Revealing Jesus in the Learning Environment: Evidence & Impact

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Chapter Two

Revealing Jesus in the Learning Environment

A Look Through the Lens of Teacher Dispositions

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Abstract

Teachers have a significant impact on student learning and the lives of the children in their care. Considerable scholarly attention has been paid to what teachers know about teaching and learning, their understanding of content, and how effectively they employ appropriate strategies to ensure quality student learning. Less attention, however, has been given to *who* the teacher is as an individual. This chapter argues that the issue of teacher dispositions is an important consideration that needs to be included in studies of teacher impact on student learning, and proposes the Dispositional Cluster Model (DCM) (Faull, 2008) as a suitable instrument for exploring this often-neglected aspect of teacher impact. One of the defining features of Christian education and the Christian school is the influence and presence of Christ in the learning environment. In this chapter, the DCM is employed as a lens to consider how teacher dispositions and associated behaviour can serve to reveal Jesus in the learning environment. To this end, the DCM is applied to the teaching dispositions evident in the example of Jesus as the Master Teacher, and how His example is activated by the contemporary Christian teacher in the context of the Christian school.

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The Theory and Explanation Underpinning the use of the DCM in the Context of Christian Education

Internationally recognised experts in the field of teaching and teacher effectiveness such as John Hattie (2003, 2009) and Dylan Wiliam (2020), who have researched the impact of teachers on student learning, acknowledge the critical role of the teacher. In the journal article *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?*, Hattie (2003) discusses the greatest influences on a child's learning:

> …it lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act – the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets these policies, and who is alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling. I therefore suggest that we should focus on the greatest sources of variance that can make the difference – the teacher. We need to ensure that this greatest influence is optimised to have powerful and sensationally positive effects on the learner. (pp. 2-3)

In the context of Christian schools and the influence of Christian teachers on student learning, it is reasonable to assume that there should be demonstrable evidence of these "sensationally positive effects", such as a deeper understanding of Jesus on the part of the students, and His abiding presence in the learning environment. This conclusion leads to the question: What is the evidence of Immanuel – "God with us" - in the learning environment? One way to respond to this question is by taking a closer look at the Christian teacher through the lens of the issue of teacher dispositions. This can be done through the application of Faull's (2008) Dispositional Cluster Model (DCM), an instrument that emerged from research on exceptional teachers who positively impact the lives and learning of their students. Hare (2007), a scholar who has engaged in intensive research in the area, makes a pertinent statement in this regard: "We teach who we are" (p. 139).

It is through the lens of the DCM that this chapter explores the dispositions of the Christian teacher and evidence attesting their impact on the revelation of Jesus. We examine how the Christian teacher reflects the example of Jesus as Rabbi, the Master Teacher. The practical application of this chapter is that it provides a way for teachers, administrators, and academics to reflect on the impact of those dispositions that can be nurtured and developed in order to

ensure that Christian schools maintain a learning environment in which Jesus is revealed to the students and the wider community.

Context and Concept Definitions

Teacher dispositions are not always a popular lens through which to examine the phenomenon of teaching and the impact of the teacher. One reason for this is that dispositions can be difficult to measure empirically. However, when we examine the evidence and impact of the revelation of Jesus in the learning environment, such a focus on the teacher and teacher dispositions is both supported by apposite research literature and warranted, if one is committed to holistic education. It is not only the level of the teacher's expertise, knowledge, and skill mastery that impacts student learning and the school environment; equally important is an understanding of the teacher as self, including their dispositions, values, and beliefs, if one is to fully assess the impact they have on the learning environment and the student as learner. This is particularly true in the context of Christian education and the Christian school, which emphasises Biblical principles and the example of Christ.

Dispositions

The word *dispositions* is used in various ways in the literature. For our purposes, *dispositions* can be said to refer to "inherent qualities that incline a person to act in consistent ways that can be observed through patterns of behaviour in particular contexts" (Faull, 2008, p. 14). Underpinning this definition is the belief that dispositions are inherent. When put into action, dispositions are observable as patterns of behaviour, and different dispositions are manifest in different contexts. The assumption of consistency suggests that while there may be day-to-day variations in an individual's behaviour, it is their overall pattern of behaviour that reveals their particular disposition. This corresponds with Katz's (1993) definition of a disposition as a "pattern of behaviour exhibited frequently…in the absence of coercion…constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control… [that is] intentional and oriented to broad goals" (p. 16). It is important to note Katz's inclusion of the concepts of intentionality and voluntary control, as well as the goal orientation.

