

The Values of Faith-Based Schooling - A Case-Study.

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Abstract

Christian Parent Controlled (CPC) schools which currently enrol over 22 000 students commenced in the 1960s as a result of the post-war influx of European migrants to Australia. Amongst the Dutch migrants was a group whose allegiance to Reformed Christianity and whose experience of Christian schooling in their homeland led to a determination that Christian schools directed by parents be established. In the first part of the study upon which this paper is based, the foundational values of these schools were identified. These were that: parents' should control the education of their children; the focus of the school should be on the needs of Christian families, including affordability and the importance of a protected environment; the curriculum should be thoroughly Christian, guided by the Bible with Christ at the centre of all school activities; and courses should be developed and taught by Christian teachers. This paper explores the current practices of these schools in relation to these foundational values. The paper finds that prevailing practices in CPC schools generally give faithful expression to these foundational values, however, there are a number of areas where these schools struggle to consistently realize these values.

Introduction

Christian Parent Controlled (CPC) Schools were established in Australia in the early 1960s by Reformed Dutch migrants who sacrificed significant time and finances in an environment which was not particularly conducive to this type of educational venture. Even the well-established Catholic schools were not accepted by all sections of the Australian community and CPC schools which were wore the labels of 'Christian' and 'Dutch' elicited some suspicion.

CPC schools were established because their founders held values which were in conflict with the values of existing Australian schools and it is the values of these schools that are the focus of this paper. The author undertook research on CPC schools in two parts - an identification of their foundational values and a consideration of their prevailing practices in the light of these values. This paper considers the second part of that research - the extent to which the values of the pioneers and early leaders are still alive in and important to CPC school communities.

Values

Holmes and Wynne (1989) claim that values pervade educational endeavours and impact directly on the lives of children:

Education is a moral exercise; it is a set of activities steeped in values. We educate children because we wish to change them from what they would otherwise become. The attempt to change human beings is the application of moral choice. We want to make children better, not worse (p. 3).

While the language of 'changing' other human beings has an unfortunate ring of coercion and power, it is nevertheless the case that all schools act with the intention of inculcating values - they influence and shape students' attitudes, behaviours and beliefs. Classroom etiquette and emphases, student welfare and bullying policies, assessment and reporting practices, the use of praise and rewards, prominence given to academic and or sporting success, the importance accorded students' matriculation results, school celebrations (such as prize-giving evenings, graduation ceremonies, Easter pageants and Anzac Day observances), parents' information evenings, management structures including gender balance amongst executive staff, and the myriad other elements and practices that constitute a school, are all value-laden and impact on the way students understand themselves and others, and thus on their behaviour and values.

In this paper values are defined as beliefs, codes or standards that persist through life and provide a constant motivation toward action (Flynn, 1993, p. 42; Hill, 1998, p. 5; Wallace, 1998, p. 20). Values are not simply sentiments or inclinations. They find active expression in those behaviours and activities regarded as worthwhile and important. The foundational values established in the first part of the research are summarised in the table below.

<i>The Foundational Values of CPC Schools in Australia</i>	
<u>Foundational Values</u>	<u>Value Descriptions</u>
Parent Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian parents should control the direction and purpose of

	their children's education.
Focus on Serving Christian Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPC schools should support Christian families in the task of educating their children • CPC schools should be affordable for Christian families • CPC schools should provide a protected environment for children in which the beliefs and values of Christian families will not be undermined
Christian Curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school curriculum should be thoroughly and distinctively Christian • The Bible should be the foremost guide in all areas of schooling • Christ should be central to, and honoured in all school activities
Teaching by Christians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All courses should be developed and taught by Christian teachers

The Methodology - A Study of 12 CPC Schools.

To identify the prevailing practices (in relation to the foundational values) in these schools, a research design was constructed which involved a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative procedures. Kumar (1996) suggested "In many studies you need to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches" (p.12) and Cresswell (1994) cited five purposes for the combination of methods in one study, particularly "triangulation in the classic sense of seeking convergence of results" (p. 175). Krathwohl (1998) suggested that "by combining methods not only can we compensate for the flaws of one method with the strengths of another, but we can obtain different perspectives, 'depth of field', and detail" (p. 627).

The methodology for the study involved the collection of data by way of document study, surveys and interviews. The documents included research studies and publications, predominantly from Australia, but also from similar schools in North America. The surveys and interviews were conducted with members of constituent groups in CPC schools - parents, senior students, graduates, teachers and executive staff. Surveys were first sent to these constituent groups in 12 CPC schools and these were followed by interviews with selected members of these groups (in the same schools), to clarify and develop issues raised in the surveys and to verify conclusions reached on the basis of the quantitative data. The quantity of surveys and interviews were:

- Parents - 82 surveys and 21 interviews.
- Students - 405 surveys and 21 interviews involving a total of 78 students.
- Graduates - 70 surveys.
- Teachers - 296 surveys and 58 interviews, including 11 principals and 10 other executive staff.

