows it to reshape and reorganise networks, depending on increased or decreased use. This makes the brain malleable and able to change. “When unused memory circuits break down, the brain becomes more efficient as it no longer metabolically sustains the pruned cells” (Willis and Kappan, 2008, p. 4). When learning occurs, the structure of the brain itself is changed. Our brain is constantly learning how to learn, and is not just a vessel to be filled up as was once thought (Doidge, 2007). Several studies with language impaired children (Doidge, 2007) have demonstrated the plasticity of the brain, and its power to change itself. This suggests that God is a God of restoration. He designed bodies to heal and rejuvenate, imaging God’s desire for sin damaged humans to be restored to a responsive loving relationship with Him.

Research and implications for classroom practice
As research unlocks more about the brain’s operating system, educators can adjust classroom learning environments to be more brain compatible. This article chooses some salient points from research and suggests tested strategies to help provide a quality learning environment.

Rewiring the brain in the school setting
Technology can be used to train the brain so as to ‘rewire’ itself. Computer-based software has been developed that exercises brain function related to language. Other programs target cognitive thinking
applications such as spatial working memory and visual attention through the use of computer games (see Table 1—Fast ForWord and The luminosity brain fitness program).

**Exercise**
When it comes to the brain operating efficiently, exercise is an extremely important factor. Medina describes physical activity as “cognitive candy”. One study found that when physically inactive people engage in aerobic activities “all kinds of mental abilities begin to come back online” (Medina, 2008, p. 14). Medley (2011) and Erlauer (2003), also report studies where the benefits of regular exercise include observable cognitive improvement in both adults and children. Some ways to incorporate exercise into the school day include:

- Increase daily physical activity, possibly a regular morning fitness program where, ideally, the whole school gets involved to increase motivation. This could be a running or skipping program, or any activities where the children are improving their cardio-vascular fitness. Thirty minutes of fitness activities just two or three times a week improves cognitive performance.
- Implement a “Run around Australia” program in which classes run laps of a set course. Laps are converted to kilometres, and a school wide map kept up to date with the combined number of kilometres run by the school. Celebrating milestones once certain cities have been reached can provide motivation, with a grand celebration upon completion.
- Provide students with pedometers to record how many steps they have made over the course of a day, with totals being tallied, and posted on a website.

- Schedule regular movement breaks throughout the day. Some schools opt for three half hour breaks instead of the traditional shorter recess and longer lunch period.
- Schedule movement breaks during lessons. Standing, stretching and moving help pump the blood around the body to deliver much needed oxygen to the brain.
- Provide children with equipment at playtimes to further develop fine and gross motor skills through play.
- Model an active lifestyle.

(See Table 1—The Perceptual Motor Program).

**Sleep**
The eyes may be shut but the brain is “displaying greater rhythmical activity during sleep, actually, than when it is wide awake” (Medina, 2008, p. 152). It is only during the non-REM stages of sleep, 20% of the sleep cycle, that the brain is consuming less energy than during a similar awake period. The rest of the time, the brain’s neurons are firing electrical commands to one another maintaining normal energy consumption rates.

Adequate sleep is vital for the brain to function effectively. One study clearly indicated that sleep significantly shortened the time taken to solve mathematical problems. “Sleep has been shown to enhance tasks that involve visual texture discrimination, motor adaptations, and motor sequencing” (Medina, 2008 p. 161). Conversely, a loss of sleep has adverse effects on attention, immediate and working memory, moods, reasoning skills and general mathematical knowledge (Medina, 2008). Sleep loss also diminishes the body’s ability to extract glucose from the bloodstream, resulting in a lack of energy, with the brain’s prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for executive functioning, suffering the most (Bronson and Merryman, 2009).

**Table 1: Programs contributing to enhanced brain function**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Purpose/comment</th>
<th>Web address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The luminosity brain fitness program</td>
<td>Based on cognitive research that shows the brain is malleable</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lumosity.com/app/v4/personalization">http://www.lumosity.com/app/v4/personalization</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Perceptual Motor Program (PMP)</td>
<td>Develops children’s physical motor skills</td>
<td><a href="http://www.movingsmart.co.nz/home/schools/pmp/">http://www.movingsmart.co.nz/home/schools/pmp/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop Think Do</td>
<td>Children’s social skills training</td>
<td><a href="http://www.stopthinkdo.com/">http://www.stopthinkdo.com/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The executive functions include the organising of thoughts to fulfil a goal, predicting outcomes, and perceiving consequences of actions, all of which have implications for behaviour, and therefore learning.

It is interesting to note research by Dr Matthew Walker, as cited by Bronson and Merryman, (2009). Walker explains that during sleep, the brain shifts what it has learned that day, to more efficient storage areas in the brain. Each stage of sleep has a role to play in securing memories. Learning a foreign language, for example, requires learning new vocabulary, auditory memory of new sounds, and motor skills to enunciate the new word. The vocabulary is stored early in the night during slow wave sleep; motor skills are processed during stage 2 non-REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, and memories that are emotionally charged are processed during REM sleep. It is claimed that, “The more you learn during the day, the more you need to sleep at night” (Bronson and Merryman, 2009, p. 34). According to Walker, during sleep, certain genes appear to be activated, to reconsolidate memories. One of these genes is essential for synaptic plasticity, which is the strengthening of neural connections. Memories are enhanced and “concretised during the night, and new inferences and associations are drawn, leading to insights the next day” (Bronson and Merryman, 2009, p. 35). Willis (2006) cites Frank, Issa, & Stryker (2001) who note that, “This recognition of the need for sleep has led researchers to test and confirm their predictions that increasing sleep time from six or less to eight hours can increase memory and alertness up to 25 percent” (par. 135).

While sleep occurs outside of the school day, the following strategies may help highlight its importance to students and their parents:

- Educate parents as to the importance of sleep via school newsletters, handouts, parent information evenings or the school website.
- Encourage parents to set technology curfews for week nights.
- Construct class graphs of student bed times. Use a wiki page to record the number of hours of sleep that each student has, then graph the results. Parents could access the site and see progress, as could other classes. Incentives could be offered for the class with the most number of sleep hours per night or for reaching an ‘optimum target’.

**Increasing sleep time from six or less to eight hours can increase memory and alertness up to 25%**

**Nutrition**

Eating a healthy well-balanced diet provides the brain with valuable amino acids, which in turn provides the neurons with neurotransmitters. Omega-3 fats provide the brain with an essential fatty acid that is required for memory. Studies of animals have shown that omega-3 fats influence the function of genes in the brain within the hippocampus (Innis, 2007), which controls learning, attentiveness, verbal and declarative memory. Omega-3 has also been shown to increase the production of transthyretin, which is vital for long-term brain health (Needly, 2011). Another essential brain-food is calpain (Erlauer, 2003, p. 42) which both cleans dendrites and synapses and keeps them working efficiently. Calpain can be sourced from green vegetables and dairy products (Jensen, cited by Erlauer, 2003).

There are also foods that have negative brain effects. Junk food and excessively refined foods inhibit optimal brain function (Richardson, 2006). Sugar-laden foods excessively consumed also hinder peak mental performance as the sugar high is followed by a nadir (Needly, 2011). As the brain is composed of a higher percentage of water than other organs, dehydration has a significant impact, usually resulting in lethargy. Further, when water levels decrease, salt levels increase, causing feelings of tenseness and stress (Erlauer, 2003).

While schools cannot mandate healthy eating, the following ideas may be useful:

- Educate the school community regarding brain healthy foods by using posters, handouts, newsletters, and class or school websites.
- Encourage parents to limit the use of junk foods and sugary drinks, and have the benefits of brain friendly foods explained to them.
- Share brain-food recipes with parents, through a student made recipe book that promotes healthy eating.
- Encourage students to eat a healthy breakfast.
- Allow fruit breaks for younger children.
- Allow water bottles in class.

**Memory**

It was once thought that the brain stored information like a computer system—filed away in a single location to be retrieved later. The brain works differently to this, however. Memories are distributed all over the surface of the cortex, and many regions of the brain are involved in representing a single input, each contributing something different to the memory. To facilitate ease of retrieval, re-exposure to information at regular intervals is important. Learning occurs best when new information is incorporated gradually into the memory store rather than when it is jammed in all at once” (Medina, 2008, p. 133). The environment can act as part of the original learning trace by make the encoding more elaborate, helping to aid retrieval. It is beneficial
for learning and retrieval to take place under the same conditions. Information is also more readily processed if it can be immediately associated with ideas already present in the learner’s brain. Information being learnt needs to be interesting and relevant for the brain to remember it and not dismiss it. Choices are an important part of making learning relevant for students. “When some control and choices are provided for students, the content relevance is increased, their interest is heightened, stress is reduced, learning styles and ability levels are better accounted for, and both motivation and effort are enhanced” (Erlauer, 2003, p. 59). To facilitate memory, try some of the following:

• Teach shorter, more frequent lessons where material is reviewed to assist retention.
• Introduce class content gradually, then review at timed intervals.
• Remember that “Memory is not fixed at the moment of learning and repetition provides the fixative” (Medina, 2008, p. 146).
• Recap the previous lesson’s content at the beginning of the lesson, and recap throughout the lesson to highlight the main points to strengthen the neural connections that are being formed.
• Allow reflection time after learning new concepts.

