EDITORIAL

Graeme Perry

Gabbie Stroud (2022) asks "Why are teachers leaving Australian schools?" She has vocalised the concerns of many teachers in offering an explanation. Stressors include a general baseline of stress due in part to 'destroying' work expectations—increased administration requirements (data entry), added house-keeping tasks (distributing RAT tests) and management of antisocial behaviour but also lack of trust, lack of respect for skills and a casualised work force (1 in 5 in the public system) who are 'jumping through hoops' to retain their jobs as uncritical 'system players'. But perhaps most telling are Theresa's (cited in Stroud, 2022) claims of a mental health crisis amongst children.

> **We're not dealing with the impact of the pandemic … Our students are lacking a sense of belonging, resilience, commitment and organisation on a grand scale. Rather than addressing this, we're told to get students 'back to normal'. But you know what? It wasn't so great before.** **(para. 22)**

Earlier observation of COVID impacts in the US advised addressing these needs in schools (Abramson, 2022) by recommending the funding of more psychologists in schools, consequently needing to train more psychologists, and Howell (cited in Abramson, 2022) asserts in the interim "we don't just want to bring in interventions that only we as experts can deliver … We need to make it sustainable by teaching those on the front lines how to equip kids with the skills they need to thrive" (para. 11). Offering teachers professional development to respond in more informed ways to trauma is advocated.

Kosmeier's interview in this issue of Mr J (p. 4) provides insight into pandemic impacts on students' experiences, some Australian school reactions and online resources that reflect local recognition of these needs. Shields (p. 6) discusses Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) from a Christian school's perspective, sharing proactive responses to a condition potentially more frequently occurring in a time of common trauma. Christian and Morton (p. 27) share children's perceptions of how a garden program helps make them better people.

Maddie (Stroud, 2022), in the process of leaving teaching for another career laments,

> I felt there would never be enough of myself to give in order to meet the needs of my students. I thought I was not enough, that I would never be enough, … I feel immense sadness walking away from teaching. Overwhelming grief. (para. 27)

How can teachers be optimally prepared for their career and retained? University programs need to flex to these new social contexts and future teacher supply shortages predicted. Morrison et al. (2022) warn against students being included as paid 'school teachers' before they meet professional standards. Is student preparation for wellbeing an important element of course programs? Avondale University suggests wellbeing is a rewarding focus as reported for 'The Lift Project' (Hinze and Morton, 2017) and a more recent ACE initiative (Beamish, 5th June, 2022, personal communication). Stacey (2022) reporting results of the 2021 Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Student Experience Survey, notes the survey ranks;

> Avondale as number one for satisfaction with quality of teaching practices and skills development. … it is the first time Avondale has been benchmarked with other universities. 'So, to achieve the highest overall student satisfaction ratings of any Australian university is a remarkable achievement,' says Provost and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Kerri-Lee Krause.
> (paras. 3, 5) TEACH

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we don't just want to bring in interventions that only we as experts can deliver ... We need to make it sustainable by teaching those on the front lines how to equip kids with the skills they need to thrive

[Photography: Glenys Perry]

Mr J and his 'Insta' account: Aaron builds big social media following to inspire other teachers

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Keywords: Pedagogical support, teaching podcasts, remote learning

Meet Aaron Johnston (BEd, 2008), who epitomises the bright future of teaching. In the lead up to World Teachers' Day in Australia this Friday (October 29, 2021), we asked @mr.j.learning.space (as he's known to his 18,400 followers on Instagram - 20.5K by early 2022) these questions.

Figure 1. *Aaron Johnston*

> *One of the positive impacts from COVID has been our realisation of students' flexibility and adaptability*

Why a teaching Insta account?
I wanted to connect with colleagues in other states and across the world for advice and inspiration. It's a great way to see inside the classrooms of other amazing educators and share what I do with others as well.

What has remote learning taught us about teaching?
It's opened the door into classrooms. We now have a much greater understanding of the role teachers play in supporting the needs of students so they can reach their potential.

You're Assistant Principal at your school, how have you found remote learning?
Difficult, but as we finished our final week of it, a student emailed to thank me for the effort and the feedback we provided. I can't tell you how much that meant to me, to have a student show such kindness and gratitude.

Any good resources you recommend?
The Teacher Takeaway podcast (n.d.). I host it with three other incredible educators and school leaders. I also love *The New Brew* (n.d.) and *The Art of Teaching* (n.d.). They're podcasts, too.

In your role are you finding persisting positive or negative impacts of COVID, being consequences of the adaptations made for learning?*
One of the positive impacts from COVID has been our realisation of students' flexibility and adaptability to change without warning. I was incredibly impressed by how easily our students adapted to learning from home and got on with what needed to be done; it was mind blowing to see. I think sometimes we don't give our students enough credit for what they are truly capable of doing without needing a lot of prompting and support beforehand. The gaps in learning that have been revealed, as a result of two years of interruptions to learning, is the biggest challenge for us as educators. We look to support students in trying to 'catch up' those bits that were missed usually because the style or learning and pedagogy required wasn't as easy to adapt during remote learning—in the way we do in the classroom as we immediately respond to the needs of our learners as we teach.

What are you implementing or suggesting for the students within your own classroom as a consequence?*
The additional funding provided to schools as a result of returning from COVID has been such

a great resource for us to create small support groups for students in literacy and numeracy to provide them ongoing, targeted intervention at their point of need every day of the week which was not something we were able to do previously.

What school wide initiatives are direct responses to long term COVID impacts?*

Acknowledging the ongoing impact of lockdowns and COVID has also led us to have a greater emphasis on mental health and wellbeing which we are addressing through the Smiling Mind program for schools. This is all about providing regular and ongoing opportunities for students to grow in their mindfulness and self-awareness by providing them tools to help regulate their emotions, including through the use of the Smiling Mind app in the classroom, which has been integrated into our PDHPE programs across K-6. Our staff have also had the opportunity to build their understanding and skills through professional learning around Trauma Informed Practices to again support us in how best to meet the emotional needs of our students.

Have you sourced specific materials to meet these needs on your 'insta' account?*

There's a wealth of resources available to educators in the 'instagram' teacher world with educators around the world sharing examples of practice and amazing resources to support student learning. I have created a range of free resources which teachers can access to support differentiation in literacy and numeracy to meet the needs of students, but there are also so many other incredible educators out there doing the same. One of the educators I follow online is 'Good Morning Ms Foster' (Foster, n.d.) who shares a wealth of knowledge about behaviour, emotional regulation, student support and building safe classroom spaces.

What do you love about teaching?

Making our future all it can be and having an impact beyond the classroom.

Finally, tell us about your Avondale experience?

Studying teaching at Avondale not only enabled me to develop knowledge and understanding of the curriculum but to also apply that in the classroom through practical experience. I felt at home. The smaller class sizes meant I had better access to my lecturers, who were always willing to help in any way they could.TEACH

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*Editor's Note:

Additional questions were addressed to Aaron in 2022 and his responses update information to address current contexts.

> *Our staff have also had the opportunity to build their understanding and skills through professional learning around Trauma Informed Practices*

TEACH[R]

Managing Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) from a Christian school's perspective

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Keywords: Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), criteria for diagnosis, behaviour management, evidence-based strategies, teacher stress, teacher well-being

Abstract

Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD), was at first, anecdotally, considered to be unacceptable behaviour by children who had been poorly managed. However, by 1980 a specific definition and description had been made. ODD is a serious juvenile mental health concern causing extreme distress to both parents and educators.

This paper has been written from a Christian perspective and describes the criteria for a diagnosis as well as its incidence. Research has been ongoing and a number of known links to the condition are detailed. The greater part of the paper focusses on effective, evidence-based strategies together with succinct summaries. These include teaming with parents, the school team, classroom structure and management, pedagogy and engagement, relating to the child and teacher well-being.

> *anecdotal thought suggested that ODD was simply bad behaviour displayed by a child who had not been well managed.*

Scenario

The year started well for Amy with her grade three class at Christian Community School. She quickly established the routines, consistency, interesting activities and an ethos of care and Christian faith. By the middle of Term 1, Amy was really enjoying her teaching and loving her students.

On Wednesday of week six the principal asked to speak with her after school. Amy wondered what he had to say as she felt things were going well. Initially she relaxed as she heard that a new student would be joining her class on Monday of the next week. However, she became somewhat uncomfortable as the principal explained that this student had special needs. What did that mean? "He has ODD", she heard. Amy vaguely remembered hearing about ODD in one of her classes during her teaching degree, and that it wasn't something pleasant.

Introduction

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) was first defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-III* in 1980. The DSM is published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and is recognised as an authoritative handbook for healthcare professionals in the United States as well as throughout the world.

At first, anecdotal thought suggested that ODD was simply bad behaviour displayed by a child who had not been well managed. While most children have times of difficult and challenging behaviour, ODD takes 'challenging' to a new level. "Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is a predominant and pervasive juvenile mental health concern" (Hankins, 2020, p. v); and Riley et al., (2016, p. 588) reported that: "Concern about ODD is among the most common reasons children are referred for mental health services". Unfortunately these children are also more likely to underachieve and drop out of school (Veenman et al., 2018).

Diagnosis and description

In 2013, the fifth and latest edition of the DSM (DSM-V) was published and listed criteria for diagnosing ODD. These criteria include both behavioural and emotional symptoms. There are three categories within the criteria:

1. Angry and irritable mood:
   - Often and easily loses temper
   - Is frequently touchy and easily annoyed by others
   - Is often angry and resentful
2. Argumentative and defiant behaviour:
   - Often argues with adults or people in authority
   - Often actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules
   - Often deliberately annoys or upsets people

- Often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehaviour
3. Vindictiveness:
    - Is often spiteful or vindictive
    - Has shown spiteful or vindictive behaviour at least twice in the past six months (APA, 2013)

As is the case with many disorders, ODD manifests itself across a range of severity. For some children it may be mild and only occur at home, or at school. If the behaviour occurs across two settings it is described as moderate, and in severe cases the behaviours can occur in three or more settings (APA, 2013). Moreover, ODD is often detected in a co-morbid combination with other disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), depression, anxiety and learning or communication difficulties (APA, 2013). In addition, the DSM-V (APA, 2013) states that for a child to be diagnosed with ODD he/she must display at least four of the behavioural criteria within the categories of angry/irritable mood, argumentative/defiant behaviour, or vindictiveness. Further, the symptoms must last for at least six months and educational, social and occupational areas have to be negatively affected to obtain the diagnosis (APA, 2013).

Incidence
Estimates of the number of children displaying ODD vary considerably and Boat and Wu (2015) noted variations between reports of ODD by parents and teachers. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) reports that approximately 16% of youth present with ODD (AACAP, 2009). APA (2013) estimates rates of between 1% and 11%. The US Library of Medicine estimates 20% of school children overall. While Lawrence et al., (2015, p. 26) note "around 5.1% of all children and adolescents had oppositional problem behaviours. This is equivalent to around 204,000 children and adolescents across Australia". Additionally, Nielson (2016) and Knarr-Colian (2021) report that the incidence of ODD is increasing.

Aetiology
While no single factor has been found to cause ODD, research has found multiple risk factors that may contribute towards the emergence of this condition: biological, psychological and social (Hankins, 2020; Riley et al., 2016, 586-587). Although every child, with parents who have mental illness or psychological and behavioural dysfunction, does not have ODD, nevertheless children with this genetic background do have higher rates of the condition (AACAP, 2009, p. 3).

Biological factors include a higher incidence of ODD in children living in poverty (Riley et al., 2016, p. 586), exposure to toxins, maternal smoking during pregnancy, and poor nutrition (AACAP, 2009, p. 3). Jones (2018) notes: "When a child with a difficult temperament lives in an unstable home, or with overly authoritarian or permissive parents, this can create a transactional parent–child cycle which leads to oppositional and defiant behaviours" (p. 13). For some children, traumatic experiences that they witness or experience, such as violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse or death, may trigger disturbed behaviours including ODD. Barrett (2020) noted that in Australia "The NSMHWB [National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2007] revealed that 41% of Australian adults (approximately 6.5 million) experienced at least one traumatic event before 17 years of age. The most common traumatic events reported were witnessing domestic violence and experiencing physical or sexual assault" (para. 7).

Studies in neurobiology (Knafo, Jaffee, Matthys, Vanderschuren, & Schutter, 2013) provide additional information: "impaired fear conditioning, reduced cortisol reactivity to stress, amygdala hyperactivity to negative stimuli, and altered serotonin and noradrenaline neurotransmission suggest low punishment sensitivity, which may compromise the ability of children and adolescents to make associations between inappropriate behaviours and forthcoming punishments" (p.193). While Cavanagh, Quinn, Duncan, Graham, and Balbuena (2017) posit that "ODD more likely captures a disorder of emotion regulation, rather than a disruptive behaviour disorder" (p. 381).

Given the wide variety of possible and probable causes of ODD, it is essential that classroom teachers, who work with these children every day, are able to access and utilise a range of effective, research-based strategies.

Many teachers reading the first part of this paper might subsequently try to avoid having a child with ODD in their class, at all costs. Indeed, researchers have noted the link between challenging student behaviour and the departure of teachers from the classroom (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). However, research has also shown that with planned and carefully executed strategies, by parents and teachers, many of these children are able to move beyond the typical ODD behaviours. Additionally, AACAP (2009) provides encouraging information: "For many children, Oppositional Defiant Disorder does improve over time. Follow up studies have shown that the signs and symptoms of ODD resolve within 3 years in approximately 67% of children diagnosed with the disorder" (p. 2).

> *ODD is often detected in a co-morbid combination with other disorders such as … ADHD, depression, anxiety and learning or communication difficulties*

Despite many non-educators assuming that rules and compliance are the solution to classroom challenges, Lane et al., (2018) wisely note: "However, education professionals know the best teachers understand, and leverage, the complicated interplay of effective instructional practice, good curriculum planning, and proactive classroom management techniques to establish a welcoming, productive, and harmonious learning environment" (p. 160). These effective professional practices are the foundational building blocks for success for children with ODD.

Most importantly, these children, as much as any others, are entitled to the best educational provisions educators can give them led by caring, competent and prayerful Christian teachers. The following sections provide information about effective, evidence-based strategies for teachers to use when working with children who have ODD. The perspective is from within a Christian school setting.

Effective strategies
Parent programs
Parent training programs are considered to be effective and important strategies in managing ODD, with a focus on effective disciplinary practices and positive reinforcement (Hankins, 2020; AACAP, 2009). Khaddouma, Gordon and Bolden (2015) note that parent-training programs are frequently used for families of children with ODD and that they are effective. However, they observe that when used alone, this option focusses mainly on the parent and does not address the neurological difficulties within the child. Danforth (2016) points out that for many parents who lack behaviour management skills "Prevention and management of clinically significant defiant and disruptive behaviour across time and settings is difficult" (p. 64). Nevertheless, Danforth also notes that programs that offer training, with support, role play and feedback can be very effective. Hankins (2020) suggests that if school districts offered these types of training programs the communication, coordination and support between home and school would be greatly enhanced, resulting in a greater chance of success. In addition, the relationship between parents, the school and their child's teacher needs to be strong, collaborative and consistent (Knarr-Colian, 2021). This means that teachers may have to remember that the parents are likely to be struggling with managing the child's behaviour, and may be grieving, angry, blaming or even disengaged. This is an opportunity for the Christian teacher to display the values of kindness, patience and tolerance that Jesus espoused. Not that this will necessarily be

> " *parents are likely to be struggling with managing the child's behaviour, and may be grieving, angry, blaming or even disengaged* "

easy; however, earnest prayer, for the child and the family, is an effective strategy that many teachers have found to be invaluable.

Strategy Summary 1: Establish a strong, positive contact with parents and develop a training program with ongoing support, role-play and feedback. Pray for these parents.

School-based strategies
Researchers emphasise that success in addressing ODD is more effective when based on a holistic, foundational approach (AACAP, 2009; Hankins, 2020). That is to say, not only is there no single, effective method for managing ODD, but a combination of relevant approaches for a particular child is likely to have greater success. Medication is not recommended for managing ODD, except in cases with severe aggression (Hankins, 2020; Riley et al., 2018; Veenman et al., 2016).

Whole-school approach
An essential, foundational practice is that of a whole-school policy, whereby school administrators plan, model, support and positively articulate strategies, processes and expectations of all staff and students in regard to students with challenging behaviour. Research in 860 schools by Pinkelman et al. (2015) found that "the most commonly cited enablers were staff buy-in, school administrator support and consistency" (p. 171). While Drake-Young (2021) found that "Positive attitudes towards implementing School Wide Positive Behavioural Support (SWPBS) programs were influenced by team training and support, peer mentoring, individual professional development and in-school workshops" (p. 39). Boujut et al. (2016) add: "In fact, a high level of social support from superiors and work colleagues is associated with a lower level of burnout, less depression and increased professional satisfaction" (p. 2876). Cooper (2011) points out that rather than the teacher alone, struggling to manage behaviour, the involvement of the whole school (students, staff, administration and parents) is more likely to produce success. Clearly, this approach is extremely important in achieving consistency of management for the child; while leadership by the school's administration provides the essential cohesion, motivation and encouragement for the school team. However, the whole-school approach will only be successful if the leader of the school team, the principal, influences a culture of support and consistency. This is not easy. Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, (2017) comment: "Principals have the responsibility of leading inclusive schools,

a complex work that requires a substantial knowledge base and an understanding of diverse learners and the systems that support their learning and long-term" (p. 6).

> **Strategy summary 2: Implement School Wide Positive Behavioural Support (SWPBS) with team training, administrative support and peer mentoring. Pray for each other. Articulate and work to develop a strong, positive 'team' culture.**

Classroom essentials:

Basic techniques of effective behaviour management are vital in supporting these children and include: "establishing a structured classroom environment" (Moore et al., 2017, p. 222). A structured classroom environment is about the teacher's approach being proactive and consistent, rather than reactive, as illustrated in Table 1.

In Table 1, Mitchell, Hirn and Lewis (2017) list eight specific, evidence-based strategies that are the essential basis for effective classroom management, particularly where there are children with ODD. Although these strategies are logical and appropriate, Mitchell et al., (2017) comment that many teachers struggle to use these strategies effectively. Their research using a collegial coaching approach with performance feedback, has been shown to provide valuable professional development for teachers in achieving these strategies, with improved behavioural and academic outcomes for students. Zoromski et al. (2020) researched middle school disruptive behaviour and found: "overall, teachers demonstrated low rates of appropriate responses to disruptive behavior" (p. 199). Thus, it is clear that although there is an expectation that qualified teachers will be able to successfully manage challenging behaviour, this is not always so, and targeted training and intervention is needed.

In addition, teachers need to be aware of and sensitive to, the ecological aspects of providing support to students such as the student's emotional state, illness, fatigue or even hunger (Klopfer et al., 2019). Ecological approaches also include teacher

> **Strategy Summary 3: Provide individual professional development and in-school workshops on structured classroom strategies as in Table 1. Print these out for each teacher and have teachers practise and monitor their own and each other's behaviour, providing constructive feedback. Schedule specific times for this to happen.**

Table 1:	Effective, evidence-based strategies in a structured classroom (adapted from Mitchell, Hirn & Lewis (2017, p. 143).
1. Physical layout	The classroom is orderly, clean, tidy and attractive, organised for typical activities and is safe for movement.
2. Expectations	The teacher explains how the students are to behave and teaches them how to do this.
3. Routines	The teacher describes and teaches the routines in the classroom, such as entry, exit, moving for activities, group and individual work.
4. Behaviour specific praise	The teacher specifically identifies and praises particular, desired behaviour.
5. Active supervision	The teacher walks around the room, monitoring, scanning and interacting with students.
6. Opportunities to respond	The teacher frequently requests student responses in various ways (written, oral, group, individual).
7. Reminders about behaviour	The teacher reminds students what is expected before the action required. Prepare the children (child) for transitions.
8. Consistent responding	The teacher follows classroom expectations and routines, and corrects and re-teaches as needed.

awareness of and sensitivity toward biological and psycho-social issues including adverse behavioural reactions to certain foods or drinks.

Relating to the child with ODD

As noted earlier, serious behavioural difficulties, such as ODD, can be triggered by a traumatic event and Brunzell et al. (2015) propose that the classroom can be a place of healing for children affected by trauma. While these authors maintain that therapy conducted by qualified professionals is the best approach, they recognise that many families may not be able to access or participate effectively in programs. Therefore, as school may be the most predictable routine for these children, teachers are well placed to provide support and act as "*front-line trauma healers*" (Brunzell et al., p. 4). Brunzell et al. (2015) go on to point out that the relationship developed between the teacher and the student may be the key element that effects the needed change for that child. The ability to coordinate cognition, self-regulation and behaviour

> " *teachers need to be aware of and sensitive to, the ecological aspects of providing support to students such as the student's emotional state, illness, fatigue or even hunger* "

is critical for all children, and especially for those affected by trauma and for whom this process is thus damaged. The teacher's role in developing this link is essential. In fact, Drake-Young (2021, p. 36) describes this relationship, and in particular the teacher's interpersonal skills as the 'lynchpin' in the process of successfully working with children with ODD.

The communication between the teacher and student with challenging behaviour is frequently in the context of reprimands or redirection, thus the interpersonal style of the teacher together with an essential balance of positive comments is crucial. The teacher's facial expression and tone of voice give various messages. Jones (2018) notes: "Three distinct tones of voice are suggested: a neutral tone for giving instructions, an upbeat and cheerful tone for praise and encouragement, and a firm, steady tone for reprimands" (p. 13) and "Yelling, sarcasm, and frustration all serve only to escalate a situation and incite a student with ODD to rebel further against authority" (p. 14).

Above all, students in a Christian setting need to know that they are of value and that God loves them. Students with ODD may have been told the opposite for most of their lives, but teachers can share this vital message throughout the day, explicitly or implicitly.

Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA) is an essential tool in the management of children with challenging behaviour (Albert, 2020). Put simply, FBA attempts to 'look behind' the child's behaviour for a cause. Involving teacher, parents and special needs personnel, and even the child, working as a team, the goal is to find the cause of the inappropriate behaviour as well as the triggers, and then develop a plan to deal with it.

A normal, human reaction to being challenged in the classroom is to defend oneself and possibly, fight back. However, this behaviour will frequently escalate the situation. For Christian teachers, the guidelines are found in Galatians 5:22-23: *"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."* And again, in Proverbs 15:1: *"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."* A teacher who reflects love, joy and goodness in the classroom, coupled with perseverance is best placed to achieve success with challenging students. How is this attitude and behaviour achieved when the child constantly challenges and defies the teacher? The ability to display the crucial care and persistence comes through frequent prayer for the child and the family, together with support from peers and administration.

