

Are Christian schools really Christian? Perceptions of final year pre-service teachers in Australia

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Abstract

Final year pre-service teachers at a private provider of Christian higher education were surveyed to discover their perceptions of the special character of a wide spectrum of Australian Christian faith-based schools. They each completed an eight week placement, spread over two sessions, in a Christian school. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through open-ended written responses and a questionnaire. The results indicated that a special Christian character was visible to the pre-service teachers, with evidence that Christian worldview alignments in the areas of school culture, relationships, service and discipleship in Christian schools is easier to identify than in the learning and teaching aspects of schools' operations.

Introduction, aim and purpose

Stephen Covey (1989, p. 28) reminds us that, 'We see the world not as it is, but as we are...' This study sought to investigate the visibility of the special Christian character of schools from the perspective of final year pre-service teachers who are about to enter the workforce. In particular, the study looked at the alignment of the practices of the school with a Christian worldview and uses the phrase 'Christian worldview alignment' to describe aspects of a school's operation that reflect beliefs rising out of a Christian worldview and hence give it a special character that reflects Christian characteristics. The study aimed to identify those areas in the sampled schools where Christian Worldview was overtly

visible, and those areas where it was less noticeable to pre-service teachers. In doing so, this investigation is relevant to key stakeholders in Christian education; firstly to Christian teachers and administrators as it identifies how special character through a Christian worldview alignment is perceived from the perspective of preservice teachers who may bring a fresh set of eyes and new perspective; secondly, to providers of Christian higher education as they develop frameworks to discuss and explain the concept of Christian worldview alignment and its implications for teachers, and thirdly; to pre-service teachers as they prepare for employment in Christian schools.

Background and context

The number of students in independent schools in Australia has grown from 4.1% of total enrolments in Australian schools in 1970 to a market share of 20.3% in 2016, with 85% of independent schools having religious affiliation (Independent Schools Council in Australia, 2017). This growth has been accompanied by robust discussion pertaining to the philosophy, purpose and practice of Christian education (Cairney, Cowling & Jensen, 2011; Edlin, 2014; Ellis & Ireland, 2006; Fennema, 2006; Goodlet and Collier, 2014; Knight, 2016; Murison, 2018; Roy, 2008). These conversations are crucial given the increasingly diverse belief systems from which students are attracted as more parents seek a values-based and academically strong education, rather than a specifically 'Christian' education for their children (Beamish & Morey, 2014, p.32). Even in those schools that draw from a predominantly Christian base, ongoing examination of how a Christian worldview is enacted within a school remains important in order for schools to fulfil their mission, preserve their special character and the operational distinctiveness of Christian education.

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Worldview and Christian education

Worldview can be defined as the assumptions that guide our understanding of the big questions in life. These big questions (in everyday language) include: Where did I come from? Why am I here? What is wrong with the world? Is there a solution? (Fisher, 2010; Olthuis, 1985; Sire, 2015). The answers to these and related questions provide a worldview structure through which we understand the world and our purpose for existence (Fisher, 2010; Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008; Henderson, Henderson & Thompson, 2006; Nash, 2013; Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2004). Christian educators agree that Christian education needs to have underlying beliefs and philosophical assumptions that are Christian (Cairney, et al., 2011; Dowson, 2014; Edlin, 2014; Knight, 2016; Roy, 2008). In fact, most Christian schools and school systems have been set up to foster a Christian worldview. These schools, and the associated expense of operating them, can only be justified if they are faithful to the philosophical foundation upon which they were established (Knight, 2016).

The formation of the Christian worldview is a priority because Christian education seeks to help 'students to live life before God as God designed it to be' (Fennema, 2006, p.30). A worldview construct becomes the framework through which students view the world and gives them a way to structure, interpret and implement the various components of their life in a way that gives their life meaning. Developing a robust Christian worldview equips students with an important tool to negotiate and make sense of life using a Christian lens and is central to the purpose of Christian education. Despite this belief, Murison (2018, p. 90) posits that Christian worldview alignment in schools "has been undertaken as a largely intellectual and theoretical task". This can be attributed, at least in part, to the understanding that an individual's worldview exists partially in the sub-conscious rather than the conscious (Olthuis, 1985; Sire, 2004). As Walsh and Middleton (1984) posit, worldview needs to become visible if it is to provide a paradigm to guide and fashion the thoughts and actions of its adherents. Without this visibility, there may be a disconnect between the actuality of belief and the reality of life (Thompson, 2004). This calls for Christian teachers to be overt in living their worldview, and poses a challenge because an institutional worldview enactment relies on individuals whose personal worldviews may be at various stages of development. While it is anticipated that teachers in Christian schools will adopt and model a Christian worldview, Rasmussen and Rasmussen (2006, p.3) have identified seven distinct teaching levels that