Attention
The brain needs to be paying attention before it can learn. “The more attention the brain pays to a given stimulus, the more elaborately the information can be learnt. “The more attention the brain pays to a given stimulus, the more elaborately the information can be learnt. (Erlauer, 2003, p. 59). To facilitate memory, try some of the following:

• Evoke students’ emotions when appropriate.
• Construct learning sequences that pique curiosity, provide big picture connection and relevance, employ memorable narrative, engage students, arouse emotions and allow reflection. An example of this style of teaching can be found in Cobbin’s (2011) Transformational Planning Framework, utilised in the Encounter Adventist Curriculum (Adventist Schools Australia, 2010).
• Allow some choice in process and presentation of material. “Providing choice for student learning provides an increase in motivation for learning. The brain’s cortex is more fully functional” (Caine & Caine, 1994, as cited by Erlauer, 2003, p. 59).
• Cater for a variety of learning styles, including those informed by Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993).

Sensory impacts
The senses are wired to work together. It is the thalamus which serves as the central distribution centre for most of our senses. The more visual an input is, the more likely it is to be recognised and recalled. Vision is the most superior sense. If you hear a piece of information, three days later you’ll remember 10% of it. If you add a picture, you’ll remember 65% (Medina, 2011). Eighty per cent of all information absorbed by the brain is visual in nature. Colour also has a powerful effect on the brain. In one study students increased IQ test scores by an average of 12 points when testing occurred in a room with a low painted ceiling of light blue, yellow, yellow-green, or orange. Conversely, those placed in rooms painted white, black or brown, made lower scores when given new IQ tests (Wilmes, Harrington, Kohler-Evans, Sumpter, 2008).
Smell has an unusual ability to evoke memories, especially emotional memories. In some smell-exposed experimental groups, it was found that smell increased an individual’s ability to recall memories by between 10–50% (Medina, 2008). Smell bypasses the thalamus and goes directly to the brain, whereas all other sensory information travels to the thalamus before being redirected to the rest of the brain. Smell stimulates the amygdala, which directs emotions. Smell also plays a part in decision-making, because smell signals also travel to the orbitofrontal cortex, which is involved in decision-making.

Our sense of hearing is also important to learning beyond direct instruction. Some studies have shown a significant improvement in reading comprehension when background music is played. Music can also be used to commit facts to memory since the words of songs are easily remembered. “Music appeals to the emotional, cognitive, and psychomotor elements of the brain, and several studies show a link between music and increased learning” (Wilmes, Harrington, Kohler-Evans, Sumpter, 2008, p. 3). Music can be utilised to create a relaxing atmosphere, adding an element of fun, or providing inspiration. Musicians have been found to have a larger planum temporale, which is the region of the brain associated with reading skills. It was also found that musicians had a thicker corpus callosum; the nerve fibres that connect the two halves of the brain (Nedley, 2011). What follows are some ideas for a multi-sensory classroom:

- Include multi-sensory experiences wherever possible. This could include excursions to evoke vivid memories years later.
- Link colour to new information wherever possible, to help the brain recall information.
- Use natural lighting, or soft, full spectrum lighting in classrooms rather than fluorescent lighting.
- Make use of aroma in the classroom. Wilmes, Harrington, Kohler-Evans & Sumpter, (2008), report that the use of smell can be harnessed to evoke memories. Certain aromas have been linked to increased performance. Peppermint and lemon scents can energise. “One study showed that groups exposed to the aroma of peppermint were able to solve puzzles 30% faster than the unexposed control group” (Wilmes, Harrington, Kohler-Evans, Sumpter, 2008, p. 4). Vanilla, chamomile and pine have been found to create a relaxing atmosphere before tests.
- Harness the power of music in the classroom to reap benefits for learning. Playing classical music softly in the background at work times could provide improved cognitive ability. Encouraging students to learn an instrument would also be cognitively beneficial. Music can also add interest to lessons.

Stress

One study showed that adults who were under chronic stress performed 50% worse on certain cognitive tests than adults with low stress. Stress hurts declarative memory and executive functioning, and these skills are needed to excel at school. “In almost every way it can be tested, chronic stress hurts our ability to learn” (Medina, 2008, p. 178).

When the body is under stress, adrenalin is released. Cortisol, which is released to cancel the effects of adrenalin, renders the cells in the hippocampus more vulnerable to other stressors. Cortisol can disconnect neural networks and can stop the brain from making new neurons. Under extreme conditions, cortisol can kill brain cells among the hippocampal cells. “Though the evidence is not as conclusive, a growing body of data suggests that children living in hostile environments are at greater risk for certain psychiatric disorders, such as depression and anxiety disorders. Such disorders can wreak havoc on cognitive processes important to successful academic performance” (Medina, 2008, p. 185). Some suggestions to minimise stress are:

- Provide a learning environment that provides high challenge yet low threat.
- Encourage the use of diaries to support memory and to learn time management.
- Minimise school generated stress with positive student welfare programs that deal with issues such as cyber-bullying.
- Be aware of when students may need to speak to a school chaplain or school counselor and facilitate the process.

(See Table 1—Stop Think Do).

The brain, designed by a loving creator God, is an extremely intricate organ. Research is only beginning to understand its true complexity. Neuroscience has educational implications, since brains are malleable and have the amazing ability to rewire, to heal and restore. There are many ways teachers can make classrooms and teaching practice brain compatible. By understanding how brains learn best, teachers can implement best practice in the classroom to impact learning in the most significant way.

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Children living in hostile environments are at greater risk for certain psychiatric disorders, such as depression and anxiety disorders.

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The Screwtape Strategies

I.M. Screwtape
Dear Wormwood,

It’s been quite some time since I gave you serious written advice on how to entrap the human species. Unfortunately that dastardly fellow from Magdalene College, C.S. Lewis, leaked most of our communication and spread it far and wide. Notwithstanding the current spate of ubiquitous hacking, this email should reach you safely.

To avoid misunderstanding I’ll set out my instructions in an orderly fashion (Always work and think strategically, nephew!). Before launching into serious educational matters, allow me to mention some ordinary ‘stuff’.

An update on the global landscape
First, congratulations Wormwood! Your efforts in the western world—my former territory of labour—appear to be paying handsome dividends. Keep all those busybodies, in particular those who want to know about the Enemy and his eternal plan, focused on being consumers. I used to remind them, “when the going gets tough, the tough go shopping”. It rarely failed. Especially for the materially oriented, there is nothing like shopping therapy! You must whisper to them that it beats prayer ‘hands down’, anytime. Convince the earthlings, as most advertising currently does, that when their stay on this planet is coming to an end, the one with the most toys wins. If you can do that Wormwood, it’s GAME OVER for them.

Second, as for my work in the developing world, I’ve had a devil of a job, but we must ‘hang in’ there. In these places, most people—many with very few possessions—actually believe that the Enemy loves them supremely and wants each one (imagine the ghastly thought) in his promised eternal kingdom!

To make matters worse, the Comforter-Counsellor (who goes by either or other monickers) has made it difficult for me to combat the sickening interest in and devotion to the Enemy that the human vermin in some Asian countries has shown. For instance, in one country, the Lamb’s followers have reached catastrophic numbers; much to our disgust.

Of course, as we know, our master has different plans. A significant membership drive should increase Lucifer’s legions, all of whom will receive a warm welcome to the nether regions.

Third, from my experience, never ever make the mistake of confronting the Lion/Lamb (he changes roles) head on. Hell no; that’s the worst thing you could do! And don’t overplay your hand like those loose ‘atheist canons’ e.g. Dawkins and Hitchens. The latter, I assume, has now gone to our father’s house; but don’t take it for granted. The Lion/Lamb (together with the Comforter-Counsellor) intervenes and advocates freely when any miserable earthing shows the slightest interest in deserting our ranks. Remember that infamous day when the Enemy snatched victory from the jaws of defeat? It was on Golgotha Hill outside Jerusalem, almost two millennia ago. The miserable creature on the Lamb’s right escaped us, much to our chagrin, and the predicted great fall of our “father-now-below” occurred on that fateful weekend. Shameful, Wormwood! We mustn’t face a predicament like that again.

By the way, it is encouraging that you are making some progress on another front. The deconstruction of words such as marriage, family, truth, values and morality, in the public arena, can only favour our interests.

Several of my minions from Down Under have informed me that Christian schools are growing in number, in the antipodes. Apparently some are going from strength to strength. This is not good news and I’m afraid some effective measures need to be taken immediately. So now I turn specifically to outlining the serious business of my communication.

Strategies for negating or minimising the impact and influence of Christian schools
General
I notice there is a renewed interest in magic in children’s books. Many of the young today couldn’t be bothered with boring fairy tales and the like. But they’ve been happily following the adventures of the ‘hero’ (and his associates) from the school at Hogwarts, in droves. What better age group to start with, than the young?

Opportunism, Wormwood! Never under-estimate what a little tinkering with the spirit world can lead to for many of the Muggles. On the one hand, almost everyone thinks it’s only a little harmless, creative fun, while on the other, some alarmists on the Enemy’s side help our cause immensely through exaggeration...
and irrational claims that are laughed out of court. In either case our undertaking is helped; mind you, but only if we can keep those eager beavers, who have what the Counsellor appallingly calls *spiritual discernment*, out of the way. Slobgub, my deputy, contends the whole thing is a waste of our time, but I think that if the Enemy can get exposure from *The Chronicles of Narnia*; the ‘flip side’ is that we can use a similar strategy to achieve our goals. Thus, alertness to opportunity should always be one of our general guiding strategies. A revival of interest (Dare we hope for practice?) in a little natural religion or primitive paganism is certainly to our advantage, dear chap.

