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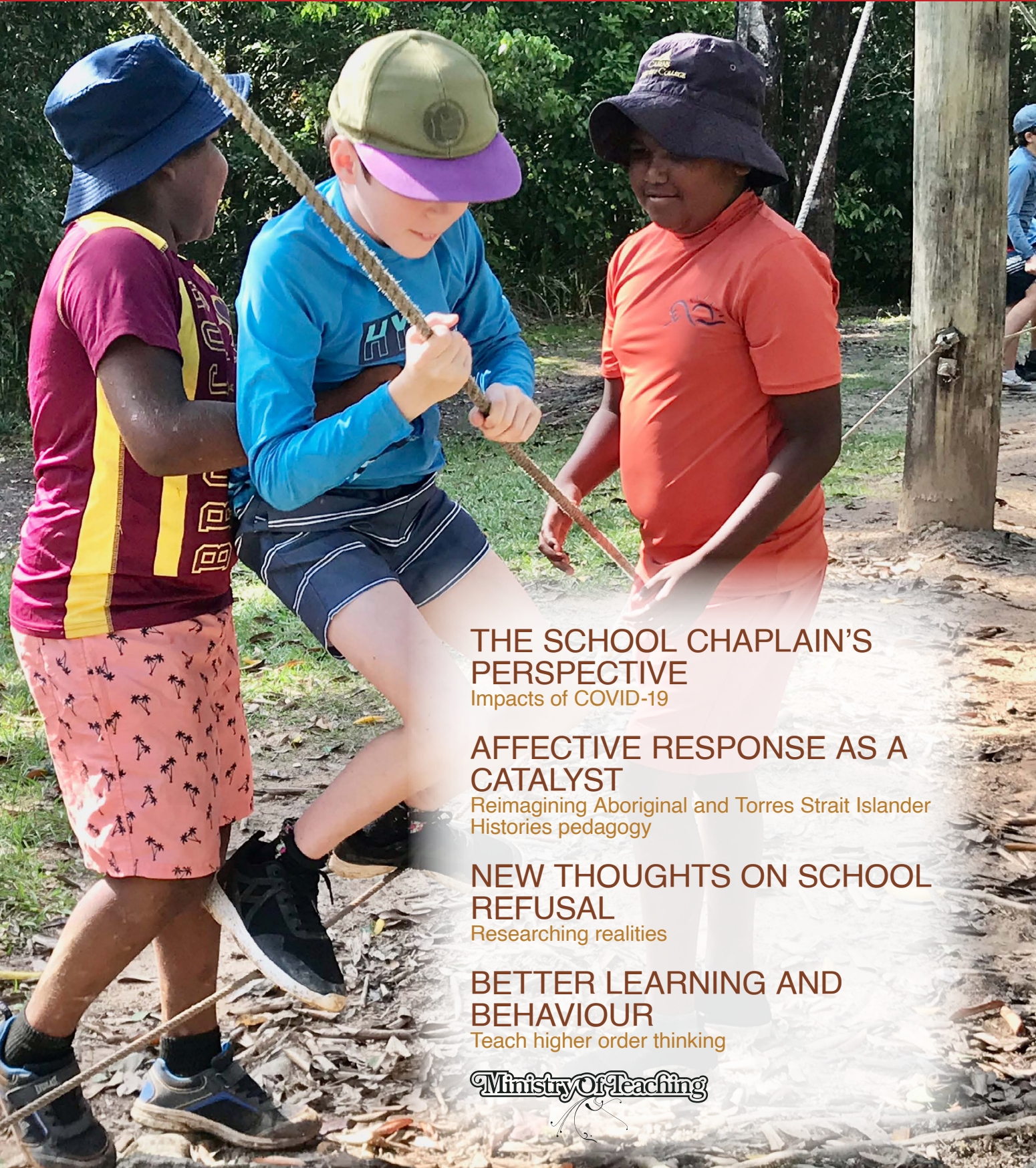
THE SCHOOL CHAPLAIN'S PERSPECTIVE
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Ministry Of Teaching

Cover photography: Cairns Adventist College image files.

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EDITORIAL

Graeme Perry

In this post-COVID-19 lockdown period, aspirational recovery has progressed beyond a return to past 'normal' practice. Sensing the potential for learning from adaptations introduced under the duress of the pandemic, the proven flexibility and creativity of incredibly responsive educators, the impact of greater freedoms to resource individuals and focused awareness of current learner needs, inspires and requires a review of curriculum and pedagogy. An additional current disruptive impact is the ease of access to Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies like ChatGPT, creating controversy about its use in schools. Reactions include bans and/or restricted use in Department of Education (DoE) schools within some states (DoE, 2023), yet acceptance in some independent schools (Duffy, 2023) and avid advocacy by early adopters. Tired teachers continue to be challenged by the imperatives of change.

Reflective complex school change processes are informed by an understanding of guiding paradigms. Aston citing Roche (Aston, 2020) asserts "teams … need to periodically reflect on their assumptions about how change happens, and their identity and values, what some call triple loop learning" (para. 1). The loops are reduced in Aston's discussion to three questions. "Are we doing things right? … Are we doing the right things? ... What is right?" (paras. 3,4 &5). These questions are linked to assumptions classified as: operational assumptions ("resources, access, participation … chiefly about the WHAT"), causal assumptions ("events and conditions needed … about the WHY and the WHO"), prescriptive assumptions ("shared norms and values … chiefly … the WHY and the WHO") and paradigmatic assumptions ("belief systems, world views, and philosophies … WHY we do what we do and WHO we want to be?" (para. 8). Change and curriculum reform has in the past motivated professional development by changes in terminology associated with new ways of conceptualising, structuring, naming/referencing existing processes and practices but asserting a new emphasis or theoretical base.

A recent overarching theme is Wellbeing. While an important perspective for employers, employees, clients and community before the pandemic, the experiences of: enforced isolation, differentiated employment conditions—compulsory vaccination, onsite presence or working from home, and income constraints, together with parental responsibility for supervising learning from home, and experienced mental health impacts has emphasised the importance of pervasive intentional wellbeing support across the whole of school community experience.

This TEACH issue includes planned wellbeing supportive responses for educators suggesting whole of school initiatives firstly, being: a primary school focus on friendship (Hills, p. 10), learning from chaplains' COVID-19 perspectives (Williams et al., p 13), seeking crisis information from staff and students (Medbury, p. 23), teacher affective response and reimagining teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories (Williamson-Kefu et al., p. 31), addressing school refusal (Costigan et al., p. 38), and providing pathways to leadership (Williams, p. 46). Secondly, focusing on individuals, teaching critical thinking within a student's learning supports their growing wellbeing by enhanced learning and their choosing better behaviour (Jackson et al., p. 4; Lewis, p. 53).

Bedouw (2023, para 4) shares "when young people identify a purpose in life, it leads to increased happiness, academic performance and resiliency." Even better she offers suggestions for how you can do it. Why not check it out! TEACH

> *teams ... need to periodically reflect on their assumptions about how change happens, and their identity and values*

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[Photography: Glenys Perry]

An exploration of using examples and non-examples to develop the skill of critical thinking in students

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Introduction

In the context of fast-paced and social media driven news and information consumption, the central importance of developing the ability of students to think critically is difficult to overstate. It is vital that students receive an education that includes the teaching of critical thinking that moves beyond the assumption that students will acquire these skills incidentally and instead explicitly, and carefully, teaches students how to think critically. To inform this aspirational goal, we engaged in modest practitioner-based research to explore some possible methods for teaching critical thinking skills using examples and non-examples.

We conducted our practitioner-based research at Brisbane Adventist College (BAC), which is located on the border between Mansfield and Wishart in the southern suburbs of Brisbane City Council. BAC is a medium sized, P-12, college of around 600 students who come from a range of cultural backgrounds. Over the past two years we have been supported by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) to investigate ways to improve the quality of feedback students receive during the preparation for their summative assessments. Our participation allowed us to engage in targeted professional development about student-centred feedback, from which we then supported our colleagues through a process to implement this approach across our college

Assessment feedback principles

The Hattie and Timperley (2007) feedback model features a feedback cycle, in which teachers provide feedback to students that answers three questions: (i) *Where am I going? (The learning goals)*, (ii) *How am I going? (The current progress in relation to the learning goal)*, and (iii) *Where to next? (The steps that need to be taken in order to move from the current progress through to the learning goal).* This cycle is sometimes referred to as *Feed Up / Feed Back / Feed Forward*. Providing feedback to students that address these three questions is very teacher-centred in that it requires teachers to invest considerable time and energy into providing quality guidance to students which is, too often, either ignored by the student, or not understood by the student (Brooks et al, 2021). By contrast, Brooks et al (2021) suggest that increasing student participation and involvement in monitoring their progress should reduce the workload for teachers while improving the quality of student responses.

It has long been recognised that a student can, and should, be involved in self-monitoring their progress. For example, Sadler (1998) argued that self-monitoring against the marking criteria is a skill that can be taught to students. A major problem, though, is that students are prone to considering their work to be of a higher quality than it might be. This is compounded by the fact that many students, particularly those with attention or language difficulties, often do not understand what an assessment task is requiring them to do (Graham, et al., 2018). While Graham et al. (2018) highlight the important work to be done in improving the clarity and accessibility of assessment, we posit that providing students with examples and non-examples will supply students with additional support to understand the requirements of a task.

The generation and provision of examples and non-examples has the potential to be yet another teacher-directed process. Instead, it is preferable that students should be active agents in the feedback cycle and not passive recipients of teacher-directed feedback (Brooks et al., 2021). One way of involving, and engaging students, in the feedback process is to develop their assessment feedback competence by co-constructing success through the examination

> *This [feedback] cycle is sometimes referred to as Feed Up / Feed Back / Feed Forward.*

of carefully selected examples and non-examples of each of the skills and concepts related to an assessment (Brooks et al., 2021). A key skill identified in the Australian Curriculum as a general capability is creative and critical thinking. Recognising the importance of creative and critical thinking, we wanted to determine if the principles of student-centred feedback could be applied to developing this crucial skill. In particular, we wanted to create a collection of examples and non-examples that could be used with students to develop their critical thinking skills and to evaluate student and teacher views regarding the effectiveness of these examples and non-examples.

Teacher professional development principles

In addition to our focus on using examples and non-examples with students to develop their critical thinking, we wanted to engage our teaching colleagues in ways that would affect lasting change. The work of Guskey (2002) indicates that teachers are more likely to change their beliefs about classroom practices when they observe positive changes in student learning outcomes. Consequently, we recognised a need to provide opportunities for teachers to experience success, and to hear about success, as we worked together to implement the student-centred feedback technique of examples and non-examples. It is also known that teachers possess independently developed and contextually specific understandings about the content and skills of their teaching areas and how to go about teaching those content skills, these understandings are collectively referred to as pedagogical content knowledge (Loughran et. al., 2012). Of relevance to our project, then, was how to develop critical thinking pedagogical content knowledge. Hegazy et. al., (2021) report on a series of team-based action research projects that were effective at developing critical thinking pedagogical content knowledge. Our project sought to provide teachers with opportunities for success by engaging them in professional learning team practitioner-based research focused on the use of examples and non-examples.

The process

The modest practitioner-based research that our college engaged with was implemented in the following way. Each of the steps are linked to the guiding principles outlined in Section 1.

Step 1: Learning about student-centred feedback

As part of our participation in the ISQ supported project, we, the authors of this paper, participated in two days of intensive professional development. The professional development was delivered by Cameron Brooks and focused on the student-centred feedback model that he had developed. Over the course of these two days, two members of The University of Queensland Science of Learning Research Centre alongside the ISQ personnel supporting this project worked with us to refine the focus of our research project. This process helped develop our understanding of the principles of effective feedback as described in Step 1.

Step 2: Development and trialling of examples and non-examples

Each of the authors of this paper developed and trialled the use of examples and non-examples in their individual classrooms. This allowed us to begin to develop our pedagogical content knowledge about how this technique could be used effectively within our own teaching domains.

Step 3: Feeding forward to our colleagues

The authors of this paper drew on the professional learning we had received, and the experience we had developed in our respective classrooms, to prepare and present a professional learning community presentation to our colleagues. Our candid reflections on how we were going with our implementation of student-centred feedback allowed us to identify the learning and practice gap in reference to where we wanted to go. In particular:

- we shared specific examples of how we had used examples and non-examples in our classrooms;
- what we had found to be successful and what needed more thought or development;
- and what we considered to be the goal, namely developing students who are able to monitor their own progress and take the necessary steps to move towards their learning goals.

As part of this presentation, we outlined the focus of our professional learning community and constituent teams for Semester 2. The focus was to develop examples and non-examples to support students with the Australian Curriculum's general capability of creative and critical thinking. This was presented as a natural progression from the Semester 1 focus on the literacy general capability.

Step 4: Professional learning team time

In order to support teachers and provide "space" for them to work on the focus area, professional learning team time was provided to the teams. The professional learning teams were primary stages and secondary learning areas. On our secondary

Our project sought to provide … professional learning team practitioner-based research … on the use of examples and non-examples.

campus, many teachers work across departments, so the teams were assembled around a common focus subject with teachers only expected to work in one team for this project. Four weeks of professional learning time over the course of semester 2 was allocated for teachers to complete the following procedures:

1. Use the ACARA Creative and Critical Thinking Learning continuum (ACARA, n.d.) to select a skill to focus on. The teaching team was able to draw on their pedagogical content knowledge of the skills gaps (or misconceptions) that they commonly encountered in their classrooms to select a target skill.

2. Develop some examples and non-examples that illustrate a relationship to the selected skill. The teaching teams again drew on their understanding of the common skills gaps to either select student work that illustrated a particular skill gap or to develop their own examples and non-examples that illustrated this skill gap.

3. Decide as a team how to use the examples and non-examples in their classrooms. One of the key tasks for each team was to determine where in the teaching and learning cycle they would use the examples and non-examples and how they would go about using them. For example, a team might choose to provide the examples and non-examples as a static wall poster or the team might have a lesson in which they model a process done well and not well and then ask the students to respond with an explanation of why the non-example was not effective. The exploratory nature of our study was designed to both collect samples of examples and non-examples and also to collate techniques of how they were used.

Step 5: Professional learning community sharing time
In order to share the experiences learned and develop a greater shared understanding of the use of

> *students had to analyse the supplied texts against a writing check list and reflect on the positives and negatives.*

examples and non-examples, a professional learning community meeting was allocated for each of the teams to present what they had done. This type of sharing session has been introduced recently in our college and we have found that they are a great opportunity for teachers to share and to hear success stories.

The products
All teachers in our college worked on producing examples and non-examples relating to critical thinking in their classes. The authors of this paper produced the following categories of examples and non-examples.

Year 1
Teachers of Year 1 produced a wide range of examples and non-examples that were used in class. The examples and non-examples were used in conjunction with the question "Which is more effective?". This provided opportunity to highlight to the class the features of the example that made it more effective than the non-example. Some of the areas that the Year 1 teachers produced examples and non-examples for were:
- Use of descriptive verbs in a procedure (See Figure 1)
- Handwriting (See Figure 2)
- Categories of shapes
- Descriptive writing
- Diorama construction

Year 5
The team members working in Year 5 chose to focus on the critical thinking skill "Evaluate procedures and outcomes". They asked their students to interact with written examples and non-examples of writing. This allowed them to further develop earlier work from our literacy focus. The students had to analyse the supplied texts against a writing check list and reflect on the positives and negatives. The writing checklist

1. Put on the icing	1. Place the cake on a plate.
2. Put on the sprinkles.	2. Spread the icing on the cake.
3. Put on the candle.	3. Shake the sprinkles onto the icing.
4. Eat the cake.	4. Push the candle into the icing.
5. Finished.	5. Now your birthday cake is ready for the party!

Figure 1: *Example and non-example of the use of descriptive verbs. The highlighted descriptive verbs were revealed to the students after they had a go at identifying the features that made it more effective.*

included points on the text structure and language features needed in persuasive and informative writing.

English

The team member working in English provided to students some examples and non-examples relating to their advertising unit. As part of their summative assessment students had to produce an advertising poster. To inform their poster, a commercial poster and a sample of previous student work (See Figure 3 and Figure 4) was provided to them. They also had to critique advertisements and were provided with examples and non-examples of a critique.

Science

The science teachers focused on the critical thinking skill "Evaluate procedures and outcomes". They had observed that students struggled to identify error sources within experiments that impacted the quality of results. To remedy this, they produced a series of videos of themselves conducting experiments, well and not well, that they were able to show their students in class (See Figure 5 for a sample of one of the videos). The videos were presented in class during the period of time before the submission of their summative assessment. The students had to identify and list from the videos experimental errors and describe the possible impact of these errors on the experimental results.

Evaluating the effectiveness

To assess the effectiveness of this approach in teaching critical thinking, selected students from each of the author's classes responded to questions about the use of examples and non-examples. The authors of this paper also responded to some questions relating to our experience in this project.

Student questions

Three of the authors of this paper selected students from their respective classes to respond to questions about the use of examples and non-examples. The students were selected based on their likely ability to provide meaningful answers that could identify both

Figure 2: *Handwriting examples and non-examples*

what had been effective about using examples and non-examples and also what was not effective.

The questions the students were given follow:
1. What does success look like in this task?
2. How do you know?
3. Remember when we looked at the example and non-example, was that helpful? Why? How?
4. Did you compare your work to the example and non-example?
5. What did this show you? How are you going? What can you improve?

Of the three teachers who collected student responses, one teacher collected written responses from 11 of their students, one teacher transcribed the spoken responses of two of their students and the other teacher transcribed the spoken responses of the four students who were interviewed simultaneously. The responses were then reviewed with a view to identifying benefits and opportunities arising from the use of examples and non-examples.

Teacher questions

In addition to gathering the perspective of our students, we also reflected on the process within our own classrooms. The following questions were sent
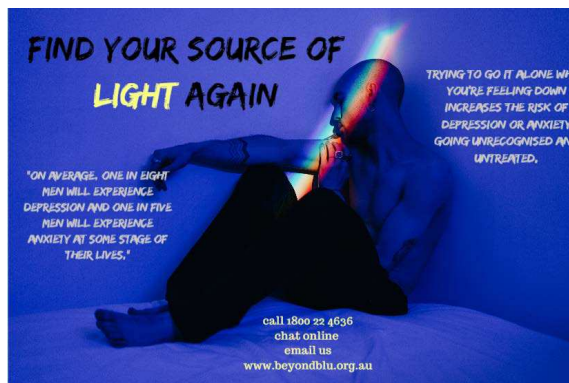

Figure 3: *A sample non-example poster.*

Figure 4: *A sample poster demonstrating effective communication techniques. Retrieved from: http://www.eriandiles.com/guide-dogs*
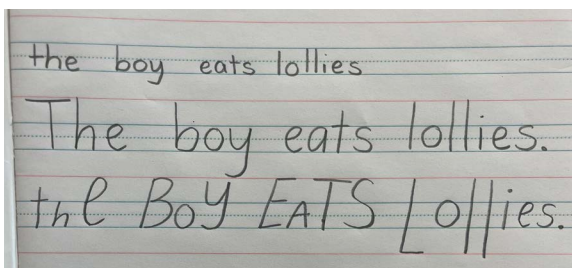
> *Selected students from each of the authors' classes responded to questions about the use of examples and non-examples.*

Figure 5: *Single frames illustrating non-example and example from one of the videos produced by the science teachers.*

to all the authors of this paper:

1. What did you learn about making examples and non-examples?
2. Did you find it easy? What were the challenges?
3. How did you implement them in the classroom?
4. Do you think it was effective (with reference to student work)? What did you notice?
5. What advice would you give to another teacher about using examples and non-examples?

Written responses were collected from four of the five authors of this paper. The responses provided useful information but due to the relatively low number of responses analysis via thematic coding or word clouds was not possible. Instead, the responses were reviewed and key insights were identified and collated.

Results

Overall, both teachers and students considered the use of examples and non-examples to be useful.

The written teacher responses identified the following:

1. That misconceptions/problems/common mistakes are the key to developing non-examples.
2. Examples and non-examples can be used across all subject areas to teach critical thinking skills.
3. Students used both the examples and non-examples to compare with their work, although students preferred the examples.
4. Three of the four teachers responding to the written questions could identify improvements in student work following the use of the examples and non-examples in their classes.

In a similar way, the responses from the students also identified the benefits of examples and non-examples. Students appreciated having concrete

> *The key to developing a good non-example is to identify the common mistakes or mis-conceptions … evident in student work.*

examples (and non-examples) that helped them to visualise what the teacher was talking about. One of the sentiments that was shared by the group of four students was that they found the examples to be more useful than the non-examples. This sentiment motivated a critical reflection on our experience of applying this technique, and this is discussed in the next section.

Implications for teaching and learning

Our exploratory study has deepened our understanding of assessment and how to support students to also better understand that assessment. The following implications are offered showing how our experience in this project could influence both our future practice as educators and also the practice of our colleagues across the education system.

1. Constructing non-examples is a useful exercise for teachers to support thinking about common misconceptions. The key to developing a good non-example is to identify the common mistakes or misconceptions that are evident in student work. The teacher can select a sample of student work that illustrates this misconception. The sample can be used as an illustration provided there is no way for the student to be identified. One way to do this is to combine work from multiple students. Alternatively, the teacher might produce a non-example that illustrates the misconception. We consider the initial challenges in identifying the common mistakes to be a key part of making the often implicit pedagogical content knowledge explicit and that by implementing responsive strategies within a team their pedagogical content knowledge is further developed and expanded.
2. We would like to see the examples and non-

examples, that our team and our colleagues have produced this year, form the start of an expanding bank of examples and non-examples. Each of the examples and non-examples would be attached to some recommended methods for using them in the classroom. Future research could, and should, investigate the effect of using these resources on both the academic achievement and the assessment self-efficacy of students.

3. Teachers should consider methods that make the non-examples as useful to students as the examples. The sentiment noted in the results (item 3) suggests that both our selection of non-examples and the way we were using them in our classrooms was not providing as useful learning for our students. Instead, students should be able to articulate from a non-example the reason why it is partially correct and identify the key skill lacking in the non-example. In the language of Hattie and Timperley (2007) the development of instructive non-examples is about reducing the gap between the example and the non-example so that the non-example becomes an instructive illustration of a misconception or skill.

Conclusion

Our modest practitioner-based exploration of the use of examples and non-examples to teach the Australian Curriculum general capability of creative and critical thinking:

1. Found that examples and non-examples can be constructed to teach critical thinking with teachers
2. Developed some practice-based examples of how to use examples and non-examples to teach critical thinking.
3. Found that students find them to be a useful technique for helping to unlock what success looks like.