Surveys and Interviews

In the first part of the survey, Likert-style questions (*Strongly Agree, Mostly Agree, Mostly Disagree, etc.*) were used to measure the extent to which constituent groups agreed with a number of propositions regarding the practice of foundational values in their schools. This allowed for a measure by way of a percentage, of the extent to which constituent groups agreed with a particular item.

The questionnaires also incorporated 'open-ended' questions in order to give participants the opportunity to comment in greater depth on aspects of prevailing practices in their school. Interviews with members of the constituent groups in the 12 schools were also conducted to further refine and clarify the quantitative data and to explore a number of issues further.

The Selection of Schools

In order for the schools involved in the study to represent a broad cross-section of Australian CPC schools they were chosen from large country towns, regional cities, working class and upper middle-class suburbs of capital cities, and from semi-rural areas. The schools also ranged in size from relatively small (Year 11 population of 10) to relatively large (Year 11 population of 110). All schools were co-educational and represented six of the eight states and territories. Two of the schools commenced in the 1960s, five in the 1970s and five in the early 1980s. Seven of the schools had their roots in the Reformed Dutch migrant communities and five had evangelical, interdenominational origins. The size of the sample and the variety of schools involved, indicate that the sample was a reasonable cross-section of Australian CPC schools. At the time that the research was conducted, there were 79 CPC schools and 26 schools with Year 11 students.

Foundational Value I. Christian Parent Control

This foundational value was strongly supported in all the schools involved in the study, but was also the most contentious in its application.

In response to the survey, parents and teachers indicated strong support for the concept of parent control. The item, *The governance of the school reflects the God-given authority of the home in the education of children* was agreed to by 90% of the parents and *Christian schools run by parents reflect the God-given authority of the home in the education of children* was agreed to by 86% of the teachers. *Parents are encouraged to be partners in the educational process with teachers* received 62% agreement amongst senior students and 77% amongst graduates.

During the interviews, parents were generally positive about parent control, focusing mainly on issues of communication, of access to teachers and the principal, and of involvement in the life of the school rather than on governance matters or decision making mechanisms. The following comments were characteristic of the positive perceptions most parents had of parent control.

[*How well does parent control work?*] As far as parent control goes ... it works well from the point of view that the board represents parents. ... The board has a cross-section of abilities and all in all, it works well for us. Parents certainly have input into what happens. ... It doesn't mean that you can change anything you don't like though (Interview 25 Parent).

[*What do you think of parent control?*] Parent control is a good system from what I have seen of it. In my son's previous school, I had a 'run in' with the

principal. He wielded absolute power, or at least projected it. Here, I have access to the board if I have any real concerns. It is much more balanced (Interview 53 Parent).

[*Why did you send your children to [this] Christian School?*] I liked the ethos of parent control and the opportunities for parental involvement. ... [*Are you still happy with your decision?*] Yes. It is not a perfect school, but it is an extension of what we believe at home. God is central ... there is prayer. These things are still central to the ethos. (Interview 81 Parent)

The 78 students who were interviewed in 21 group or individual interviews showed little understanding of the concept of parent control. When asked their opinion of parent control, for example, *How does parent control operate in your school?*, there was not one occasion when a student commented on the principle of Christian parents controlling the direction of their children's education or on the relationship between parents, the school association and the board. Senior students were most likely when asked about parent control to comment on the various activities they observed parents engaged in around the school, their own parents' ability to confront particular teachers, concerns about the poor styling of the school uniform or the school board's veto of a school canteen.

The teachers interviewed were generally positive about parent control in their schools. The following comments from three experienced teachers, in response to the question - '*What are your impressions of parent control?*' were representative:

The school liaises well with parents. Parents have a high profile. Parents are on site a lot, especially in lower primary. We are training groups of parents in how to help more effectively, eg, with language skills, reading skills, process language and mathematics (Interview 22 Teacher).

The school supports parents. Parents are number one in kids' lives and it is the parents who want Christian education for children. Everything else follows. The curriculum needs to be acceptable to Christian parents. Our board is very supportive of staff. They try and do the best they can for the school, but they leave the running of the school to school staff (Interview 78 Teacher).

The concept of parent control is good. Parents making decisions for their kids is appropriate (Interview 85 Teacher).

Without exception, the 23 executive members of staff, or school leaders, including 11 principals were positive about the *principle* of "parent control", but most had significant reservations about at least some aspects of its *practice*. Typical of the support for the concept, as opposed to the implementation, of parent control were these comments:

Fundamentally I agree with it [parent control]. ... The board's role is to look after the big picture, to maintain the integrity of the Christian vision, to look after the finances and the future (Interview 5 Principal).