Now, you may wonder, what are our priority targets in this campaign? Simple Wormwood; I’ll draft a cross-section for you.

**Teachers**

Our arch enemy, the Lion, was foremost a teacher when he lived among his earthlings. That’s why he wreaked such diabolical damage, and anyone today following his example will do likewise. So be aware, nephew.

Your most strenuous and cunning efforts should be directed at reducing the ranks and disrupting the efforts of teachers who are thoroughly committed to the Enemy’s educational enterprise—both in their personal lives and competent teaching ministry.

Expressly convince secondary teachers that as a ‘blanket’ rule, practitioners of excellence have always thought of themselves as teaching, above all, *subject specialisations* rather than students. We don’t want any empathy and caring coming to the fore in classroom learning. This could lead to students and teachers perceiving themselves to be on the same team. What next might the Enemy’s troops think of, Wormwood? For us it should be ‘strictly business’ in any educational ‘tug-of-war’.

There is, of course, another line of attack, in contrast to the above. Let students and teachers be ‘buddies’, appearing on each others’ Facebook pages, exchanging phone numbers and encouraging students to address teachers by their first name—ever in class. By using what the naïve and inexperienced consider to be *camaraderie*, we twist a legitimate idea and metamorphose it into something else; thereby creating potential for much mischief. We’ve accomplished results, similarly, through swaying earthlings to wrongly employ what is essentially ‘neutral’ technology, whether ancient or modern, to further our undertaking.

Thus sharp knives are turned into murder weapons (instead of being scalpels in the hands of surgeons, as the Enemy would have it) and SDHC cards become electronic storage devices for corrupting pornography rather than technology for making the Enemy’s Message more easily available to people in ‘closed countries’—code language for places where we have the thought police on our side and where they threaten people with imprisonment or worse.

Let’s return to teachers, Wormwood. If success is not forthcoming, seek out teachers who’ve become apathetic. (The Lion refers to this condition as Laodecian, I believe.) Better still, single out those who have given up on their calling entirely. The latter are mostly a discouragement to their colleagues, to say nothing of poor role models for students, but we gleefully count them as useful co-workers. They, although no longer interested in the Enemy’s cause—instead, in many cases, being interested in entitlements, remuneration and share prices—prefer not to leave their comfortable positions and the comparative ‘calm’ of the private education sector for the ‘rough and tumble’ of government schools in low socio-economic urban or country areas. Use your wiles, Wormwood, to increase the power, influence and numbers of these teachers. I assure you, it will sap the vitality of any school under the banner of the Enemy. Guaranteed!

Who should be some of your other targets?

**Principals**

By any means, persuade the Enemy’s school administrators to lower the bar in regard to spiritual criteria when employing teachers. Suggest that they should be a little more broad-minded in their approach. After all, it could be perceived as “discriminatory” if they were to ascertain from applicants (either personally or from their CV) if they had experienced a personal encounter with the Lamb that they could relate.

A ruse that has worked well in the past is the notion that *bigger* is not only *better*, but more beautiful and ‘bolder in faith’. Thus, using this reasoning, large enrolments are obviously an indicator not merely of *quantity*, but of *quality*, and as we know, parents vote with their feet to enrol their children in schools that have a good name. Wormwood, earnestly usher principals in the Enemy’s schools to equate quantity with quality. That error of judgement, as we know, is a form of pride disguised as self-congratulatory satisfaction. And it can lead to many others, I assure you.

You may have noticed that most of the principals have an active prayer life; an abhorrent practice by our standards, but much loved by the Enemy. The Lamb laid down the groundwork for this practice and it can do us untold damage when these administrators cast all their heavy burdens on the Enemy and ergo, they regain their drive and spiritual equilibrium.
long, we could have the staff as a whole taking up this vile habit. I dread to think what might result if they'd have staff devotionals—even short ones—before the commencement of each school day. Wormwood, disrupt this abominable discipline! Do whatever it takes! Overwork them; principals and staff alike. Run them off their feet. Keep them constantly busy with the urgent rather than attending to the important, so that they’re too tired to talk to the Enemy at any time of day or night. Soon this whole prayer business will be dragged down to the level of auto-suggestion, we hope, or perhaps neglected altogether. Wormwood, remember, if you don’t succeed at first, try again.

Also, I strongly encourage you to use stealth. Entice principals to engage marketers who employ motivational slogans like, I can change the world, etc. in the Enemy’s schools. As you know, it’s easy for us to manipulate trendy aspirational parlance. In the past, we have enlisted the service of mottos, like the above, as the guiding light for the exploits of many of our esteemed hell-bent collaborators—Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot, not to mention the recent 9/11 newcomers and Anders Breivik. Such catchy but nebulous mottos can serve our purposes well, Wormwood. They extol individualism (the opposite of the horrid selflessness and collegiality, co-operation and fellowship nurtured by the Enemy) and reveal absolutely nothing about what kind of world the change will lead to, simultaneously promoting an earthing self-confidence based on arrogance. For us, this is the perfect recipe: It leaves the Lion out of the change equation and should ensure our ultimate success, Wormwood. Mission accomplished!

But don’t become too over-confident and excited. There are still more geese to pluck.

School boards/councils; boards of governors
These bodies are very influential in appointing key administrative personnel. In decision-making processes, Wormwood, guide them to appoint principals who are managers rather than leaders. It serves our cause much better if leaders concern themselves with the administrivia of education rather than the big picture. The last thing we want is leaders who can cast a vision (the worst ones are those who are biblically competent), get their staff behind them in support, and then actually work towards achieving the Enemy’s goals.

You can get a lot of traction, by some board members (who you can influence) arguing that to have a successful school is paramount. So, always keep boards occupied with finances and the prestige of the school. Don’t ever let them contemplate what a faithful school might mean. Matters are made worse if this group buys into the principal’s vision and the whole bunch team up with the Enemy. What often follows, you might easily imagine—pure anathema!

School fees are necessary for funding the Enemy’s educational endeavours, as you well know. There are some parents who are sufficiently financial to meet the expenses, but there are also others who find it a real struggle. Wormwood, your task is to reassure board members that they are occupying the high moral ground when they use weasel words such as taking responsible action, and financial viability, when they raise school fees, knowing all along that the rate of increase will disqualify students from financially challenged families from attending. Consequently we notch up another victory for Mammon.

There is another matter that needs raising. It concerns influential individuals who might put to the board that a serious study of Scripture should become a regular part of the school curriculum—a suggestion originating from the Comforter-Counsellor, no doubt. It should be rebutted strongly by those susceptible to your purveyed doubts, on the grounds that there is no more room in what is an already overcrowded curriculum. Wormwood, your doubters should argue that (as we see it) it might be considered proper that the Enemy’s teachings be studied on his day, in his house, but not in school. Our job then is to find all kinds of spurious reasons why the young earthlings should give these gatherings in the Enemy’s house a miss.

Speaking of the young, here are a few additional tips for you.

Students
Wormwood, you’ll have done well if you can manage to degrade the behaviour of senior students during schoolies week. This will set the standard for future years. By all means prevent them from engaging in service projects, whether at home or abroad, during this ‘winding down’ period. Many of the beastly little things are likely to come back changed and inspired, spouting: “Awesome, cool, fantastic,” often feeling compassionate and empathetic towards the have-nots of their world. If they infect the Year 10 and 11 students, worse is to follow.

May I remind you of our Mephistophelian and utilitarian maxim: Always aim for the least good and the greatest evil? Sell to the young the notion: One’s youth should be hedonistically savoured and celebrated and that the serious stuff of life—which is OK if they really want to pursue it—should be kept for adulthood; much later. As you can see, my dear fellow, Faustian bargains can still be made today and experienced fiends always pave the road to Hell with good intentions.
On another score, manipulate the entertainment media to be a proxy for us, although of course it mustn’t be seen as such. In place of school work and study, fill students’ minds with the antics of celebrity idols ranging from Justin Bieber and any number of rap stars, to Kylie Minogue and Lady Gaga.

Wormwood, we make progress with the young unsophisticated followers of the Enemy when the media, with our help, make the imaginary world seem real, whereas the representatives of the Enemy in many of their dull weekly gatherings talk of that which is real as if it were imaginary! Dear fellow, by our sheer brilliance, we can make Alice Cooper look like the archangel Gabriel himself. And the human sheep wouldn’t know the difference. So ensure that in the Enemy’s schools, students somehow don’t become attached to any heroes that haven’t Hades’ approval; i.e. anyone that follows in the Lion’s footsteps and who qualifies as role model material.

Should you want a perfect recipe for mayhem, stir up a few of the daring and physical kids (although the potentially sneaky, spiteful and surreptitious will also do) to try out for a bout of bullying. It causes no end of trouble and dismay. Why? Most teachers are likely to dismiss it, because, by ‘definition’, bullying—physical or cyber—doesn’t exist in the Enemy’s schools. What a ghastly surprise they are in for, Wormwood! And by the time someone wakes up, the damage is done. You can do further damage by dissuading principals, teachers and students from talking about it openly and publicly taking whole-school measures to deal with it. Good luck with your mischief.

Last, but not least, is another major group that deserves our attention.

Parents
Regarding ownership of schools, keep parents under the apprehension that they have nothing to contribute to the school except the payment of fees. Paint the school board as being legally entrusted with school property and solely responsible for the school’s operation and welfare. Moreover, convince all those upwardly-mobile parents to regard themselves only as customers who have certain expectations of the school, the most important being that the school’s primary function, to the exclusion of all others, is the running of an academic program that guarantees their children a good job. In contrast, dissuade parents from buying into the Enemy’s values that are promoted by the school. If you can accomplish this, Wormwood, you can look forward to being promoted to “tempter first-class” status.