> *The interpersonal style of the teacher with an essential balance of positive comments is crucial*

Strategy Summary 4: Teachers must know and understand their students, their backgrounds; and take time to develop meaningful, caring individual communication with them. Take a genuine interest in the challenging child and pray for them – persevere! Let them know that God loves them.

Pedagogy and engagement

Drake-Young (2021) asserts, "Structure and predictability are essential strategies for most students, especially those with ODD. Strategies must be fun, stimulating, on the students' ability level and relevant" (p. 41). First, ensure that the student is actually capable of the work he/she is required to do; it is very likely that learning has been interrupted many times in the past due to disruptive behaviour, leaving many knowledge gaps. Therefore assessment, even informally, must ensure the work is at a suitable level for the child and additional support is provided as needed.

Taking the time to know the child and reflect on the child's needs and interests, then researching appropriate, engaging activities will help in avoiding situations that are likely to trigger non-compliance. Regardless of how you are feeling on a particular day, endeavour to walk into the classroom with a positive greeting and a pleasant facial expression. Have an appealing activity ready to start immediately and follow this up with praise and incentives (Floress et al., 2017). Frohnapfel (2020) comments on the reality of the use of praise in the classroom:

> Research shows that the use of praise at a 5:1 ratio is ideal for all students; however, the typical ratio is 45 negative statements to every three positives, and that number is even higher for students with E/BD (Knoster, 2014). That ratio inadvertently tells students that we pay more attention to the behaviors that we do not want to see instead of those that we do. (p. 88)

"The way that teachers and peers treat and respond to these students can either mitigate or exacerbate their challenges in establishing and maintaining positive social relationships and adjusting adaptively to the school context" (Bierman & Sanders, 2021, p. 16). It cannot be emphasised too much, that the teacher's attitude, demonstration of care and regard for the student is pivotal in changing aggression and hostility to acceptable behaviour.

Brain breaks

Brain breaks are an essential pause during the day,

to allow relaxation, fun and creativity and to break the tension as needed. These can be a physical fun activity. A pictorial timetable is also useful to reduce stress for some students.

Technology
Multi-media activities are a valuable tool for engaging challenging students and providing effective learning opportunities. Drake-Young (2021) has confirmed: "Student preference for use of technology, as evidenced by enthusiasm and concentration as compared with paper and pencil activities" (p. 42). Various applications are continually being developed to help teachers in the classroom as noted by Saegar (2017):

> ClassDojo is an online application that can be accessed through a computer, tablet, or SmartPhone. It launched in August 2011 and now is in two out of three public schools in the United States of America (ClassDojo Fast Facts, 2016). Class Dojo digitally tracks each student's behaviour through the addition and subtraction of points that fall in specific categories that can be designed by the teacher and/or children.
>
> (p. 2)

Teachers can also use technology, within regular teaching, such as providing recorded reading (to use with headphones) and recorded voice to add punctuation among many other applications. Try using Kahoot to quickly and enjoyably revise previous work, to introduce a new lesson.

Individualised programs
Students with ODD require a planned program, that is, an individualised education program/plan (IEP). The IEP, a legal document, developed by the teacher, specialist teachers, parents and the student (if old enough) describes explicitly what the student is to learn and how this will be taught. The IEP ensures accountability and provides evidence, upon which further planning can be based.

Social skills
The ability for a student to be able to interact appropriately with peers is an important skill that links to personal well-being as well as academic achievement. However, for students with ODD this is invariably lacking, and many do not have friends (Biggers, 2020).

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT)
CBT teaches the use of a "systematic problem-solving process to slow students down and to brainstorm ways to respond to interpersonal and academic situations successfully" (Tucker, 2015, p 50) A child learns to better solve problems and

> **Strategy Summary 5: Teachers must ensure that the learning activities are relevant and interesting (get feedback), using a variety of technology and rewards. Students with special needs must have a collaboratively developed IEP. School administrators must ensure that support and time are allowed for IEP meetings.**

communicate and they also learn how to control impulses and anger. Helander (2021) found that parent management training together with Cognitive Behavioural training was the most effective in developing self control.

A useful strategy that assists students in developing self control is the use of a daily diary. Each day the student together with the teacher sets a behaviour goal, or goals, and keeps a written record of progress. An electronic or paper form can be used and rewards that are attractive to the student can be added for additional motivation (Riden, 2018)

Social skills training
Many children with ODD lack the ability to problem solve in social situations without reverting to aggression (Biggers, 2020), therefore actual social skills training can be useful. An effective strategy is to organise a 'social club', meeting each week during lunchtime or school time, for thirty minutes or so. This activity can be presented as a 'privilege' with lunch and using role-play to teach and repeat appropriate responses to challenging situations.

> **Strategy Summary 6: An assertive approach, through conversations, modelling and activities is essential in developing important social skills in all students, especially those with ODD.**

Teacher well-being
For many, teaching is a stressful occupation (Mansfield et al., 2016). This stress is exacerbated when management of students with ODD is part of the daily process. Therefore, it is essential that teacher-wellbeing is accommodated through professional development, individual support and a strong sense of team resilience and encouragement.

An authentic Christian approach by a genuinely interested, caring teacher can be quite ground-breaking for these students, it can also be extremely helpful for the teachers themselves. Garcia-Klemas (2019) researched various stress reducers such

An effective strategy is to organise a 'social club', meeting each week … for thirty minutes or so. This activity can be presented as a 'privilege'

as prayer, self-control and positive self-talk. The teaching group delegated to the prayer approach rather than encouraging self-talk, displayed a significant reduction in blood pressure and stress.

Finally, accept that you are only human, and you will have difficult days. However, remember the wise advice found in Micah 6:8: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." So, as you encounter students with difficult, challenging behaviour each day, determine to be fair, to be kind and to walk with God through prayer, meditation; reading His Word and 'listening' to the Holy Spirit.

TEACH

> **Strategy Summary 7: Teachers need to support each other by taking time to pro-actively pray together, on a regular basis and for particular children and families.**

> " The teaching group delegated to the prayer approach rather than encouraging self-talk, displayed a significant reduction in blood pressure and stress. "

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Author information

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Wellbeing NOTEBOOK

Implementing wellbeing

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Keywords: Creativity, exploration, virtual locker, wellbeing, belonging

Introduction

Early in the naughties (90s) we asked the question "How do our clients see us?" the answer was clear - as a school that prioritised care and nurture.

That gave us an opportunity to buy into that intentionally or try to change that. We decided to buy into that deeply.

Wellbeing has been an intentional focus for us since 2005. The wellbeing program is guided by our wellbeing team, all allocated timetable time to implement and manage the initiatives at CCAS.

Over the years we have developed multiple wellbeing programs that span from Kindy right through to Gap year programs post year 12.

Wellbeing framework:
CCAS recently adopted the NEST framework for wellbeing, developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, to specifically measure elements of student wellbeing and coordinate the numerous programs offered at CCAS. It also helps us to be intentional when evaluating the success of our Wellbeing efforts.

Wellbeing at CCAS is seen as involving the following key elements as essential considerations:

- **Valued, loved & safe**
  Involves a child or young person feeling valued by teachers and other adults in their life and knowing that they are important to others. It also encompasses feeling safe at home, in the community and online.
- **Material basics**
  Children and young people who have material basics have the things they need. They live in suitable, secure, stable housing, with appropriate clothing, nutritious food, clean water and clean air.
- **Healthy**
  Healthy children and young people have their physical, mental, and emotional health needs met. They receive appropriate preventative measures to address potential or emerging physical, emotional and mental health concerns.
- **Learning**
  Individual learning needs are addressed to allow children to realise their full learning potential. They have opportunities to participate in a breadth of experiences where their learning is valued and supported by their family and in the wider community.
- **Participation, inclusion & belonging**
  Participation and inclusion encourages young people to use their skills and strengths to meet challenges together. Working with others to achieve a shared vision contributes to our sense of belonging.
- **Meaning, identity & culture**
  Meaning identity & culture can be derived from belonging to and serving something bigger than the self. At CCAS we believe ultimate meaning is found in God. A safe and supportive culture helps us explore life's big questions and develop our own personal identity and belief system.

Ei Pulse is a wellbeing survey provided by an external company that gives us an anonymous general wellbeing perception of the cohort and also gives a portal for students to reach out for help and send others gratitude each week. Pulse uses the NEST framework, which enables us to gather real time data on student wellbeing. We pay for this as an add-on to own data, as a way of being clearly data informed in wellbeing decision making .

Covid taught us some lessons

We learned pretty quickly during lock down that there are two types of students. Those who can work on their own and those that really find that difficult. Most of the "passive dissengagers" rose

> *Ei Pulse is a wellbeing survey … that gives us an anonymous general wellbeing perception of the cohort and also gives a portal for students to reach out for help and send others gratitude each week.*

in anxiety levels as their connections and sense of belonging reduced. As a wellbeing team we intentionally created opportunities to connect on zoom and also to connect individually. We found opportunities to send home care packages that reminded students they were cared for and belonged to a community. This is just one example of how you need to remain cognisant of current student wellbeing. So having some kind of data informed mode of operation is great, and for this we use Ei Pulse.

Wellbeing leader roles

CCAS has grown as a school, and now has more intention within wellbeing roles across each stage level. These leaders work closely with teachers, parents, students, counsellors to provide a holistic support network to best cater to the students' needs. That wellbeing team, across all stages, meet regularly and collaborate on strategies for continuous growth in the area of wellbeing.

Additional programs

CCAS also outsource and use various specialists and professionals to address and educate our students in areas such as:

- Safe technology use
- Drugs, alcohol and safe practices
- Social awareness and mental health
- Communication skills
- Study and organisation skills
- Money skills

Other focus areas include:

- Student- teacher relationship
- Student voice (Wellbeing Wednesday's EiPulse)
- Staff wellbeing (Ei Pulse as well)
- Student Representative Council

Wellbeing classes

Here at CCAS we offer specific wellbeing classes from kindergarten to year 8. This has been developing and growing for quite some time.

Students regularly participate in activities that support their mental health and wellbeing with the aim of building their 'toolbox' of ideas to self soothe and cope with situations or emotions that challenge their wellbeing in everyday life. Our wellbeing framework helps to identify areas of growth and supports awareness of effect.

As students move through to stages 5 and 6, they engage in wellbeing programs such as

i-Link in year 10 and SDL in 11 & 12 (Spiritual development and leadership).

i-Link is a program that is attached to the Bible program in stage 5. It encourages students to be involved in caring for others and the community at large, both inside and outside of the classroom. Requirements include 40 hrs of community service, through individually chosen activities or organised programs like Storm Co.

SDL is our stage 6 wellbeing program that focuses on 'rite of passage' and 'legacy'. For year 11 the staff realised a lack in student development at school, was supporting 'the official' transitioning from childhood to adulthood and our "Rite of Passage" is aimed at inviting each student into taking on the responsibility of being an adult..

Year 12 draws all the prior learning and experience together. Our year 12's implement community wellbeing programs that are aimed at increasing student connectedness and a sense of belonging across all the years. This is the student legacy on which each year builds upon the strengths of the previous years iniatives .

Our Student Leadership program is also build on the same legacy of belonging. Students are taught to find ways of implementing the servant leadership model, by serving others and facilitating opportunities to discover "your place" at CCAS and the community of the Central Coast.

The final part of our program is the MAD trip (Make a Difference). This trip is after school is finished and like many of our other schools in Australia, heads overseas to demonstrate to the international community that same sense of belonging, through service to a sister school in Vanuatu.

Finally

While there are people with the title of "wellbeing" in their role, we recognise that the true care of our students happens via all of our individual employees, from cleaners and maintenance workers to teachers and administrators. It is the sense that belonging only happens when it is felt from multiple areas, within multiple settings and from multiple people. With sthe upport of peers, significant adults and systems, students grow towards the desired sense of belonging.

It was when we sat down and mapped what we do as a school, accepted why the community was coming 'through our doors' and intentionally worked towards that 'caring' goal, we fully understood our role on the Central Coast.

Most of the "passive dissen- gagers" rose in anxiety levels as their connections and sense of belonging reduced.

Where to go for a Christian research degree? Part 2 of a two-part report

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> *What were the differences between the way current and graduate candidates … males and females reported on their postgraduate learning experiences*

Abstract

Avondale University is committed to providing quality higher research degrees. Data on candidate and graduate experiences from the institution and across the sector are central in shaping good practice and informing policy, processes and systems designed to support candidate and supervisor research training (TEQSA, 2018) and employment opportunities (Bentley & Meek, 2018).

This paper reports on research conducted at our institution which focused on the following two questions: What were the differences between the way current candidates and graduates reported on their postgraduate learning experiences in the MPhil or PhD degrees at Avondale? And, what were the differences between the way males and females reported on their postgraduate learning experiences in the MPhil or PhD degrees at Avondale?

In this mixed methods research project questionnaires and interviews were used to determine what is valued by current and past HDR candidates of Avondale and which areas of our HDR programs need further development. This is the second of two papers that report the findings of this project and identifies future
research which may further support HDR candidates' holistic experiences.

Introduction

In the previous article in this series, *Where to go for a Christian research degree: Part 1 of a two-part report*, the aspects of Avondale's higher degree research (HDR) program that were valued by current and past MPhil and PhD candidates were outlined and this information was used to identify the areas of our HDR program that require further development. Following on from the previous article, this paper reports on answers to the final two[1] research questions of the study.

> RQ3: What were the differences between the way current candidates and graduates reported on their postgraduate learning experiences in the MPhil or PhD degrees at Avondale?
>
> RQ4: What were the differences between the way males and females reported on their postgraduate learning experiences in the MPhil or PhD degrees at Avondale?

These questions guided the researchers in their investigation of the differences between two different subgroups within the HDR cohort: that is:
1. Current candidates and past graduates; and
2. Males and females.

The data gathered through the study's questionnaires were analysed to delve deeper into

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[1] The answers to Research Question 1 and Research question 2 were provided in the previously published article in *TEACH* titled *Where to go for a Christian higher degree? – Part 1 of a two-part report.*

the experiences and preferences of these subgroups in order to further inform the development of our HDR program and the research training program that supports the supervisors and candidates within the HDR program.

This research project opens up future possibilities for surveying HDR candidate perspectives on mental health and wellbeing as part of Avondale's ongoing responsiveness to data-informed cohort research training, mission-focused course design and delivery, and sector good practice.

Background literature

The experience of higher degree research (HDR) students in degrees such as a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) or a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is important because it impacts on the commitment of those enrolled in such degrees and the completion rates. The experiences of HDR candidates also reflects on the institution that offers such degrees. Furthermore, many and varied sections of educational institutions contribute to the overall experience of the HDR candidate, including supervisors, administrators, librarians, technical staff and other HDR candidates (Nulty, et al., 2009). While evaluation feedback has been gathered from undergraduate students for many decades to identify strongpoints and weak points of their university learning experiences, this practice has not been as regular in the postgraduate field of higher degree research. Carayannopoulos (2012) noted the importance of closing "the feedback loop with research candidates" (p. 59). HDR candidates also benefit from research training opportunities which enable them to develop as independent researchers (Cummings, 2010; Pearson & Brew, 2002; Sapouna, et al., 2020)

University students' experiences of their degree as a whole are often evaluated through the institution that offers the degree or a governing body's data gathering processes. In Australia, for example, data about undergraduate and postgraduate students' experiences are collected and analysed in the form of Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) data by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. To gather data about research students' experiences, the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ), an instrument developed by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA), is administered to research graduates who have recently completed masters or PhD degrees. Results of these questionnaires has shown that the proportion of HDR female students has increased over the past 15 years (Radloff, et al., 2017) but there is little published research that investigates the differences experienced by male and female candidates during their enrolment in HDR

degrees. There is also little evidence that provides insights into the differences in HDR experiences between current and past candidates who have been enrolled in the Australian higher education sector.

While some earlier work focused on LGBT students has been researched at school level (DeWitt, 2012), at this point, the experiences of the different genders at tertiary level have typically focused on heteronormative or cis-normative identities of students who identify with being male or female. However, the way in which students of different traditional genders perceive their higher education learning experiences has been documented in recent years. For example, the study by Grebennikov and Skaines (2009) found that female university students were more focused on the university's services than their male counterparts. Furthermore, while typically based on comparisons of male and female students, various aspects of students' university learning experiences have been investigated in relation to issues such as self-assessment activities (González- Betancor, et al., 2019), abilities to cope with assessment-associated stress (Bonneville-Roussy, et al., 2017) and differences in academic achievement (Pirmohamed, et al., 2017). To date, we have not been able to locate any studies that have focused specifically on the needs of students of varied genders, the binary male and female genders, engaged in postgraduate degrees.

Research methodology

The research methodology used and the research setting of the "Why Avondale?" research project have been described in our previous article in this series, *Where to go for a Christian research degree: Part 1* of a two-part report. In summary, this project adopted a participatory mixed methods research approach (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) in which evaluation data were gathered from HDR candidates from Avondale's Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees. Both past graduates and current candidates from these degrees were invited to contribute comments and feedback about their experiences of being enrolled in these degrees. The data provided by these participants was analysed in order to determine the aspects of their HDR degree experiences that they valued or, alternatively, viewed as wanting in some way. The results of these analyses are currently informing our modifications to the HDR degrees as well as the research training program that supports the candidates enrolled in these degrees and their supervisors.

From the total population of 69 potential participants, including 24 graduates and 45 current candidates, 29 participants (42% of the total

> " we have not been able to locate any studies that have focused specifically on the needs of students of varied genders, … engaged in postgraduate degrees. "

population) provided evaluation data in the form of responses to the study's *Why Avondale Online Questionnaire* by providing responses to Likert-style items and closed questions (quantitative data), as well as responses to open-ended questions (qualitative data). In addition to the data gathered from participants' responses to the study's *Why Avondale Online Questionnaire*, eight participants (12% of the total population) provided commentary about their HDR experiences in an interview (qualitative data). While both sets of survey and interview data were used to inform the answers to the first two research questions of the study, reported in our previous article, *Where to go for a Christian higher degree? – Part 1*, we have answered the study's final two research questions by utilising quantitative data gathered from the survey. This decision was made because the answers to the final two research questions (RQs) of the study (RQ3 and RQ4, outlined earlier in this article) required a comparative analysis of quantitative data to determine the extent of the differences (or similarities) between two sub-cohorts within the overall cohort of participants: that is, male and female participants, and HDR graduates and current HDR candidates.

> *The differences in male and female responses … [are] considered to be statistically significant (p<0.05)*

Findings and discussion

Our findings report on the differences in the perceptions about their HDR experiences of two subgroups who had recently enrolled or graduated from HDR degrees at Avondale between 2016 and 2019. These two subgroups include:

1. Current candidates and past graduates; and
2. Males and females.

By identifying the differences in these subgroups' experiences, the degrees and the research training program have been further developed to meet the needs of these subgroups within the HDR program at the institution.

Differences between current candidates' and graduates' experiences

Our analysis of the quantitative data provided by current candidates and graduates provided us with answers to the study's third research question:

> *What were the differences between the way current candidates and graduates reported on their postgraduate learning experiences in the MPhil or PhD degrees at Avondale?*

To determine the differences between current candidates' and graduates' experiences, we began by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient to measure the association between the ratings for the two groups. The value was found to be r = 0.79, indicating that there is a strong association between the experiences of graduates and current students. When an independent sample t-test was used to compare the means of the two sets of data, the p-value was 0.203, which means we cannot conclude that a significant difference exists.

Further detail is provided in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3.

Differences between male and female candidates' and graduates' experiences

Tables 4, 5, and 6 contain data that show a comparison of male and female results when the current or graduated status is removed. The results of this analysis provide answers to the fourth research question:

> *What were the differences between the way males and females reported on their postgraduate learning experiences in MPhil or PhD degrees at Avondale?*

The differences in male and female responses are highlighted in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6 where the two groups are compared statistically. When a two-tailed independent sample t-test was calculated to compare the means, the value was p = 0.0063 which indicates that by conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be statistically significant (p<0.05). An independent sample t-test was used because the objective was to compare the means of two independent cohorts on the same criteria (Cohen, et al, 2002).

Table 4 indicates the items with largest and least difference, while Table 5 shows the most positive responses for males and females, and Table 6 lists the most negative aspects of the candidate experience.

Summary of findings and discussion

When we analysed the quantitative survey data from the current candidates and past graduates of Avondale's HDR programs, even though there was no significant outcome from the t-test that indicated a difference in the means of the two sets of data, we noted a distinct difference in themes between where these two groups agree the most, and disagreed the most. Table 1 illustrates there is little difference between the way they saw the supervisors' helpful feedback, their satisfaction with their supervision, and their growing confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems.

The areas where these two groups disagreed the most was primarily on support services. To a large extent it can be seen that graduates show a

Table 1:   *Comparing graduates' and current candidates' greatest and least differences in ratings**

		Graduates	Current candidates	Combined	Difference
Items with greatest difference	Avondale's Library services were helpful to my study	3.86	4.71	4.29	-0.85
	Avondale's IT services were helpful to my study	3.86	3.0	3.43	-0.86
	I benefitted from having more than one supervisor	5.0	4.19	4.60	-0.81
	I communicated with staff in the Research Office at Avondale	3.57	4.38	3.98	0.81
	I used Avondale's Library services	4.86	4.05	4.45	-0.81
Items with least difference	My supervisor(s) provided helpful feedback on my progress	4.14	4.14	4.14	0.0
	Avondale provided opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students	3.14	3.14	3.14	0.0
	I had adequate financial support for my research project	3.57	3.55	3.56	-0.02
	I found the online environment at Avondale useful to collaborate with other staff or students about my research	2.57	2.62	2.60	0.05
	Overall, I am satisfied with the supervision I received	4.14	4.19	4.17	0.05
	As my research progressed, I felt more confident about tackling unfamiliar problems	4.14	4.10	4.13	-0.05

*Responses indicated level of agreement on a Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

> " *The main areas of negative responses included the candidates'/ graduates' perceptions that there was little opportunity to work with other research students during their degree.* "

high level of satisfaction with support services when compared to current candidates. It is likely that current candidates experience frustrations with any obstacles they encounter during their studies and that these obstacles are at the forefront of their memories, when compared to corresponding views held by past graduates who may not remember these obstacles with as much detail or urgency. It is equally likely that graduates are so satisfied in having completed the degree and achieving their academic title, that any such frustrations they experienced are now in the past, and they can look back more positively about their experiences.