range from 'non-use' of Christian worldview through 'superficial' and 'routine' to 'dynamic integration' of Christian worldview. These labels reflect the anomalies found in Christian classrooms and suggest that Christian scholarship needs to further investigate how faith shapes pedagogical practice, an idea supported by Smith and Smith (2011).

Alignment of school practices with a Christian worldview models the way that Christian principles are actioned and integrates faith, learning and life. This process is important and should underlie all the educational activity in a Christian school. It is a mixture of corporate and individual influence that is the result of intentional activity that aims to holistically develop students.

Christian education

A review of relevant literature reveals that schools' alignment with Christian worldview, that is this aspect of their Christian special character, is often evidenced in the areas of: school culture, relationships, belief enactment, and transformation. School culture includes the daily program of the school and the impact of the physical environment (Roy, 2008). The relationships within the school are important and Christian worldview alignment is often exemplified by relationships within the school community (Francis, Casson, & McKenna, 2018; Scouller, 2012). Based in the belief that a triune God is a God of community (Cairney et al., 2011), Christian schools operate as communities of faith and learning where committed teachers foster safe and authentic relationships as part of their ethos. Wilhoit and Rozema (2005, p. 248) make a strong case for teachers whose words and actions transform the school "into a loving, just, compassionate, and worshipping community that invites openness and dialogue". This results in an environment where "committed partnerships, mutually supportive relationships and a relationally supportive environment are reflected in every aspect of the school" (Burggraaf, 2014, p. 79).

The special character of the school is also influenced by the beliefs adhered to within the school. This involves more than intellectually subscribing to the theological beliefs on which the school philosophy is based. Rather, school special character focuses on how those beliefs are evidenced in every aspect of school life (Edlin, 2006; Jackson, 2009). It goes beyond knowing what one believes, or transmitting these beliefs to students in religious education classes. While Wilhoit and Rozema's (2005) position on the relational role of Christian teachers is salient, one must also assert the foundational premise that the curriculum should also be aligned with a Christian worldview, so

that the school's learning and teaching programs support Christian faith and biblical beliefs rather than contradicting them (Anderson, 2013; Edlin, 2014; Thompson, 2004). Even more challenging for Christian teachers is the act of aligning pedagogical practice with Christian frameworks, so both what is taught and how it is taught aligns with a Christian worldview, an area where reality often falls short of expectations (Cairney et al., 2011; Edlin, 2014; Scouller, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2014). Murison (2018) offers a cautionary note on this issue, positing that attempts to integrate faith and learning may actually result in dualism unless teachers are teaching from a strong faith basis.

The final area where Christian worldview alignment is often evident is in the transforming process at work in the lives of the students and teachers. How this redemptive and restorative purpose (Cairney et al., 2011; Knight, 2016; Roy, 2008) of Christian education is achieved in practical terms may be unique to each school but a common denominator of discipleship runs through the literature. Discipleship is the enactment of worldview in individual lives through a personal commitment to follow Jesus Christ, and Christian education is united in the purpose of making disciples and disciple makers (Murison, 2018). Jackson (2009) posits that how a school upholds its faithfulness to the content of the Bible is through discipleship of, and service to, its community. Both of these activities are an enactment of belief. Smith (2013) emphasises the importance of discipleship within with the development of Christian character. He is supported in this view by Winter (2014) who likewise supports the development of character as a distinguishing factor of Christian education. Service activities are also a great way to enact belief and act as a mediator between spirituality and life satisfaction (Pashak and Laughter, 2012). Opportunities for discipleship and service can be found within the curriculum and in the extra-curricular activities Christian schools offer. Other Christian authors (Francis et al., 2018; Garber, 1996; Lindsay, 2014; Scott, 2013) reason that active participation in a school faith community is the prime evidence that a school is truly Christian.

