

EDITORIAL

Graeme Perry

As participant researchers, observing from the isolation of ‘down under’ the soaring statistics of ‘the covid-19 curve’, is there awareness of emergent new knowledge? Any understandings from the shape symbol hiding the personal tragedy of increasing illness, suffering, death, anxiety, unemployment, isolation, despair and anger about constraints? Any learning from home experiences? From populations of either cultural allies or past foes, whether that be at war or sport?

Weinglas (2020) references experts that “have observed people experiencing loneliness, anxiety, marital strife, lack of motivation and even guilt over not experiencing negative emotions” and their suggestion of “six strategies for maintaining well-being and even thriving during the pandemic and social distancing measures. These are: cultivating relationships, sticking to a routine, exercising, helping others, distracting ourselves, and finding meaning in our situation” (para. 6).

Co-director of the University of Sydney’s Brain and Mind Centre, Professor Ian Hickie (cited in Fitzsimmons, 2020) affirms the first strategy by asserting, “the language of ‘social distancing’ sends the wrong message - the true goal is physically distancing, while socially connecting” (para. 11) and qualifies contexts for exercise suggesting a natural location. “People report all the time, from a mental health point of view, how much better they feel when they are in contact with nature and they can exercise,” he states. “It’s not just about gym in your home” (para. 26). Fitzsimmons (2020) notes “Hickie says there is a bonus - volunteering and helping others is ‘fabulous’ for your own mental health” (para. 35).

Psychiatrist Cross (cited in Fitzsimmons, 2020) “says it’s important to keep perspective. “We’re being asked to go to couch, not to war” (para. 8). Grant Blashki a practising GP and Beyond Blue’s lead Clinical Advisor in advocating for all a ‘mindfulness’ approach suggests,

Many people who practise mindfulness report a number of tangible benefits, such as: improved memory, better concentration, more flexibility in their thinking, greater ability to focus, less rumination (when the mind gets over chatty!), better stress management, and higher satisfaction with relationships and quality of life. (para. 2)

All of these ‘emergent learnings’ are components

of the Wellbeing theme content of this and earlier issues of TEACH. Schools adopting an advocated wellbeing focus are preparing their students advantageously for all of the risks in life – including a world-wide epidemic.

What positives have come from the pandemic? Haski-Leventhal (2020) has suggested seven positive outcomes: a positive effect on the environment, peace choices, connectedness – community and social cohesion, online platforms, innovation – social and industrial adaptation, corporate (social) responsibility – demonstrated philanthropy, reimagined education at every level but most deservingly gratitude.

To our colleagues in education—teachers and parents—for your fortitude, our gratitude. To Him who sustains you yet, thankfulness and gratitude.

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“*the language of ‘social distancing’ sends the wrong message - the true goal is physically distancing, while socially connecting*”



[Photography: Glynys Perry]

Being outdoors: What educators can learn from cross disciplinary research on the benefits of the outdoors on health

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Keywords: Christian education, health, nature-based learning, mental, outdoors, physical, social, spiritual

Ancient questions

As people living in a modern world, our connection with nature is varied, which has an impact on health. This paper looks at cross-disciplinary research conducted on the impact the outdoors has on health, more specifically mental, physical, social and spiritual benefits. Results from different fields of research collectively strengthen claims made for the positive influence time outdoors has on health, and prompt educators to ask how Christian schools can take this knowledge and apply it in an educational setting for the benefit of students.

Our connection with the outdoors varies. We may live in houses, apartments, and buildings, drive air-conditioned cars to our thermostat-controlled offices and complete a workout in an indoor gym. Alternatively, we may spend large amounts of time outdoors for work as bricklayers or tour leaders, or enjoy leisure in outdoor sports, or simply reading a book, jogging or undertaking multi-day trips, travel by varied forms of bike or scooter riding or simply walking. Whichever way we choose, we can never escape the foundation of life that a connection to the outdoors, living and non-living, brings. The World Health Organisation defines Health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” (2019).

This article aims to highlight research conducted examining the effect the outdoors has on people, in particular, our mental, physical, social and spiritual elements of health. The research undertaken is derived from a broad range of study areas to provide evidence that the effects of the outdoors is not

simply contained within one area of knowledge, such as education. A widespread literature indicates its positive influence on all areas of health.

Nature & scope

For this article, it is necessary to identify some key terms used and the understanding of these within the scope of this article. A starting point is a definition of ‘outdoors’. In general, the outdoors refers to any space that is not contained within a building, or man-made environment. In general, ‘nature’ refers to “areas containing elements of living systems that include plants and nonhuman animals across a range of scales and degrees of human management, from a small urban park through to relatively ‘pristine’ wilderness” (Bratman, et al., 2012, p. 120). The term ‘green spaces’ is extended to represent any space that may have some form of nature growing in it, generally by design (Berman et al., 2012). Green spaces may include but are not limited to parks, ovals, walkways with foliage growing alongside, or a garden bed. It is difficult to fully comprehend and articulate the breadth of the outdoors, nature and green spaces within the context of this article and debates such as the degree to which something may be defined by these terms is beyond the scope of this article.

Mental benefits

As a society and as leaders in the ‘technology era’, Western Civilisation has experienced incredible developments in technology, including automation of machinery. Conversely, however, the increase of urbanisation has been associated with an increase in stress-related diseases and mental disorders (Krabbendam, & van OS, 2005; Peen et al., 2010; van Os et al., 2010). In Australia alone, the most recent national survey estimated that almost half (45%) of the adult population will experience a mental disorder

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at some point in their life, and one in seven (13.9%) adolescents were assessed as having a mental health disorder in the previous 12 months. Of these diagnosed disorders; anxiety disorders, ADHD and major depressive disorders were the most prevalent (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2018). The effect of quality time in the outdoors has been documented through research for some time. Studies across the globe concur from a plethora of angles the positive effect nature has on: cognitive functioning, attention, impulse inhibition, positive mood, emotions, neural pathways, decreased stress, memory, self-wellbeing, and psychophysiological functioning (Taylor et al., 2002; Berman et al., 2012; Ulrich & Simons, 1991; Brown et al., 2013; Barton, 2009; Nicholls & Gray, 2007). One study looked at the physical outlook of student's study windows at home and correlations with various factors including self-discipline and academic performance. Results showed that the more natural the view from the window, increased girl's academic performance by up to 20%. Boys find distant green spaces (ie. park, playground, natural space, forests) equally as important (Taylor et al., 2002). Another study by Bratman et al., (2015) had participants walk a particular route with an urban outlook (city), or natural outlook (green space) for 90 minutes. Outcomes from this showed a decrease in both reported rumination (a predictor to the onset of mental disorders) and neural activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, for those whose outlook contained the green space, compared with the city walk. Similarly, van den Berg et al., (2015) looked at the recovery effects of viewing green spaces compared with urban spaces on autonomic nervous system activity. Participants were placed in a psychological stress test, then shown images of either green spaces or urban spaces. Results were conclusive and indicated that even five minutes of viewing green spaces can support recovery from post-stress. These studies, with others, culminate in compelling evidence to show the positive outcome that the outdoors has on psychological wellness, which has a rippling effect on many other areas of life, including the physical body.

Physical benefits

Linked with the psychological benefits the outdoors provides, research covers an array of fields that document the effects of the outdoors on the body. In the healthcare sector a breakthrough study by Dr Roger Ulrich (1984) was the first to use the standards of modern medical research [strict experimental controls and quantified health outcomes] to demonstrate that having nature views in a hospital setting does in fact speed up recovery, lead to patients requiring significantly less pain reduction

and experiencing fewer post-surgical complications. Ulrich went on to conduct further research amongst (heart surgery) patients and confirmed these same results (2001). A literature review in this field of study revealed a broad range of evidence from scientific studies on the health benefits of the outdoors including, but not limited to, reduced stress (Berto, 2014), lower blood pressure (Duncan et al., 2014), improved postoperative recovery (Park & Mattson, 2009), improved pain control (both chronic & acute) (Diette et al., 2003; Lechtzin et al., 2010; Han et al., 2016), improved child development (cognitive and motor) (Kellert, 2005), reduced obesity (Bell et al., 2008) reduced diabetes (Brown et al., 2016), improved immune function (Li et al., 2008), improved congestive heart failure (Mao et al., 2017) and better general health for adults, children, and cancer survivors (Wheeler et al., 2015; Ray & Jakubec, 2014; Kim et al., 2016). From this, it is not surprising that doctors in Scotland have been authorized to prescribe time in the outdoors as part of medical prescriptions for the past few years in the form of 'green scripts'. What once started as a 'niche idea' has now become a substantial part of many doctors' prescriptions to patients (Bauers, 2015). The research for prescribing exercise as medicine has long been established, and many professions (physiotherapists, allied health professionals, and exercise physiologists) utilise Exercise is Medicine (EIM) within the healthcare system (Alencar, 2014). Yet, as the research above states, there are proven benefits to spending time in the outdoors, not just simply undertaking physical activity. Other nations, besides Scotland, are responding to the physical benefits of time spent in the outdoors, including Australia which hosted the decennially convened International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress to discuss the health and medical benefits of our country's natural parks (IUCN World Parks Congress Sydney, 2014). From the perspective of healthy bodies, the research is clear on the benefits of spending time outdoors. These benefits, however, are not restricted to only psychological and physical changes related to predictors of our health, but it also impacts one of the greatest learning areas within schools—social interactions.

Social benefits

Social inclusion and support are pivotal aspects to a child's growth and development during school years, and although not always taught explicitly in a curriculum, relationships have been recognised as keys to wellbeing, belonging, attendance, participation and long term achievement in schools (Meads & Ashcroft, 2000; Ashcroft et al., 2015; Loe,

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2017). These key attributes along with a positive impact on a range of other factors such as: self-control, resilience, confidence, cooperation, together with development of responsibility, the building of empathy and enjoyment of classroom learning have all been attributed to activities undertaken in the outdoors (Christian, 2010; Williams, 2015). Students have long been taken on programs in the outdoors, but to what effect? In 2009 Outdoor Youth Programs Research Alliance (OYPRA) developed a three-year study about the impacts a five-day camp program has on student's physical, mental, confidence, and connectedness (OYPRA, 2012). Results identified that students who went on camp were more independent, less anxious, worked harder at school and felt more connected to their school community. These trends were similar regardless of the school, type of camp or student gender. [Those most impacted were students who started with lower levels of self-efficacy and/or high levels of anxiety]. Dr. Rob Loe mentions in a case study for his Relational Schools survey (Loe et al., 2017), one school whose catalyst for strong relationships was an Outward Bound trip undertaken by students. "The challenging environment had forged connectedness, belonging, understanding, respect, and an alignment of purpose and goals" (p. 14). Whether formally or informally the outdoors enhances improvements in children's lives. A study conducted by Plymouth University on the impact of family camping in the UK found that 98% of parents said camping made their kids appreciate and connect with nature; 95% said their kids were happier when camping; and 93% felt that it provided useful skills for later life (Williams, 2015). Children identified their highlights from camping as: making and meeting new friends, having fun, playing outside and learning new skills. The outdoors has been used as a place of change, challenge and growth for both small groups and individuals for decades, and research shows the value and benefit the outdoors can provide in developing the broad range of elements of health—including the physical, mental, social, and also spiritual aspects.

Spiritual benefits

From a spiritual perspective throughout human history, there has been a strong connection with being outdoors and feeling spiritually connected. This connection extending throughout time, also involved religious practices, beliefs, and gods worshipped (McQuillan, 2015). In a secular child psychology study, when describing a significant spiritual experience, 80% of respondents described this occurring in the outdoors (Paffard, 1973). Specific language such as; nature, mountainside, hills, lake, sea, and rivers were often used, and were

associated with times of solitude, and/or times in the evening or night (Paffard, 1973). Barrett (2012) posits that from birth, children have sense-making brains; that is, they observe patterns and purpose in nature and presume a designer. As adults we scientifically categorise these elements such as the Fibonacci sequence, elements of the periodic table, and the light spectrum, to name a few. Thomas Aquinas [1224-1274] proposed that "Sacred writings are bound in two volumes – that of creation and that of Holy Scripture" (Aquinas, 1273, p. 59). When children are fully engaged with all senses, as when immersed in nature, Louv (2012) suggests children have a heightened ability to sense a higher power. This ability of people to connect with God when in the outdoors should come as no surprise then. Gary Thomas, in his book *Sacred Pathways* (1996), describes nine ways Christians 'worship'. One of these is described as 'Naturalists' – those who love the outdoors and connect with God through nature. Throughout the Bible we see a God whose grandeur is on display through His created nature. His first introduction is through the Creation story. Throughout both the Old and New Testament, writers are enamoured with a God who reveals Himself through this creation (Genesis 1, Psalms 8:3-4; 18:15; 19:1-2; 24:1-2; 95:4-5; 104:1,4; Job 38-39, Isaiah 45:18, Matthew 6:26; Romans 1:20, Revelation 4:11; 10:6). Therefore, connection with nature has the potential to enrich a child's relationship with God by creating moments of awe and wonder. This may be an experience in the sweeping views of the horizon at sunset, the brilliance of the first light at dawn, the fierceness of the wind, or the intricacies of a bug's design. Steve Bourma-Prediger, author of *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (2010) says "We only care for what we love. We only love what we know. We only truly know what we experience" (p. 21). Allowing exploration of the natural world first-hand prompts children to ponder the origins of life from a first-hand perspective and allows the opportunity to have their eyes open to God's character through first-hand experiences.

In summary

The findings of this research review provide overwhelming evidence of the impact the outdoors has on health from a mental, physical, social and spiritual understanding. The WHO (n.d.) defines health as: "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (para. 2). Extensive research collated from a broad field of studies provides concrete evidence about the impact nature and the outdoors can have on these elements of health, including spirituality. Within a Christian education

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setting, this research can influence change through implemented short or long-term programs integrated into teaching methods, or simply changing the environment in which content is taught. As discussed, spending any amount of time outdoors, spanning a spectrum from having a 'natural' outlook from windows through to multi-day hikes with student groups, provides health benefits. Christian schools are encouraged to think about the changes they can make to optimally provide these mental, physical, social and spiritual health benefits to their students.

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Figure 1: The Hillcrest Environmental Reserve (previously - the wetlands) is 10 acres at the back of our school

Your classroom as an orchestra: Practical differentiation strategies

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Keywords: Achievement, choice, differentiation, effective learning, gifted education, professional development, student wellbeing

Every child needs a champion

In 2013, Rita Pearson reflected on a conversation she had with a fellow teacher. The teacher claimed that she wasn't paid to like the children she taught; she was paid to teach. Rita replied "... kids don't learn from people they don't like" (Pearson, 2013, May). Recalling this conversation was the introduction to Rita's viral TedEd talk, which has gained over 13 million views to date. Pearson, who at the time of the TedEd talk had been a professional educator since the 1970's, reminded educators that "Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be." As Christians, we know that God is our "champion", who has written our names in the palms of His hands; "[our] walls are continually before [Him]" (Isaiah 49:16 English Standard Version). But how can we connect deeply with our students, especially in the high school where we teach multiple classes, with students of different abilities? How can we realistically be their "champion"? The answer lies in knowing, understanding and catering to the learning of students through quality differentiated teaching practices. Although the research evidence regarding differentiation is sound (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019), it's unfortunately not always well understood. Delisle (2015) commented on differentiation in relation to gifted learners, stating that "differentiation does not work" (para. 2). His comments were rebuffed by Tomlinson (2015) and DeWitt (2017), with the latter stating that differentiation is not the issue, but rather "the actual issue is the lingering remnants of the factory model/mindset of education still largely ingrained in our educational system" (para. 9). DeWitt (2017) explains his viewpoint through the analogy of a train heading to a station, i.e. all students learn at the same pace and in the same way, and through the analogy of a conductor leading an orchestra, i.e. students have different abilities and require specific

instruction on using these abilities through quality differentiated practice.

What differentiation is, and is not

Effective differentiation relies on a teacher's ability to understand that each student in their classroom differs from each other (Hertberg-Davis, 2009). Fundamentally, this concept is clear to all teachers, however the difficulty in implementing this understanding is often fraught with misunderstanding. For teachers to understand differentiation and the elements required, there needs to be a whole school approach. However, teachers also need to understand the process of differentiation and the required elements, as most curriculum documentation does not explicitly provide guidance within this model. Carol Ann Tomlinson (2012) elaborates on what differentiation is and is not. She succinctly describes that "teachers who differentiate provide specific alternatives for individuals to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible" (p.4). Tomlinson (1995) further assures teachers that differentiation is not individualised instruction, homogenous grouping, chaos or making minor additions in a learning activity, but it is proactive, qualitative, student centred and allows students to demonstrate their learning through different approaches to the content that is being taught, the process of learning and the final product demonstrating a student's learning.

Differentiation is a symphony

In using DeWitt's (2017) analogy of a teacher using quality differentiated practice, similar to a conductor leading an orchestra, we need to be mindful that differentiation is "a sum of all its parts" (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019; p.3). Just like an orchestra playing a symphony, the performance is only one part of the planning, practice and organisation of the performance. In-class differentiation is similar, with a number of important steps which are imperative for the successful operation of a differentiated classroom.

The first step in the implementation of differentiated practice, is asking the question: What

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Just like an orchestra playing a symphony, the performance is only one part of the planning, practice and organisation of the performance.”

do I want my students to know (K), understand (U) and be able to do (Do)? These KUDo's turns the content from "edu-babble" (Heacox, 2017) to clear learning intentions. Great KUDo's will include what students should be able to do independently by the end of the learning experience, considering their zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, cited in Kanevsky, 2011). It also includes the crucial skills and processes, incorporating critical and creative thinking, which is imperative for students to be successful in the 21st century. Figure 1 shows a KUDo's table developed for a Year 9 History (Mandatory) unit on the Industrial Revolution. The "Know" section uses facts, vocabulary, dates, people, places and events as basis, with the "Understand" section including concepts, principles and bigger ideas which students need to consider. Lastly, statements in the "Do" section consider independent skills, with each skill statement beginning with a verb,

usually using Bloom's Taxonomy (Heacox, 2017). The table clearly incorporates the required NESA outcomes for Stage 5 History, ensuring compliance.

Once teachers have asked the KUDo question, the focus can shift to understanding what students in the class already know, understand and do through pre-assessment. Pre-assessment is a crucial component of differentiated instruction (Heacox, 2017), with differentiation without assessment described as a random educational act (Tomlinson, 2012). The results of the pre-assessment and any information regarding student learning needs, for example student Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), will be used to inform educational planning to ensure that the content and activities in a unit of work are within the ZPD of students in this class. Differentiation will occur through content, process, product, affect and the learning environment, based on their readiness, interest and learning profile (Tomlinson, 2012) to

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Pre-
assessment
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differentiation
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Figure 1: Year 9 History

| KUDo's Topic 1: Making a better world? The Industrial Revolution | | |
|--|--|--|
| Know | Understand | Do |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocabulary, assembly line, capitalism, colonisation, communism, cottage industry, enclosure movement, imperialism, nationalism, Marxism, middle class, socialism, urbanisation The technological innovations that led to the Industrial Revolution Conditions that influenced the industrialisation of Britain and Australia Key features of the agricultural revolution in Britain The main reasons why the Industrial Revolution began in Britain The growth and extent of the British Empire from 1750 to 1900 The population movements and the changing settlement patterns during the Industrial Revolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key inventions and innovations during the Industrial Revolution and the social, economic and political impact The experiences of men, women and children during the Industrial Revolution, and their changing way of life The short and the long-term impacts of the Industrial Revolution, including global changes in the landscapes, transport and communication The positive and negative consequences of the Industrial Revolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse sources using the acronym OPVL (origin, value, purpose, limitations) Use source analysis information to investigate experiences, impacts and consequences of the Industrial Revolution Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the content and concepts of change and the Industrial Revolution by using descriptions, explanations and examples to support knowledge Synthesize knowledge from English and History to inform inquiry into narrative writing and source analysis, in order to create a narrative set during the Industrial Revolution Develop a focused research question that is closely related to the Statement of Inquiry Demonstrate self-regulation by providing evidence of planning, note taking and self-evaluation Create an accurate reference list of sources (following the APA 7th edition convention) |

Figure 2: Year 9 History Unit Pre-assessment – Task 1

| Year 9 Industrial Revolution Pre-assessment | |
|---|--|
| Student name: _____ Teacher: _____ | |
| Task 1: Read the quote below. | |
| Source A | |
| <i>“society is industrial and based on mass production, mass distribution, mass consumption, mass education, mass media, mass recreation, mass entertainment, and weapons of mass destruction. You combine those things with standardization, centralization, concentration, and synchronization, and you wind up with a style of organization we call bureaucracy.”</i> Alvin Toffler | |
| Complete the table below, using your knowledge of the Industrial Revolution and Source A. | |
| CONNECT How does Source A connected to what you already know about the Industrial Revolution? | |
| EXTEND How does Source A extend or push your prior knowledge about the Industrial Revolution? | |
| CHALLENGE What is still challenging or confusing for you, considering the Industrial Revolution? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have? | |

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Differentiation will occur through content, process, product, affect and the learning environment, based on their readiness, interest and learning profile
”

ensure gifted learners make continuous progress and extend their learning.