My view is that if you are going to have an educational institution such as a school, then parent control is the best system to allow parents to fulfil their God given responsibilities (Interview 94 Principal).

The Application of Parent Control

Many principals and other executive staff (Deputies, Heads of school and equivalent) commented, however, on a number of problems they saw with the practice of parent control. Their concerns could be broadly categorised as:

- I. The quality of board leadership / the narrow conservatism of some school boards
- II. The role perceptions and relationships between boards and staff / the negative impact of parent control on the decision making of teachers and students
- III. The lack of real commitment of school communities to parent control / the lack of parent involvement / the need to educate school communities about parent control

One principal, in response to *Do you think parent control is a good model?* suggested "The greatest weakness of parent control is the political process needed to get the right people on the board. ... getting the right people, people who have some experience." (Interview 39 Principal). Another principal responded to *Are you aware of dangers for CPC schools in maintaining a distinctively Christian approach?* - "Our Achilles' heel as a movement is our boards. Our own board is very good, but where this is not the case, you can get a lot of conflicts" (Interview 24 Principal). The following perspective was offered by a Principal with over two decades experience in CPC schools:

The problem with parent control is that it is often too difficult to implement good ideas. In a CPC school, ideas often need to go to association meetings to be justified or overturned and there are usually only two association meetings per year. The issue of control is also a problem, because the key word in Christian Parent Controlled schools is 'control' not 'Christian'. The board spends hours talking about control, not about Christian education (Interview 17 Principal).

A secondary school coordinator commented on problems that had arisen as a result of a board making decisions without consulting teachers:

From a board point of view, there have been mistakes. Not enough consultation, especially with senior staff. The board has made changes and just presented them to staff. Staff have been stunned by directives from the board and not given enough time to respond. ... A recent example was when the board announced that there would be [a major management restructure]. Staff were stunned (Interview 40 Executive.).

A principal of one of the older, well established CPC schools added in response to - *Are parents involved enough? Is parent control working?*:

It is very difficult to define and translate parent control into meaningful processes and therefore it is more difficult to manage the processes in an even-handed way. I am warmly committed to the biblical principle behind parent control, but not at all convinced that CPC education as an expression of those principles is sustainable. The resources put in place to support this mechanism are too great. (Interview 35 Principal).

A number of executive staff commented on the danger of boards becoming 'conservative' or narrow, in the sense of rejecting the wider Australian culture and promoting Christian schools as institutions to shelter students from the evils of their society. In response to the question *Are you aware of dangers for CPC schools in the future, in particular in maintaining a distinctively Christian approach?* one principal observed:

The danger is that we might be captured by the conservative element. We are preparing not protecting. There is a risk that we will be taken over by a very conservative element. ... Particularly as the world becomes more challenging, our natural response will be restrictive. There are parents who are frightened of the world, who don't want to talk about things (Interview 24 Principal).

A school board member who had also had leadership responsibility at national level for CPCS brought a perspective on the issue of parent involvement and commitment couched in terms of the importance of the education of parents:

[Is parent control as a concept, working in our schools?] In spite of giving lip service to parent control, we have almost nothing that is tangible evidence of the way we inform, frame or include parents in the education of our children - we provide board members with board training seminars, which assists with governance, but we don't include parents in the process - we don't teach them what Christian parent controlled education is about and we don't include them in programs for teachers that speak to leadership in our schools. ... We need seminars to educate and involve these parents... we need to involve all parents much more inclusively and thoroughly in educational processes. ... We need to get school boards and school leadership generally talking about how we can get parents involved, not about uniform and small insignificant issues, but big picture stuff (Interview 7 Parent).

Summary - Parent Control

This study found that 'Parent Control' is primarily exercised by school boards on behalf of other Christian parents in their school community on the basis that parents have a responsibility before God for the nurture of their children. Constituent groups in the school communities involved in this study are strongly committed to the concept of parent control, however, there is widespread concern on the part of executive staff with the manner in which boards understand and exercise this control. The major issues facing CPC schools in relation to parent control relate to the quality of school boards, the problematic relationships between boards and principals, and the passivity, lack of enthusiasm and lack of involvement on the part of many in these school communities.