The literature generally concurs on the purpose of Christian education and the role of worldview in determining practice. With respect to Christian worldview alignment, four attributes of practice are identified in the literature; fostering a Christian culture, the presence of authentic relationships fostered by Christian teachers, biblical beliefs that undergird the school's operations, including curriculum and pedagogical practice, and the transforming power of a Christian worldview in

members of the school community through an emphasis on opportunities for discipleship and service.

While the literature addresses where and how Christian worldview alignment should be visible in a Christian school, fewer studies focus on pre-service teachers and their role in observing, understanding and supporting this alignment in schools. One study found that pre-service teachers' perceptions 'focused on the more external aspects of demonstrating personal faith such as prayer in class and teacher modelling of Christian behaviour' (Matthias & Wrobbel, 2013). Van Dyke (2013) supports this finding, noting that graduates from Christian teacher education programs often admit their ignorance of what it means to teach Christianly. Rasmussen and Rasmussen (2006) have developed a model of Faith-Learning-Living Integration in an attempt to address this issue in Christian teacher education courses, and Christian (2009) found a social science/worldview nexus increased pre-service teachers' awareness and understanding of how to use a Christian worldview as a reference point when teaching social sciences. This "faith-learning integration requires no small effort and dedication" (Shotsburger, 2018, p.1). Although scholarship in this area is increasing (Smith, Um, & Beversluis, 2014), limited evidence from the literature regarding pre-service teachers' perceptions of Christian worldview alignment in a school setting prompted this investigation to gain insights into how Christian schools are viewed by pre-service teachers.

This literature-based discussion has led to two important questions that have formed the basis for this study.

1. How visible is the special character, founded on a Christian worldview alignment in Christian schools, from the perception of Australian pre-service teachers?
2. What do Australian pre-service teachers perceive as the best way to align a Christian Worldview with their teaching role?

Research methodology

This investigation sought to answer the two research questions and was conducted with final year pre-service teachers enrolled at Avondale College of Higher Education in Australia. All participants were enrolled in the subject 'Philosophy of Christian Education'. Data were collected only from those pre-service teachers who completed their final professional experience placement in a Christian school. The schools represented five Christian denominations; Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Pentecostal and Seventh-day Adventist.

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A mixed method approach was used to investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions of the Christian worldview alignment in schools. A total of 94 final year pre-service teachers volunteered to complete a questionnaire generated from the literature. They responded to thirty-one items using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'not evident at all', to 'very evident', being specifically – 1. Not evident at all, 2. Scarcely evident, 3. Fairly evident, and 4. Very evident.

Questionnaire items related to the four broad attributes of practice identified in the literature: Christian ethos, including daily culture and the school's physical environment, safe and authentic relationships, curriculum and pedagogical practice, and how evident Christian worldview is in discipleship and service, particularly in extracurricular activities.

Participants were asked to circle responses that most closely matched each item's contribution to the Christian worldview alignment of their placement school. Descriptive analysis, factor analysis and reliability testing were used to investigate and develop the scales and variables used in the study. All scales had appropriate item loadings, and reliabilities as measured by Cronbach's alpha were above 0.75. The questionnaire also contained two open-ended responses. The first asked for additional areas within schools where Christian worldview alignment was evident. The second asked for participants' opinions of the best way to demonstrate Christian worldview alignment in a school.

Pre-service teachers were also asked while on placement and prior to completing the questionnaire, to write a reflection on their placement school's Christian worldview alignment. Line by line coding was employed with the open-ended responses from the questionnaire and written reflections. Individual observations were clustered and themed (Basil, 2010; Cresswell, 2011). Themes were then cross-referenced with the various sections of the survey, facilitating triangulation of the data (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This resulted in a deeper and richer view of the pre-service teachers' perceptions of Christian worldview alignment in Christian schools.

Results

The quantitative and qualitative results have been combined in this section to provide an integrated discussion of the data within the questionnaire categories as listed below.