Figures 2 - 4 demonstrate the use of a concept under the “Understand” section of the KUDo’s sheet, for students to demonstrate links to other subjects and prior knowledge. The use of the connect/extend/challenge visible thinking framework (Harvard Project Zero, n.d.) provides additional information on critical thinking skills and student interest, as the “challenge” section encourages students to indicate what they would like to know about the topic, allowing student interest to influence curriculum planning.

Differentiation is student-centred and provides multiple approaches to content, process, product, affect and environment (Tomlinson, 2012). The choices offered to students are controlled as it links in with the content and skills covered in each unit. Students are given the opportunity to incorporate their interests through the selection of a topic, focus area and product creation through a number of differentiation strategies, which can be adapted to all year levels and subjects. Figure 5 is an example of a RAFT (Role-Audience-Format) choice board. According to Heacox (2017), choice boards follow the

essential features of quality differentiated practice as students benefit from both control and choice. The activity offers engaging and interesting choices for students. In addition to differentiating for gifted students through choice, the task will be formatively assessed through student selected criteria using peer-feedback. Involving students in their achievement by supporting their input in substantive criteria, positively influences their results (Andrade, 2012). Supporting students to provide feedback to each other, can promote self-regulated learning through meta-cognition for both the student being assessed and the student providing the assessment feedback (Andrade, 2012).

Another practical differentiation strategy is the use of tiering. Tiering keeps the focus of an activity the same for all students, but it provides alternate routes of access at different degrees of complexity which will maximise student engagement and challenge. Through pre-assessment, teachers will be able to group students into tiers. Tiering for the activity used in Figure 5 is based on degree of challenge and the level of complexity (Figure 6). Challenge and complexity are supported using

Figure 3: Year 9 History Unit Pre-assessment - Task 2

Task 2:

Consider Source B and Source C. In an extended response, using PEEL [Point, Evidence, Explain, Link] identify specific changes and provide reasons for these changes. In what way would these sources be valuable for historians? Use lined paper below.

Source B

<http://webs.bcp.org/sites/vcleary/ModernWorldHistoryTextbook/IndustrialRevolution/PreIndus.html>



Source C

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2031783>



“
Through pre-assessment, teachers will be able to group students into tiers. Tiering for the activity used in Figure 4 is based on degree of challenge and the level of complexity.
”

Figure 4: Year 9 History Unit Pre-assessment - Task 3

Task 3: Demonstrate your understanding of the changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution, by completing the table below. You can use key words, phrases or sentences.

| Innovations | Political Change |
|---------------|------------------|
| | |
| Social Change | Economic Change |
| | |

Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Bloom, 2001) and the William's Model (Gross et al., 2001), as students are expected to analyse the sources and evaluate their conceptual understanding of change considering the sources. The final level of the Bloom's Taxonomy is reached for Tier 3 students through their creation of a concept map and an analogy, which provides the opportunity to reveal their depth of knowledge and evidence of how they "see the big picture" (Brulles & Brown, 2018, p.70).

Don't forget the conductor, (or the Theatre Board)!

To support teachers in effective differentiation, a "systematic and continuous" (VanTassal-Baska, 2018,

p. 360) implementation plan is required. Professional development (PD) should incorporate the elements and focus of differentiation, demonstrated through a "myriad [of] models to construct curriculum" (Kaplan, 2009; p. 258). In addition to long term planning through the development of a detailed scope and sequence for all grade levels, the scope and sequence and core curriculum differentiation should be aligned with ACARA and NESA outcomes, to include too the explicit teaching and incorporation of psychosocial skills (referred to as Social Ability Continuum by ACARA (n.d)). The final requirement of "instructional leadership" (VanTassal-Baska, 2018, p. 360) by the school executive is the final component in building teacher capacity and demonstrates the

“students are expected to analyse the sources and evaluate their conceptual understanding of change considering the sources”

Figure 5: Year 9 History RAFT choice board

| ROLE | AUDIENCE | FORMAT | TOPIC |
|---|--------------------|----------------|---|
| Karl Marx | Future generations | A letter | The class struggle |
| A child labourer | Factory Owner | Vignette | Working conditions |
| A doctor | Self | Journal entry | Diseases in the slums |
| A single mother who moved to London for work when her husband passed away | Her children | A conversation | Living conditions in the slums and the position they are in |
| Inventor | Self | A memoir | Financial and class change due to his invention |
| A suffragette | Government | A one act play | Women's right to vote |

Figure 6: Year 9 History source analysis using tiering

| | Tier 1 | Tier 2 | Tier 3 |
|------------------------|--|---|---|
| Source material | Sources demonstrating life before and during the Industrial Revolution. | Sources demonstrating life before and during the Industrial Revolution. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quotations from futurists, related to the change in the 1st to the 4th industrial revolutions. • Two infographics related to the 1st to the 4th Industrial Revolutions. |
| Activity | Groups create a poster to visually demonstrate life before and during the Industrial Revolution. | Groups create a comparison table on life before and during the Industrial Revolution. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups create a concept map to show their understanding of change during the four Industrial Revolutions, considering the supplied source material. • Students individually create an analogy on change. |

commitment of the school to move education away from the industrial era one size fit all approach, to a wonderful symphony where the orchestra plays their part with passion and finesse, under the guidance of the conductor. A conductor who is a champion for each of the musicians, knowing their strengths and areas of development.

As Christian educators, our duty is not just to focus on content and subject, but to demonstrate our faith through knowing and caring for each of our students, following the instructions of our ultimate “conductor”; Christ’s leadership and guidance in our lives and the important work we do.

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”

Pen and paper: A simple formula for enhancing wellbeing

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with

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Sitting in her classroom, Lynn wonders whether her pen pal, Jean, has received and read her letter. Several kilometres away, sitting in her armchair, Jean's eyes light up as she reads the questions that Lynn has carefully written. She takes up a pen and begins to write. Theirs is a mutually beneficial relationship established through pen and paper, with the help of an envelope and an enthusiastic teacher who acted as a courier.

Students from Toronto Adventist School set the goal of writing one letter a week to residents at Avondale Residential Aged Care, Cooranbong. Students were excited to receive their response letters each week and readily wrote replies, asking a host of questions of their writing 'buddies'. The letters were a candid representation of stories from the past and present, and it became apparent that the weekly replies touched the students' lives.

This English project evolved to also be a wellbeing project for both the students and elderly residents. Dr Darren Morton, a world-leading educator in lifestyle medicine, offers insights as to why this project enhances the wellbeing of those involved. Social connectedness, Morton (2018) asserts, is vital to a sense of wellbeing. In this project, the connection was through letter-writing, instilling a sense of self-worth in the receivers as they perceived themselves as reciprocal recipients of care.

Morton also claims, service is a crucial

strategy in the wellbeing stakes. "Something deep within us seems to embrace the paradox that, through giving, we receive" (p.151). Giving to others through their letter writing, also lifted the spirits of the residents and students involved. Teacher, Andrea Thompson, who organised the project, believes in the value of connection. Through helping her students read some of the beautifully penned cursive letters written to her students, Thompson also developed her own unique relationship with the pen pals. "It was a wonderful moment to finally meet them. I felt like I already knew them from the delightful responses they had shared with my students through their written word."

At the end of the school term, the students visited the aged care facility to meet their pen pals. Music teacher, Janel Tasker, and children from the younger grades supported the senior students in a musical concert and sing-a-long. The items chosen were a direct outcome of the letter-writing project. The students had asked the residents via their letters what their favourite Christmas carols were. They then collated the results, practised these songs during music classes, and researched interesting information about them to present at the afternoon tea and concert. This integration of subject areas gave additional purpose to their learning as children looked forward to sharing this information with their pen pals and others who came to enjoy the program. Having a purpose for learning is another wellbeing strategy (Morton, 2018) that was built into this project.

Although the musical part of the program was very well received, it was the interaction between the pen pals, both elderly and young, that highlighted the success of the program. It was a special moment when the pen pals met face to face for the first time.

Jean, the pen pal of Year 4 student Lynn, shared her perspective of the meeting. "It was just a happy experience. It brought a tear to my eye. The children were so delightful. I was very impressed with how they spoke. The whole thing was most successful." Resident Yvonne added similar sentiments. Pen pal to Grady, Year 3, Yvonne thought the pen pal program between

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Something deep within us seems to embrace the paradox that, through giving, we receive”

the school and nursing home was “thrilling.” She comments, “I said to Grady, I look forward to my envelope and he said he looks forward to his envelope. What an absolute thrill it has been to see these young people relating to us so well.” Year 5 student Riley, pen pal with Joan, shared that his highlight from the visit was seeing Joan’s face after “all that writing” he had sent her. Jack, also in Year 5, could not wait to meet his pen pal and had repeatedly asked his teacher if he could meet her earlier.

Lindl Webster, Lifestyle Manager at Avondale Care commented on the program. “The benefits are quite clear. Some of the residents have been so enthralled that they have written multiple letters in one week. They have shown them to their families, and the letters have become a talking point. It’s anticipation, something to look forward to. The children bring a different vibe to the place.” Morton also ranks anticipation as critical to wellbeing and believes that “the excitement of looking forward to something can be all it takes to pick us up when we are feeling down (2018, p. 93). In this case, both the elderly and the youthful pen pals had something to eagerly anticipate.

Teacher, Andrea Thompson remarked, “The whole experience was a win-win, and one I will definitely be replicating in the new school year. The majority of the elderly residents are keen to keep writing, so I want to foster this connection. Apart from the obvious curriculum benefits, students gain so much more from this kind of relationship. The letters have been a very popular part of the school week. I cannot say enough good things about the advantages for both my students and their pen pals.”

This pen pal project not only supported the curriculum but enhanced wellbeing through reciprocal relationships, characterised by social connection, service and learning with purpose. It allowed the students to enact their values by showing a genuine interest in others with everyone emerging as winners! [TEACH](#)

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Editor’s Note

‘Live More Happy’ is available through Amazon Australia.



Leslie Reedman chats with pen pal Rain Darby (Yr 4).



Stephen Tasker (Yr 5) waiting to meet his pen pal Elva

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Something deep within us seems to embrace the paradox that, through giving, we receive
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TEACH^R

School leader preparation and development programs: What teachers want

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Keywords: Faith-based education, principal aspiration; principal's leadership; school leadership development; school leadership preparation; teacher professional development

Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the literature on school leader preparation and development programs. It seeks to do this by identifying and discussing elements that current faith-based education system teachers would like to see embedded in the creation of aspirant and novice school leader preparation and development programs. This research utilised a qualitative research design, adopting semi-structured interviews to collect employee perceptions. These teachers identified a five-element framework for leadership programs: School and Community; Working With and Through Others; System Understandings and Practice; Leadership Wellbeing; and Special Character. This paper proposes a number of recommendations that may assist in the development of aspiring and novice school leadership preparation and development programs within this faith-based education system.

Introduction

Developing and preparing effective school leaders takes time and intentionality, with the typical process involving challenges associated with self-identification and the seeking out of support and learning experiences to facilitate and assist the development of required leadership capabilities. It is even more challenging to have an education system play an active role in the identification of future potential leaders, encourage a culture of aspiration, provide support and learning opportunities for aspirants along the way, and to continue to provide quality development opportunities and support for beginning, or novice, school leaders.

It is unsurprising then, that much literature has

considered school leadership preparation and development programs in recent years. Yet while much of the literature around school leadership preparation and development reports on programs available to current principals or deputy principals, there is a comparative dearth of literature that focuses on the leadership development elements that teachers would like to see implemented in leadership preparation and development programs. While a growing number of research studies are considering the participant perspective of leadership preparation, few consider the insights these participants have regarding the elements they perceive should be included prior to their participation in such leadership programs. Incorporating such perspectives into these programs would likely encourage and enhance the involvement of those who may prove the most likely to fill future school leadership positions.

This paper examines a range of elements identified by classroom teachers and current school leaders that they would like to see implemented in school leadership preparation and development programs being offered in one faith-based education system for aspiring and novice school leaders. Previous research within the system that is the focus of this research has identified that only 1.8% of education system staff are actively seeking school leadership positions, yet another 19% remain open to the possibility of considering school leadership positions in the future (Williams & Morey, 2018). As such, the potential leadership development of current classroom teachers, and beginning school leaders, must now take on a renewed effort as the sustainability of leadership into the future is of chief importance to this education system.

Literature review

With increased expectations and accountability in place for school principals, an ever growing number of demands are being placed on school leaders who are seeing significant changes in the nature of their work. In the Australian context, this is resulting in an

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there is a comparative dearth of literature ... on the leadership development elements that teachers would like to see implemented in leadership preparation
”

increased focus on school improvement with ongoing pressures to deliver ‘extraordinary and sustained improvement and achievement’ (Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2014). While a significant body of school leadership literature still identifies an ageing principal population, Heffernan (2018) notes that older principals can easily identify this increase in accountability and policy, but for the increasing number of beginning principals, this climate of increasing pressure is serving as their ‘normal’.

Educational literature, however, identifies that many aspiring and novice principals who complete school leadership training are inadequately prepared to meet this increased climate of responsibility (Gentilucci et al., 2013; Hernandez et al., 2012; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Razzak, 2013; Tingle et al., 2019). Much educational literature identifies the links between effective leadership and organisational performance, however, and as such recent years have seen increased attention paid to what constitutes quality school leadership development, with preparation programs a particular point of research emphasis (Barber et al., 2010; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016; Tingle et al, 2019; Walker et al., 2013). It is noteworthy that in light of many preparation programs being perceived as not adequately preparing school leaders for the role, some school districts have moved towards developing their own leadership preparation and development programs that emphasise their own desired leadership standards (Taylor et al., 2014).

Historically, the group most likely to take on school principal positions have been middle leaders, given their exhibited leadership and current roles. Research from a number of differing Australian education contexts suggests that there exists an unwillingness of assistant and vice principals, deputy heads and leading teachers to aspire to be in the principal role (d’Arbon et al., 2002; Fink, 2011; Lacey, 2003b; Lacey & Gronn, 2005; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016). Additionally, research also identifies the reluctance of classroom teachers to aspire to principal positions and outlines concern over the lack of suitable applicants willing to consider these school leadership positions (Cranston, 2007; Lacey, 2003a; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016). There is also research to suggest that the length of teaching experience an individual has affects their career aspirations. One such study undertaken by Lacey (2003a) found that teachers with less than 5 years experience were more likely to aspire to the role of principal, while those with more than 10 years experience are more likely to want to remain in the classroom. This same research project also found that although there was a significant increase over time in the number of teachers aspiring to the assistant principal position, 50% of the younger teachers who had aspired to the principal position at

the beginning of their careers no longer did so.

One Australian national study outlined that only 1.4% of teachers reported an intention to apply for a principal position, and 7.1% of teachers would apply for deputy principal positions in the next three years (McKenzie et al., 2014). As mentioned, previous research from within the faith-based education setting which is the focus of this research paper has identified that while only 1.8% of educational staff were actively seeking a school leadership position, 19% of those who indicated they had not yet applied for a school leadership position envisaged doing so in the future (Williams & Morey, 2018). Thus, it is noted that whilst there appears to be a reluctance in some Australian education systems to consider school principal roles, a good number of teachers would be open to considering school leadership positions within this Australian faith-based education system.

Australian school education systems largely rely on the self-identification of aspiring school leaders managing their own pathway towards school leadership, given no mandatory principal preparation programs exist. Much literature laments the difficult journey of the aspiring school leader, with barriers, lack of support and encouragement, few suitable preparation programs, and minimal opportunities to gain broad leadership experience commonly identified (Bezzina, 2012; Gurr & Drysdale, 2015; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016; Russell & Cranston, 2012). School education systems are largely left to develop their own requirements for school leadership positions, and as Gurr and Drysdale (2015) note, a completed teaching qualification, registration with the relevant teaching authority, any state/territory legislated child-related employment pre-screening, and a few years of teaching experience, are often the only needed formal requirements. Most often faith-based education systems will have established some additional leadership criteria that considers religious affiliation within the relevant education system faith.

Internationally, a myriad of attempts has been made to ascertain principles to underpin effective leadership development programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Dempster et al., 2011; Schleicher, 2012; Walker et al, 2013; Young, 2015). A synthesis of research exploring effective leadership development programs reveals a focus placed on the needs of both individuals and education systems, an emphasis on improvement of schools and student learning, that programs be time-rich—providing for spaced learning opportunities, be research informed, allow for school based application and reflection upon this, be context sensitive, and provide for the evaluation of the effects on both schools and leaders (Dempster et al, 2011; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016; Walker et al, 2013). Dempster et al. (2011), particularly, expressed

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the need for effective leadership development to consider both individual and school system needs in order to contribute to both school improvement and the aims of student learning and achievement. Huber (2013) concluded that while no single method is most appropriate for the professional development of school leaders, taking an approach that utilises a wide range of strategies and methods would appear most appropriate. As such, a context specific program that considers these principles would appear the best approach to take to school leadership preparation and development. Importantly, there appears growing consensus for the need to consider the participants perspective.

Current school leadership programs range from high end, comprehensive professional development initiatives designed by national bodies, through to university qualifications, and qualification programs (Walker et al, 2013). Typically, these programs consist of combinations of characteristics including: active participant-centred instruction integrating theory and practice, interactive online sharing, reflective journals, simulations, problem-based learning, action research, the exchange of resource, assessment by peers, instructors and the learner themselves, and job-embedded applied learning (Corcoran, 2016; Dempster et al, 2011; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016).

In Australia, there is little research that outlines the nature and extent of new principal support—and this is particularly the case in faith-based education systems. The research that does exist more broadly paints a picture that little support is provided, resulting in new school leaders having to ‘learn on the job’. This ‘apprenticeship model’ has been considered to provide inadequate training and preparation (Wildy et al., 2007). Clarke et al. (2011) developed a survey as part of the International Study of Principal Preparation which compared principal preparation programs in England, Scotland, Australia and Mexico, asking 45 novice Australian principals to identify their most significant challenges and to what extent their preparation programs had prepared them to deal with these challenges. The findings showed a lack of formal and suitable preparation programs to meet the needs of these novice school leaders.

It is interesting to note the conceptual framework for principal preparation outlined by Wildy and Clarke (2008) who investigated the role of novice principals in small rural and remote Western Australian government schools (a context not dissimilar to the school system which is the focus of this research), and the influences on their work within the context of their communities. This framework proposed four distinct, but interdependent focal points: *place, people, system and self*. Wildy and Clarke (2008, p. 5) described place as school leaders ability to “read the complexities of their

context”, which becomes crucial for school leaders in small, isolated or rural settings, as these communities often take on societal and cultural views that many first time principals may not be familiar with should they have come from more urban perspectives. The focus of people refers to the ability of the school leader to interact with diverse groups in an interpersonal space on a day-to-day basis, such as staff, students, parents, education system personnel or members of the broader school or local community—often in complex situations. These researchers also noted that for principals who work in small rural communities, which a number of the principals in this research study work within, there is increased likelihood that some of these teachers are also likely to be parents and members of the broader school or faith-based community, whose ‘goodwill’ is significant to the success of these leaders school improvement efforts. The domain of *system* refers to the ability of the school leader to navigate through system-imposed processes, regulations and protocols, and to skilfully prioritise aspects of their work role accordingly. Lastly, the focus of *self* refers to the innate personal resiliency that is required of the role of school leader, who often work within spaces that involve multiple and competing tensions and pressures, which may entail unanticipated levels of emotional labour.

Mentoring, or coaching, is a well-established area in the corporate and sporting landscape, but a much more recently introduced concept in the education sphere. Noble (2012) stated that “In its simplest form, coaching is the act of helping others to perform better” (p. 32). Leadership coaching for school principals has been identified to be growing at a rapid rate (Reeves, 2009; Reiss, 2006; von Frank, 2012; Wise & Cavazos, 2017). A national study undertaken in the US by Wise and Cavazos (2017) identified that almost half of the 1361 respondents (659 or 48.9%) had received formal leadership coaching within the last 5 years, with the greatest percentage receiving 1-2 hours a month (44%), but 23% received 2-4 hours a month and 26.8% received more than 4 hours of individualised leadership coaching per month. These results strongly identify that a place for coaching exists, as school principals see this as an important means of supporting them in their work.

Methodology

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

What elements would teachers working within a private faith-based education system like to see included in ideal

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leadership development programs?

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

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

Results

When interviewees were asked to identify elements they would like to see included in school leadership preparation and development programs, respondents were able to identify that this faith-based education system already has an aspiring leaders’ program, but they were largely unable to articulate what elements this program includes, how participants are selected, whether attending or completing this program led to promotion opportunities, or any other specifics related to this program. However, respondents were of the view that leadership development programs need to be in existence, and were open to exploring what other professional bodies do in this space, should they wish to access these on their individual journeys towards school leadership.

The interview respondents in this study identified five major themes which identify the necessary elements that they would like to see included in any newly designed leadership development programs: School and Community; Working With and Through Others; Special Character; System Understandings and Practice; and Leadership Wellbeing. There were also points raised relating to not only program content, but also program delivery.

School and community

Importantly, a focus on understanding the local context

was identified by these interviewees. Identifying how a new school leader may work with community partners and the local school staff particularly, was seen as important given a number of schools in this faith-based education system region were based in rural or small community settings. Comments such as *“I think it can be quite risky when job applications are taken for principal from people all across Australia or wherever apply for these jobs and come into communities that they’re completely unfamiliar with, unaware of, have no relationship with, and pretty much try to impose their way of doing things, and I think it backfires. It’s backfired here”* (R2) outline the importance of school leaders having sensitivity training with regards to the local school and community contexts.