On the basis of this, we encourage our teaching colleagues to consider the use of this strategy within their own classrooms. **TEACH**

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> *students should be able to articulate from a non-example the reason why it is partially correct and identify the key skill lacking in the non-example.*

Wellbeing in Primary School – Focusing on Friendship

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Introduction

Towards the end of 2018 we noticed the wellbeing needs of our primary students and their families had begun to surpass the support mechanisms we had in place. These included our chaplain, external professionals and intentional classroom practices/programs. We found classroom teachers, support staff and our chaplain were spending a great deal of time supporting students with wellbeing needs ranging from friendship challenges and anxiety to individual disorders and family breakdowns. As a school we knew this was a concern and understood that students' wellbeing has a significant impact on their ability to be successful in the classroom (Porter, et al., 2021; Quin, 2017; Willms, 2003). Specifically, we agreed with the researched understanding that students need to feel safe, connected, and happy to engage successfully both academically and socially at school (Abdollahi et al., 2020; Allen & McKenzie, 2015).

We began to explore the trend we were seeing in our school to discover if it was a broader issue. Unsurprisingly we found in 2015 the Department of Health in Canberra completed one of the largest Australian studies into children's mental health, *The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*. This report provided a comprehensive picture of the major mental health and wellbeing issues that affect Australian children. The report stated that "one in seven (13.9%) 4-17 year-olds were assessed as having mental disorders in the previous 12 months. This is equivalent to 560,000 Australian children and adolescents" (Lawrence et al., 2015,

> *one in seven (13.9%) 4-17 year-olds were assessed as having mental disorders in the previous 12 months*

p. 4). These mental health issues encompassed areas of depression, stress, ADHD, anxiety, and emotional/behavioural problems. This research further supported the growing recognition that children who suffer from poor mental health/wellbeing face significant challenges when trying to access school curriculum as well as the social context of school (Redmond et al., 2016) which can have a significant impact on an individual's long term growth, development, and life success.

School role in wellbeing

It was interesting to note from our research, schools were identified as 'on-the-front-line' to identify and address these mental health challenges for children through their social and personal development (Thornton, 2011).

Hamilton and Hamilton (2009) further explain that schools are one of the most important developmental contexts in young peoples' lives and are a key source of skill and competency development. Furthermore, they explained that schools provide accessible and relatively stable sites within which interventions can be realised to address wellbeing (Bond et al., 2007). Hence, schools are uniquely placed to play a significant role in a child's wellbeing development and intervention. So, the next question for us was how we could implement wellbeing initiatives specific to our school and students?

Being intentional

As a result, we began to examine the wellbeing needs of our school community and mapped these against the current roles, programs and practices we already had in place within our school. Naturally we had gaps. We then began to investigate the wellbeing product market and discovered there were a significant number of companies and people willing to take our money with the exciting promise of 'fixing' our school's wellbeing challenges and creating a healthy culture in our school. Sadly, it took us a little time (and money) to discover that there are no easy 'quick fix' answers when it comes to wellbeing.

As part of this examination process, we also reflected on identity as a school and decided that we would become very intentional

about wellbeing and how it fits into our school mission of developing 'the whole child'. With this intentionality we created a wellbeing landscape in our school that continued to draw on the existing capabilities and strengths of our staff and enhanced it to included elements such as: timetable space to focus on wellbeing, the position of a wellbeing officer, educational nights for parents, and referral resources.

Re-examine and re-focus

As 2020 began I don't think any of us could have imagined the impact of the two years ahead. During these years we learnt to pivot like some of the best ballerinas on Broadway (like all schools)! This was also true for our intentional approach to wellbeing. We noticed that due to social isolation, educational disruption and economic hardship, student wellbeing was significantly impacted. As a result, we were quick to re-examine and re-focus our wellbeing efforts. Areas that became priorities were student and teacher connections, a sense of belonging and anxiety support for students, teachers, and families. However, one of the most interesting areas that became a priority, and continues to be, is that of friendship.

Focusing on friendship

Building trusting and supportive relationships between students, teachers, and staff is vital for creating a connected environment within schools. Research shows that when these positive relationships exist, it leads to better academic outcomes as well as improved emotional growth (Payne, 2018; Riekie, 2016). Something that became apparent during and after the COVID pandemic was our students' difficulties developing and maintaining relationships with their peers. As a primary school this is always an area of anticipated growth and development, however, it had also become a significant lagging skill. Research suggests this can be attributed to many things over the past few years but one of the most significant is lockdowns with social isolation and the lack of in-person socialisation. Professor Louise Paatsch from Deakin University's School of Education explained that preliminary research coming out of the pandemic showed young students do not know how to interpret their peers' behaviour or co-operate during group work. Meuwissen (2022) further explained that

developing friendship and social skills takes practice, and children without that practice over the past few years may need time, scaffolding and experience to catch up.

With this knowledge our wellbeing coordinator introduced a friendship curriculum for our school that involves teacher training, common metalanguage, student lessons and parent support. The program is called URStrong (2023) and is a skills-based program that teaches children how to put a voice to their feelings, create healthy friendships, and build a solid foundation for future relationships. Along with learning what's normal in a friendship and the difference between healthy and unhealthy friendships, students also learn and practice a step-by-step approach for 'putting out' common friendship conflicts and how to combat unwanted behaviour.

The program aligns with CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework (CASEL, n. d.) and Positive Education's PERMA model (Seligman, 2018) and is a great addition to our primary school's wellbeing curriculum. As a school we are looking forward to seeing the measurable impacts of the program over the next few years.

Conclusion

Through this whole process it has reinforced for us that helping a student flourish in a fast-paced changing world is not an easy task. Unfortunately, we also discovered there is not a one-size-fits-all wellbeing approach that our school can use to support students. However, as our knowledge grows and develops, and our school intentionally re-examines and re-focuses our wellbeing supports each year we are taking some promising steps forward. As John C. Maxwell (2017) says, "Success each day should be judged by the seeds sown, not the harvest reaped." **TEACH**

coming out of the pandemic showed young students do not know how to interpret their peers' behaviour or co-operate

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Lessons from COVID-19: The school chaplains' perspective

TEACH[R]

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Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the literature relating to school chaplaincy during the COVID-19 pandemic. It adopts an Australian faith-based education system case study to explore school chaplains' insights of their roles, interactions with staff and students, as well as their perceptions of professional development and support available during the January 2020-December 2021 pandemic period. This research explored both quantitative and qualitative survey data. The role of school chaplains was found to be significantly impacted during COVID-19, affecting the nature of the support they provided to students, staff, and the school community during this time. A number of findings are presented for consideration that may help to improve school chaplaincy support, with learnings for both school chaplain leaders and the broader faith-based education system.

Introduction

School chaplains contribute to the values development of school students and are uniquely placed to respond to the social, emotional, spiritual, and pastoral needs of students, parents, staff and the school community. Consequently, literature identifies that school chaplaincy is "an understudied, yet very important and controversial" area (Isaacs & Mergler, 2018).

School chaplains operate within the contexts of a school environment – an environment that experienced unprecedented disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, every Australian state and territory was subject to school closures across the K-12 educational setting, over varying time periods across the different states and territories, owing to the different Public Health Acts in place. For example, Sacks et al. (2020) reported that in early May of 2020, only 3% of children in Victorian government schools physically attended, while in NSW government schools, 'learning from home' continued for two months for many students (Gore, et al., 2021). In early 2020, with state and federal governments urging families to keep children at home, a "swift and dramatic shift from face-to-face learning to flexible and remote delivery of education" took place, with schools and teachers required to implement online learning in a matter of days (Gore et al., 2021, p. 606).

Such dramatic changes to schooling also impacted school chaplains, who continued to provide pastoral care for students, staff and families throughout this time. It is clear that the young people with whom these school chaplains work have been negatively impacted during the pandemic years, with students reporting increased feelings of social isolation, loneliness, frustration, confusion, and anxiety, regardless of demographics (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020; Mission Australia, 2020). Whilst the pandemic has been quite unique in the extent of social disruption, in recent times Australia has also experienced bush fires, flooding and economic cost of living concerns – issues that are not lost on our young people, and in many instances by extension, school chaplains.

> *school chaplaincy is 'an understudied, yet very important and controversial' area*

This study explores the role of the school chaplain within the faith-based Adventist Schools Australia (ASA) (2022) education system, during the COVID-19 period. Adventist Education represents the largest protestant schooling system in the world with over 8,500 institutions in over 100 countries educating nearly 2 million students each year. In the Australian context, 48 schools and 13 early learning services are providing Christian education to nearly 17,000 students representing the range of demographics found within Australian society. Purpose, Vision and Mission are important to Adventist Education in Australia, with the mission of Adventist education specifically "to inspire and care holistically for each individual person – equipping them with the beliefs, values and skills to live a life of purpose, hope, joy, and peace" (Adventist Schools Australia, 2022).

Importantly, there is a distinction to be made between the role of school chaplains in this faith-based education system, and school chaplains in many other school contexts within Australia. While the National Schools Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) states that NSCP chaplains "do not provide religious instruction or religious counselling" and "must not proselytise" in their role working with school communities (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022), school chaplains within the faith-based education system of Adventist Schools Australia are enabled to engage with students in all aspects of their religious life, being integral to their educational experience.

Literature review

Research exploring school chaplaincy is relatively scarce. Ryan, (2015) states that "there remains a lack of accessible public research on what chaplains are, what they do and why (if at all) their roles matter" (p. 9). There have been very few studies exploring the views and values-based nature of school chaplaincy in Australia (Isaacs & Mergler, 2018).

Much controversy has existed around school chaplaincy over the last decade, receiving extensive media coverage in Australia. While questions regarding the effectiveness of school chaplaincy programs for student welfare and the funding of resources for chaplaincy compared to other support services has been debated, specifically in the context of the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP), the key focus of the disagreement regarding the role of school chaplains relates to "the blurring of line between religious activity and welfare support" (Mackenzie & Thielking, 2011, para. 8).

Under Prime Minister John Howard, the Australian Federal government established

> **"** *chaplains deal with most frequently behavior management and social relationship issues, … but also issues relating to the development of the self* **"**

the NSCP (Howard, 2006), stating "A chaplain might support … in a range of ways, such as assisting students in exploring their spirituality; providing guidance on religious, values and ethical matters; helping school counsellors and staff in offering welfare services and support in cases of bereavement, family breakdown or other crisis and loss situations" (para. 4). Even after High Court challenges by Williams (Rule of Law, 2020) successive governments supported NSCP through the Department of Education (DET), including being administered under the National School Chaplaincy Association (NSCA). A current goal of the NSCA is to "support the wellbeing of students and communities through pastoral care services and student support strategies" (DET, 2022, para. 1), but clarifies relationships to religion and faith-based chaplain backgrounds in FAQs (NSCA, n.d.). Significant financial resources have been poured into the NSCP. Between 2006 and 2011 an estimated $437 million was spent on the program, and more recently, a four-year agreement with the states and territories in 2019 was signed to spend $245.7 million on school chaplains, with additional funding provided in 2020 to support school communities that were impacted by the 2019/2020 bushfires. In 2021 there were calls to extend school chaplaincy to help young students through the COVID-19 pandemic (Crowe, 2021).

In a national study commissioned in 2009 by the NSCA, the contributions of school chaplains to school welfare were identified, specifically their accessibility to students, a proactive approach to building relationships, their lack of involvement with the school discipline system, flexibility of role in meeting the needs of the school, addressing the welfare of the school community in a holistic way, bringing a specific set of values to their roles, and including a network of support from local churches (Hughes & Sims, 2009). This was a large scale, national study of the effectiveness of chaplaincy in government schools, registering response rates of 42% for principals completing the survey (688 out of 1626), and 74% of chaplains (1031 out of 1396). A number of interesting findings emerged from this study, including how chaplains spend their time (30% informal or structured pastoral care of students, and 9% in pastoral care of families and staff), the issues chaplains deal with (most frequently behaviour management and social relationship issues, such as anger, peer relationships, loneliness and bullying, but also issues relating to the development of the self, such as sense of purpose, self-esteem and mental health, issues relating to the involvement of students in the community, such as social inclusion and racism),

and the effectiveness of chaplains (Principals rated chaplaincy effectiveness for encouraging moral values and responsibility as 8.1/10, while Chaplains rated this 7.6/10). When asked about the most important contribution chaplains made, the most frequently mentioned response by both principals (42%) and chaplains (55%) was their provision of pastoral care in a non-judgmental way.

An independent evaluation of the NSCP was undertaken in Australian Government, Catholic and Independent schools in 2016-2017 (DET, 2018). This evaluation found that awareness of the school chaplain was high amongst the students surveyed (87%). Twenty five percent of students reported having a large amount of contact with the chaplain in the past year, 28% reported medium levels of contact, while 24% reported low levels of contact and 21% reported having no contact with school chaplains. Of note, actual reported individual engagement with the school chaplain by students (46%) was higher than school principal perceived student contact (30%) - although it was acknowledged that higher reported individual engagement amongst students may have been in informal contexts such as at recess or during school activities. The main advantages of having access to a school chaplain, as identified in this study, included having an accessible figure for them to talk to or confide in (24% of students), having someone who can provide them help and support with problems (22% of students), and having someone to provide assistance to help students understand or 'figure things out' (13% of students). Additionally, 13% also reported the benefit of being encouraged in their faith, and for 11% of students the program provided someone they could trust talking to other than a teacher or parent. Both staff and school principals experienced high levels of satisfaction with the programme, with 85% of principals and 81% of teachers considered to be extremely satisfied with the services and activities delivered in their school. The evaluation report stated the NCSP was "delivering on its objectives of supporting the emotional wellbeing of students and the broader school community" (DET, 2018, p. 6). The NSCP Snapshot (2021) reports that school chaplains "have 15,724 formal pastoral conversations with students per week" and "30,805 informal conversations with students" (p. 1) every week across Australia, with conversations involving topics such as relationships, friendship or peer concerns, school behaviour, mental health, bullying and harassment, and family breakdown or parental separation.

Martin, et al. (2020), reflecting on the NSCP, posit that "there is still a distinct lack of evidence as to whether the chaplaincy program is effectively supporting children and young people's well-being" (para. 11). Scripture Union Australia and Generate, two organisations providing chaplains to more than 1300 schools across Australia, believe school chaplains have proven their worth (Crooks, 2022). A Scripture Union spokesperson identified the work of chaplains in early intervention and prevention of issues, as well as promoting positive behaviours, stating "Chaplains do this through one-to-one support to help young people find a better way to manage issues ranging from bullying, friendships, family breakdown, mental health, substance abuse and more" (Crooks, 2022, para 7.). A large part of doing this effectively, as identified by one school chaplain, is through established relationships (Powell, 2020). However, given some of the issues students raise, the question has been asked of whether psychologists may be better placed to help address some of the complex personal issues, psychological issues and those related to self-harm and suicide, while recognising the additional cost associated with hiring these professionals.

Other independent studies have explored aspects of school chaplaincy in the Australian setting. Pohlmann (2010) explored the nature and effectiveness of chaplaincy services in Queensland state schools, with findings including that state school chaplaincy can be highly effective, is highly contested in nature, is multi-faceted and demanding in nature, that strong initial and continuing education is needed, that considerable support is needed given the demanding work state school chaplains perform, that full-time chaplaincy is superior to part-time chaplaincy, and that state school chaplaincy services are particularly challenging in practice. This research found that "state school chaplaincy services were broadly regarded by school-based respondents as effective and worthwhile additions to the life of Queensland state schools" (Pohlmann, 2010, p. ii). Several areas for improvement were identified however, including setting goals for chaplaincy services and achieving them, having sufficient resources for the chaplaincy services to operate, the initial training and continuing professional development for chaplains, and the effect of finance and employment issues on chaplaincy services.

Research purpose and specific research questions

The data for this study was collected as part of a research project exploring the perceptions of school chaplains working within the faith-based education system, Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), during the COVID-19 impacted 2020 and 2021 school years.

"

85% of principals and 81% of teachers … extremely satisfied with the [chaplaincy] services and activities delivered

"

Informed by the literature reviewed, the study adopted four specific questions to direct the research:

1. How has COVID-19 impacted the role of ASA school chaplains?
2. How has COVID-19 impacted the support offered to students and staff by ASA school chaplains?
3. How has COVID-19 impacted the support offered to ASA school chaplains by the school and church communities?
4. How has COVID-19 impacted the preparedness of ASA school chaplains to face situations such as this in the future?

Methodology

This study collected survey data, both qualitative and quantitative, relating to elements of the role of school chaplaincy, school chaplain interactions with students and staff, available professional development and perceived supports within the school chaplaincy role. The survey was prepared to fit the ASA school chaplaincy context, while including themes identified within the broader school chaplaincy literature, and then piloted to ensure its appropriateness in this context. The survey instrument consisted of sections exploring respondent demographics, school chaplains and students, school chaplains and staff, professional development and support, and the role of the school chaplain. The survey included both fixed choice questions including varied Likert scale responses (1 = High, 4 = Low) as well as open-ended responses for particular questions. Inclusion criteria required participants to be 18 years or older, and to have been employed as a chaplain within this faith-based education system for at least a part of the COVID-19 pandemic during January 2020-December 2021. Permission for the research was obtained from the national office of Adventist Schools Australia.

Emails were sent to 82 ASA school chaplains including a link to complete a survey via SurveyMonkey, an online-based survey application (SurveyMonkey, 2022). This online link was left open for a one-month time frame and participants were prompted multiple times to complete the survey. At the completion of the one-month (and three subsequent follow-up emails), 61 total responses were collected, representing a 74.4% response rate.

Findings
Sample
Of the 61 ASA school chaplains who responded to the survey, 43 completed the survey in full, and these fully completed responses form the data for this research. Of these, 69.8% were male, and 30.2% were female. Of the survey respondents,

> **"** only 53.49% of these school chaplain respondents indicated that they 'strongly agree' with this statement … taken from an ASA school chaplain job description. **"**

Table 1: *Demographic details of study respondents (N=43)*

Measures	Number of Respondents (n)	Proportion of Respondents (%)
Gender		
Female	13	30.2
Male	30	69.8
Years of School Chaplaincy Experience		
1-3 years	11	25.6
4-6 years	14	32.5
7-10 years	7	16.3
10+ years	11	25.6
Location		
Urban/ Metropolitan	34	79.1
Rural/Regional	9	20.9
Hours Worked Per Week		
Up to 15 hours	10	23.3
16-30 hours	12	27.9
31-45 hours	13	30.2
45+ hours	8	18.6

58.1% had been a chaplain for 6 years or less, and 41.9% for greater than 6 years. With regards to location, 79.1% of those who completed the survey described this as Urban/Metropolitan, and 20.9% described their location as Regional/Rural (Table 1). From those surveyed, 18.6% were employed in Primary school settings, 11.6% in Secondary school settings, and 69.8% were at schools with both a Primary and a Secondary campus. The majority of these school chaplains had qualifications in theology (53.49%) and about a tenth in education (9.30%), while others had qualifications in a broad range of areas including counselling, youth work and marketing, to name a few.

The role of the school chaplain
Role alignment
The school chaplains surveyed were asked the extent to which they agreed with the following statement:

> Chaplains are recognised as spiritual leaders in their school community, with a focus on Christian ministry to staff, students and their families.

It is noteworthy that only 53.49% of these school chaplain respondents indicated that they 'strongly agree' with this statement – a statement taken from an ASA school chaplain job description. A further 32.56% indicated they 'agree' with this

statement, 11.63% 'somewhat agree' and 2.33% of school chaplain respondents indicated they 'disagree' with this.

Role rewards and satisfaction
These faith-based education system school chaplains were also asked how rewarding they find their role as a school chaplain. Encouragingly 62.79% found their role to be 'very rewarding', 30.23% indicated they found their role 'rewarding', 4.65% found it to be 'neither rewarding nor unrewarding', and 2.33% of school chaplain respondents found it to be 'unrewarding'. When asked to what extent they were satisfied that they were fulfilling the role of a school chaplain, 72.09% of school chaplain respondents indicated they were 'satisfied' in their fulfilment of the role, 16.28% were 'neither satisfied or dissatisfied', and 11.63% of school chaplain respondents indicated they were 'dissatisfied' with their personal assessment of their fulfillment of the role.

Role expansion and choice to continue
These school chaplains were asked if at any stage during the pandemic they extended beyond their usual role as a chaplain to provide support within their school community. 81.40% of respondents indicated 'yes', 6.98% indicated 'no', and 11.63% were 'unsure' if they had extended beyond their usual roles as school chaplains to provide support during the pandemic period being explored. Interestingly, these school chaplains were asked whether in the last two years, and related to COVID-19, whether they had at any time considered a change in vocation; 41.86% of respondents indicated that they had considered a change in vocation, with the remaining 58.14% not considering a change in vocation during this time.

Stress levels
These school chaplains were also asked about the extent of stress they experienced in their roles during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, 55.81% of those surveyed indicated that they experienced 'quite a lot' of stress during this time, a further 37.21% experienced 'a moderate amount' of stress, 6.98% experienced 'a little' stress, and there were no school chaplains who reported 'not at all' experiencing stress. Looking more closely at this question from the survey, the parametric statistical t-test for independent groups was used to determine whether the difference in mean scores was significant at the 0.05 level. After merging the years of experience demographic into two groups for purposes of statistical analysis, those with 6 or less years of experience and those with greater than 6 years experience, school chaplains with 6 or less years of experience appeared to have statistically significant higher stress during COVID-19 (M<6 = 2.000, M>6 = 2.588, t (38) = -1.989, p<0.05].

Preparedness for future COVID-19
Asked how prepared these school chaplains felt to face a situation like COVID-19 again, 55.81% of respondents indicated they felt 'very prepared', 44.19% reported feeling 'somewhat prepared', and no ASA chaplains who completed the survey

> *school chaplains with 6 or less years of experience appeared to have … higher stress during COVID-19 … [but] were less sought out by students*

Figure 1: *Percentage of Chaplains reporting a category of student concern*

Student Concerns

Expressed Concerns / Percentage of Chaplains reporting a concern

- Salvation/Faith related: 4.26
- End time events: 27.66
- Vaccinations: 36.17
- Family related: 42.56
- Relationships/Friends: 46.94
- Study impact: 59.57
- Anxiety/Mental health: 63.83
- Isolation and loneliness: 74.47
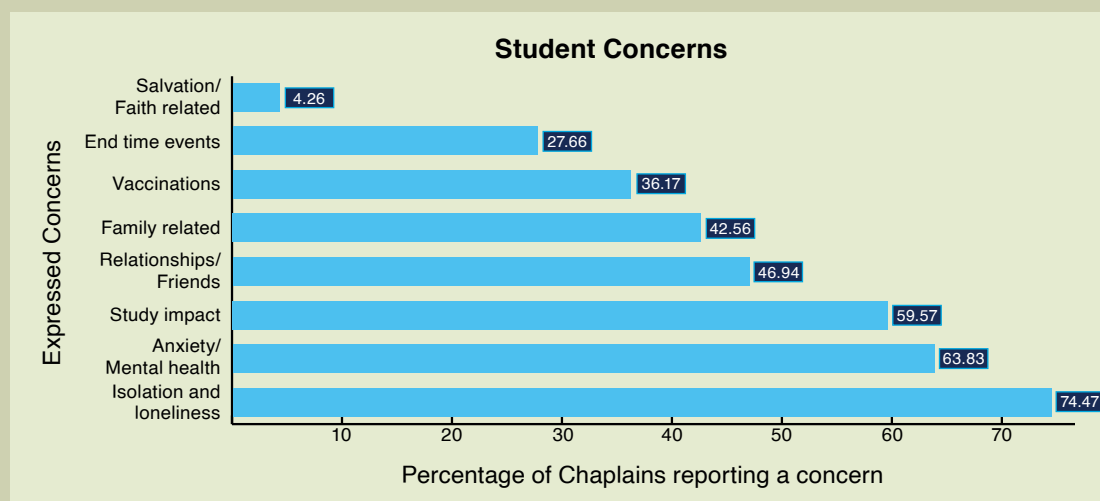
reported feeling either 'not sufficiently prepared' or 'not at all prepared'.