Finally, even if dispositions are inherent in the individual, they may not be readily manifest, and may require nurture and

development. When God, in the form of the Trinity, created Adam and Eve, they worked according to a plan. We are told in Genesis 1:24 (*New International Version* [NIV], 1973/1983): "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness…'", while in Genesis 1:27 (NIV, 1973/1983) we find: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Here, the use of parallelism is a form of emphasis: God created mankind in *His* image. Commentators such as Killian III (2016) are quick to point out that the reference to "the image of God" does not necessarily refer to physical attributes but rather to humankind's ability to think rationally and behave as a moral creature. The fact of having been created in God's image could be said to include the dispositions manifest in God's character, as seen in God the Son's incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth. "So", we may ask, "why is this important?" It is important because Jesus was the Master Teacher, the Rabbi, and if we can gain insight into Jesus as Teacher, then we can gain an understanding of how an examination of the qualities of a 21st-century Christian teacher can provide persuasive evidence of Jesus' presence in the school learning environment.

We can gain clarity by conducting a closer look at the DCM (Faull, 2008) in order to examine and come to an understanding of how the Christian teacher can be seen as evidence of Jesus' presence in the Christian school learning environment, and the impact that such a teacher has.

Understanding the Dispositional Cluster Model

The DCM was designed in the context of a study of exceptional teachers who, following a rigorous process of research and the analysis of case study interviews, were described as teachers:

> …who not only are able to facilitate and maintain high quality learning and teaching, but who also manifest those dispositions and attributes that positively distinguish their teaching in tangible ways. Exceptional teachers elevate teaching so that it is more than the manifestation of expertise or competence. (Faull, 2008, p. 13)

The professional capabilities and expectations of such teachers are clearly benchmarked in legislative and regulatory documents across a number of jurisdictions. In the Australian context, examples of such documents include the Australian Professional Standards for

Teachers (NESA, 2018) and the Quality Teaching Framework (NSW Government, n.d.).

There is another dimension that is worthy of consideration. It is not only knowledge and the mastery of strategies that determine teacher effectiveness; it is also necessary to consider *who* the teacher is as self, and the impact of this factor on student learning, including the learning environment. From this perspective, in the context of Christian education, teachers can be seen to "elevate teaching" and learning through their personal revelation of the character of God. Logically, this is based on the teacher's relationship with Jesus Christ who, when on Earth, *was* that revelation. His name is Immanuel – "God [is] with us" (*King James Version* [KJV], 1769/2017, Matthew 1:23). If, as Christian educators, we can understand more deeply the dispositions that were manifest when He taught and the impact He had on His audiences, then we are better positioned to understand the evidence and impact of the teacher who is a conduit for the manifestation of Jesus in the Christian school learning environment.

The five primary dispositional clusters covered in the DCM were derived from research in the areas of effective teaching and effective teachers; giftedness and talent; different domains of intelligence; engagement and the effective teacher; creativity and effective teachers; and dispositions and the effective teacher. Each cluster is populated by secondary dispositions that provide clarity and contribute to the overall definition and function of the clusters. In addition, a number of intensive case studies were used to test the practical application of the DCM. The five primary clusters have been given the descriptors:

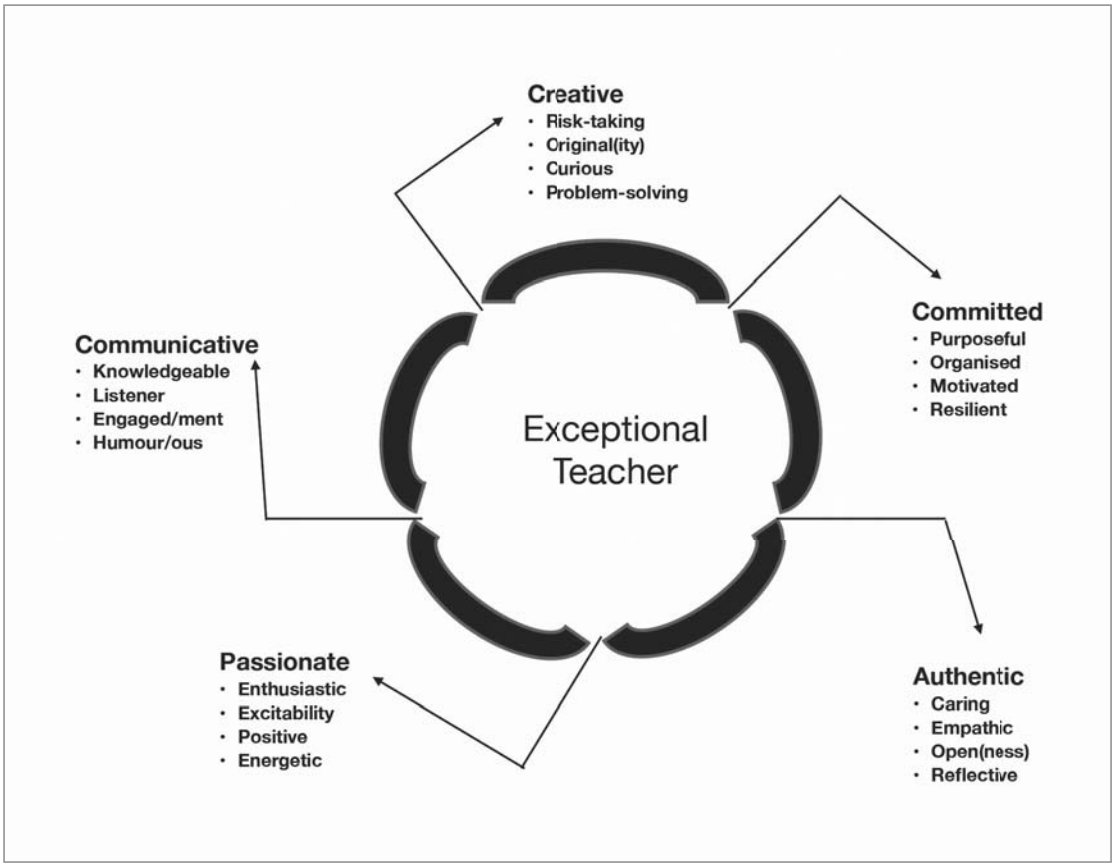
1. Committed
2. Communicative
3. Creative
4. Authentic
5. Passionate

Examples of secondary dispositions that populate each cluster can be seen in Table 2.1 over the page.

Table 2.1 Examples of Secondary Dispositions

Primary dispositional cluster	Example of secondary dispositions in each cluster
Committed	Purposeful; organised; motivated; resilient
Communicative	Knowledgeable; listen(er); engaged; humour(ous)
Creative	Risk-taking; problem-solving; curious; original
Authentic	Caring; sympathetic; open; reflective
Passionate	Enthusiastic; excitable; positive; energetic

Figure 2.1 Dispositional Clusters (Faull, 2008)



Note. Figure 2.1 illuminates the initial conceptualisation of the dispositional clusters and their relationships to each other.

Summary of the Dispositional Clusters

Committed

The primary disposition of commitment encompasses the teacher's acceptance of and dedication to a number of key areas in the learning environment including: teaching activities; student learning experiences; their [the teacher's] own personal goals, attitudes, and values, as well as those of their students; and their professional and personal growth as teachers and as individuals. In order to maintain high levels of commitment across these diverse areas of activity, effective teachers are purposeful, well-organised, highly motivated, and resilient in the face of adversity (Faull, 2008, p. 167).

Communicative

Effective teachers are knowledgeable across a broad spectrum of content and contexts, are habitually good and attentive listeners, and their engagement with teaching and learning and with their students is evident in their various styles of communication within and outside the classroom. Humour tends to be an integral part of these interactions (Faull, 2008, p. 170).

Creative

Creativity expresses itself through the teacher's enquiring and innovative approach to designing and implementing the curriculum. They tend to employ bold ways of incorporating independent thinking, learning, and problem-solving as part of their active engagement with students, which contains both experimental and risk-taking elements (Faull, 2008, p. 172).

Authentic

This cluster is evident through illustrative behaviours associated with the four secondary dispositions: caring, empathic, open(ness), and reflective. The patterns of behaviour are directed towards the achievement of a high quality of interaction and relationship between teachers and students that nurtures the totality or wholeness of their learning experience. The Authentic cluster takes into account the teaching of the whole child (Faull, 2008, p. 165).

Passionate

The Passionate cluster is distinguished by patterns of behaviour characterised by a consistently positive outlook, high involvement, and high energy. This is not simply unbridled or blind passion; rather, it is considered and rational, in that it leads to well-considered teaching practices and active student engagement. Of key significance here is the teacher's sense of enjoyment, self-assurance, and love of what they do, that drives the Passionate cluster (Faull, 2008, p.175).