Nothing succeeds like success in creating dissonance between home and school. Our best allies are frequently the most personable and respectable of parents; the ones that attend church at Christmas and Easter. When the Comforter-Counsellor turns up in their own lives because of some school-related experience, muster all your wiles, and focus their attention elsewhere; perhaps professional responsibilities or interests. An overseas holiday may also do the trick. Do whatever is necessary! Intentionally deceive them. Put to them that to trust the Enemy and join his ranks is being fanatic; far better for them not to take these matters too seriously. Perhaps delay a decision until a more convenient time.

And keep school chaplains from ministering to any of the students’ parents. The High Court’s decision in Canberra declaring the Commonwealth Government’s funding of the national school chaplaincy program invalid was, unfortunately, a Clayton’s victory for us. New funding legislation has kept the program intact; a done deal. Absolutely disgusting, Wormwood! However, one thing we can still do: Help the sitcom media portray school chaplains (and all clergy for that matter) as Charlie-Chaplin-like caricatures. Present them as irrelevant comical figures from a bygone era who have reached their use-by-date.

On this appealing and tempting note I shall conclude my salutary missive. I want you to keep in mind, it is not intended in any way to be comprehensive, my dear fellow, but at least it should point you in the right direction.

Finally, remember to make mischief while the sun shines. We don’t have unlimited time, even though deluded earthlings behave as though they do; which is to our credit.

So much for now, Wormwood; I shall be looking forward to receiving a progress report on your endeavours in the middle of the year.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape. TEACH

Endnotes
1 With acknowledgement to, and written in the spirit of C. S. Lewis’ Screwtape letters, using the literary device of inversion. Hopefully, the device should assist readers to gain insight into and question and critique the tactics used by ‘the prince of darkness’ in obstructing and ‘derailing’ anyone looking for the Way, the Truth and the Light.
It should be noted that inversions, however, are a deficient substitute for prayerful and thoughtful study of the principles of biblically based Christian education which readers are encouraged to explore more fully for themselves.
2 A pseudonym.
3 A fictional email address.
4 The term is roughly equivalent to the non-initiated.
Eternal H&S Issues
There is an item that appears on the agenda at every staff meeting in our department. Indicated merely by the acronym WH&S, it is a reminder to each of us that Workplace Health and Safety is a top priority. Although each meeting varies in what is discussed for this agenda item and how long the discussion lasts, the appearance of this agenda item ensures that ample opportunity is given for discussion on Workplace Health & Safety issues. This is also an opportunity for staff to raise potential safety issues they have observed and a time for open discussion. Some workplaces make this item number one on the agenda while others relegate it to the end, but wherever it appears, it serves as a reminder of the importance of safety in the workplace.

This brings us to a number of questions. Where does Eternal Health and Safety appear on our regular staff or department meeting agendas? Does it appear on the agenda at every meeting, or does it get lost in the day to day running of the school? Is it overlooked in favour of those agenda items that must be dealt with immediately? Do we find ourselves sacrificing the important for the urgent?

If your school suffers from this crisis management syndrome, one suggestion could be to make the first item on every staff/department meeting agenda kingdom focused. It could provide an opportunity for staff to explore the reasons for the school’s existence; to affirm their own commitment as individuals to the mission and vision of the school or to engage in some possibility thinking surrounding the core business of the school. Whatever the topic raised; sufficient time for substantive communication should be allotted to allow time for the exchange of ideas, reflection and development of an action plan, if appropriate.

The agenda item topics could range from very simple through to more complex topics. An example of something quite simple yet meaningful could be an opportunity to share some precious prayer moments from individuals’ classrooms or ways of keeping school prayer time meaningful. Short staff testimonies of how God has led in the past week would also be uplifting and keep the focus where it belongs. Some more lengthy discussion could revolve around ways to foster a sense of belonging to God’s family, how to disciple students, or ways to encourage members of the school community to become active in worship. There could be discussion about school partnerships with the local church or reports from the school chaplain or school service events. Staff meeting may also be a forum for reflecting on how well a school’s current behaviour management plan reflects God’s redemptive plan for His children. Staff members could also raise issues they perceive to be important to the eternal health and safety of their students.

It is easy to have prayer and read a quick devotion at the commencement of a meeting. It is more challenging to devote time to spiritual concerns in a school and allow for meaningful conversation when the list of ‘to-do’ items is growing longer by the day. Curriculum needs to be developed, policies discussed, routines adapted and directions set for the future. The challenge is to keep our teaching ministry at the forefront rather than let it slip down the agenda until it slides off altogether.

Why not start adding the acronym EH&S alongside WH&S on your staff meeting agendas. Let’s do all we can to keep the focus of Christian education where it should be. EH&S issues is a joint initiative between the Adventist Schools Australia Curriculum Unit and Avondale College of Higher Education.

The Eternal Health and Safety of our students is our greatest priority.
1-1-2012

The Role of the Principal: A Multifaceted Role

John Collier
The role of the principal: A multifaceted role

John Collier
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Principalship in the twenty-first century is complex and diverse. A principal is responsible across the domains of educational leadership, curriculum development, teaching and learning theory and classroom practice, spirituality/values education, student welfare and discipline, including reporting to agencies, school finances and budget, property management, risk mitigation, litigation management, staff welfare and industrial relations, marketing, selection and dismissal of staff and students, strategic planning and vision, outdoor education, and depending, on the governance of the school, reporting to statutory authorities, School Council, Church or denominational hierarchy. In addition to these roles, the principal will often be expected to be a prominent member of the community, a visible attendee at evening school cultural activities, and a sidelinor observer of school Saturday sport activities. The principal is also expected in many settings to be in Church on Sunday, and in so far as he or she is a model husband or wife, father or mother, and citizen, to be a pillar of the community. The context in which these functions and attributes are to be manifest is in a contemporary society which appears to be, at least in Australia, if not the western world, suspicious of authority and sceptical of the claims of any person to lead, manage or arbitrate.

The Biblical mandate

The Bible is clear on the efficacy of authority as part of the Divine order. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans,

> Everyone must submit to authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves. (Romans 13:1–2)

The principal is therefore invited to exercise authority, but exercise it in a Godly fashion for the sake of others and not “lording it over those entrusted to you”. (1 Peter 5:3)

The principal who is equipped and trusted to lead, must “govern diligently” (Romans 12:8). In a position analogous to a father, he or she must avoid exacerbating subordinates (Ephesians 6:4).

Constructing leadership

The principal of an Anglican school will seek to construct leadership according to Biblical precepts. In so doing, it is necessary to distinguish between models of leadership which are Biblical, and others which are secular or cultural, but which may be commonplace in schools.

A key metaphor for Christian leadership is that of the body. Paul in Romans 12:4–8 and in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 stresses the interdependence of the believers that form the body of Christ, employing their various gifts for the benefit of all. This metaphor is applicable not just to the Church, as a congregational meeting of believers, but to the Christian organisation, with its Christianity defined in its key goals and the faith of its staff. Furthermore, Paul’s injunction in Romans 12:3, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement”, is a helpful corrective to the tendency for community and sometimes staff to put the principal on a pedestal as a solo and sole leader.

The body image, with its limitation on the self reliance or hubris of the principal, is well supported in the leadership literature. Fullan (2001) has popularised the notion of “distributive leadership”, stressing the importance of reciprocity, mutual obligation and shared knowledge. Indeed Fullan (2001) insists that a large part of the role of the leader is to develop the knowledge of the organisation’s people. He goes on to say “Those in a position to be leaders of leaders, such as the CEO, know that they do not run the place. They know that they are cultivating leadership in others” (p. 134). It is a point well reinforced by Fullan’s colleague Andy Hargreaves, who at a Sydney conference (2003) had participants chant the mantra “Don’t try to do everything yourself, otherwise you burn out, get sick, retire early and die!”
Metaphors and models

It follows then some other common metaphors for leadership: the authoritarian, Olympian in his or her (usually his) loftiness and unapproachability; the heroic ‘strong man’ who does it all unaided; the messianic figure who has all the answers and maintains the mysteries of leadership in unassailable secrecy; the priest/king who alone can mediate access to the sacred rites of the school, are deficient in a Biblical understanding of the place of the leader under God. Some of them in fact focus too much unhelpful attention on the leader, rather after Louis XIV’s famous aphorism “l’état, c’est moi!” [I am the state]. The role of the leader in a Christian school is ultimately to attract attention to Jesus, not to him or herself. Moreover, the leader needs others to share the vision and to share the work, just as Moses needed Aaron and the armies of Israel (Exodus 4:10–17). Such is the interdependence of the body of Christ. Nonetheless, the principal ought to be Moses to his or her school, that is, spiritual leader, despite the presence of a ‘Levi’ in the form of the Chaplain.

The Biblical model of servant leadership is well known and apt for the principal of an Anglican school. The well known Christ-hymn of Philippians 2 provides an effective exemplar. In summarising the import of these verses, Paul editorialises in Philippians 2:4 “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others.”