The one area of difference that is much more positive for current candidates than for graduates, is the level of communication provided by Avondale's Research Services Office. It is pleasing to note that the deliberate effort by the higher degree course convenor and the research services officer to

provide regular communication with higher degree candidates, is being appreciated by those currently in the program.

Table 3 contains the least agreed on factors for graduates and current candidates. The main areas of positive responses from both groups included: the good work of the supervisors, the way they see they have sharpened their analytical skills while doing the research, and the positive impact of the library on their study. The main areas of negative responses included the candidates'/graduates' perceptions that there was little opportunity to work with other research students during their degree.

The greatest variation between the survey responses that reported on the perceptions of males and females was related to the quality of the supervision in terms of the feedback provided and the supervisor's availability. The results in Table 4 showed in total that females were much more positive

Table 2: *Graduates' and current candidates' most agreed upon factors**

Graduates most agreed with	Score	Current candidates most agreed with	Score	Overall most agreed with	Score
I benefitted from having more than one supervisor (if applicable)	5.00	My supervisor(s) made a real effort to understand difficulties that I faced	4.52	Doing my research sharpened my analytical skills	4.62
Doing my research sharpened my analytical skills	4.86	I learned to develop my ideas and present them in written work	4.48	I benefitted from having more than one supervisor (if applicable)	4.60
I used Avondale's Library services	4.86	I communicated with staff in the Research Office at Avondale	4.38	I learned to develop my ideas and present them in written work	4.52
Avondale's Library services were helpful to my study	4.71	Doing my research sharpened my analytical skills	4.38	I used Avondale's Library services	4.45
I learned to develop my ideas and present them in written work	4.57	Avondale's Research Office staff were helpful to my study	4.33	I had access to suitable working space when needed	4.36

*Responses indicated level of agreement on a Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

> **" females were much more positive about their perception of the supervision experience while males expected more and were less positive. "**

Table 3: *Graduates and current candidates' least agreed upon factors**

Graduates least agreed with	Score	Current candidates least agreed with	Score	Overall least agreed with	Score
Opportunities to work with other research students were provided	2.29	Avondale's counselling staff were helpful to my study (if applicable)	2.00	Opportunities to work with other research students were provided	2.41
Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my social life (transposed)	2.29	Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my mental health (transposed)	2.48	Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my social life (transposed)	2.48
I found the online environment at Avondale useful to collaborate with other staff or students about my research	2.57	Opportunities to work with other research students were provided	2.52	Avondale's counselling staff were helpful to my study (if applicable)	2.50
I was encouraged to become integrated into Avondale's community	2.57	Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my physical health (transposed)	2.57	I found the online environment at Avondale useful to collaborate with other staff or students about my research	2.60
Avondale provided opportunities for me to become involved in the broader research culture	2.71	I found the online environment at Avondale useful to collaborate with other staff or students about my research	2.62	Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my mental health (transposed)	2.67

*Responses indicated level of agreement on a Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

about their perception of the supervision experience while males expected more and were less positive. Males and females were in agreement, however, on the amount of guidance they received to do their literature review, the helpfulness of IT services and the stimulus they received at Avondale through the research environment. The two groups both agreed and were both very positive in their views about the

Table 4: *Comparing male and female candidates' greatest and least differences in ratings**

		Males	Females	Combined	Difference
Items with greatest difference	Avondale's counselling staff were helpful to my study (if applicable)	3.38	1.81	2.50	1.56
	Supervision was available within a reasonable time period when needed	3.25	4.79	4.05	1.54
	My supervisor(s) provided helpful feedback on my progress	3.46	4.62	4.14	1.16
	Avondale's Student Administration Services (including Academic Office, etc.) were helpful to my study	4.00	2.88	3.48	1.12
	Opportunities to work with other research students were provided	1.79	2.89	2.41	1.10
Items with least difference	I received valuable guidance in my literature search (if applicable)	3.29	3.29	3.29	0.00
	The research context at Avondale stimulated my work	3.08	3.05	3.07	0.03
	Avondale's IT services were helpful to my study	3.42	3.33	3.38	0.03
	Doing my research sharpened my analytical skill	4.50	4.58	4.54	0.08
	I found the online environment at Avondale useful to collaborate with other staff or students about my research	2.46	2.56	2.60	0.10

*Responses indicated level of agreement on a Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

> *Males and females were in agreement, however, on the amount of guidance they received to do their literature review, the helpfulness of IT services and the stimulus they received*

Table 5: *Male and female graduates and current candidates' most agreed upon factors**

Male candidates most agreed with	Score	Female candidates most agreed with	Score	Overall most agreed with	Score
Doing my research sharpened my analytical skill	4.50	Supervision was available within a reasonable time period when needed	4.79	Doing my research sharpened my analytical skills	4.62
I benefitted from having more than one supervisor (if applicable)	4.42	My supervisor(s) made a real effort to understand difficulties that I faced	4.73	I benefitted from having more than one supervisor (if applicable)	4.60
I used Avondale's Library services	4.38	I benefitted from having more than one supervisor (if applicable)	4.64	I learned to develop my ideas and present them in written work	4.52
Avondale's Research Office staff were helpful to my study	4.38	My supervisor(s) provided helpful feedback on my progress	4.62	I used Avondale's Library services	4.45
I learned to develop my ideas and present them in written work	4.29	Doing my research sharpened my analytical skills	4.58	I had access to suitable working space when needed	4.36

*Responses indicated level of agreement on a Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Table 6: *Male and female graduates and current candidates' least agreed upon factors**

Male candidates least agreed with	Score	Female candidates least agreed with	Score	Overall least agreed with	Score
Opportunities to work with other research students were provided	1.79	Avondale's counselling staff were helpful to my study (if applicable)	1.81	Opportunities to work with other research students were provided	2.41
Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my social life	2.29	I found the online environment at Avondale useful to collaborate with other staff or students about my research	2.56	Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my social life (transposed)	2.48
A good Research Training program was provided for postgraduate students	2.33	Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my social life	2.82	Avondale's counselling staff were helpful to my study (if applicable)	2.50
I found the online environment at Avondale useful to collaborate with other staff or students about my research	2.46	Avondale's Student Administration Services (including Academic Office, etc.) were helpful to my study	2.88	I found the online environment at Avondale useful to collaborate with other staff or students about my research	2.60
Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my physical health	2.46	Opportunities to work with other research students were provided	2.89	Studying for a higher degree has had a negative impact on my mental health (transposed)	2.48

*Responses indicated level of agreement on a Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

> " It is also interesting to note that across all of the data for males and females, females were consistently more positive about their experience "

way in which their analytical skills were sharpened in the process of completing their HDR degree.

Table 5 shows the most positive responses for males and females. While the sharpening of their analytical skills featured in the top five most positive responses for both groups, males rated this as the most positive. It is interesting to note the top five most positive responses from female candidates, four of them mention the supervisor, while for males, only one of the top five mentioned anything about the supervisor experience. It is also interesting to note that across all of the data for males and females, females were consistently more positive about their experience, and were most positive about their work with people including supervisors. Males however, tended to appreciate the individual skills they developed and the functionality of the support services.

Some of the differences between male and female responses identified in this study align with a study of student satisfaction carried out by the University of Western Sydney (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2009). In that study it was found that females were more concerned about administrative services and getting the more routine activities of a higher education student done efficiently and effectively. These factors largely did not rate for males. Similarly, at Avondale, two of the greatest differences between female and male response were in the services provided

by Student Administrative Services and Avondale's Counselling Services. Here males were far less concerned in these areas than female candidates.

Recommendations
By investigating the views of their HDR experiences across two subgroups of the study's participants, this study has revealed that there were not major differences between each groups of candidates within each of the subgroups. However, the differences were slightly more distinguishable between the male and female candidates than the past and current candidates. These results have been used to make practical modifications to the MPhil and the PhD degrees at Avondale and we have also drawn applications from this study to strategically improve our Research Training Program. Specifically, the results of this study have resulted in the following practical applications to our HDR program:

* Continued evaluation of current and past candidates' experiences
  While a large difference between the views of current and past candidates from the 2014-2019 period was not found, a number of changes have taken place in the HDR program since this study concluded. As a result, collection of evaluation data from current and past graduates will be collected in future years within the HDR program.

- **Information regarding Avondale's internal services**
  There was some variation between the past and current candidates' understanding of the internal services (e.g., library and IT) available to HDR candidates. As a result, our new and current candidates are currently fully aware of the range of services available to them. Time in our orientation, re-orientation and research training activities are currently ensuring awareness about these services.

- **Regular communication with candidates**
  On the whole, candidates expressed an ongoing appreciate for the communication they received from the University's Research Services Office. The recent attempts to keep regular contact with candidates about their enrolment, progress, examination and graduation will continue.

- **Importance of administration and counselling services**
  When comparing the differences between male and female candidates, females appeared to be more interested in the administration and services offered by the institution. When enrolling new candidates, this issue will be clarified during orientation sessions, for both males and female candidates.

- **Perception of supervision**
  Male candidates appeared to be more critical of their supervisors than their female counterparts. While program providers do not want to distinguish the quality of supervision afforded to male and female candidates in the future, we will be integrating more activities throughout our research training program in which supervisors and candidates share their expectations of each other, in order to reach some form of agreed-upon set of realistic expectations.

While the research-informed practical recommendations listed above were deemed suitable for implementation at the institution where this study was conducted, readers of this article from other universities may consider a selection of these recommendations for application in their own contexts, based on their knowledge of their own HDR settings.

However, when reflecting on the implementation of sustainable recommendations at a supervisory level, an observation from Duke & Denicolo's (2017) research into 'What supervisors and universities can do to enhance doctoral student experience (and how they can help themselves)' proves relevant to creating supportive HDR environments:

It is critical that supervisors do not feel they alone are responsible for all aspects of their doctoral candidates' development and well-being, but are aware of and actively engaging with support services. This interaction will allow supervisors to better balance these new requirements and demands at the same time as enhancing student experience, by working in partnership to create safe places where supervisory practice can be explicitly shared and to build inclusive interdisciplinary communities to better support all doctoral students.
(pp 4-5)

This framing of the doctoral journey as a shared practice with distributed responsibilities acknowledges both individual and collective contributions in producing a successful outcome.

Limitations of the current study and suggestions for future research

In the research instruments developed for use in this study, two options were provided for participants to nominate their gender: female and male. However, we recognise that, in future replications of this study, participants may be offered more than two options to choose from when nominating their gender.

Universities seek to create communities where HDR candidates experience support and inclusion regardless of gender, sex characteristics or sexual orientation. The work of English and Fenby-Hulse (2019) is one example of agentic research which documents the diverse experiences of doctoral researchers and addresses the question of "what support, culture, and pedagogy might better support candidates who identify as LGBTQ+" (2019, p. 403).

In the context of our study, because the final two research questions were answered using data from the questionnaire used to gather data from current candidates and past graduates from the HDR program at Avondale, this limitation of the study may act as a catalyst to further explore the differences between candidates' and graduates' views about studying at Avondale through focus group interviews or individualised interviews. By continuing to investigate the differences between these two groups using qualitative research methods, the reasons behind some of the differences illustrated by the participants' questionnaire responses may be revealed.

Studies of the type outlined in this article may be extended to further investigate the differences between the needs of students from varied genders (Lindahl, et al., 2020). Such future research may assist in ensuring that a greater level of equity is achieved in meeting the requirements across groups of candidates representing varied genders, as noted by Grebennikov and Skaines (2009) who suggest that "a sharper focus on these areas for improvement action could help the university ensure

> *This framing of the doctoral journey as a shared practice with distributed responsibilities acknowledges both individual and collective contributions in producing a successful outcome.*

equity and better manage competition" (p. 71). Future research may also focus on candidate and graduate perceptions on diversity and inclusion.

Further explanations of the limitations of this research and suggestions for future research, are included in to our earlier paper published in this journal, *Where to go for a Christian research degree? Part 1 of a two-part report*.

Conclusion

While the results of this study are not intended for wide generalisation, central to the purpose of this research project is the importance of direct feedback from HDR cohorts completing an MPhil of PhD degree at Avondale University in contributing to the improvement cycle of institutional processes and practices.

In this paper we focused on two questions exploring the differences in perceptions of HDR experiences from various subgroups: current candidates and past graduates, and males and females.

The findings from the current study indicated there were not major differences in perceptions between groups of candidates within the current and graduate subgroups. However, differences were slightly more distinguishable between male and female subgroups with the greatest variation in survey responses linked to the area of supervisor feedback and availability where females responded more positively. The data also highlighted that male respondents where less concerned about administrative or counselling services.

As a result of this research, external referencing and course re-accreditation, the institution has implemented practical and policy refinements for the MPhil and PhD degrees, and expanded the Research Training program. The impetus for such improvements for developing and supporting HDR candidates has also been guided by the regulatory body TEQSA which notes: "The student [candidate] is expected also to develop a more or less fully-fledged identity as a researcher, so their research activities often generate deep personal reflection and emotional significance" (2018, p.5). This theme of researcher identity has been considered when re-shaping aspects of the HDR orientation and re-orientation program, along with the need to more overtly promote services which provide emotional and psychological support for candidates engaged in a sustained research program.

The survey feedback has also heightened the need for regular two-way communication between the institution and candidates, and has further refined institutional communication systems and process which underpin good practice and support candidate

> *feedback … invited … thinking around how to provide greater opportunities … to formally and informally connect … increase inter-disciplinary research projects and communities of practice, and engage with potential employers.*

progression. Their feedback has also invited further institutional thinking around how to provide greater opportunities for candidates to formally and informally connect with each other during their study, increase interdisciplinary research projects and communities of practice, and engage with potential employers.

While the "*Where to go for a Christian higher degree?*" research project data and analysis have led to tangible improvements in course design, delivery and connection for the current HDR cohort, this study invites further research opportunities that are responsive to institutional need and sector concerns. In particular, the area of HDR mental health and wellbeing is a key focus of the Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR), and Avondale's missional focus on holism encourages ongoing work related to candidate wellbeing. Researchers from various Australian universities have sought evidence-based interventions to promote mental wellbeing (Ryan, et al., 2021; Beasy, et al., 2021; Mackie & Bates, 2019), and a future Avondale research project could contribute to a deepened understanding of the psychosocial needs of candidates and services that may better support challenges encountered during their higher degree by research.

It is important to note that our study was conducted before the global pandemic, and we acknowledge that stresses typically associated with higher degrees by research (Woolston, 2019) may have further intensified through the impact of the COVID-19 (Haas, et al., 2020). In the context of doctoral programs and early career researchers, Paula (2020) also notes the threat of the global pandemic on progression:

> It is also essential to understand that being locked down at home does not equate to a boost in productivity. We are living through stressful times, and even if our work can be performed remotely, other concerns, such as caring for family and coping with mental and physical health, must take precedence and will affect productivity.
> (p. 999)

Through our ongoing commitment to institutional improvement for the MPhil and PhD degrees, and the implementation of responsive strategies for mitigating attrition and enhancing course satisfaction, we see further research opportunities for exploring HDR candidate perspectives on mental health and wellbeing during this unprecedented time of COVID-19 and its residual effects. Such candidate-centred research would assist Avondale University proactively address the ways we can further create and promote a culture of compassion, support and enablement. TEACH

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> " *Avondale's missional focus on holism encourages ongoing work related to candidate wellbeing … that may better support challenges encountered during their higher degree by research.* "

Becoming better people: Children's perceptions of how a school's garden program has impacted their actualisation of values

TEACH[R]

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Abstract

Education is perceived, among other things, to be a character-building enterprise. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a renewed emphasis on character development through values education has been on the agendas of Australian schools. Many schools now offer programs designed to inculcate values into the lives of students. Although values literacy is widespread in schools, there is less evidence to demonstrate that values actualisation, that is, making positive values the basis of behaviour at school and in life, has taken root. This case study in one primary school used focus groups to gather children's perceptions of how they actualised values in the context of a school garden program. The garden program's organisational elements were found to positively impact the actualisation of intrapersonal and interpersonal values.

Context

Character is the fabric of a person's life. Although the physical body performs actions, it is the brain that determines what those actions will be, from the simple opening of the eyes to more complex actions that require decision making. Over time, the choices made, particularly in the areas of morals and ethics, determine how a person lives their life. The outward expression of these choices is known as a person's character. Inseparable from character are values, which may be defined as "ideas that manifest themselves in concrete behaviour" (Christian, 2014, p. 16). Therefore, values are the building blocks of character. Many values, including compassion, perseverance and excellence, are esteemed widely across cultures and faiths (Popov et al., 1997). Children adopt values in their own lives through the influence of families, faith traditions, society, culture and education. From an educational perspective, teachers have always played a role in the development of values whether through modelling, teaching or providing an environment in which to enact them (Haydon, 2006).

In recognition of the important role of values education in Australian schools, the Australian Government (2005) produced a set of resources designed to support schools in the values education process. The definition of values used as a basis for these documents came from Halstead and Taylor (2000) who stated that values are "the principals and fundamental conviction which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable" (p. 162). In preparing this set of values education resources, twelve schools were put forward as case studies to demonstrate how values were embedded in the ethos or mission of the school, fostered through engagement in civic and social skills, and integrated into the curriculum (Australian Government, 2004). Australian schools rose to the challenge of values education and many adopted school-based approaches to teaching their students about values and encouraging children and adolescents to enact their school's values in the learning environment. Although values

> *there is less evidence to demonstrate that values actualisation, that is, making positive values the basis of behaviour at school and in life, has taken root.*

education has continued, research evidencing the actualisation of values is limited.

Character and values

Character has always been at the forefront of human endeavour. The importance of character is highlighted in quotes from history. Of character, Socrates (Libquotes, n.d. a) wrote "I believe that we cannot live better than in seeking to become better" and Heraclitus (Brainyquote, n.d. a), "Character is destiny." In addition, Abraham Lincoln (Libquotes n.d. b) once said, "Perhaps a man's character is like a tree and his reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing", and Eleanor Roosevelt (Brainyquote, n.d. b). believed that character is built by people growing "through experience if they meet life honestly and courageously."

In education, the promotion of values has a long history. John Dewey believed that values develop through positive habits which Heilbronn (n.d.) claims "enable the child to experience and experiment with behaviour that is socially and personally beneficial" (p. 3). Although sometimes maligned for his views on moral education, Dewey argued against the imposition and conformity of behaviour, instead promoting an environment where the will is independently exercised (White, 2015). Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers and Janusz Korczak are presented by Woolley (2013) as forward-thinking educators who promoted skills for their present time and for the future. These critical skills aligned with personal attributes such as curiosity, collaboration and confidence. Ellen White (1903), an inspirational Christian author from the 19th century, wrote to teachers that "Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings" (p. 225); a statement that resonates with educators today (Brady, 2008; Lovat et al., 2009).

While there is agreement on the importance of values education in schools, there is less consensus about how values education should be approached. Brady (2008) has outlined four approaches to teaching values: the Trait approach, the Cognitive Development approach, the Values Clarification approach and the Role Play approach. The Trait approach is based on the premise that pre-determined traits, or values, are absolute and can be taught both explicitly and implicitly through exploring the lives of historical characters who epitomise the desired values (Brady, 2008). This approach stops short of an intentional strategy to transition students from learning about another's values and adopting the values as their own.

The Cognitive Development approach, based on Kohlberg's (1975) stages of moral reasoning, is

> *Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings*

defined by three distinct stages: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. The pre-conventional stage starts with following rules to avoid consequences and progresses towards the post-conventional stage of choosing values based on inner consistency with beliefs (Brady, 2011). This approach identifies stages that move students beyond values literacy to internalising values for life but appears to be a chronological progression during which values are caught rather than taught. Therefore, the Trait approach, and to a certain extent the Cognitive Development approach, start with pre-determined values.

The Values Clarification approach, developed by Raths et al. (1978), is based on the principles of 'values relativity' (Brady, 2011) and relies on students choosing their own values and beliefs, and adopting those that are personally meaningful. This, it is proposed, occurs through a process of choosing values based on evidence, prizing values by publicly affirming one's choice and acting on values by repeatedly enacting one's choice (Brady, 2011). While criticised by those who favour providing pre-determined values to students (Brady, 2011), the strength of this approach lies with the requirement to act on one's chosen values and so opening opportunities to form positive values-driven behaviour.

Role Play, the final approach identified by Brady (2011), is a social method involving values used in role play situations. It is an approach where briefing and debriefing with the teacher forms an important part of the process and reflection, either individually or as a class, prompts discussion and further enactment in role play situations. Although this approach requires students to enact values, it does so in a simulated context rather than in a real-life setting.

Two additional approaches are worth mentioning. Ferreira and Schulze (2014) conjecture that initiatives have done little to advance the effective implementation of values in education, and propose a Constructivist approach of active, socially constructed learning in open-ended contexts that most closely supports the Values Clarification approach. Aligned to the Role Play and Trait approach is the narrative approach which uses literature to stimulate discussions and learning about values (Pearmain, 2007). To her credit, Davy Pearmain also suggests follow up activities including how to turn the "story ideas into action" (p. 17).

Lovat et al. (2009), rather than promoting a specific approach, identify three crucial components they consider should be built into values education: 'head learning', 'heart learning' and 'hand learning'. Without all three components,

they posit, values education approaches will miss their mark. Head learning is values literacy, or knowledge, and understanding of values. Heart learning includes the social awareness of values that leads to prizing the values and therefore motivates behaviour. Finally, hand learning is experiential learning which involves "action based activities where students can apply their curriculum learning in direct service to others" (p. 119). Others concur, citing the importance of offering an environment where children learn to enact their values (Althorf & Berkowitz, 2006; Christian, 2014; Clement, 2010; Knowles, 2012; Marks et al., 2015).

The different approaches to values education described above lead to the bigger question of "How does one measure the effectiveness of values education?" Clement (2010) offers that the actualisation of values provides an answer. Clement defines actualisation as the reality of values played out in the school setting in such a way that values become part of the school culture and ethos; that is, being known, prized, and practised by staff and students. He maintains that "Taking values to the heart of educational endeavours begins with valuing and orchestrating those conditions wherein students can develop agency across personal, social, academic, spiritual and moral domains" (Clement, 2010, p. 1). Further, he posits that the actualisation of values is essential to student wellbeing and that "student wellbeing is a positive observable outcome of the implementation of values as they are embedded in educational policy, leadership administration, and the explicit and hidden curriculum", as well as "pedagogical practices and the web of relationships amongst the various stakeholders of a school" (p. 26).