The DCM is conceptualised as a dynamic system in which the primary dispositions that give their names to the five clusters interact with and strengthen each other, as do the secondary dispositions. It is proposed that if one dispositional cluster is not activated or is weak, this will negatively impact the other four clusters, and may be an indicator that remediation or professional support is required.

How the Descriptor *Passionate* is Used

In the context of the DCM, the descriptor "Passionate" refers to more than physical, emotional, or intellectual energy; it also encompasses spiritual power—that is, energy that not only emanates from within the individual but that is fuelled by a power external to itself. In Biblical terms, this power is expressed by the Greek word "*dunamis",* which is linked closely to the English word "dynamic". We find evidence of this when Jesus promises the disciples, "…you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you…" (NIV, 1973/1983, Acts 1:8).

From the perspective of Christian education, one of the most convincing Biblical examples of this conception of "passionate" can be seen in Matthew 28:19-20, when Jesus commissions His disciples to: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (*English Standard Version* [ESV], 2016). One of the most significant statements here is "I am with you always". The idea of the "I Am", Emmanuel, being with us always suggests empowerment through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Later, Jesus promises that after He leaves, the Father will send the disciples "another Helper, the Holy Spirit" (*New King James Version*

[NKJV], 1975/1982, John 14:26), and here is the empowerment of this promise: "He [the Holy Spirit] will **teach** you all things, and **bring to your remembrance** all things that I said to you."

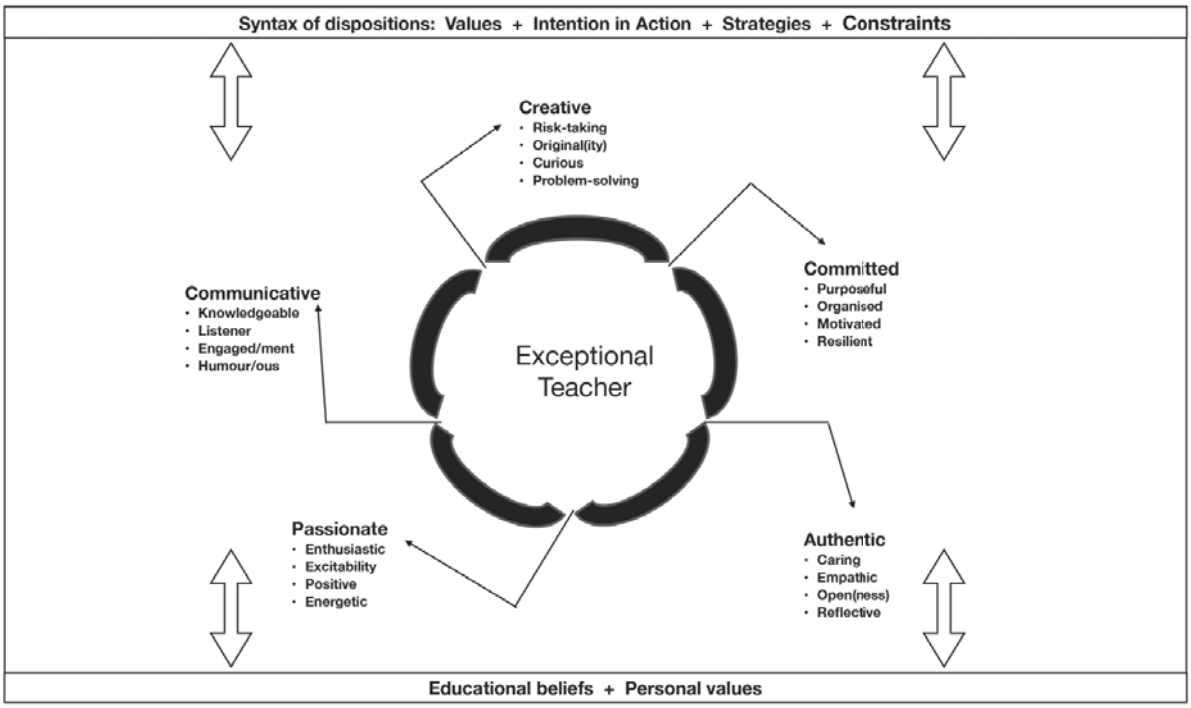
Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the neurobiological aspects of Passion, it is worth taking account of contemporary research and thought in the area of neurobiology and spiritual experience, such as that of Moll (2014) and Pretorius (2020). These scholars can offer considerable insight when we consider the dispositions of Christian teachers and their impact on students because it helps us to understand the connection between teachers and the dynamic power imbued through the Holy Spirit. This is one of the central aspects of the Passionate cluster of dispositions.