The literature has adopted strongly the notion of servant leadership in schools. Murphy (1992) argued that principals needed to be servant leaders, moral educators (motivated by deep personal beliefs and values) and social architects (addressing people’s needs). Beare, Milikan and Caldwell (1998) argued for transformational leadership which would be driven by vision and values, and function through communication and collaborative decision making. None of this is to suggest however, that servant leadership is by its servanthood prevented from being authoritative; although it is clear one cannot be an authoritarian while still serving. Authoritative leadership will provide clear direction rather than bend with every conflicting opinion and demand. And in so doing, it will be robustly committed to truth and the good of others, even when they don’t recognise it. It will avoid being naïve or weak, knowing the context in which it operates is not optimal. As Jesus said, “I am sending you out like sheep amongst wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. But be on your guard against men” (Matthew 10:16–17).

The principal as visionary

One of the key roles of the principal is to establish and enunciate (often) a clear and compelling Christian vision for the school. As the writer to the Proverbs said, “Without a vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18 AV). The literature supports the central importance of the principal’s vision. Sergiovanni (1999) describes this role as establishing a strong culture and a clear sense of purpose which defines the central thrust of the school and the nature of life for its stakeholders. To Sergiovanni, this is part of transformative leadership, which unites leaders and followers in the pursuit of goals. Evans & Lake (1998) regard the projection of strong vision and clear goals as critical to the success of schools. An important role of the principal is therefore to tell and retell the school’s ‘story’, ideally in an attractive and compelling manner, which promotes and inspires the allegiance of stakeholder groups and energises them to carry on the mission of the school.

The principal as advocate and defender of faith

In a secular age where secular humanism is the dominant paradigm and the prophets of ‘New Atheism’ are making considerable incursions into the thinking of young people and indeed adults, an important role of the principal in an Anglican school is as theologian and defender of faith. The principal will need to take a clear and visible stance on the truth of the Gospel, as Paul writes, in what to some degree might be seen as a leadership manual to Timothy,

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. (1 Timothy 6:20–21)

He or she will be keen that the Bible is taught faithfully and accurately within the school and that there is a Christian apologetic active in the school and there is a Christian apologetic active in the school.
This is an aspect of what Cooling (1997) calls making Christian faith the primary culture of the school.

In order to ensure appropriate Christian teaching in the school, there will be some procedural considerations which are worthy of attention: Chaplains must have extensive access to students, Christian Studies lessons must be taught by staff fully equipped to teach the work of God accurately, school culture must demonstrate the importance of Christian Studies, as an alternative to marginalising such studies to the periphery of the school. An appropriate focus should be placed on evangelism; the notion that Anglican schools are really about (or should be about) teaching Christian values independently of doctrine or salvation by faith must be resisted. To nourish such a notion relegates Anglican schools to moralism and a theologically errant quest to make students good by teaching them virtue. Nonetheless, Anglican schools will want students to be tutored in the growth of Christian virtues, not as a means of salvation, but as a practical outworking of faith for Christian students, and as the ministry of ‘salt’ and ‘light’ to the student body in general.

The literature indicates the difficulty of conducting effective Christian programmes, even in Christian schools. Astill (1998) demonstrated that Christian schools habitually made little impact on the thinking of students unless their Christian input was replicated in student homes. This is particularly manifested in areas of values, where students are unlikely to adopt what is discernibly a Christian stance, unless such views are upheld by their parents. It follows that Christian education programmes within Anglican schools must be compelling, engaging and relevant if they are to impact strongly on student thinking.

Maple (1997) also comments on another potential shortfall in Anglican schools, which often so dominate the actual time of students (with sporting, co-curricular and academic obligations) that there is no time for Christian involvement, for instance, through the local church, and therefore students’ experience of Christian faith is entirely, or almost entirely, administered through the school. The deficiency in this situation is that when a student graduates, there is a cessation of student faith involvement. Principals therefore need to consider how best to interface their work in schools with the work of local churches and para-church groups, so that after graduation there is articulation of students into other faith sustaining environments.
The principal as steward and custodian of the school
As the current incumbent, the principal needs a longitudinal perspective of the school. Unless he/she is foundation principal, the school has existed before the present incumbent and will exist after that person’s tenure. The commission therefore as current principal is a role held in trust. Part of the obligation of trust in an Anglican school is to maintain the essential character of the school and particularly its Gospel focus. This requires clarity from the principal, as well as a personal modelling of Christian truth and grace. Paul puts it to Timothy thus, “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good faith of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:11–12).

In this quest, and particularly in its public stance, the principal will need to privilege the school’s Christian position above all other core values, for instance, academic success, pursuit of personal happiness, social cohesion, material success, environmental sustainability (Matthew 5:33). This will require considerable wisdom and insight. Schools are not churches; their core business is to educate, albeit in an Anglican school within a Christian paradigm. Furthermore, schools that do not aim at academic excellence, in a way which provides passports for students into adult immersion in the world, will run the risk of losing their students and having no one to evangelise.

The principal as shepherd
The ‘sheep’ of the school, defined pre-eminently as its students, but also including the staff, are infinitely valuable as they are made in the image of God. An enduring Biblical metaphor is that of the shepherd of the sheep. Jesus himself is the good shepherd (John 10:11). However, just as Peter was instructed by Jesus, “Take care of my sheep” (John 21:16), so the principal is in an analogous position as shepherd of the school’s flock. This operates on multiple layers. The principal has a role to defend the sheep against heresy, but also to protect and defend them pastorally. For this reason Anglican schools appropriately major on quality pastoral care, which exhibits a deep love for and care of students. Indeed, the community see love and pastoral care as a defining hallmark of Anglican schools. The other person centred nature of this care is clearly outlined by Peter in his first letter,

Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be: not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2–3)

The principal as academic champion
The principal of an Anglican school needs to resist the reductionist tendency observable in some Christian schools that understate the importance of academic excellence and emphasise more exclusively the evangelistic mission of the school. This is not to underestimate the importance of evangelism and Christian nurture, which are fundamental to the purposes of Anglican education. However, Anglican schools are in the first instance schools, accepting parental fees and government grants in order to educate across the cognate disciplines. These, although they exist in a fallen world, are worthy of study, as part of the created order which owes its allegiance to the Creator God; many demonstrate aspects of God’s faithful provision for his world, and his common grace:

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praise worthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

The principal will want students to strive for excellence in all these areas of learning, knowing that God wants us to use our talents effectively (Matthew 25:14–30). There should be no conflict in schools between the academic and the spiritual focus of the school. Christian schools should be characterised by an emphasis on excellence in both areas, as Christian staff and students seek to do all things well as to the Lord (Colossians 3:17).

The principal as a member of the educational community
As an educational leader, most principals accept the responsibility to contribute to educational discourse, mostly by being active participants in educational associations and peak bodies. This is an opportunity for the Christian principal to attempt to inject Godly wisdom, as he or she can bring it to bear on the educational issues of the day. It is also an opportunity to attempt to shape the agenda, in a way that is at least not antithetical to faith-based schools.

The principal as exemplar
The principal will need to model the graces of Christian faith in his/her dealings with students, staff and parents: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control” (Galatians 5:22). This will be difficult to maintain given the inevitable provocations from within all
stakeholder groups. In order to maintain such equilibrium, the principal will need to take steps for the sustaining of self for the long haul of leadership. This will include resting in God rather than expecting to resolve everything oneself (Peter 5:7).

Maintaining one's self as a spiritual leader whose life and conduct is appropriate, requires the spiritual disciplines of holy living. The qualifications set out by Paul for eldership of the congregation (1 Timothy 3:1–10 and Titus 1:6–9) are equally applicable to the 'eldership' position of school leader. They include

...not overbearing, not quick tempered, self controlled, upright, wholly and disciplined. (Titus 1:8,9)

...above reproach, temperate, self controlled, respectable, gentle, not quarrelsome, a good reputation with outsiders, worthy of respect, sincere. (1 Timothy 3:3–8)

Moreover, the principal will need to remain steadfast to the Gospel calling. As Paul writes to Timothy:

Be diligent in these matters...Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them. (1 Timothy 4:15–16)

and to Titus:

Hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine, and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:9)

The principal and conflict management
Resolution of conflict between various stakeholders: students and students, students and staff, staff and parents, will be one of the most testing aspects of a principal's leadership. Within the community of an Anglican school, it is important that proper Biblical principles of conflict resolution be undertaken (Matthew 18:15–17) and that unhelpful gossip and slander be minimised, if not eradicated (Ephesians 4:31–32). Even in a school which itself aspires to be a Christian community of staff, gossip and slander can be manifested in a way which is quite damaging of persons.

The principal and succession planning
The nature of leadership is that it is temporary, for a season. Much leadership within Anglican schools is 'home grown'. Principals need to be alert to the possibilities and indeed necessity of cultivating leadership. It may not be quite the situation of passing on the mantle from Elijah to a Elisha (2 Kings 2) but opportunities will abound to teach as Jesus taught his disciples, that is, by modelling, demonstrating and didactic teaching as emerging leaders learn 'at the elbow'. In demonstrating and encouraging such leadership, principals help create sustainable leadership for the future.

The uniqueness of the Christian principal
Many of the attributes of good principalship discussed above could be said to be generic, rather than particular to Christian leaders, or leaders in Christian schools. What then is distinctive, or even unique, for the Christian principal? The answer to this question will essentially relate to the Christian world view vision of the Christian person in the role, the primacy such a person affords to the gospel, the desire to build the kingdom of God amongst staff, students and parents, their Christian humility as a person in need of redemption and who understands that the school is not focussed on them, but on the Lord Jesus.