School garden programs and values education
School garden programs could be what Clement (2010) calls orchestrated conditions; learning environments that offer opportunities for children to enact a wide variety of values and develop personal agency. Schools operate garden programs for a variety of reasons. Rationales for school garden programs include environmental, educational, nutritional, experiential, social and wellbeing reasons (Beery et al., 2013; Blair, 2009, Ohly et al., 2016).

Although studies of intentional links between school garden programs and values education appears limited, there is evidence that points towards the efficacy of school gardens as environments conducive to the development of values. Passy (2014) posits that garden programs contribute to the "social, academic and emotional development" of children (p. 36). Broadly speaking,

the social, academic and emotional domains have the potential to foster values such as empathy, perseverance and self-control, but regarding values education, it is the social domain that has attracted the greatest attention in the school garden literature. This is based on the premise that gardening is a social activity and therefore promotes interpersonal relationships through opportunities to engage in teamwork, which encourage cooperation, empathy and the skills required for conflict resolution (Austin, 2021; Blair, 2009; Dyg & Wistoft, 2018). Teamwork also acts as a springboard for developing other values, including responsibility and perseverance (Cairns, 2017), while Moore et al. (2015) claim that 'working' in a school garden assists not just in the development of values but also ethics.

One salient point is that school garden programs are experiential in nature and therefore enable children to enact their values in practical ways. According to Clement (2010), the optimal environment for children to actualise values is one where they can practise values. Despite the potential link between school garden programs and the acutalisation of values, there have been few studies that intentionally explore the relationship between the two. Therefore, this study explored the role of values in one outdoor learning environment using a primary school's garden program as a case study. The aim was to discover, from the students' perspectives, whether the garden program contributed to them becoming better people, that is, whether positive values were being actualised and how this was evident.

Methodology
The overarching question for this investigation was, "What influence, if any, does one school garden program have on children's perceptions of the actualisation of values?". This question determined the qualitative paradigm used for this study (Borrego et al., 2009). As children were the sole respondents in this investigation, strict ethical guidelines were followed when collecting data.

The site for this investigation was a small Christian primary school with an ongoing school garden program. One day each week, all students, ranging from five to twelve years of age, assembled in the garden and were directed to activities where they spent the next 45 minutes. There were three organisational elements to this garden program: heterogenous (i.e. mixed-gender/age) groups, collaboration and authentic real-life learning. Children worked in one of five authentic learning activity groups: garden care, market garden, kid's kitchen, chicken care and garden planning. The

Taking values to the heart of educational endeavours begins with … conditions wherein students can develop agency across personal, social, academic, spiritual and moral domains.

groups rotated each week allowing children to participate in each garden activity at least twice in each of four school terms. Group membership was changed each term and was comprised of mixed-aged children. Details about this school's garden program is further outlined in Williams et al. (2020).

This investigation was embedded in a larger qualitative case study exploring broader curriculum links to the garden program. The data used in this investigation was drawn from four student focus groups, each containing six children (n = 24 children total), and corresponded to Kindergarten (ages 5-6 years), Grades 1-2 (7-8 years), Grades 3-4 (9-10 years) and Grades 5-6 (11-12 years). Focus groups, according to Jayanthi and Nelson (2002), are a good fit for school research and the topic under investigation as they allow researchers to gain insights into both what is happening and why it is happening. The focus group membership for this study was negotiated with the teachers, and participating students had the opportunity to meet the researchers facilitating the focus groups during their garden sessions to ensure they felt at ease with them (Litosseliti, 2003; Smith, 2008). All focus groups discussed general open-ended questions regarding the activities and outcomes of the school garden program. The Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-6 focus groups were also asked to respond to a question asking whether their involvement in the school garden program has made them a better person and how they felt when they were working in the garden. Probing and clarifying questions were asked where necessary (Litosseliti, 2003).

The data was analysed by coding the focus group transcripts (Charmaz, 2014). Initially, two types of data emerged. First, values were recorded based on responses of Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-6 children to the question asking whether their involvement in the school garden program has made them a better person. Second, the remainder of the transcripts were coded using a line-by-line approach to identify examples of where values were enacted, based on the responses of the children to general open-ended questions about the activities and outcomes of the school garden program. This resulted in two sets of values: those identified by the participants and those identified by the researchers. A further stage of analysis involved the values identified by the children and the researchers being grouped then organised into categories which were further collapsed to form two overarching themes (Charmaz, 2014). The emerging values were also mapped to the organisational elements of the garden program to understand where, and how, the values were actualised.

> "
> *children identified these values by name: patience, cooperation, care, kindness, helpfulness and under-standing.*
> "

Findings: Children's perspectives of values literacy and actualisation

Two types of data emerged from the focus groups. Primary data emerged from children in the Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-6 focus groups when asking whether their involvement in the school garden program has made them a better person. To this question there was an overwhelmingly positive response. These children were able to articulate their answers using values as labels and gave examples demonstrating how their garden sessions helped to build their character. The children identified these values by name: patience, cooperation, care, kindness, helpfulness and understanding. Secondary data was identified from the children's descriptions of the activities and outcomes of the school garden program.

Identified values fell into several categories from which two broad values themes emerged: intrapersonal values and interpersonal values. Intrapersonal values can be developed without relying on interaction with others, but they still impact the child's behaviour. In contrast, interpersonal values are only visible when children interact with others. The only value to be both interpersonal and intrapersonal was care. Which category care was placed in depended on to whom, or to what, the care was expressed. The intrapersonal values of care and patience were self-identified by the children and are identified in Table 1 by an asterisk. Other intrapersonal values were within the scenarios described in the focus groups.

Theme 1: Intrapersonal values

Of the intrapersonal values (Table 1), twelve comments related to care and this value emerged in transcripts the most frequently. These comments ranged from tool care to caring for God's creation, as in this comment from a Kindergarten child, "*It takes a lot of care to keep the buggies away without insecticides*", while another child offered, "*We care for it* [the garden] *and it grows well*". Five of the comments relating to care did not provide a context.

Seven comments related to excellence or doing their best at whatever task they were given (Table 1). One child commented,

> *When we built the chicken coop, we had to follow the instructions and the measurement to build it and we had to look for the right screws … otherwise we might find that we had a screw that was too long that would go through and split some wood, or you might have something too short that can't actually hold onto and bite into the wood.*

Table 1:   *Intrapersonal values identified from focus groups, including their frequency of mention and context in which they were identified*

Intrapersonal value	Frequency	Context
Care*	12	Caring for tools, caring for God's creation, or no context given
Excellence	7	Building the chicken coop, filling orders, counting out change, keeping records, measuring amounts, recording rainfall data on graphs
Perseverance/ Diligence	4	Weeding, moving wheelbarrows full of compost, recording data from garden activities, doing some activities again and again
Patience*	3	Waiting for plants to grow
Responsibility	2	Taking responsibility for whatever task their group is given or no specific context given
Self-control	1	When to do something and when to hold back
Willingness to learn	1	Listening and learning about new things

* Indicates this value was self-identified by focus group members

Closely related to excellence were perseverance and diligence. All children were allotted set tasks to do during the garden sessions and some of these tasks, including weeding and using a wheelbarrow to move compost, called for greater levels of perseverance than caring for the chickens, for example. One child shared that some garden activities were helping him to persevere, "*I like everything* [garden activities], *but I don't like doing it, you know, again and again*". Diligence was also displayed in the recording of weekly data.

We have a little book … and we have all of our days, all of our terms, the weather, the temperature, the soil temperature, the air temperature, how much produce we picked, how much money we made, and we record everything we do in the garden. And we also have, like, a

digital copy just in case we lose the book.

Three comments related to patience, with one child reflecting, "*It [the garden] teaches you a lot of patience*". This comment was made in the context of waiting for the potato plants to grow. Willingness to learn and self-control both attracted one comment each. The comment relating to self-control implied the child had to exercise a choice of when to do something and when "*to hold back*".

Theme 2: Interpersonal values

The second theme to emerge was interpersonal values (Table 2.) which are enacted when children interact with others. The interpersonal values of cooperation, care, kindness, helpfulness and understanding were self- identified by the children and are identified by an asterisk in Table 2. Other

> "
> *I like everything [garden activities], but I don't like doing it, you know, again and again*
> "

Table 2:   *Interpersonal values identified from focus groups, including their frequency of mention and context in which they were identified*

Intrapersonal value	Frequency	Context
Cooperation*	10	Working in groups, working with teachers and volunteers
Respect	8	Working in groups, listening to others
Generosity/Stewardship	6	Paying tithe on the market garden shop sales each week, adding an extra potato to orders
Care*	5	Caring for each other, especially those who are younger
Kindness*	4	When working in groups
Helpfulness*	4	When a task is too big for one person to handle. Helping younger children
Honesty	2	Giving the correct change to customers
Understanding (of others)*	1	When working with younger children

* Indicates this value was self-identified by focus group members

interpersonal values were those extracted from the garden scenarios described in the focus groups.

Of the interpersonal values identified, ten related to the value of cooperation (Table 2). Comments included, "*I learnt, you know, how to work … together with other people through* [the] *garden* [activities]", and from a child without much interaction with younger children outside of school,

> *But I don't, like, really get involved with that younger age bracket, but in the garden I've got people from pre-kindy and kindy in my group, and you learn to actually know what they're like, how they work really well, but they're not so good at [the activities] so you can kind of help them with that and then they help you as well, like understand some other things from others' points of views.*

This comment reflects the child's awareness of how working with younger children was developing both understanding of younger peers and fostering cooperation between age groups.

Respect also featured as a separate value with eight instances cited. This included both respect for property and respect for others. Respect for others is a precursor to cooperation and is therefore linked to it. Six references were made to generosity, which is mostly centred around the topic of paying tithe (e.g., "*We also pay 10% tithe*"), but it was also evident in the practice of weighing the potatoes and then adding an extra one to the bag. As one child stated simply, "*I have learned to give*". There were instances where kindness was evident and this was one of the areas where a child had responded to becoming a better person as, "*You have to be kind to each other*". Another child commenting on kindness related it to "*the Fruits of the Spirit" from Galatians 5, and stated, "because in one of our Bible classes we learnt that each fruit represents one* [value]". The children could also identify values in the behaviour of others with a young child saying,

> *It's really good to have the bigger kids because they really help us a lot. When we need help, kindness, and that, we just call out for them, and they just come to help us. That's really helpful of them and I really like them.*

Values and organisational elements

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrated the variety of activities in which values were identified. The three organisational elements of the garden program (i.e., heterogeneity, collaboration and authentic real-life learning) were mapped to the values to identify if they had any bearing on the values that were

identified. It is important to note that none of the organisational elements were mutually exclusive to any of the garden activities.

Heterogeneity

This organisational element was featured in the school garden program by having each group of children comprising of mixed genders and ages. Where pairing within groups occurred, such as following a recipe, younger and older child were paired to work together. This organisational element linked to all the values but was particularly noticeable through the values of respect, care, understanding, helpfulness and kindness.

Collaboration

The second organisational element of collaboration, also called cooperation by the children, was a strong element evident in the children's descriptions of six activities built into the weekly garden program: filling orders and counting out change in the market shop; weeding, shovelling and moving compost in the garden; and cooking in the kitchen with their partner. The children identified with this collaborative component requiring teamwork for task success. The values most associated with the organisational element of collaboration in these activities were cooperation, respect, helpfulness and kindness.

Authentic real-life learning

The third organisational element was application of authentic real-life learning. All garden tasks in this study involved an element of life application with real-life consequences. If a recipe was followed correctly, everyone enjoyed their food. If correct change was given with vegetable orders, the customers were happy. If instructions were followed accurately, the chickens enjoyed safe wellness. If weeding and mulching were done regularly, the plants flourished. If a portion of the profits were given to charity, someone enjoyed a better life. The
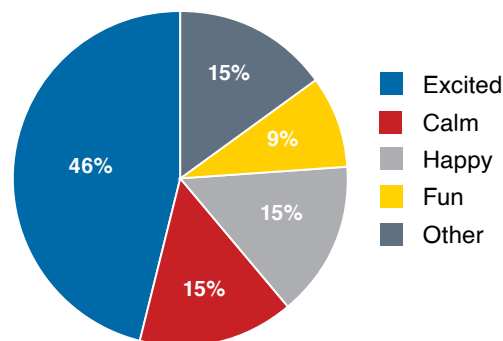

Figure 1. *Feelings self-identified by children when participating in the garden program.*

application of garden activities to real life contexts was explicitly linked to the values of honesty, excellence, perseverance/diligence and generosity/stewardship.

In line with Clement's (2010) reasoning that values actualisation impacts the school culture and ethos, the Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-6 groups were also asked, "*How do you feel when you work in the garden?*". Figure 1 provides an analysis of the answers given. Four of these answers were preceded by the adverb "*really*", which added more emphasis. The words in the 15% of other responses included '*enthusiastic*', '*super*', '*great*', '*incredible*' and '*delightful*'. There were no negative responses and only one neutral response.

Overall, the children were very positive about the school garden program, indicating that the garden was a happy place. The children's responses support the plausibility that the garden environment, inclusive of the learning activities, was conducive to a positive school culture and therefore to the actualisation of values.

Discussion and conclusion

A critical component of character development identified in values literature is the opportunity to practise values (Lovat et al., 2009; Marks et al, 2015; Reye, 2009). While conversations and value-filled narratives help establish values literacy, enacting values in practical ways leads to values actualisation (Clement, 2010). This school garden program provided an opportunity for children to enact positive values and, of importance, was the children's ability to articulate these values. The values they self-identified (care, patience, cooperation, kindness, helpfulness and understanding) appeared to occur naturally in response to the garden context, rather than in response to expected behaviours conveyed by a set of rules. The children made direct links between these values and the garden program, clearly indicating their belief that the garden program was helping to grow their characters.

Two broad types of values were identified in this study: intrapersonal and interpersonal. Intrapersonal values play a role in character development and were linked most strongly to the garden's organisational element of real-life learning. The real-life nature of the tasks gave the students opportunities to enact intrapersonal values as they worked in the market shop, cooked from recipes, harvested vegetables and tended the garden beds. The understanding that their behaviour impacted the success of the garden program encouraged the children to be responsible, generous, honest and to strive for excellence in these authentic tasks.

This study also demonstrated how the school garden program offered ample opportunity for children to work alongside others in a positive environment where goals were met through working as a team, and therefore allowed opportunities for interpersonal values to be enacted. This supports the school garden literature that offers evidence of student growth in the areas of social interaction (e.g. Austin, 2021; Blair, 2009; Dyg & Wistoft, 2018; Passy, 2014). Linked strongly to interpersonal values were the two organising elements of heterogeneity and collaboration. The heterogeneous composition of the groups, consisting of mixed genders and ages, encouraged a culture of understanding, helpfulness and kindness as a diversity of students worked together. It became evident from the comments that the students perceived this to be a positive opportunity to become better people, with both the younger and the older students benefitting from the developing culture of understanding. This finding aligns well with Clément's (2010) comments about values actualisation and the impact on school culture and ethos. Regarding collaboration, the range and nature of the garden program activities provided a context in which the success of the activities depended upon cooperation. This collaborative environment created a context for cooperation and other interpersonal values including respect, care, kindness and understanding, and confirms the important role of the 'hand' component in values education, as identified by Lovat et al. (2009). This school garden program therefore provided opportunities for children to enact values as a precursor to the actualisation of values. The school garden program also had a positive culture, indicated by the self-identified feelings of students (Figure 1) and the values evident when engaged in the garden program (Tables 1 & 2).

Although Clement (2010) proposes that the actualisation of values in a school program impacts the culture of the school, he also acknowledges the reverse position. This reciprocal relationship was observed in the present study.

Limitations

Despite the interesting results, we acknowledge that this investigation has limitations. First, it is a small case study and would benefit from a study spread across a wider range of schools and a greater number of participants. Second, it is important to acknowledge that the garden program was not the only area of the school's operation contributing to character development and the actualisation of values. Finally, the role of

> *This collaborative environment created a context for cooperation and other interpersonal values including respect, care, kindness and under-standing,*

the teachers in promoting values was not known. However, the students at this school were clear in attributing aspects of their character growth through values actualisation to the school garden program. This study therefore demonstrates that a school garden program, operated in the way described, offers fertile ground for values actualisation and character development. TEACH

" the students at this school were clear in attributing aspects of their character growth through values actualisation to the school garden program. "

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When is 'Social Science' an oxymoron?

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Abstract

How often do we hear the phrase, "The research says", in our discussions about improving teaching and learning? What do we mean by the term ''research''? Often this concept is used with the assumption that something like the ''scientific method'' has been used to describe educational reality in a way that can help us in our teaching.

This thinking, in turn, assumes the validity of education being part of the 'social sciences'. But what do we mean by, ''social science''? For some, it means using statistical methods to help us discover cause and effect within teaching practice. This can involve the use of *qualitative* as well as *quantitative* methodologies.

Yet it is not uncommon to hear people use phrases such as "But what do the hard data show?" Or, "Was this a real / 'solid' / large enough piece of research?" Such misgivings rely on the assumption that if we use the same scientific methods as the physical sciences (which can be referred to as the 'natural' or 'hard' sciences), then the research is more creditable. This article will review two core difficulties with these assumptions— inappropriateness and ineptness—and then review some suggestions in approaching research about humans more aptly and more appropriately, in order to avoid social science research that may become contradictory in terms.

What is real for our research?

The distinction between different aspects of life has been recognized for a long time. One of the earliest (if not the earliest) reflection on these categories from a Christian teaching perspective was in *On Christian Teaching* (Augustine, 427/2009):

> … there are two kinds of learning pursued even in pagan society. One consists of things which have been instituted by humans, the other consists of things already developed, or divinely instituted, which have been observed by them. … Now those elements of human tradition which men did not establish but discovered by investigation, whether they were enacted in time or instituted by God, should not be considered human institutions, no matter where they are learnt. (pp.47 & 54)

Augustine is here alerting his students that they could observe aspects of reality instituted by God, but they could also discern ways of thinking about reality apart from God's revelation. Augustine noted that this kind of study could be applied by Christians in and outside the Church:

> A person who is a good and true Christian should realize that truth belongs to his Lord, wherever it is found, gathering and acknowledging it even in pagan literature, but rejecting superstitious vanities and deploring and avoiding those who 'though they knew God did not glorify him as God'. (p.47)

Yet we can already see in these two quotes that even though there are different kinds of knowledge, the purpose of the knowledge is also critical. As Augustine noted, our knowledge either invites us to love God and others more, or the contrary. This reflects the explanation about wisdom and foolishness given to us by the Apostle Paul when reflecting on how God chose to reveal Christ to us (1 Corinthians 1:21-24, NIV):

> 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God . (NIV)

For that reason, when we are searching for what is true as Christians, scripture reminds us that there are spiritual realities at work. That is one reason that St Augustine was so clear about the proper *purpose* of what it is that we study, or in contemporary terminology, of what we are *researching*.

Consequently Augustine (427/2008) explained

> *Augustine is here alerting his students that they could observe aspects of reality instituted by God, but they could also discern ways of thinking about reality apart from God's revelation.*

that, even though "This whole area of human institutions which contribute to the necessities of life should in no way be avoided by the Christian; indeed, within reason, they should be studied and committed to memory" (p. 54), we should be wise in how we evaluate the worth of what we study, for example: "Of [those areas of study] instituted by humans, some are superstitious, some are not" (p. 47).

Where does ''social science'' fit into Augustine's reflections? The starting place for such a consideration is understanding the nature of personhood, so that we can then ask, "What kind of research – or science – appropriately helps us understand the reality of human beings in relationship?" This is the realm of the appropriateness of our research.

What is a person?

The basic presuppositions about human beings are presented from the beginning of Scripture. There, God is asserted as the Creator. No attempt at an apologetic is made. We have simply the statement that God is, He speaks, and good happens.

Part of that good is making the universe inhabitable. Genesis 1-2 describes how this order needs development and maintenance, and the task given to human beings is to continue to do the good the Creator started. All human beings carry this mandate, to be good stewards of God's creation. Gender differences do not diminish the mandate to be God's representatives on earth. Difference provides the opportunity for each to serve the other (Walton, 2015; Broughton-Knox, 1989).

This 'imageness' requires what we call "self-transcendence" (Vitz cited in Vitz & Felch, 2006)—the capacity to think and expand one's consciousness beyond self (Lennox, 2020; Swinburne, 2013). This is different to the capacities of animals, vegetation or rocks.

At times, in research publications, the wonder of being human is discussed. However, in many standard educational research articles and in books, it is simply ignored. It is not assumed but ignored. How can one tell the difference? If our ''soulness'', or moral agency was being assumed, it would be openly considered when we are trying to describe and measure what we do in social science. But it rarely is given consideration. More than that, some, including Scruton (2019) and Kanpol and Poplin (2017), have identified barriers to spiritual knowledge being allowed into mainstream social science.

What we are proposing here is a relationship between how we understand personhood, and how we research people in relationships. Smith

(2011) undertook a detailed consideration of this issue as a research sociologist. A summary of his four hundred- and ninety-five-page volume could not do it justice, but his main points may be helpful for our consideration of how we decide what is appropriate in social science research, based on our assumptions of what it means to be a person. In particular, how can we use the methods of the natural sciences within social science?

Smith's (2011) starting point is that good theory about anything that is ''social'' needs to be grounded—understood and explicated—in an understanding of the nature of persons. His suggestion is that this carries with it certain complications because: "many people today stand uncertain about the meaning or lucidity of the very notion of a coherent self or person, unclear about what a person essentially is" (p.5).

As Trueman (2020) noted, we live in a time when someone can say, "I am a woman trapped in a woman's body" and that statement is "regarded as coherent and meaningful" (p.19). Smith (2011) explained this uncertainty about the nature of persons as being, because we do not test our presuppositions about the nature of who we are routinely enough:

> Are we simply self-conscious animals improbably appearing for a moment in a cosmos without purpose or significance? … Are we instead really materially acquisitive hedonists or carnally desiring sensualists who have nothing higher to which to aspire than the gratifications of possessions and physical sensations that we can use… Or perhaps are we children of a personal God, whose perfect love is determined to rescue us from our self-destruction in order to bring us into the perfect happiness of divine knowledge and worship? (p.7)

The implications for research about persons in relationship is greatly impacted depending on which alternatives we choose. Coe (cited in Coe & Hall, 2010) has explained how contemporary psychology has given up on 'psyche' and progressively denied the spirit. The consequence was ''quantification'', which assumes that human life can be best understood by using the number system of the naturalistic scientific method. He noted that contemporary psychology is therefore basically secular (in the materialist sense), and therefore has "found no home for the 'person' in the scientific academy" (p.213). This, explained Coe, has direct implications for how we undertake research in psychology/social science: "As the 'science' of quantification slowly became the language of knowledge in the university, the study of ethics, the 'person' (and not just the body) and God would more and more be moved out of the university" (p. 124).