School chaplains and students

Number/frequency of requests for interaction
The data from the survey indicated that almost 81% of school chaplain respondents perceived there to be a moderate or substantial impact on the number of requests for their time, service or support stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response to being asked how often students sought their support specifically related to COVID-19, school chaplains reported this to be 'frequently' approximately 11% of the time, 'occasionally' approximately 40%, 'rarely' approximately 34%, and 'never' approximately 15% of the time. Exploring these further, statistical tests revealed statistically significant results across experience and gender. Again merging the years of experience demographic into two groups, those with 6 or less years of experience and those with greater than 6 years experience, it was evident that students statistically significantly [t (38) = 2.466, p<0.05] more regularly sought those chaplains with greater than 6 years experience (M>6 = 2.177) for support related to COVID-19, than those with less experience (M<6 =2.826). Similarly, the t-test also confirmed that students were more likely to seek the support of female school chaplains (Mf = 2.000) than males (Mm = 2.897, t (39) = 3.424, p<0.05) with concerns specifically related to COVID-19.

Specific COVID related concerns
Over 70% of school chaplains reported students raising COVID-19 when seeing them for other concerns. The nature of concerns raised by students in relation to COVID-19 was also insightful. Concerns raised in order of decreasing frequency of response related to, isolation and loneliness (74.47%), anxiety or mental health concerns (63.83%), impacts on studies (59.57%), raised relationship or friendship concerns (48.94%), raised family-related issues (42.55%), vaccinations (36.17%), raised end-time event concerns (27.66%), and raised Salvation or faith related concerns (4.26%) (Figure 1.). This question also included an open-ended response section, that elicited additional concerns raised relating to other types of fears including the impact of COVID-19 on school memory events such as school formals, overseas trips, service opportunities, school camps and 'schoolies' celebrations.

These school chaplain respondents also provided insights into what supports were offered to students during the COVID-19 pandemic. In decreasing order of frequency of response, 82.98%

> *95.65% of … staff spoke to them about workload stress or changes … (82.61%) … teaching online, and 76.09% … the issue of vaccinations.*

of school chaplains prayed with students, 82.98% offered regular check-ins or communications with students, 59.57% provided guidance on religious, values or ethical matters, 57.45% provided encouragement of personal reflection, and 42.55% provided referral to other support services during this time. Additionally, school chaplains reported other forms of support to students, including home visitations, phone calls, wellbeing check-ins, family support seminars, and running class and group activities online.

Acknowledging school site closures, the survey asked how students accessed the school chaplains' services during the January 2020 to December 2021 COVID-19 period. School chaplains reported the use of technologies such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams (74.47%), 65.96% reported meeting face-to-face, 46.81% reported using emails, and 36.17% made use of telephone calls.

Whilst the majority of respondents indicated that they saw students experience a crisis during this pandemic time (77.1%), 59.27% of these school chaplains reported less than 25% of the students they saw during COVID-19 to be experiencing a crisis, 23.40% considered that 25-50% of the students they saw were experiencing a crisis, and 17.02% of respondents considered 50-75% of the students they saw to be experiencing a crisis.

The respondents to this survey were confident in their ability to support students with concerns relating to COVID-19. Almost 90% of respondents reported feeling 'very confident' (21.28%), or 'confident' (68.09%), with only 10.64% of these school chaplains reporting that they felt 'not confident' to support students with concerns relating to COVID-19.

School chaplains and staff

When asked about the nature of staff requests for chaplain time, service or support during the COVID-19 pandemic, 71.74% of school chaplain respondents indicated requests increased. Only 8.70% of chaplain respondents indicated that staff requests for their time, service or support decreased, while 19.57% of respondents indicated that there was 'no change' to staff requests during this period of the pandemic.

Incredibly, 95.65% of school chaplain respondents indicated that the concerns staff spoke to them about in relation to COVID-19 linked to workload stress or changes. Many (82.61%) reported staff concerns related to having to move their teaching online, and 76.09% of chaplains reported staff concerns related to the issue of vaccinations. A large majority of chaplains (73.91%) reported staff concerns in relation to general

anxiety, while fewer (41.30%) indicated school staff raised faith-based questions with these school chaplains during this time. Staff concerns related to relationships were reported by 30.43% of chaplains.

These school chaplain respondents also provided detail as to what supports were offered to staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order of frequency of response, 84.78% offered regular check-ins or communications with staff, 82.61% of school chaplains provided prayer to staff, 65.22% reported providing guidance on religious, values or ethical matters, 56.52% provided encouragement or personal reflection, and 30.43% provided referral to other support services during this time. Additionally, school chaplains reported other forms of support being provided to staff, such as specific programs being offered or made available, the creation of fictional comedic characters who offered well-being tips, gifts of food and drinks, practical supports including media and technology support for content delivery, handwritten notes of affirmation, sharing devotions with classes to alleviate pressures on teachers, and providing COVID-19 related resources.

Of concern, 56.52% of school chaplain respondents reported feeling unable to effectively support a staff member at some point in time during the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of limitations were reported by these school chaplains regarding provision of support to staff, including things such as not being able to have face-to-face communications, limitations being placed on the role of school chaplains by school principals, carer's fatigue, implementation of guidelines relating to communication platforms and social media use, unanswered phone calls or returned emails, difficulties around visitation guidelines, an overemphasis placed on school policies, staff turnover brought about by mandated vaccinations, inability to assist increased workloads experienced by teachers, and reported anxiety created by employing bodies.

Professional development and support

The school chaplain respondents were asked whether they were offered any professional development or training to increase their ability to provide support to students and staff during the COVID-19 period under investigation. When asked if they were offered professional development or training, 29.55% responded 'yes'. 54.55% responded 'no' indicating they were not offered any professional development or training, and the remaining 15.91% were 'unsure' if they were offered professional development or training that assisted them providing support to staff or students during

Table 2: *Means of how often Chaplains were connecting with factors in their roles*

Factor	Ranking	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Christ	1	1.409	.658
Staff in School	2	1.546	.730
School Principal	3	1.659	.861
Local Church	4	1.682	.800
Students	5	1.818	.657
Families of Students	6	2.432	.818

this COVID-19 period. These school chaplains were also asked if they believed that further professional development could have been of assistance to them in providing improved support for students or staff, with 65.91% of school chaplain respondents answering 'yes', 11.36% of respondents answering 'no', and 22.73% answering 'unsure' as to whether further professional development would have assisted them in providing improved support for staff and students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To attempt to understand school chaplain connectedness, these respondents were asked how often they were connecting with Christ, students in their school, the school principal, families of students, their local church, and staff in their school. Table 2 sets out a hierarchy of connectedness based on the means of these school chaplain responses (1 = High level of connectedness, 4 = Low level of connectedness). Chaplains asserted a spiritual connection with Christ as their highest connectedness. The data further indicates that in the context of their temporal roles, they most frequently connected with school staff and the school principal. The difference in the higher connectedness between chaplains and staff (M = 1.546) compared with chaplains and principals (M = 1.659) proved statistically significant in paired samples statistics [t (44) = 1.094, p<.001]. This would suggest school chaplains perceived greater support from school staff as opposed to the school principal during the COVID pandemic.

The school chaplains who were surveyed were asked the extent to which support for school chaplains had changed as a result of COVID-19. Only 9.09% of school chaplains reported that support has been 'greatly increased' because of COVID-19, while 22.73% reported support has 'increased somewhat', 63.64% of school chaplains

> 29.55% responded 'yes', that they were offered professional development or training, 54.55% responded 'no'

Table 3: *Means of the extent chaplains felt supported by factors in their roles*

Factor	Ranking	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Your friends and family	1	1.500	.665
The school principal	2	1.727	.872
The school community	3	2.046	.806
Your church family and community	4	2.068	.759
The church system	5	2.182	.896
The education system	6	2.364	.891
The students	7	2.568	.925

> *40% of students … experienced a crisis during the period explored … a higher need for the support of school staff, as evidenced by 71.4% of school chaplains*

reported that support is 'about the same', and 4.55% of chaplains reported that support has 'decreased' as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked to what extent these school chaplains were supported by the education system or church system they are employed by, the school principal, the school community, their church family and community, by the students, or by friends and family, a hierarchy of support emerged based on the means of their responses. Table 3 shows a hierarchy of support based on the ranking of support based on the means of the individual chaplain support factors (1 = High level of support, 4 = Low level of support). The data suggests these chaplains felt most supported during COVID-19 by friends and family, followed by the school principal, school community, church family and community, employing bodies, and lastly, the students.

Discussion
The role of the school chaplain
It is evident that COVID-19 impacted the role of school chaplains.

Consistent with literature elsewhere in the Australian chaplaincy context, 93% of ASA school chaplains found their roles rewarding. Research undertaken in Australia by Stanford and Timms (2021), and in which almost half (45%) of respondents were school chaplains, found that their research participants "reported a strong sense of fulfilment in relation to the opportunity afforded by their work to help others negotiate difficult experiences in their lives" (p. 290). This research also indicated that the chaplain respondents

"tended to regard their work positively and that it has great meaning for them" (p. 290). These areas relate to what the literature refers to as 'compassion satisfaction' – the idea that "individuals achieve personal fulfilment and are thereby rewarded, through helping others" (p. 285).

That 81.4% of school chaplains reported they extended beyond their usual role as a chaplain to provide support to students, staff, parents and the broader school community, is in some ways expected. The school-based educational literature from the pandemic period paints a particularly challenging landscape, with broad recognition of a profession under extraordinary pressure. Flack et al. (2020) noted in their research, which explored more than 3500 educator perspectives of the impact of teaching and learning in Australia and New Zealand, that teachers reported significant increases in demands on their time under remote learning, as well as feelings of social isolation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the comments in the open-ended responses describing the concerns staff discussed with chaplains reflected these pressures, with one respondent concisely stating, "*Keeping up with all the changes that were occurring at a fast pace*".

School chaplains and students
Given the broader educational literature exploring the pandemic period during 2020 and 2021, it is no surprise that 80% of school chaplains indicated COVID-19 impacted student requests for their time. Concerningly, 40% of students are reported to have experienced a crisis during the period explored. With school lockdowns, heavily regulated school environments, increased social distancing and a more challenging environment in which to meet face-to-face, school chaplains were forced to adopt online technologies to stay connected to students. The majority (58%) of school chaplain and student interactions between January 2020 and December 2021 involved digital technology as the communication medium. The respondents acknowledged this meant less than ideal circumstances in their support of students experiencing a crisis. This finding is consistent with other literature, with "increased social isolation and reduced ability to support student wellbeing" (Sacks, et al, 2020, para. 6) being an identified challenge of the school-led remote learning environment in Australia during this time.

While such challenges were presented, school chaplains continued to offer a wide scope of support to students during this time. Such supports included encouragement, prayer, spiritual guidance, and referrals to counselling and other support

services. In most cases, regular check-ins were established with the student.

School chaplains and staff

The COVID-19 pandemic appeared to create a higher need for the support of school staff, as evidenced by 71.4% of school chaplains indicating that staff requests for their time, services and support increased. This would appear consistent with literature that indicated teachers were experiencing greater workplace pressures during this time. Workload stress, moving to teaching online, adapting to rapid changes, vaccination related stresses, and other pandemic induced concerns were all identified within the survey findings that combined to create increased requests from staff for school chaplain time. These responses raise the question of scope regarding the school chaplain's role and priorities, and a greater understanding of time and support required for teaching staff on an ongoing basis, as well as during times of adversity (such as during natural disasters and future pandemics). This is in stark contrast to existing literature from the 2009 NSCP evaluation, where only 9% of staff reported receiving pastoral care from school chaplains.

Additionally, 56% of school chaplains felt they were unable to effectively support a student or staff member during COVID-19, suggesting there may be an increased need to provide professional development or additional resources to school chaplains to continue to provide strong levels of support to both staff and students. The school chaplains identified limitations in their ability to provide support to students or staff during COVID-19, stating examples such as limited opportunities to connect in a face-to-face setting, rapidly changing rules that impacted both communication and technology types that could be utilised, students becoming more insular, health-related concerns, and awareness of a greater need for support yet often not knowing the best type of support needed. In contrast, there were respondents who did not feel they encountered limitations, instead taking the view that "*It was a time to be creative in our approach to carrying out our roles!*".

Professional development and support

With respect to professional development and support, the research team sought to understand whether professional development was offered, what sort of professional development would have been welcomed or perceived as increasing capability to respond to the pandemic. Relationships between the school chaplains and principals, as well as the broader school community, in terms of perceived support during COVID-19 were also explored.

Only 30% of school chaplains reported being offered professional development during this time. Greater or increased opportunities for professional development were desired by respondents, with 66% of chaplains indicating their view was that further professional development could have enabled them in providing improved support for students and staff.

The open-ended question in the professional development and support section of the survey identified a number of supports that could be further explored in the context of this particular education system. When asked what better support for school chaplains might look like, respondents identified several elements that could assist school chaplains professionally and personally. Comments such as "*Personal check-ins from Admin*", "*People calling or emailing to check on us*", "*There was no one checking in to make sure the chaplains were ok*" all acknowledge the need for improved systemic support for these school chaplains. One respondent captured this sentiment, stating "*We were the ones doing the supporting, it didn't often go the other way around*". In addition, increased supervision of chaplains and mentoring were commonly identified as elements these school chaplains would consider to be of increased support to them, while wide ranging components from counselling vouchers, increased IT support, and professional resources were all identified as supports that could be made available.

Conclusion

This research is important because it provides insight into the perspectives of school chaplains working during COVID-19 in a faith-based education system, areas that remain under reported in the literature. This study found that chaplains experienced more requests for their time and support from students and staff during COVID-19, working through serious student and staff concerns amid increased demand and stress within their roles. While these school chaplains still overwhelmingly found their roles rewarding, it emerged that more could be done to provide support to them, including offering more professional development opportunities, encouraging more self-care, and creating networking opportunities with chaplaincy colleagues. Systemically, supports in the forms of increased supervision including mentoring and resource provision are highlighted as areas for further consideration.

> " *56% of school chaplains felt they were unable to effectively support a student or staff member during COVID-19* "

The findings here suggest some directions for future research investigating school chaplain perspectives. These directions include further exploration of school chaplains' psychological health and the support provided by and to chaplains in their roles, as well as the working relationships that exist between them and their school principals, their teacher colleagues and the students they provide support to. With increasing instances of crises impacting on schools and their communities, recognising the impacts of COVID-19 and the pressure points created within school chaplaincy roles can do much to support those who provide important pastoral care within these school communities. **TEACH**

> *recognising … the pressure points created within school chaplaincy roles can do much to support those who provide important pastoral care*

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The impact of COVID19 lockdown on the wellbeing of staff and students in our schools

TEACH[R]

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns have had varying effects on school staff and students. Through a combination of an online survey and student focus groups, feedback was obtained about engagement with work during lockdown, what they valued most from their school leaders and teachers, suggestions for improving wellbeing and feedback about how they were managing their own personal wellbeing. After a whole school term of learning from home, the school company now has clear information regarding staff and students' enthusiasm for their work, stress, work-life balance, online connections, strategies and processes. Strategies can now be put in place to continue to support these key stakeholders through the remainder of the current lockdown and prepare them for the return of teaching our students face-to-face. This research has enabled the school company to focus its support moving forward in this pandemic and provide feedback to schools regarding their staff, and students' wellbeing at this time.

Introduction

As our schools were recovering from the impacts of our first COVID19 lockdown in 2020 we did not foresee another lockdown with wider impacts and harsher restrictions, stretching for over three months. Our school leadership teams led their schools through this new situation and adapted to regularly changing, and often unknown, guidelines and restrictions daily. It was clear early that this would be ongoing for most of the term and would have wider reaching affects than in 2020. Schools sought regular feedback from staff, students, and families regarding the quality and impact of their online learning and adjusted their service based on this. Staff wellbeing was recognised as a focus area and our schools took a range of approaches to manage this, due to differing impacts in each school context. This article explores the impact of this second lockdown on staff and student wellbeing with an intention to modify programs based on identified needs, as students return to school in Term 4.

Background

The welfare of people during the COVID19 pandemic has been affected in various ways. These include:

- The need to implement restrictions to contain the virus, limited socialisation and subsequent impacts leading to an increase in people's feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- Concern about catching the virus that increased levels of anxiety.
- Increased pressure to supervise children at home whilst also working from home.
- Students not able to concentrate when learning from home and concerns regarding their consequent learning.
- Job losses for those that were not able to perform their job from home.
- Not having the appropriate computer equipment, internet and computer literacy to support learning at home.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report (2021) states that by mid-April 2020, one-third (33%) of Australian adults had reduced the frequency of their contact with family and friends since the start of the COVID-19 epidemic (AHIW 2021a, p. 60). At this time half of Australian adults expressed they were lonely, though this reduced to a third by May (AIHW 2021b, para. 5). Additionally, 22% of people described loneliness as the most common stressor (AHIW, 2021a, p. 60). By the end of June 2020, this figure had reduced to 9.1% (ABS 2020,

> *recovering from the … first COVID19 lockdown i… we did not foresee another lockdown with wider impacts and harsher restrictions, stretching for over three months.*

para 15; AIHW, 2021a, p. 60).

School closures also had an impact on people's wellbeing during the pandemic and survey data from the November 2020 ANUpoll (Biddle et al., 2020) indicates that around half of parents were concerned about their child's learning due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, in particular 13% were very concerned and 37% somewhat concerned (p. 2). The vast majority were satisfied, however, with the way their child's education institution handled the COVID-19 situation (48% very satisfied and 40% somewhat satisfied (p. 3).

Research design
Research purpose
The research was initiated to gather data indicating the ways in which the COVID-19 lockdown was impacting the wellbeing of staff and students in system schools so as to inform organisational responses facilitating optimised learning and wellbeing.

Research questions
From the research purpose two research questions were derived.
1. What are staff and students' perceptions of their wellbeing, enthusiasm and engagement with their work, stress, work-life balance, online connections, teaching/learning strategies and whole of school and classroom processes pre COVID lockdown and during COVID lockdown.
2. Can this data indicate system schools that require support regarding wellbeing?

Method
A voluntary online survey for teaching and non-teaching staff was prepared in Microsoft Forms and

> *around half of parents were concerned about their child's learning due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic … The vast majority (88%) were satisfied, however.*

Figure 1: *Number of staff from each school participating in the survey*

distributed to staff at six Adventist schools in Sydney (referred to as system of schools) from 30 August to 3rd September 2021, after ten weeks of lockdown and eight weeks of learning from home. Staff were questioned regarding their engagement with their work during lockdown, what they valued most from their school leaders at that time, suggestions for improving staff wellbeing, and feedback about how they were managing their personal wellbeing.

The questions in this survey used wording based on the Insight SRC school culture survey (Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), 2021) completed in ASA schools 3-14 May 2021. At this date, this system's students were learning at school and had been since the beginning of Term 4, 2020. The questions were replicated to allow comparison of data to measure the potential impact of the second COVID19 lockdown on our staff.

Student focus groups were also conducted with Stage 2 and 3 students using qualitative semi-structured interviews. Classes were selected by school principals based on teacher wellbeing, to ensure this process did not add any further stress. Groups of 5 students were selected by teachers based on possible engagement in the process and ability to express their views and opinions. The semi-structured interviews allowed students to explain their thoughts and provide any clarification on their views. The focus groups were conducted online using Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The interview questions were a mixture of open and closed responses. The open responses were analysed using deductive coding, to capture themes present in the responses.

The survey was voluntary and the responses from each school provide an acceptable response rate. With 133 staff completing the survey, the overall response rate for this survey was 44% of all staff across the surveyed school

This information was used to identify schools with staff wellbeing levels that were of concern and to initiate interactions with leadership to adapt school strategies to address these issues. The information gathered also validated, contextualised, or eliminated, perceived issues held by system leaders based on independent anecdotal staff feedback.

Findings and discussion
Closed question staff responses - system wide data
To assist analysis staff responses were `collapsed'. Responses at or above the midpoint of the scale were considered 'favourable' and the percentage of these responses compared to the whole population was calculated (% favourable). Table 1 provides a comparison of % favourable data collected across the sampled schools in May and September 2021 using closed questions.
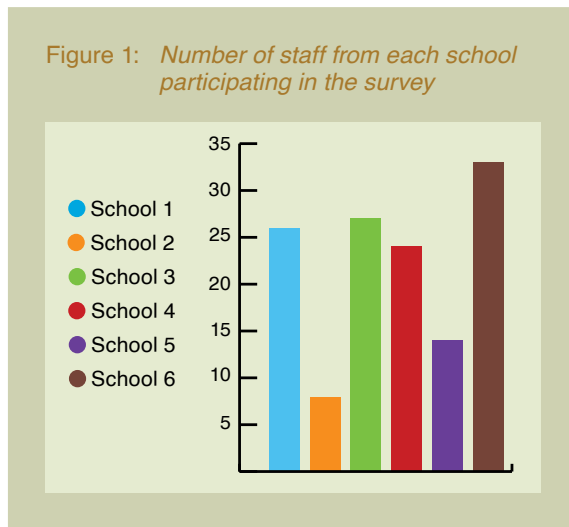
Comparison of current and pre-lockdown staff responses

	Pre lockdown % favourable	Current % favourable	Difference %
How positive are you feeling while working during lockdown?	92	84	- 8.0
How enthusiastic are you feeling while working during lockdown?	95	75	- 20.0
How stressed are you feeling while working during lockdown?	56	65	9.0
How depressed are you feeling while working during lockdown?	89	83	- 6.0
How much do you feel there is a good team spirit at our school during lockdown?	90	84	- 6.0
How high do you think school morale is during lockdown?	86	75	- 11.0
How effective do you feel you have been in completing your work during lockdown?	97	92	- 5.0
How supportive do you feel your leaders/managers have been during lockdown?	89	91	2.0
How effectively have you been able to communicate with your colleagues during the lockdown?	98	88	- 10.0
How effectively do you feel students have engaged with their learning during lockdown?	88	77	- 11.0
How well have you been able to access the resources needed to do your job during lockdown?	95	96	1.0
How concerned have you been about catching COVID-19 as a result of your work?	65	63	- 2.0

In the COVID period pre-lockdown staff responses indicated high positive levels (>85% favourable) for mental health, morale, enthusiasm, team spirit, effectiveness, leader support, resourcing, communication, and student learning. Catching COVID as a result of being in the workplace was the least favourably addressed concern.