Working with and through others

Respondents identified that effective leadership was based on effective relationships. As such, a key area for an ideal leadership development program involved effective communication. Elements such as professional conversations, basic counselling skills, conflict resolution strategies, effective team building procedures and skills to assist understanding different personalities in ways that inspire their staff to do their jobs to the best of their ability, were all seen as essential.

It was common for respondents to emphasise the inter-relational aspect of school leadership, with comments such as *“I think dealing with difficult people is an important one, how to have conversations and manage difficult people, conflict resolution, all of that”* (R5) highlighting the need for elements to upskill participants in this area.

Special character

Respondents were keen to see any leadership development program include a strong spiritual emphasis. This is illustrated by a comment from Respondent 5: *“I think there should be a spiritual component to [the program] where they’re inspired in their own relationship with God, because ultimately that’s what is going to keep them inspired and equipped for what they are trying to do”*.

These faith-based education system respondents regularly acknowledged the ‘calling’ attribute when mentioning school leaders in this context. The mission, ethos and special character of this faith-based education system was stressed by these respondents and is unsurprisingly a point of emphasis for inclusion in any school leadership preparation and development program being offered. Rieger (2017) has “proposed an ethics, moral and spiritual purpose lens to ‘refract’ distinctive leadership profiles — *complementary* to the published Australian Professional Standard for Principals (APSP)” (p. 24).

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System understandings and practice

These faith-based education system respondents were able to identify the need to be able to navigate through the education system's procedures and policies to be successful in leadership. Further, it was recognised that this required significant familiarity with the protocols of leading in this context. To have the required political and structural knowledge was seen as essential to being a successful school leader.

Given this perspective, these respondents identified elements such as a clear overview of the day-to-day aspects of running a school, basic financial skills, an overview of legalities and governance, policy writing, and school funding were all considered crucial components of a leadership program. Additionally, the learning management system (SEQTA) utilised by this education setting was specifically identified as an area to be given coverage.

Furthermore, these respondents identified the need for the system to provide support and initial directions (including such things as a 'Getting Started Checklist') for school leaders. The establishment of school leadership preparation and development programs was one such mechanism for how these respondents would perceive the education system to be supporting them. Comments such as *"I think if there was more training, if there was more—'we're [the education system] gonna set you up and give you the skills to be a leader' rather than throw you in the deep end and go, 'Oh well, you'll learn along the way'. I think more people would be likely to step up [to school leadership positions]"* (R3) illustrate this perception.

Respondents identified that inspirational presentations by people who are well recognised in their fields as effective, high performing leaders, is desired. These successful individuals sharing what has been their experience and tips they have learned along the way about effective leadership was seen as highly valuable. Comments such as *"I think understanding what it means to be a leader which is more than just ticking boxes and jobs. It's about leading people and emotional IQ and I guess sometimes the best programs are delivered by practitioners who share their own experiences and their wins, their losses, their successes, that sort of thing"* (R6) were often mentioned by respondents as forming an element of any ideal leadership development program. The frequency of occurrence of statements like this indicate that inspiration is the thing most needed to encourage people to want to step up to leadership positions.

Leadership wellbeing

This theme captured respondent perceptions of wellbeing incorporating both improved work-life balance and strategies to assist the school leader in their day-to-day roles. It could be seen that many

elements identified by respondents relevant to wellbeing are interconnected, in that improving day-to-day efficiencies can lead to better work-life balance. For example, improving time management skills, skills profiling and self-awareness training, task delegation and 'working smarter not harder' are all seen to improve leadership wellbeing.

Tied to this was the respondents shared view that there be consideration of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2014) standards for school leaders. The preparation and development programs should reference these standards in their content, as these leadership standards were seen as one accessible benchmark for effective school leadership.

Including leader self-care in leadership preparation and development programs was also considered to be important. Strategies for dealing with personal stress was a commonly identified element, as noted by the following respondents: *"I think there has to be components on well-being and self-care for our leaders so that they're equipped in how to manage stress, how to actually take care of themselves in [school leadership] roles"* (R5), and *"...I think that work-life balance and prioritising family and themselves and their own well-being"* (R9).

Program delivery

A view emerged from respondents that there may be a need to consider two different types of programs in this space: Firstly, a leadership aspirants' program in order to provide insight into both the role of the school leader, and an overview of systemic practices and support for school leaders – proving to be a taster of sorts. Secondly, a leadership orientation program for novice school leaders, which would address aspects relating to local school contexts, work processes or interpersonal elements with the aim of better equipping and upskilling participants. Both of these programs would incorporate the involvement of inspirational speakers, current school system leaders, and experts in the respective fields they present in. It was perceived that where participants are at in their journey with regard to school leadership should determine which of these programs has more benefit for them, and this also impacts the nature of the elements included in these leadership development programs. The participants did not often identify explicitly the difference between such programs, rather, they regularly identified the need for such programs to be in place. As one respondent stated, *"I actually think we need to be more intentional and proactive to actually give people those skills... I think there's value in continually providing upskilling because the reality is sometimes if it's left to the devices of the individual, in the business of life, they never get around to it"* (R10).

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These respondents also addressed the timing of when such leadership development programs would be run. A view emerged that these programs should take place during the school term, as it was seen that teachers are reticent to give up their holidays. It was acknowledged that towards the end of the year, or early in the year is better, while the Curriculum and Primary Education/Curriculum and Secondary Education (CAPE/CASE) meetings held every second year (being the major two day PD experience for the faith based system teachers) was also identified as a possible space for a parallel leadership development event. Lastly, a view was presented that such leadership development programs need to take place multiple times per year, and involve the entire potential leadership pool.

In terms of program delivery, respondents identified scenario-based learning situations and outdoor expeditions as potential program options to assist the building of leadership skills.

Finally, the respondents perceived that mentoring, both formal and informal, was important in any overall leadership preparation and development program. Connections enabling networking with other principals was also identified by respondents as being an important option to make available, particularly in the case of new or novice principals.

Discussion of research findings

A study undertaken by Gentilucci et al (2013) which focused on the multifaceted roles of new principal's found that the most frequently mentioned challenges (100% of participants) included dealing with stress and time management, as well as the creation and sustainment of effective working relationships. Additionally, their study identified that almost all (91% of participants) of the new principals desired more mentorship and support in their roles. These elements of the role of a school leader were clearly identified by teacher respondents in this study as elements to consider for modules in school leadership programs. It is evident that work-related stress, time management, relationships, and support are areas that must be addressed in any effective school leadership training.

The vast majority of the leadership development program elements identified by the respondents of this study *School and Community, Working With and Through Others, System Understandings and Practice, Leadership Wellbeing, and Special Character* resonated with the—*place, people, system and self*—framework set out by Wildy and Clarke (2008).

The *School and Community* theme that emerged from this study is largely similar to that of Wildy and Clarke's *place* where there is a need for preparation and development programs to stress sensitivity to the local school context. For this faith-based education

context, it is important to understand that the local Church is a key community stakeholder. The *Working With and Through Others* theme had less emphasis on politics than Wildy and Clarke's *people* foci, but paralleled the elements relating to the interconnection of the local community and school community; it is not uncommon for staff members to be active participants in both of these communities. The theme *System Understandings and Practice* resonates with Wildy and Clarke's *system* in that these respondents recognise the need to be skilled in how to relate to and process school activities within the machinations of a school education system. However, this study context adds layers of system, given that the system consists of local, regional, and national systemic levels within the faith-based education system, but further this education system also must operate within the compliance regime of the government. It is not unexpected then, that this was an element heavily stressed by respondents in this research study. The theme *Leader Wellbeing* differed from Wildy and Clarke's *self* in that it included work-life balance as well as strategies to improve ability and confidence in performing the school leadership role.

The respondents had a clear desire to see programs include a strong spiritual emphasis, which is seen as an important way for this faith-based education system to strengthen spiritual capital, and emphasise *Special Character*. Gerald Grace (2010) defines spiritual capital as “the sustaining resource for everyday leadership in Christian living and working” which encourages “a personal witness to faith in practice, action and relationships” (p. 120). Barstow-Melley (2017), with reference to the Catholic education system, notes that preparation and development programs should have a focus around faith formation in order to strengthen and embolden the unique mission of the faith-based school setting.

Effective school leadership, while potentially impacting student outcomes directly, most often promotes improved student outcomes through facilitating improved support and work conditions for teachers, in order to positively impact staff and their work (Drago-Severson, 2012; Zepeda, 2012). The complexity of the role of school principal often presents challenges such as dealing with problems and dilemmas involving a high level of interpersonal relationship interaction at both the school and wider community levels.

Recommendations

School leaders are being faced with a monumental challenge in accomplishing school improvement mandates. However, it is recognised that two major factors impact the success of effective leaders: the knowledge, characteristics and actions of the school

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leader, and the extent of support that exists for the school leader and staff from their regional, system or national level. In light of the clear need to create a pipeline of future potential leaders to ensure system sustainability for this faith-based education system, the extent of action taken at a systemic level to support school leadership preparation and development initiatives, could well prove to be its defining moment.

Resulting from this, it is firstly strongly recommended that this faith-based education system develop a minimum of two separate school leadership programs, one developed for aspiring school leaders, and one to be focused on novice principals. Consideration could also be given to the development of a program aimed at middle and senior school leadership levels. These programs should be tailored for these groups to incorporate the various elements identified by the respondents of this study that relate to the various points along their leadership journey, as well as any additional elements that this education system sees fit to add that may collectively enhance the school leadership capabilities of program participants. It is recommended that these programs be run at two different intervals, however the aspirants' program is recommended during the mid-year CAPE/ CASE given the wide availability of interested staff from across the regional area.

Following this, it is recommended that for the aspirants' program, both self-identifying aspirants and system/school identified classroom teachers who exhibit leadership potential and particularly those in the first 3-5 years of their career be encouraged to attend. In light of literature that emphasises the aspirations of younger teachers, it is advised to begin initiating insight and discussion with this staff cohort, as it is the most likely pool of potential future school leaders. As noted previously in this faith-based education system context, system leadership sustainability is contingent on these younger staff following through on their current aspiration for school leadership (Williams & Morey, 2018; Williams, 2019). However, it is recommended that this system cast a wide net to invitees, in order to promote and maximise the impact of such programs and resources, and in recognition of an ethos that God enables the called.

It is further recommended that the elements identified here be presented as professional development style modules tailored to the specific program participants. These modules may be delivered by system-based administrators for the purpose of encouraging consistent system wide practices, by current principals in order to provide role specific insights, or by recognised experts in the various other areas presented. For example, current school principals may present sessions where modules cover elements such as understanding the

local school context, and day-to-day aspects of leading at the school level. System-based administrators may wish to present modules covering support and mentorships, grant applications, learning management systems (SEQTA), school governance issues, and the mission of this faith-based education system. Other presenters may address remaining modules, such as dealing with conflict, time management, team building, counselling skills, positive communication, and wellbeing; as identified in the *School and Community, Working With and Through Others, Special Character, System Understandings and Practice, and Leadership Wellbeing* framework.

It is also recommended that all participants of these programs, whether they be aspirants, novice principals or other, should receive certificates of completion for the sessions and modules completed, which are then recorded on their personal service records and are able to be added to individuals' curriculum vitae if desired. Ensuring a readily accessible record of preparation and development modules which individual participants have completed may prove beneficial from a human resources perspective at a later time, such as the staffing of school leadership positions.

Furthermore, it is recommended that at the local school level thought be given as to how to enhance professional learning communities and creating extra leadership opportunities for example developing 'online learning' leadership positions. It should be a focus of these preparation and development programs, wherever possible, to include learning modules that upskill participants for use in the local school setting, in order to facilitate an ongoing school improvement focus. All leadership preparation and development programs need to include a mentoring/coaching component mostly based at the local school level.

It is clear to respondents that a role exists for the faith-based education system to initiate and develop a coherent set of preparation and development programs that are transparent and widely communicated. In the interests of sustaining a leadership pool who are well positioned to take on school leadership positions, developing such programs may prove to be a critical investment. **TEACH**

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“All leadership preparation and development programs need to include a mentoring/coaching component; most often based at the local school level.”

Author information

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TEACH^R

Flourish: The impact of an intergenerational program on third-grade students' social and emotional wellbeing with application to the PERMA Framework

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Keywords: Accomplishment, caring, community, emotions, engagement, eudaimonic, flourish, hedonic, intergenerational, relationships, wellbeing

Abstract

Intergenerational programs are increasingly being recognised as a means of promoting wellbeing through connecting communities, promoting caring relationships, and combating loneliness and isolation. While existing research provides evidence of the positive benefits of intergenerational programs for the elderly, there is limited research on the impact that these programs have on children's wellbeing. The aim of this study was to measure the impact of the intergenerational program, 'Flourish', on student social and emotional wellbeing.

The study was conducted on 20 third-grade students from Noosa Christian College who participated in the Flourish Program over a six-month period. A mixed-method, qualitative and quantitative research design consisting of questionnaires and reflective journals was applied. Martin Seligman's (2011) PERMA model provided a functional framework to measure student wellbeing within the elements of positive emotion, engagement,

relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Quantitative data indicated a significant difference in the elements of relationships, meaning and accomplishment. These findings were supported by qualitative data which additionally showed strong indication of the positive emotion element and the role it plays in the engagement of participants. The positive emotion element was also found to permeate across each of the other four PERMA elements.

Results emerging from this study highlight the role that a well-planned intergenerational program can play in providing positive experiences and interactions; creating caring and connected communities; enabling students to experience meaning and joy associated with serving others; and enhancing student self-efficacy. This study also draws attention to the essential role that both hedonic and eudaimonic facets play in promoting wellbeing and flourishing. Findings underscore the importance of implementing regular, scheduled visits with activities that focus on positive experiences and outcomes that actively engage all participants.

Introduction

The rapidly changing 21st century has resulted

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the role that a well-planned inter-generational program can play in ... enabling students to experience meaning and joy ... serving others; and enhancing student self-efficacy.

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in shifts in lifestyles, living conditions, families, relationships, and methods of communication. These changes have had a direct impact on individuals, families and communities. Although material wealth and access to services have improved substantially in developed countries, there has not been a corresponding increase in life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing, but rather, a rise in depression, anxiety and distress (Forgeard et al., 2011; Post, 2005). This increase is reflected in Australia's young people with around one in seven primary school aged children and one quarter of secondary school aged children experiencing mental health problems (Lawrence et al., 2015). In response to this wellbeing crisis, the Australian Government has injected funding into the development of wellbeing resources and programs such as Headspace, Mind Matters and Beyond Blue (Scott & Kearney, 2018). Schools play a pivotal role in implementing initiatives and programs that aim to increase wellbeing and resilience in children, preparing them socially and emotionally for learning and living in the 21st century (Gregory & Brinkman, 2015; MCEETYA, 2008; Waters, 2011). The implementation of wellbeing initiatives in schools has a flow on effect, positively impacting on academic engagement and achievement by enabling students to experience a sense of purpose and connectedness to people and the world around them (Noble et al., 2008).

This study focuses on the implementation of the Flourish Program, an intergenerational program which was developed to positively impact student wellbeing in a third-grade classroom.

What is wellbeing?

Defining wellbeing is challenging due to its complex and abstract construct, which involves both feeling good and functioning well (Dodge et al., 2012; Kern et al., 2015). A hedonic perspective of wellbeing focuses on happiness, defining wellbeing in terms of deriving pleasure and avoiding pain, whereas a eudaimonic perspective focuses on meaning, self-realisation, competence and social-connectedness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Research (McMahan & Estes, 2011) shows that although both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions are associated with wellbeing, the eudaimonic dimension has a stronger association. Allin & Hand (2014) point out that in most cases, definitions of wellbeing are merely descriptions of what wellbeing looks like. For the purpose of this study, social and emotional wellbeing is defined as:

A dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and

creatively, build strong, positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community. It is enhanced when an individual is able to fulfil their personal and societal goals and achieve a sense of purpose in society

(UK Government Office for Science, 2009 cited in Allin & Hand, 2014, p. 117).

Positive psychology defines wellbeing in terms of describing aspects of positive affect that can be measured, rather than focusing on the absence of negative affect such as depression or loneliness (Butler & Kern, 2016). The term 'flourish' is used to describe human functioning that is thriving, resilient, generative, socially-connected and fulfilling (Butler & Kern, 2016; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Flourishing describes a state that is achieved through the integration of hedonic and eudaimonic facets (Henderson & Knight, 2012), and engagement in valued activities (Bhullar et al., 2013). Due to the multi-dimensional nature of wellbeing, it is more readily measured using various aspects rather than a single measure. Research (Kern et al., 2015) supports Seligman's (2011) PERMA model as a multi-dimensional approach to measuring wellbeing within a school context.

The PERMA model

In this study, the PERMA model provides the framework to conceptualise, clarify and measure student wellbeing. This research supported approach to measuring wellbeing focuses on the five elements: Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA) as aspects that contribute toward individuals flourishing.

The first element of the PERMA model, positive emotion, includes states of happiness, pleasure, rapture, warmth, peace and other pleasant emotions (Seligman, 2011). Experiencing positive emotions enhances an individual's ability for optimistic outlook, leading to positive reactions to others and activities, as well as general positive moods like joy or contentment (Noble et al., 2008). Exposure to positive emotion also acts as a contagion and research (Fowler & Christakis, 2008) indicates that people who are surrounded by happy people tend to become happier themselves. Furthermore, positive events can be a catalyst for growth by signalling a more meaningful and purposeful life, increased self-esteem; spiritual development; and more effective relationships (Roepke, 2013). Positive emotions may propel individuals towards greater capacity for creativity, resilience, knowledge, and social integration, as well as enhance overall health and wellbeing (Fredrickson, 2004).

Engagement, the second PERMA element,

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refers to psychological connection to activities or groups and how interested or absorbed one is when participating in an activity or event (Kern et al., 2015). Students are reported to show higher levels of participation and engagement when they have opportunity to participate in challenging yet manageable activities which make use of their intellectual or character strengths (Noble & McGrath, 2010). During engagement, when an individual is operating at full capacity, a state of flow is achieved (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009), leading to feelings of pleasure, mastery and personal satisfaction.

The third element of PERMA, relationships, pertains to being part of a community and having close and meaningful connections with others (Kern et al., 2015). Roffey (2011) defines connectedness as “a sense of belonging to a community, a feeling that you matter, and that your contributions are valued, and others care about you” (p.15). Good relationships are linked to happiness, resilience, and quality of life (Walsh, 2011). Social and emotional skills are positively linked to wellbeing. These skills enable individuals to get along with others, work cooperatively, show empathy, manage conflict, share, and develop and maintain friendships (Noble et al., 2008).

The meaning PERMA element refers to a state where individuals have a sense of belonging to and contributing to a purposeful endeavour that is greater than self. Pathways to wellbeing include civic participation where students are given opportunity to participate in and contribute to school and community projects as well as service learning, which assists students to develop a sense of meaning and purpose (Noble et al., 2008). Knight (2016) points out that Christian education assists students to “unwrap their God-given gifts” (p. 77) and use these gifts for service to others. Contribution and service to others are essential elements of joyful living (White, 1909) and the “paradox of happiness” (Walsh, 2011), is that when individuals spend time and resources on others, they in turn become happier and an “uplifting influence brings new life to the whole being” (White, 1909, p. 257).

The final PERMA element, accomplishment, deals with experiencing success, achieving or completing a task or attaining a desired goal. An individual’s self-efficacy impacts on motivation, achievement, accomplishment and wellbeing (Fishman & Husman, 2017). Schools play an important role in providing a variety of opportunities and diverse activities that help students to explore weaknesses and areas of low efficacy, and to utilise strengths. When individuals are able to identify

and use strength areas, doing what they naturally do best, they have a sense of control, mastery and autonomy which has a positive impact on wellbeing (Noble et al., 2008).

Experiential service learning

Service learning is an experiential form of education that provides an engaging and meaningful way of fulfilling community needs while supporting students to develop socially and become part of something bigger than themselves (Freeman & King, 2001). According to Fair and Delaphane (2015), “Service learning differs from community service in that academic curriculum accompanies service learning as teachers incorporate the experience into class curricula and assign directed reflective writings” (p. 19). Reflective practice (Celio et al., 2011), and strong community partnerships with shared goals (Karasik & Wallingford, 2007) are important for fostering student growth and monitoring the effectiveness of the program. Researchers (Pretty et al., 2006) report that individuals who are engaged in “meaningful social contact and positive social cohesion” (p. 9), where they are belong to and are able to make contributions which impact positively on a community, show increased levels of health and wellbeing. Similarly, research (Post, 2005) indicates a strong correlation between regulated altruistic behaviours and emotions, and individuals’ happiness, health, longevity and wellbeing. Service to others is central to the educative process in Adventist schools, as it “help[s] students to not only internalize God’s love but also to externalize it” (Knight, 2016, p. 77-8).

Intergenerational programs

Radford et al., (2016) describe an intergenerational program as “the purposeful bringing together of younger and older people for their mutual benefit through activities aimed at meeting specific life goals” (p. 120). Such programs are beneficial for developing prosocial behaviours in children, forming positive relationships and promoting wellbeing in all participants (Radford et al., 2016). Internationally, a shift has been made towards localised and ongoing intergenerational programs which serve the purpose of bringing the young and old together. These programs range from playgroups and child-care centres to college classrooms with a growing number of these programs occurring at integrated facilities to allow maximum interaction between the generations (Skropeta et al., 2014). Effective intergenerational programs are characterised by components that promote participant engagement. These components include provision of a shared, accessible space for participants of all ages; a

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consistent schedule; open-ended activities that give emphasis to the process rather than the product; intentional facilitation of cross-age interactions; and observational evidence which informs the planning of future activities and is shared with the families of participants (Epstein & Boisvert, 2006).