This, as Blamires (1963/2005) warned fifty years

> *many people today stand uncertain about the meaning or lucidity of the very notion of a coherent self or person, unclear about what a person essentially is*

ago, leads to individuals within the Church not having a Christian mind. Blamires, like Chesterton (1910/2015) before him, also explained how this meant that Christian thinking would progressively be *in absentia* in general society.

Smith (2011) explained that this assumption – of a privatised faith in the world of social science research – is based on a misunderstanding of the purpose of a theory. Smith also warned against the quantification-type processes described by Coe (2010). He noted that this kind of reductionist starting point makes people-focussed research "predicting observable outcomes and events" only fit to be "tossed into the dustbin" (p.11). Instead, Smith explained that theories about people in relationships, and the attendant research based on these theories, should be focussed on the reality that includes physical and non-physical aspects of reality:

> Human beings, I will suggest, are free, **ensouled** creatures of a particular kind… When it comes to the human, therefore, reductionistic moves towards either the physical or the mental, the material or the ideal, the corporeal or the spiritual are unacceptable and self-defeating. Humans are **embodied souls** who can only be well understood and explained in light of the complex reality.   (p. 22 – emphases added)

Of course, there are different theological ways of expressing this 'non-physical aspect of human reality.' Smith's use of words is one way. It is important to note the diverse views of what a human soul is. But the intention of this discussion is to also acknowledge that theistic faiths recognise human experience beyond the tangible—a non-physical reality—and reflect on some implications of this for our social science research within Christian education.

Implications for research relating to human beings

Other philosophers and researchers confirm the need to be more realistic with reference to how we attempt to describe reality for human beings. For example, when exploring the difference between science and scientism, Moreland (2018) highlighted that when research about human life is limited to the physical aspects of reality, then "our moral and spiritual claims will be 'de-cognitivized' … [that is,] unworthy of rational consideration" (p. 31). This forces our spiritual beliefs to be considered as "neither factual in nature nor subject to rational evaluation" (p. 34).

Moreland (2018) outlined how scientism is bad for science per se, marginalising for Christian faith at best, and fallacious as a way to teach and think

about the deeper truths of life, at worst.

In a similar vein, Dirckx (2019) explored whether our thinking as humans can be reduced to the functions of the brain. If we are "just our brains", then naturalist research methods should be highly efficacious. As Dirckx surveyed possible alternative frameworks in considering the brain and mind relationship, with reference to how and what humans think, she noted that, "In sum, there are persuasive reasons to discount the view that consciousness is the brain, from philosophy, neuroscience and medicine" (p. 54).

Dirckx (2019) then explored theoretical constructs that attempted to explain human choice-making. She explained that determinism, in any form, cannot adequately explain the kinds of "intentional causation" (quoting Swinburne, 2013) that is evidenced in human thinking. With reference to research techniques, this means that the brain cannot explain human choice-making, nor can techniques that rely on such deterministic assumptions. This is because "brain processes and human experience are two different things … brain data tells us nothing about why the person has chosen" (p. 111).

This Biblical understanding, which Dirckx described as being supported by neuroscience (her field), also provides a basis for accountability for our choices. If our students are only defined by their physical capacities and socially determined experiences, then naturalistic science would give us, as their teachers, both control *and* responsibility for their choices. That is a different world from the one of sin, grace and forgiveness that we find in Christ, in Scripture (Siedentop, 2014). The Biblical world of people being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) is a different world that explains the realities of life much more fully, than a reductionist, quantified and deterministic framework would suggest.

Swinburne (2013) unpacked this difficulty— of the brain and mind being different, and the implications for measurement—by reminding his readers that "Mathematical relations can hold only between properties which have degrees, greater or less, which can be measured on some scale" (p. 188). However, when using various research scales (e.g., Likert scales), we ask people to respond to hypotheticals that don't facilitate participants giving authentic and meaningful answers. Our statistical manipulations to demonstrate *reliability* of the items then do not help us with whether we are really tapping into the meaning of that item for that person, specifically its *validity*. For:

> All of this suggests that we could **not** derive from data about what a subject believed that they would do

brain processes and human experience are two different things ... brain data tells us nothing about why the person has chosen

under different circumstances any **absolute** situation-independent numerical values of the strengths of their beliefs or desires. … Again, we could only have a long list of the kinds of brain activity which increases or decreases the strength of which kinds of mental events.

(Swinburne, 2013, pp. 194 & 188 – emphases added)

This speaks to the aptness, or otherwise, of our research methods as applied to people – that is, What are the proper uses of the scientific method when incorporated into social science? Ritchie (2020) outlined difficulties with fraud, bias, negligence and hype across many disciplines, including many in the physical sciences. However, for psychology and related disciplines, he reserved this assessment:

> Psychologists have the unenviable job of trying to understand highly variable and highly complicated human beings … [it is] difficult, if not impossible, to pin down in a lab experiment…. Could the sheer complexity of the task make findings in psychology particularly untrustworthy, compared to other sciences? … There is something to this argument …
> (p. 32)

So many of our social science studies that we cite do not demonstrate that they have controlled all the variables that constitute the *full* reality of human experience. This includes the wonderful, mysterious and complex world of the classroom. This is why Lennox (2020), after describing the state of artificial intelligence and the hopes of many who have high dreams for AI, noted that "the immateriality of information presents a categorical barrier to the construction of a material machine (computer) that can consciously understand in any meaningful sense" (p. 117). In the same way, reducing complicated human experiences, like teaching and learning, to a machine based (computer) algorithm, inevitably is missing important meaning about the humans involved.

Where does this leave us with our question - "When is social science an oxymoron?" The arguments described to date would at least suggest that when we attempt to use natural scientific method with persons, we run the risk of doing science that can be both inappropriate (it does not address the reality of our natures) and / or inept (it does not capture what it says it does). Some of the implications of this dynamic will now be described.

Some implications for educational research

One implication of the difficulties in capturing the meaning of human ideas and actions is to be careful, to the point of being humble, with whatever we describe in social science research. Ritchie (2020) made this point with reference to the common carelessness that occurs in reporting correlative studies. Researchers can give a false impression of reality when they use descriptors such as "variable A produced effect X'', or that "his survey clearly demonstrated''… . Correlational studies do not describe causation.

This isn't saying that there is nothing worthwhile to report through observational data that has not been gathered under the strict procedures of the scientific method (like randomised groupings in controlled contexts). As Ritchie (2020) noted:

> That's nothing to be ashamed of: there's a lot we can learn about how things relate to each other in the world and building up an accurate picture of patterns of correlation is an essential foundation for understanding systems like the brain or society. We need to be awfully careful about how we interpret those correlations, however. (p. 150)

That is why, when researchers are not reporting physical causation according to naturalistic science methods, results are best presented with appropriate transparency and descriptive language. Ritchie gave the negative example of Dweck's "mindset'' research, which he explained was over-reported (''hyped'') based on her initial data and findings:

> The risk of such overhyping is that teachers and politicians begin to view ideas like mindset as a kind of panacea for education, focusing time and resources on them that might be better spent on dealing with the complex web of social, economic and other reasons that some children fail at school. (p.153)

Beyond being careful when observations are being reported, is the consideration of the nature of the knowledge sources being used, if we wish to reflect more realistically about life and learning. Kanpol and Poplin (2017) collected essays to describe how there is what they describe as a "secular border control" to keep spiritual sources of knowledge out of the Academy. Poplin's contribution to that volume explained how real spiritual transactions are observed and reported through secular lenses (even by Christians). This is consistent with Willard (2009), who similarly described the increasing lack of acceptance of a Christian view of life portraying reality. Willard explained that the shift towards secularism has been derived from the marginalisation of God because of the untested no-God assumptions that have developed about reality ("worldviews").

Willard (2009) noted the result is that:
> in their effort to be in control of knowledge, *they have redefined knowledge*, through "specialization" and "professionalisation", in such a way that it cannot deal with those [worldview] questions. So real life—which must assume answers—is, as a matter of fact, abandoned by our "knowledge institutions" to feeling, force, politics and "traditions". Ragtag, incoherent

> " *the immateriality of information presents a categorical barrier to the construction of a material machine (computer) that can consciously understand in any meaningful sense* "

"answers" float here and there, with no responsible clarification and critique.

(p. 57, emphases in the original)

Willard thus proposed that Christians need to challenge the incoherent claim of those who promote the scientism referred to by Moreland. He declared that the secularisation of knowledge will continue until:

institutions of Christian higher education and their faculties break out of a posture that holds genuine knowledge to be secular, and until they carry out their task of developing and conveying distinctively Christian knowledge – in free, open, and rational manner that characterises the life of the mind and of scholarship at its ideal best – those institutions will, despite all appearances, be a primary *hindrance* to the "Jesus project" on earth.

(p. 208, emphases in the original)

Suggestions for improvement

Moreland (cited in Coe & Hall, 2010) added some specific suggestions for Christian educators if they wished to move beyond reductionist and reality-denying ways of describing the social aspects of life, even at the school level: "As Christians, our goal is to make Christian ideas relevant to our subject matter appear to be true, beautiful, good and reasonable to increase the ranking of Christian ideas in the culture's plausibility structure" (p.21).

Perhaps if Christian researchers want to avoid the oxymoronic use of social science research, then they also may need to explore how accepting different knowledge sources can inform the plausibility structures of their disciplines. Such a broader base, that includes a biblical base for knowledge, would include exploration of respective theological and philosophical descriptions of reality.

Smith (2011) came close to this point when lamenting the state of social science research, after describing the embodied soulness of persons. Similarly to Ritchie (2020), Smith explained the great lack of reality description within most tests of statistical significance in social science research, because they:

tell us mostly about the size of our sample, not about the strength of association between variables, since sample size dramatically affects the ability to find significant differences. … On the other hand, nearly any association can be found statistically with a large enough sample size.

(p.283)

How then, can causation be understood in the context of persons in relationship to the world and others? Smith (2011) noted that causality for humans is real because it does happen, but that it is not because of the naturalistic assumptions of mechanical laws. If we bring these assumptions

to social science research, then our findings dramatically remain "hypothetical or fictionalised causation." [1] For Smith:

Causation is a matter of the operation of often non-observable yet real powers and mechanisms that naturally exist at different levels of reality and operate (or not) under certain conditions and in particular combinations to tend to produce characteristic results.

(p. 292)[1]

In the spirit of Kuhn (1962) and Polyani (1969), Smith (2011) concluded his reflections, noting the critical importance to acknowledge that even though reality is objective (he used the term of being a 'realist'), we engage with this knowledge personally. To pretend otherwise brings its own ignorance: "Scientific knowledge without personal knowledge amounts to ignorant proceduralism." (p.297)

This is why there has been a growing interest in alternative ways of describing aspects of reality. Termed ''qualitative'' research methods, these frameworks invite understanding people's stories – about our students and teachers – without attempting to reduce the events to a series of manipulated numbers. There are many introductory texts that explain how qualitative methodologies work[2].

For example, the field of qualitative research has seen the following methodologies develop (and there are many combinations of these that can be used):

Ethnography method, where one works 'from within' a community to understand their lived experiences

Narrative method, where one works to understand and describe the experiences of others in the form of a cohesive story

Phenomenological method, which is focussed on understanding the lived experiences from different perspectives, through use of exploring different presuppositions, or basic assumptions

Grounded Theory method, where the researchers work to come to a theory on the basis of what they learn from the people involved

> *our goal is to make Christian ideas … matter, appear to be true, beautiful, good and reasonable to increase the ranking of Christian ideas in the culture's plausibility structure*

[1] We should also acknowledge that for some researchers, they may use the term 'causation' as an indication of a tendency towards cause and effect, and in doing so, are not implying the mechanistic assumptions of physical cause and effect.
[2] An example would be Merriam, S.B. & Tisdell, E.J. (2016) Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation. Jossey-Bass.

Case Study method, where the experience, person or event is described in great detail, with reference to a theory or theories

The principles at the end of this paper are suggested as one way that we might encourage each other in how to use and develop these and other ways of approaching our research.

And again, similarly to Ritchie (2020), Smith (2011) acknowledged that this change in orientation may make a difference to our publication habits: "Publish or perish be damned, in this case, because truth and reality are more important than curriculum vitae and careers" (p.311).

However, it is not being suggested that we stop researching people. As indicated from some of the quotes by Smith (2011), there is a move to what he and others call Christian critical realism (Cooling et al., 2017; Edlin, 2018). Holmes (1977) expressed this using the Augustinian notion of all truth being God's truth. As noted above, this means recognising God as the starting point of reality, but also recognising our imperfect capacity to engage fully in understanding this reality.

In a series of lectures to Christian educators in Sydney in 1992, Glenn Martin (1993) outlined how Christians can start this process of engaging imperfectly with the seen and unseen aspects of God's reality:

> Biblical Christian thinking is the recognition that, because God is Alpha and Omega, everything other than God is relative. God alone is absolute and changeless. Therefore, nothing can be understood ultimately except in relationship with God. Accordingly, in Romans 12:2 we are instructed not to be conformed to this age, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that, thinking the thoughts of God after Him, we may implement the good, acceptable, and perfect will and way of God.
>
> (p. 9)

This is why in his discussion about why scientism cannot explain human consciousness, Moreland also gave an insight into alternative processes to the common, natural scientific ones, when working to understand non-physical aspects of reality: "Simple introspection—combined with biblical, theological and philosophical reflection— is the most rational and very best way to learn facts about the *nonphysical nature of mental properties and mental/conscious states*" (p. 90, emphases in the original).

Smith's suggestion for a collegial starting point follows logically: "Our theories, in turn, are developed not by studying statistical output printouts but by employing our best personal, substantive knowledge as participants in reality about how reality operates" (2011, p. 294).

> "
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> *Our theories, in turn, are developed not by studying statistical output printouts but by employing our best personal, substantive knowledge as participants in reality about how reality operates*
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> "

Ritchie (2020) similarly shares some practical wisdom about how to help each other to be better researchers. His suggestions include:

a. Sharing our uncertainties about our methods and findings more openly; and

b. Starting the sharing sooner – Ritchie commends the ''open science'' research movement, where researchers share not only their results more humbly, but also their plans before they start researching, including their raw data. They can also share their initial findings for comment, before publication.

Perhaps we need a Christian educator's research forum to enable such a commitment?

Thus, the best science in which we can engage within Christian education is one that places God at the centre of our thinking, reasoning and logic while we share ideas, parameters, and methods with each other on collaborative journeys. From that starting presupposition and practice, we can then explore the unseen and seen aspects of reality with open, logical and well-reasoned descriptions of what we observe. What we 'observe' can be those aspects of life that are external, and those aspects of life that 'live' in the realm of ideas and experience.

We might then do what Augustine encouraged in 427AD – to discover more of God's physical creation, while discerning the spiritual aspects of life that also inform us more of what God has done. Following Augustine's advice, we would simultaneously discern between those human institutions which are "superstitious" and those that are in accord with God's ways (even Augustine agreed that all truth is God's truth, wherever it is found).

He would also remind us that this is a prayerful endeavour, and that this characteristic is most evidenced in "the life of the speaker" (teacher). All of this is to be done within the 'two-fold love', which is the deepest purpose for any Christian who is a teacher: the love of God and the love of others.

Hopefully then, in truthful, transparent and gracious relationships, we should view oxymoronic social science research with a critical eye, and also be cognizant of and open to exploring alternative methodologies when researching human behaviour. **TEACH**

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TEACH[R]

Implementing a biblical vision for education: Challenges facing leaders from primary campuses of Christian schools in Sydney, Australia

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Keywords: Challenges, Christian school, leaders, vision

Abstract
This article outlines the results of a recent study that investigated the challenges that leaders from primary campuses of Christian schools in Sydney are faced with as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education, along with strategies used to overcome the challenges.

Competing Priorities was found to be the central challenge facing Christian school leaders as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education. Others identified include: Governance Issues, Changed Parent Expectations, Commodification of Education, Dealing with Conflicts and Human Resource Management Issues.

With consideration of the challenges faced by Christian school leaders, the paper highlights a number of key strategies found in the study. These could be critically effective in assisting educators to help overcome the current problem facing Christian schools, that their ideologies are being challenged due to a rise in secularism in Australia, and assist them as they implement a biblical vision for education in their school. The results were displayed diagrammatically.

> *Australian Christian schools are functioning during a time of great tension. Research has reported the rise of secularism within them, implying … founding ideologies and practices are being challenged and coerced to conform to a secular vision.*

Introduction
Australian Christian schools are functioning during a time of great tension. Research has reported the rise of secularism within them (Campbell, et al., 2009), implying that their founding ideologies and practices are being challenged and coerced to conform to a secular vision. This vision is opposed, in many ways, to the biblical vision for education from which most Christian schools were formed and established. There are many stakeholders in Christian schools who can address this problem, however, the Christian school leader is the focus here, with specific attention to the challenges Christian school leaders face as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education.

Research into tensions that Christian leaders face is rare (Cafferky, 2007) although there was a recent study conducted in Australia which focused on challenges faced by Christian leaders in the Early Childhood Sector (Shields, 2019). It provides some parallel findings to this study. Other related research focused on the beliefs and practices of Christian school leaders (O'Harae, 2007; Prior, 2018), with vision being highlighted as important to Christian school leadership in both. These studies, along with Berber (2009) and Iselin (2010), focused their Christian school leadership research on Principals working within Christian schools. Considering that minimal research involving Christian school leaders who are not principals has been conducted, it was decided that this study would involve leaders from varied leadership levels. To narrow the focus of the study each leader who participated was based at a primary campus of a Sydney Christian school. These leaders have influence on the development of children aged approximately five to twelve years old, with primary education considered to be the stage of education that strongly affects the attitude and character of the learner for life (Nias, 2000, cited in Osborne, et al., 2000).

The following questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are the challenges primary department leaders face as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education?
2. How do primary department leaders seek to overcome these challenges in Christian schools in Sydney?

Vision and the Christian school leader

A school's vision is its compass. It directs its journey and determines its destination. Vision produces focus, ensures the 'main thing' remains as the main thing, and can smooth leadership successions (Harris, 2013). The Christian school leader can strive towards a well-articulated vision that is broadly shared, which will ensure that the biblical integrity of a school will be maintained (Edlin, 2014, p.98). For the purposes of this study, vision was defined as 'a mindset and or set of beliefs that directs the journey and determines the destination that a school is aiming to reach'.

Christian schools will emanate God's truth in their practice if the vision they are seeking to implement is a biblical one. Many Christian educators believe that the Bible, and particularly the Gospel message, will be at the heart of a true Christian school (Frisken, 2013; Goheen, 2004; Roy, 2008; Thompson, 2004). Biblical vision in a Christian school is not just a written statement to do with God's kingdom but is to include the outworking of the Gospel within the school, with a key component to address implementing a biblical vision for education including the Christian school leader being like Christ.

Christian School leaders are to set an example in terms of the outworking of a biblical vision since vision is one of the primary functions of leadership (O'Harae, 2007) and leaders have significant influence over others (Bush & Glover, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). For a leader to truly model the way for their staff they must first 'lead' themselves (Maxwell, 2004) and Christian leaders can turn to the Bible for counsel. Though the Bible is not a textbook about education (Van Brummelen, 2009), the core values taught within it can be considered as a guide for the Christian school leader and can be used to form a true biblical vision for education. The core biblical values include integrity, courage, humility and preparedness (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011).

Whilst guided by biblical values, the effective Christian school leader can seek to address problems associated with a more secularized influence on Australian Christian schools by identifying challenges they face and determining strategies to overcome such challenges. In identifying challenges opportunity arises for problems to be addressed (Gibbs, 2012). This study sought to provide insight into what challenges Christian school leaders are faced with as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education and how they are overcoming those challenges.

Challenges found in the literature

In the current culture of rapid change (Duignan, 2012), where religious values are considered less important in Australian society compared to the past (Neidhart, 2014), Christian schools are faced with challenges that interfere with the implementation of a biblical vision. These can undermine the key values and founding principles by which Christian schools began.

The digital technological revolution, which has been influenced by the globalisation of education (Buchanan, 2011), presents challenges for Christian school leaders who are being hard pushed to keep up with global ideals. In 2008 the Australian federal government, under Rudd's leadership, introduced a 'Digital Education Revolution', encouraging schools to be using and teaching with up-to-date digital technologies. Burnett and Turner (2018) explained that technologies are exponentially expanding and will impact leaders in education more than they have previously. One of the potential impacts of this on Christian school leaders is they need to invest more time and resources into technologies which may not add value to their school's core purpose, taking time away from other priorities.

There are increasing expectations on improving the quality of education globally, challenging the Christian school leader to discern if and how these fit in with moving the school forwards in terms of its biblical vision for education. Tuinamuana (2011) identified that Australian Christian school leaders are influenced by the global drive towards professional standards and accountability in education, with the introduction of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in 2011 intensifying the workload and placing more external pressure on schools. Leaders in schools have less time to lead teaching and learning due to the push to meet accountability expectations (Edwards, 2014a). Time that the Christian school leader may have previously spent helping teachers underpin their teaching and learning with a biblical worldview has been usurped and may be used by leaders to ensure their responsibilities to external authorities are met.

In Australia the concept of 'educational excellence', which is a prevalent term used in education now (Justins, 2009), has been causing Christian schools to reconsider their priorities, with market competition forcing schools towards corporitisation (Edwards, 2014a). Parents of children in Christian schools now see themselves as consumers in a competitive marketplace (Beamish & Morey, 2013). The Christian school leader needs to carefully navigate the implications of a corporatised school while outworking its biblical vision for education. 'Educational excellence' carries with it the implication of competitiveness and high academic achievement, being driven by individualistic ideologies, somewhat in contrast to the view of an interdependent community encouraged in Christian

> *Time … previously spent helping teachers underpin their teaching and learning with a biblical worldview has been usurped … used by leaders to ensure their responsibilities to external authorities are met.*

education (Frisken, 2013). Dickens (2006) argued that a school taking an individualistic approach, along with other problems, may consider the learning of certain students as more important than others. The Christian school leader may be challenged to maintain the biblical view that all children are made in God's image and seen as of equal importance (Frisken, 2013) whilst external ideologies promote the opposite.