The Christian principal of a government school
When in a state or territory system of education, the governance of the school will, by definition not hold a distinctive Christian belief nor privilege a Christian position. Rather, as part of a pluralistic society, where secular humanism is the dominant paradigm, such a school, including its leader, will have less freedom than a principal of a Christian school to articulate a personal faith position. However, such a man or woman can and should seek to function as a Godly leader, humble and caring, and indeed to manifest the gifts of the spirit and function as shepherd of the school's students and staff. Such winsomeness will often provide opportunity informally to give an account of the Christian motivation which drives such a person. In this context Paul's comment to the Philippians is apt, "become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe" (Philippians 2:15).

The Christian principal of a government school will also seek to encourage meetings of Christian voluntary groups, and, in states where such opportunities are possible, the presence and activity of the School Chaplain and the ministry of Special Religious Education ('Scripture') provided by representatives of local churches. Such opportunities are strategic for the ministry of the word of God.

The role of the principal is multidimensional and multifaceted. Sergiovanni (1999) describes aspects of the role as technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural, all requiring...
adequate attention if the role is to be performed well. Principals of Anglican schools need to be purposeful and thoughtful as they conceptualise their leadership to the greatest advantage for all parties, and particularly as they function as visionaries, theologians, shepherds and stewards, seeking to defend and commend the Gospel to their charges, the young people of our schools. TEACH

Endnote

John Collier has been principal of three schools: a government high school, a pre-kindergarten to Year 12 Christian grammar school and a Kindergarten to Year 12 Anglican school.

References

Connectedness

Jerry Unser
Connectedness
Bridging the gap between values and practice in developing a safe and supportive school community

Jerry Unser
Counsellor, Emmanuel College, Gold Coast, Qld

Introduction
For the sake of this discussion, it is suggested that there exists a paradox within the teaching profession: one found in most schools. On one hand educators know and believe that students need role models and that almost every aspect of teaching, even (or especially) including discipline—is all about relationships. Yet on the other hand we know that our school pays us to teach—we’re not there to be a friend. The teacher’s job is to teach and the student’s job is to learn. Teachers acknowledge a duty of pastoral care and that every student should have a trusted teacher to speak to in time of need. However, they don’t have time to chat with students and if something is wrong, the preferred option is to send them to the chaplain or the counsellor. On one hand teaching is relational, pastoral—some may even see teaching as a ministry. Yet on the other hand, school is about classroom management, teaching and learning, timetables and assessment. Both concepts are correct. Both are descriptors of a good teacher, yet one tends to be seen as an ideal and the other as functional reality.

Educators want to make teaching about relationships and building a sense of community, but the reality is that a school is a busy place—there is material to cover, assignments to monitor and assessments to be made. There are playground duties, staff meetings, sports training, field trips, detentions, class preparation, roll marking, risk assessments, lesson plans and a dozen other little things that have to happen almost every day. Sometimes the goal of teaching as a ‘noble profession’ has to be patient and wait its turn, while we deal with the reality and demands of school life.

Few schools would deny that one of their core values is that of a vibrant, interactive, supportive and relational school community. Yet the timetable and job expectations don’t often reflect it. Professional development opportunities tend to have an academic focus. Pastoral care time is juggled with assemblies and chapels around the academic timetable.

Teachers have precious few spare periods to get things done at school, and the rest gets squeezed in at lunch breaks or taken home. Schools are busy places; our primary emphasis is on teaching and learning; teachers are busy at school, after school and on the weekends; and the addressing of issues relating to relationships and school community have to fit in to very small time slots.

Teachers want schools to be places of community, connection and belonging—but the demands of daily school life mean that those values don’t always get the priority desired.

Research
There is a substantial amount of research relating to the importance of this sense of school belonging or connectedness to an adolescent. Although the terms used as descriptors vary, the research consensus is that students who see their school as a place where they belong to a community do better in a number of documented areas. Researchers (Schaps, Knopf, Hanson and Muller, 2005) state that:

“Connectedness, belongingness, and community all refer to students’ sense of being in close, respectful relationships with peers and adults at school. These terms are used interchangeably here since they all refer to students’ sense of being in close, respectful relationships with peers and adults in school or of being contributing and influential members of the school.” (p. 40)

So regardless of whether the term is connectedness, a sense of belonging or building community (all of which are worth considering), the research is clear that when it is a characteristic of a school, the students do better.

Students’ academic and social-emotional and behavioural successes are interdependent. When students have positive academic self-esteem and feel safe in school, their potential to be academically engaged and successful increases.” (Schaps, Knopf, Hanson & Muller, 2005, p. 9)

American research shows that students who feel connected or have a sense of belonging to their school are less likely to use drugs, be depressed,
The researchers suggested that school connectedness was one of the strongest safety factors, even above that of the family home, to guard against depression.

In summary, the research is clear and overwhelming that regardless of the terms of reference, those ‘community related’ values described in our suggested paradox are important. They have implications beyond religious or moral affects, to the point of being essential not only to academic achievement, but student safety and well being. A thorough review of available literature might even conclude that it would be negligent not to show an intentional, demonstrable strategy for building these values into the whole school program and particularly the timetable.

Refining parameters
If the research is convincing, it is also fairly nebulous in that there are no common or absolute terms of reference, let alone a prescriptive course of action for a school to follow in an attempt to provide that sometimes elusive sense of belonging desired for our students.

However whether the term School Connectedness (and focus on the student’s perception of their school experience) is used, or the delivery of pastoral care (from a staffing and program delivery perspective) is reviewed, or the relational aspects of the school community (from an organisational viewpoint) are considered, there are some aspects of school culture that are commonly mentioned across research literature.

Libbey (2004) identified nine areas of school life that were shown as having direct impact on a sense of connectedness: 1) high academic expectations and engagement, 2) a sense of belonging, 3) a perception of fairness in the application of discipline, 4) the availability of and engagement in extracurricular activities, 5) a feeling of pride and general ‘liking’ of their school, 6) the presence of a student voice in school related decision making, 7) positive peer relations, 8) a feeling of safety, and 9) the perception of teacher support.

These areas are consistent with other measures (Resnick, et al., 1997; Moody & Bearman, 1998; and McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002), and provide a useful outline for an initial consideration of how a school might begin to formulate an action plan towards a more connected school community. If our introductory paradox has any likeness to the reality of our schools—where the core value of a connected school community is not matched to the practice of daily school life; and if the research suggesting that the successful implementation of those same values will not only increase academic performance but also increase both the physical and emotional health of our students, then it would seem prudent to examine a potential course of action.

Asking questions
While noting that the nine identified areas above are consistent with research literature, but not assumed to be totally comprehensive, consider what an approach to building a more connected school community might look like. In the absence of a more authoritative directive, ask a few ‘audit’ questions in each area. Choose what may apply to your school community and begin to consider the potential for building a sense of connectedness.

1. High academic expectations and engagement
Are students motivated to do well? Do their teachers believe they can do well? Even more importantly, do the students believe that their teachers believe they...
can achieve? Do all students do homework? Is there a reporting measure of student effort or application apart from achievement? Is there a process for identifying and supporting students who are not achieving to their ability?

2. A sense of belonging
Research literature suggests that ‘a sense of belonging’ may be the most significant factor for school connectedness. Does every student feel like they ‘belong’ in this community? What pastoral care structures are in place to give students the opportunity to belong? Does every student have a teacher who they believe cares about them personally? Are there multiple ways for students to seek support when they are struggling with belonging at school? Are the avenues of support for students clearly communicated to both students and their parents? Do all teachers see it as their personal responsibility to make students feel welcome at school and to care for those students who don’t? Is there a proactive approach to helping students feel included rather than only reactive interventions for those who may be struggling?

3. A perception of fairness in the application of discipline
Are the behaviour standards consistently applied by all teachers? Is there a whole school discipline approach? Is the discipline policy and subsequent consequences for the disregard of the policy clearly communicated to students and parents? Does the discipline policy encourage students to take responsibility for their actions? Does the discipline policy encourage teachers to build relationships with students in the process of consequence and reconciliation?

4. The availability of and engagement in extracurricular activities
Does the school have an active and varied program of extra-curricular activity? Are the activities that happen before and after school available to all students? Is there a timetable of extra-curricular activity? Is it created so that students are not overloaded or pressured to participate in one at the expense of another?

5. A feeling of pride and general ‘liking’ of their school
Are students proud of their school? Is there a sense of school spirit? Do students wear their uniform with pride? Does the school have a good reputation in the community? Does the school promote its strengths to students and the wider community? On another train of thought, is there a sense of ‘fun’ in the school? Are there times in the regular school day where students and teachers laugh together?

6. The presence of a student voice in school related decision making
Do students feel that they have a voice concerning decisions that impact them? Do students have representation at a decision making level? Do senior students have meaningful leadership roles within the school community? Is there a clear avenue for complaint or discussion regarding issues raised by the student body? Is there an avenue of approach for students to address higher administration regarding school issues?

7. Positive peer relations
Is there a structure for interpersonal, relationship and resilience education within the curriculum? Are positive friendships and relationship skills promoted within the school community? Are there multiple avenues of support available for students struggling with friendship issues? Are there effective peer support programs and peer mentoring structures and opportunities available to students?

8. A feeling of safety
Can every student feel safe in every social interaction area of the school at lunch times or before and after school? Does the school deal effectively with bullying and harassment? Is the process for reporting bullying promoted and communicated consistently during the school year? Are students confident that if they speak up about a bullying or personal safety issue, their concerns will be addressed immediately, effectively and respectfully?