Foundational Value II. Focus on Christian Families

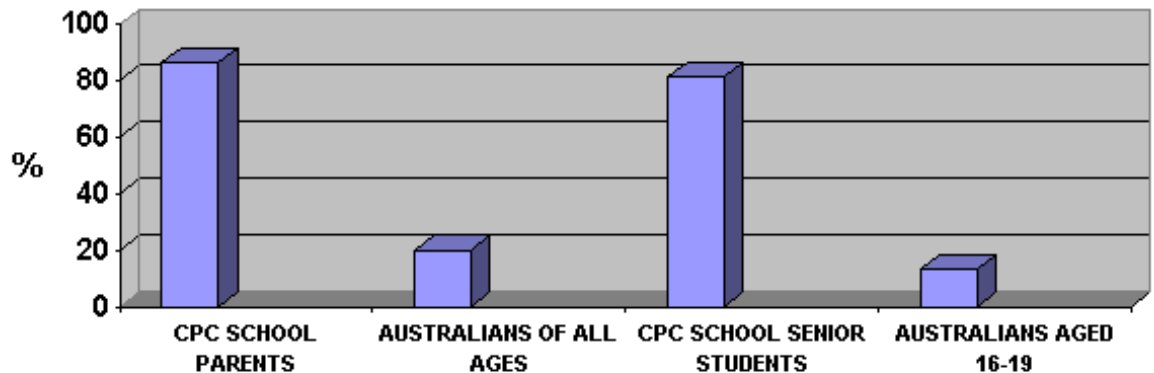
In order to assess whether CPC schools support Christian families, the first question to be considered concerns the constituency of these schools. Are CPC schools providing education for Christian families or for the wider community?

Of the 82 parents who responded to the survey, 78% attended church at least weekly, 86% at least monthly and only 9% did not attend church at all. This statistic which indicates a high rate of church attendance amongst CPC parents is supported by the responses of the senior students (404 Year 11 students in 12 schools), 64% of whom indicated that they attend church at least weekly, 81% at least monthly, and only 13% not at all. These statistics support the contention that CPC school communities are composed predominantly of church going families and therefore (according to the definition), Christian families.

According to the 1998 Australian Community Survey, 20% of Australians (of all ages) say they attend church monthly or more often and for 16 to 19 year old Australians, the figure is 13%. When these statistics are compared to the 86% of CPC parents and the 81% of CPC

senior students who attend church at least monthly, it is clear that the CPC schools serve a population of church families which is significantly different to the general population (Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Castle, and Hughes, 1999, pp. 30-31).

Graph - Church Attendance 'Monthly' or 'More Often'
(A comparison of CPC school parents and senior students with the wider Australian population)



Parents have a miscellany of reasons for choosing a particular school for their children. However, it is clear from the surveys and interviews that parents involved in CPC schools send their children primarily for purposes that are consistent with their Christian beliefs and way of life, and that many are looking for the school to support them in their role as Christian parents.

When surveyed regarding their reasons for sending their children to a CPC school, 'religious' or 'faith' reasons rated most highly for parents, and were also perceived by senior students and graduates as most important for their parents. The item, *'Because there are Christian teachers'* received the greatest endorsement from parents with 93% agreement (*strongly agree or mostly agree*). This was followed by the *'Central importance of the Bible'*, and the *'School seeking to put Jesus at the centre of everything'*. *'Good discipline'* ranked 4th for parents, followed by *'Dissatisfaction with state schools'*, then *'Better employment opportunities'*.

Consistent with the surveys, most of those interviewed (in all groups) mentioned some kind of religious or Christian factor. These reasons can be summarised as:

- *Christian teachers and an ethos consistent with a Christian home.*
- *A caring atmosphere; good values; good discipline; good academic results.*
- *A school free of the problems associated with some state schools such as drugs and violence.*

Many CPC schools also have enrolment policies which have been designed to ensure that a certain percentage of 'Christian' families supportive of the school's ethos is maintained within their school. It should be noted that the broad definition of "Christian" proposed by the Oxford dictionary - "one who believes or professes the religion of Christ" (p. 332, 1973) would be accepted by the vast majority of those involved in Australian CPC school communities and would certainly be understood to include those belonging to other Christian traditions. The term itself though, has a narrower currency in most of these schools. It would be understood that most, if not all of the Christian families associated with CPC schools would come from the Reformed, Evangelical or Pentecostal (Protestant) traditions. The use

of the term 'Christian' in this study ought not, however, be read as exclusive or restricted, but rather as the self-designation that these traditions regard as most appropriate.

In the interviews, parents, teachers and executive staff were strongly supportive of these enrolment policies. There was a general concern that if the essentially Christian populations of CPC schools were to change, then support for the schools' religious basis and ethos, and eventually the distinctive natures of the schools themselves, would also change.

Affordability

It is difficult to make a definitive assessment of the affordability of CPC schools in general, or even of particular CPC schools, due to the problem of defining 'affordability'. Is a school affordable if families who are struggling financially are required, (as is the case in at least one of the schools), to take out a loan to cover fees which would eventually be repaid a number of years after their children have completed their schooling?