In the lockdown period of this investigation, there was a significant reduction in enthusiasm for work and school morale which is expected after eight weeks of working from home and the separation of staff from colleagues, students and work contexts. It is interesting to note that while enthusiasm dropped, stress levels have improved since the last survey, possibly showing improvement in managing the changes and implementing learnings from the first lockdown in 2020.

The perceived reduction in student engagement during lockdown is supported by the student focus group data which shows student positivity for learning from home dropped 12% since the last lock down (Table 2).

Another indicator that leadership teams have improved their management of this lock down, compared to the previous one, is the improvement in the data regarding supportive leadership with

91% positive responses (rating a 3, 4 or 5 out of 5), though this is a modest 2% increase. A 1% increase in access to resources may also suggest a facilitating leadership response.

Open response findings – staff wellbeing survey
The following Figures 2-4 summarise the results of the coding analysis, identifying common themes in the responses to each question. One of these themes was work life balance (WLB). Each pair of graphs indicates the percentage offering responses to a specific question included in the title of the graph on the left. The graph on the left represents the responses from across the whole system while the graph on the right is a combination of the system responses in the centre circle and a specific set of school responses in the outer 'ring'. This enables easy identification of differences between whole of system and specific school responses.

The ability for staff to work from home and use time saved was highly valued along with staying connected through staff worship, online meetings, and classes with students (Figure 2a). This data varied among the schools. Comparative information (Figure 2b, 3b, 4b) unique for each school was provided as feedback to that school's leadership team to

while enthusiasm dropped, stress levels have improved … possibly showing improvement in managing the changes

Figure 2: *Most valued school response during lockdown*

Figure 2a: *What have you valued most from your school during lockdown/learning from home? (system level)*
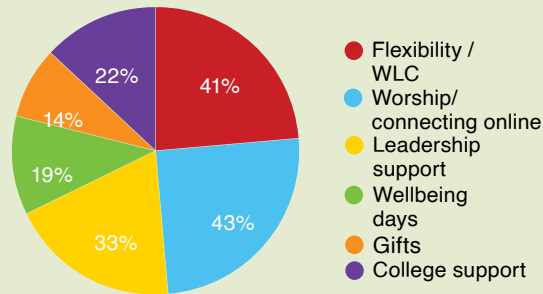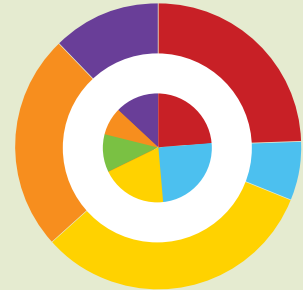
Figure 2b: *Comparison of a specific school – School 2 data (outer ring) - compared to whole of system (inner circle)*

- Flexibility / WLC
- Worship/ connecting online
- Leadership support
- Wellbeing days
- Gifts
- College support

41%
43%
22%
14%
19%
33%

"I appreciate the regular and clear updates from the Principal"

"Being able to be a part of the school worship each morning"

> *If you want to know how to do something better, ask the people doing it!*

enable them to adapt their staff wellbeing strategies, leadership support and teamwork as needed.

Figure 3a shows that most of the staff would like to maintain the current wellbeing strategies implemented at their schools and to continue to focus on their wellbeing moving forward as they adapt to future changes and transition back to face to face learning. There were many suggestions for improvements to processes including meetings, assessments, and professional development. By comparing each school's data to the system level data, schools with higher staff wellbeing needs and suggestions regarding current processes could be identified, as is shown in Figure 3b for School # 6. Staff at School 6 express a strong need for prioritising wellbeing, process improvement and less focus on maintenance. This data informs system administration, suggesting targets for change in facilitating school leaders' management for enhanced staff wellbeing.

Figure 4a shows the variety of ways our staff were managing their own wellbeing during the lock down. All leadership teams in our schools, and at system level, were encouraging staff to go outdoors as much as possible and were enabling meaningful spiritual connection times through staff worship and chaplain support. There was not a lot of variance in results across our schools in how staff have taken care of their wellbeing. The main variance noted was the participation in 'Religion' as a wellbeing activity, with smaller schools (P-6) recording higher results (as shown in Figure 4b for School 5).

This survey process provided an opportunity to give a voice to our staff regarding their experiences and recommendations during this second lockdown.

This is a key component of effective schools which itself leads to increased staff wellbeing. Nita Clarke (2010) commented that in organisations where engagement worked well, there are employees who are "informed, involved and energised" (p. 2). To meet challenges and provide a better service, leaders need to seek the views and feedback of staff on the frontline. 'If you want to know how to do something better, ask the people doing it!' (p. 2). Chauhan & Sharma (2019) agree that providing opportunity for a staff voice can reduce fear and stress, consequently increasing engagement in an organisation.

Closed response findings – students
The table below indicates that whilst the students' positive feelings about learning from home have decreased across all schools by 12%, they are looking forward to school, feel their teachers are supportive and enjoy being a student at their school, with an average positive response of 91% in these areas. Student concern about contracting COVID19 during this lock down was varied across the schools, which could be attributed to the varied restrictions in place within LGAs of Sydney, however it is noted that this has increased significantly since the last lockdown. Two of the three schools who participated in this research were in Level 4 plus LGAs where restrictions were increased and recorded COVID19 cases were higher.

Open response findings – student focus groups
Student focus groups were conducted online with students from schools #1, 4 & 5, based on the availability of students to gather feedback on their learning from home experiences (these will be

Figure 3: *Suggestions for managing wellbeing at school*

Figure 3a: *Do you have any suggestions for managing wellbeing at your school? (system level)*

12%
30%
32%
19%
6%

- Communication
- Maintain
- Care packages
- Improve process
- Wellbeing
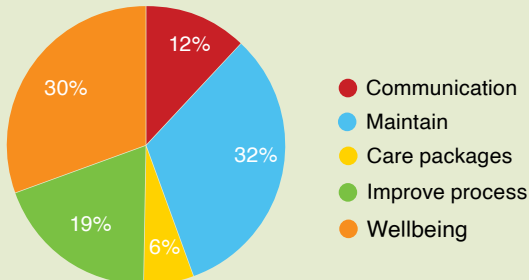
Figure 3b: *Comparison of specific school data compared to system (School # 6 outer ring, system inside circle)*

"More individual wellbeing check ins for staff."

"The school counsellor to check in with staff and to provide assistance"
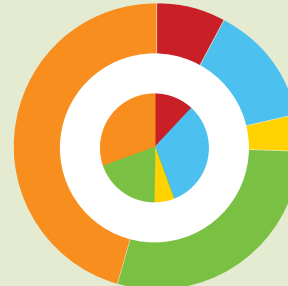
Figure 4: *Wellbeing strategies used during lockdown*

Figure 4a: *How you have taken care of your wellbeing during the current lockdown? (system)*

9%
19%
36%
12%
23%

- Exercise/ outdoors
- Socialising
- Hobbies
- Relaxing
- Religion
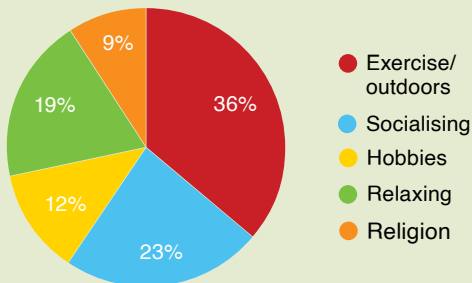
Figure 4b: *Comparison of specific school data compared to system (School # 5 outer ring, system inside circle)*

"Exercise & eating healthier because of more time available in the evenings"

"Reading the Bible, praying and exercise"

> *The overwhelming feedback from these students was that they needed schools to facilitate connections with their peers and to provide more engaging lessons*

referred to as combined schools).

The following Figures 5-7 summarise the results of the coding analysis, identifying common themes in the response to this question.

The overwhelming feedback from these students was that they needed schools to facilitate connections with their peers and to provide more engaging lessons so as to be motivated and encouraged to remain engaged in their learning. Associate Professor Femke Buisman-Pijlman from Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) comments that social engagement is an essential component to positive learning and the online learning space needs to be adapted to create a connected learning environment (cited in MGSE, 2021). This student feedback aligns with staff feedback that they valued staff worships and connecting online (43%) during this time.

Other observations noted were the differences in student's perceptions of engaging lessons, with school #1 having no feedback that this needed improvement and also that schools # 4 & 5 had no technology issues and appear to have higher motivation to learn, requesting increased meeting times online and engagement strategies.

The system technology support during the lockdowns was valued by staff, with 96% favourable responses regarding staff ability to access resources

Table 2: *Comparison of current and pre-lockdown student responses*

Questions	Pre lockdown % favourable	Current % Favourable	Difference %
How positive are you feeling about learning from home?	85	73	(12)
How cheerful are you while learning from home?	81	73	(8)
How frustrated/angry are you feeling while learning from home?	79	73	(6)
How happy are you to be a student at your school during learning from home?	87	100	13
How much do you look forward to school while learning from home?	78	80	2
How supportive/helpful do you feel your teacher has been while learning from home?	91	93	2
How worried are you about catching COVID-19?	60	40	(20)

> *data … indicates how well staff have coped in these stressful situations and it is recommmended that feedback be conveyed … to … affirm their professional capacity*

needed to do their jobs. This is also supported by student data which shows that there were limited technology issues during the lockdown period and the technology that was used was working so well that the students were requesting more opportunities to connect.

Staff data shows stress levels had reduced since the first lockdown and this could be linked with the student data which shows high percentages of students who feel their teachers were supportive during working from home (93%). This reduced stress level of staff could also contribute to students looking forward to school during this time (80%) and their positivity about being students at our schools (100%).

Recommendations

Four recommendations emerge from this research include:

1. This research has provided an opportunity for a staff voice, providing system administrators with useful data to inform system interventions. It is recommended that these surveys be adapted and repeated in the future, becoming a continuing practice to monitor staff and student wellbeing post COVID and inform both staff and administration.

2. A focus on effective communication with staff during periods of change and affirmation for adaptability during these times is recommended. The data collected indicates how well staff have coped in these stressful situations and it is recommended that feedback be conveyed to staff regarding these positive aspects to support and affirm their professional capacity. Specific feedback to our Information Technology team

regarding the positive responses regarding staff access to resources and students desire for more online learning should also be communicated, as this was a steep learning curve during the first lockdown and this feedback shows the result of the dedication of these staff.

3. Structured student socialisation time should be planned during any future learning-from-home periods and where possible should be considered as an effective engagement strategy in face-to-face teaching.

4. Schools with lower levels of staff wellbeing should be provided with extra system support and linked to other schools who have strengths in these areas.

Future research directions:

Ongoing research into student and staff wellbeing should be conducted annually, with relevant adaptations, and variances between schools researched and leveraged to grow and strengthen each school context.

Learning from home processes could be reviewed and analysed with results shared to inform future response strategies. Student engagement during online lessons that were recorded could also be reviewed to inform current teacher practice.

An investigation into the factors influencing the positive and negative variances between schools for staff and student results could also occur. These include variances such as why smaller schools have higher identification of religion as a wellbeing activity with staff, which engagement strategies were used in school # 1 and what forms of technology support were offered in schools 4 & 5.

Figure 5: *How could your teacher/school improve your learning from home experience? (combined school results)*

- Motivate/encourage — 15%
- More meetings/friend time — 45%
- More work/balance — 1%
- Address IT issues — 5%
- More engaging lessons/activities — 25%
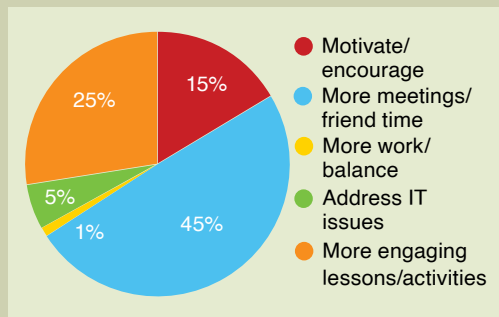
Figure 7: *School # 4 results (outside) compared to combined school results (inside)*
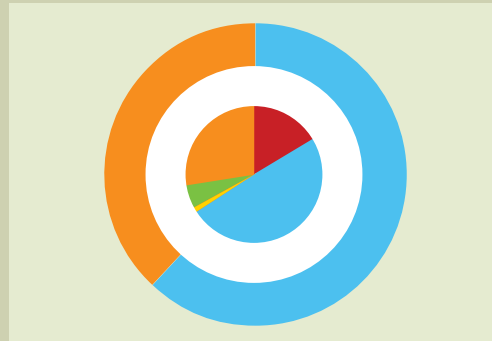
Figure 6: *School # 1 results (outside) compared to combined school results (inside)*
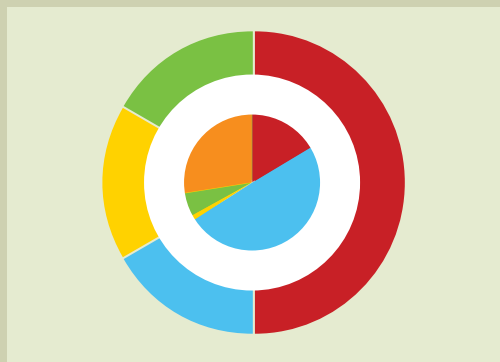
Figure 8: *School # 5 results (outside) compared to combined school results (inside)*
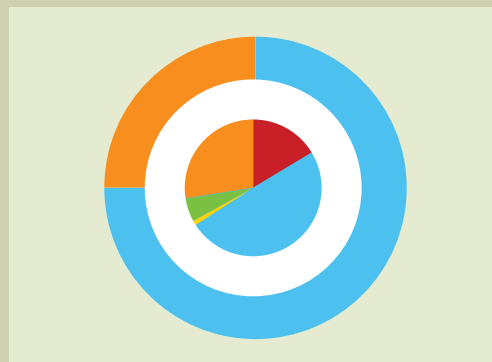
Structured student socialisation time should be planned during any future learning-from-home periods

As our schools strive to use data to inform and modify their teaching and provide our students with best practice pedagogy, research could be conducted on the benefits of student collaboration on student outcomes and pedagogical approaches that incorporate this.

Conclusion

The impact of the second COVID19 lockdown in Sydney has varied across Adventist schools in Sydney. Staff and students 'concerns regarding contracting COVID19 range from mild to severe depending on the location of schools, the number of COVID19 cases reported, and the level of restrictions present.

Through regular communication from school leadership teams staff are feeling supported, are able to do their jobs and are experiencing lower stress levels compared to the 2020 lockdown. Schools have improved their strategies for learning from home that were developed in 2020 and will continue to do so through the remainder of 2021 and gradually return to face to face teaching.

This research enabled the school system to focus its support during the pandemic and provide valuable feedback to schools regarding their staff, and students' wellbeing at this time. TEACH

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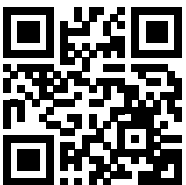
Affective response as a catalyst for reimagining curriculum and pedagogy for teaching of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority in Christian education

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Abstract
In 2018, Australians Together commissioned research on a trial program designed to improve teachers' confidence in relation to teaching the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority. The research, led by the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, was designed to engage staff at two peri-urban independent schools who had participated in the professional learning, several months after they had taken part in an Australians Together 2-day workshop. Teachers described a strong affective response to the professional learning, which prompted them to engage more deeply with the cross-curriculum priority and adapt new teaching resources and approaches to their classrooms. In this article we explore these outcomes but pose the question: 'Is affective response sufficient?'. Based on the research, we suggest additional steps that could be taken to further extend the impact beyond classroom actions.

Introduction
Australians Together is a not for profit organisation that is working to create new narratives to "help non-Indigenous people learn the true story of our shared history, understand how it's still having an impact today and imagine new ways to live together more respectfully" (Australians Together, 2020). Fiona Partridge (2020, p. 27) highlights that Christian teachers "are called by the very words of Jesus Christ to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves

> *Teachers described a strong affective response to the professional learning, which prompted them to engage more deeply*

(Mark 12:30-31)", and emphasises that "That surely includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people". As such, Christian teachers should be actively working to enhance the ways in which they work to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to ensure First Nations students can see themselves and their cultures reflected in the curriculum, as well as enabling all students to better understand more of the histories and cultures being lived and experienced in this country and by their neighbours.

As teachers it is critical to understand the potential impact genuine engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and content could have on shaping a new national narrative towards reconciliation, another biblical mandate (2 Cor 5:18). Similarly, we take the apostle Paul's normative statement of "there is neither Jew nor Gentile" (Gal 3:27) as an expression of contemporary anti-racism (Ash et al., 2017).

A significant part of Australians Together's work is to support teachers and schools in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives through Professional Learning (PL) Workshops and curriculum resources. The PL programs were designed—according to Intergroup Contact Theory (Christ & Kauff, 2019; Mazziotta, et al., 2011; Pettigrew, et al., 2011)—to build the capacity of teachers so that they can effectively and appropriately teach elements of the *Australian Curriculum*, particularly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority. Australians Together has developed resources and a learning framework around a set of five key ideas (Australians Together, 2017, p. 1)

1. *Our Cultures*—focuses on the importance of understanding one's own identity and culture and how that influences the way we see the world;
2. *The Wound*—explores the ongoing negative effects of colonisation;
3. *Our History*—tells stories that many Australians have never heard;
4. *Why Me?*—examines why this is relevant to every Australian; and
5. *My Response*—gives some guidelines for how to respond respectfully.

In 2018 Australians Together commissioned a team of researchers led by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), to conduct a small research project in order to better understand how Australians Together's work with teachers is perceived and applied.

> " *Specifically, we examine whether a teacher's affective response can be an effective catalyst for change in classroom practice.* "

Methodology

Our study was based on qualitative methods drawing on an interpretive paradigm where responses were analysed through a critical transformative lens (Mertens 2009) in order to assess the impact of the Australians Together PL on teachers.

The research questions guiding the research are as follows:

1. What barriers/limitations/challenges do educators and school leaders face in applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority through teaching and learning?
2. What are the outcomes (for teachers, students and schools) of a professional learning program designed to support teachers?
3. What new narratives and discourses emerge as a result of these outcomes (in the classroom, at leadership levels and at the system level)?
4. What evidence is there of changes towards an education that focuses on equity, justice, rights and reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

In this paper, we've added to this by posing the question, "Is affective response sufficient?" Specifically, we examine whether a teacher's affective response can be an effective catalyst for change in classroom practice. The primary aim of this project was to understand how non-Indigenous teachers can develop knowledge, skills and confidence to include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority from the *Australian Curriculum* in their pedagogy. Secondary to this aim was a need to understand and respond to teachers' need for resources and professional learning in a way that supports the application of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers—in particular those that call for skills to respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures with the aim of promoting reconciliation and strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2017, Standards 2.4 and 1.4).

This small study involved nine teaching staff, five curriculum coordinators, mentors and school leaders, as well as one system level coordinator, in two Lutheran system schools in regional Victoria, Australia. One of the schools had no students who identified as Indigenous and the other had about 10. Both schools participated in PL in May 2018. Interviews and focus groups with participants were conducted in October 2018. The data was analysed

using NVivo qualitative analysis software to identify themes emerging from the data, for each question we posed.

Ethical clearance was sought and approved through the AIATSIS (Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) Research Ethics Committee (HREC Reference Number: EO94-23072018).

Findings

The purpose of this paper is to explore how teachers' *affective*, or emotional, response to the PL resulted in tangible curriculum and pedagogical outcomes in their classrooms. The data set is interrogated to examine whether positive change extended beyond the classroom, something Australians Together aims to achieve, particularly focusing on evidence of new narratives. Discussion relates this into six themes that emerged from the data. Consideration includes teachers' affective responses to the PL, their reflexive responses, teachers' engagement with curriculum and planning, practical classroom applications and pedagogical responses. The schools are referred to as School 1 and School 2.

Affective response

There were many reports from respondents about the enthusiasm and excitement that people felt after participating in the professional learning workshop.

I think after the first day, we got in the car and we drove home and we were like 'this is incredible'. This is what's needed, this is what we need, this is what everyone needs.

Another commented on the experience as one of the best professional development experiences (PDs) she had attended:

It was a wonderful opportunity. In fact, I think… I came back and said it was probably one of the best PDs that I had attended in so much as being able to come back and actually do something to make a difference.

One respondent talked about being more 'comfortable' after the workshop:

It has certainly given me a little bit more of a confidence and a comfortable feeling in being able to deliver this part of the curriculum and through the program.

Another school leader, who was not able to attend all the time, made this observation:

I wasn't there full time. I do remember teachers leaving being very emotionally exhausted, so [staff member] left one of the meetings and she had to lead a meeting for the junior school and she just said my heart is full and troubled and my head is swimming with stuff.

The staff member provided her own reflection:

…just the information that was shared with us was quite full on and emotional and eye-opening and you know, made you sad, made you mad and I think yeah, my eyes were definitely opened.

The mix of mostly positive emotional responses described in the quotes above point to strong affective responses from participants. In many ways, the PL provoked and inspired participants. It made them feel more comfortable, more empathic and positive about their ability to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as required by the cross-curriculum priority. The responses also point to a high level of engagement in the workshop process. There is, however, no discussion about confrontation, discomfort, shame, whiteness or niceness—research suggests that these more difficult topics need to be addressed to affect real change (Ohito, 2020). Similarly, there are no discussions that challenge teacher positioning in relation to Maudlin's (2014) sense of a "white hope", which problematises the reinscription and perpetuation of white privilege that occurs through an assumption that white people can transcend whiteness through its recognition and critique.

Reflexive response

The reflexive responses that emerged from the workshop are in part about the positioning of self differently as a result of the new knowledge and also about repositioning professional practice. In terms of personal impact one focus group respondent commented on how the material connected with her feelings—perhaps understanding what it would be like to walk in someone else's shoes:

For me, it was like wow, it made me realise why things like Sorry Day, why it really was a big deal because it really highlighted to me the situations, how I would feel.

We note that the implied emphasis of the above quote is not on the teacher's personal involvement in Sorry Day, but in her understanding of what it might be like for 'the other'. The personal impact is also expressed in another workshop participant's 'emotional' reaction to the content:

I was very emotional and I went … back home and I shared the whole story with my daughters and we all got very emotional about it and that actually helped me understand a lot, and what I did was the very next day after the session, I just poured it out on my kids in the class so 'lest I forget', you know?

> " *there are no discussions that challenge teacher positioning in relation to Maudlin's sense of a 'white hope'* "

One of the exercises in the PL was planning for a unit of teaching and learning. The level of collective responsibility for the quality of the units is expressed in the following quote with references to 'we need', 'we can', 'we've always felt like that'. This indicates some of the repositioning that resulted at a professional level through the PL. The repositioning allows teachers to remain in control of the content they are teaching without becoming personally vulnerable.

> I think when we would sit down and we'd get ready for these units, we would look at that and we'd all kind of be like 'this isn't great', this isn't a very good unit, you know, how can we improve it, you know, make it more engaging for the students and create more awareness and acknowledgment? I think we've always felt like that… we need to scrap it, we need to start again. This is, like it's not doing enough.

The teachers' newfound ability to ask questions and encourage their students to ask questions was also evident.