Each member is to be valued in a Christian school community (Frisken, 2013) and outwork the role God has given them to build his kingdom. Due to traditional organisation structures, it may be challenging for the Christian school leader to ensure that every community member can serve in his or her role. Fowler (2004) refers to these roles as a person's 'office' and advocated the approach where a participatory system of decision-making enables members of a community to serve in their 'office', rather than the hierarchical top-down approach. The Australian Christian school leader may be going against traditional organisational structures of Western civilization, which exalt individualism and minimise community. Some resulting problems to this approach include people having less respect for one another, other moral virtues and the loss of a spiritual dimension to life (Johnston, 2008), which could flow into human resource management issues for the Christian school leader. Notably, in the Christian early childhood setting human resource management challenges were significant (Shields and Hattingh, 2022).

Aspects of the Christian school leader's role in and of itself can present challenges. Responsibilities such as formation of teacher character, discerning a biblical vision for pedagogy and implementing a biblical vision through the school curriculum, are each time consuming and challenging tasks related to implementing a biblical vision for education. Christian school leaders may find it a challenge to support their teachers as teachers learn to follow the recommended practice of integrating faith "with their teaching so that they teach from a Christian worldview" (Harvey, 2009, p. 6). The leader themselves, if not an experienced teacher, will discover that understanding what teaching Christianly looks like is difficult (Beech, 2015). In addition to this, most teachers in Christian schools have been taught in institutions where "God is seen as an intrusion" (Fyson, 2014, p. 3) so Christian school leaders will need to invest a large amount of time shaping and reforming perspectives gained by their teachers from secular institutes. Christian school leaders will need to facilitate explicit training and provide support, particularly for teachers new to Christian education, to ensure the school curriculum being offered by their school is aligned to a biblical vision for education.

> " most teachers in Christian schools have been taught in institutions where "God is seen as an intrusion" … so Christian school leaders will need to invest a large amount of time shaping and reforming perspectives "

Upholding a biblical vision for discipline and conflict resolution, another challenge for the Christian school leader, also needs to be given priority by the Christian school leader. Micah 6:8 and Matthew 23:23, when applied to discipline in the classroom, suggest that teachers and leaders are to be just when they discipline, to love having mercy and to walk humbly in their faith, before the Lord (Fyson, 2014), each a difficult guideline to follow, as classroom management is so multifaceted. The Christian school leader will be involved with disciplining students in their school, and at times, their staff. Shields & Hattingh (2022) explain a range of complexities to managing staff within the Christian early childhood sector that present challenges, such as philosophical differences between staff. It is also challenging for the Christian school leader since teamwork may not naturally occur. Harris (2013) explained that while people united by a common vision will ideally work well together, this is often not the reality.

With consideration of the many and varied challenges facing Australian Christian school leaders and the minimal research that has been conducted on the topic, this investigation into the challenges Christian school leaders face as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education and the strategies they implement to overcome these challenges is both timely and crucial.

Methodology

An exploratory qualitative case study approach was taken to investigate the challenges facing Christian school leaders as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education. The researcher sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the issue, which was explored at four school sites in Sydney, Australia, making it a multi-site case study. Grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin,1998) with coding strategies as outlined by Strauss & Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2014), were used in this project to analyse data and generate the theory.

The researcher's belief about knowledge creation is best aligned with Smith (2011), who explained "our theories … are developed … by employing our best persona, substantive knowledge as participants in reality about how reality operates" (p. 294). The researcher also considers Colossians 2:3, which explains that in Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found, presents a guiding perspective. It is in reliance on Christ that this research has been conducted.

A purposive sampling technique was used which allowed data to be collected from participants who were in various leadership roles (e.g. school deputies, student welfare leaders, stage coordinators) based at

primary campuses of Christian schools within a 40km radius of the city of Sydney, Australia. The leaders were working in schools that were a part of the most recent Christian school movement that started in the 1970s and used to be or are still a part of Christian Schools Australia or Christian Education National.

The main research instrument was the interview proforma, which included several background information questions and six interview questions. Four of these related to the participants' understanding of a biblical vision for education – including, "How do you seek to implement a biblical vision as you lead in your current role?" The final two questions related specifically to the research questions that were the focus of this study, one being, "Tell me about challenges that particularly affect you as you seek to implement a biblical vision for education at your school". The interview questions were general and intentionally open-ended, which can "encourage "unanticipated statements and stories to emerge" (Charmaz, 2014). An interview protocol was developed, which included elements recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), to ensure a consistent interview approach was followed. Handwritten notes taken during interviews were scribed onto an interview field notes document and every interview was recorded and transcribed.

Approval to complete the research was given by the Morling Human Research Ethics Education Panel (HREEP) and consent was gained from the four schools and participants who took part.

Data was collected from eight participants (two per school site) via a semi-structured face-to-face interview. The researcher sought to gain accuracy of handwritten notes taken during interviews by member checking. Participants were invited to forward to the researcher any further thoughts following the interviews and some were contacted via email to clarify particular responses given. An important validation strategy for the research project was clarification of researcher bias which can both positively and negatively influence interpretation of the results. It was valuable that the researcher for this project had extensive engagement in the field of Christian education, which can help with the learning of a culture (Creswell, 2013).

Data was analysed combining grounded theory coding techniques outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2014). Initial coding occurred by reference to transcripts using an open coding, line-by-line approach, which is the common initial coding approach grounded theorists use (Urquhart, 2013). The intermediate stage of coding was axial coding, where initial codes were grouped into categories and sub-categories around the core issue being investigated. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain this process whereby "data are put together in new ways". In the final stage of data analysis, selective coding was used, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), to further analyse the categories and sub-categories and a core category was identified. A theoretical explanation of the findings of the research were represented by a model.

Results and discussion

How leaders defined and seek to implement a biblical vision

Leaders articulated the main elements of a biblical vision for education to include beliefs formed from a Christian worldview, actions guided by what the Bible says about living for Christ and that the main goal of a biblical vision for education be that children learn to live for Christ. These ideas are similar to those outlined by Christian educators, such as Van Brummelen (2009), who relate a biblical vision to preparing students to be and become citizens of God's kingdom.

It was also found that every leader believed implementing a biblical vision was of high importance, with four leaders explaining that an intentional attitude was needed at every leadership level within the school in order to effectively implement the vision. Each leader identified several approaches they take to implementing a biblical vision, including living out the vision, enabling staff through avenues such as professional development, implementing intentional co-curricular activities and having empathy with school community members, especially staff. Three leaders specifically used the term 'embodied' to describe how the vision is to be implemented, but all leaders implied this through their responses.

For a leader to truly model the way for their staff they must first 'lead' themselves (Maxwell, 2004). It became clear that each leader sought to do this, keeping the Bible, and particularly the gospel message, at the heart of their school in all they do. The leaders were seeking to be like Christ.

Challenges identified by leaders as they implement a biblical vision for education

Leaders identified several challenges they face as they seek to implement a biblical vision. These challenges were categorized through coding of responses given during the interviews. The challenges that emerged include: Governance Issues, Changed Parent Expectations, Commodification of Education, Human Resource Management Issues, Dealing with Conflicts and Competing Priorities. The most significant relationship found between these challenges is that all of them contributed to one central challenge,

> "The challenges that emerged include: Governance Issues, Changed Parent Expectations, Commodification of Education, Human Resource Management Issues, Dealing with Conflicts and Competing Priorities.

Competing Priorities. The extended work of this research found other relationships existed between these challenges as well, however, they are not described in detail here. The following are descriptions about each challenge found.

Competing Priorities

The leaders were trying to balance too many things, felt pressure from society, and were overloaded, explaining there were too many ideas from the 'top'. They found that time to reflect on and communicate the school vision were a challenge. Leaders expressed a general feeling of being overwhelmed by responsibility, which was also found to be a main concern to Christian leaders in the early childhood setting (Shields and Hattingh, 2022). It could be said that they faced the many competing voices demanding the attention of the school leader, as outlined by Pietsch (2018): "History, policies, research, parental and student concerns, and the theological vision of the school – these are the significant voices that demand the attention of school leaders" (p. 62).

Time constraints were extensive, with one leader explaining, "… often your priorities are hijacked". It was difficult for the leaders to be focusing on biblical priorities. For some there was confusion about the nature of Christian schools. This was coupled with worry that Christian schools could not stay afloat, aligning with literature that highlighted the increasing competitive environment in Christian schooling (Edwards, 2014a). Most leaders expressed concern about their teaching staff being over worked, with some attributing this to high curriculum demands placed on schools.

> " The leaders were trying to balance too many things, felt pressure from society, and were overloaded, explaining there were too many ideas from the 'top'. "

Governance Issues

This included both external and internal governance issues. External governance issues included curriculum compliance to authorities like the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) and ensuring that teachers maintained their accreditation, which demanded extensive time and energy. Tuinamuana (2011) noted that the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers has intensified the workload and placed more external pressure on schools to comply with regulations and policies. Internal issues included maintenance of the board and school cultural attachment to a biblical vision, aligning with Edwards (2014a), who found that Christian school boards are often dominated by secular thinking.

Human Resource Management (HRM) Issues

There were difficulties for some leaders in recruiting suitably qualified Christian staff and providing effective professional development (PD) for them. Edlin (2014) cautioned that Christian schools not intentional and consistent with PD for their staff risk marginalising their core reason for existence. Leaders in the study particularly mentioned that enabling staff to incorporate a biblical worldview into the culture of the school along with curriculum was a challenge, as many staff had not considered a biblical approach to education. Fyson (2014) explained that many teachers in Christian schools have themselves been educated in a godless environment, which has had a major impact on classrooms around the world.

Dealing with Conflicts

Most leaders raised dealing with conflicts as a challenge. Sometimes this was associated with discipline of staff, but more often it was conflicts within the school community: between staff, between staff and parents, between staff and other school community stakeholders or between students. Harris (2013) explained that while people united by a common vision will ideally work well together, this is often not the reality. Denominational differences were highlighted to present a strain on relationships, along with staff gossip. It was explained by Reel (2015) that weariness can make it harder for the Christian school leader to uphold a biblical vision for discipline and conflict resolution, suggesting leaders may be challenged further when fatigued.

Commodification of Education

Some leaders explained that education was being viewed more as a commodity, or a product that can be traded, compared to a valuable service that is delivered. New technologies have become an avenue by which education is commodified. This directly connected with the challenge of Changed Parent Expectations since parents were making judgements about schools from a mindset of education being a commodity. Commodification of Education is influenced by the ideologies of consumerism, economic rationalism and individualism, key components of secularism, the worldview by which Australian schools have been found to be increasingly aligning to (Campbell, et al., 2009).

Leaders also mentioned the use of technology to market schools in new and unique ways as a challenge, aligning with Burnett and Turner (2018), who highlighted an exponential expansion of technologies impacting leaders in education more than previously. The intangible nature of key qualities of Christian education were seen to be a challenge to market to parents, with one leader questioning, "We love the kids, but how do you put that on social media?" Interestingly, the findings of

Beamish & Morey (2013) indicated that although there was more competition between Christian schools, parents were making choices about Christian schools based on an interaction of many complex factors and cautioned Christian schools to keep this in perspective when considering how parents choose a school for their child.

Changed Parent Expectations

Leaders were challenged by a different attitude from parents, with comparison made in some instances to parent expectations held in the founding days of Christian schooling. Some felt the partnerships were not as close as they once used to be. Pietsch (2018) and Beamish and Morey (2013) explained that increasingly in these times, there is a disconnect between the purposes of a Christian school and the desires of some parents who send their children to Christian schools. Leaders interviewed believed that some parents did not necessarily share the school's vision, but rather sent their children to a Christian school for, what one leader described as, "a good child with a good HSC result". Since values and educational achievement are two major motivations for parents choosing independent schools (an Australian Institute Survey cited in Edwards, 2014b), parents who may not share the school's vision may still be attracted to Christian schools, contributing to the misalignment of vision between parents and Christian schools. This misalignment occurs in the early childhood setting as well and contributes to the challenges for the Christian school leader of interacting with parents, as identified by Shields & Hattingh (2022).

Strategies identified by leaders to overcome the challenges

The results related to the strategies used to overcome the challenges of implementing a biblical vision for education were coded into six categories, which will be known as strategies: Building Relationships, Christian Practices, Professional Development (PD), Opportunities for Collaboration, Reflection and Policy or Procedural Changes. Two strategies were described as effective to overcome all challenges identified, Building Relationships and Christian Practices. Other strategies were connected with overcoming specific challenges. These strategies are described below.

Building Relationships

Sharing the biblical vision by speaking about it regularly to staff was important to leaders as a way of Building Relationships. Kouzes and Posner (2012) explained that positive communication is highly important to one of their identified five practices of

exemplary leaders, 'Inspire a Shared Vision'. A vision that is owned by many stakeholders in a school is likely to have a greater influence on all in the school community (Harris, 2013). Leaders considered that clear communication, empathy and advocacy were helpful to overcome challenges, particularly when Dealing with Conflicts and Changed Parent Expectations.

Inviting parents to be partners, as found in this study, is seen by Quaglia (2016) as an effective way for school principals to overcome the challenges to do with parents being disengaged. Listening and advocating for staff were a part of overcoming challenges as well. Two leaders explained that visual displays have also been a helpful communication tool to remind the school community about its biblical vision for education.

Christian Practices

Christian Practices, which involved leaders modelling their relationship with God, were not only seen as fundamental to facing all challenges identified, they were also a motivation and inspiration for leaders to continue leading in their school contexts. One leader linked their life purpose as a motivating factor to persevere and overcome particular challenges, explaining "we are working for His glory and they are His skills and His gifts and His talents that He has provided us with for that purpose". Prayer, devotions, trusting that God is in control, submitting to God, praising God, meditating on the Bible and speaking the Word were some of the Christian Practice strategies named by leaders.

The concept of the leader being the person that they want others to become aligns to general and Christian leadership ideas. Kouzes and Posner (2012) describe 'Model the Way' as another of their five practices of exemplary leaders. For a leader to truly 'Model the Way' for their staff they must first 'lead' themselves (Maxwell, 2004). Gunderson (2006) describes modelling as something that Christian leaders should eat, sleep, breathe and think. Further, Ledbetter, Banks and Greenhalgh (2016) suggest that it would be dangerous for the church and the world if Christian leaders did not follow Jesus, the Son of God.

Policy or Procedural Changes

Policy or Procedural changes were mostly referred to as a strategy to overcome Changed Parent Expectations. Schools already had enrolment policies in place to suit their context, which would help to set realistic parental expectations about the biblical vision of their schools. These included parents signing agreements at enrolment about the school's biblical teachings. One participant shared

> *increasingly in these times, there is a disconnect between the purposes of a Christian school and the desires of some parents who send their children to Christian schools.*

about a uniform variation policy developed that was associated with uniform requirements for students with religious beliefs outside of the Christian faith. There was also mention of recruitment policies that allowed for better screening of applicants.

Although leaders usually linked this strategy to overcome Changed Parent Expectations, it is clear from the literature that policies and procedures also benefit other stakeholders in the Christian school setting and would assist in maintaining a biblical vision for education. Policy and procedural changes may allow for a context to be created whereby school community members could implement the school's vision, as was suggested by Van Brummelen (2009) to be the key reason why school policies exist. Collins and Porras (2004) similarly explain that the core ideology of a school can be preserved through organisation and strategic alignment, which can be seen in a school's policies and procedures.

Reflection

Reflection is an essential practice for educational leaders (Whitaker, 1995), and when combined with prayer and meditation, was considered by leaders to be a particularly helpful strategy when Dealing with Conflicts and HRM Issues. These strategies enabled leaders to carefully consider the best courses of action in Dealing with Conflicts or HRM Issues and allowed them time to be guided by the Holy Spirit in the decision-making process.

Allocating time for leaders to self-reflect and providing opportunities for staff to reflect helped leaders to overcome the challenge of Competing Priorities since it gave them opportunity to remind themselves or each other what a biblical vision for education is, re-establish correct priorities and put strategies in place to ensure maintenance of a biblical vision for education.

Something worth noting about reflection explained by Atkins (as cited in Pietsch, 2018), was that there are benefits when school leaders take time to reflect upon fulfilling government requirements while still maintaining practices consistent with their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning. This is the kind of reflection one of the leaders described in order to overcome the HRM Issue of implementing a biblical vision through the school curriculum. He explained, "to question and reflect and challenge what they are teaching … this is the real challenge - to get off the merry-go-round and stop and ask - is this it?"

Opportunities for Collaboration

Facilitating Opportunities for Collaboration between leaders and teachers was a key strategy to overcoming HRM Issues, particularly in relation to dealing with staff management and being able to professionally develop teachers who do not understand how to design curriculum with a biblical framework. Leaders suggested meetings that enabled the sharing of materials and resources, and a PD framework that allowed for collaboration. Glantz (2006) highlighted the importance of PD being a collaborative task. In addition, schools that perform best tend to extend decision-making and responsibilities to their community (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). This includes organisational structure alike to what Fowler (2004) described where a participatory system of decision-making is allowed, giving community members the opportunity to serve in their 'office', as explained previously.

Leaders suggested that asking for advice from outsiders as well as those within the school for feedback were opportunities for collaboration that assisted with Governance and HRM Issues. Engaging consultants to assist with challenges, such as compliance to authorities, was a strategy mentioned. Leadership mentors were important to some leaders, both from within and outside of their schools. These mentors gave encouragement to leaders, provided alternative perspectives to situations and assisted in problem solving challenges the leader faced.

Professional Development

Most leaders mentioned Professional Development (PD) about biblical concepts and how to incorporate a biblical perspective into the curriculum as a strategy that helped to overcome the challenge of staff not being equipped, a HRM Issue. This aligns to Edlin's (2014) assertion that claimed PD as a key strategy to maintain the biblically focused vision within a Christian school.

Leaders saw staff development weeks as important opportunities to share and upskill staff about a biblical vision for education. This is one component of equipping teachers to teach in their schools, seen as something effective principals realise (Dinham et al., 2018). The leaders of this study appeared to understand the positive implications of upskilling teachers in terms of implementation of a biblical vision for education, contributing many ideas in this regard. Some leaders floated the idea of a mandated certification course about Christian education, with it being implemented already at one of the schools visited. One on one mentoring of teachers was also seen to be effective; the participant described the process to include her sitting with teachers and helping them write lessons for programs. This was an effective strategy to ensure the school's biblical vision was implemented through pedagogy and its curriculum.

> " *to question and reflect and challenge what they are teaching... this is the real challenge - to get off the merry-go-round and stop and ask - is this it* "

Conclusion

The study sought to address a problem impacting upon many stakeholders within Christian schools, that is, the founding (biblical) ideologies of Australian Christian schools are being increasingly stretched by conflicting external factors. This problem appears, in some ways, to relate to the rise of secularism in Australian schools. Christian school leaders find themselves in a time of great tension, facing several and varied challenges to reconcile a vision, that is in many ways, opposed to the biblical vision for education they seek to implement in their Christian school. The two questions used to focus this study were 'What are the challenges primary department leaders face as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education?' and 'How do primary department leaders seek to overcome these challenges in Christian schools in Sydney?'

Figures 1 and 2 were developed in direct response to these questions, providing answers in a succinct visual form. They represent the challenges primary department leaders face and strategies used by leaders as they seek to overcome these challenges. Icons have been used to represent each challenge and four of the six strategies. The other two strategies are represented by the formation of a circle.

In Figure 1, the icon of a person in the centre represents a Christian school leader who is overwhelmed by the central challenge found when implementing a biblical vision for education, Competing Priorities. Surrounding the leader are icons to represent the five other challenges found in this study, each of which contributed to the central challenge. The arrows indicate that each of these challenges contributes to the Christian school leader being overwhelmed by Competing Priorities.

In Figure 2, which visually displays strategies implemented to overcome the challenges, the Christian school leader has a changed persona and surrounding him or her are the strategies used to overcome challenges identified. This leader is considered strategic. The strategies, written and represented by icons in most instances, are connected to the particular challenge/s they were found to assist in overcoming, by them being overlaid and or overlapping on those challenge/s. Building Relationships and Christian Practices are strategies that surround all the challenges, represented by the circle, since they were identified in this study as being used to overcome all challenges. The arrows indicate that each strategy contributes to the person in the centre overcoming the challenges they face as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education.
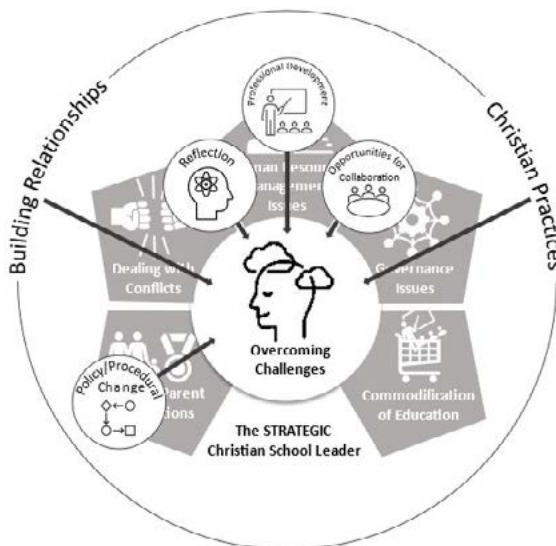

Figure 2. *The Strategic Christian School Leader: Strategies used by the Christian school leader who seeks to overcome challenges they face when implementing a biblical vision for education*

Recommendations

The dissemination of information from this study to Christian school leaders may be a source of encouragement and motivation for them to continue in their role. This could be achieved in PD settings or by simply providing this article to leaders. Ideas that could be of benefit include the strategies used by Christian school leaders to overcome challenges such as the importance of Building Relationships with members of their school community and colleagues in their team, exercising clear communication and having empathy and advocating for them when needed. Along with

> " dissemination of information from this study to Christian school leaders may be a source of encouragement and motivation for them to continue in their role "

Figure 1. *The Overwhelmed Christian School Leader: Challenges facing the Christian school leader who seeks to implement a biblical vision for education*

> in tertiary institutes, it is reco-mmended they ensure time is allocated for learning about the challenges leaders may face as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education and strategies that can be used to overcome these challenges.

this, implementing Christian Practices, individually and with their team, such as prayer, devotions, the reading of the Bible and reminding their school community that the Bible teaches that God is in control are also strategies that can be highlighted to leaders.