In the survey, 73% of parents agreed that *Income prevents some parents from sending children to this school* but only 36 % of parents agreed that *This school should be more conscious of the financial difficulties faced by parents on low incomes*. These responses appear to leave the question of the affordability of CPC schooling unanswered. If the surveyed parents indicated that income prevented other parents from sending their children to a CPC school, it might be assumed that they would also indicate that schools should be more conscious of the financial difficulties of low-income families. However, the survey did not indicate this. It may have been that the parents surveyed believed that fees could not go any lower without leading to a decrease in school services and facilities or that lower income families needed to change their financial priorities in order to send their children to a CPC school.

The interviews provided some clarification of this issue. On the whole, parents suggested that CPC schools were affordable if families were willing to make sacrifices, but they also pointed to the policies of many CPC schools which already subsidise the fees, or in some way, financially support the enrolment of children from low-income families.

A lot of Christians decide whether or not to sacrifice ... it is very tight for a lot of people, but most people would be able to send their children to a Christian school if they were willing to sacrifice (Interview 2 Staff-Parent).

Fees are moderate in the first place. There is a fee remissions policy and some budgetary counselling occurs (Interview 34 Executive - Parent).

If your priority is for it, yes it is affordable. From my time on the board, I know of parents who have sold their homes and invested the money in order to keep kids in school. However, this school has the cheapest fees I know except for Catholic schools (Interview 84 Parent).

A small number of parents and teachers sounded a note of caution however. One of the Principals, considering the possible dangers that face CPC schools warned: "If we are not careful, we could cost ourselves away from those who have a heart for Christian education." (Interview 82 Principal).

Significantly, two of the pioneers who have retained an active interest in CPC schooling spoke of their disquiet about the cost of educating children in CPC schools today:

[*What do you see in the future for CPC schools?*] Where will the schools end up further down the track? Will they become elitist as the grammar schools have? ... That would be my main concern. ... If I listen to some of the parents who are 'hard up', in terms of meeting the school fees and the way that is being dealt with, well they are the first signs of really becoming elitist. (Hoekzema, Pioneer Interview 3)

For the real Christian battler, there is no room, it becomes too expensive. This is one of the biggest dangers facing our schools ... people I know are going to home schooling and cost is a big factor in that, ... we are losing part of the less economic section of the Christian community (Schippers, Pioneer Interview 7).

As these responses indicate, a consensus is not held in CPC school communities regarding their affordability. While the parents on the whole suggested that CPC schools were affordable, particularly if families were willing to sacrifice, there were some who were concerned that CPC schools could lose sight of a foundational value which focused on the importance of Christian education being available to all Christian families, regardless of their income level.

Protection

The importance of a protected environment did not receive unequivocal support in the surveys either. About half of the parents, senior students and graduates thought it was significant in the parents' choice of a CPC school. The item *I send my children to this school because I want my children to be safe from non-Christian influences* was agreed to by 49% of parents (n=82) while 53% of senior students (n=402) and 53% of graduates (n=69) agreed that *My parents chose this school for me because they wanted to keep me safe*.

A number of parents mentioned (in the interviews) the importance of protecting their children from a state school environment. The following comment was typical:

I wasn't happy with the state schools ... the standards ... I wasn't happy to have the kids time wasted. And the humanistic ideas, homosexuality, evolution ... Also discipline standards - there is such a wide range in state schools. It is a third teach and two thirds discipline. In a Christian school these fractions are reversed, therefore they are better value, better run. Teachers really care. It is not just about money, but teachers really put in the effort. This is not so much the norm in public schools (Interview 80 Parent).

A teacher of over 15 years experience in CPC schools who had a young child, also reflected on the importance for parents of the 'safety' factor:

I don't really talk to parents about this, but you get the feeling that parents send their children here because it is a safe environment for kids and it has good morals. ...Thinking of my own [pre-school] child, I want her to grow up knowing God, but also protected. The danger is I suppose that the protection factor is most important - and how many parents think like me? (Interview 85 Teacher).

Summary - Focus on Christian Families

- *This study found that CPC schools serve a largely church-going constituency that is looking to these schools to support their religious values. Parents are attracted to these schools because there are Christian teachers and because they believe Christ and the Bible are central. It is also evident that in general, CPC schools preserve their Christian constituency via enrolment policies that maintain a certain percentage of Christian families in the school. The prevailing practices of CPC schools are consistent with the foundational value that schools should support Christian families in their task of educating their children.*
- *This study has not been able to clearly identify CPC schools' prevailing practice in regard to affordability. Many schools exhibit evidence of a commitment to this value through the provision of fee-relief for low income families, but this was not the case in all the schools involved in this study. The widespread use of the word 'sacrifice' indicated that the financial responsibility for this type of education was generally regarded as being the responsibility of individual families rather than that of the wider school community and there was evidence of concern amongst some members of CPC school communities that this foundational value lacked widespread support.*
- *It was evident from the survey responses and interview comments that there were many families who continued to send their children to CPC schools because they regarded the environment as safer, or as more protected than alternative schools. It was also evident, on the basis of the comments of a number of students and parents that protection involved not only a guarding of the Christian beliefs and faith of the families, but also the provision of a morally and physically 'safe' environment.*

Foundational Value III. Curriculum from a Christian Perspective

The survey responses supported the contention that CPC schools continue to regard Christian curriculum as important. The statement *Teachers at my school present(ed) lessons from a Christian perspective* was supported by 73% of senior students and 90% of graduates while 83% of teachers agreed that *Teaching programs at my school are all written from a Christian perspective*.