9. The perception of teacher support
Do teachers like their students? This is the most common measure in research literature on school connectedness. Do teachers believe that their teachers like them? If they have a problem, are students confident their teachers will help them? Do students care what their teachers think of them? Do teachers praise their students in class? Are students comfortable interacting with teachers within the school community? Does every student have one teacher who is looking out for their welfare?

Conclusion
Regardless of whether there is an actual disconnect between the relational and community values of a school and the practice of delivering education, there is still significant research to suggest that students who feel more connected to their school
community will do better emotionally, physically and academically. The Wingspread Declaration (2004) made a clear statement that

...some contend the business of school is teaching for knowledge acquisition and that attention to the non-academic aspects of school are a low priority. However, the health and education literature suggests these factors contribute significantly to school success. (p. 282)

The overwhelming evidence is that students who feel like they belong to a connected school community will benefit from that sense of connectedness. The not so subtle inference is that an intentional focus on those aspects of school culture that contribute to such a community will be a practical and effective path towards values based education. TEACH

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School Choice: What Motivates Parents

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Introduction

The educational system in Australia today is radically different from the school systems of the past. As Mark Porter (2010), Chairman of the Independent schools Council of Australia writes:

The expanding role of the federal government in school education and the sustained growth of the independent sector are major developments which have influenced the nature of schooling in this country. (p. 2)

The rise of the independent sector has given parents choice when it comes to selecting a school for their children. This increase in choice has been accompanied by a change of focus in Australian education. There has been a move in two major policy directions, marketisation and school performance. Both of these policies can be seen through a lens of competition, choice, the increasing emphasis on accountability, value adding to the curriculum through the addition of extra curricular activities, and the move to make the consumers of education bear the costs (English, 2009).

Parents have now become consumers in an educational market that has seen the rise of a new class of school, the new, non-government school characterised by non-denominational Christian values, reasonably inexpensive fee structures which includes many 'value addeds' and management by a board of directors (Campbell, 2005; McCarthy, 2007).

Although Christian communities have largely embraced Christian schools, these schools now find themselves operating in a more competitive space. With the large increase in the number of independent schools in Australia, it has become harder for schools to maintain their special character and distinctiveness from other independent schools; especially in an era of open enrolments. Indeed today many Christian schools have similar enrolment patterns to other independent schools and offer similar curriculum choices. Some would even argue that the low fee Christian school sector has a certain homogeneity and that the ethos and value system of individual schools is not radically different to other Christian schools in this sector.

Surveys show that parents support independent schools for a wide range of reasons. Whether the reason is discipline, religious emphasis, teacher quality, values in tune with those of the home or a rigorous or well-rounded curriculum, parents consistently see independent schools as better than government schools in meeting their aspirations and the needs of their children (Donnelly, 2009).

Before considering what factors parents are looking for in schools for their children, it is important to understand what motivates parents and why they are choosing schools as they do. Parents are motivated in their school choice by two main things: the aspirations that they have for their children, and the anxieties they hold for them (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington, 2009). School choice is therefore a parental attempt to maximise aspirations and minimise anxieties associated with their children's future. These decisions are made in a competitive market place (English, 2009) where school data on school performance is made public through websites such as the 'My School' website.

This study set out to explore the factors that influence parents’ choice of school for their children using a mixed methods approach. Parents with students attending Christian schools completed a total of 102 School Choice questionnaires, and 17 families with children in schools were interviewed. The analysis of the data generated two separate but interrelated reports. The first (reported in this article) investigates what motivates parents in the choice
of a school for their children, while the second report investigates factors parents are looking for in a school (to be published in the next edition of TEACH).

Aspirations

So what do parents want for their children? Parents were quick to articulate their aspirations for their children. Each of the most frequently expressed aspirations are discussed below.

Their children to fulfil their personal potential

During the interviews, all parents indicated that they wished their children could fulfil their personal potential and follow the career path of their choice. This was the strongest sentiment of any expressed during the interview process.

I want my children to be empowered through their education so they can be whoever they want to be.

I want my children to have freedom of choice so they can choose a passion or interest that they would like to follow. I hope that they can contribute to society as positive citizens of society and live in a way that adds value to whatever community they join.

To help their children achieve this, parents were expecting schools to provide a diversity of experiences in order to facilitate their children’s development.

I want the school to maximise his personal potential. I want them to consider who he is, and what he is capable of...whatever that is. Whether it is academics or sport or music or all of them.

Parents were particularly keen that students reached their academic potential. Around half of the parents interviewed, with children in high school, linked academic performance with their children’s ability to enter the workforce and follow their career of choice.

I want my child to academically succeed so that they can have decent jobs and be successful in whatever vocation they choose.

These comments relating to academic potential are also reflected in the results from the school choice questionnaire where parents were asked to list their top school characteristics. When ranked, characteristics like high level: quality of teaching, student support and care, opportunities for academically gifted students, academic quality, opportunities for academically struggling students, teacher competence in their field, and wide curriculum choice, dominate the upper end of the list indicating that parents saw these characteristics as being most important.

A number of parents expressed concern about the academic performance of some Christian schools in their local region, and that this had heavily influenced their choice of school.

Academic results of schools are really important, particularly with respect to high school. Some Christian schools do not have a good reputation and generally have a poor level of academic performance. We would never consider sending our children to our local Christian School because of poor academic standards as evidenced in newspaper rankings and NAPLAN ranking on the MY School website.

Our local Christian school has the potential but is not fulfilling its potential. The subject selection is too narrow for us to seriously consider it as an option.

Our local Christian school offers very limited academic and extracurricular choices and this is a major problem.

What is clear is that the academic performance of Christian schools is coming under increased scrutiny. The Australian Government position has encouraged this scrutiny and the My School website has placed school performance in the public domain. It would seem that there is an increasing number of parents who are accessing this data to inform their choice of school for their children.

The parents perceived that any local Christian school’s poor performance could be attributed to a variety of reasons. These included a confused strategic direction for the school, poor performance of the Principal, a general lack of resources, and poor quality of teachers at the school due to high rates of teacher turn over and the employment of young teachers who do not have a lot of experience. These factors were perceived reasons and the current study has not conducted any research to determine the validity of these perceptions.

What is clear is that the academic performance of Christian schools is coming under increased scrutiny. The Australian Government position has encouraged this scrutiny and the My School website has placed school performance in the public domain. It would seem that there is an increasing number of parents who are accessing this data to inform their choice of school for their children.

The parents perceived their school of choice was one that provided their child with a diversity of experiences and enabled them to perform well academically. While some parents rated their local Christian school very highly, there was a large amount of variation and not all parents rated the local Christian school highly on its ability to help their child achieve their potential.

Their children to be committed Christians

A clear majority of parents have aspirations for their children to be committed Christians.
His spiritual life would be foremost consideration. We want him to make his own choice about God in his life, and place a relationship with Jesus as a priority.

I want him to have a strong relationship with God and that he knows what God chooses for him not what I choose for him.

We want our children to know how much Jesus loves them and they develop their own personal relationship with Jesus and they end up serving Him in some special way.

It is interesting that only about one third of the parents interviewed expressed a desire for their children to remain within their denomination.

We want our children to be Christians, our denomination would be great but definitely Christian.

It may be that some of the parents felt that belonging in their denomination was implied when they articulated that they wanted their children to be Christians, however, the overall impression from the interviews was that parents would be happy for their children to be practising Christians in a range of faiths including their denomination.

Parents did not see the school as being solely responsible for the faith development of their children. Most parents expressed the opinion that the main responsibility for the faith development of their children rests with the home.

We don’t have an expectation that the school is going to be the primary learning and teaching facility with respect to the spiritual development of our son because we believe that this is us. It is our responsibility. The school needs to be supportive but is not the primary means for that.

Various studies have identified that the home, school and church are the three institutions that impact the faith development of children (Hughes, 2007). When parents were asked to rank these institutions in order of importance to the faith development of children, all parents placed the home first.

Opinion was divided almost equally as to the position of the church and the school. Those parents who ranked the church second recognised that children started attending church from a young age and most had a good peer group at church that kept them focused on the church. These parents recognised the importance of belonging to a strong church community. Some parents however lamented the declining importance of the church in the lives of their children. Some put this down to a lack of strategic direction in the youth activities in their area, and the fact that there did not seem to be as many activities as there once was for youth and often activities were poorly coordinated. Parents who had their children in Christian schools that were run by a denomination different to their own tended to nominate the church as the next most important influence on faith development after the family.

Parents who ranked the school next recognised that their children spent a significant amount of time at school, and were influenced by the dominant position that their teachers had in their lives as authority figures. Parents greatly appreciate the pastoral care offered by schools and the way that schools can work with children to nurture them and offer them counseling and guidance in a way that is not always possible in the home. For this reason a number of parents commented that they appreciated teachers that care and took the time to offer meaningful interaction with students.

I want the teachers in the school to be diligent enough and passionate enough to take on any kid, even if they are the troublemaker in the class.

One of my children was baptised early this year and the school and the chaplains at the school had a big influence on that decision.

Parents were particularly keen that the school reinforced the beliefs and values of the home.

We were looking for a school where the values of the home would be reinforced at the school.

This theme was repeated by about half of the interviewees and most parents saw this as a very important consideration when choosing a school for their children.

Some parents wanted their children to be socialised with other Christian children as this may draw their children to the church. Families reflected:

Friendship groups heavily influence Church attendance. If their friends are at church then my children will keep going.