On the Australian scene, intergenerational programs are still in their infancy, with the current trend being one of segregation between facilities, and programs according to age (Radford et al., 2016). There has been a shift, however, towards implementation of intergenerational playgroups in aged care facilities, particularly in the states of Victoria and New South Wales (Cartmel et al., 2018). Griffith University, in Queensland, recently trialled the implementation of intergenerational programs across four research sites with positive results for all participants and a raised community awareness of these benefits (Moriarty, 2018; Marshall, 2019). There is research support that successful programs have mutual benefits for both young and elderly participants (Fair & Delaphane, 2014; Hagert, 2017; Karasik & Wallingford, 2007; Schwalback & Kiernan, 2002; Skropeta et al., 2014; Thompson & Weaver, 2016). Studies of intergenerational programs have focused on children's perceptions of aging or children's attitudes towards the elderly (Cumming et al., 2002; Newman et al., 1997; Penick et al., 2014; Pinquart et al., 2000); the contribution to the wellbeing of the elderly (Belgrave, 2011; Thompson & Weaver, 2016) and intergenerational programs as an intervention strategy to reduce the risk of child delinquency (Whitten et al., 2017).

There is a lack of documented research regarding the effectiveness of intergenerational programs on children's wellbeing. The aim of this study is to determine the Flourish Program's effectiveness in promoting social and emotional wellbeing in third-grade students. It is hypothesised that student social and emotional wellbeing will be enhanced as a result of participation in this experiential, intergenerational program.

Methodology

The Flourish Program is an intergenerational program which was developed for a third-grade classroom. The program seeks to promote student wellbeing through participation in service-learning activities, linking the students with elderly residents at an aged-care facility located within close proximity to the college. Each fortnight, after initial preparation in the classroom, the third-grade children were involved in visits to an aged-care facility for ninety minutes which provided opportunities for them to participate in

activities designed to promote interaction between generations, build relationships and generate positive emotions. Program activities included singing, craft, dance, games, reading, along with other activities that involved learning and sharing together.

The program is underpinned by Adventist Education's ultimate aim of preparing students for service to God and others, as it is through service to others that joy and highest education is found (Knight, 2016; White, 1952). The Flourish Program implements Positive Educational Practices (PEPs) (Noble & McGrath, 2010) as pathways to wellbeing which include: developing social and emotional skills; building positive relationships; promoting and enhancing positive emotions; using a strength-based approach; and nurturing a sense of meaning and purpose.

Participants

The study involved 20 third-grade students (male n=6; female n=14), aged 7-9 years. These children were predominantly from middle class socioeconomic backgrounds.

Research design

A mixed-method design was used for this study. Denscombe (1998) states: "The multi-method approach allows findings to be corroborated or questioned by comparing the data produced by different methods" (p. 85). Quantitative and qualitative data was collected concurrently using an embedded design which allows one form of data to support the other form of data (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the quantitative data determined whether the Flourish Program made an impact on student wellbeing, and the qualitative data explained how the program impacted on wellbeing. Using a mixed methods design enables the strength of one method to counteract the weakness in the other method (Creswell, 2014), and enhances the validity of the findings through triangulation (Descombe, 1998).

Data collection

Seligman's PERMA theory (2011) underpinned both quantitative and qualitative data collection, providing a tested framework as a springboard. Veal (2005) proposes that the researcher sources and examines existing research, using this to inform the questionnaire design process. A quantitative component, consisting of a questionnaire was constructed, based on Seligman's (2011) PERMA theory in combination with the EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Wellbeing (Gregory & Brinkman, 2015) to make it more developmentally appropriate. Responses to the questions were based on a Likert

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Table 1: Questionnaire Examples

| PERMA Element | Question |
|------------------|---|
| Positive Emotion | I enjoy participating in the Flourish Program I am comfortable about spending time with elderly people I am happy when I am around the elderly people |
| Engagement | I enjoy being with the elderly people so much that I forget about time I share ideas about activities I would like to do at Minodus ¹ I get so involved in the activities at Minodus that I forget about everything else |
| Relationships | I think about other people's feelings before I do or say something I can make friends at Minodus I am uncomfortable when I am around people who are different to me There are people at Minodus who care about me |
| Meaning | I actively contribute to the happiness of elderly people to make their life better. I feel that visiting Minodus is valuable and worthwhile I am able to contribute to my local community |
| Accomplishment | I work hard to master things that are difficult for me to do At Minodus, I am making a positive difference in somebody's life I have strengths and talents that I can use to make the world a better place |

5-point attitudinal scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Due to the age-group being researched (7-9 year olds), emojis were used to assist students when using the scale.

The initial questionnaire was administered to students before the commencement of the Flourish Program. Students were surveyed four months later, and a third time six months after the initial survey. Kumar (2011) states that pre-test/post-test study designs are effective for measuring change and “is the most appropriate design for measuring the impact or effectiveness of a programme” (p. 107). The questionnaire was comprised of 16 questions based on the dimensions of Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model, as shown in Table 1.

The applicability of the PERMA elements scales for this context was evaluated by generating the internal reliability using Cronbach’s alpha for each PERMA element, as shown in Table 2. These alpha values suggest that the use of the PERMA element scale is appropriate for this preliminary research data (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) however low reliabilities for both Relationships and Accomplishment means that readers should keep outcomes associated with these variables in context.

In order to obtain richer interpretation of data,

¹Minodus is a pseudonym for the aged care facility visited.

Table 2: Internal Reliability of PERMA Elements Scales

| PERMA Element | Cronbach Alpha |
|------------------|----------------|
| Positive Emotion | .804 |
| Engagement | .776 |
| Relationships | .510 |
| Meaning | .602 |
| Accomplishment | .482 |

qualitative data in the form of journal entries, was used in addition to the questionnaire. After each visit to Minodus, students completed a reflective journal entry outlining their experiences, understandings, and growth (Fair & Delaphane, 2015). Cress et al. (2005) state: “Effective reflection involves pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones to make new connections between concepts and to think in new ways” (p. 111). In addition to highlighting these areas, guided reflection gave students a means of developing emotional

awareness through assisting them to recognise social and emotional growth as well as personal strengths and weaknesses.

Data analysis

An analysis of the questionnaire responses was conducted to determine if changes in the five PERMA elements (Seligman, 2011) occurred from baseline to post-intervention. A one-way ANOVA test was performed to determine if there was significant variance between the baseline and subsequent post-tests.

Qualitative data was obtained from analysing students’ reflective journal entries according to the general principles of thematic analysis. The journal entries were initially deductively analysed and categorised according to the five PERMA elements. This directed analysis approach allowed the initial coding of data to be guided by a pre-existing framework or theory (Hashemnezhad, 2015; Zhange & Wildemuth, 2009). The data was then inductively analysed and reduced to ideas and understandings which provided further meaningful themes from which conclusions were drawn.

Results

Data obtained from the administration of questionnaires at intervals over a six-month period described an overall upward trend for the Year 3 group (n = 20) for each of the PERMA elements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships,

meaning and accomplishment as shown in Figure 1.

Results of the one way ANOVA test indicated a significant difference between the pre-test and subsequent post-tests, at the < 0.05 level, for the elements of Relationship, $F(2,57) = 4.757, p = .012$; Meaning $F(2,57) = 8.900, p = 0.000$; and Accomplishment, $F(2,57) = 8.288, p = 0.001$. There was no significant difference for Positive Emotions and Engagement.

Data analysis of journal entries identified and correlated key themes, providing a richer description of student experiences and understandings. A total of 113 statements, words, phrases and sentences were colour-coded according to the five PERMA elements. Following this, 15 themes were inductively identified (italicised in discussion following) and these themes enabled a depth of understanding as to how the Flourish Program impacted on student social and emotional wellbeing within the PERMA framework.

PERMA element: Positive emotion

Positive emotion was the most frequently identified element of the PERMA model in this study. Themes pertaining to this element included *self-happiness, an all-round happy experience, happiness of the elderly, positivity towards the elderly and positivity towards the program*. Students reported feelings of happiness, excitement, and joy which was evidenced by smiles, laughter, singing and happy social interaction.

“Results ... indicated a significant difference between the pre-test and subsequent post-tests for ... Relationship, ... Meaning ... and Accomplishment”

Figure 1: Year 3 Students’ Self-rating on Questionnaire

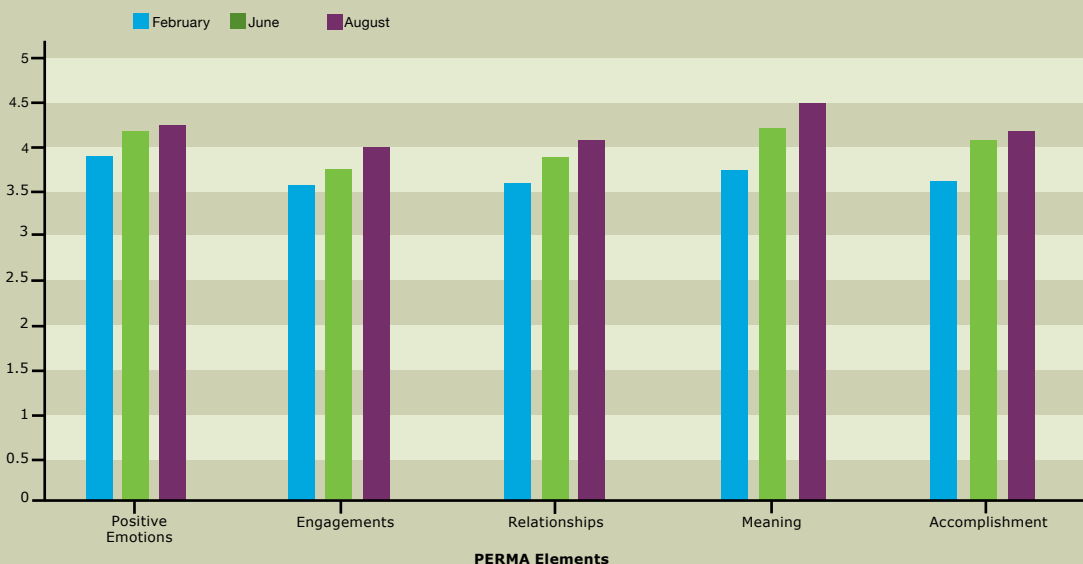


Table 3: PERMA Elements and Identified Themes

| Positive Emotion | Engagement | Relationships | Meaning | Accomplishment |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| 38 Statements 5 Themes | 18 Statements 3 Themes | 23 Statements 3 Themes | 17 Statements 2 Themes | 17 Statements 2 Themes |
| Happiness (self) 6 Happy Experience 4 Happiness (elderly) 9 Positive to Elderly 7 Positive to Program 12 | Engaging activities 5 Interactive activities 7 Fun 6 | Caring relationships 10 Friendships 9 Togetherness 4 | Contributing to others 11 Sense of purpose 6 | Personal Development 11 Increased confidence 6 |

*Out of a total of 113 statements, 15 PERMA sub themes were identified.

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Going there has made me a lot happier in my life... I think whenever we go to the old people's home it is a happy day for me.”

Going there has made me a lot happier in my life... I think whenever we go to the old people's home it is a happy day for me. (Participant 2)

They smile when we sing and dance. When we enter in the door they are always happy and smiling at us. And it is really amazing and it brightens up their faces. When we go (to Minodus) we all feel excited. (Participant 19)

I really enjoyed my time at the nursing home because they smiled and sang along. They were more happy because we came and made them be more happier and more excited for the next time. (Participant 6)

Students noted the happiness that the elderly people derived from participating in the program and attributed their own happiness to be a by-product of observing other people's happiness.

Today what made me smile was Joyce smiling and singing. (Participant 2)

I feel happy because they smile at me and it makes me happy. (Participant 9)

Positivity was also expressed towards the elderly people, with students commenting on pleasure derived from spending time with them and delight that they were fun to be with. The people are amazing and fun. (Participant 1)

Being with the old people is good. (Participant 3)

I love going to Minodus to see the old people. (Participant 16)

Optimistic feelings towards the program was most notable, with students expressing amazement and surprise at the positive outcomes and the benefits for participants.

It's amazing. The best thing the students have done in year 3 is the Flourish Program. (Participant 18)

The Flourish program makes a difference because the students can sit next to the old people and talk to them to make a smile, show something so they can get interested. It is amazing how the Flourish program can make a difference to everybody. (Participant 11)

PERMA element: Engagement

Thematic analysis of the engagement element revealed activities that were *interactive, engaging* and *fun* as being engaging to all participants.

The results revealed that students saw value in participation in activities that were designed to promote interaction between the generations, particularly singing, dance and show-and-tell. There was a lot of overlap between engagement and positive emotion.

At the old people's home the best thing to do with the old people is singing. The students have lots of fun singing, playing and talking with the old people. When the students sing, the old people are clapping and singing. (Participant 15)

We did a lot of singing, dancing and talking to the old people. I just can't believe that their smiles looked just like ours. The old people were singing with us and yeah it was AMAZING! The students cheered them up by doing activities, show-and-tell and singing. (Participant 18)

PERMA element: Relationships

The Flourish Program gave students the opportunity to develop relationships with elderly people. Emergent themes included *caring relationships, friendships* and *a sense of togetherness*. Students identified a caring attitude

towards the elderly as well as the reciprocation of care from the older generation.

I had a chance to have the experience of having old people around me and now I'm much more caring for them. (Participant 3)

I love the old people. I think they are kind and friendly. They love us to come over there. They understand you. They might have difficulty hearing or have old skin but they still love you going there. (Participant 17)

I know the people at Minodus care about me because they smile at me and hug me and laugh at me. (Participant 9)

As the relationships developed, participants experienced a sense of togetherness and community. Students were observed to be more comfortable with the elderly, holding conversations and showing physical affection (smiling, holding hands, hugs).

Before I went to the Flourish Program I was embarrassed to be with elderly people. But now I can make friends and talk easily to them. The old people just love being with us and we love being with them. (Participant 13)

At the end of the day we miss them and they miss us because we have been parted. (Participant 7)

Students were also able to establish new friendships and experience a sense of social competence.

Before I even went there I thought that I wouldn't make a friend. But afterwards I made a friend and she is so good at looking after me. (Participant 7)

PERMA element: Meaning

With relation to PERMA's meaning element, *contributing to others* and *having a sense of purpose* during the Flourish Program were two themes that emerged. Students identified links between their contribution to the program and the positive response from the elderly participants. Student reflections revealed a correlation between serving and contributing to others and the element of positive emotions.

They were happy because we came and made them more happier. (Participant 6)

The Flourish Program can make old people happy. It makes a difference because we make them have big smiles. They love us coming and they enjoy the Flourish Program. We cheer them up by going every week. (Participant 8)

I feel like I'm making a difference in someone's life by looking at how the old people are smiling at me and it makes me feel joyful too. (Participant 18)

PERMA element: Accomplishment

Themes pertaining to the accomplishment element included *personal development* and *increased confidence*. Students who were apprehensive prior to the first visit documented growth in confidence with feelings of nervousness subsiding as the visits to the aged care facility continued. For example:

At Minodus the first time we went there I was feeling very shy when I saw all the old people there when we had to meet and greet. Before I even went there I thought that I wouldn't make a friend. But afterwards I made a friend and she is so good at looking after me. (Participant 7)

When I went to the old people's home at first I was really shy but now I love going to the old people's home. I met some of the old people and they are really nice but one of them is really funny and kind. Her name is Margaret. She laughs a lot and smiles a lot and she loves to see what we want to show her. (Participant 15)

Having opportunities to experience success in forming new relationships with the elderly and trying new activities have contributed to student personal development.

Ever since the first time I visited Minodus it made a big difference in my life. I made a friend called Joyce. Going there has made me a lot happier in my life. We have done a lot of things and it has made me feel more confident around old people. When Joyce passed away I felt like nobody could make me feel better. Then I met another person called Joyce. We became friends and Minodus is a great experience. (Participant 2)

I think it [Flourish] has made me more confident and every time I go there [Minodus] I learn something new. (Participant 12)

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I think it has made me more confident and every time I go there I learn something new.
”

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the impact of an intergenerational program on the social and emotional wellbeing of third-grade students. Findings in this study support the hypothesis that student social and emotional wellbeing can be improved through participation in an experiential intergenerational program.

The Flourish Program was instrumental in bringing generations together to enhance participant wellbeing. According to Radford et al. (2016), achieving shared goals is a primary purpose of successful intergenerational programs. The wellbeing of the elderly participants was not

investigated in this study however, students were found to have increased subjective, hedonic wellbeing during the program as well as ongoing, increased eudaimonic wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Data indicated an overall increase in positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and engagement, with significant increase in the areas of relationships, meaning and accomplishment. These findings indicate that the Flourish Program contributes towards preparing students socially and emotionally for living in today's society (Gregory & Brinkman, 2015; MCEETYA, 2008).

Upward spirals of positive emotion

Although the data from the questionnaire revealed no significant change in the area of positive emotion ($p = .061$), the qualitative data identified positive emotion as the most frequently occurring element. The positive emotion element was found extensively throughout journal entries. In this case, the discrepancy of results between research methods allowed the strength of the qualitative data to offset the weakness of the quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). A possible cause of the lack of significant change from baseline to post-test is the participants' high pre-existing positive attitudes and feelings towards the program prior to its commencement ($M = 3.9$), leaving little room for scaled growth.

Consistent with findings in happiness studies conducted by Fowler and Christakis (2008), a flow-on effect of positive emotion occurred as a result of intergenerational interactions, with students attributing their happiness to the result of seeing the elderly people happy and being in a positive environment. Students expressed positive attitudes towards the elderly people, commenting on pleasure derived from spending time with them and delight that they were fun to be with. These findings were in accordance with previous studies (Cummings et al., 2002; Newman et al., 1997; Pinquart, et al., 2000). Qualitative data revealed that positive emotion experienced during the Flourish Program contributed to further positivity towards the program as students expressed optimism and excitement about visits and realised that their contribution had benefits for all participants. These positive events led to hedonic happiness and were found to lead further to eudaimonic wellbeing, having lasting effects (Fredrickson, 2004; Roepke's, 2013). It would seem that the integration of both hedonic and eudaemonic dimensions, as found in the Flourish Program, is a precursor to a flourishing form of wellbeing (Henderson & Knight, 2012).

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students expressed optimism and excitement about visits and realised that their contribution had benefits for all participants.”

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Engagement

Quantitative data revealed no significant change in the area of engagement ($p = 0.197$). Qualitative data analysis revealed *engaging, interactive activities* and *fun* as emerging themes for this element. Students participated enthusiastically in activities which they perceived as valuable. This demonstration is congruent with studies showing that engagement promotes aspects of wellbeing (Bhullar et al., 2013). The program also provided opportunities for students whose strengths may not be as evident in a traditional academic environment (Noble et al., 2008). Interactive activities provided connection as a group (Roffey, 2011), and provided opportunity for students with strengths in interpersonal relationships to operate at full capacity (Noble & McGrath, 2010). The emergent theme fun, indicated that positive emotion was linked with engagement and motivation, highlighting the value of the hedonic dimension (Henderson, & Knight, 2012; McMahan & Estes, 2011) when planning activities for intergenerational programs. Provision of a variety of activities and experiences within the Flourish Program aided in capturing students' interests and strengths (Noble & McGrath, 2010) as a means of engaging students in the program and enhancing their wellbeing.

Caring connected communities

The Flourish Program significantly contributed to the enhancement of relationships ($p = .012$). Quantitative findings correlated with qualitative data, which indicated relationships as a frequently occurring element with identified themes of *caring relationships, friendships, and togetherness*. Each of these themes are linked to enhanced wellbeing as they confirm a sense of connectedness through belonging to a caring community where individuals are valued, which is supported by previous findings (Kern et al., 2015; Pretty et al., 2006; Roffey, 2011). In accordance with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2004), the caring, supportive and positive relationships which were experienced during visits, assisted students in forming further friendships in subsequent visits, and having confidence to try new things. As students established new friendships, they also experienced a sense of social competence. Research literature (Noble et al., 2008; Walsh, 2011) affirms that social and emotional competence and the ability to develop and maintain good relationships are positively linked to increased happiness, resilience and wellbeing.

Meaning and joy in service

According to quantitative data, meaning was the most significant area of change in this study ($p =$

.000) from baseline to post-test. Qualitative data analysis revealed the two themes of *contributing to others* and *having a sense of purpose*. In accordance with the literature (Freeman & King, 2001; Noble et al., 2008), the experiential nature of the Flourish Program provided opportunity for students to contribute to the community in a purposeful and meaningful way, becoming part of something that was greater than themselves, thus enhancing wellbeing. Scheduled fortnightly visits with well-planned activities (Epstein & Boisvert, 2006) that promoted social cohesiveness provided opportunity for students to gain direct and immediate feedback about their actions, words and gestures. This first-hand involvement enabled students to experience joy and pleasure in service, leading to increased wellbeing, as found in previous studies (Post, 2005; Walsh, 2011). Reflective journals provided an effective method giving students opportunity to process their experience and see the connection between their contribution and actions as well as the positive responses of the elderly.