School plant

Contributing to the special character of Christian schools were elements of the physical plant

observed by pre-service teachers including, posters and displays observed as they entered schools, mission or vision statements on walls, school signs, foyer and office displays, classroom posters, slogans, bulletin boards, school prospectus, school website and handbook. When asked how visible special character was in the school plant preservice teachers responded with an average school plant response of 3.29 (SD = 0.63, possible range 1 - 4). In reporting this, pre-service teachers rated special character in the physical environment as being 'Fairly evident' and significantly different ($p < 0.05$), being more evident than the other variables included in the study, except for Relationships. This aspect of the school was mentioned in the open-ended responses a total of 67 times. The names of many of the schools were overtly Christian, as were the school mottos. Examples of mottos were Christ our Light, Growing through Christ, Do all for God's Glory, Grow up into Christ and All knowledge in Christ. Seven pre-service teachers (10%) connected Christian worldview alignment to the mission and vision statements which were displayed in prominent places in the reception area of the schools, an example of which was 'To acknowledge God as the source of life and wisdom.' A number of schools hung Christian posters in noticeable places, and one school had a sign above every door exiting their staffroom, reminding the staff, 'You are now entering your mission field.' These were visible reminders of the Christian worldview alignment and special character of the school.

Relationships

Pre-service teachers perceived that relationships within the school made a very important contribution to the Christian worldview alignment of the school. Students were asked to reflect on aspects of relationships that included attitudes of staff and students towards each other, and staff collegiality. They reported an average response of 3.20 (SD = 0.58, possible range 1 - 4) on the Relationships scale which was above 2.5 (the midpoint of the scale). This indicated that preservice teachers see the visibility of Christian worldview through relationships formed in the school as being between 'Fairly evident' and 'Very evident' and this visibility is significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) than the other variables included in the study except for School Plant.

From the written reflections, relationships emerged as the second most frequently commented on evidence of Christian worldview alignment, with a total of 83 individual comments in this category. The nature of these relationships and examples are identified in Table 1.

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A total of 28 individual comments (34%) highlighted the important way that teacher/student relationships contributed to the special character of the school and its visible Christian worldview alignment. One pre-service teacher stated that “*Staff members’ relationships with the students and God, along with the simple presence of the Holy Spirit... gives this school its special character.*” This was further supported by a pre-service teacher who wrote, “*The teachers care about their students in a way that is only possible through a loving relationship with Jesus.*” Also, “*They [the teachers] make every effort to encourage [in students] development of character and an attitude of service to each other rather than self-service,*” while another noted that the teachers were “*dedicated to revealing God’s love to the students and families.*”

Also focused on relationships, thirty comments

(38%) from pre-service teachers related to how the school fostered a sense of wellbeing in its students, with some crossover in this area to school ethos and culture. In one case, this was evident in a school motto ‘Caring for their tomorrow, today’, which the pre-service teacher perceived as being “*very evident through the efforts teachers put into their classes and also into the wellbeing of the students in their day to day lives.*” Positive comments about relationships also related to chaplains, student welfare programs and peer support programs.

Overall, the responses to the questionnaire and the open-ended comments indicate that relationships were a persistently evident indicator of Christian worldview alignment for pre-service teachers.

Daily culture

Pre-service teachers were asked to reflect on the daily culture of the school by considering the impact of: assemblies, roll call groups/home groups/circle time/morning worship, closure of the school day, other school gatherings (e.g. chapel, incursions) and playground rules. Students reported that in the daily culture of the school, the Christian worldview alignment of the school was visible with participants reporting a mean of 3.00 (SD = 0.60, possible range 1 – 4). The average response was above the midpoint of the scale (2.5) and indicated that on average pre-service teachers readily observed the schools special Christian character in action in the daily culture of the school. This result was reinforced by qualitative data. A total of 163 separate comments were made that identified the contribution of the daily culture toward the Christian worldview alignment of the school. This was the largest response category, with thirty-three respondents commenting on the practice of holding a daily staff devotional or worship before the commencement of the school day. A feature of these devotionals was prayer; for the school, staff, families and students, often by name. One pre-service teacher commented, “*In these morning worships the teachers are valuing and thanking God for these beautiful little ones in their classrooms.*” Regular chapels and religious celebrations were also very visible with nearly all respondents identifying this aspect of the school’s operation, and many also commenting on class devotions either at the start of the day or in roll call groups, with one respondent stating, “*You just knew that God was moving in this school.*”

Belief enactment through discipleship and service

Discipleship and service was mostly evident to pre-service teachers within the range of extra-curricular activities that schools offered their students. These

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Table 1: Types and examples of positive relationships identified in Christian schools.

TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP	QUOTED EXAMPLES FROM OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES
Teacher/teacher	‘staff...work as a collective team, ensuring that everyone in the community is heading in the same direction.’
Teacher/student	<p>‘The school promotes a spirit of community where teachers and students work alongside each other to create an environment of quality learning/personal values and school unity.’</p> <p>‘Teachers are able to build a positive Christian relationship with these students supporting them and encouraging them in their walk with God and their schoolwork.’</p>
Teacher/parent	‘very community minded... close relationships to parents... encourages feedback and strives to keep parents informed.’
Student/student	<p>‘...the school supports students to fill out affirmation cards that are delivered to their peers as forms of encouragement and support.’</p> <p>‘where everyone from every grade can be friends with each other, where there is respect for the teachers and other students, and where God is the cornerstone.’</p>

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activities included; school camps or excursions, service projects, music groups, performing arts such as drama, and community engagement opportunities. Overall, pre-service teachers rated that worldview alignment was 'Fairly evident' in these extracurricular activities as participants reported a mean of 3.01 (SD = 0.68, possible range 1 - 4). This was supported by 46 individual comments. School based activities fostering discipleship included consecration services at the commencement of the school year and fellowship dinners for school families. Many of the extra-curricular activities were associated with mission, discipleship and service. Church based activities included choir and band performances 'during chapel and at church events'. Community based activities that involved a service component received the most comments and ranged from fundraising for charities to overseas mission trips such as a 'Schoolies mission trip to Fiji', 'serving a little school in a village in Vanuatu', and STORMCo (Service to Others Matters Company) trips during term breaks.

Planning, teaching and assessment practice

Pre-service teachers were asked to indicate if the Christian worldview alignment of the school was evident in the learning and teaching environment of schools. They reflected on lesson planning, teaching illustrations and examples, learning resources, incidental teaching and assessment tasks (operational) by responding to the Planning, Teaching and Assessment scale and responding to open ended questions. With an average response of 2.82 on the Planning, Teaching and Assessment scale asserting visibility (SD = 0.54, possible range 1 - 4) which is just above the scale midpoint of 2.5 preservice teachers reported that Christian Worldview was approaching but less than 'Fairly evident'. It was however the lowest average response of all the scales measured and was significantly different ($p < 0.05$) and lower than the other variables included in the study. Of the 19 individual comments made in this area, six comments (32%) related to religious education classes, a further six (32%) to the alignment of faith and learning, and the remaining (36%) were generic statements about a Christian approach to teaching. Compared to the other categories where pre-service teachers could cite multiple examples of worldview alignment, only one specific example relating to worldview alignment was cited in any of the respondents' open ended responses: the 'teacher would incorporate Bible teachings wherever it was relevant in the curriculum'.

While the learning and teaching context was the lowest visibility response reported, the companion

area of curriculum planning scored only a little higher as pre-service teachers reported that in this area Christian worldview alignment was 'Fairly evident', an average response of 3.01 (SD=0.68, possible range 1 - 4). This was significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) than the other variables included in the study except for Planning, Teaching and Assessment Practice. Within this area students were asked to reflect on unit plans (e.g. Christian focus, biblical perspective, values), yearly programs of work, assessment tasks (planning), and other special learning and teaching programs (e.g. values, personal development, resilience and health programs). Although there were markedly fewer comments (13) demonstrating evidence of a Christian worldview alignment in the area of planning documents than other areas, a pre-service teacher noted that the 'curriculum has been altered to accommodate Christian values into the classroom.' Some pre-service teachers noted practices such as the renaming of units (This is Me to God made Me), integration of values into units, and a pre-service teacher noted that units had Christian worldview alignment 'infused in each lesson' and identified specific examples observed.

Within each school, the way that values were emphasised, was particularly noticed by pre-service teachers. The qualitative data contained a total of 54 comments relating specifically to values. Pre-service teachers noted that school values were displayed in classrooms, highlighted in devotionals and chapels, promoted in school newsletters and importantly, modelled in the lives of the teachers. A pre-service teacher noted that the school 'promotes its values through signage, the newsletter, and introducing each week's focus value during Monday morning assemblies,' while other pre-service teachers observed that schools had a definite set of values based on the Bible.

What would pre-service teachers do?