> I think, [students] being able to ask those questions that maybe [we] were sitting on in the session. Is it the wrong thing to ask? We were encouraged to ask them anyway and there were some answers that weren't able to be given because they weren't sure or whatever, but I think it's the same with the students. They sit there and they're not sure and they hear things… They've got opinions… from their parents that they bring to the classroom…

The participants' experiences with their own questions, in some cases, caused them to reflect on how it might be for students. In some ways, this reflects a shift in pedagogical approach that sees the teacher as having to know and relay information, to one that knows how to ask questions and explore answers. Interestingly, these reflections did not extend to how this experience or questioning might be different when First Nations students are in the classroom.

The focus on understanding their thinking and how this affects teacher practice was reflected in feedback from focus group respondents who were reflecting on a unit they had just taught on the First Fleet and colonisation:

> It may be a chance to reflect on their own thinking and why they think that way and has their thinking changed since…

> Posing hard questions, hard thoughts that they have to then take back and self-reflect on and say well maybe I've thought wrong, you know, I've been told the wrong thing from the start.

These reflections suggest that an affective response did shape teacher practices. Participants described experiences that could be labelled as epiphanic moments and needed to share those revelations with their family, colleagues and students. But we do not see evidence of a shift in values or a deepening of understanding in what it means to be a First Nations student in this educational context. This remains hidden.

Engagement with curriculum and planning

Beyond the affective and reflexive responses, one perceived benefit of the PL was that it fed directly into curriculum planning.

> [The workshop was] thoroughly enjoyable for all of us and has since been enjoyable for [School 1] because… we did a presentation as part of a curriculum day recently and it just led to so many things like, you know, editing our scope and sequence for our integrated studies and having a real P-6 approach and I believe now that they're going to go beyond and go 7-9.

Another participant from School 2 stated:

> Not only were we able to do that really deep level thinking of just the planning. We also learnt a lot about some extra things to add to our planning repertoire as well so that part of it was really well presented, the process was great.

Another participant commented on how it changed the way they approached the content of a unit. Note how this teacher from School 2 also connected the emotion and affective response (discussed earlier) with planning and classroom practice.

> They explained why teachers and students should… share this information with others and then we made a connection with our cultures, the current cultures, how that history was brought into the modern society, how we can implement that and towards the end, [and] we were given the opportunity to put all that knowledge into our unit planner so we could see from the emotions, triggering emotions, to actually putting into our classroom practice through [a] unit planner.

So, the benefit of the PL was that it not only contributed to content, but it also connected that content with curriculum and pedagogy.

Practical classroom applications

The interview data provides numerous examples of ways that teachers responded to their learning in the classroom. One strategy that emerged was to shift the focus from delivering content to making the content engaging and relevant:

> I just think I'm really excited in a way that we can deliver it to help the kids connect. I think that wasn't there, it was 'this is what we're teaching you' and that

> " *Posing hard questions, … that they have to then take back and self-reflect on and say well maybe I've thought wrong, you know, I've been told the wrong thing* "

was it but now, 'this is your history, this is about you and this is why this happened and what can we do about it?'

The use of the AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia (Horton, 1996) as a teaching tool was also enthusiastically embraced: "They [students] just love the language map, they do. They just love it."

Another activity incorporated into classroom practice was reflection on five aspects of culture based on Paulson and Brett's (2013) Five Smooth Stones:

So, each learning outcome has learning intentions, success criteria then a brief about what the lesson, or some guidelines for what the lesson can contain and the five stones reflection is an amazing activity.

Another commented on enriched learning for students:

I felt like it was going to definitely enrich the year four Aboriginal studies unit, where before it had been focused on a lot of important things like dance and art and that sort of thing but not getting into the meat of it I guess, of the history and how your history shapes people. It can't not shape people and the way they think.

One teacher commented on a USB drive that participants were given, which included a range of resources they could apply:

This USB is the best thing. It's got so [many] rich resources and stories and clips. It's so comprehensive, it's like it's one of the best teaching tools I've ever seen so that was fantastic.

The above responses suggest that the PL activities, tools and resources were directly transferrable to the participants' classrooms.

Pedagogical responses
Related to the application of workshop activities in the classroom was a corresponding change in the pedagogical approach used by teachers. Helping students connect with the content was a key benefit for some teachers: "*I just think I'm really excited in a way that we can deliver it to help the kids connect*".

We noted earlier that the reflexive response of PL facilitators was reflected in the way that questions were used to elicit responses from workshop participants as a way of breaking down opinions and in turn opening up alternative possibilities in the minds of the participants. Participant teachers then used this strategy to encourage their students to ask questions.

[You] break [those opinions] down completely but you've got to have those [points of view], if you're

confident enough to share and teach that then they're able to ask those questions and maybe change opinions.

The level of critical thinking applied to pedagogy was evident too. Noting that School 2 has a strong migrant cohort, one teacher commented:

Half of my class are migrants, including me, so when we had to sit for our citizenship test, Australian citizenship test, there was absolutely nothing about Indigenous history; absolutely nothing. We had a good discussion in the class that that must be included …

The consequence of these altered approaches appears to be stronger student engagement:

I was teaching a lesson about 'terra nullius' and that really hit home for a lot of the kids of, you know, the Europeans at the time and the way they came in here and, how would you feel if someone came and actually started camping in your backyard and setup, how would you be feeling? I think maybe it opened up more ways to talk about things. The kids are certainly very… very engaged.

While the above quote certainly indicates teacher and student engagement with the history element of the Curriculum, the focus is on a somewhat disembodied recount of the past that does not directly connect with the present.

Discussion
Returning to the research question: "What are the outcomes (for teachers, students and schools) of a professional learning program designed to support teachers?" we want to explore the extent to which the professional learning was transformative. Did it lead to anti-racist praxis? Was there a recognition among teachers that showed their understanding of being complicit in the enterprise of colonialism? Or were the outcomes limited to a more emotional/empathic response, leading to the "white hope" that Maudlin (2014) expresses?

White hopefulness
There is little doubt that the data we collected reflects a strong affective response to the professional learning workshops. It should also be noted that there were five months between the workshops and the interviews we conducted. So, it is reasonable to suggest that the empathic and reflexive responses were sustained in the minds of teachers who participated—in as much as the emotional response was still strong in the participants' memories. But as noted in the literature for changes to be considered antiracist, there must be a movement towards change in actions, such as a commitment "to social action for the purpose of dismantling the dominance paradigm" and actively seeking "cross-cultural and cross-racial interactions"

> " I was very emotional and I went … home and I shared the whole story with my daughters and we all got very emotional about it and that actually helped me "

(Howard, 2016, p. 114). There is evidence in the data of some reflexivity, consistent with a critical examination of self as viewed through at least some of the 5 key ideas presented by Australians Together. However the data exudes a sense of hopefulness, which gives rise to a sense that the 'white teachers' we interviewed now had an idea of what they could practically do, it is as if they had found the answer that Maudlin (2014) was looking for in her self-reflexive article we cited earlier.

The data shows that following the workshop, teachers were prepared to adjust their classroom practice. There were examples of teachers accessing and using resources that they previously had not—for example the Map of Indigenous Australia (Horton, 1996). Others moved beyond facts to a more historical and reflective approach to their classroom teaching. Teachers were more inclined to engage with teaching Indigenous perspectives from the Curriculum. Some teachers were more open to discussing difficult issues of colonial history with their students. To the extent that the empathic response led to reduced angst and changed attitudes among teachers, the application of Intergroup Contact Theory seemed to work to reduce prejudice, negative attitudes and tensions consistent with Christ and Kauff (2019). But did teachers recognise their 'complicity in upholding the… oppressive structures' (Ohito, 2020, p. 30) they were teaching about?

What's missing?

If we were to consider this as a workshop designed to encourage antiracist pedagogies in the context of Christian education, there are some missing elements that could be incorporated in future development of a bigger package designed to have a greater transformative impact. Specifically, there are no references to the forming of accountable relationships between teachers and First Nations families and students reported by teachers in the data. Utt and Tochluk (2020) have noted how difficult this can be, especially when there are no First Nations staff at the schools and very few First Nations parents and students to engage with. The schools, which both had close ties to historical missionary endeavours, could have drawn on their network of First Nations schools (for example the system operates a boarding school for First Nations students from remote Australia) for information. But none of these relational actions were followed up by teachers. From a Christian and biblical perspective, if a goal of the PL was about reconciliation or as noted earlier the mandate to "love your neighbour" (Matt 22:39) the impact has been limited. Teachers had not taken the next step outside of the classroom

> **Teachers did not make a connection between their theological position and their teaching … so discussions about antiracism as a Christian mandate were strikingly absent.**

to build relationships with their local Aboriginal communities. Teachers did not make a connection between their theological position and their teaching or the curriculum, so discussions about antiracism as a Christian mandate (Gal 3:27; 2 Cor 5:18) were strikingly absent in the interview data.

Beyond this, there is little indication that the transformative orientation of teachers has extended to a deeper questioning of themselves in relation to the 'Nice White' structures they work within (Castagno, 2014; Wong, 2019; Wozolek and Atif, 2022). No questions or comments were made by teachers about the role of the Church to which the schools belonged (past or present) in the perpetuation of racist or discriminatory practices— perhaps reflecting the discomfort and shame associated with these topics (Ohito, 2020). Further, there was no evidence of questioning or critical review of the curriculum—which they were using in their classroom planning—and its perpetuation of injustices, racism and inequities—or the trivialisation of Indigenous knowledges in the Curriculum that Parkinson and Jones (2018) discuss. While the 5 Key ideas certainly do not 'whitewash' the historical facts of colonialism, how these ideas are connected to curriculum or schools' theological positioning is not clear. While investigators see several references to engagement with the Curriculum in the data, little critique of the Curriculum as a racialised document that promulgates an 'othering' discourse that is to a large extent assimilative and silences the traumas, massacres and injustices of the past, is evident.

To be fair, the PL was a two-day trial, and taking teachers to this level of self-critical awareness is a big ask. But the absence of these important transformative discourses highlights the work that remains to be done.

Conclusions

In this article we have reported on the findings of research into the outcomes of professional learning workshops designed to support teachers to better teach the content of the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority. The rationale for this professional learning workshop was the perceived lack of confidence non-Indigenous teachers have in their ability to teach about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. When we interviewed teachers five months after the workshop was held, it was evident that the affective response to the content of the workshop had been sustained. That affective response did translate into improved confidence and greater reflexivity, and it also resulted in changed classroom practices. However, while the approach

did demonstrate the application of Intergroup Contact Theory to achieve an empathic response to issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to reduce prejudice, attitudes and tensions, it did not result in an embodied or relational response consistent with antiracist praxis. Nor did it result in a deeper questioning of teachers' selves in relation to their complicity in racist or oppressive structures they and their schools were embedded in. Finally, there is potential for further impact in the area of relationships development between the teacher/s, school/s and First Nations Peoples. A change here would be a strong indication that teachers were 'becoming' (in the ontological sense) transformative. **TEACH**

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> " *Nor did it result in a deeper questioning of teachers' selves in relation to their complicity in racist or oppressive structures they and their schools were embedded in.* "

TEACH^R

New thoughts on school refusal

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Abstract
School refusal is a psychosocial issue defined as persistently missing school, educational activities or avoiding activities within the school setting which manifests in children and adolescents from 5 to 17 years of age. It occurs in between 2% and 5% of children and is a growing problem. Case studies show the varied nature of the problem: no two children have the same experience or triggers for school refusal behaviour. This makes it difficult for parents and teachers to support them and can see their cases being placed in the "too hard basket". This paper discusses the current literature on school refusal as well as providing teachers with suggestions based on current research into the best ways to support and encourage students who exhibit school avoidant behaviours.

> *for some children, school is not a mildly unpleasant thing that they won't do, it is a deeply distressing activity that they can't do*

The old joke is that most children will do anything to get out of a day of school, pretending to be sick, skipping classes or even playing truant for entire days. But for some children, school is not a mildly unpleasant thing that they won't do, it is a deeply distressing activity that they can't do. As every child's experience of school refusal (SR) varies, we have included three case studies within this paper to highlight these differing journeys.

Over time, the way that SR has been understood and treated has evolved. It is no longer considered purely behavioural, but rather symptomatic of psychological and social issues, and often connected to trauma (Kearney et al., 2019). Once attributed to individual student's maladaptive behaviours, a generation of global research has

shown that school attendance problems actually have complex, multifaceted personal, family, community and educational origins (Elliot & Place, 2019). Despite this growing understanding, many schools still attribute school attendance problems to either student or family failings (Ingul et al, 2019).

Unfortunately, not all schools and systems have kept up with findings and, as a result, many are often less than supportive of parents and their children who refuse to attend or stay at school. It seems that emerging research is not effectively being shared with the educators that would derive the most benefit from the knowledge (Gonzálvez & Ingles, 2019). Limited understanding and flawed attributions result in SR students not getting the individualised support and tailored interventions that they need to overcome their distress and increase their attendance (Elliot & Place, 2019).

The need for dissemination of this knowledge is a central concern of this paper. Using an introduction to current research, along with three diverse case studies, we hope to offer an insight into how teachers can use SR research to support their individual student's varied needs.

A review of the current research on SR
What is it?
SR is a psychosocial issue defined as persistently missing school, educational activities or avoiding activities within the school setting, which manifests in children and adolescents from 5 to 17 years of age (Lehman, 2020).

A commonly used definition of school refusal includes (a) reluctance or refusal to attend school, often leading to prolonged absences, (b) staying at home during school hours with parents' knowledge rather than concealing the problem from parents, (c) experience of emotional distress at the prospect of

attending school (e.g., somatic complaints, anxiety, and unhappiness), (d) absence of severe antisocial behaviour, and (e) parental efforts to secure their child's attendance at school (Berg, 1997, 2002; Berg, Nichols, & Pritchard, 1969; Bools et al, 1990).

Since 1941, refusal, avoidance, aversion and absenteeism with psychological or psychosocial origins has been given various names (Kawsar et al, 2022). First referred to as "school phobia", it is now most commonly called "school avoidance", "school anxiety", "child-motivated absenteeism" or most commonly "school refusal" (Elliott & Place, 2019; Kearney, 2008; Kearney & Silverman, 1995). For the sake of continuity, this article will use the term school refusal (SR).

Who does it affect?

School refusal affects between 2% and 5% of school-aged children (Elliot & Place, 2019), which in Australia equates to about 200 000 children. In a school of 1000, we could expect 20-50 students to be struggling. SR is typically equally distributed across genders and across socioeconomic groups (Kawsar et al, 2022). SR occurs across all age groups, but support referrals are more frequent in adolescence (Garfi, 2018; Heyne & Sauter, 2013).

SR behaviour affects students, their family and the school. It's important to note that multifaceted underlying causes and the diverse manifestations mean that every affected student's SR behaviour and experiences can be vastly different (Ingul et al, 2019) as the selected case studies illustrate. Students' experiences include (but are not limited to) reduced learning time resulting in lower achievement through to a sense of being different or abnormal because they struggle with attendance and potential social withdrawal (Havik et al, 2015; Knollman et al, 2010).

Parents report feeling embarrassed, blamed by school staff, misunderstood, isolated, and anxious about their responses to absenteeism along with a sense of frustration and helplessness (Gregory & Purcell, 2014). School communities report struggles with the emotional challenges, the resource-consuming task of managing absenteeism and individualised instruction as well as negative impacts on teacher morale (Ingul et al, 2019; Wilkins, 2008).

Why do some students struggle?

SR is acknowledged internationally as a significant issue for adolescents and is a recognised interdisciplinary public health issue (Sobba, 2019). Ongoing research explores a variety of causes and responses at the individual, family, school and community level (Elliot & Place, 2018).

Individual level: School refusal is not classified as

an independent diagnostic category in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), however SR is linked to diverse mental health disorders including anxiety, depression and PTSD (Maynard et al, 2018; McShane et al, 2001). Australia's largest scale assessment of SR found anxiety and depression to be central reasons that students began avoiding and/or refusing to attend school (Garfi, 2018; Heyne et al, 2013). Up to 80% of school refusers meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder and 50% of students with referrals have an existing anxiety diagnosis (Garfi, 2018; Heyne et al, 2013). Other predisposing, precipitating, and/or perpetuating individual factors include low self-esteem, behavioural inhibition, fear of failure, low self-efficacy, learning deficits and physical illness (Garfi, 2018; Ingul et al, 2019).

Family level: There is no longitudinal research into the influence of family functioning on SR so the few studies typically make correlational rather than causal associations (Ingul et al, 2019). While not always features of SR, potential links include separation or divorce, dysfunctional family interactions, loss of a family member (or fear of such), moving, mother returning to work, parents with mental or physical health concerns (Ingul et al, 2019).

School level: SR is frequently impacted by challenges within the school setting. Struggling with the transition to secondary school, a sense of unpredictability within the structure of the school day have both been identified as potential causes (Heyne et al, 2015). Bullying has been identified as a significant contributor to teen SR and victimisation is a significant concern (Lehman, 2020; Sobba, 2019). As are fears of specific events like being ridiculed, shamed, criticised in front of classmates, or sent to the principal (Kearney & Albano, 2004). Poor school climates and/or problematic teacher-student relationships that lack connection and trust, or involve harsh management or differentiated student treatment, have all been found to influence SR behaviour (García-Fernández et al, 2008; Havik et al, 2015; Sobba, 2019).

Community level: The array of SR influencing community factors include living in unsafe and disorganised communities, inadequate or inconsistent support services, through to pressure from a culture emphasising high academic achievement (Kearney & Albano, 2004). Once SR behaviour emerges, a lack of community understanding of both causes and supportive responses can lead to condemnation and eventual isolation (Elliot & Place, 2019). Returning a child to school can require a monumental community effort which requires vast amounts of time, energy

> *Australia's largest scale assessment of SR found anxiety and depression to be central reasons that students began avoiding … school*

and collaboration between parents, teachers, psychologists, and importantly, the child. Too often these resources are not available (Garfi, 2018; Ingul et al, 2019).

Specific SR case studies

This paper also seeks to explore the issue from the perspective of parents of the students refusing to attend, with the case studies recorded by parents of a child who struggled with SR. As noted, these journeys of school avoidance and the associated issues with schools who do not understand or have capacity to help, are highly individualised. Following are three case studies of school aged students who, for varied reasons, became school resistant and struggled with finding an education structure that worked for them. Students and schools have been made anonymous for privacy reasons and case studies are provided from the point of view of the parents of the student involved.

J.

J came from a single-parent home with a history of domestic violence. She started kindergarten two months before age five at a public school in the ACT but moved interstate a year later to an independent school in NSW with a focus on academic achievement. J's confidence and comfort in this new school environment was complicated by frequent casual educators and constant changes to routine for the class. Grade three saw J enter a classroom that was co-taught by two teachers, who had considerably different teaching styles. The changes in her perceived emotional safety in the classroom due to these contrasting teaching styles caused her anxiety to heighten. This anxiety manifested into avoidance not only in the classroom, but in completing school tasks at home. J's primary grade three teacher demanded rigour with homework and attendance, and despite negotiations from J's mother, she was forced to catch up on a term's worth of missed homework; having to stay in at lunchtime for three weeks to complete the work. This reduced her social engagement during the school day, and she was embarrassed in front of her peers. By the end of this year J was exhibiting poor sleep, changes in eating habits, fidgeting, grey hairs on her head and regular school avoidance (claiming to be sick, stomach aches, hiding in toilets, crying regularly before school). From grades four through to six, her school nervousness continued, with her often ending up in the school counsellor's office or having days off school. J would tell her mother that she felt that teachers were annoyed with her because her anxiety was an inconvenience.

J's introduction to high-school was complicated

– with an initial strong sense of social connection, but a challenging time with her teachers. Some of her teachers were invested in J's backstory, paying attention to her trauma history, and affirming her talent for creative writing. Other teachers, however, were not—often engaging in a way with J that was perceived as bullying and unkind. J's social connection changed significantly over the next two years, with her often being the victim of verbal and physical bullying. In grade eight, J's anxiety and wellbeing was tragically impacted by the murder of a family member. Again, J was supported by some staff members, while others felt that J needed to (quote) '*get over it and apply herself*'.

By grade nine, J moved to a public school in hopes of less academic pressure, but her anxiety grew and mental health continued to decline. She completed a task for an English assignment in which she wrote a story detailing a very vivid self-harm and suicide plan. This story was flagged by J's teacher, and the new school and her parents worked hard to access mental health support for J both at school and at home. Whilst this school was quite supportive, J's avoidance continued, with her missing almost half the term. Extreme online bullying eventually saw J withdraw from the school and return to her previous independent school.

J's re-enrolment at this school only lasted one term. During this time J's anxiety was resulting in significant struggles with concentrating in the classroom (unable to retain information, stay on task, needing to fidget, and sudden anxiety attacks). J was diagnosed with complex PTSD and would spend a lot of time each week with the school counsellor, with whom she felt safe to express her distrust of several staff members (from whom she felt perceived as dramatic and attention-seeking).

The balance of grade nine and all of grade ten were completed at an independent school with a focus on support for students experiencing challenges with mental health and/or academic issues. Despite a sexual assault by a student at a neighbouring school, J thrived at this school; her anxiety attacks reduced significantly, she achieved high results in assessments and developed strong social connections. They had a strict anti-bullying policy, daily meditation and other wellbeing practices that enabled J to manage her anxiety in tangible, intentional ways during the school day.

J chose to leave school at the end of grade ten and worked for a year before deciding to return to school for grade eleven and twelve. Initially, J was motivated to complete schoolwork and to try to attend school regularly, but the pressure to perform academically exacerbated her anxiety and PTSD, seeing her once again dissolving into tears, hiding

> " *J was diagnosed with complex PTSD and would spend a lot of time each week with the school counsellor, with whom she felt safe to express her distrust of several staff members* "

on campus, or messaging her parents to be picked up early. She would articulate a sense of words 'jumping' around when her anxiety was high, and again she would find herself in classes shallow breathing, heart racing, fidgety, shaky, and nervous. J's parents worked closely with the school to develop a knowledge of J's trauma history and implement strategies to reduce anxiety attacks on campus, however a lack of unity in this support approach from staff members again meant J felt as though she was unsupported and viewed as dramatic and attention-seeking. A few weeks out from her year eleven exams J made the decision to leave school permanently to find full-time work.

M.

M's schooling journey was always complicated. At five years of age, he was still having a 2-3 hour nap every afternoon which was not conducive with a classroom structure. By the time he started school at almost six years old, he was reading fluently and was physically much larger than the other kids in his class. He was bored and restless, exhausted by mid-afternoon and regularly in trouble for rough-play due to his size and strength. By grade four he was doing maths and reading with a Year 6 class and was transferred to a Selective School for his final years of primary school.