Research (Henderson, & Knight, 2012; McMahan & Estes, 2011) shows that both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions play a role in optimal wellbeing. Student journal reflections on their contributions to the elderly were permeated with examples of hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of wellbeing suggesting that the Flourish Program is instrumental in promoting student wellbeing.

I can do it!

Overall, students gained a sense of accomplishment as a result of participating in the Flourish Program with quantitative data showing significant change for this element ($p = .001$). Qualitative data revealed predominant themes of *personal development* and *increased confidence*. The experiential nature of the Flourish Program enabled students to push out of their comfort zone and experience a sense of satisfaction and achievement as they developed socially and emotionally (Freeman & King, 2001). Some students who were socially and emotionally reserved in the initial stages of the program reported an increase in confidence after subsequent visits, as well as a sense of achievement at overcoming their shyness through increased self-efficacy in social situations. This reinforces findings (Noble et al., 2008) that schools can provide diverse opportunities and activities to assist students to explore weaknesses and areas of low efficacy. Experiencing success in completing a difficult task is shown to be a contributor of motivation and wellbeing as shown in previous research (Fishman & Husman, 2017).

Conclusion

There were several limitations associated with this project. The small sample size (one class of 20 children) and the lack of a control group limited the generalisability of the findings, threatening external validity (Creswell, 2014). The absence of a control group made it difficult to determine if the results occurred naturally or were the result of participation in the program. Another limitation of this study is that the lead researcher was also the teacher who developed and implemented the program. Conducting the study using an independent researcher would reduce the risk of researcher subjectivity and bias.

Much of the literature presently available focuses on the benefits of intergenerational programs on elderly participants' wellbeing (Belgrave, 2011; Thompson & Weaver, 2016) but this study also indicates there are benefits for third-grade children's social and emotional wellbeing. The PERMA model offers a functional framework to measure student wellbeing in this context, with significant quantitative findings in the elements of relationships, meaning and accomplishment. In addition, qualitative data showed a strong indication of the positive emotion element which also permeated each of the other four elements. Results of this study highlight the role that a well-planned intergenerational program can play in providing positive experiences and interactions; creating caring and connected communities; enabling students to experience meaning and joy associated with service to others; and enhancing student self-efficacy. This study acknowledges the essential role that both hedonic and eudaimonic facets play in promoting wellbeing. Findings underscore the importance of implementing regular, scheduled visits with activities that centre on positive experiences and outcomes which engage all participants. A mixed methods design proved effective in the measurement of the impact of the program on student wellbeing, and the journal entries augmented the findings for each of the PERMA elements.

The topic of student wellbeing continues to be relevant and focal in Australian society and schools and teachers are in a position to address wellbeing concerns by delivering programs and initiatives that assist in promoting wellbeing and flourishing in students. The Flourish Program contributes to the toolbox of school wellbeing initiatives and has the capacity to play a valuable role in schools. More so, the Flourish Program is aligned with the ultimate aim of Adventist Education – unselfish service to others that flows from Christ's selfless service to humanity. Thus, the joy of service becomes the highest education (White, 1952). The experiential

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Experiencing success in completing a difficult task is ... a contributor of motivation and wellbeing
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service-learning approach underpinning the Flourish Program provides an opportunity for students to learn in a real-life context and to externalise love to others in a practical, meaningful and rewarding way. As students experienced the joy of serving others in this study, the words Jesus taught, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35 NIV), became a reality for them. **TEACH**

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TEACH^R

Christian schooling: Teachers' understanding of purpose and practice

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Keywords: Christian schooling, faith and learning, Christian pedagogy, worldview.

Abstract

Christian schools are faith-based communities offering education consistent with their particular approach to the Christian faith. Using language such as “Bible-based” or “Christ-centred”, Christian schools routinely suggest they provide a distinctively Christian approach to education. Central to the preservation of this approach is the teacher.

This paper is based on research into Christian Education National (CEN) teachers' understandings of the purposes of Christian schooling and how students are exposed to Christianity in their school, including their classrooms.

This research identified that, despite varied understandings of the purposes for, or goals of, Christian schooling, teachers perceived that the Christian faith should be evident across all aspects of the Christian school.

Within classrooms, in addition to Bible reading, classroom devotions, and prayer, teachers suggested students were exposed to the Christian faith through the example set by staff. Further, teachers taught from a Christian perspective, or connected curriculum content with the Christian faith as opportunities arose.

Introduction

Established by church communities or associations of Christian parents, Christian schools are faith-based institutions offering education consistent with their particular approach to the Christian faith. As a Christian alternative to government schooling, Christian schools routinely suggest they possess purposes and practices that are different from those of government or secular schools; a distinctively Christian approach to education (Smith 2018). At

the heart of Christian schooling is an education grounded in the Bible, often expressed as “Bible-based and Christ-centred” (Twelves, 2005). Certainly, the goals of Christian schooling include the achievement of high academic standards and the preparation of students for life beyond school, including employment. In addition, Christian schools suggest outcomes that include enabling young people to “think critically about their faith” (Etherington, 2014, p. xvii) and “preparing students to live godly lives in God’s world” (Dowson, 2014, p. 43). Yet, in practice, the education that Christians offer in pursuit of their goals vary. Some Christians understand Christian schooling to include the employment of Christian staff who can model the Christian faith in word and action, and the addition of times of prayer, scripture classes, and chapel (Etherington, 2008). Another approach seeks to embed the faith across all elements of practice including regular class instruction (Collier, 2013).

Christians utilize a variety of approaches to integrate faith and learning in classrooms, including: teacher embodiment, Christian practices, spontaneous integration, and planned integration. Teacher embodiment understands that teachers are to model, or embody, the Christian faith. Through their words and actions teachers demonstrate to students how to live and make choices that honour God (Scouller, 2010). Also known as the parallel approach, Christians may look to integrate Christianity and learning by exposing students to certain Christian practices such as prayer, Bible reading, and class devotions. In spontaneous integration, teachers discuss biblical concepts as appropriate moments arise in lessons (MacCullough, 2016). These “teachable moments” occur as students pose questions, during times of discussion, or as the curriculum content prompts the teacher. Planned integration understands the need to connect the biblical story to the curriculum. Teachers begin with the curriculum and look to

“*Outcomes... include enabling young people to ‘think critically about their faith’ and ‘preparing students to live godly lives in God’s world’*”

naturally connect it to the biblical story, often utilising a biblical worldview.

This research was situated within the Christian Education National (CEN) network of Christian schools. Previously known as Christian Parent Controlled Schools, CEN is a predominantly Christian parent established and parent governed Christian schooling movement that seeks to integrate faith and learning in a manner described as distinctive or distinctively Christian (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2002; Prior, 2018). The CEN vision includes the affirmation of the lordship of Christ over all of life, the Gospel rather than culture informing practice, and parental responsibility for the education of their children. In CEN schools, it is envisioned that children will be inspired to follow a Christian way of living and equipped with a biblical worldview that can be utilized as an aspect of their Christian discipleship (CEN, 2019). Consistent with their emphasis on the lordship of Christ over all of life, CEN schools seek not to be dualist replicas of government schools with the addition of Christian staff and a smattering of Christian practices combined with otherwise secular schooling. Instead, they adopt a holistic approach to education, expecting the biblical story to shape all aspects of school culture (Justins, 2014).

In CEN there has been a tendency to be “wary of mandated curricula and educational paradigms” (Dickens, 2013, p. 222). While all of the above approaches to the integration of faith and learning may be evident, a particular focus within CEN has been the use of biblical worldview as a means to holistically integrate faith and the curriculum (Engelhardt, 2012). Often including a Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration schema, a biblical worldview has been utilised to ensure that teachers and students can critique both the curriculum and culture from a biblical perspective.

This study originated as part of a larger project on the perceptions and practices of those employed within the CEN association of Christian schools. An assumption of this study was that the teacher was central to the preservation of the particular approach to education of the Christian school. That is, within Christian schools, there is an expectation that teachers are competent educators who are also able to live out their Christian faith in the day-to-day life of the school, including in classroom practice (Neidhart & Carlin, 2011). To date, there are few studies on teachers’ understanding of Christian schooling within the CEN association of Christian schools. There is, however, evidence of how teachers include a Christian perspective into classroom practice within one particular school (Hewitt, 1994). There have been studies with respect to how the Bible is used

(Thompson, 2003), teachers’ perceptions of how thoroughly they teach from a Christian perspective (Justins, 2002) and leaders’ perceptions of how the CEN vision is understood and embedded (Prior, 2017). However, no research has dealt specifically as to how teachers understand the goals of Christian schooling, and how Christianity is embedded into school culture, including within classrooms.

Methodology

This study sought to reveal teachers’ perceptions of the purpose of Christian schooling, and how they understood Christianity to be evident across the school and within classrooms. Consequently, a qualitative research design was chosen because this type of inquiry “gives voice to the participants” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018, p. 288) and has the potential to provide rich descriptions of a phenomenon. The study posed three questions:

- In your opinion, what are the goals of Christian schooling?
- Where do you think Christianity should be evident in the life of the Christian school?
- In your experience how (or when) do students encounter the Christian faith in the classroom environment?

Sample

The data for this study was collected from the larger research project on the beliefs and practices of employees of CEN member schools with respect to Christian schooling. This stage of the study was confined to teachers within five CEN schools, each with classes from Foundation to Year 12. One hundred and ninety six teachers responded to the online survey questions.

Instrument

An online survey comprised of open-ended questions was used to collect the data. Open-ended questions were chosen as they are exploratory in nature, providing participants with opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and understandings of Christian schooling in their own words (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Analysis

The data analysis was guided by the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This method allowed the collection, analysis and interpretation of data to occur concurrently (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method was chosen as it aligns well with qualitative research (Boeije, 2002), and provided a means to compare the data, and allowed theory to be developed based on the participants’ perceptions rather than preconceived theory.

“no [CEN] research has dealt specifically as to how teachers understand the goals of Christian schooling, and how Christianity is embedded into school culture”

Findings

Teachers' perceptions as to the goals of Christian schooling

CEN promotes education where children are inspired to understand the world through a biblical lens and follow a Christian way of living (CEN, 2019). Respondents agreed with this suggesting a Christian life or Christian discipleship was a goal of Christian schooling. Respondents noted that CEN schools offered a “safe environment to foster faith” and were “an ideal place to ask questions about God and voice doubts”. In the literature associated with CEN, it is clear that discipleship is not simply to be church attendance (Edlin, 2014) and is more comprehensive than salvation (Dickens et al., 2017). Discipleship involves being engaged in the world (Dickens, 2013; Hanscamp et al., 2019), active in service to God and their neighbour (Burggraaf, 2014). Respondents suggested the goals of Christian schooling provided opportunity to “show students that being a Christian isn’t just limited to a Sunday” and to develop “counter cultural people who will impact society”.

In order to assist students to understand how as Christian disciples they can view the world biblically, CEN has utilised a biblical worldview. Indeed, a biblical worldview is synonymous with CEN (Prior, 2017), being the primary medium for the integration of faith and learning in the classroom (Dickens, 2013). Consistent with this, teachers from across the five schools in this study related the goals of Christian schooling to a biblical perspective and worldview. Respondents remarked that teachers taught from a biblical or Christian perspective. Students were also educated to “discern other worldview perspectives inherent in curriculum” and live out of a Christian worldview. As one respondent offered:

To teach students to see the world as God’s world; to understand that He has something to say about every area of Creation including education in all of its facets: curriculum, methodology, environment, class management, discipline etc. To help students understand that all people have a worldview that directs the way they view everything in the world, including how they think and their ideas as to what the world should look like, Christians also have a worldview and this should direct and inform their lives in every aspect. (Respondent 56)

Christian parents who desired an alternative faith-based education in alignment with their own beliefs established CEN schools (Hoeksema, 1983). Respondents in this study, while noting the importance of faith, also acknowledged the centrality of delivering the Australian Curriculum. Schools equipped students for employment, further study, service within their communities, and as one teacher offered, to be “passionate stewards of God’s world.”

Previous studies, have suggested, with its emphasis on a holistic approach to education, CEN schools have not been renowned for academic achievement (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2009). Academic standards were important to the teachers in this study. While education was to be from a Christian perspective or worldview, teachers discussed their high expectations of students, using words like “quality”, “rich”, or “excellent” within their goals for Christian schooling.

Teachers' perceptions of where Christianity should be evident in the life of the Christian school

The sovereignty of God is central to CEN schooling. It was important to the founders of CEN, providing a rationale for a whole of life approach to schooling (Justins, 2002). To this day, the CEN vision celebrates the lordship of Christ over all of life (CEN, 2019). From this, it is held that CEN schools not confine Christianity to certain elements of practice, such as chapel and prayer, but that it be evident holistically across the life of the school (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2002). In this study, sixty percent of teachers affirmed the above, suggesting that Christianity be evident “everywhere” or in “all aspects” of school practice. As found in previous research, respondents suggested the Christian faith not be confined to religious instruction classes or chapel services, but rather be evident holistically across all elements of school life (Prior, 2018). These aspects included policies and practices, school events including assemblies, student reports, in the playground, and the carpark. In explanation:

Every day in every way possible. It should be authentic, though, not contrived or tacked on. It should inform the way we think about every part of what we do. It should be the thread that makes up the whole tapestry of a child’s education in the Christian school. (Respondent 10)

In describing where (in the school) Christianity should be evident, it was clear that teachers understood that Christianity is embodied within members of the school community. Consequently, as a respondent suggested, the Christian faith “should be obvious in the relationships, first and foremost” (Respondent 57). As to which relationships, another wrote, “in every relationship (between parent and teacher, student and teacher, teacher and teacher)” (Respondent 196). Only a few teachers commented on the importance of leaders setting an example. Instead, the emphasis was on either “teachers” or “staff” practicing the Christian faith through modelling wholesome relationships and in their communication with other members of the school community, including other staff and parents. Fewer

“
Every day in every way possible. It should be authentic, though, not contrived or tacked on. It should inform the way we think about every part of what we do.”

”

than ten percent mentioned chapel or assemblies.

Consistent with the sovereignty of God over all of life, CEN has long advocated that the Christian faith must influence the classroom, including the curriculum (Justins, 2002). According to respondents teachers were to teach from a Christian perspective. Learning outcomes that affirmed a biblical worldview were to be embedded in the curriculum. As above, teachers suggested that the Christian faith was also to be evident in the interactions between teachers and students, as well as in behaviour management.

I do not feel it should be ‘forced’ into every facet of the curriculum. In my experience, this is when students start to see the process of ‘Christian schooling’ as contrived and overdone. Instead, it should be modelled through the actions and attitudes of staff, reinforced through relationships and even through discipline and conflict. Therefore, the classroom environment/culture shifts towards one that is inclusive, more critical and allows for organic conversations to take place when discussing areas of the curriculum.

(Respondent 188)

Teachers’ perceptions of how/when students encounter Christianity in the classroom

Teachers’ perceptions of how/when students encounter Christianity in the classroom were organized under five approaches. These were spontaneous integration, intentional integration, Christian practices, teacher embodiment, and student-to-student relationships.

CEN schooling has long advocated a biblical worldview approach, which has distinguished it from other Christian traditions that divide schooling into religious and non-religious education (Low, 2013). Two thirds of respondents suggested that students encounter the Christian faith through teaching from a biblical perspective or worldview. The main method was understood to be spontaneous integration or teachable moments. To teachers these moments arose incidentally, often during classroom discussions. One respondent suggested:

The most effective [teaching] is when an unplanned opportunity opens up through class discussion for the teacher to offer a sincere and personal faith perspective, showing how they themselves allow their faith to help them interpret an issue or decide on a stance or behaviour. (Respondent 113)

Respondents understood these as “powerful”, “real”, and “natural” moments that arose, predominantly, in response to discussions between students or in response to questions posed by students. In some instances, this spontaneous integration was also teacher initiated.

The spontaneous/teachable moment approach has been acknowledged as “necessary”

(MacCullough, 2016, p. 103) and “welcome” (Dickens et al., 2017, p. 55). An assumption of this approach is that a teacher has the ability to look for moments and then is able to use his/her biblical knowledge to integrate faith and learning (MacCullough, 2016). In doing so, the teacher is actually modelling to students what the school may ultimately be aiming for in students, the ability to critique culture from a biblical perspective. Having said this, the spontaneous/teachable moment has also been criticised as having the potential to be “ad hoc” and “idiosyncratic” (Dickens et al., 2017, p. 55) separating the Christian faith from an otherwise secular life (Dickens et al., 2017; Parker & Street, 2018). If a goal of Christian schooling is to encourage students to develop a biblical worldview then it is appropriate that teachers plan to embed this in the curriculum, as an element of their pedagogy.

Biblical worldview mediated practice is at the heart of CEN schooling. However, only twenty percent of teachers in this study suggested that students encounter Christianity in the classroom through a learning program with an intentionally embedded biblical perspective. Many teachers find teaching from a biblical perspective challenging (Dickens et al., 2017; Fisher, 2012). Further, previous research has suggested that biblical worldview mediated practice in CEN schools has been inconsistent (Dickens, 2013; Prior, 2017). Thus, it was unsurprising that this was the least utilized method. In teachers’ responses, it was clear that they perceived certain subjects oriented themselves to this more than others did. These included English, History, Integrated Studies, Mathematics, Psychology, and Science. Interestingly, one respondent suggested this was the role of classroom rather than specialist subject teachers.

Despite CEN advocating this approach, there have been criticisms. One criticism is that it presents a narrow, almost textbook, usage of the Bible that is more about transmitting knowledge and information than capturing the hearts of students (Cairney, 2018). Another criticism is not a critique of actual practice, but rather an implicit claim often associated with the integrated model, suggesting the assertion that it is the only true way of bringing faith and learning together (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004).

While CEN schools advocate a whole of life approach to Christianity, certain practices such as prayer, Bible reading, class devotions, school assemblies and chapel provide opportunities for the Christian faith to be explicit (Prior, 2018). Half of the teachers in this study mentioned one or more of these practices when describing how students are exposed to Christianity in the classroom. In a few instances, teachers’ responses suggested that

“only 20% of teachers in this study suggested that students encounter Christianity ... an intentionally embedded biblical perspective.”

classroom prayers and/ or devotions were the main means by which Christianity was evident in the classroom. While participation in Christian practices is a normal expression of Christianity, a separation and emphasis of faith practices and programs distinct from the academic or secular parts of the curriculum is considered dualistic (Beech, 2015). For the most part, however, teachers suggested Christian practices as an element of a much broader understanding that included teacher embodiment and the integration of the Bible and the curriculum.

In addition to explicit Christian practices, teachers understood that students encounter Christianity in the classroom through the example set by teachers. As one teacher suggested, “students are quick to discern the faith of their teacher by the manner in which they interact with them” (Respondent 169). According to respondents this example or modelling included how teachers fostered a supportive classroom climate, the care and attention they paid to individual students, their expectations of students, and how they dealt with classroom conflicts. The importance of teachers modelling the Christian faith was robustly affirmed:

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I believe they understand God’s love by the way I show them I love and care for them. They get that God is patient because of my patience

Students encounter faith in the classroom environment in ways that I might not plan or assess but somehow they know that I do really love Jesus. I believe they understand God’s love by the way I show them I love and care for them. They get that God is patient because of my patience with them. Students encounter Christian faith through Christians and the Holy Spirit working in and through God’s people.

(Respondent 75)

”
The significance of modelling should not be understated. There is an expectation in Christian schools for staff to model the faith (Scouller, 2012). Students often remember the impact of their teachers’ lives rather than the actual classroom content they taught (Fennema, 2014). Further, personal relationships, mentoring and role modelling have previously been understood by teachers as the most effective ways of encouraging the spiritual formation of students in Christian schools (Horan, 2017). Yet, as a means of integrating faith and learning, modelling is insufficient (Shortt, 2014). Christianity is more than personal piety. CEN schools celebrate the lordship of Christ over all of life. Within CEN schools, there is a desire for faith to impact the curriculum, and the pedagogy. While most participants coupled modelling with biblical integration, twenty-five percent did not. Should teachers understand that their piety is the main means of exposing students to the Gospel there is a risk that students will be presented with a reduced, dualistic understanding of the Christian faith.

When responding to this question, in addition to writing about themselves, a few respondents noted the importance of other students. Teachers understood that students were often exposed to the Christian faith through a variety of interactions with their classmates. These included classroom discussions, the modelling of behaviours, and when conflicts arose within the student body.

Concluding comments

This research sought to reveal CEN school teachers’ perceptions of the purpose of Christian schooling, how they understood Christianity to be evident across the school, and within classrooms.

Research participants’ understandings of the goals for Christian schooling (Research Question 1) included Christian discipleship. The Christian school was understood as a safe place where students were nurtured in the Christian faith. Respondents acknowledged that schools were places of learning and they valued academic standards. CEN has long had an emphasis on worldview as means to integrate faith and learning. Respondents’ answers suggested teachers taught from a Christian perspective and encouraged in students the inculcation of a biblical or Christian worldview.

The CEN vision affirms the lordship of Christ over all of life. In accordance with this vision, CEN has promoted a holistic approach that is beyond the employment of Christian staff, chapel services, and biblical studies (Justins, 2002). Consistent with this, a majority of respondents stated that the Christian faith should be evident holistically (Research Question 2.). Understandably, this included within classrooms, in the curriculum, which was to exhibit a biblical perspective or worldview, as well as across a variety of aspects of school life. Additionally, respondents advocated that Christianity is embodied and, as such, should be evident in the interactions between various members of the school community.