The 'Syntax of Dispositions'

While the five primary dispositional clusters (see Figure 1) provide instructive information about effective teachers, the information needs to be contextualised, and it is here that we see the use of the 'Syntax of Dispositions' proposed by Larry Freeman (2007). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of this syntax and how, together with the teacher's educational beliefs and personal values, the primary dispositional clusters and their secondary dispositions can be activated.

The syntax is not only used to contextualise the dispositional clusters but also to include the critical elements of beliefs and values. Usually, we associate syntax with language, but in this instance, syntax is used in the sense of connectedness and order, or the "harmonious arrangement of parts or elements" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, n.d.). Freeman (2007) formulates this Syntax of Dispositions as: "Constraints and possibilities of context + an intention-in-action + values to be realised + pursuing selected strategies" (p. 133). He is quick to point out that "All of these elements must be present in order for a disposition to be active and result in observable action" (p. 133). With any given educational context, there are possibilities and limitations, and the teacher needs to understand this in order to make logical, well-considered decisions that enable the activation of their dispositions.

Figure 2.2 The Extended DCM, Framed by the Syntax of Dispositions (adapted from Freeman, 2007)



Jesus's Teaching: A Look Through the Lens of the Extended DCM

An example of dispositions in action can be found in Jesus's encounter with the rich young ruler (NKJV, 1975/1982, Mark 10:17-22) who approached Jesus and knelt before Him, thus acknowledging His authority. The young ruler asked, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). The form of address, 'Good Teacher', is significant: It is an acknowledgement of Jesus's power and authority. Jesus recognised the potential of this young ruler, but He also recognised his limitations. After engaging in a brief Socratic dialogue, we are told, "Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, 'One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me'" (Mark 10:21). Then comes the constraint, the limitation dictated by choice: "But he [the young ruler] was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:22). This young ruler's intention was to have eternal life, and he recognised in Jesus, the Master Teacher, a divine power. He approached Jesus and knelt before Him. Jesus asked, "Why

do you call Me Good? No one is good but One, that is, God" (Mark 10:18). No answer to Jesus's question is recorded; this was a rhetorical question aimed at provoking the young ruler, and the listeners around him, to reflect on what Jesus was asking. Jesus was offering the young ruler an opportunity to consider his values. "Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" (Mark 10:21). Jesus gave this young man an opportunity to prioritise his values and to realise his desire to gain eternal life. Had the young ruler followed Jesus's instruction, he could have had that intention fulfilled; the choice was his, but we are told that "he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:22).

In this example, Jesus is not only engaging with the young ruler; He is also teaching His disciples. Of course, He wanted to help the young man to fulfil his desire for eternal life, but His intention in this action was also to teach His disciples a significant lesson about values. Through the action of turning his back on Jesus when admonished to "sell all you have and give to the poor" (Mark 10:21), the young ruler demonstrated that he placed greater value on his possessions than on eternal life, and could not follow Jesus because of this misplaced value.

It is interesting to note that when dialoguing with the rich young ruler and the disciples, Jesus *looked* at them; He was really looking *into* them, and saw their potential, needs, and weakness, as well as the possibilities and constraints of the situation. If we look through the lens of the DCM and apply Freeman's (2007) Syntax of Dispositions to Jesus as Rabbi in this incident, as well as to the dispositions of the Christian teacher, the following emerges:

The Constraints and Possibilities of the Context

Jesus saw the possibilities and potential of the rich young ruler in terms of salvation, but also the one constraint preventing this: The wealth and possessions of the young man, who could not give up this wealth to follow the 'Good Teacher'. Jesus also understood the constraints and possibilities pertaining to His disciples, as well as the constraints of sin, when forming a trust relationship with humanity. The disciples needed to learn to trust Jesus and to have faith in what He was teaching them; similarly, the Christian teacher sees before them a

class of children all of whom have potential, but there are constraints that may prevent that potential from being fulfilled. For example, children may be held back by negative attitudes towards learning, certain insecurities, or home issues and other forms of dysfunction. At this point, the teacher becomes a risk-taker and a carer, and despite these constraints, they forge ahead because their desire is to serve the child, and to teach them so that effective learning takes place, not only in terms of the child's knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, but also in terms of their relationship and experience with Jesus.