While he enjoyed the selective program, the competitive nature of the class and students triggered an anxious nature and he began to suffer from regular headaches, stomach problems and further exhaustion. A couple of days a month he would need to stay home to sleep. M was awarded an academic scholarship to a private high school and began Year 7 at the new school. He was playing competitive sport at a national level and the combined pressures heightened his already problematic anxiety levels. Attempts to reduce his load also caused him anxiety that he was "falling behind". The school was a competitive, highly academic environment and rather than celebrating his successes they pushed him further, accelerating him to Year 8, part way through the year. The pressure provoked further illnesses and by early Year 9, M was hospitalised with severe depression, anxiety, and a diagnosed sleep disorder. The sleep disorder and its associated medications caused him to be clumsy and have micro-sleeps resulting in several accidents, two of which required surgery. He had further surgery in the same year to fix a breathing issue and missed several weeks of school recovering. When he returned to school his anxiety about catching up missed work was such that he was hiding in empty classrooms and bathrooms to avoid teachers. The school counsellor asked teachers to

avoid pressuring him, but the school culture of high achievement and regular testing meant that he was continually pressured to catch up the year of work he had missed due to the acceleration to a higher grade.

Part way through Year 9 he was hospitalised for almost three months after self-harm and suicide attempts. He withdrew from the school on the advice of his psychiatric team and enrolled in a local public school. By this time however school was an anxiety trigger that made it almost impossible for him to attend. The school provided a leave pass, a time out room and he was able to go home early when he needed to sleep. However, communication between staff was limited and teachers would regularly question him on his mental health, ask about self-harm scars, and pressure him to stay in class during severe moments of panic and even psychosis. He would regularly skip school altogether.

After a third hospitalisation of two weeks, he enrolled in a hospital school specifically for students with health issues that kept them out of mainstream schooling. During his time at this school he was able to sleep in a quiet room whenever he needed to, go for a walk or do exercise if he felt anxious and able to study at his own pace. The school advised that Distance Education might be the only educational opportunity that would work for Year 10 given his severe school avoidance at that point. Distance Education worked well for M. He was able to get extra sleep when needed, work at his own pace, use exercise to manage his mental health and manage the stimulation of social life, sporting commitments and academia on his own terms. Teachers at his school would call, text or message to keep him on track with his work, but pressure was limited and attendance at physical school hubs was non-compulsory. By the end of Year 10 he was once again enjoying study and felt mentally healthy. He then felt ready to return to a regular school environment for his senior years and is, so far, thriving.

C.

C's school related anxiety began in her first months of schooling. Beginning with separation anxiety at the start of the day and quickly evolving into distress that spilled into the evening and disrupted her sleep. Initially this was attributed to the multitude of family changes in the preceding years; her parents separation became public, the family moved to another city, her father began drinking excessively, her mother returned to full-time work and then her father moved interstate for work. However, discussions with C revealed that a number of unexpected causes were at play.

> *Distance Education worked … He was able to get extra sleep … work at his own pace, use exercise to manage his mental health … social life, sport and academia on his own terms.*

C reported that a few of her classmates had formed a clique that conspired to taunt her about made-up issues. These included convincing her that she looked 'fat' in her uniform, she had a speech impediment and no-one could understand her when she talked—a taunt that resulted in her no longer speaking at school. These conspired taunts were led by an older child who had also been hitting and threatening C. The school's observations and discussions with students confirmed C's account.

Making an effort to address the impact of these events on C, her mother wanted to try a fresh start at another school. The family agreed it may also be best if they were to live in the same city. So, C's mother ceased full-time work and returned to study, C's father attended a rehab facility, they found a supportive school with a warm and inclusive culture and rented a home directly across the road from the school. Anxiety continued to be a concern, but over time there were improvements in C's attendance, engagement, friendships and confidence. And after a year she began to speak in class, a moment that was celebrated with hugs and tears of joy between her teacher and mother.

Unfortunately, after two years C's father was no longer sober and the resulting behaviours made visits unsafe, co-parenting difficult and their current life unaffordable. After seeking advice from an individual and family psychologist, C's mother decided to focus on stability and safety by buying their own home close to her family and friends. She assumed that school gains would come with these changes, but this was not the case.

C was enrolled at a small private school that promised excellent support, but it became evident that a recent change in leadership had resulted in a negative cultural shift that permeated all aspects of the school. C became a target of bullying that again escalated into her being physically hurt. Her anxiety heightened, leading to complete school refusal. She was also experiencing intense nightmares, disrupted sleep, bouts of illness and was falling asleep for hours at school. There was a brief reprieve following the responsive appointment of a new teacher that had specialised training in student interpersonal conflict resolution and took a compassionate approach to student anxiety. When he resigned midway through a school day due to the negative culture, multiple families, including C's, sought new schools.

This experience affected C emotionally, cognitively and physically. It was further complicated by near-daily harassment from her father, especially around school attendance. C's new school initially struggled with how to support her, however they remained determined to do so and communicated

> "
> *C's father was no longer sober and the resulting behaviours made visits unsafe, co-parenting difficult and their current life unaffordable*
> "

openly and regularly with C's mother. C was primarily supported by a school counsellor and in his absence, the school principal – who ensured that her door was always open. Both offered non-judgemental support that prioritised C's mental and physical health over academic and attendance concerns. With their support she was able to flourish academically, socially and engaged in an array of intra-curricular sporting and creative activities.

C's transition to high school was not as successful. Over the intervening holidays her sleep became further disrupted with debilitating nightmares and an increased need for daytime sleep. When C started high school she was already physically and cognitively exhausted and struggled to engage with either content or peers. The presence of her former primary school bullies (who now attended the same private high school) along with destabilising harassment and threats from her father led to crippling bouts of anxiety and further school refusal. Initial positive efforts by the school were undermined by condemnation and shaming while attributing school refusal as entirely due to personal failings. Within months C was unable to even enter the grounds without physically collapsing due to anxiety attacks.

Discussions with C's GP, school psychologists, paediatrician and paediatric sleep specialist all supported transitioning C to home school or distance education for the foreseeable future in an effort to protect her mental health and allow time to investigate the role sleep might play in her anxiety. C has since been diagnosed with chronic sleep deprivation due to Restless Leg Syndrome, resulting in impaired cognitive and emotional function. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the investigation of viable, long-term treatment strategies. Respite and counselling have led to mental health improvements and a desire for increased social engagement, so C is now keen to eventually return to traditional schooling.

Teachers and SR

These case studies illustrate the highly personal ways that individual, family, school and community factors can affect SR behaviours. They also demonstrate how, if not effectively addressed, these factors can compound over time.

How can teacher's help?
Individual support
Teachers can offer individual support by:
- Listening to why students say they can't attend school is essential. Teachers should try to understand how emotionally and cognitively difficult it is for students struggling

with SR. These students find it incredibly difficult to explain their emotional reaction to school. Many SR experiences are either connected to past trauma or have developed recent trauma, making it even more difficult to articulate (Evans, 2000).

- Showing students compassion is vital, they are victims of SR. A recent study showed that there is significant dissonance between even student and parental understanding of the anxiety that the SR student feels, their levels of distress are most often underestimated (Olino et al, 2018). This understanding can be even harder for a teacher who spends only a portion of their time engaging with the student (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002; Wilkins, 2008).
- To support these students, provide flexible, negotiated learning plans that prioritise the needs of the SR student. Be honest about the resources available (or deficiencies) so that expectations are realistic and review the plans weekly or monthly as needed. It may be necessary for the student to work from home until they can resume the normal educational pathway (Heyne & Sauter, 2013).

Family support

To support families, teachers can:

- Consider the situation from the parent's point of view. Family factors can be difficult to understand and there is an unfortunate tendency for school personnel to attribute absences entirely to parent attitudes and factors within the home (Malcolm et al, 2003).
- If you identify early signs of SR speak with parents and be clear and compassionate. The SR struggle for parents and carers is typically confusing, overwhelming and exhausting. They are usually working hard to manage the SR behaviour with limited resources and little experience (Havik et al, 2014)
- Develop a relationship with the child and the child's guardian/parent as you will need to keep each other informed throughout the process. Addressing SR attendance is resource-intensive and emotionally challenging for both parents and teachers, a positive supportive and collaborative relationship can help immensely (Finning et al, 2018).
- Accept that supporting an SR student's return to school will take time as there are rarely quick fixes for school avoidance - diagnostic processes for physical and mental health issues can take years and treatment take even longer (Elliot & Place, 2019).

School support

Whole of school support, teachers inform, includes:

- Safety and predictability, contexts essential for students struggling with SR. Evaluating the environment of your classroom, school and the social dynamics affecting the child to see if there are potential triggers or points of pressure can be a great place to start (Ertesvåg, 2009).
- Creating separate safe spaces that can be accessed discreetly at any time by students can support oft-needed time out. Libraries are a good, simple option as they are quiet, tend to have nooks and private areas and are less brightly lit than classrooms (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020).
- Familiarise staff with school and state guidelines regarding SR support strategies and share these with parents. Do not assume that they know. Support structures are extremely diverse across different schools and parents will need to have individual school policies and systems explained to them (Elliot & Place, 2019).
- Provide negotiated learning plans for school avoidant students that prioritise the needs of the child. This often means prioritising mental and physical health needs over educational and academic needs - academic pressures can overwhelm SR students (Wimmer, 2010).

Community support

Involving the community empowers stakeholders to:

- Develop a dedicated 'attendance team' within and beyond the school. When teachers are expected to cope with the SR behaviour alone, conflicting classroom demands mean that SR can often be placed in the "too hard basket". The involvement of the Principal or Vice Principal, student welfare staff, year advisors, counsellors, front-line library, administrative personnel, community members, psychologists and local health advisories could not only help share the support, it may also lead to much-needed structural and cultural change (Elliott & Place, 2019)
- Ensure school networks are trauma informed. In 2020 the "Trauma informed practice in an educational context" professional development program was rolled out by the Department of Education and Training in Australia, and this would be a valuable addition to any community seeking to understand students with mental or physical health induced school avoidance (Centre for

" there is an unfortunate tendency for school personnel to attribute absences entirely to parent attitudes and factors within the home "

Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020)
- Avoid punitive threats and placing legal pressure on parents to get their children to school - they would if they could. Such pressure drains their already depleted resources and is very discouraging. Parents need help, not threats and the child needs to feel supported, and not made feel guilty for the stress they are causing their parents (Carless et al, 2015; Havik et al, 2014).
- Not force school attendance. Gradual re-entry plans must necessarily be carefully tailored to each individual SR student. Some students may engage in part-time attendance from the outset, while others may need support to transition to home-school or distance education if it is in the immediate best interests of the child (Wimmer, 2010).

> *Taking time to understand and care for a child exhibiting SR can be life-changing to that child and the value of teacher support to struggling parents cannot be over-estimated.*

Conclusion

Taking time to understand and care for a child exhibiting SR can be life-changing to that child and the value of teacher support to struggling parents cannot be overestimated. The Trauma-Sensitive Schools Descriptive Study (Osher, 2018) found that:

many school improvement efforts fail because they do not produce lasting changes in school practices and within the school in general. Given that a safe and supportive school climate and culture is linked to positive student outcomes, it is critical that educators understand how to create and sustain such an environment.   *(p. i)*

A deep understanding of the individual, family, school and community factors involved in SR and the individual nature of the student's journey, as well as education about proven support systems can create an environment that encourages recovery and re-attendance. TEACH

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Pathways to School Leadership: Perceptions of Australian Faith-based Education System Employees

TEACH[R]

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Keywords: School leadership, leadership pathways, teacher aspiration, principal preparation

Abstract

This article discusses school leadership pathways and recognises the important role that clearly communicated pathways can have on school leader development. It adopts an Australian faith-based education system case study to explore classroom teacher and school-based administrator perceptions of current pathways to school leadership positions. This research utilised a qualitative research design, adopting semi-structured interviews to collect employee perceptions. The paper concludes with a discussion about the need for pathways to provide multiple routes into school leadership roles, the importance of leadership opportunities for teachers at all stages of their career, the need for pathways to allow teachers to transition back into the classroom where desired, as well as context specific pathway elements for this faith-based education system to broadly consider.

> *providing teachers both pathways to leadership and … leadership opportunities can be crucial not only in terms of teacher retention, but also in teacher recruitment.*

Introduction

Pathways to school leadership play an important role in both school leader development and employee retention. It has been a long-held view that years of experience are required of teacher leaders before formal leadership opportunities are presented, even though it is recognised that the job of a first-year teacher is largely the same as that of a vastly more experienced classroom teacher (Danielson, 2007; Goodwin, et al., 2015). However, emerging trends are demonstrating that a growing number of younger school leaders are exhibiting interest in school leadership. As a result, providing pathways to leadership opportunities for teachers can become a mechanism for changing the typically flat career trajectories that many classroom teachers face (Goodlad & McMannon, 2004; Goodwin et al., 2015). Additionally, the current generation of teachers are

not likely to stay in any one position for too long, even if they express an intention to stay in the profession for the long-term (Johnson & Kardos, 2008), as they typically aspire to seek out roles that allow them to exert leadership and influence change. Consequently, providing teachers both pathways to leadership and the requisite leadership opportunities can be crucial not only in terms of teacher retention, but also in teacher recruitment.

Literature review

The literature related to school leadership pathways is something of a nebulous space. While an extensive literature relates to leadership preparation programs, leadership attributes and identification, the experiences and socialisation of novice principals, the broader context of leadership in educational settings, and school leadership aspiration; literature relating to actual pathways to school leadership appears to be something that appears bound within contextual factors. Niche spaces, but well reported, such as the under representation of women and ethnic minorities, has also emerged in the literature relating to school leadership pathways. The concept of 'pathways' has at times been described in the school leadership literature as progression through a series of career stages, "with each stage being characterised by differences in work attitudes and behaviours, types of relationships, employees' needs and aspects of work valued by the employee" (Oplatka, 2012, p. 130). However, it may be more appropriate to describe a career pathway as "a sequence of positions ordered so that each provides experiences considered necessary to perform in subsequent positions" (Montecinos, et al., 2022, p. 287, adapted from Adkison, 1981). Goldring, et al. (2021) suggest in some countries this may take the form of a well-established leadership continuum, starting as a classroom teacher, becoming a teacher leader, then moving up into an assistant principalship role, and finally to a principalship position. In other countries such a sequence of pathway steps may simply not exist.

What is clear in the leadership pathways literature, is that better understanding school leaders' career pathways can both assist and supplement an understanding of leadership preparation (Davis, et al., 2017; Murphy, 2020). Even one of the most commonly explored areas associated with school leader pathways, that being preparedness to transition into the role of school principal, appears understudied globally (Farley-Ripple, et al., 2012; Murphy, 2020; Stevenson, 2006). In 2003, Gates, et al. reported that while 99% of school principals in the US had been teachers, and that while transitioning from teacher to school administrator was a common step, "very little is known about how, when, and why the transition occurs" (p. 25). Sugrue (2015) explored experienced school leaders' pathways into, through and out of the principalship, and concluded that more leadership preparation needed to be "embedded in a larger systemic effort to increase the leadership talent pool by creating appropriate career pathways and structures" (p. 277).

There is some consensus that multilevel or wider distribution of leadership practices in educational settings enhances instructional quality, builds leadership capacity, improves instructional practices and benefits student learning (Harris & Muijs, 2004; Laleka, 2019; Spillane, 2005; Vennebo & Ottesen, 2012. The theory of distributed leadership suggests that "the authority to lead is not exclusively located in formal positions, but is dispersed throughout the organisation" (Rutherford, 2009, p. 50). However, it has been proposed that distributed leadership may contribute to turning teachers away from school leadership roles, as they find themselves in roles that have expectations beyond their classroom teaching duties, and for which they are often unprepared and insufficiently supported (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). It has been suggested that distributed leadership needs to be thought of more as behaviour rather than a role definition (Harris & Muijs, 2004). Fitzgerald, et al. (2006) note the challenge in schools with distributed leadership of identifying who leaders are, as leaders can include teacher leaders who have no formal leadership position as well as those who do have a formal leadership designation.

Middle leaders have been identified in the school leadership literature as operating "at the interface between different sources of influence and change within the school" (Lipscombe, et al., 2021). Often defined as 'a teacher with formal leadership responsibilities', middle leaders are seen as fundamentally different to school principals, as the positioning of their leadership is seen to remain closer to the classroom, leaving them well placed to lead teaching and learning practices (Lipscombe et al., 2021). While not responsible for the overall organisation of the school setting, they are generally seen as key players in any distributed leadership approach and act as influential players working between the senior leadership of the school and their teacher colleagues (Earley & Bubb, 2004; Edwards-Groves, et al., 2016; Grootenboer, et al., 2015; Larusdottir & O'Connor, 2017; Lipscombe et al, 2021). These middle leaders often directly impact and enable teacher leadership to flourish. This group is also important because they are often considered to be a key group in the school leadership talent pool, often marking middle leadership as a key 'stepping stone' along the pathway towards the principalship.

Despite the importance of middle leaders in the literature, there have been research studies undertaken that identify the difficulty of attracting middle leadership roles, such as Heads of Department, Heads of Curriculum, and Deputy/Assistant Principals, to higher-level leadership roles (Fluckiger, et al., 2015; Harris, 2007). In fact, this has at times been referred to as a 'crisis'. Goodwin et al. (2015) note that many middle school leaders who play key managing roles in their schools do so without having to leave the classroom. Sugrue (2015) laments that in the Republic of Ireland where middle school leadership recruitment is limited to internal candidates instead of being made publicly available, the potential for aspiring school leaders to develop their "leadership professional portfolio" (p. 283) is limited, restricting the mobility of school leadership development, and thus pathways.

Interestingly, the literature identifies that while in recent years we have seen an exodus of baby boomer principals and middle school leaders, the logical replacements were the Generation X cohort who "would be seen by many as the natural law of succession" (Lambert, et al., 2016, p. 115). However, Lambert et al. (2016, p. 115) note that Generation Y represents another fast-rising group of employees who "appear equally eager to advance to the same levels of leadership". This situation leads to a consensus among younger schoolteachers that "leadership is there for the taking by the most able" (Lambert et al, 2016, p. 115). It would appear that the days where senior teachers lead and junior teachers followed are being left behind, increasing the importance of embedding pathways to school leadership that are available to younger staff.

Singapore's education system provides an interesting case study. In 1997, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong announced the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation initiative, which saw Singapore place increased efforts on the recruitment and preparation of quality teachers. In the years since, Singapore's international reputation for educational excellence has highlighted the success of these efforts, with a myriad of citing's in the literature emphasising their consistent

> *very little is known about how, when, and why the transition occurs*

performance at or near the top of international assessments (Luke, et al., 2005; Ministry of Education, 2020; National Centre for Educational Statistics, n.d; Stewart, 2011, 2012). Fitting with the distributed leadership concept, this has allowed an intentional upskilling of teachers in the Singapore education system, involving them in leadership and management roles. It did this, while factoring that of the target of 33,000 teachers, reached earlier than expected, one-quarter of these teachers were below the age of 30 and had less than 5 years of teaching experience (Heng, 2012). It is notable that the mentoring of younger teachers is strongly encouraged within the Singapore system.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative orientation implementing semi-structured interviews to collect data and grounded theory methodology for the analysis of these interviews. The study is directed by the following research question: "What are the perceptions of teachers working within a private faith-based education system of current pathways to school leadership?"

The data for this study was collected as part of a larger research project exploring the perceptions of elements of school leadership development held by those working within classroom teacher and school-based administrator positions within this faith-based education system. Approval to approach employees within this education system was requested and granted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting at a number of school locations, with the interviews lasting approximately 30 – 40 minutes in duration. Okeke and van Wyk (2015) note that semi-structured interviews allow the participants to fully express and communicate responses while covering subject areas of interest to the researcher. Twelve employees were invited to participate in the interview process, all of whom agreed to be involved in this research study. The interviewees provided written consent for the interviews to be audio-recorded.

The interview data was first transcribed from the audio recordings, and then subjected to grounded theory processes. Grounded theory is an inductive process, "based on concepts that are generated directly from the data" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 411). This allowed the textual data to initially be broadly coded, then refined into a smaller number of categories, and finally, these categories were mapped into substantive themes (Byrne, 2022).

Findings

Employee perceptions of current pathways to school leadership

When asked to identify any existing pathways to school leadership in this faith-based education

> " *I've ticked the box for years straight and never even had so much as a conversation about (school leadership) roles* "

system, a number of perceived pathway elements were mentioned.

Firstly, respondents identified that an annual staffing form exists which enquired whether respondents would be interested in school leadership positions. It was identified that the time of completing this staffing form is towards the end of the school year in a period of time that is often quite busy for teaching staff. For a number of respondents, this staffing form was perceived to constitute a pathway element to leadership positions by self-identifying a desire to pursue school leadership positions. Other respondents were adamant this staffing form does not constitute a pathway, as they raised scepticism about who at system level notes these responses and what follow up takes place with those who have indicated they would have interest in school leadership positions. One respondent stated that "*I've ticked the box for years straight and never even had so much as a conversation about (school leadership) roles*" (R5).

Secondly, some confusion surrounded an identified aspiring leaders' program being run nationally within this faith-based education system. While some interviewees considered this to be a pathway to school leadership in this education system, other respondents were uncertain how this program was linked to job opportunities in leadership positions. Respondents raised three differing concerns regarding this program as a perceived pathway to school leadership positions. The first concern raised was in regard to the timing of this program, which was believed to take place during school holiday periods. Secondly, who and how individuals are chosen to attend this program was raised, with a perception being gatekeepers – specifically the school principal - played a role in offering or withholding opportunities to be a part of this education system-run program. Thirdly, the level of commitment that is required to be involved with this program was raised, which linked back to the first, as respondents raised some reticence to give up their holiday and family time to be involved, even if they had aspirations to pursue school leadership roles.

Thirdly, the undertaking of a Master's degree program partially sponsored within this faith-based education system was noted as a potential pathway. Two elements of this were raised. Firstly, it was identified that those who were invited to take part in the aspiring leader program may already have had the opportunity to do a unit of study that contributed to this study program as course credit. Secondly, it was noted by several respondents that they see people in leadership roles who do not have this qualification. For these interviewees, this appeared to detract from the significance of the Master's degree as a pathway, as they perceived that having this qualification was

not necessary to be considered for school leadership positions. Regarding the possibility of making this qualification more accessible to teaching staff one respondent shared that:

> *I think that there'll be a portion of teachers out there who would very much consider picking up part-time or online study if it was made a little bit more accessible. And from that, I guess once you up-skill a teacher, their horizon starts to pan out a little bit different and they start to feel a little bit more empowered. So that's probably another thing, the post-graduate element of creating a pathway.*
> *(R11)*

Issues relating to school size were also raised by respondents around current pathways to school leadership. It was noted that pathways are clearer in bigger schools where their structure provides for individuals to progress their development through a series of small leadership opportunities that act as "*stepping stones*" (R9). This was not seen to be the case for smaller schools where these opportunities are perceived not to exist. One smaller school interviewee stated simply "*There's really only one leadership position. I think we're too small a school to have like stage one, stage two, stage three leadership*" (R3). Contrasting this, however, was a perception that being in a smaller school allowed more opportunity for hands on experience, with one respondent stating,

> *I think there's a difference between understanding the pathways and having the opportunities. So, a bigger school can provide the opportunities, whereas a smaller school may not be able to provide those opportunities. Having said that, in a smaller school, and having worked in a small school and been a leader in a small school, the limited group of staff get opportunities to do a lot more potentially in leadership and middle management than you do in a bigger school. So, there is, I think, advantages you can see in a smaller school as well as in the bigger school.*
> *(R10)*

It was interesting also to note that a number of respondents took the perspective that a natural pathway exists for potential school leaders with 5-7 years of teaching experience. It was perceived that in this time a pool of talented employees will have developed good organisational skills, relational skills, and their teaching experience and personality trait characteristics will have likely identified them to their education system peers as future potential leaders. It was seen that by this stage in their careers the inevitable conversations would likely have taken place at a system level around 'Do you have any aspirations to consider school leadership?'. From here, it was perceived that pathways via school-based leadership opportunities or possibly intentional or individualised mentoring and further skill development emerge. It was acknowledged that given this faith-based school

system is relatively small, personalised conversations can take place that would further this natural pathway to leadership.