It is recommended that Christian PD organisations provide training for leaders in Christian schools that address the challenges leaders may face as outlined above and suggested strategies for leaders to overcome these challenges. Sessions in relation to curriculum design and programming may be particularly valid, since there appears to be a great need for this within the four Christian schools in this study, which could be symptomatic of other Christian schools. When conducting training for leaders and teachers in Christian schools, trainers should consider the mode of delivery to include opportunities for collaboration, Christian practices and time for reflection.

In courses designed for Christian school leaders in tertiary institutes, it is recommended they ensure time is allocated for learning about the challenges leaders may face as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education and strategies that can be used to overcome these challenges.

Relevant future studies could include a longitudinal study of leaders in Christian schools, both new and experienced, from primary and high school departments, identifying challenges unique to different levels and stages of leadership, times of the year and locations of Sydney. They could also narrow in on the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon Christian school leaders and the way leaders have dealt with them.

It is clear from this study that leaders from primary campuses of Christian schools face several and varied challenges as they seek to implement a biblical vision for education while they lead. Leaders overcome these challenges using various strategies that, if shared with the broader Christian school community, will enable them to be better aware of ways they could overcome these challenges. Gibbs (2012) reminds Christians in ministry it is important that they draw close to each other, working in unity to overcome challenges. TEACH

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Rick Warren and Ellen G. White on Christian character development: An unexpected meeting of minds?

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Keywords: Character, Christian, Ellen White, fruit of the Spirit, Rick Warren, values

Abstract
The article examines and discusses how two influential Christian authors from different eras perceive the importance and development of *character* in the lives of Christian believers. It is a discourse that is intended to offer 'food for thought' to Christian teachers in the context of current educational interest in character development.

Preamble

"Character is the diamond that scratches every other stone", according to Josephson (2013). It is a claim that points to the pervasiveness and significance of character in human relationships.

Character building has arguably become an important contemporary educational issue in the broader educational world as indicated by acclaimed work, and publications such as:

- *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004);
- *Moral education the CHARACTERplus Way* (Marshal et al., 2011);
- *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance* (Duckworth, 2017); among others.

Educator and philosopher George Knight (1998) perceives character building as a remit of Christian education, and asserts it is part and parcel of Christian schools' *raison d'etre* in the "telling of the biblical metanarrative" (p. 95). That, indeed, the task of character building is taken seriously is reflected by a prospectus content (aimed at parents and carers) that is typical of many Christian faith-based schools in Australia:

The development of *character* is fundamental to our pursuit of academic excellence and is at the heart of our teaching and pastoral care.

… We are thoughtful about what we do, with a wholistic view of Christian education that sees community, curriculum, *character* and systems as inextricably linked
(St. Andrews Cathedral School, Sydney, 2022; emphasis supplied).

It is expected, given the above stated goals, that include character development, teachers become crucial and indispensable role models in such schools.

Following the preamble, it is appropriate, now, to introduce two Christian authors—Rick Warren and Ellen White—and then proceed to examine and focus on what each author has written about aspects of character development that is relevant to a wide audience.

Background and context

Although Warren and White's lives (1954- … & 1827-1915) did not intersect, they have much in common. Their theological perspectives, backgrounds, and life experiences, in many ways share certain contours.

With roots in North America—Rick's in the west, in California, and Ellen born in the east, in Portland, Maine—both individuals were co-founders of their church/faith groups. Warren's Southern-Baptist-affiliated Saddleback mega-church now has a reported membership of over twenty thousand, after inauspicious and humble beginnings in 1980, while White's original, insignificant group of Christian Advent believers (officially organised in 1863 as the Seventh-day Adventist Church) has grown globally to over 20 million adherents.

The two authors have been widely published, consequently being influential and successful. Translated into more than twenty languages, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Warren,1995) and its 2002 successor, *The Purpose Driven Life*, have sold millions of copies. Correspondingly, tens of millions of White's (1892) *Steps to Christ* are still in circulation. The small book on basics of Christian living has been translated into 165 languages. White's prolific works (24 books and voluminous periodical articles and tracts) include

the five-book Conflict of the Ages series, central to which is *The Desire of Ages*, a classic on the life of Christ.

In their own time frames, neither Rick nor Ellen, in leadership roles, have been strangers to criticism or malignment (but for different reasons), and each has had to deal with family tragedy (both having lost a young son in distressing circumstances) and experienced recurrent personal health issues that impacted their lives.

There is also a number of shared theological perceptions, that may be 'distilled' from their published works, which should not go unnoticed. Some of these may be summarised as follows:

- believing that all Scripture is God inspired;
- adhering to an Arminian understanding of the gospel, i.e., human free will responding in faith and co-operating with God in salvation—*vis a vis*—predestination;
- upholding the biblical Reformation doctrine of justification by faith in Christ;
- committing to a trinitarian conception of God;
- demonstrating a missionary passion for communicating and spreading the gospel;
- advocating believer baptism by water immersion;
- professing the literal second coming of Christ;
- building and supporting faith communities that exhibit order, structure and flexibility;
- holding a penchant for order, planning, and discipline, not as an end in itself, but for the teaching and advancement of the gospel.

Moreover, as believing and practising Christians, the two hold some interesting views on *character* development and its importance in the Christian life. Prior to examining and discussing these views, it is prerequisite to 'unpack' the concept of "character" as referenced by academics, ethicists, moral education literature, Christian educators, and Scripture.

Character: What it is/not

In an interview, Angela Duckworth (2022), professor and CEO of Character Lab, describes character as, "all the things you habitually do, think, say and feel that are good for others and good for you." She sees character development as a life-long project and differentiates between values and character. For instance, one might value generosity, but not necessarily be a generous person.

Academics Marshall, Caldwell and Foster (2011) perceive (good) character as a complex, multi-faceted concept. They argue, as part of their CHARACTERplus Way® approach to moral education that it extends beyond the demonstration of "'a mixed bag of virtues'" (p. 51), to one of the discerning application of virtues for the greater good, without

regard to extrinsic rewards; sometimes in the face of contradictory goals and values dilemmas, and being able to employ 'sharp' reasoning and analytical skills. More will be said about this perception further on in the article, in relation to Warren and White.

Timpe (2007), in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* contends,

> what kind of person one is, is constituted by one's character; the link between moral character and virtue is clear. We can think of one's moral character as primarily a function of whether she has or lacks moral virtues or vices. (para. 3)

Regrettably, *character* is currently often understood as merely referring to *personality*. A recent case in point was sports journalist Tracey Holmes' (2022) report at the Beijing Winter Olympics. When the father of gold medallist snow boarder Ayumu Hirano was asked to explain the extraordinary success of his son, he was reported as saying: "The most important thing in the world is personality". Unless accuracy was 'lost in translation', the expressed view is a typically emasculated one.

Writing from a Christian perspective, ethicist Wayne Grudem (2018) defines character in terms of character traits and virtues as, "habitual dispositions to act, feel, respond and think in morally good ways" (pp. 107-108). For Christians, *good* being the moral standards found in God's law and a reflection of his character, as revealed in Scripture and also written (even if imperfectly perceived) on people's hearts and consciences (Grudem, 2018). By implication, responding in morally bad ways leads to negative character traits, that is vices.

Knight (1998) goes further; confronting his readers with a provocative claim: "*true* character can develop only in the born-again Christian. Character development outside that experience may be good humanism, or even good pharisaism, but it is not congruent with the Christian model" (emphasis supplied, p. 201). In Knight's view, "leading young people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ [and] service to God and other people for both the here and hereafter" (p. 203), constitutes authentic character development that also includes developing a Christian mind, social responsibility, physical health, and development for the world of work. In Knight's paradigm, Christian education should be concerned with students' salvation, where teachers are committed followers of Jesus and active agents bringing students "back to "at-one-ment" with God, other people, their own selves, and the natural world" (p. 201).

It is noteworthy that the New Testament makes several specific references to character.

> Now you must tell them the sort of *character* which should spring from sound teaching. The old men should be temperate, serious, wise—spiritually healthy through

> **"**
> *Angela Duckworth … describes character as, all the things you habitually do, think, say and feel that are good for others and good for you.* **"**

their faith and love and patience
        (Titus 2:1, J. B. Phillips, 1960, emphasis supplied).

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of *character*, and *character* strengthens our confident hope of salvation
        (Rom 5: 3-4, NLT, emphasis supplied).

Yet when it [discipline—correction of behaviour that God allows or is the result of natural consequences] is all over, we can see that it has quietly produced fruit of real goodness in the *characters* of those who have accepted it in the right spirit
  (Hebrews 12:11, J. B. Phillips, 1960, emphasis supplied).

Wherever that gospel [of love, truth, grace, faith and hope] goes, it produces Christian *character*, and develops it, as it has done in your case …
        (Col 1:6, J. B. Phillips, emphasis supplied).

> " *character development in students is a major goal of their teaching ministry, their educational priority not being to inform or conform, but to transform* "

What can be deduced from the apostle Paul's inspired statements about Christian (and by implication, "good") character, noted above? First, from a biblical perspective, it is honorific and desirable. Second, character, whether bad or good, does not come with our DNA at birth, but is developed. Additionally, good character is not easily or quickly attained, for it involves struggles to bring about changes in our human behaviour that are not temporary, but which are stable and endure over time. Third, character formation is linked to behaviour; our actions. Fourth, "fruit of real goodness" suggests that the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22,23), is a basic ingredient of Christian character, as believers choose to lead Spirit-empowered lives and become transformed (Romans 12:2). The fruit metaphor also brings to mind Jesus addressing the issue of whether a bad tree can produce good fruit, and vice versa (Luke 6:43, 44).

For this article, what steps were taken to obtain Warren and White's views and understandings on character?

The authors' perceptions

To ascertain their perceptions, statements about specific aspects regarding character have been taken from major works of Warren and White. With a view to potential concurrence, they were arranged in a table format (see below). In examining the quotations in Table 1 (In subsequent discussion, all numbered paragraphs cited, e.g., 1, 2, 3a etc. refer to Table 1.), and keeping in mind the set of Bible verses quoted above, several features become evident:

The significance of character

Both Warren and White recognise the importance that is placed on character in Scripture. Actually,

character's import stretches from the mistrust of Adam and Eve, in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis, to the sentence pronounced on unrepentants in the concluding chapter of Revelation. Conversely, its positive import extends from Enoch and Noah, who both "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24; 6:9), to the doers of God's precepts in the ending of Scripture (Rev. 22:14).

Jesus' description of the judgement in Matthew 25 spotlights that character traits have a bearing on salvation—not that these have any salvific merit *per se*—but in that they reflect the immeasurable, unfailing love and grace that God has extended to humanity. Also, that one's responsive human acts or virtues reveal authentic living according to the Great Commandment of Matthew 22:36-40.

Statements by the writers (Table1, 1) leave the reader in no doubt about their parallel views on the *priority* placed on character development in Christian education. Education philosopher George Knight (1998, p. 200) also underscores this significance, by referring to Christian teachers as "agents of reconciliation" (following Jesus' example). For these teachers, character development in students is a major goal of their teaching ministry, their educational priority not being to inform or conform, but to *transform*.

It is of interest that an emphasis on character development, particularly in Christian faith-based schools, is meeting parents' perceived expectations and gaining their appreciation. At the turn of the century, Buckingham (2000) named ethos and discipline as contributing factors in parents' choice of non-government schools. Similarly, Justins and Sauber's (2002) research found, "parents involved in Christian Parent Controlled Schools send their children primarily for purposes that are consistent with their Christian beliefs and way of life" (p. 8). Two decades later, Spencer (2022) notes a 14% enrolment increase from 2021-2022 in Christian Schools Australia (CSA), on the 9% high of the previous year, as part of a long-term trend. While there may be diverse reasons for parents' choice of CSA schools, Spencer concludes, "there is clearly a strong desire for education built on strong and explicit values and beliefs … and the desire is continuing to grow."

Even parents without religious affiliation increasingly recognise that virtues and moral values are essential elements of character development and want these to be part of their children's formal education. This may be indicated, to a certain extent, by a continuing, long-term growth of enrolments, also, in Independent Schools (ISA) (2021; Baker, 2021), that are part of the overall Australian non-government schools sector. ISA schools are often typified by their educational emphasis on competency, conservatism and character.

Which character qualities?

Unsurprisingly, secular sources or texts about character—namely about its make-up, development, or importance—are not mentioned by either author. Their focus is entirely a biblical one. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22,23; KJV) are upheld as most desirable character qualities; being the fruit of the Spirit (Table 1, 2) of which many other virtues are sub-sets or derivations.

Even though one's personal efforts contribute to character development, for the Christian believer, these qualities have their grounding and source in God. Indeed, it may be argued that any and all goodness, irrespective of who exhibits it (non-believers included), has its roots in the Creator God, because human beings of themselves, are incapable of engendering it (Isa. 64:6). Jesus' disciples are encouraged to follow in his footsteps.

The perpetuity of good character

What surprises about both statements 3a, in Table1, is that a Christ-like character is the only 'possession' that mortals may take into eternity; this assertion, notwithstanding of:

- Paul, the apostle's statement, "… we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7, KJV);
- Job's agonising acknowledgement, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart" (Job 1: 21, NIV); and
- Solomon's conclusion, "People come into this world with nothing, and when they die, they leave with nothing. In spite of all their hard work , they leave just as they came" (Eccl. 5:15, NCV).

However, Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21,33), and the immediate sequel for the benefit of his disciples, differentiates between *material possessions* and an enduring, incorporeal treasure in heaven, safe from earth's familiar threats. That treasure, Warren and White would claim, is more than a metaphor, but the essence of our being, our spiritual fingerprint or DNA; more specifically, character.

Statements 3b in Table 1 assert the connection between the present life and a future one, with character being a significant link. Readers are reminded of Jesus' declaration: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), prefixed by Martha's strong conviction, "I know that he [Lazarus] will rise and live again in the resurrection on the last day" (John 11:24, NCV). Scripture does not provide us with details of the process of the character 'transfer'. However, at death, the 'breath' of God that gives life (Gen. 2:7) returns to the Giver, together with our 'spiritual DNA' to be reunited with our resurrected bodies—transformed and perfected in Christ—with the time and circumstances outlined in 1Thes.4:13-17 and 1Cor.15:52; yet to be realised and fully understood.

Character and conduct

Not 'walking the talk' is a common criticism of some of today's public figures—politicians, business leaders, celebrities, and sporting greats. In the latter category, to mention merely one recent example, a former Olympic kayaker and his younger brother were sentenced to 28 and 25 years jail respectively, for trying to smuggle an estimated $200 million worth of cocaine into Australia (Siganto, 2021).The failure to live up to promises and meet exacting standards of conduct is increasingly becoming acceptable, common-place practice, with the resulting compartmentalisation of private lives and public lives, as if two distinct kinds of water could be drawn from the same source.

As statements 4 indicate, Warren and White are in agreement that for Christians, in particular, there should be no gaps between words and deeds. Good intentions or lofty rhetoric are insufficient, while assent unaccompanied by action is usually insincerity or worse—hypocrisy—for which, in spiritual matters, Jesus repeatedly reserved his strongest criticism.

Habits and character

Another area of concurrence is the role of habits in character formation as indicated by statements 5a and 5b. Habits are regarded as behaviour patterns of thinking, acting or feeling that have become established over time, through frequent repetition.

Warren and White's references to the nexus between habits and character assumes a *moral* context. This precludes mannerism and routines such as sniffing and nail-biting or brushing one's teeth after meals and making a daily to-do list, among others. Rather, for example, it has to do with habitual dishonesty, arrogance, abusive conduct or malicious Twitter gossip, when these behaviours have become 'second nature' to an individual. Jesus touches on this in teaching his disciples, "from a man's heart, come the evil ideas which lead him to do immoral things, to rob, to kill, commit adultery" (Mark 7:21, TEV). How is such a low point reached?

Character, according to the authors, is not established by a significant single act, but a multiplicity of minor actions and behaviours (see statements 5a). In turn, actions are prefixed by thought patterns which lead to distinctive behaviours; hence the apostle Paul's counsel to the believers at Philippi to think on the things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and respected because, as Proverbs 23:7 (KJV) frames it, "as he [man] thinketh in his heart, so is he."

> *Good intentions or lofty rhetoric are insufficient, while assent unaccompanied by action is usually insincerity or worse— hypocrisy— for which Jesus repeatedly reserved his strongest criticism.*

> " Character is an edifice that is perceived as being built 'brick by brick', resulting eventually in virtue or vice; good or evil. Moreover, the building venture is intentional, rather than fortuitous; "

Table 1: *Selected quotations about character from the published works of Rick Warren and Ellen G. White (italics supplied)*

Note: The quotations below have been taken from Warren's two major books; the White quotations come from her books, and also from compilations (sourced from White's articles, tracts and letters) posthumously published.

Rick Warren	Ellen G. White
1. Christlike *character* is the ultimate goal of all Christian education. To settle for anything less is to miss the point of spiritual growth (PDC, p.359).	1. Its [true/Christian education's] goal is *character* building. The highest class of education is that which will give you such knowledge and discipline as will lead to the best development of character … (CG, p.296).
2. The fruit of the Spirit is a perfect picture of Christ … If you are going to develop Christ-like *character* you must have these qualities in your life as well (PDC, p. 361).	2. In our *character* building we must build on Christ. He is the sure foundation … In our character building, Christ is our example (CG, p.166). "[The fruit of the Spirit comprises] the elements of the Christian character" (CG, p.173).
3a. Developing the *character* of Christ is life's most important task because it is the only thing we'll take with us into eternity (PDC, p.360).	3a. A *character* formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we'll take with us into eternity (MYP, p.100).
3b. Jesus made it quite clear … eternal rewards in heaven will be based on the *character* we develop and demonstrate here on earth (PDC, p.360).	3b. The harvest of life is *character*, and it is this that determines destiny, both for this life and for the life to come (Ed., p.109).
4. The Christian life isn't just a matter of creeds and convictions; it includes conduct and *character*. Beliefs must be backed up with behavior. Our deeds must be consistent with our creeds (PDL, 336).	4. A profession of religion places men in the church, but the *character* and conduct show whether they are in connection with Christ. If they bear no fruit, they are false branches (DA, p.667).
5a. Even the smallest incident has significance for your *character* development. Every day is an important day, and every second is a growth opportunity to deepen your character, to demonstrate love, or to depend on God (PDL, p.43).	5a. Faithfulness or neglect in what are apparently the smallest duties may open the door for life's richest blessings or its greatest calamities. It is little things that test the *character* (PP, p.155).
5b. Your habits define your *character*. There is only one way to develop habits of Christlike *character*. You must practice them—and that takes time. (PDL, p.221).	5b. *Character* does not come by chance ... It is the repetition of the act that causes it to become habit, and molds the character either for good or evil (MYP, p.163).
6. *Character* development always involves choice. When we make the right choice, our *character* grows more like Christ. Whenever we choose to respond to a situation in God's way instead of following our natural inclination, we develop *character* (PDC, p.360).	6. Without freedom of choice, his [Adam's/human] obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced. There could have been no development of *character* (PP, p.32).
7. God is far more concerned with our *character* than he is with our comfort. … For this reason he allows all kinds of *character*-building circumstances: conflict, disappointment, difficulty, temptation, times of dryness and delays (PDC, p.361).	7. Christ has given us no assurance that to attain perfection of *character* is an easy matter. … A noble *character* is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ. … It [character] is formed by hard, stern battles with self (MYP, p.99).

Key to abbreviations used in Table 1
PDC - *The Purpose Driven Church*   PDL - *The Purpose Driven Life*   MYP - *Messages to Young People**
Ed   - *Education*   CG - *Child Guidance**   DA - *Desire of Ages*

* Indicates a posthumous compilation sourced from the author's articles, tracts and letters

Character is an edifice that is perceived as being built 'brick by brick', resulting eventually in virtue or vice; good or evil. Moreover, the building venture is intentional, rather than fortuitous; it takes time, practice and repetition, before it becomes permanent and part of our real self.

A determinant of character

"Character development always involves choice", declares Warren (1995, p. 360), which is foreshadowed by White's (1898, p. 32) statement, "Without freedom of choice … There could have been no development of character" (Table 1, 6). The Genesis 2:16-17 (NLT) statement, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil", plainly illustrates that freedom of choice within clear boundaries (*vis a vis* 'programmed' behaviour) has been the

immemorial privilege of human beings. Thus, neither writer subscribes to predestination, but each upholds humanity's free will to respond to God's unmerited offer of salvation.

In making choices, we weigh up alternatives. The quality of our moral and spiritual choices has eternal consequences so clearly seen in Scripture; for instance, in the lives of Ruth, Absalom, Judas, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, and the Philippian jailer. Furthermore, as mentioned above, when our repeated moral choices become habitual, when weighing up alternatives no longer becomes necessary, they form part of our character; of who we are.

However, when it comes to decisions, Christians should not become self-reliant; there is no place for hubris. Believers are challenged to claim Jesus' promise, "I will not leave you orphaned. ... I will love him [you] and will make myself plain to him [you]" (John 14:18, 21; The Message); the promise applying not merely to spiritual matters but our everyday life, guided by the Spirit. Hence, one is always able to avail oneself of God's guidance in perplexing situations. Divine Providence, through the Spirit, may use various means to direct us, including clarity of thought, verses of Scripture, trusted friends, pastoral counsel, or professional help, in dealing with whatever circumstances we may be faced with.

Character development's woes

Both White and Warren piggyback on the apostle Paul—who invokes the analogy of a foot race (1 Cor. 9:25, Heb. 12:1) and the associated necessary athletic training and self-discipline—to describe their view of character development. The apostle readily admits to his own struggles with character formation in his letter to the believers in Rome (Rom. 7:15-19).

Together with Paul, our two authors (see Table 1, 7) perceive character development for the Christian as an enduring battle with self. In listing the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23, it is instructive to note that the KJV's "temperance" is rendered as "self-control" in the NIV. Thus, character development is perceived not as 'happening' to us. It is not a passive experience, but an active process in us; it is a dynamic involving choice, our will, and requiring decisions—including amidst trials, turmoil, and temptations—in the context of, "I can do all things through Christ, because he gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13, NCV). But believers may yet have to endure some fiery experiences in 'the kiln of life' before the beauty of the finished artefact by the Divine Potter is realised.

It should be noted at this point that Warren and White look at character development from an angle of practical and foundational Christianity (as a Spirit-empowered faith endeavour, where Christ is the

embodiment, *par excellence*, of good character) rather than looking at it through a theoretical, academic lens. The two authors focus on principles and essentials of good character for the edification of their audiences. Thus, they emphasise character development's eternal significance, the contribution of habits, making good and noble choices, exhibiting conduct that confirms exhortation, while acknowledging the day-to-day struggles inherent in this challenging human project.