After their school placement, pre-service teachers were asked to comment on what they believed were the best ways to make evident the Christian worldview alignment of the Christian school. A total of 43 pre-service teachers commented, and of these comments, 23 (53%) focused on teachers. Four (1%) were general statements like 'Starts with the teacher!' Twelve (28%) indicated teacher modelling of Christian lifestyle, 'by living what you preach,' and a further seven (4%) dealt with teacher and student relationships. Thirteen comments (30%) related to daily culture, 'the little things that are part of the school,' three (7%) specifically to aligning all aspects of the school with 'not just words but works that give action to beliefs such as service'. Just four

comments (9%) indicated a connection between learning and teaching and Christian worldview alignment. The comments were, ‘being intentional in teaching’, ‘class content’, ‘incidental teaching’ and ‘incorporate God in every lesson.’

Discussion

The findings from this investigation help us to understand what aspects of the special character of schools, based on a Christian worldview alignment, are most visible to pre-service teachers during an extended school placement. Pre-service teachers were able to identify some of the evidence that

Christian authors (for example Cairney, Cowling & Jensen, 2011; Edlin, 2014; Jackson, 2009; Roy, 2008.) cite as indicative of a school that is Christian in practice as well as name.

For most schools, the physical environment immediately evidences the Christian worldview alignment of the school. Although this could be interpreted as a somewhat shallow indicator of Christian worldview alignment, the physical aspects of a school may help make the worldview that the school espouses visible. The daily culture of the school also contributed to the visibility of the Christian worldview alignment of the school.

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Table 2: Summary of quantitative and qualitative responses (1)

Quantitative			Qualitative	
Scale	Mean*	Standard Deviation	Number of Comments	% of scale comments
School Plant	3.29	0.63	67	7 (10%) note mission and vision statements
Relationships	3.20	0.58	83	34% student/teacher, 38% student wellbeing
Daily Culture	3.00	0.60	163	Most note chapels, and services. Many classroom devotions am/pm. 33 (20%) refer to daily staff worship.
Belief Enactment through Discipleship and Service	3.01	0.68	46	School, church, and community
Curriculum Planning	3.01	0.68	13	-
Planning, Teaching and Assessment	2.82	0.54	19	32% RE classes, 32% in learning activities
Values	-	-	54	-

* scale scores: 1 Not evident at all, 2 Scarcely evident, 3 Fairly evident, 4 Very evident.

Table 3: Best way to make evident Christian Worldview alignment (qualitative 2)

Best ways (n = 43)	Number of Comments	Topic of Comment and	Frequency
Focus on teacher performance	25 (53%)	Teacher modelling	12 (28%)
		General comments – ‘starts with teacher ‘	4 (1%)
		Teacher / student relationship	7 (4%)
Daily culture	13 (30%)	Learning and teaching aligned to Christian worldview	4 (9%)
		All aspects aligned to Christian worldview	3 (7%)

Staff devotions, chapel programs and prayer were widespread in schools, and a values focus was a strong component of the daily culture, supporting an orientation towards building Christian character, as discussed by Smith (2013) and Winter (2014).

For pre-service teachers, the relational aspects of Christian schools were also fairly evident and indicative of Christian worldview alignment. These identifiable relationships support the position of Wilhoit and Rozema (2005) who place high importance on the authentic Christianity of teachers and the relationships they build. Burggraaf (2014) and Scott (2013) also highlight the importance of relationships. Relationships were also perceived to contribute to students' wellbeing. While Christian schools do not have a monopoly on positive relationships, the pre-service teachers in the schools observed that the Christian schools that they were in provided a good environment for positive relationships to form.

Additionally, pre-service teachers perceived that, in the extra-curricular activities of their placement schools, the Christian worldview alignment of the schools was fairly evident. Extra-curricular activities cited in the qualitative data nearly always included either a service or mission component which Jackson (2009) links to discipleship, and Garber (1996) associates with active participation in a faith community.

While the areas just discussed are a real strength for schools in displaying their special character through Christian worldview alignment, within the teaching and learning area in schools, the Christian worldview alignment was not perceived to be as evident. This finding is supported by the literature (Matthias & Wrobbel, 2014; Van Dyke, 2013; Christian, 2009). Therefore, it would be expedient for both Christian schools and Christian higher education providers to further explore authentic ways that evidence a Christian worldview in the classroom learning and teaching, especially in the areas of planning, including choice of pedagogical approaches, resources, content and assessment. It is also important to note that the lower ratings in this area may indicate any of three things: firstly, that classroom practitioners are not necessarily experienced in teaching from a biblical Christian perspective, and/or that pre-service teachers could not see a Christian worldview alignment because they either were not looking for it, or not actually perceiving it perhaps due the subtlety of the approach, for clearly they were unaware of it. This might be opportunity to question the effectiveness of pre-service teachers as sensitive and perceptive assessors of the presence of perspectives of alignment. It may also be reflective of disparate