It was clear from a number of interviews, however, that there are teachers who struggle to clearly articulate their understanding of a Christian perspective on curriculum and there are schools where attempts to present a distinctively Christian approach to curriculum can best be described as inconsistent. The results of this research do not however, support the contention that this situation applies to all teachers or all schools.

[What are your main concerns for the future of Christian Parent Controlled Schools?] Christian curriculum is still a problem in the movement. We rely very heavily on Christians who are teachers, to teach our kids. We do not insist on rigour in the Christian content of curricula. We use secular curricula. I haven't seen evidence that this has been pursued diligently (Interview 7 Parent).

The business of teaching christianly is the biggest issue and the biggest difficulty that Christian teachers face. ... How do you teach maths and science

christianly? ... Many of the teachers do reasonably well and teach Christian perspectives reasonably often. Many who don't, find it difficult and perhaps don't know how - there is an "icing on the cake" approach for some people. There aren't too many teachers who teach christianly in everything they do. Sometimes opportunities are lost, because teachers don't know how. Teachers need the time and opportunity to develop these ideas. (Interview 62 Executive).

The difficult nature of presenting distinctively Christian curriculum has never been underestimated by CPC educators. Mechielsen (1978) for example, argued that "developing a distinctively Christian approach in the construction of curricula is without doubt the most difficult task faced by parents and teachers in all Christian schools" (p.2).

Teachers and executives continue to wrestle with the difficulties outlined by Mechielsen but it is also evident that CPC schools are characterised by their engagement with the issue of Christian curriculum. Many CPC schools would willingly use the word 'struggle' to describe this engagement as it reflects the difficulty of the task and also the sense that the task is incomplete.

The Bible as Guide

The importance of the Bible for CPC schools was also supported in the surveys. *This school teaches students to understand the Bible* was supported by 83% of parents, 71% of senior students and 87% of graduates. In addition, 87% of parents, 66% of senior students and 89% of graduates agreed that *I (My parents) chose this school for my children (me) because the Bible is of central importance to all that happens.*

Thompson, who has held various teaching and leadership positions in CPC schools since 1980 including director of CPCS Ltd. and who is currently undertaking doctoral research focused on the role of the Bible in Christian schools, made a number of comments regarding the role of the Bible in CPC schools. He maintained:

I have no doubt at all that CPC schools agree on the Bible's foundational importance ... The Bible is traditionally used in three ways in CPC schools -

- Devotionally - where the Bible is used in the context of commitment, worship and prayer.
- In curriculum - where the Bible is studied as a separate subject such as biblical studies.
- Perspectively - where the Bible give perspective to every subject and every aspect of the curriculum. [Personal communication, Thursday, 21 June 2001].

According to Thompson, the 'perspectival' use of the Bible dominates in CPC schools, followed by its use devotionally and then its use as curriculum. In response to *How well is the Bible used in CPC schools?* Thompson suggested:

It is not used well - in that perspectival use dominates CPC schools ... When teachers are under pressure, given the frantic and urgent nature of life in schools, the perspectival focus quickly dies and teachers fall back on what keeps kids quiet. ... One of the problems is the lack of theological perspective amongst teachers. In the days when people debated and read the Bible, it was OK to ask what the Bible's view was on Economics, but in the last half century, the breadth of Bible reading has gone. ... we need to assist teachers with training and in-service to develop a biblical theology. ... The fundamental issue is not that the Bible isn't espoused and loved but

that perspectival emphasis can't succeed without teachers being trained. [Personal communication, Thursday, 21 June 2001].

The following comments by Mechielsen on the occasion of his retirement from the position of Executive Director of CPC schools point to both the significance of the Bible for these schools and of the interdependence of this value with others such as the importance of the centrality of Christ:

Christian Parent Controlled school communities seek to have and promote a world view shaped by the Bible. ... A Christian school is not worthy of the name if it does not seek to ensure the Bible is directive for learning and for the learning community. This means taking God's Word seriously because it reveals Christ for whose purposes the school exists and because it is instructive for learning and life. Our biblical basis says, the Bible is 'the only absolute rule for all faith and conduct, and therefore also for the education of our children at home and at school.' In a world whose message is that people make their own meaning, we acknowledge that meaning can only be found in Christ. The Bible points to Christ 'in whom all things hold together'. Acknowledging Christ will help our children to make sense of the world in which God has placed them (Mechielsen, 2000).