A finding of this research is that teachers perceive students to encounter the Christian faith in the classroom in a variety of ways (Research Question 3.). Generally, teachers’ perceptions suggest that students encounter the Christian faith through classroom role models. With respect to discussing the Christian faith, it would appear that, predominantly, this occurs explicitly through Christian practices, including during devotional and prayer times. Additionally, when either the students or the teacher understands there to be a genuine connection between the classroom content and Christianity. Further, while teachers’ responses suggest that students encounter a Christian worldview or perspective, it is clear that intentional worldview integration is not the default position

despite it being championed by CEN as the medium to integrate faith and learning.

In conclusion, this research has provided an opportunity to listen to the voice of teachers within a particular association of Christian schools, CEN. It has contributed to the body of knowledge on Christian schooling, particularly with respect to teachers' perceptions of the goals of Christian schooling, how the Christian faith is evident across school culture, including within classrooms. CEN has emphasized a holistic approach to Christian schooling based on the lordship of Christ over all of life. It has also promoted the importance of biblical worldview as a means of equipping students to understand the world through the lens of the Bible. This research has found that teachers understand Christian schooling in similar terms to those described by CEN, yet perceive that students are more likely to encounter Christianity in classrooms through a range of practices rather than intentional biblical worldview mediated practice. **TEACH**

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“ it is clear that intentional worldview integration is not the default position despite it being championed by CEN ”

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A decade of Encounter Biblical Studies

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Keywords: Administrators, assessment, Bible, change, curriculum, Encounter, ethos, engagement, evaluation, framework, implementation, professional development, spiritual, spirituality, social-emotional.

Abstract

Starting with a brief history of the development of the Encounter Bible curriculum and summary of the evaluative research methodology, this paper draws on teacher, student and administrator interview data in its account of teachers' attempts to teach Encounter Bible. The writers refer to selected points of interest from their evaluation as they discuss teacher perceptions of the Encounter resource, assessment practice, the theory behind planning, the teaching and learning process, spirituality in schools and classrooms, and professional development. They also review student perceptions of teaching, and administrator involvement in supporting teachers. In surveying teacher achievements and challenges, the paper addresses a limited number of key issues that could ultimately be of critical reflective importance for Christian schools.

Introduction

Although research suggests that teaching Bible or religious studies in a Christian school is a rewarding task, it also suggests that it has become increasingly challenging for a raft of important reasons (Luetz et

al, 2018). This paper draws on data from a national qualitative evaluation of the Encounter Bible teaching program in the Australian Adventist school system. The discussion refers to selected points of interest from that evaluation and addresses a limited number of key issues that could ultimately be of critical reflective importance for other Christian school systems.

From reasoning to response: Systemic realisation of need

There came a point in time relatively early in this century when the Adventist school systems in Australia and New Zealand became convinced that a more current and engaging Bible curriculum was needed to meet the spiritual and learning needs of a changing group of learners. Further, teachers were thought to need more resources and up to date theoretical and practical support to meet these needs. The result was the launch of a major development by Adventist Schools Australia (hereafter abbreviated ASA) of the Adventist Encounter Bible curriculum.

Established in 2008, the Australia and New Zealand Encounter Committee oversaw the conceptual development, writing, professional development and implementation of the Adventist Encounter Curriculum in both countries. Committee members wrote the first units, but the authorship soon shifted to teachers who had participated in writers' workshops, placing the ownership with those responsible for implementing it. Some external

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Although research suggests that teaching ... religious studies ... is a rewarding task, it also suggests that it has become increasingly challenging”

writers were employed to keep the project on target. By the end of 2014, the full suite of units for kindergarten to Year 10 was complete. Professional development workshops and online training accompanied the rollout of units in the early years of implementation. Today, the Adventist Identity Officer is responsible for continually reviewing units and evaluating resources.

This outline of events indicates that ASA and Adventist Schools New Zealand (ASNZ), have together invested substantial resources in developing the Encounter curriculum over an extended period of time. To the credit of the developers and implementers of Encounter, the resources flowing from this development program have been well received by most teachers. In fact most have manifested much good will towards ASA and ASNZ, and shown commitment in receiving, implementing and supporting the roll out of Encounter. Further, Encounter's conceptual framework and wealth of resources have been discovered and deemed desirable by other school systems in the Adventist world. Consequently in the last 5 years the Encounter program has been introduced to Adventist schools in North America, Canada, Inter-America, England, and South East Asia.

Listening to the stakeholders

After a decade of Encounter's implementation, and in a quest for transparency, accountability, and continual improvement, ASA decided to facilitate an independent review of how well Encounter was being implemented. This review would investigate the perceptions of students, teachers and other school personnel.

The authors of this article were engaged to conduct this review.

Sampling and the review methodology

Interview respondents and schools were selected through "purposeful sampling" (Quinn-Patton, 2002). This method is characteristic of qualitative research, in that respondents are chosen for directed reasons so deeper data can be collected. Overall, fourteen schools supporting twelve primary and ten secondary campuses were selected as data sources across the ASA system.

Data were drawn from a 'focus group' interview approach involving students, teachers and administrators, and occasionally chaplains and parents. Between October 2017 and October 2018 45 groups of students from Years 3 to 10, and 27 groups of available Bible teachers who taught those years were interviewed. We also gathered data through in-situ field notes and summaries of interviews, unsolicited written submissions, peer

debriefing, discussions between researchers, 'crystallization' interviews with a small set of former teachers, Encounter developers and administrators, and constant referral to the recordings of interviews.

While the interview questions formed the basis of this inquiry and were utilised in each setting, they were not set in sequential concrete. As qualitative researchers, the "smart bomb" approach was also employed (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 193) in that interesting or idiosyncratic responses from respondents were explored in-depth, and once concluded, the interview returned to the flow and sequence of questions.

The intent of this paper

The following discussion is limited by two caveats. Firstly, although this paper draws on much data and discussion from the evaluation of how well Encounter Bible is being implemented, it is not a summary of that evaluation. The original review including its major recommendations was written for ASA system leaders and decision-makers to be used for system improvement. However, following the writing concept of "audience purpose and text," this paper is aimed at providing teachers with a spectrum of possibilities and areas that could be considered when teaching Bible. Also, there is a need for teacher and administrator stakeholders in the Encounter curriculum process to receive some feedback about interesting patterns in the data. This is particularly important for those involved with interviews in schools.

Secondly, the original evaluation process was underpinned by the ideology that it should be aiming at 'collaborative growth' (Bakken 2018). Hence, the following discussion in this paper aims at developing "collective visioning" (Bakken 2018 p. 65) so that teachers can reflectively consider the points raised and design ongoing Bible-based programs suitable for their context of culture and situation. As a consequence, this paper does not contain an introductory literature review since one finding of our research was that teachers need to take more responsibility for understanding their own personal and collective perspectives and positions.

Teacher and student perspectives of Encounter

The paper is structured around a set of questions, each intended to help focus the thinking of readers and prompt discussion of associated issues.

The curriculum resource

Question: What did teachers think of the Encounter curriculum resource?

“this paper aims at developing “collective visioning” so that teachers can reflectively consider the points raised and design ongoing Bible-based programs suitable for their context”

This question is important because teacher perceptions of the quality of resources help indicate how well they feel supported. And obviously good resources help teachers perform better. After interviewing all teacher groups, we concluded that the great majority of teachers appreciate the content and arrangement of the curriculum ASA has provided. Consequently, we wrote in our report:

Consensus is that the system has a valuable resource that provides a significant step up from what it had before. Because of its unifying thematic structure, implementation of supportive instructional practice, involvement of many teachers in its sustained writing program, consistent approach to developing spirituality and faith, and other qualities, Encounter has earned widespread systemic teacher appreciation and support. It has done much to demonstrate good teaching practice and strengthen the impact of Bible in Adventist schools in the last decade.

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a number of “myths” about ASA expectations seem to have crept into the system and manifest themselves in teacher misconceptions
”

However, as with any aspect of an evaluation process, a range of teacher perceptions about the resource were fielded, ranging from positive to negative. Typical positive teacher comments were: “I think it’s a fantastic portal where you can share soul and journey with slight modification,” and “I love Encounter. Our struggle is to choose units.” Then there were comments like “I give it a big tick, although it does have some serious shortcomings,” or “It’s a good road map, but we have had to update the resources as we go, and modify it to school ethos,” and more negative comments like “You get lost doing surface stuff,” or “It’s a trap to have too much.”

One indicator of Encounter’s perceived usefulness is its pattern of usage. The large majority of schools in our sample were committed to using Encounter. However, there were exceptions. One larger primary teacher group had made little use of Encounter, another had changed it dramatically to suit the school’s context, and two others, while being supportive, expressed frustrations about perceived issues with the resource.

Although teachers appreciated their wealth of Encounter resources, issues emerged from their attempts to tap into this wealth. The discussion below is not exhaustive.

One of ASA’s key aims was to provide teachers with plenty of teaching material to choose from. Ironically many primary teachers in particular felt overwhelmed by the wealth of content, especially on first meeting the new curriculum, and hence found their lesson preparation unduly time consuming. Also because of the broad array of teaching activities presented, many also felt bogged down trying to teach it all. Secondary teachers rarely reported having issues with the wealth of content.

Secondly, Encounter’s usefulness and applicability for children not of the Seventh-day Adventist faith appears to be a major issue for many teachers and schools, as many teachers think that Encounter appears to be written for Adventists. This view is partly because some Biblical issues found in successive units need to have sufficient context in earlier units for the content of the later units to make sense. As one primary teacher found “When going back for non-SDA’s you really need time to unpack it, but they don’t get time to dwell on it.” We noted that this issue negatively affected more primary teachers than secondary, and yet a number of teachers from both teacher groups seemed to take it in their stride.

Thirdly, there was a desire in some schools for more content to address the plethora of current life issues confronting pre-adolescents and adolescents.

Fourthly, some teachers, particularly primary teachers, wanted to feel more ‘permission’ or latitude to add, subtract and change content, activities, assessment tasks and unit timeframes to suit their situation, experience and teaching style.

A fifth issue was that themes within and between some curriculum units and sections were seen by a significant minority of senior teachers as being somewhat fragmented, not suitably aligned with the flow of Scripture, or lacking critical detail that should reflect more of the actual ‘warts and all’ record of the Bible.

Finally, a number of primary teachers wanted to see still more Bible stories than Encounter had presented and felt that there could be more use of the Bible in classes. That state of affairs seems ironical, given Encounter’s strong affirmation of Scripture.

After recording these data and interviewing ASA curriculum developers and school leaders, it was noted that a number of “myths” about ASA expectations seem to have crept into the system and manifest themselves in teacher misconceptions. No matter how thorough the in-service schedules or communication processes have been, miscommunication still happens in systems.

Assessment

Question: How did teachers perceive assessment?

Assessment is part of the Encounter curriculum resource, but because of its importance, we have discussed it as a separate issue. After reading through Encounter units and interviewing a curriculum developer the researchers felt that Encounter units have provided a good range of useful assessment tasks and exemplars. Nevertheless, in their interviews, many teachers expressed a wish for

more guidance on how to assess.

The developers of Encounter did not want the curriculum to be primarily information or assessment driven. Instead, they looked for a paradigm shift to make student connection with God a key goal of the program. The data shows that this decision may have had some flow-on effect on teacher attitudes to assessment practice. There was, in fact, widespread division of opinion regarding how Encounter should be assessed.

There is much variation in systemic assessment practice. Some teachers do not assess at all, while others set assessment tasks that can take substantial class time. For the majority who want some form of assessment, there is debate about whether they should use comments, self-assessment, work folios, grades, all of these, or other methods besides.

There was also debate about whether there should be any assessment of the spiritual and faith domains. If the purpose of Encounter is to embark on a spiritual journey and encounter Jesus, teachers question where assessment fits. As both staff and students have often stated, “Can something so subjective be assessed?” This question provides the biggest and most divisive assessment issue for Encounter, so the researchers feel that further clarifying statements about the intent of assessment in the teacher materials would be beneficial.

The theory – Transformational Planning Framework

Question: How were teachers using the Transformational Planning Framework?

The Transformational Planning Framework (Cobbin, 2011) outlined the process of starting with a “Spiritual Growth Model” (Maxson, 2006) and developing it into an eight-part framework. The eight-stage learning model was designed to allow students to:

be emotionally engaged; see the big picture; respond with depth, rigour and creativity; be touched at heart level; personally reflect; intentionally worship; develop an authentic connection with God; be challenged by an obedient response; share meaningfully; and truly celebrate who God is. (p. 11).

In Australia there is wide variation in how well the framework has been applied in schools. Teacher data led us to estimate that less than twenty per cent of teachers attempt to faithfully follow the framework cycle in teaching, while less than ten per cent of them affirm its use strongly and apply it consistently. A typical affirmative statement from a primary teacher in this teacher minority was: “Love it, good. You have different thought processes, you can take it to

heart, can leave bits, kids love Kaizen.” Similarly, a secondary teacher thought: “The wheel is very helpful, focused, not too complex, great, particularly the bait part.”

Around fifty per cent of teachers say they appreciate and understand the framework reasonably well, and see it as having some use, often because it at least helps to give some shape to their teaching. Many of these teachers use selected elements to suit their purposes. A frequent kind of comment from this group was: “The framework has some sense. I definitely use it, but I pick and choose.”

About thirty per cent of teachers reported making no attempt to directly follow the framework while planning. As one primary teacher said: “The time-fit is hard so I don’t look at the framework.” A number of teacher groups also suggested specific ways to simplify the framework. For example, a minority think that it could be collapsed from eight to four parts.

Various issues such as time pressure, perceived complexity of the framework, teacher skill or personality, or the perception that heart and soul learning can be too “touchy-feely,” “emotional” or “girly” appeared to lessen the effective application of the framework. Hence the latter parts of the learning cycle often received less attention than the introductory parts.

After interviewing teachers, the researchers questioned whether the framework’s usage pattern reflected any shortcomings in the Encounter implementation process, model design, teacher inadequacy, all of the above, or something else.

The researchers felt that the number and arrangement of the elements of the framework collectively challenged a number of teachers. Not only does the framework attempt to encompass some complexity of cognitive learning, but also the additional demands of social-emotional learning and both spiritual and faith development. To the researchers it seemed that the amalgamation of the learning and faith development processes in one model was laudable on one hand, yet ambitious on the other.

To its credit, ASA did attempt to trial the model and set up a teacher feedback process. The researchers wonder if teachers think that in hindsight the system may have benefited from inviting more trialling, more staffing to assist the developers, a longer timeframe and more rigorous process of review involving more feedback loops, more “negative case analysis” (Quinn-Patton 2002) pursuit of systemic consensus, and teacher development than occurred. This discussion highlights the challenges any school system meets when attempting to implement a major curriculum initiative.

Clearly many teachers seem quite content to

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About thirty per cent of teachers reported making no attempt to directly follow the framework while planning.
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modify their use of the framework, to choose parts that suit them, or to use it mainly as a guide for good teaching practice. Further, in light of student feedback and our observations, many appear to be teaching quite well despite not following the framework closely. The authors believe that in future, some discussions during staff development sessions could centre on matters such as the benefits of theory for improving spiritual classroom practice, the limits of teaching models, and the qualities needed to make a learning model work well.

The teaching and learning process

Question: How well are teachers teaching?

The bottom line in any curriculum evaluation is that teachers want to know how well they are teaching. That is why the researchers wrote a short report for each school visited, reporting largely on how students perceived their teachers and the Encounter lessons. We can say that Encounter has resulted in the implementation of a good variety of teaching strategies and activities, more so in primary than secondary campuses. Among other methods, teachers have used stories, group work, discussions, video analysis, acting and skits, written stories and diaries, use of practical props, service activities, debates, Bible study skills, research, and art work. As one primary teacher reported: “Teaching strategies are great. A lot of lessons, group work, engaging. You really can’t do 3 units in a term.” Overall, it appeared to us that the pedagogical approach advocated in Encounter was supported by reference to credible literature and has helped facilitate systemic classroom practice that often ranges between good and very good.

Because the researchers did not see classroom lessons, they used student perceptions as an indirect indicator of teaching competence and adherence to the spirit of Encounter. Student responses indicated that they have generally enjoyed their Encounter classes. Primary student reports of this enjoyment on a 1-10 scale were high, and ratings generally ranged around 8 out of 10 or higher. Secondary group ratings were a little lower, but student estimates still averaged at least 7 out of 10 in terms of enjoyment. Naturally, more significant fluctuations in ratings depended on the teachers and classes involved. For example, in a few lively Year 8-10 groups, it was possible for some in the group to rate Bible at 2, 3, or 4 for enjoyment!

Besides students’ numerical ratings, their comments show that teachers using the Encounter resource are achieving a ‘power of good’ in schools. For example, Years 3-4 students said things

like “Really like it,” “Fun,” “Helps me learn how connected we are to Jesus.” Years 5-6 comments included “Absolutely helps me, helps me think about my purpose in life,” “It has changed my life,” and “Bible is a really good start to the day.” Two Years 7-8 comments were “In the last topic, the 10 Bridesmaids, it really really reassures me that He is coming back,” and “I enjoy Encounter mainly ‘cause in that class I get to express my identity.” And one Year 10 student reflected on Year 8, saying “In year 8 we learned how God led in our lives. Bible lifted the weight off my shoulders and put me at ease. It made me curious. Maybe this whole God thing is real. Maybe there is something bigger. I love the understanding of God.”

However, it became apparent that some teachers are attempting to teach Encounter in a predictable “traditional” way. A number of students complained about boring repetition of the same stories, repetition that was not iterative and deepening in meaning over successive years. Students also cited too much mindless note taking and written work, lack of variety in learning activities, the perception that Bible is a time to switch off, insufficient group and class discussion of issues impacting students, or limited opportunity to ask questions. Students especially wanted more hands-on activities, service-learning opportunities, inquiry-based approaches, discussion and group work.

This desire was heightened by the enrolment in schools of varying numbers of unchurched or Christians from diverse denominations, whose presence was distracting, and appeared to stress the instructional capacity of numerous teachers. Interestingly, the structure and philosophy of Encounter were intended to depart from the style of traditionalist teaching that some students complained about.

Another theme emerging from student interviews in five of the schools from Year 5-6 upwards was the desire for more engagement with learning, a process that included opportunities to ask questions and lead out in class, suggest content or help organize learning. Two comments from Year 8 students were: “We wouldn’t mind if we could take over the class one day and preach about something,” and “We rarely get to speak about what we think.”

Several groups of teachers agreed with this student perception and commented that they thought Encounter was not sufficiently student-centred, further it did not allow well enough for newer pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning. Though Encounter was designed to incorporate student inquiry, there was some thought emerging from teacher interviews that any future revisions of Encounter could still embrace

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a more constructivist learning style that better accommodates student research, inquiry, project-based learning, and other types of learning like STEM.

There is always a gap between curriculum intent and variable teacher ability. Student interviews provided a collage of perceptions of the ideal teacher. Students wanted teachers who can stimulate them by varying their teaching methods, and who are passionate, authentic, fun, friendly, emotionally warm, engaged, open-minded, enthusiastic, well informed, interested in student issues, and consultative. This sounds rather like a rather ambitious wish list. Teacher attitude, vision, spirituality, personality and ability, all substantially moderate the learning process. As one administrator declared: "It's the teacher, not the program." This comment was one among many of similar sentiment from all respondent groups. In the words of a secondary teacher: "The content resources are great, but if it lacks soul or heart that goes with it, it doesn't work. It needs passionate teachers."

Spirituality in classrooms

Question: How well does Encounter assist the development of faith and spirituality in classrooms?

There is evidence that the teaching of spirituality by using the Maxson (2006) model and other resources is working reasonably well in schools. Teacher consensus was that Encounter is a helpful resource for facilitating student encounters with God and other people, one that lends itself well to engaging students spiritually.

Numerous teacher accounts revealed how spirituality is made manifest in Encounter classrooms. For example, teachers felt connected to God while teaching Encounter. One primary teacher observed: "We teach it and it does change us", and a secondary teacher reflected: "It gives me a very connected feel to God, even when I teach it." Others found that applying the heart and soul elements of the learning framework cycle assisted spiritual learning. Still, others found spirituality particularly present in classes when teaching units such as the crucifixion story, when taking class worship, or using their class to run a chapel.

Some teachers saw spirituality most obviously present through prayer experiences in classes and worship, and particularly when teaching a unit on prayer. Others prayed over desks and rooms as evidence of their conviction of the power of prayer or spoke of praying for opportunities to promote spirituality in conversations with students.

A minority of teachers, mostly secondary, were rather cautious about reporting how Encounter develops student spirituality. They thought that although they saw spiritual engagement happening in Encounter classes, it was hard to tangibly identify it and develop it. One said, "the idea is good, but it's hard to do it." For these teachers, spirituality is something that they do not presume to perceive or develop easily. In general, despite some articulate teacher responses, some teachers could have demonstrated more awareness of how to foster student spiritual sensitivity and awareness. In summary, the human spiritual development field appears to be a fruitful element for ASA to work on going forward.