Marshall, Caldwell and Foster (2011), hold to a much more complex and academic approach in their CHARACTERplus Way® education model. On a secular platform, it features a whole school and community curriculum-integrated K-12 character education program with specified elements, content and pedagogical processes, adapted from several sources. If extended to its logical extremity, the ideal type of character development suggested by this model would incorporate student growth towards idealised states of being, specifically:

- *self-actualisation* (acting consistently according to an internalised belief system), a part of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs;
- *integrity* (an end of life stage reflection that fully accepts oneself), a feature of Erikson's (1950) stages of psycho-social development;
- *universalising faith* (i.e., individuals' personal systems of meaning) in Fowler's (1981), or similarly, an *universal ethical principled orientation* in Kohlberg's (1984), stages of moral development);
- *characterisation* (i.e., internalising values and consistently acting on these), as in Krathwohl, Blooms and Masia's (1965) affective domain, a section of their taxonomy of educational objectives.

In comparison, Warren and White's 'character projects' probably rate in the KISS (Keep It Simple Samantha) category. Aimed at a different audience, the projects' comparative modesty, however, project a powerful biblical worldview about transformation of human behaviour. Also, speaking prophetically (as in 1Cor 14:3), i.e., forthtelling, and in a teaching-pastoral capacity, the authors are building up, encouraging and comforting for the purpose of seeing changed lives patterned after Christ. Warren and White are thus clearly engaged in a faith-grace project, vis a vis a secular initiative that is not biblical-virtues-focused and which aims to teach ethical conduct and behaviour to develop good character, through a formal whole-school curriculum program.

Conclusions

In review, Warren and White, surprisingly, turn out to be fellow pilgrims. It is evident that they have a

> " character development is perceived not as 'happening' to us. It is not a passive experience, but an active process in us; it is a dynamic involving choice, our will, and requiring decisions "

remarkably similar outlook on Christian character development, according to the tabled texts and the ground covered in this article. On the authors' part, there is particularised concurrence—rather than a display of differentiated, denominational viewpoints—despite their contrasting formal educational levels. Warren has a DMin from Fuller University, whereas White was self-educated, not having gone beyond an elementary education; yet they communicate a mutual message. This raises an interesting and important question; why the similarity in outlook?

Given Warren's background, history and *modus operandi*, it is most unlikely (although not an impossibility) that he has read some of White's work or that he has a 19th century theological mindset. So, one should look elsewhere to explain the similarity.

Initially, one should focus on the part played by Scripture. It is extensively 'mined' by both authors. Albeit there are no direct Bible quotes in Table 1, the influence of Scripture is keenly felt. Neither author specifically refers to their method of interpreting Scripture; their assumed approach being not unlike using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral—a variety of tools for theological reflection, namely, Scripture, tradition, experience and reason. A progression of this approach is what today's theologians call the historical-grammatical method—a hermeneutic that takes various aspects into account, e.g., author's intention, language, context, culture etc. to arrive at a faithful interpretation of the text. Furthermore, Warren and White are writing about timeless principles articulated in holy writ. It is contended that accepting these constant principles, when coupled with a similar approach to interpreting Scripture text, would lead to shared viewpoints and additionally result in compound flow-on effects as considered below.

Second, faithfully interpreting the text of Scripture leads to an understanding of the importance of grace in the development of Christian character. It also inevitably points to the centrality of Christ in character development in the lives of Christian believers. We are not the 'architects' of our own characters, as Warren and White believe and point out, notwithstanding a measure of self-determination, our personal input, and co-operation with Christ.

Importantly, no measure of character growth on our part should be conceived as meriting salvation; it is wholly a free gift! Hymnologists precis this viewpoint fittingly, "On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand" (SDA Hymnal, 1986). Thus, in character formation, dependence on Christ is seen as paramount by Warren and White; both are entirely Christ-focused. The corollary of their mutual belief in justification by faith in Christ alone, together with their attendant commitment to sanctification (as

> *faithfully interpreting the text of Scripture leads to an understanding of the importance of grace in the development of Christian character. It also inevitably points to the centrality of Christ*

suggested by statements 2 and 4), is a harmonised view on Christian practice and lifestyle, that extends to character development.

Third, it can be inferred from statements in Table 1 and as a flow-on from the authors' orientation to Scripture, that they hold to the understanding that human beings were created in the image of God—the *imago Dei* (Gen. 1:27). Human beings are perceived as having been created to be image bearers, having the immense potential to reflect God's divine nature in their moral, spiritual, relational, creative and intellectual essence! The staggering implication and outcome of God's original act of creating humans becomes crystal clear in light of a recent statement regarding the human brain by the New Scientist Academy (2022, p. 26), "Your head holds the most complex object in the known universe."

What is more, Warren and White's perspective on character development, in essence differs from a secular viewpoint in that it not only has a distinct spiritual, moral, and eternal dimension but, even more important, it is a Christ and Spirit empowered endeavour rather than a solely human self-constructed undertaking.

Fourth, another already noted shared feature is the effort and time taken to develop a Christ-like character. The latter is developed—like diamonds from coal—under pressure! Not only can this be deduced from the lives of Jesus' original disciples but also their present-day counterparts. Warren and White identify with all believers who struggle with sanctification; our need and willingness to be made holy—set apart—by God, as a loving response to Jesus' saving sacrifice. It is very likely that in their own Christian journey, both Warren and White have experienced deeply the reality of the adage, "God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable"; leading them, again, to shared insights—the upshot of similar experiences.

Having put forward some reasons that underpin Warren and White's surprising shared perspective on Christian character development, one might safely conclude that they would also jointly declare with the apostle Paul, "I am certain that God, who began the good work in you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (Phil. 1:6, NLT).

Finally, what is the key takeaway message? God is the source of gifting the ministry of teaching (1 Cor. 12:28). Teachers (and parents) of students in Christian faith-based schools have been placed in a privileged and challenging position of responsibility of being co-workers with Christ. In performing their many teaching tasks and duties, teachers, over time, play a critical role in shaping students' learning and character development. Through modelling of an authentic Christian lifestyle, teachers also bear witness to the

power of the gospel and the agency of the Holy Spirit in character formation.

As respective leaders in their faith communities, Rick Warren and Ellen White in writing about aspects of character development have offered teachers, as well as educators and parents, some valuable insights about a 'project' that ultimately has eternal consequences. **TEACH**

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* Indicates a posthumous compilation sourced from the author's articles, tracts and letters

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Through modelling of an authentic Christian lifestyle, teachers also bear witness to the power of the gospel and the agency of the Holy Spirit in character formation.

Wellbeing needs to take into account client expectations of 'who we are', and then build a program that supports that. We have tried many things and spent lots of money and time,, but one thing stands out to us. There are no quick fixes or copy/paste programs that will do what you want. There are no end of people and programs out there that are willing to take your money with the promise of creating a wellbeing space in your school. To be honest - nothing works better that looking at what your community needs and responding to that with intention, care and compassion.

Our theme, one that guides all of our Student Leadership, Chaplaincy, Counselling, Bible and all our general teaching, wellbeing and campus church is an adaptation of Micah 6:8

"Love God, Love Others, Love Yourself and Always Be Kind. **TEACH**

A "must read" for Christian educators: The latest in 'Revealing Jesus' series

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Keywords: Biblical teaching, peer bullying, spiritual intelligence, teacher dispositions

Introduction

The latest in a series of books about how teachers reveal Jesus to students can help safeguard Christian education in a changing society, say its editors.

Christian education is "a light on a hill" but, if unexamined, "risks becoming irrelevant in a world where concepts of authority, knowledge and relationships are open to interpretation and where technology is restructuring the educational landscape," says Beverly Christian, co-editor of *Revealing Jesus in the Learning Environment: Evidence and Impact*. With an increasing focus on self, sidelining of biblical truth, and reliance on online delivery of classes, "the calling of Christian educators to reveal Jesus is more crucial than ever."

Bev and colleague Associate Professor Peter Kilgour encourage readers to heed this call by compiling chapters that explore ideas and practices from historical, philosophical and practical perspectives. The context spans Christian learning environments across primary and high schools and colleges and universities. The content, in the form of academic literature reviews, position and research papers, is in three parts.

Part one offers evidence of the role teachers play in revealing Jesus. It includes research about teacher dispositions, peer bullying, and how a garden program influenced children's perceptions of God and Jesus.

Part two presents the journey of the Pacific Group of Christian Schools as it reimagined teaching practice to reveal Jesus. It elaborates on personal viewpoint pedagogy, other-focused and inclusive thinking, and validating opinions using the Bible as a source of truth.

Part three discusses the role of community in schools. It provides an understanding of the roots of Christian education and explores spiritual intelligence. The final chapter challenges educators to: recognise the assumptions behind evidence of impact; ask how these relate to biblical teaching, and; increase

> *With an increasing focus on self, sidelining of biblical truth, and reliance on online delivery of classes, the calling of Christian educators to reveal Jesus is more crucial than ever.*

Figure 1: *Bev Christian, Peter Kilgour and Alicia Starr*

understanding of the Bible at the same pace as their field of expertise.

In her speech at the launch on April 6, Bev described editing the book as not only "excellent professional development" but also "a spiritual experience." Now retired, the former head of the School of Education and Science has revealed Jesus to students "her whole career," said Peter. He presented her with a bouquet of flowers to celebrate this commitment to Christian education.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Kevin Petrie thanked Bev and Peter for their "labour of love." "What could be more aligned with our purpose of transforming lives through Christ-centred higher education?"

Revealing Jesus is now a three-part series, with earlier publication of *Experiences of Christian Educators* in 2019 and *Making A World of Difference* in 2020. All are available at Amazon. **TEACH**

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Brenton Stacey is the Public Relations and Philanthropy Officer at Avondale University, being an experienced Public Relations Officer with a demonstrated history of working as a communicator and fundraiser in the higher education sector. Skilled in relationship building, news and feature writing, editing, event management and public speaking.

It's an adventure: Pre-service teachers serve and see in the NT

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Keywords: Pre-service, relationships, service learning

Introduction

Summer starts early in the Northern Territory. This is what our students discovered during school placements that introduced them to the ministry of teaching in indigenous culture.

Figure 1: *Chloe Macgillivray teaching a Grades 3 and 4 Science class at Marrara Christin College*

Thirteen pre-service teachers have just returned from the Top End after three weeks of professional experience in Darwin. It's a cool destination that's not, says secondary course convenor Dr Jason Hinze. With daytime temperatures in the low to mid-30s, "we felt like we'd travelled to another country." Arts and teaching student Megan Wilson describes the placement as an "adventure," and why not, with the lush waterholes and misty waterfalls of Litchfield National Park and the rugged and remote beauty of Kakadu National Park among the destinations. The students even got to try deep-sea fishing.

But the real catch is the schools. The "enthusiastic" support of Marrara Christian College and Palmerston Christian School creates a sense of belonging, which encourages the students to "feel confident experimenting and being themselves in the classroom," says Jason.

And that's particularly important when teaching indigenous students. "They're so imaginative and playful," says Joel Bennetts, who taught a Year 7-9 class of up to 15 students. "We were using green spray paint, so one of the boys went haywire trying to make the grass green again." The students valued relationships. "Every boy came up to me on my first day, shook my hand and wanted to know my name. They were the most welcoming students."

Megan had a more challenging first day. "The level of energy overwhelmed me. It was the first day of term, so everyone was excited to be back." The experience "reset my expectations." But teaching became easier as the students got to know Megan. "Building relationships is probably the best part." And that goes for outside of the classroom, too. "Coming on placement with your friends makes dealing with challenges easier," says Megan. "They get it because they're experiencing the same thing."

The Top End trip doubles as a service learning initiative called Ministry of Teaching Overseas, which Jason developed and coordinates. About 350 students have participated in a MOTO trip since 2007, with India, Cambodia, Nepal and Tonga the previous destinations. "We want our students to use their God-given gifts from day one of their course," says Jason, "the gifts of teaching, of connecting with children and of showing what a life with Christ looks like." He enjoys leading the trips because "they remind me Avondale exists to train young adults to go into the world." TEACH

Coming on placement with your friends makes dealing with challenges easier, … They get it because they're experiencing the same thing.

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BOOK REVIEW

Listening in the Morning: Devotional Readings for Teachers

Trevor Lloyd, (2022)
Signs Publishing, 200 pages. Edition - English
ISBN: 9781922373670

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> *[Lloyd] invites teachers … to go beyond the curriculum … day books, the yard duties and the never-ending paperwork and reminds … educators … why they chose teaching as a career in the first place.*

Listening in the Morning **is a manifesto of sorts. Written by teacher, lecturer and passionate educator Dr Trevor Lloyd,** ***Listening in the Morning*** **is a devotional book with a singular golden thread running throughout: teaching is a missional calling. Dr Lloyd rightly places high value on the work of teachers and educators as missionaries. He invites teachers and educators to go beyond the curriculum and the day books, the yard duties and the never-ending paperwork and reminds the educators among us of why they chose teaching as a career in the first place.**

Although the devotional book would certainly bring value to any educator, from community kindergartens to state schools across the country or anywhere else you might have the opportunity to teach, perhaps the biggest impact is reserved for Adventist educational institutions. The mission—the why behind Adventist education—is more than just giving students an excellent education. It's also about telling them there's a God who loves them dearly and wants nothing more than to be in a relationship with them. When an entire school community remembers and embraces this mission, lives are changed, disciples are mentored, and students, families and staff get to know Jesus better.

The readings are short and sharp—perfect for staff worship in the morning, if that is your setting—and come with a question to ponder or discuss. Dr Lloyd employs storytelling as the foundation of the book, sharing anecdotes he's gathered from a lifetime of listening, reading and learning. Sometimes entertaining, sometimes moving, these stories are the perfect vehicle for the message.

For those who are teaching outside Adventist Education, thank you for your ministry. *Listening in the Morning* might be a way for you to fill your spiritual cup and remind you of your personal why.

For those teaching within Adventist Education, thank you for your ministry. *Listening in the Morning* can be a catalyst for renewal and growth and revival within your entire school community.

Listening in the Morning is available from Adventist bookshops in Australia and New Zealand, or online at *https://adventistbookcentre. com.au/ listening-in-the-morning.html*. TEACH

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Karen Collum is a teacher practicing in a variety of contexts for the past 26 years.

Back Cover Introductory Notes –
Adventist education finds its inspiration in the teaching approach of Jesus-the master teacher-and traces its tradition back even further to the acclaimed schools of the prophets of Samuel's time.

Filled with insight and inspiration, these 80 devotional readings will encourage you in your high calling as an Adventist teacher. These engaging readings feature passages from the Bible and Ellen White's writings, stories that expand on the principles they contain and a reflection question to apply these principles to your teaching ministry.

Published in the 150th anniversary year of the official sponsoring of church schools by the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church, Listening in the Morning recognises the achievements of our faithful teaching forebears and seeks to inspire a new generation of Adventist teachers in their work.

(Adventist Book Centre, 2020, para. 1-3).

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Dr Trevor Lloyd has taught at all levels of the Adventist education system. In later years, he worked in curriculum consultancy in Adventist schools, colleges and adult education in South Africa, South Korea, Hong Kong and Russia, as well as in curriculum review across Australia. His commitment to fostering the ideals of Christian education reaches back more than half a century.

Holy Work with Children: Making Meaning Together

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Holy Work with Children: Making Meaning Together is the culmination of personal experience and qualitative research by Campen (2021), children's ministry pastor and director of the Discipleship of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas. Although her research is set in the context of the church rather than school, this book is also highly relevant for Christian teachers in Christian early learning centres and schools who desire to connect their students with God in personal ways. The book is well supported by references throughout, has an extensive bibliography, and for those interested in how the data was collected there is an appendix outlining the research methodology.

While the literature in the area of children's spirituality has been growing, this book is focused entirely on the kinds of spiritual conversations that adults initiate with children. The main premise of this book is that conversations about God are most effective when adults talk with children rather than at children. The early chapters focus on providing context, exploring how children reflect on religious issues, and acknowledging the impact of community on religious experiences. Campen then espouses children as theologians, seeking to offer an inclusive theology that advocates for children to experience God in authentic ways.

Having established the importance of respect for the child and the inherent dangers of persuasion or coercion in spiritual questing, the remainder of the book draws on the author's research to identify the characteristics of 'Holy Conversations'. Campen begins with the notion of creating safe spaces for conversations through intentional prayer and building authentic relationships with students. She then proposes that the keys to having meaningful conversations include active wondering, opportunities for silence, modeling theological reflection, and active listening.

Chapter Four deals with the concept of Holy Conversations with God and elaborates on four phases that together help form a child's theological beliefs and actions. These phases are presented as verbs – engage, recognize, claim and respond – to indicate the active component they play in a child's spiritual life. No book on this topic would be complete without a toolbox for teachers and in the fifth chapter, Campen describes a variety of tools ranging from story, liturgy, and ritual to memory markers such as objects and symbols. She also includes the role of wonder, community, and involvement in the life of the church. Each tool is defined, explained, and illustrated.

The final chapter is called 'Faithful Praxis'. This chapter, although in essence, a summary of information already provided, is presented as a challenge to religious education teachers to be faithful to their calling.

This book is a balanced blend of theory and practice, challenge and affirmation. I frequently found myself reflecting on how I do 'Holy Conversations' with children. I highly recommend this book to parents, teachers, and anyone involved in children's ministries who desires to be more effective in helping children experience God in their lives. **TEACH**

"It was a normal Sunday morning. The children's minister at a United Methodist Church, I was scurrying around making sure everything was ready for the morning ministries. As I raced up the stairs to check the copy machine, I saw a family (Mum, Dad, Son) standing in the hallway looking slightly lost. I slowed my pace, walked up to the family and introduced myself. The parents looked at each other, then at their son, and finally me. The Mom took a deep breath and said: "He has a question for you" (motioning to their son). I quickly got down to eye level with the young child and said: "Hi, I'm Tanya, I'm the pastor for children at this church. I am so glad you're here. Do you have a question for me?" The child looked at the ground, shuffled his feet, and asked, "How do I know I believe in God?"

Chapter 1, Para. 1 (emphasis supplied)
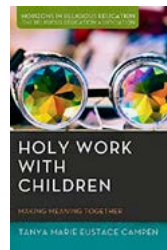
> *conversations about God are most effective when adults talk with children rather than at children.*
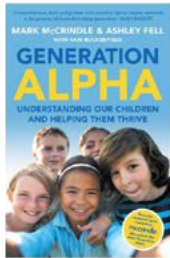
Generation Alpha: Understanding our children and helping them thrive

Mark McCrindle & Ashley Fell (with Sam Buckerfield). (2021).
Hatchette, 358 pages.
ISBN: 978 0 7336 4630 0

Graeme Perry

Editor of TEACH, Avondale University, Balcolyn, NSW

> COVID-19 has accelerated and highlighted trends, including a widespread uncertainty [among many]… about younger populations, challenging their sense of "their world" and the influences shaping it.

Social researchers McCrindle and Fell draw on their experience in following trends in technology—information management, social media, robotics and artificial intelligence; demographic trends—ageing and diversity in the population, and social trends including interactions between the mix of generations within current society. They assert that in 2020 the impact of COVID-19 has "accelerated and highlighted" trends, including a widespread uncertainty amongst parents, educators, and social, business and political leaders about younger populations, challenging their sense of understanding "their world" and the influences shaping it.

The purpose of the book is "that you will have a greater understanding of the world Generation Alpha are growing up in. … be informed, but inspired and equipped with the tools to help them live and thrive … in today's changing world" (p. 3, 4). The chapter structure of the book follows this purpose by firstly observing "the increasing speed, size and scope of change" (p. 7) then clarifying the concept of generations (Builders, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Y - millennials, and Z) ultimately explaining the identification of Generation Alpha (GA) with birth within the years 2010 to 2024. Chapter Two defines Generation Alpha, being characterized as digital, social, global, mobile, and visual. It suggests they will live longer, work later into their life of necessity, but retain a need for relationships, connection and social interaction, with an increased emphasis on communication and leadership skills.

Three subsequent chapters are functionally oriented describing interaction with Generation Alpha in parenting (Chapter 5), educating (Chapter 6), and leading (Chapter 8). The remaining chapters are descriptive of *The Wellbeing Generation*—an emergent social focus (Chapter 3), *The Great Screen Age*—benefits and hazards (Chapter 4), *The Future of Work* (Chapter 7), *Generation Alpha's Lifestyle* (Chapter 9), *The Alpha Consumer* (Chapter 10), and *The World of Alpha: A Future Forecast* (Chapter 11). Important and useful design elements are the inclusion of: poignant attention focussing quotes that introduce each chapter, full page quotes (white text against a grey background)

that visually interrupt text and stimulate contemplation of author valued opinion challenges, 'key takeaways' at the end of each chapter, 315 numbered endnotes and an extensive index.

Nelson Mandela's claim "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (cited p. 186), affirms teachers in their role as the reader begins Chapter 5. It traces educational change from a moral conduct emphasis in colonial times to the current emphasis on social contribution (p. 187). The discussion provides a useful summary of the issues most practicing educators could feel informed about including: STEM and technology in the classroom, new teaching styles characterised as—individualised, self-directed, collaborative, and inquiry based learning; equipping and future proofing students—21st Century skills, creating learners for life. A unique inclusion is an early assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 (p. 195-198) and a commentary on "rising parent engagement", two in five have increased their involvement over the last two years, while 50% have given it higher priority (p. 215).

It is interesting that while parents are increasingly exercising choice to enrol their children in non-government schools the author's do not identify any religious schools specifically other than in comparative enrolment data (p. 188) indicating no unique contribution to future proofing students though earlier research investigated independent schools (McCrindle 2019). In discussing building positive schools, however the importance of vision, values and unity are discussed as factors in thriving school environments and illustrated by quotes from principals of schools with religious affiliation. The authors acknowledge, "The best teachers have always been focused on students. The focus is not on what they're learning but who they are becoming" (p. 208).

Other chapters offering perceptions of the future inform the reader so they may be active participants in shaping preferred futures.

This work's value lies in the coalescence of ideas with an extended research base, one that confidently contextualises interaction with Generation Alpha. It's easy reading style provides a sound resource for informing parenting and initial social backgrounding course work for professionals interacting with children. Further, it is suitable for professional reading within continuing education units or as professional development pre-reading to ensure orientation for institutional or commercial planning and adaptation to change.

This work it is highly recommended since its content and readable style will readily support, enhance and affirm research based professional practice.

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