There is a perception that pathways to leadership is, to a degree, dependent on what school the respondent is employed at. This is because these employees consider that possible pathways to school leadership roles depend on the current leadership of the school; their view of the employee, the potential they see in the individual, and whether the current school leadership encourage, foster, and communicate that potential to the relevant personnel at conference or system level. As such, employees see several variables impacting progression to leadership, none of which are documented or clearly communicated to them, yet each of which has the potential to act as a gatekeeper in the pathways process.

Other employee perceptions relating to school pathways

It was seen that while communicating pathways to school leadership roles is considered important by these faith-based education system employees, it is recognized this will not be a "*one size fits all*" solution. However, given that pathways identify the types of things which aspiring leaders should be doing in order to move towards school leadership, there was value identified in articulating pathways to school leadership. It was recognised that not every leadership candidate will move in the same direction along any communicated pathway, as factors such as school contexts, individual attributes, leadership level, and educational experience will vary between individuals. Respondents perceived that there needs to be flexibility in any pathway, allowing the employees' individual circumstances to be addressed. As one respondent noted,

> *I think it's hard to formalise it when you've got so many variables and such a small pool that you're drawing from. So, having flexible pathways, flexible alternative ways to identify and provide people with opportunities and experience I think is a critical element moving forward. We are too small to just rely on a standardised system."*
> *(R10)*

One concern relating to establishing pathways to leadership positions that was identified by these faith-based education system employees involves the context of someone who is considered to be moving along a pathway to leadership but who is identified not to be a suitable school leadership candidate. The interview respondents in this study appeared to have some reservations about the ability of key decision-makers to have these conversations, given the close-knit social structure that exists within this educational context. Clear communication is needed in this

pathways … depend on the current leadership of the school; their view of the employee, the potential they see … and whether the[y] … encourage, foster, and communicate that

instance as to why the individual is not suitable, and what skills/experience/personal attributes need to be addressed for the candidate to be considered eligible.

The large school pathway of classroom teachers gradually taking on increased responsibility, and transitioning into higher levels of responsibility is without doubt seen by these respondents as the preferred pathway to school leadership positions. This is seen to allow rapport with staff, respect, skills, and credibility to grow over time with relevant experience. It should be noted, however, that one idea raised for the small school context involves staff in these smaller schools having the opportunity to take on projects of interest to the school community, and evidence growth and leadership through the successful project management of these tasks. Recognition being given on a personal service record for these value-adding projects and the skills utilised would provide an opportunity for small school employees to evidence upskilling and leadership in these respective spaces.

There appeared to be some preference amongst staff from smaller schools that current employees be more strongly considered for school leadership roles in these schools. A view was presented that:

> It can be quite a risk when job applications are taken for principal and things like that and people from all across Australia apply for these jobs and come into communities that they're completely unfamiliar with, unaware of, have no relationship with, and pretty much try and impose their way of doing things, and I think it backfires. I think it's backfired here…. I think there is an implied undercurrent that says, 'We didn't think there was anyone competent within the current staff'… I don't know that there's a lot of solid awareness of staff ability in a lot of the little schools. (R2)

Small school respondents implied on numerous occasions that they had little confidence in the education systems' awareness of leadership capability in small school contexts.

It is interesting to note two repeated observations from respondents concerning newly appointed school leaders. The first relates to large schools, where there was a definite expectation that school principals would have previous school principal experience. Secondly, there was a consensus that small schools are much more likely to be getting first time principals. As one respondent stated,

> more often than not, my observation is the people that we get in our small schools are simply just the ones who are willing to do it… we seem to be desperate to fill those positions and often have no other choices. (R5)

Respondents were of the view that any implemented pathways towards school leadership that were actively communicated would increase

pathways to school leadership positions need to be more formalised. 'If I wanted to pursue leadership, I wouldn't know where to start'

the engagement of potential school leaders. As one respondent stated when asked whether clear pathways to school leadership being provided would increase engagement,

> I believe that it would. I think that letting people know of what it takes to attain or to reach a certain position would energise a portion of our teachers to seek more study, possibly up-skill within their job and familiarise themselves with what that would entail… I think it would certainly energise and motivate some teachers to want to move and build their careers and try to move into that because, at the moment, there are no clear pathways.
> (R11)

It was evident from these faith-based education system employees that pathways to school leadership positions need to be more formalised. Providing a 'stepping stone' approach was seen to be good practice and a worthwhile exercise to be developing the next tier of school leaders. While the idea of allowing potential leaders to learn through experience is not a new concept, it is one that is still seen as important to help enact leadership development. It should be noted that a view was presented that this faith-based education system could more proactively plan ahead for its future leadership needs, evidenced by comments such as: "*I feel like we chase our tails a lot. We don't look forward to what we need in two years, three years, five years' time*" (R9).

Lastly, when interviewing these respondents, it was evident that the perceived lack of clearly articulated pathways to school leadership is causing some frustration amongst these employees, who are unclear on what is expected of them should they wish to progress towards school leadership positions within this faith-based education system. As one respondent simply stated, "If I wanted to pursue leadership, I wouldn't know where to start" (R6).

Discussion

The traditional concept of pathways does not have to result in traditionally seen leadership positions – while traditional pathways to school leadership culminated in position titles such as 'Head of School', it may well be that leadership positions can be acknowledged in areas not traditionally considered school leadership. For example, allowing the use of titles for teachers, such as 'Pedagogical Leader/ Specialist' to distinguish leadership roles may be one option. There has historically been an egalitarian ethic among teachers, a long-standing norm among teachers that suggests all teachers should be seen to be equal and deserving of the same rewards, recognition and standing (Childs-Bowen, et al., 2000; Garchinsky, 2008; Lacey, 2003; Lortie, 2009; Myung, et al., 2011). However, anecdotal

evidence suggests there is a shift towards the use of leadership titles amongst school teaching staff where classroom teachers have taken on leadership roles. Recognising master teachers who provide pedagogical leadership can play an important role in acknowledging leadership and keep these individuals on the radar for more traditionally recognised school leadership positions, while acknowledging their leadership within the school.

Transparency of process was seen as a crucial element in any articulated school leadership pathway for these faith-based employees, as they recognised the prevalence of gate keepers given the nature of this small, socially connected education system. Heads of school, assistant principals, principals, and system-based administrators were all mentioned as potential gate keepers by these respondents. This is a thread often noted within the literature; even where highly formalised policy may exist, in practice school leadership candidates often report a lack of transparency in the pathway which has led to the appointment of many unqualified school leaders (Goldring et al, 2021; Lumban Gaol, 2021; Montecinos et al, 2022; Sumintono, et al., 2015).

Pathways should be articulated both in policy and in practice, and these should acknowledge the possibility of providing multiple routes into school leadership roles. Goodwin et al (2015) note that "There needs to be differentiation within pathways as well as between pathways" (p. 116). When individual pathways represent graduated continua that allow teachers to build leadership skills and develop capacity as well as experience, teachers are more likely (a) to be willing to take the initial step into leadership and (b) to be inspired to move to the next level given a pathway clearly marked by forward—and concrete—steps."

Teachers at all stages of their career should have access to school leadership opportunities. While senior teachers may be considered to bring deeper knowledge and experiences to leadership roles, early career teachers should also be encouraged towards teacher leadership. This can recognise the enormous potential of younger generation teachers and facilitate both school and school systems in building on the strengths and talents of these teachers. Likewise, teacher leaders need to be given the space to exercise leadership, and professional development in areas related to the leadership they provide. As Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) noted when exploring the development of teacher leadership identity, "there is no single 'panacea' or a pre-fixed pathway for leadership development" (p. 369).

In the context of this study, four themes emerged which could be given consideration by this faith-based education system as it relates to leadership and leadership pathways. Firstly, it was identified that mid-year Primary and Secondary meetings take place biennially. Such meetings might include a short segment being added to the program outlining pathways or communicating to staff information that may be helpful in terms of considering and applying for future leadership positions. Secondly, it is recommended to create differing pathways for differing leadership purposes: firstly, one that focuses on the preparations required for future school leadership positions, and secondly, one that focuses on the development of skills and knowledge that would allow enhanced teacher leadership while remaining in the classroom setting. Thirdly, the idea of two-year stints in school-based leadership roles was presented by interviewees, with a relevant and transparent application process made a part of this. Lastly, where teachers decide against these pathways having tested them, they need to be able to transition back to the classroom. School leadership is not for everyone, and where individuals have determined this, there should be pathways for them to remain as classroom teachers, perhaps with the less traditionally recognised leadership roles commonly identified in the distributed leadership literature. Oplatka (2012) recognises that some school leaders may move backwards and forwards between career stages and leadership levels for a variety of reasons, including personal, psychological, or social factors.

Finally, the importance of communicating pathways and the associated policy direction and evident administrative interest may stimulate employees to consider leadership, an important point in this study context. With previous research in this faith-based education system noting that only 1.8% of system-wide staff indicated they were actively seeking school leadership positions (Williams & Morey, 2018; Williams, 2021), articulating such pathways may generate increased interest that may prove critical to the future sustainability of leadership within this education system. Leadership needs to be encouraged, supported, and developed - it cannot be left to chance - and pathways to leadership positions should recognise this and provide the requisite supportive structures. **TEACH**

Transparency of process was seen as a crucial element in any articulated school leadership pathway for these employees, … recognised the prevalence of gate keepers

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The meaning of this hour: Teaching higher-order thinking as a pathway to better learning outcomes and behaviour modification

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Abstract

A rapidly changing society has created the need for a new kind of graduate. The workplace is looking for conversance in higher-order thinking and emotional intelligence. While the pre-disposition of the student has been seen to be a significant factor in a student's ability to engage in higher-order thinking, much can be taught and enhanced by teachers well versed in higher-order thinking pedagogy. There are a variety of teaching and learning approaches, including transfer, critical thinking and problem-based learning. However, common to them all is the need to develop student's metacognition. There is also a need for the teacher to set assignments that focus on essential questions that extend students beyond their acquired knowledge. To be sure, well thought-through questioning is more likely to result in well-thought through answers. Metacognition can also be a pathway to improved behaviour and can form the basis of a dialogue for self-awareness and behavioural improvement. Therefore, higher-order thinking development is a pathway for both intellectual and behavioural maturity. This work enhances the theoretical base for whole school and individual teacher engagement in teaching higher-order thinking to achieve better learning contexts and outcomes.

Preamble

Rapidly changing demands in the workplace have led to the need for graduates who are conversant with higher-order thinking. In addition to the traditional characteristics of punctuality, presentation, cooperation, and competency, have been added the necessity for a growth mindset. One should add to this, social and cultural awareness, complex problem-solving skills, the transference of knowledge and skills to new situations and contexts, emotional intelligence, and innovation (Dugar, 2019). The pathways to shaping mentoring and developing this kind of graduate is seen in the development and nurture of higher-order thinking. This kind of nurturing occurs when a student has the capacity to take new information, together with information stored in memory, and "interrelates and/or rearranges and extends this information to achieve a purpose or find possible answers in perplexing situations" (Hilton & Hilton, 2017, p. 225). Importantly, higher-order thinking is also evident in a student's social and emotional capacities. Therefore, the student skilled in higher-order thinking is a critical thinker, with a sound sense of self, and possesses productive inter-personal relationship skills.

Robyn Collins refers to Brookhart's identification of three categories of higher-order thinking. That is, *transfer, critical thinking, and problem solving* (Collins, 2014, para. 2.). Transfer builds upon retention, by applying information learned to new situations. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) contend that understanding is about transfer. That is, "the ability to transfer what we have learned to new and sometimes confusing settings in such a way that 'goes beyond' information" (p. 40). Further, transferability is essential, since it is impossible for teachers to be able to impart all that is to be known about a particular topic. Compared to what is accessible on the internet, teaching in the classroom covers a relatively small number of ideas, examples, facts, and skills. "So, we need to help them transfer their inherently limited learning to many other settings, issues and problems" (p. 40). Establishing ideas facilitates the achieving of these goals. For example, big ideas in reading, or English Literature, can be

> *the student skilled in higher-order thinking is a critical thinker, with a sound sense of self, and possesses productive inter-personal relationship skills.*

transferred and applied to any book and author without much difficulty, since skills for reading and/or analysis, have already been established (p. 45).

Knowledge is now available in the accessible (internet) public domain. Therefore, students' ability is not primarily seen when they demonstrate knowledge. Ability is discerned when students are able to transfer knowledge to different contexts or draw knowledge in from what has been previously learned. Jackson et al. (2019) refer to this as the "transfer in" of prior knowledge, "which prepares students to learn and create new knowledge in different settings" (p. 2). "It focuses on developing learners who can make sense of, and interpret, new learning contexts in a way that enables them to connect with, and use their prior learning, successfully adapting skills and knowledge to novel circumstances" (p. 4). There is a spectrum of transfer, from simple to complex, with "far" transfer being the most difficult. Indeed, transfer is not always automatic, but requires effort and conscious thought. Experimental learning can assist students to "practice" and in so doing develop transfer skills.

Charanjit Kaur et al. (2020) studied teaching strategies to develop higher-order thinking skills in the Malaysian school system. They defined higher-order thinking in terms of the transference of learnt knowledge to new environments to develop thinking skills. They contend that for a student to attain the higher level of reading they "must be able to relay new information to what is known in order to find answers to cognitive questions" (p. 212). However, essential to the process of transfer is the disposition of the learner (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 2). Gupta & Mishna (2021) state, "Thinking is a complex act comprising attitudes, knowledge, and skills that allows the individual to shape his or her environment more effectively than by intuition alone" (p. 2). To be sure, students who excel at transfer of knowledge are more likely to have a propensity for risk, motivation for learning, and a self-confidence that accompanies their cognitive ability (Jackson et al., 2019). Consequently, the personality of the student is seen to be a significant and contributing factor.

Personality traits have been observed to also include an openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraverted thinking and agreeableness. Jackson et al. (2019) noted that these combine to form a learner that is "inquisitive, intelligent and confident, and one who perseveres, takes initiative, is systematic, and is achievement-oriented" (p. 5). Bhattachara and Mohalik (2021) have identified a "willingness of students to comprehend ideas, construct knowledge, and solve problems is a function of their capacity to learn" (p. 2). Further contributing factors include an individual's self-

> *Thinking is a complex act comprising attitudes, knowledge, and skills that allows the individual to shape his or her environment more effectively than by intuition alone*

efficacy and motivation for transfer. This has been found to influence the rate of behaviour change in the transfer context (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 5).

By contrast, critical thinking is seen to be evident in students who have the ability to engage in reflective or artful thinking, "which includes reasoning, questioning and investigating, observing and describing, comparing and connecting, finding complexity, and exploring viewpoints" (Collins, 2014, p. 1). David Loseby (2019) divides critical thinking into essentially two distinct components. Firstly, a set of information and belief generating and processing skills; and secondly, the habit, based on intellectual commitment, of using those skills to guide behaviour. Further, according to Steven Schafersman (1991) a student who has acquired and developed critical thinking skills:

> can ask appropriate questions, gather relevant information, efficiently and creatively sort through this information, reason logically from this information, and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the world that enable one to live and act successfully in it.
> *(p. 3)*

Significantly, critical thinking skills are gained when students are explicitly taught how to think critically. For example, "questioning techniques… play an important role in inducing students' higher-level thinking skills, such as self-reflection, revision, and social debate, all of which are essential for Critical Thinking" (Alselah, 2020, p. 27). To this can be added robust class discussion and the teaching of effective reading techniques (Alselah, 2020, p. 28).

Strategies used to effectively teach higher-order thinking may also include problem-based learning, discovery learning and inquiry-based learning. In problem-based learning the learning process starts with a problem. Students are tasked with coming up with solutions to real-life situations, or a problem faced by a character in a text, by providing their own opinion after they have provided an interpretation of the situation. It is a process of discovery learning in which students are engaged in: active, hands-on lifestyle experiences. "The students need to explore the environment by asking questions and performing experiments with their peers to encourage thinking, speculating and collaborating to solve a problem using their own ideas" (Kaur et al., 2020, p. 217). Ali (2019) describes problem-based learning as a "student-centered educational method which aims to develop problem-solving skills through a self-directed learning as a lifetime habit and teamwork skills" (p. 73).

Assignments that extend

An understanding of student higher-order thinking capacity, and the explicit teaching and development of higher-order-thinking awareness and skills, has

resulted in the need for new kinds of assignments. Concurrent with this are methods of teaching to those assignments, that assess students' higher-order thinking, in addition to their ability to demonstrate knowledge. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2007) students are meant to leave school as not merely learned, but inquisitive; not merely knowledgeable, but capable of using their education for good ends. They are not meant to graduate with merely technical skills, but with the appropriate habits of mind that determine whether the skill is used wisely, unwisely, or not used at all when needed. (p. 17)

Consequently, there is the need to build students with a disposition to learn and the ability to solve complex problems with creativity, insight, and perception. The result is the production of effective, thoughtful and engaged members of society. Claire M. Wyatt-Smith et al. (2017) identified that assessment is a powerful factor in the learning growth journey. They deduced that there is the need for assessments to provide "critical links between what is valued as learning, ways of learning and thinking, ways of identifying need and improvement and, perhaps most significantly, ways of bridging school and other communities of practice" (p. 303), so that students can identify links between what they are learning to real-life situations.

There are several approaches that will facilitate higher-order thinking in an assessment, whether that be to assess transfer, critical thinking or problem solving. However, good questioning that challenges the student to think beyond their knowledge base, is essential. Assessments should always challenge students to apply their knowledge to new contexts in such a way that transfer must occur to fulfill the requirements of the assessments. Indeed, standards-based assessments can help foster higher-order thinking skills, when assessments include open ended, instead of close-ended questions (Gupta and Mishna, 2021, p. 5). These assessments can be criticized because slow learners and academically unsound students find difficulty responding to such tests. However, teachers can mitigate against any bias or exclusion by scaffolding assessments to give accessibility to most, if not all, students in the class. In addition, they can write alternative assessments, or approaches, for those requiring intervention and differentiation.

Importantly, while teachers well understand that good work arises out of well-crafted assignments, the pursuit of higher-order thinking is facilitated *by the essential question*. An essential question can be defined in terms of that which is "important" and "timeless" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 108). To assist this process teachers can formally introduce the essential question for a new unit or topic. The essential question is the reference point that leads discussion into higher-order thinking. It guides inquisitive discussion and aims to encourage perceptive, insightful, highly effective and critical thinking. Therefore, an essential question should lead students to grapple with ideas, principles and concepts. Further, it will enable them to apply what they have learned and the manner in which they have learned it, to different situations and contexts (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 40). In this way, students become not just knowers, but thinkers, problem solvers and innovators.

Teacher efficacy as a whole school approach
Bhattacharya and Mohalik (2021) have further found that higher-order thinking is more likely when student's attitudes, motivation and internal locus of control (their disposition and motivation to learn) is met by teachers explicitly teaching higher-order thinking. In addition, explicit teaching in the classroom is backed by a whole school approach, that is aimed at facilitating and supporting higher-order thinking. Consequently, the teacher needs to have sufficient knowledge about higher-order thinking skills, and have enough self-efficacy, to implement their skills in the classroom. Teachers should use suitable teaching-learning strategies to inculcate higher-order thinking skills among students and frequently evaluate students to see whether or not they are improving in this capacity (p. 354).

In addition, the school is supportive of teacher professional development and implements curriculum expectations that help students develop higher-order thinking skills. To this extent, the school should embrace its individual learning journey by developing its own metacognitive skills as a learning organisation. Subsequently, a school has the capacity to produce its own essential question. The essential question of a school should require time to process. Such a question should be posed to key stake holders, and decision makers, within the school community. The question should possess sufficient depth. That is, a question based on ideas and principles, that requires participants to respond with insightfulness. The question's construction should be hard earned, encompasses the development of the whole person, and embody deeply held convictions. Finally, a school's essential question should be definitive enough to guide its major decisions and inform its curriculum. This should be done in such a way as to produce the kind of learning that will equip students for a rapidly changing world.

Developing metacognition
Training in metacognition is a tool that teachers can use to bring out the best in their students. It is

> *an essential question should lead students to grapple with ideas, principles and concepts. … apply what they have learned and the manner in which they have learned it, to different situations and contexts*

a 'tool set' designed to enhance their pre-existing disposition to learn or encourage development in personality traits that will assist in developing new ways of thinking. Metacognition is the thinking about thinking, particularly, in this context, the thinking about self and learning that may lead to new perspectives. Indeed, "good learners are aware of how they think and can make smart choices about effective strategies" (Marzano, 1998). Adam Green (2022) has listed metacognitive skills used in the classroom. These include planning, reflective practice, goal setting, seeking help, self-questioning and monitoring, self-talk and mental scripting. Planning involves thinking about the best approach before starting a task or assignment. Self-questioning and monitoring provide the student with the opportunity to track their progress and efficacy during the task or assignment process. When the task or assignment is completed, reflective practice enables students to review their own performance and establish current strengths and weaknesses in order to improve in the future.

> **good learners are aware of how they think and can make smart choices about effective strategies**

Green's *before, during and after scheme* follows the concept of metacognitive skills defined by O'Neil and Abedi (1996), who have identified three components specifically planning, monitoring and evaluation (pp. 234-235). "Planning is a learning plan, setting goals, prioritizing materials instead of learning itself. Monitoring is the monitoring of learning and strategies used in self-analysis and assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy" (Rahman et al., 2010, p. 348). The research conducted by Seamah Rahman et.al, through the Faculty of Education at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, discovered that the main inhibitor to students developing metacognitive skill was the teacher's lack of training and understanding coupled with the lack of explicit instruction of reflective practice in the classroom. Subsequently, the researchers emphasised the importance of teachers being "aware of the importance of metacognitive reflection activities to promote metacognitive development in the classroom" (p. 350).