In their group interviews, students were asked to define spirituality, to explain how Encounter helps them think about their lives, and to reflect on how they know God is with them. They entered into discussion willingly, and in keeping with their year levels, responded with insight. For example, when asked what spirituality was, they offered responses like "Relate to God, Jesus" or "Connection with God and relation to Him." In summary, most students of all ages showed some fundamental awareness of what it means to be personally spiritual and experience God's presence.

Despite students' interesting and encouraging responses, we did note that about twenty-five per cent of them, particularly in lower grades, floundered in trying to say anything about what it meant to be spiritual. And students at all levels sometimes experienced some difficulty in explaining how Encounter was helping them think about their behaviour and life, an area that corresponds with the 'Gospel' and 'Lordship' elements of Maxson's model.

Writers of Encounter define spirituality as "movement of the entire life towards God." (Cobbin 2010, p. 72), a view congruent with Ofsted's (2004) perspective. However, as Adams et al. (2016) point out, schools will better nurture spirituality in their students if they have a clear understanding of these terms. Consequently, we think it would be worthwhile for teachers to at least explore the overlap and differences between the meaning of faith and spirituality.

Unlike the work of Fowler (1995), Westahoff III (1976) and Gillespie (1988), Maxson's model does not directly address students' developmental stages of faith or spirituality. However, it does encourage teachers to reflect on spiritual development as complex and multi-faceted, occurring in different ways for different people as they make sense of experience (Roehlkepartian et al., 2006). The reviewers wonder how much teachers have been aware of the developmental aspects of faith, and

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most students of all ages showed some fundamental awareness of what it means to be personally spiritual
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whether such awareness would impact their teaching.

Along with the many positives, there are spiritual issues for the Australian system to address. Examples include the negative influence of disruptive student minorities, and time pressure brought about by teachers attempting to cover too much material.

School spiritual ethos

Question: Is the spiritual impact of Encounter being carried into school ethos and life?

School administrators and teachers support Encounter and see it as being an essential element of the broader spiritual ethos of their schools. However, there is some variation in how well they perceive its integration into the spiritual life of schools. While it is operating in all schools, in many cases it tends to be siloed and not deliberately connected with broader school life.

Despite this siloing, many teachers could see Encounter's presence in school ethos. Typical expressions from this group were: "Yes it spills over into the school program," "Learning and applying Bible stories happens in the playground," "Bible integrates beautifully with English, art, drama," "Encounter is part of the whole, and the effect is greater than the sum of its parts." In schools where Encounter is perceived to be an essential and integrated core of the religious program, it takes on a more vibrant feel. Indeed, it is clear that when Encounter becomes a component of a more holistic spiritual framework, there is a higher degree of engagement by students.

In the last third of our data collecting activity, students were asked to rate the overall spirituality of their school. Their ratings were very positive, usually ranging between 8 and 10. In our discussions two points became clear. The first was that schools were deliberately creating good social-emotional warmth, acceptance and spirituality in their ethos. Secondly students were focused much more on the actual people and relationships in schools than on the spiritual or faith facets pursued in class lessons. While this perception can be seen as positive, when student minorities disrupted classroom lessons or avoided singing in chapels, these actions pulled the school's spiritual rating down in the estimation of Adventist students.

As part of school ethos, chaplains are not always involved with Encounter within SDA schools. Teachers often commented that their school could "dovetail better with chaplains." However, although chaplains' activities can be siloed from the teacher's role in some schools more than others, chaplains are still widely appreciated by staff and students.

Encounter is also perceived as more relevant when it is a core part of the chaplain's role. The authors contend that teachers think there could be more ongoing dialogue between themselves and chaplains in schools.

Administrator involvement with Encounter

Question: How well have administrators assisted the implementation of Encounter?

One of the objectives of this study was to ascertain administrator awareness of Encounter's efficacy in their school. While responses revealed a continuum of awareness, the researchers felt that administrators, in general, needed to engage more with this essential curriculum element. Typical responses were: "I know Encounter is here, but I don't know enough about it," "We could be more deliberate how we implement it," "There's been no review for a long time," or "It needs to be led and driven harder than it is." These responses showed some willingness to self-evaluate and realign personal impact.

In general, teachers appreciated their principals for providing strong spiritual leadership. In expressing their vision, these leaders frequently mentioned their motivation to make school values visible, and to reach out to churches, parents and community. Administration teams were also successfully creating a warm and spiritually nurturing social-emotional climate in their schools, which was tangible during data collection visits.

There were specific areas where principals could be more proactive in implementing Encounter. For example, three out of the ten secondary schools we visited had no Bible Head of Department. Some principals seemed unaware of the unequal distribution of resources. Others appeared to be unfamiliar with the silo effect of Encounter in the curriculum, or relatively unaware of the quality of the connection between teachers and chaplains. So far, there has been little monitoring or appraisal of teaching within schools, and little initiation of school-based professional development. ASA may consider providing more professional development for administrators to help them become more aware of how to orchestrate the interconnection of various elements of school spirituality and faith, including Encounter, into a coherent ethos.

Professional Development

Question: Have teachers been adequately supported in their need for professional development.

“*it tends to be siloed ... [un]connected with broader school life ... administrators ... needed to engage more with this essential curriculum element.*”

Initially formal professional development (PD) provided by ASA for teaching Encounter appeared to involve three components. Firstly, as a partner of ASA, Avondale University College helped to prepare both primary and secondary undergraduate teachers to teach Encounter. However, this move did not benefit all students equally. One teacher said “I did a unit at College, but it went well over my head. I can see the benefit now.” Secondly, some PD was offered at various Conference teacher meetings. Thirdly ASA consultants circulated around schools.

As the curriculum was rolled out, some teachers were involved in the unit writing cycle. These teachers rated the writing process as a very positive professional development experience, even though it was not planned to be direct PD. Some of these senior teachers are still in schools to help less experienced teachers.

Teacher interview data have pointed to several ‘gaps’ in the PD strategy. For example, a few teachers perceived that teacher professional development sessions sometimes covered only the Adventist philosophical perspective of education but not specifically tips for teaching Encounter. Several felt that these sessions were “perfunctory.” Other teachers missed some or all of these presentations and all training depending on when they joined the staff or whether they attended Avondale University College.

While some teachers could not recall any PD since about 2012, others appreciated the effort made by the ASA Encounter team to provide practical teacher PD. It was particularly noted that in the three years prior to 2019, ASA had lent their presenters to the USA to roll out the Encounter program in that country. This generous gesture has meant that in those years ASA PD virtually dried up in Australia.

Finally, it was encouraging to the review team that some teachers expressed a desire for more development in the social-emotional, relational, and spiritual aspects of teaching. One said “We need more PD on how to experience Christ, on how to be spiritual,” and another had the view that “Something more important is this relationship thing. We need some kind of training in relation building.”

Two aspects of PD in particular are worth noting for discussion. Firstly, it appears that schools could assume more responsibility for PD and share the burden more with ASA. Given the diversity of Adventist schools, an “action research” or other mode of on-site school professional development could be considered. Secondly, both ASA schools and system administration will need to weigh up how to divide resources between PD and curriculum development. As several teacher groups observed, ASA “money went into curriculum development and

not the equivalent into training.” Some administrators also weighed in on this issue, saying things like: “Teachers are not prepared enough. We have spent millions on curriculum but not teacher training.”

Where to next?

As previously indicated, Encounter has served Adventist schools well. Teachers generally think it is a valuable learning resource that has supported them well and done much to promote both good Bible teaching and learning in Adventist schools. As shown in the data, it has been mostly well received and supported by teachers and administrators. Hopefully teacher awareness and discussion of some of the issues identified in this paper will help strengthen Encounter as it moves into its second decade.

During our research the question continually arose as to whether Encounter should be reviewed or changed. Encounter’s longevity possibly spoke to its strong initial foundation, and that it had in fact outlived other contemporary curricula implementations. On the other hand, in the last decade there have been ‘seismic’ shifts in the Australian context that have made the review timely. There has been a major change in the student population of Adventist schools to include a higher percentage of other faiths, rapid developments in research relating to both learning and spirituality, and major social and technological changes in society.

Being mindful of these impacts prompting educational change, the reviewers found that while there were a large number of teachers who either made no comment, or who believed that Encounter was satisfactory or better as it stands, there were a corresponding number who believed that it needed to be revised and changed in light of current trends in both the Adventist system and the wider Australian education system. ASA administration’s immediate response to the evaluation signified that Encounter would be reviewed. **TEACH**

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“*Something more important is this relationship thing. We need some kind of training in relation building*”

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A Response to – A decade of Encounter

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This study—*A Decade of Encounter*—research commissioned by Adventist Schools Australia, offers valuable data worthy of reflection as we enter a new decade of Encounter’s implementation within Australia. The time and effort invested in the collection of these voices from the field is valued and appreciated. Recent engagement with the researchers has brought rich discussion and a commitment to make the Adventist Encounter curriculum even stronger as we embark on a revision of the curriculum in 2020. This dialogue will continue as time goes on.

Even prior to the release of this helpful data, ASA had been aware that training had not been as rigorous as it might have been and had begun to offer a far more comprehensive training schedule for schools in each Conference. By June 2020, all Adventist schools in Australia will have undertaken Level 1 training. Since the time of these research interviews, ASA has also invested in developing Encounter Coaches including representatives from each Conference, who can further support the local context.

Level 1 Encounter training has brought clarity to: the big-picture objective of Encounter; an understanding of the purpose and philosophy behind the Transformational Planning Framework as a foundational structure; the value of each phase within it; the reality of implementation flexibility; the online availability of units and non-kit resources; differentiation for mixed faith learning; core Adventist beliefs as a basis of units; an appreciation for the slower pace of units; increased Bible use in Version 2 units; the inclusion of a range of other pedagogical emphases in Version 2 units now available to teachers; the Scope and Sequence rationale, highlighting themes and flow; redemptive assessment practices; and strategies to mitigate a siloed curriculum focus. We believe the clarity achieved in the delineation of these details is reflected in the comments of lead teachers whose schools experienced the most recent round of training,

The day was inspirational and beneficial to all staff. Feedback from staff included a new enthusiasm for using Encounter, definitely a clearer understanding of how best to use the program and resources.¹

The training brought clarity to teachers as there were misconceptions regarding the pedagogy and implementation of the curriculum. The staff felt inspired and enabled to teach Encounter.²

It is gratifying to observe the researchers’ note that “In schools where Encounter is perceived to be an essential and integrated core of the religious program and spiritual ethos, it takes on a more vibrant feel ... and a deeper spiritual engagement by the whole school community.”³

Now, as we stand at the door of 2020 and commence a new decade of Encounter, we also welcome a re-invigorated opportunity to move forward together with even greater intentionality and purpose; with the preeminent goal of inviting our students to meaningfully encounter God. **TEACH**

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- ¹Reported by Joanne Andrews, Director of Teaching and Learning, Central Coast Adventist School.
- ²Primary Teaching and Learning Coordinators, Macquarie College, Newcastle.
- ³Encounter Bible Evaluation Report, Fitzsimmons, P., Hill, B. (2019) p 19.

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Editorial Note:

TEACH shares this response to—*A Decade of Encounter*—with the intention of supporting interaction between teachers as the classroom implementors of Encounter, their regional education directors and Encounter developers so as to further encourage engagement in developing learning concepts and strategies of implementation.

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Education for what? An essential question amidst the COVID-19 crisis from an American perspective

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Keywords: Christian education, crisis, formation, goals, mission, online learning, priorities, purpose

Education for what?

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown many schools around the country into turbulent waters. In a short period of time, many K – 12 Christian schools had to transition into the alternate universe known as virtual learning. Many educators have probably dabbled in virtual learning elements as a supplement to their normal pedagogical practice. Ironically, the challenges and questions with which many schools were immediately concerned were perpetually at the doors of many schools, not just Christian schools.

As a new secondary principal charged with leading a faculty into uncharted, virtual waters, I found it interesting that many of the most pressing concerns were the same concerns we had been discussing throughout the year. The challenges of online learning vary from challenges of face-to-face learning in degree, not in kind. For example, while we were wrestling with the best ways to keep learning virtually, we had already been investigating together what “learning” means. As we tried to solve the problem regarding virtual assessments, we had already been investigating the pitfalls of traditional, standard assessments while turning our attention to a variety of authentic assessments, such as a portfolio assessment of a student’s best work. We were concerned with how to engage our students at a distance as if we had already solved the problem with student engagement when we are face-to-face (I assure you, we have not). We are wading through other challenges as well, but the central point is this: the COVID-19 pandemic did not usher in new issues for educators to wrestle with; rather, the pandemic brought to the surface questions which educators must perpetually wrestle.

Of all the important questions demanding answers, there is one question that demands constant engagement. To what ends are we educating our students? This question is not only

central for primary and secondary Christian schools, but for Christian colleges and universities (Dockery, 2019). The question of mission is the most important question schools must answer (and keep answering). While schools wrestle with issues such as equitable access to technology, delivery of resources, changing family structures, possible economic hardship, instructional delivery platforms, and means of assessment, just to name a few, it is possible the mission of the school is pushed to the back burner. It is perilous to ignore a school’s *raison d’être* at the precise time such clarity and focus is paramount.

What works for what?

Yong Zhao (2020) recently wrote about the essential question’s that educators must answer as they make decisions about online learning. In his article “Beyond Does it Work,” Zhao asks the following guiding question “What works for what?” I was stopped in my tracks when I read that line. Zhao’s (2020) question raises the central issue which schools should wrestle through the long night of education, much like Jacob wrestled with God (Gen 32). Schools must know “for what” they exist. Only then are schools ready to answer the question, “what works?”

Donavan Graham, in his book *Teaching Redemptively* (2009), wrote, “Education is not an end in itself; it is a means to develop a response to our calling in life.” (p. 49) Education is a means of glorifying Christ (Col. 3:17) and the process by which disciples learn to think and live like Him. Taken holistically, a K-12 Christian education is about leading individuals out from their destructive, deluded, self-centeredness towards the life of wholeness, fellowship, and joy for which man was created. A Christian education seeks to remediate the fallen, sinful condition of man by pointing him to the source of joy and true, eternal life, Jesus. An education that seeks to bring salve to the whole person need not diminish the role of the intellectual life. However, the mission of Christian schools cannot simply be the accumulation of facts.

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There are numerous examples in Scripture and life where an accumulation of facts leads to death (see one context Mt. 23:15). Although worldly, temporary success can be gained by accumulating facts and academic degrees, it is perilous for Christians to forget that no knowledge is profitable if that knowledgeable person misses Christ. As Ecclesiastes teaches us, success without God in Christ is not success. Christian education, then, fulfills its mission when schools encourage students to pursue true success, or as the Old Testament puts it, shalom (peace) with God.

Mission statements for Christian schools likely vary widely from school to school. Answering the “for what” a school exists is a unique but essential task for every institution. In my opinion, one excellent mission statement for any Christian school is articulated by James K.A. Smith. He (2009) wrote, “education is not primarily a heady project concerned with information; rather, education is most fundamentally a matter of formation, a task of shaping and creating a certain kind of people” (p. 26). In the Christian tradition, education plays a seminal role in the holistic formation of disciples, not merely informing a mind. Education, therefore, is not merely about the accumulation of facts, but rather is about cultivating character and forming habits of the mind, body, and soul. The final *telos* (Gr: purpose, end, or goal) towards which Christian education strives is man’s reconciliation with God through Christ. Christian education also seeks to inculcate a life of godliness, wisdom, and simplicity displayed perfectly by Jesus Christ. A clearly defined mission enables more clear answers to pressing questions, whatever they may be.

How might a school with Smith’s (2009) mission statement answer pressing issues about online learning, assessment, and equitable access to resources? If a school exists to create a certain kind of person, then the tools they use and the structure for which the tools are used might look different than, say, a traditional “college-prep school” that pursues “rigorous academic preparation.” Knowing “for what” you exist is as essential for today’s schools as it was for the world’s greatest Teacher, Jesus.

Knowing “for what”

In Luke 4, Jesus had been ministering around the home of Simon’s mother-in-law. One morning, Jesus went to a solitary place while the crowds searched for him. Upon finding him, they implored Jesus to remain with them and continue his work. However, Jesus denied their request. How intriguing! There was good work left to accomplish, but the Son of God chose not to do it. Within this community there were undoubtedly questions people wanted to ask of

Jesus. There were probably personal maladies that could have benefitted from the Physician’s hand. Yet, the Teacher ended his lesson and moved on. Why? Why not capitalize on the interest of the people and stay a little longer? The answer is simple. Jesus knew “for what” he came. When pressed to stay, Jesus said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” (Lk. 4:43, NIV)

Jesus’ singular focus on his “for what” enabled him to make mission-oriented decisions despite the abundant opportunities to do good. Zhao’s (2020) article, likewise, mentions many ways schools might employ online learning tools, yet while cautioning the use of good tools for the sake of ease or simplicity. Doing online learning well, or any type of learning for that matter, demands a clearly articulated and communicated mission. The faculty and families of a school need to know the “for what” the school exists. The “for what” of a school will provide the necessary parameters with which to address pressing matters, such as a transition to virtual learning.

While the whole world is focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainties it catalyses, schools continue to educate their students as well as possible. The mission of a school should be the GPS by which the Educational Enterprise sails the storm-tossed sea of uncertainty. With a clear understanding of where a school is going, and “for what” it exists, a school is more effective in deciding which tools, programs, or personnel will work towards that end. As a fellow educator and administrator, I encourage you to keep returning to your mission statement when you are uncertain about the issues you face. Even when the options before us are all good, it is crucial we, like Jesus, are able to say no to good work because we are absolutely convinced what is best for us, namely, that we know “for what” purpose we exist. **TEACH**

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John Grant is a husband, father and Secondary Principal at Washington School. Grant holds a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies from Crichton College, a Master of Arts from Reformed Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Education from the University of Memphis, TN.

“
Even when
the options
before us are
all good, it is
crucial we,
like Jesus,
are able to
say no to
good work

”

Anzacs were secular but . . . soldiers steeped in biblically-informed worldview had passive belief in “diffusive Christianity”

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Keywords: Anzacs, belief, Christianity, cynicism, religious, secularity, spiritual

It's always tempting to see the past in terms of the present, to deny the past its difference. In Australia, perhaps that temptation has been hardest to resist when it comes to Anzac history. In popular imagination and representation, the Anzacs are routinely invested with the attitudes and beliefs of late 20th century and early 21st century Australia. We explain the motivations of people 100 years ago according to today's values and norms.

“
[the ordeal should] bring my lack of faith home to me and give me new light in that direction as I walk blindly and aimlessly now



Which brings us to my central focus: a cherished belief about the Anzacs is that they were secular. Yet my own reading of the diaries and letters of more than 1000 members of the Australian Imperial Force reveals more than one-third wrote about religious and spiritual matters and about a quarter demonstrated some level of religious commitment.

My new book, *The Anzacs, Religion and God*, addresses the question, what did spirituality and religion look like for individuals going through the war? It tracks the spiritual journey of 27 members of the Australian Imperial Force, as revealed in their own writings. But a simple faith-to-doubt spectrum doesn't adequately explain the religion of the Anzacs. We must add to it cynicism and secularity.

Tom “Rusty” Richards (pictured) is one of the more complex soldiers profiled in the book. Almost every aspect of his life involved great tensions of polar opposites, torn between lofty ideals and ambitious elitism. An Olympic gold medal-winning rugby union player for the Wallabies, and also the British Lions, Richards served as a stretcher-bearer and then an infantry officer in World War I, receiving the Military Cross for bravery. He hated the war and was angry at the fusion of nationalism and religion. He skipped compulsory church parades because “I detest listening to prayers for our own puny selves” and “for the defeat and overthrowing of the enemy.”

Richards wrote sarcastically, on the night before the landings at Anzac Cove in April 1915, about the soldiers' “stronger tendency for sacred music also of late, with mouth organ and concertina. Only a few minutes ago they were playing and singing ‘Nearer My God to Thee’ and ‘Lead Kindly Light.’ It's wonderful how religion gets them down when there is danger about.” But then he adds that the ordeal should “bring my lack of faith home to me and give me new light in that direction as I walk blindly and aimlessly now.”

Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

In France in 1916, Richards heard a good sermon from a Canadian padre, who “brought the meaning of his sermon and the Bible generally right into our own present-day life and dealt with it in a plain and up-to-date fashion.” If all preachers were like this, “What a difference it would make and how interesting church would be.” As the war progressed, he wrote less and less about religion.

Probably few Anzacs agonised as much as Richards did and applied such intelligent critiques to religion, the war and to his own soul. His brilliant but troubled life deserves to be remembered, not least for the fact that an Anzac could and did wrestle with profound spiritual issues on the personal and philosophical level. Eliminating discussion of spirituality from the national conversation only cheapens the experience of Anzacs like Richards.

Many Australians know of Arthur Stace, the reformed alcoholic who chalked the word “Eternity” in copperplate lettering on the pavements of Sydney. His inspiration for doing so came from the post-war preaching of another Anzac, John Ridley, who also received the Military Cross. Ridley shared his faith with as many as he could during the war and, after it ended, became a renowned evangelist.