worldviews held by individuals in a school. This presents a challenge for Christian schools to engage in open dialogue about worldviews, to communicate expectations and therefore to minimise misalignment between schools' stated Christian mission and values, and the beliefs of individual teachers. It also highlights the responsibility for creating opportunities in Christian schools and universities to engage pre-service teachers in professional conversations about the alignment of faith and learning, and modelling this in the classroom, but even more specifically what this 'actually' looks like in practice.

When pre-service teachers offered opinions about the best way to demonstrate Christian worldview alignment in schools, the results concurred with Matthias and Wrobbel (2013). Pre-service teachers perceived that Christian worldview alignment could be demonstrated through modelling Christian behaviour and school culture activities such as prayer and chapel programs. A focus on teachers building relationships emerged as an important contributor to Christian worldview alignment, a position that concurs with Scott (2013), and is also indicative of the relational approach that young adults have towards life in general. The low number of unprompted comments relating to planning, facilitating and evaluating learning; and the generic nature of the comments, support the quantitative findings that Christian worldview alignment could be strengthened in the learning and teaching environment. It is of some concern that learning and teaching, while supporting Christian worldview alignment, only does this with marginal visibility, a finding consistent with Matthias and Wrobbel (2013), Van Dyke (2013) and Christian (2009) in the context of teacher education courses, and Anderson (2013) and Edlin (2014) in the broader context of Christian education. This finding offers a challenge to reinforce the links between teaching and learning and Christian worldview alignment without it becoming dualistic, a caution offered by Murison (2018).

Christian pre-service teachers are often keen to make a contribution to the special character of their placement school, and eventually their employing school, through aligning their practice with a Christian worldview. The knowledge and skills to make this contribution do not happen by chance but are the result of intentional activity on the part of a trilogy of key players; placement schools, Christian higher education institutions, and pre-service teachers aiming to teach in Christian schools.

Recommendations

The implications rising out of the research questions in this investigation target the three groups of

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stakeholders mentioned above, and further recommends the following.

1. That Christian schools examine the visibility of their Christian worldview across the various dimensions of their school, specifically within their program evaluation audits. In areas which the Christian worldview is less visible, potentially learning and teaching, the school should implement professional development processes to track enhancement of the visibility of its Christian worldview. Furthermore, that classroom practitioners who mentor pre-service teachers be intentional in instigating professional conversations about Christian worldview alignment in the classroom, and deliberately model how this appears in practice—to increase its visibility to pre-service teachers.
2. That providers of Christian higher education examine their teacher education courses to further facilitate understanding of what Christian worldview alignment means by linking Christian education philosophy with practice in the area of teaching and learning, consequently optimising pre-service teachers sensitivity and capacity to perceive a spectrum of aligned strategies.
3. That pre-service teachers intending to teach in Christian schools be encouraged/required to be more intentional in understanding the way that a Christian worldview can be aligned with their educational practice in the schools in which they do their placements, and that they actively find ways they can contribute to the special character of schools through this alignment, then implement and report on their performance throughout the duration of their school placement.

Conclusion

The pre-service teachers' perceptions in this investigation reflected both the placement schools and their own understandings of special character and Christian worldview alignment. Consequently, the school culture, the relationships between the members of the school community and associated wellbeing, and the extra-curricular activities of the school were readily identified as making an important contribution to the special character of the school. The alignment of the learning and teaching environment of the school, while positive, did not score as highly with pre-service teachers as other areas. While this does not necessarily indicate

that the schools performed poorly in these areas, it reminds us of the importance of being intentional in this space and engaging pre-service teachers in substantive conversations about this very important issue, at both the school and tertiary level. This is an area that deserves further consideration as pre-service teachers need the knowledge, skills and commitment to support the Christian worldview alignment of Christian schools as they themselves make the transition from being students to Christian teachers. **TEACH**

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“that classroom practitioners who mentor pre-service teachers be intentional in instigating professional conversations about Christian worldview alignment in the classroom, and deliberately model how this appears in practice”

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