Our son is at a Christian school. He is socialised with a group of boys where the general pull of the group is towards the church whereas when he was at his previous school he had a good group of friends but they were not generally taking him towards involvement with the Church.

We are concerned with the statistics concerning young people transitioning into adulthood and remaining passionate about church. For us this means that a Christian school is the school of choice for us.
Other parents worried that the school influence may not always be positive as their children often socialised with other children at the school who come from other faith backgrounds or may not be Christian. This major issue will be discussed more under the section on the anxieties of parents.

Another set of parents felt that the Christianity presented at school did not always represent the faith tradition of the home, especially when the child was in a school run by a different denomination.

We have found that there is not much different in the spiritual content between various Christian schools. There are some doctrinal differences and these need to be recognised and managed. We find that the differences allow us to explore the grey areas with our children and are not a major issue and offer us real teachable moments.

Parents most often took one of three positions in terms of factors that are important in ensuring their children become committed Christians. Firstly, there is a group who see a significant role for the family, Church, and the church school. Secondly, there is a group that sees the family and the church as the significant factors. And, finally there is a group for whom it is the family that is the significant factor. For the latter two groups, this particular aspiration does not automatically point them to a Christian school, or if a Christian school, it does not have to be a school run by their denomination.

Their children to be happy now, and to develop significant self-efficacy and appropriate relationships

The majority of parents want their children to have happy fulfilled lives. Many recognise that this is usually the product of many factors but feel that the school can make a significant contribution.

We want our children to be confident young people who believe in themselves. We want the school to give them guidance and for them to have teachers who care about them.

We want our children to have a happy life, be happy, be content.

We would like our kids to have a good family life, believe in God, and be happy with what they are doing.

Parents want their children to be nurtured by teachers and fellow students.

We wanted somewhere where he would feel nurtured and the teachers take a lot of interest in the kids.

The way the students treated each other was very important, even more so than academics.

In particular parents want children to be good decision makers, and have the intelligence and ability to make good decisions whether it be in connection with a career, a life partner, or God and build significant relationships with others.

The most important and most valuable for my children is relationships.

Parents saw that their children needed to develop into strong and confident young adults through their school experiences.

I want my children to become self confident, young adults who can make well-informed decisions and not follow just anybody else.

Strong independent adults who can think for themselves without following the crowd and have a strong relationship with God. I want them to have a strength of character.

Their children and their family to be part of the school community

Several of the families interviewed indicated that they not only hoped that their children would form good friendships but they wished to be included as a family in the greater school community. Many of the families felt that they had been included in the primary school community, when their children attended primary school, and spoke highly of the experience.

The primary school our child attended is a very small school it provides a real sense of community. It is great.

Many of these families were involved in the parent teacher associations and contribute to the extra curricular program of the school.

Some families felt that having their children in Christian schools provided them with an opportunity to increase their friendship group. It gave them an opportunity to mix with other Christians.

Community is very important. We like the idea of being part of the community so we could meet people that were not part of our church community.

Having our children in a Christian school allowed us to get to know a lot of great Christian families.

These parents reported that they felt a great sense of belonging to the school community as they were included in a range of school based activities that were easily accessed as most families lived fairly close to their school.
For these parents the school of their choice was one that provided an opportunity for them and their children to become part of a wider school community. It seems that this gives them a sense of belonging and contributing to the school program. There was a strong feeling that this had been their experience when their children were in primary schools but not always the case when their children were a secondary school.

In summary, parents are looking to schools to further the aspirations that they have for their children. In particular the present study revealed parents’ main aspirations were for their children to fulfill their personal potential, to be committed Christians, to be happy now, and to develop significant self-efficacy and appropriate relationships, and further for both their children and themselves to be part of the school community.

Anxieties
As well as being influenced by their aspirations for their children parents are also influenced by the anxieties they have for their children’s future. When interviewed about school choice, many parents commented on a range of anxieties however there was a large degree of agreement across parental groups as indicated in the following discussion of each.

Their children may reject the church and be negatively influenced by the wrong peer group
The greatest concern that parents have for their children, shared by over half of the parents interviewed, was keeping their children interested in Christianity and having them remain as active members in the church.

We are mainly concerned about involvement in the church and staying in the church.
Their spirituality is one of my main concerns. We don’t want them to feel as if we have pressured them, but we want them to remain in the church.

The statistics from our church concerning young people transitioning into adulthood and remaining passionate about church are a worry.

Most parents expressed a concern that their children would only remain in the church if they had friends in the church. This was a particular concern for those parents who had children in high school.

The high school years concern me. A major issue is peer group influence.

The peer group is critical. Schools play a large role in determining peer group.

I am concerned about my children hanging around the wrong kids and the effect of peer pressure.

Parents, with their children in Christian schools, recognised that their children were building friendship circles that included a peer group inside and outside of the church.

The peer group of my children is a worry. The school my children attend is a problem as not all the kids are Christian.

Many of these parents were left relying on church based activities such as youth groups and service activities to facilitate the socialisation of their children in the church and the establishment of a peer group within the church.

It’s the youth group, Pathfinders and Storm Co and remaining in touch and involved with some of the positive influences the church does have.

It’s through extra curricular activities for students and service opportunities that students are provided with positive peer group opportunities.

It seems that for many parents, active participation in school and church events is the key to continuing engagement with the church.

Our child is involved in a leadership role in her school and gets involved in chapels and other school activities which help her to be highly focused on Church involvement.

Parents perceived that the school of choice was one that would highlight the importance of a Christian lifestyle and provide social interactions with other Christians. Parents were concerned that their children may be exposed to negative peer influences by socialising with children from different faith traditions. This raises the issue as to the composition of the student body for Christian schools. The results of this study have highlighted the conflict between the strategic use of the school as an evangelistic tool, where the enrolment of non-Christians is at times encouraged, and parents desire to have their children socialise with others who are active in their church.

Their children may be exposed to bullying
Nearly a quarter of the parents interviewed said that they were anxious about their children being bullied at school.

These results highlight the conflict between the strategic use of the school as an evangelistic tool, and parents’ desire to have their children socialise with others who are active in their church.
Our child had a bad experience being bullied for being a Christian in a Christian school, with a lot of the kids not being Christian. Moved her to another Christian school that had a strong stand against bullying.

Cyber bullying is a big thing. Parents expect schools to take a strong stand against bullying and to protect students from bullies.

Their children may make the wrong lifestyle choices

Parents were anxious over future choices that children would make. While some parents were confident that their children would do the right thing, others were not so sure. Of particular concern were life style choices that involve drugs, their career choice, and the life partner they would choose. They wanted schools to nurture, support and mentor children. They particularly appreciate the role of the school chaplain in this process.

Schools play an important role in mentoring children. We hope that the school offers Christian values in a lifestyle way and as a set of rules that encourages greatness and not the boundaries. Counselling and chaplaincy plays a really important part.

Above all, parents are looking for schools to support the home position.

Schools play a part but they really should only be reflecting what we do at home. We can’t expect schools to do it all. The home should be the dominant influence.

This study has provided more evidence that parents perceive that the school of choice is one that guides and mentors students in lifestyle choices that reflect the value system of the home.

In summary, parents are looking to schools to reduce the anxieties that they have for their children. In particular the present study revealed parents’ main anxieties were that their children might reject the church, be negatively influenced by the wrong peer group, be exposed to bullying, and make the wrong lifestyle choices.

Conclusion
This study has explored what motivates parents to choose a particular school for their children. All too often discussions on school choice are reduced to discussions of parents’ preferred collections of isolated school characteristics. This reductionist view is often at the operational level, resulting in educators focusing on a limited set of operational characteristics that are deemed to be important. This serves to limit the school choice discussion. Other educators default to perspectives that they ‘grew up’ with and fail to appreciate the full potential of a broader perspective. They often cling to views that may be nostalgic and familiar but fail to establish a contemporary understanding of parents’ motivations. The possibilities for their schools are then limited to a narrow, often predefined, set of options.

Exploring a broader understanding offers stakeholders a different perspective. It can enlarge vision and allows educators to respond with a set of actions that are often more contemporary and mesh with parents expectations. There are benefits for schools and school systems in the adoption of a broader perspective.

Parents have numerous considerations in choosing a school. Rather than focusing on individual school characteristics, this component of the study has investigated the reasons behind the importance of these factors and explored what motivates parents in choosing a school for their children. It seeks to understand the reasons behind school choice. It found that most parents choose a school with whom they felt they could form a partnership to best enhance the aspirations they have for their children and reduce the anxieties that they have about their children’s future. It is not one or two factors that significantly influence parents when making school choices, but rather there is an interplay between a range of factors that, in the minds of parents, will best enable their aspirations for their children to be achieved; at the same time limiting the negative experiences to which their children are exposed.

The logical consequence for schools is to think about the possible futures that families envisage for their children, and to take into account parents’ motives including anxiety and aspiration. Rather than concentrating on developing isolated school characteristics to attract students, schools should adopt a more wholistic approach to assure parents that their child will have a high probability chance of a good future, within a danger-reduction environment.

Parents want their perception of best for their children. They realise that their children’s school plays an important role in their family’s future. Parents have a choice of school for their children, and because their children are so important to them, they intended to exercise that choice. They are motivated by wanting to give their children a bright future, and in so doing, leave a lasting

Rather than concentrating on developing isolated school characteristics to attract students, schools should adopt a more wholistic approach.


legacy for their children and the people with whom their children interact. Schools need to recognise what drives parents and seek to offer them an environment where their shared aspirations and anxieties are adequately addressed. 

References

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