While many men reflected on religion while away from the lines, few wrote about it under the stress of combat. Ridley is an exception. During the disastrous Battle of Fromelles in June 1916, Ridley recorded his thoughts and actions while forcing his way through German barbed wire. He felt far from gallant, writing, “Oh God, help me, Oh! Keep me.” Despite seeing the “many scared and frightened faces,” and feeling that his was possibly the same, he responded by shouting, “Trust God, boys.” To a badly wounded soldier on a stretcher, he “bent down to him. ‘Trust God, lad,’ I said. ‘Yes,’ he whispered. ‘He is with you all the time,’ I said. He nodded and stared hard and long at me.” Ridley survived a throat wound inflicted during the

battle and, after being commissioned, became an effective and popular officer.

Few soldiers were as God conscious as Ridley under fire, and few were as deliberate in their attempts to convert their fellow soldiers. What may surprise us is the respect that the soldiers showed Ridley.

Other soldiers were openly anti-religious, though fewer than we might expect. John Gray wrote in anguish, “I curse the bloody war and those who made it, curse the God that permits it and Christ who died for us as we die now, for what?” He couldn’t reconcile religion and God with the horrors he experienced in Palestine.

But more common than both the religious and the anti-religious were those who accepted a religious framework without having a strong personal commitment to it. Major Frank Weir classified himself as “not religious” yet engaged with religion frequently and spoke about biblical stories as being true. Religion formed part of his world but only occasionally moved him in its own right. To that end, he’s more the pattern than the exception, evidence that the secular person of 1914-18 was steeped in a biblically informed worldview of history and morality.

The Anzacs saw the world and the war through this lens, but couldn’t articulate much theology or even biblical knowledge. So, yes, the collective tone of the Australian Imperial Force was undeniably secular, but the term means something vastly different now. On an individual level, perhaps a better description is one of passive belief in what has been described as “diffusive Christianity.”

Author information

Daniel Reynaud is a professor of history with awarded interest in pedagogies - involving gaming, touring and online modalities; and research interests including the Anzacs’ religion, social history and representation in cinema.

“
I curse the bloody war and those who made it, curse the God that permits it and Christ who died for us as we die now, for what?
”

Dear First-Year Teacher

Holly Arnold

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There are so many things that I wish I could go back and tell myself during that first year as a new teacher. I had known since the age of eight that God was calling me to teach. It was what I imagined as a child and played with my friends, but my journey to the classroom was long and laborious.

Somewhere along the way, I lost sight of God calling me to the classroom and ended up with a college degree that I did not expect: a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish. As God does, though, He used my Spanish degree for His glory and led me to the world of TESOL through a graduate program that also offered initial teaching certification. While this extended my journey to the classroom, there is no doubt that TESOL education is where God had been leading me all along. Even though I took the scenic route to my calling, He foresaw my steps and opened each appropriate door along the way.

While in my graduate program, I was completing assignments to equip me in my future role as a teacher, and before I knew it, I was there in my classroom. I was standing in front of a sea of young faces who did not just see me as their teacher. I was also their counsellor, role model, mediator, cheerleader, voice of reason, nurse, surrogate parent on occasion, confidant, cultural liaison if they moved from a different country, and even their translator at times. As a teacher of linguistically and culturally diverse students, many times I served as the one-person welcoming committee to a new school, a new culture, and a new language.

If I could send a message to the first-year teacher I once was, this is what I would share with her:

Dear First-Year Me,

I know you are excited to finally have your own classroom. You are excited to pick out your classroom materials and arrange your students' desks. However, I also know that you are nervous from the expectations now resting upon your shoulders. You are slowly realizing that teaching encompasses more than just providing differentiated instruction, assessment, and data analysis. You are seeing that as teachers, we do not only teach content; we change lives. During one school year, you are only allotted nine

months with a child. It is during this time that you have the opportunity to speak life and positivity in their hearts and minds. Sometimes your smile may be the only one they see that day, and your words of affirmation may be the only ones they receive. Don't take a day with your students for granted.

In the midst of that first year, you will also struggle, and this profession will be difficult at times. Remember that this classroom and these students is where God has been leading you since you were a child. Each year, God handpicks every single student who enters your classroom, and you may need to repeat that to yourself on those difficult days that you will most assuredly encounter. If you begin to doubt yourself or your role as a teacher, remember that God has called you to this work, and He will equip you to fulfill your role. This calling on your heart has excited your soul since childhood; do not let the difficult days deter you. Yes, it will be hard. Yes, there will be times when you question if teaching was the right profession. During those times, though, cling to the One who will carry you through the doubts. You were made for this! **TEACH**

Author information:

Holly W. Arnold teaches undergraduate and graduate teacher education courses in the field of TESOL at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia, United States. Most recently she was selected by the U.S. State Department to work with the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine as an English Language Specialist. She served as the plenary speaker for TESOL-Ukraine and trained teacher-trainers from all over the country. Dr. Arnold has worked in teacher training and professional development in the public-school system, at the college level, nationally, and internationally. Her academic interests and publications address: teacher education, support, and preparedness in culturally responsive pedagogy for linguistically and culturally diverse students; the achievement and experiences of English learners in the online learning environment; and English learners in innovative delivery models and classrooms. Dr. Arnold resides in the mountains of Blairsville, Georgia, U.S.A. with her husband and two children.

“
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”

Crazy, grace-filled God moments

Annette Melgosa

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Today was a series of crazy, grace-filled "God moments" so profound in their combined healing effect that I had to put my feelings to pen.

Strange God,
This God of the poor,
The downtrodden,
The bereaved
Who is unabashedly jealous for our broken company
and broken love.

Who is this God of contrasts?
Almighty.
God of the Universe.
God of my broken heart.
Mighty, miracle-slinging God.
Yet, God of the bruised head, beaten back, bleeding
body.
God, broken for me.
God, facing down demons, yet dying in darkness.
And yes, God restoring.
God resurrecting.

Amazing,
crazy grace that held onto me for my dear life when I
lived self-aware, self-assured, self- possessed.
When the glass was abundantly full,
grace held on...in spite of me.

Crazy grace, waiting until I was so, so lost... Until I
could finally be found.
Irony this, to be blind in the light
And to see in the dark.
Crazy grace...as long as life shall last, and then
forever more.

In the darkest night of seemingly endless grieving
Where the soul lives in shadow,
In this land of God-forsakenness,
God shows up in the form of the Son on the cross.

He shows up to reveal Himself, God, forsaken by God.

As the Hero dies,
It seems the only thing left to Him
is the commending of his bruised and broken spirit to
a silent God.



Amazingly,
When the deed is done
Crazy grace shows up again.
And somehow, the storm has quieted
And we feel that the angels are about to sing. **TEACH**

Author information:

Annette Melgosa has a background in library science and educational technology, and serves as the Strategic Planning and Research Analyst in the Information Technology Services Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Her interests include technology, interior decorating, and elegant design, in general.

BOOK LAUNCH

Revealing Jesus in the Learning Environment: Experiences of Christian Educators

Peter W. Kilgour & Beverly J. Christian (Eds.). (2019). Avondale Academic Press, pp. 254
ISBN: 978-0648470410

Brenton Stacey

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A book compiled by two Avondale academics launched on Thursday 27, 2020 will encourage Christian educators in any learning environment to more naturally and creatively reveal Jesus to their students.

Revealing Jesus in the Learning Environment: Experiences of Christian Educators (Avondale Academic Press) is the first published by the Christian Education Research Centre at Avondale University College and the first editorial collaboration of Director, Associate Professor Peter Kilgour, and School of Education Head Beverly Christian.

When the two began their teaching careers in the 1970s, “there was an expectation that Christian educators had tacit knowledge of what it meant to be a Christian teacher,” they write in the foreword. But after working at all levels of Christian education, “we still encounter colleagues, educators and teacher education students who are not sure how to apply the integration of faith to the learning environment.”

The phrase, “integration of faith and learning,” is one Kilgour finds grating, though. “How is bringing Christianity into, say, maths—five loaves and two fishes, that sort of thing—helping any student come to know Jesus?” he asked during the launch in Avondale Libraries on the Lake Macquarie campus this past Thursday (February 20). “My job as a Christian teacher is to *reveal* Jesus.” The difference between “inserting Jesus into something and revealing Jesus in something is big,” added Christian. “And that’s what we wanted to explore in this book.” Kilgour used the words “dynamic,” “creative,” and “eclectic” to describe how teachers in learning environments ranging from the playing field to the science lab are meeting this common goal. “Every Christian teacher reveals Jesus in a different way,” he said.

Kilgour and Christian sought to reflect this diversity by calling for papers sharing research about and the personal experiences of teachers who foster in their students a “redeeming relationship with Jesus.” The result: a “bricolage” of chapters by authors from three higher education providers: Avondale, its Michigan, USA-based Seventh-day Adventist Church sister institution Andrews University, and the Australian Christian Churches’ Alphacrusis College.

The chapters are grouped in four sections: challenges, relationships, school climate and teaching practice. They cover a range of primary, secondary and tertiary learning environments, including mainstream and special needs. Topics include “mission drift,” trauma-informed educational practice, the relationship between school climate and faith engagement, and teaching Revelation with a Christo-centric approach.

Faculty of Education, Business and Science Dean Associate Professor Kevin Petrie is lead author of two chapters. Publishing “is as core to our mission as any other activity,” he writes. “This leaves us with a responsibility to not only ensure research aligns with our purpose and mission but to disseminate its findings effectively. The written word is a powerful means for accomplishing this.”

Dr David McClintock emphasises the potential practical impact of the book. As Director of Education for the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he encourages teachers in his schools to “read, learn and be enriched.” He also encourages Avondale to connect with the schools’ teaching and learning directors, who can share *Revealing Jesus in the Learning Environment* with those in their teams. Most teachers must complete at least 20 hours of professional development, he notes. “Reading this book would qualify for some of those hours.”

Addressing their readers, Kilgour and Christian hope the chapters “light a lamp in your hearts and inspire you to experiment with new ways of using your skills and imagination to reveal Jesus in the learning environment.” **TEACH**

Author information:

Brenton Stacey is the Public Relations Officer of Avondale University College. His interests also include gender, religion, and curating creative arts—he is co-convenor of Manifest, a movement exploring, encouraging and celebrating #faithfulcreativity.

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BOOK REVIEWS

MJR 24/7: A Book for Life

Ogle, M., & Thomson, G. (2019). Garratt.
ISBN: 9781925073874

Karyn Cameron

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In a world of shifting sands, young people are often left to navigate uncharted pathways in life with very little guidance, other than their peers and the media. Parents find themselves unsure of how best to help, overwhelmed with their own workloads, lack of certainty and change. Even those families who are working with great intention to speak and guide the lives of their children, often feel that the deafening voices of society are weakening their sphere of influence. As a result, society, families, and young people look to schools to support and, at times, fill the role of positive guides in this world.

I believe that Christian teachers, in both the public education sector and faith-based schools, have something of great value to share in this space. Jesus Christ, His teachings, His personal witness and His ongoing presence, has a timeless yet contemporary relevance to life in the 21st century. To reveal this to their students has the potential to offer enlightenment, hope and guidance within the often-confusing duplicity of paths, directions, intersections and dead ends that appear to present themselves to children, adolescents and young adults today.

The idea of making Jesus real and relevant to students lies deep within the souls of many Christian teachers. Within the public sector, they can be this light, hope and guide through embodying the principles and values of Jesus. Those teachers who have a school-based mandate to be more overt in their teaching, either through Scripture classes in Public Schools or throughout the curriculum in faith-based schools, have added opportunities to intentionally and prayerfully reveal Jesus to their students.

This task, however, can be onerous. The faces of students in each classroom represent a range of family, faith and cultural backgrounds. Each student is stepping into an uncertain world that tenders conflicting messages about self-

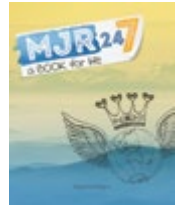
worth, moral norms, meaning and purpose. Teachers are also dealing with their own professional conflicts, navigating the educational realities of conflicting societal pushes and pulls, juggling mounting compliance tasks and an overcrowded curriculum, and the goal posts seem to keep changing. How can our schools, and specifically our teachers, meet such diverse needs amongst such relentless change?

Where can teachers find the time to develop resources that both engage students and support them in finding a unique sense of identity with value, meaning and purpose, resources that can be used with flexibility, that scaffold student personal development within a framework that supports students to sense their worth, flex their thinking, and comprehend the power of a values-rich life?

Make Jesus Real (*MJR*) 24/7 is a pastoral care resource that is purposed to fill such a need. The title indicates its purpose—to connect the realities of life with the relevance of Jesus. *MJR* is aimed at junior secondary school students. As a package it includes an engaging student journal and an e-guide for teachers. It has been developed to ‘re-engage students, via relevant issues, to think, reflect and then develop a relationship with themselves, their classmates, their teachers and maybe even Jesus’ (Ogle, 2019, p.5).

Author, Marty Ogle is a teacher with a wide range of teaching experience. He saw a need to present ‘Jesus’ to students in an engaging manner, not as an add-on to life, but as a living presence within the realities of student lives. Peter Mitchell (2016) wrote Make Jesus Real (*MJR*), a pastoral care and faith filled resource aimed at Upper Primary students. Marty coordinates the *MJR* resources and philosophy in Tasmania and throughout Australia (Ogle, 2016). *MJR* has filled a niche and its unique blend of authentic relevance, rich Christ-centred values, the potential for student and teacher dialogue, and the flexible range of uses, led to secondary teachers, students and parents asking for a continuation into the secondary space.

Co-author, Gemma Thomson is a Religious Education specialist with experience in secondary education. She has a ‘passion for pastoral care in Catholic schools’ (Ogle, 2019, p. 7). Her personal focus is ‘making Jesus real and relevant for the students’ (Ogle, 2019, p. 7), a sentiment with which Christian teachers in a wide range of faith-



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the potential to offer enlightenment, hope and guidance within the often-confusing duplicity of paths, directions, intersections and dead ends
”

Reflections, Impressions & Experiences



“
I believe that revealing Jesus through who I am, what I say, how I teach and the opportunities I give my students to question, reflect, discuss and ‘act’, should be at the core of all I do.”

based schools would resonate.

Both Marty and Gemma are passionate about developing students holistically, through ‘dialogue, reflection, prayer and social action’ (Ogle, 2019, p. 7). In Marty’s words, both authors feel that now is ‘an opportune time to connect the students and teachers to the teachings of Jesus’ (Ogle, 2019, p. 6).

The *MJR* student journal is attractively presented, including ‘lots of easy-to-remember acronyms (B.I.Y. – Believe In Yourself), quirky illustrations, wise words and insightful questions ...’ (Ogle, 2019, p. 8). Students journal their responses and reflections, ranging from single words and phrases to more extended reflective writing. The spiral bound journals are sturdy and move beyond a sense of being ‘consumable’ toward the potential for them to be regarded as ‘keep-sakes’, texts of value and on-going worth.

The theme ‘journey’ is conveyed through text, art and layout. Both the student journal and lesson plans for teachers give the impression that the teacher is there to accompany the students, not take control of their journey. Jesus is revealed as having a valued relevance within the uncharted territory of tomorrows.

MJR has 30 topics, each centred on a life reality pertinent to adolescents. Each topic highlights one particular value and some supporting virtues that can be lived out within this issue. The focus point of each topic is one particular life issue, with the values, virtues and ‘Jesus connection’ being established within that context. The teacher resource also highlights one specific connecting content descriptor from ACARA. Table 1 shows a sample of these focus points within the scope of topics.

As I poured through both the student journal and the e-learning guide for educators (<https://www.mjr247.com.au>), I could see many strengths for both teachers and students. I found the teacher guide to be masterfully designed. There is a clear, repeated template which gets to the focal point of each lesson with a minimum of dense text. A teacher could pick each lesson plan up, and within a few moments they would know the learning intention, the warm up and main activities, and any preparation required. Each section of the lesson plan has no more than two sentences to read, cutting to the main ideas succinctly, yet highlighting the deep messages and points of dialogue and reflection that would encourage students to question, reflect and

internalise within their own unique context. There are extension ideas that could move beyond the single lesson. There is a familiar rhythm to the lessons, with changing yet sequential activities that have the potential to provide evidence of personal growth to the teacher and, importantly, the students.

I believe that the rich simplicity within the lesson plans would allow busy teachers to put their time and effort into the space that will have the most impact, listening to and dialoguing with their students about things that matter.

How is Jesus revealed in each topic? His wisdom, experiences and teachings, as recorded in Scripture, are shared directly into life issues that are common to adolescents, yet unique in lived experience. And this, I believe, is a great strength of *MJR*.

This resource was initially created to fill a need within the Catholic education sector. As such, I expected that it may not be directly transferable to the wider Christian faith-based schools and systems. I did not find that to be the case. There are some quotes by Pope Francis, each relevant to the value being highlighted, and adding a positive perspective to the discussion. Possibly the biggest barrier to use within the wider range of Christian schools is the occasional use of Scriptural quotes from the book of Macabees, a book not recognised as part of the Scriptural Canon adopted within most protestant Christian faith systems.

To address these issues, *Crossroads: A GPS for life* (2020) has been released. *Crossroads* keeps the delightful strengths of *MJR247* with a light dusting of changes to better meet the needs of a wider audience across independent faith-based schools. Some phrasing, terminology, quotes and artworks have been adapted to widen the reach, giving more teachers the opportunity to engage this resource to support rich discussions, and reveal the relevance Jesus has to the life of adolescent students.

As a Christian educator, I believe that revealing Jesus through who I am, what I say, how I teach and the opportunities I give my students to question, reflect, discuss and ‘act’, should be at the core of all I do. As I poured through both of these teaching resources, I could see rich opportunities for dialogue, for listening, for responding and for journeying with students in lower secondary, through both scripture classes within the public sector and pastoral care

Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

opportunities within a wide range of Christian faith-based schools.

In fact, I found myself loathe to return the student journals. I would love the opportunity to personally use MJR and Crossroads with adolescents within my own scope of influence. I believe it would provide me with a great many opportunities for rich dialogue and relevant avenues to reveal Jesus whilst 'doing life' with young people.

I believe that MJR fulfils a need within Catholic education, offering valuable opportunities to demonstrate the relevance of Jesus in the complex world of teenagers. I am also excited to know that this Crossroads is now available to Christian educators and students in the wider realm of faith-based educational contexts. Both of these editions are rich with possibilities when put in the hands of passionate Christian teachers.

Neither MJR or Crossroads profess to be

Religious Education curriculums. They are quality examples of biblically-based, values-rich Christian resources that have the potential to enrich a pastoral care program in secondary schools. They are each a tool through which teachers can share the relevance of Jesus to student lives, providing rich opportunities to share the timeless wisdom of Jesus, a wisdom that speaks into, and transcends the shifting sands of society. [TEACH](#)

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- Editor Note: Online resources for Crossroads are available at <https://mjrcrossroads.com.au/>

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”



Design of Technology-enhanced Learning: Integrating Research and Practice

Matt Bower (2017)
Emerald, pp. 472.
ISBN-13: 978-1838679200

Homa Freeman

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The book *Design of Technology-enhanced Learning: Integrating Research and Practice* offers research-based evidence to formulate learning design. The deep and detail-oriented technology-enhanced learning research enables readers to formulate principles that can be applied in the learning design process. The focus of the book is around understanding the nature of technology-enhanced learning design, based on the idea that educators should be able to transfer their design knowledge to a rapidly changing technological context.

Focusing on the key drivers in integrating technology with learning, the book provides evidence in improving learning outcomes such as:

- facilitating personalized and collaborative learning as well as peer-to-peer support;
- facilitating higher-level problem solving and thinking skills;
- promoting engaged learning;
- providing simulations to support experimental learning;
- offering teachers platforms to analyse learning;
- and providing teachers with tools to assist students with special needs.

The book highlights the fact that current educators are teaching a generation who are very comfortable with technology, yet they may not be as 'tech-savvy' as their students. However, it reminds readers that educators have to focus on understanding the effective pedagogical strategies, rather than just technology itself. Therefore, by providing research findings associated with the use of technology, the book aims to enhance the readers' design thinking; and to indicate the pitfalls of using technology.

Chapter 2 and 3 (my favorite chapters)

formulate the underpinning pedagogical thinking. Chapter 2, from a theoretical perspective, scrutinises how different dimensions of technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) integrate together. From a pedagogical perspective, behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, social constructivism and connectivism are discussed in detail (chapter 3), while a brief explanation is provided on how technological tools can be applied to support each of these pedagogical approaches.

The book discusses the potential of learning technologies; however, educators must have a clear understanding of how technology may impact knowledge acquisition. To achieve this, educators need to have a design thinking that includes frequently reframing the problem, focusing on the solution and centering around the user, and both flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity. Factors such as establishing a clear pedagogical motivation and selecting technological tools based on Technology-Pedagogy-Content Knowledge (TPACK) are discussed as major principles in technology-enhanced learning design.

From a practical perspective, the author discusses the web 2.0 technologies (more focus on blogs and wikies) in detail and elaborates as to how these technologies enhance not only collaborative knowledge building, but also boost students' motivation and engagement, in addition to facilitating feedback and developing multimedia skills.

Considering the fact that pedagogy should be the driver and technology is just a mediating tool to distribute knowledge, the intention of the book is to place the reader in touch with the work of researchers and designers from across the world to learn from their shared insight and wisdom. In short, 'Design of technology-enhanced learning: integrating research and practice' articulates the science and art of learning design through a review of the literature.

This book would be on my recommended reading list for teachers and educators who are not only interested in using technological tools in their classrooms, but also eager to adopt evidence-based teaching. [TEACH](#)

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