Mechielsen's comments do not negate those of Thompson however. The concern is that while the Bible is respected and regarded as authoritative, it is not understood sufficiently to provide other than a muted voice alongside other and competing values in CPC schooling.

The Centrality of Christ

An issue to be considered when dealing with a concept that involves phrases such as 'Christ-centred' is that of discerning meaning, and resisting cliché. Many Christian organisations, including CPC schools, maintain that their policies and practices are centred on Christ, but what this denotes is not clear. There is no doubt that this value is important to those involved in CPC schools and that it is sincerely sought, but it is not easy to discern or assess.

The survey responses indicated that the centrality of Christ continues to be an important motif for CPC schools. In the survey, 91% of teachers agreed that *In my teaching, I seek to put Jesus at the centre of everything* and 87% of parents agreed *I send my children to this school because the school seeks to put Jesus at the centre of everything*.

In the interviews however, apart from the area of relationships, very few teachers or parents were able to articulate how a commitment to the centrality of Christ should apply to curriculum issues. Typical responses included:

[What do you understand by Christ-centred education?] The students see the life of Christ through our behaviour - there is no point talking if you are not showing. The teachers as role models should reflect and shine Jesus through God's Spirit (Interview 4 Teacher)

[What do you understand the school's priorities to be?] The school's priorities are giving kids the love of Christ - the relationship aspect. It is not always explicit and it is not always easy. I can see a lot of Christ in the teachers and that is what is most important. Kids must be able to see it (Interview 26 Teacher).

[What do you understand by Christ-centred education?] Everything during the day is related to Christ, Christ's Word and God. Everything is related to biblical principles,

forming the child's understanding about everything in God's world (Interview 29 Parent)

[What are your expectations of teachers in a Christian school?] A Christian influence should come through the way that lessons are presented. I expect teachers to be well grounded in Christian perspectives and expect staff to keep bringing these issues to children's minds, keeping kids thinking. ... to bring Christ into the classroom. Teachers are critical to a Christian school (Interview 69 Parent).

Summary - Christian Curricula

- *This study found that the interview responses of teachers and executives, together with the resources that CPC schools assign to professional development and graduate teacher training, indicate a commitment by CPC schools to the presentation of thoroughly and distinctively Christian curriculum. However, the interview comments also indicate that the task is one which teachers struggle to realise, as a result of time limitations and a lack of expertise. The provision of a thoroughly and distinctively Christian curriculum continues to be pursued in CPC schools, however, at this point in the development of CPC schools, the prevailing practice of this value is tentative and inconsistent.*
- *The survey and interview responses of this study indicated that the Bible retains its status as the pre-eminent document in the life of CPC schools and that it is used as a guide to provide perspective in curriculum and other areas of school life. The Bible is widely used by teachers in the classroom, in particular at the junior levels in schools. There is evidence, however, that many teachers do not possess a thorough or deep understanding of the Bible and might not therefore, be capable of using the Bible effectively or credibly in their classrooms or in other curriculum areas.*
- *The surveys and interviews of constituent groups in CPC schools indicated almost universal support for the value that Christ is and ought to be central to everything that occurs in a CPC school. However, a consistent approach concerning the application of this value in the life of CPC school communities was not evident. Beyond a personal commitment to Christ on the part of those who were involved in CPC schools, it was not clear what this value meant in practice. 'Christ-centredness' is primarily a statement of faith for CPC schools, an objective that is revered and acknowledged in most or all aspects of a school's operation, but difficult to identify.*

Foundational Value IV. The Employment of Christian Teachers

There was strong support in the surveys for the statement *This school employs only Christians as teachers*, with 96% agreement from parents, 98% from teachers, 87% from senior students, and 96% from graduates.

In the interviews, all constituent groups agreed that only Christians were employed as teachers in CPC schools, and also that it was critically important that this should continue to be the practice. The following responses were representative:

[Are Christian teachers necessary?] Christian teachers are necessary because I would want to know if my kid went to a teacher, that they would be a Christian role model. I wouldn't want a teacher in private conversation to disagree with my views (Interview 2 Staff-Parent).

[Do you see any dangers ahead for our schools in maintaining their distinctively Christian approach?] It is really important that we ensure that all our teachers are Christians. ... If we are not strong on this, we will be gobbled up. (Interview 53 Parent).

[Are there dangers that this school needs to be wary of if it is to maintain its distinctively Christian approach?] The distinctiveness of a Christian school is to do with the personnel. Whenever you have committed Christian people who have banded together, committed to the educational task of raising kids up for God and good, then that distinctiveness will remain (Interview 46 Teacher).