Higher-order thinking and behaviour management
Effective behaviour management begins by establishing a whole school approach to discipline, communicated consistently by teachers and consented to by parents/carers and students. Together, they find meaning and purpose in the schools established behavioural culture. It is essential that expectations are clear, consistently applied, make sense and are seen to be, along with prescribed consequences, reasonable. However, the pathway to a changed behaviour often requires a dialogue focused on meaning-making for students (together with parents/carers when required). This can be accomplished by way of the facilitation of essential questions that aim to generate (one or a combination of) improved self-awareness, an effective management of emotions, the development of social skills, functional self-management and an empathetic worldview. The beginning point is an effective teacher/class relationship. As Shaun Killian (2021) has contended, "teachers who have strong relationships with their students find it much easier to manage their students' behaviour. You forge strong relationships by **being both** *firm* **and** *caring* – **while also** *expecting* **your students to do their very best at school**" (para. 31). Indeed, effective and lasting outcomes in student behaviour frequently emanate from a thoughtful and planned dialogue that seeks to uncover the context of a behaviour and initiate a structured path forward. Effective outcomes are led by the teacher who reads the situation well and has insight into what understanding, and skills are required to facilitate change. Importantly, the connection point between the teacher and the student may be assisted by the learning context that has already been established. That is, a dialogue may emerge in the context of transfer, critical thinking or problem-based pedagogies.

It is important to remember, as Mia O'Brian (2017) has concluded, that challenging and defiant behaviour often "reflects a deep-seated, unmet need, trauma or disorder" (p. 263). Therefore, the dialogue between the teacher and the student who requires behavioural intervention should aim to facilitate self-discovery and understanding. This is best generated by information sharing and a skill set for overcoming existential obstacles and initiating positive change. A constructive dialogue, including those with a diversity of expertise where required, should aim to discover, where possible, underlying causes. Furthermore, effective conversations should establish enough self-efficacy to implement goals for self-improvement and to facilitate improved personal judgements. In this scenario the student, having been guided to garner sufficient insight and possess a workable skillset, is empowered to decide for, and own, personal success (Wills, 2020, p.13). Essential to this process is the development of the student's metacognition, that creates enough of a new lens through which the student can gain clarity and perception. The result is personal and emotional maturity supported by higher-order thinking. Significantly, there is a clear consensus that metacognitive skills are modifiable and can be enhanced through direct instruction (Wills, 2020, p. 3). Further, the onus on bringing about change should not typically rest on one teacher. Behaviour modification is often brought about as a team effort, utilizing the skills of teachers,

parents/ carers, councillors and other therapists. A diversity of connections may need to be established for a student to identify a clear way forward by way of essential questions and goals. Importantly, essential questions lead to essential answers and a clear pathway forward for both teachers and student to monitor. A behavioural improvement pathway may include negotiated and agreed goals, steps and actions which are dated for reflection and review. This approach forms the basis of a continued dialogue until the issues are resolved. Therefore, essential questions facilitate an honest facing of the situation, as they assist participants to grasp reality and forge answers that clear the way for a manageable way forward. In the school setting, as students grapple with answers to essential questions about their behaviour, they engage themselves in a critical self-reflection that can open the way for constructive self-awareness.

Typical essential questions that guide the process may include:

- What are the circumstances that have led to my current perspectives, attitudes, feelings, and behaviours?
- What might a change in one or all of these domains contribute to fuller and more satisfying learning experiences?
- How does my behaviour appear to others and is it reasonable that they would be looking for changes to my behaviour?
- If I continue in my current behaviour what are some of the outcomes that I should expect from myself and others?

The essential question also avoids defaulting to a cycle of punishments that do not result in a changed behaviour, or a super positivity that results in superficial and short-term fixes.

Embracing authenticity

Being positive is an important part of a healthy life and an essential ingredient to thriving relationships. Seligman et.al (2009) concur that positive psychology in the classroom enriches well-being, which in turn creates as "an antidote to depression, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking" (p. 295). However, "by default" positivity, where everything must be experienced or observed positively, can be problematic. Psychologist Jean Twenge (2014), from the University of San Diego, has challenged the long-held belief that self-confidence is the key to academic success and good behaviour. By example, Twenge refers to Asian Americans, who of any ethnic group have the best academic performance. Yet, they exist within a culture that doesn't place as

much emphasis on feeling good about yourself, but rather on self-improvement and working hard. "It really belies the idea that self-confidence is the key to success" (para. 27). Self-esteem is important, but it is far better, claims Twenge, to focus on the belief that a child is worthy of love. This is in stark contrast to the false success narratives that espouse the untruth that if you "believe in yourself, anything is possible", or "you can be anything you want to be" (para. 29). Again, not true. Twenge asserts that these narratives lead to an inflated sense of self, which, in turn, disconnect the student from their personal social realities. Deci and Ryan (1995) distinguished between contingent and true self-esteem. "Contingent self-esteem refers to feelings about oneself that result from, and dependent on, matching some standards of excellence or living up to some interpersonal or intrapsychic expectations" (p. 32). This leads to something of a self-aggrandizement associated with the ego and tends to be associated with a kind of narcissism. The result is not a super engagement with the path to success, but a frustration, depression, anger, and or disillusionment with the learning experience, because students find that espousing positive narratives alone have not produced the results they promised. In contrast, Deci and Ryan refer to true self-esteem, which is more stable and based in a solid and "secure sense of self… [Their] worth would be an integrated aspect of one's self and would be reflected in agency, proactivity, and vitality" (p. 33).

In contrast to super-positivity is authenticity, and the espousing of character, values, and what is of worth. This should lead to an authentic connection with the situation at hand, a healthy self-perception brought about by metacognition, and the formulation of significant essential questions and achievable goals. Psychologist Susan David (2022), on the faculty at Harvard Medical School, has averred to the tyranny of positivity. She has observed in society that there is an expectation that all emotions should be positive, leading to the suppression, or renunciation, of an array of quite legitimate feelings, including grief, sadness, disappointment, frustration, anxiety and anger. David asserts that when we push aside normal emotions to embrace false positivity, we lose the capacity to deal with the world as it is. For students to advance in learning and behaviour, there is a need to have connection with reality, a healthy understanding of self, and a grasp of the steps that are required to achieve well thought through goals. This contrasts with avert positivity, which undermines the metacognitive process. Grappling with the reality of the situation can lead to an effective discovery of the essential question, which embraces the reality of the present and forms the basis for future thought,

> " *when we push aside normal emotions to embrace false positivity, we lose the capacity to deal with the world as it is* "

action and change. Indeed, when students develop their higher-order thinking capacity to be authentic, they grow capacity to build readiness connection, which enables them to connect their feelings with their causes (David, 2022). As Michelle Blanchet (2022) has observed, it is "essential to provide a lens for students, not only on how they view problems, but also on their ability to create positive change" (para. 4). On the basis of a clear understanding of self and on the task at hand, students are empowered to take concrete steps in the right direction and generate a pathway to their best selves. Ultimately, such metacognitive growth not only significantly contributes to improved behaviour, but also a deeper and more successful engagement with learning.

Conclusion

A student's sound grasp of higher-order thinking skills, and higher-order thinking growth and development, facilitates the pathway to academic advancement and work readiness. In addition, metacognitive awareness underlines success in behaviour management. The possessing of higher-order thinking is generated from the disposition of the student to learn and the explicit instruction of the teacher, who may use several approaches to guide students in the higher-order thinking journey. These strategies taught by their teachers and adopted by students, empowers student futures, their life-long learning and personal perception and awareness of success. **TEACH**

> *strategies taught by their teachers and adopted by students, empowers student futures, their life-long learning and personal perception and awareness of success.*

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Nursing at Avondale #1 again: National student survey rates course top

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Keywords: Course ranking, nursing, student experience

Abstract

A government-endorsed national survey of undergraduate students has again ranked the nursing course at Avondale as number one in Australia.

Preamble

Results from the 2021 Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Student Experience Survey rate the Bachelor of Nursing top for the quality of the educational experience, skills development, learner engagement, teaching quality, student support and learning resources. The rankings compare Avondale with the 37 other universities and higher education providers offering a similar course.

Almost 300 of our nurses completed the survey. Linda Heath is one. As a mature-age student, she speaks highly of the personalised support she receives from dedicated academic and professional staff. "They're not only approachable but genuinely want us to succeed and go out of their way to accommodate special requests." Completing

placements at "my go-to hospital"—Sydney Adventist Hospital—also appeals. "The staff at the San do their best to help meet the requirements of your scope of practice."

Linda, now an assistant in nursing on the maternity ward, remembers the first contact she had with the School of Nursing and Health. "I didn't know whether I'd get in to the course, so I called to ask some questions. After talking to Rachel [Cardwell, Avondale University's administration assistant and receptionist] and hearing her friendly manner, I thought, I've found my place. That one call was enough to convince me."

Head of School Tamera Gosling and Nursing Course Convenor Cheryl Magus are "humbled" students like Linda have "recognised the dedication of our team and the quality of our course." The challenges of COVID-19 highlighted both. For example, the school used creative strategies to support learning during the lockdown, mailing supplies to ensure students could practise new skills before clinical placements. This culture of care is key. "We love having the opportunity as a Christian university to help students develop knowledge, skills and professional behaviour in a course underpinned by the ethic of holistic care. This ensures they are best prepared to provide that same quality care to others." TEACH

> *top for the quality of the educational experience, skills development, learner engagement, teaching quality, student support and learning resources.*

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The story of a church's "wise" response to the great war

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Keywords: Church-state separation, compulsory military service, conscientious objections, Seventh-day Adventist, World War I.

Abstract
Research shows a Seventh-day Adventist response to World War I that differed from most churches in Australia preserved church and state loyalty. How the church "tiptoed" between the opposing demands of faithfulness to a theology of church–state separation and loyalty to a government with which it negotiated favourable policies, is the focus of an academic article published by Anzac expert Daniel Reynaud.

> *rather than giving enthusiastic, parochial support to the war, like the larger denominations, the church condemned it*

Apart from opposition to compulsory military training and support for the temperance movement's attempted liquor restrictions, the church showed little interest in state affairs. It preached obedience to the state except when that impinged upon individual conscience, particularly Sunday worship and conscription to combat roles requiring the taking of human life.

So, rather than giving enthusiastic, parochial support to the war, like the larger denominations, the church condemned it as "an evil to be avoided" because it would distract from "the real task at hand"—evangelistic mission. The church also denied any link between Christianity and statehood and published anti-war articles even after an act passed giving the government draconian powers, especially in censorship. It is a mark of how important the church's stand was, writes Reynaud, and "a mark of how insignificant its publications were that they never attracted the ire of the federal authorities."

Determined to demonstrate it did not hate anyone, and with a disproportionate number of Germans as members even leaders, the church made "a show of its ethnic embrace," publishing "daring" statements against demonisation, continuing pre-war evangelistic meetings in the Barossa, beginning German-language classes at what is now Avondale University to support the campaign, and organising the German Seventh-day Adventist Church of Greenock.

But the boldness did not last and the church had to compromise, choosing, for example, to stop distributing anti-compulsory military service literature. It also stopped publishing pro-German stories and deleted references to Germans from accounts of its work in South Australia. And the
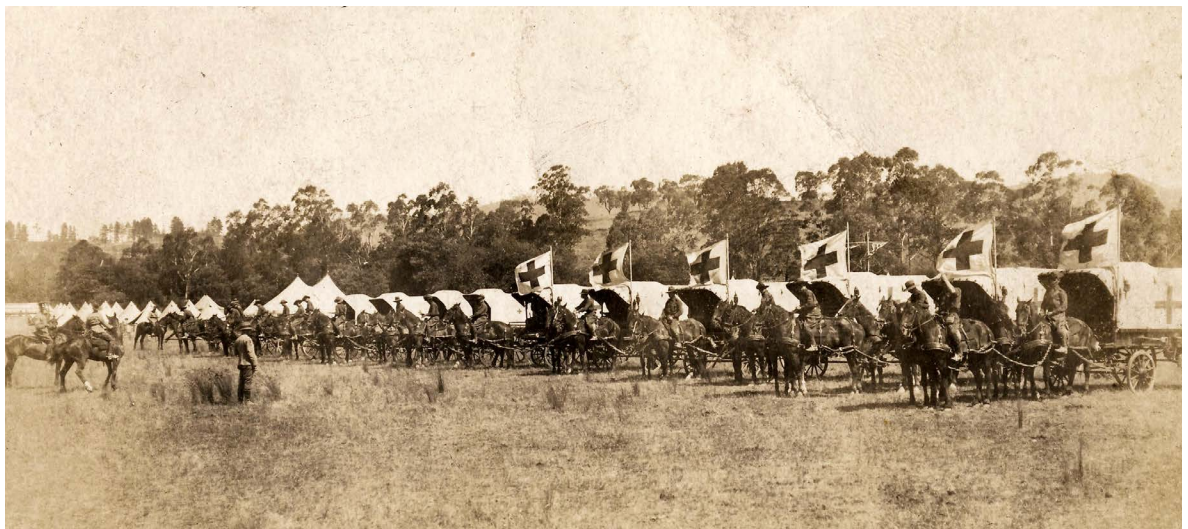
Photograph: *2nd Light Horse Field Ambulance, World War I*

Greenock congregation "judiciously" changed its name to Nuriootpa Seventh-day Adventist Church. At Avondale, the brass band played at fundraising concerts for the war and at Morisset Station to farewell recruits. The church's attitude: "not so much 'conscientious objection' but 'conscientious cooperation,' a preparedness to do anything required by the civil authorities that did not conflict with its obligations to God," writes Reynaud.

Fortunately, the church negotiated with defence minister Senator George Pearce, who acted as prime minister in 1916 while ultra-nationalist Billy Hughes visited France. Pearce's Congregationalist upbringing and "a principled approach to politics" pre-disposed him to understand the church's concerns, and he responded, "with a generosity of spirit that allowed for an effective co-existence."

Reynaud writes about how the church's wartime experiences demonstrate the latitude available for conscientious objections and the independence possible for diplomatically restrained but determined anti-war convictions. Yes, Adventists comprised a small proportion of the population but clusters in several states made their neutrality "vulnerable to the kind of hysteria that affected other groups perceived as disloyal." Instead, a "clearly-enunciated theology of war" and a "fortuitously low national profile" enabled them to avoid the "pitfall of jingoistic religion and maintain a larger sense of mission." The church could have used its lack of size and influence as "an excuse not to take a principled stand," says Reynaud. "Instead, it stuck to its guns, so to speak, and got a positive result."

Reynaud concludes if the government could work cooperatively with a small church of un-Australian character—that denounced alcohol, meat, tobacco and gambling, among other social norms, and observed Saturday as Sabbath, which prevented participation in many sports—then larger churches could have negotiated "the pursuit of their mission without tainting it with an enthusiasm for bloodshed."

But he is "distressed" Adventists have abandoned the church's historic and "wise" position on war. "We're now more military-minded, even in Australia, and more likely to endorse the use of force to achieve political outcomes. We have much to learn from our pioneers."

Reynaud's article, *Australian Seventh-day Adventism and World War One: A Different Path*, is published by the *Journal of Religious History (Reynaud, 2023)*. He has also written an article about the Adventist Church in the South Pacific and World War One for the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists (Reynaud, 2020)*. **TEACH**

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Urijah's on a mission: Lifestyle Medicine Graduand Responds to Health Crisis at Home

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Keywords: Healthcare, lifestyle medicine, public health, Solomon Islands, South Pacific

Abstract
The influence of his father and an advertisement for a scholarship encouraged Urijah Liligeto to begin his journey as a healthcare professional who is now helping his country make choices to improve its quality of life.

> " to educate leaders in the South Pacific so they can become champions for and advocates of a healthy lifestyle. Well, that's me. "

That country is the Solomon Islands, where non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and those related to the heart and lungs are the leading cause of death. Urijah is well-placed to respond. Completing a Graduate Diploma in Lifestyle Medicine from Avondale led to a role with the World Health Organization as a Public Health Officer for Non-Communicable Diseases. "I provide technical expertise to ensure activities for reducing or preventing NCDs in the Solomons are effectively implemented and monitored." Urijah works with donor partners and the government's Ministry of Health and Medical Services. He also brings contacts with faith-based organisations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Despite the church's position on health, which is a point of difference with other denominations, Urijah sees a gap between what is preached and practised. The ease of access to fast food and the limited access to vegetarian food in urban areas could be part of the problem. As could the lack of health education experience and training among church leaders. "They should be health educators as much as gospel preachers."

So, Urijah enrolled at Avondale after his father, alumnus Pr Wilfred Liligeto, showed him an advertisement in *Adventist Record* for the Pacific Partnership Scholarship. "Dad and I saw this as an opportunity to be a qualified health worker, which would equip me for service to my church and my community."

Photograph: Urijah Liligeto

Avondale planned to offer only one scholarship, but a record response to an offering collected in Adventist churches across the South Pacific in 2016 enabled it to offer three. Urijah and the other recipients received a full-fee waiver to complete the graduate certificate. Four years later, Urijah's now completed the graduate diploma and is already enrolled in the new Master of Lifestyle Medicine. He describes the scholarship as a blessing. "I wouldn't have been able to complete the degree without it," he says. "The aim of the scholarship is to educate leaders in the South Pacific so they can become champions for and advocates of a healthy lifestyle. Well, that's me. I want to help my people fight this NCD crisis."

Integrating lifestyle medicine principles into his

lectures and lessons helped students in Urijah's nursing, public health, and nutrition and dietetic classes at Solomon Islands National University understand the root causes of non-communicable diseases. "These future frontline healthcare workers will be the ones encouraging the patients who'll visit them at clinics or in hospitals to make healthy lifestyle choices." With a bachelor's degree in biomedical science and a master's in clinical immunology, Urijah dreams of developing postgraduate courses in lifestyle medicine at the university and establishing a research-based wellness centre offering lifestyle interventions to prevent or manage chronic illness.

Urijah will receive the John Ballard Trim Health Ministry Prize for outstanding achievement in the study of wholistic health and wellbeing and its application in the community when he graduates in April. "Dad passed away before I could complete my studies in lifestyle medicine, but I'm sure he'll be proud of me. I'm driven to carry on his wish for me to become a health leader in the church." TEACH

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BOOK REVIEW

The Call to Follow: Hearing Jesus in a Culture Obsessed with Leadership

Richard Langer and Joanne J. Jung. (2022).
Crossway, 132 pages
ISBN: 978-1433578038

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Richard Langer and Joanne J. Jung have written a compelling book sure to garner attention in a leadership saturated world. Richard is professor of biblical and theological studies and director of the Office for the Integration of Faith and Learning at Biola University. He is an ordained minister with over twenty years of pastoral experience. Joanne is professor of biblical and theological studies and the associate dean of online education and faculty development at the Talbot School of Theology, Biola University.

In *The Call to Follow: Hearing Jesus in Culture Obsessed with Leadership*, Langer and Jung present a strong case for the necessity of "followership" in the everyday life of a Christian (p. 15). While not intending to diminish the need for quality leadership, the authors aim "to increase the effectiveness of both followers and leaders by promoting common ownership of the vision, deepening our appreciation of one another's contributions, and seeing more clearly where our organizational and vocational tasks fit within our spiritual lives" (p. 21). Langer and Jung's audience consists of several groups of people, including those: faithful in everyday work activities, working with a sense of mission (p. 18), or part of an entity, church, or business pursuing a mission (p. 20).

The book is constructed with eight chapters which fall into four loose divisions. Chapters 1-3 introduce the book's appeal by comparing leadership and followership and then presents a biblical basis for the reality of followership as a Christlike characteristic. Chapters 4-5 reveal the crisis associated with being a follower compared to testimonies of those who have proven themselves faithful followers. Chapter 6 presents an endearing example of one historic follower who provides a helpful example relevant within every generation. Chapters 7-8 offer examples for readers, describing how to begin applying the principles
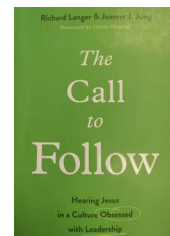
> *presents a biblical basis for the reality of followership as a Christlike characteristic.*

of followership into one's personal life and the rewards which are promised.

The authors begin their work by revealing the uniqueness of following as contrasted with leading. As a book about following, the authors do not hesitate to address leadership early-on, placing it in a category requiring caution due to the detrimental effects resulting from striving to lead while neglecting one's role as a follower. For example, chapter one opens with a sobering perspective of leading and leadership as not good "in and of itself" (p. 24). As money is a means to an end, so too is leadership. Langer and Jung present a "nuanced view of leadership that extolls its benefits even as it warns about its perils" (p. 25). Leadership can be described in a manner that can be either healthy or unhealthy, a point the authors aptly present in the remainder of the first chapter.

With the comparison between leadership and followership completed in the first chapter, the authors focus on followership for the remainder of the work. Chapter Two reveals a plethora of mistaken beliefs about followership which has saturated a generation with malign perspectives. The authors here define followership as a person's freely chosen deference to another person's lead while remaining actively engaged and personally taking mission ownership in a particular work (p. 39-40). Misconceptions about followership are addressed for the remainder of chapter two.

Chapter Three commences a biblical appeal for followership, noting the Christian as being a part of a kingdom of followers (p. 59). Jesus is described as having many disciples who are his "followers," yet remain faithful to the biblical account of Jesus truly being a follower as well. Within a myriad of examples from John's Gospel, Jesus plays "the role of a follower rather than a leader" (p. 61). The authors then solidify their appeal with a powerful question, "Does it look like the Gospel of John was written so that we can lead like Jesus led or so we can follow like Jesus followed?" (p. 62).

Chapter Four details the reality of the crisis of followership being rooted in the lack of shared vision between leaders and followers for an organization's forward movement. The authors' note, "We rarely, if ever, stop to think that the most immediate way to improve our leadership is to improve our followership" (p. 88). A powerful appeal is then made (Chapter 5) through a collection of testimonies of those who were faithful followers in life. Christlikeness and followership is clearly linked when viewed in the lives of

> *The central thesis of a book on followership exists over and against nearly every philosophy current culture advances.*

individuals as well as congregations throughout history, a point briefly yet powerfully made.

Chapter Six highlights the significant influence of Brother Lawrence, whose life provides a meagre yet powerful example of how followership impacts people through embracing everyday living. Chapters 7-8 conclude the work with a devotional approach to beginning followership in daily life and the rewards which accompany such a posture. Disciples of Christ are followers of Christ who, when standing before God the Father, will be judged in measure with their followership. God eagerly rewards good followers according to Scripture, a point which the authors introduce as a matter affecting one's earthly life and eternal life with God in heaven.

In evaluating Langer and Jung's work, one must recognize the reality of this generation's leadership-saturated culture. Perhaps a "weakness" in the work is the popularity of the topic itself, as leadership outranks followership in current publication titles by nearly 400 to 1 (p. 16). Nonetheless, the material is relevant and needed in this leadership-saturated culture. The central thesis of a book on followership exists over and against nearly every philosophy current culture advances. The appeal for followership is truly a bold step in leading people to see the eternal value in being a follower of Christ, despite one's earthly status. Chapter Two carries significant weight for the reader in relation to the unsullied awareness of mistaken beliefs of followership. Langer and Jung do a superb job in detailing the reality of followership being considered a negative character trait, a point quickly and compellingly contested in the third chapter's biblical appeal and support for God's call to followership.

The length of the book coupled with a study guide makes the work practical, approachable and highly recommended to Christian educators and Administrators in day-school and undergraduate college settings, as well as those serving in vocational ministry such as Lead Pastors, Discipleship Pastors, Youth and Children's Pastors, and Executive Pastors. **TEACH**

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