Summary - Christian Teachers

- *On the basis of the survey and interview responses of this study, it is clear that the prevailing practice of CPC schools in regard to the employment of Christian teachers is consistent with this foundational value. All constituent groups strongly agreed that their schools employed only Christian teachers while some parents and many teachers and executive staff were able to articulate the connection between Christian teachers and other foundational values such as support for Christian families and / or the delivery of a Christian curriculum. This research indicated that CPC schools continue to hold the conviction that it is not possible for a teacher to have a different worldview, particularly a different view of the significance of Christ and the Bible, and teach effectively in a CPC school.*

Conclusion

This study has found that CPC schools have four major foundational values which continue to play a significant role in shaping the ethos and direction of these schools. This study has also found, however, that serious attention needs to be given to the application of these foundational values in order to maintain their integrity and energy. The concept of parent control needs careful attention in order not to be misunderstood and the application of values such as those emphasising the importance of the Bible and Christ need to be given sustained support if they are not to fall prey to cliché.

Postscript - An Anticipation of Struggle Rather Than Success?

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) in a number of publications such as *What's worth fighting for in education?* maintained that educators ought to be fighting to maintain educational values. It is the contention of the author that the foundational values of CPC schools will continue to undergird and determine their character and ethos only if they are 'fought for'. The values face too much competition and are in a sense too demanding, to survive without being nurtured and explicitly promoted.

CPC schools face a range of external pressures, not the least being 'market' forces arising from the pervasive ideology of economic rationalism. Education is increasingly seen as critical to economic competitiveness, to economic reconstruction and to micro-economic reform (Marginson, 1997, pp. 123-124; OECD, 1987, pp. 69-70). Schools in Australia are increasingly employing public relations officers and are using a wide range of media to increase or at least maintain enrolments.

Christian schooling in the Catholic tradition is also wrestling with this issue of maintaining their identity and core values. Baker and Riordan (1998) for example, argued that Catholic schools in the USA were on the verge of becoming elite private schools that educate vast numbers of non-Catholics, children from wealthy families, and increasing numbers of children with no religious background. They maintained that faith was taking second place to academic preparation and that American Catholic schools had drifted from their origins as common schools for all Catholic children. Their assessment is pertinent:

Perhaps nothing changes a religiously oriented school more than the presence of large numbers of non-believers. ... it is well known that the families of students from higher social classes are more demanding customers and are often very adept at seeing that schools provide what they want. And students and parents from higher socio-economic groups are particularly keen on rigorous academic preparation. As Catholic schools continue to attract and adapt to such students, priorities at the schools change radically (1998, p.19).

Arthur (1995) also expressed concerns regarding the situation in the UK, where "a number of Catholic schools have pursued a line of development which is not in harmony with their founding principles. In effect their governors, parents and teaching staff have lost sight of the Christian principles which support the ideals of Catholic education" (p. 225). He despaired that many Catholic schools were so committed to a pluralistic approach that they had become indistinguishable from other schools.

In 'The Dying of the Light', Burtchaell (1998) considered a number of colleges and universities in the United States which were founded under the auspices of a number of different Christian traditions, and discovered that most no longer had any relationship with that tradition. Burtchaell offered a sober warning that any Christian institution can relinquish its purpose and identity.

Clearly, Christian schools are not immune to this danger. The issues raised by Burtchaell, Baker and Riordan, and Arthur are relevant to CPC schools. If colleges in the USA and Catholic schools in the USA and the UK can lose their distinctively Christian values then there is no reason per se, to think that CPC schools are impervious to this gradual disintegration of foundational values.

Dickens, a former CPC school principal expresses similar concerns regarding the tension between market and mission and the dangers for CPC schools of losing their integrity as a result of an emphasis on success - "looking good, acquiring possessions and achieving results, ... [rather than] character formation or transformed thinking" (Dickens, p.2, 2001). He continues that this can lead to the CPC school "becoming an educational business where the product is packaged and marketed to an increasingly demanding clientele with an overwhelming range of aspirations. Christian schools easily become cheap private schools in the educational marketplace ... rather than seeing ourselves as providers of a marketed commodity and the parents as consumers we must keep happy, we ought to be building 'covenant communities' (Stronks and Blomberg, 1993), ... made up of teachers, students and parents committed to each other in loving and honest relationships and engaged in a common task motivated by a communal vision" (Dickens, p.4, 2001).

It may be that in order to maintain their foundational values as dynamic and relevant and thereby resist the pressure to concede to different and opposing values, that CPC schools need to eschew any aspirations of "success" and embrace rather, the notion of 'struggle' which would reflect more accurately the difficulty of their task and the sense that the values

upon which the schools were established are difficult to implement and need constant attention.

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