An Intention-In-Action

Jesus took action through Socratic dialogue with the young ruler. He invited the young man to sell everything he owned, give his money to the poor, and then follow Him. Aware of His audience and the context of this experience, Jesus's intention was also to teach His disciples. He offered eternal life, and He took further action by responding to their assumption that if someone like the rich young ruler could not be saved, then no-one could be saved. The young ruler probably experienced a strong desire to take Jesus's advice, but he was unable to follow this through with positive action because he had too much to lose in terms of material possessions. Jesus, on the other hand, was willing to give His life so that whoever believed in Him could have eternal life (John 3:16); this was His intention-in-action. For the Christian teacher, the intention-in-action is directly connected to the activation of the Committed and Authentic dispositional clusters. They reach out to the child and through prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit (the Passionate cluster), they develop a relationship of trust that leads to openness and learning.

Values to be Realised

Jesus wanted the young man, His disciples, and whoever was witnessing this event to understand the value of eternal life over the treasures of this world. His intention-in-action was to offer salvation and His teaching mission was based on the value of the love of God, rather than the love of temporal possessions. This is evident in the patterns of behaviour of the Christian teacher who, connecting every day with the Holy Spirit, demonstrates the value of love by prioritising the needs of the child over their own.

Beliefs About Teaching and Personal Values

In addition to the Syntax of Dispositions, the teacher's own beliefs about teaching and their personal values are also relevant to the activation of the DCM. The highly effective teacher not only *has* these beliefs and values, but is able to *activate* them - to embed them in the way they engage with children in the classroom and the way they manifest Jesus in the school environment. This is a critical point: If we examine the patterns of behaviour of Jesus as the Master Teacher, we can see how the activation of His educational beliefs and personal values, together with the Syntax of Dispositions, impacted the learning environment, in its broadest sense. This can be seen in the example of Jesus when, as a child, He taught the rabbis in the temple; when He taught the crowd on the side of a mountain; and when He taught Zacchaeus, the little man who is still remembered today as a result of the impact of Jesus's teaching and influence, and the transformation this brought about. The corollary to this is the application of the DCM and Jesus, as supreme example, to the Christian teacher.

It can be suggested that these observations from the examples of Jesus as Rabbi can be applied to our current Christian educational contexts. This takes into account the proposition that the teacher as self and their personal impact may be one of the most convincing ways to present Jesus in the school environment. Given that Jesus provides the divine dispositional pattern for Christian teachers, we can now examine Jesus as Master Teacher, using the DCM as a theoretical framework to guide our thinking. In this context, the Bible as a book of history will be our primary text. Different versions have been cited in order to gain clarity in our understanding of textual interpretation.

The Teacher in Partnership with Jesus: A Reflection Using the Dispositional Cluster Model

> *Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'*
>
> *She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher)."*
>
> John 20:16 (NKJV, 1975/1982)

It has been shown that highly effective teachers do not simply have values, beliefs, and intentions; they live them. The main difference between a secular view of effective teaching, as seen through the lens

of the DCM, and a study of the impact of a Christian teacher in a Christian school environment that uses the same model, is that Jesus provides the pattern of dispositions, beliefs, and values that shape not only how and what they teach - and the motivation for doing so - but also who we are as teachers. When the teacher works in partnership with Jesus, those "powerful and sensationally positive effects on the learner" referred to by Hattie (2003, p. 3) occur in even greater magnitude because of the added dimension of the example of Jesus the Rabbi, the Master Teacher, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The Communicative Cluster

In the 21st century, Jesus's teaching mission, dispositions, and teaching strategies are observable in the behaviour and practice of effective Christian teachers. Buchanan (2020) describes this phenomenon as "Christian witness" (p. 97), where such witness is both intentional and integral to the Communicative cluster of the DCM. A personal knowledge of and relationship with Jesus is clearly communicated by the teacher, and underpins strong evidence of Jesus in the learning environment. From this perspective, the teacher has knowledge that they believe is worth communicating, knowledge that exceeds that of the formal curriculum and is inextricably linked to the transformational power of Christ and Christian education.

A significant aspect of the Communicative dispositional cluster is the development of trust relationships with students via conversations, both formal and informal. This is the theme of Johnson-Miller's (2013) research. Johnson-Miller argues that "Teaching that cultivates Christian transformation requires conversation, not just as a small component in the teaching process, but conversation as the overarching pedagogical framework and catalyzing force of transformational learning" (p. 378). Certainly, Jesus had knowledge worth communicating. This knowledge – which we call *truth* - concerns life, hope, salvation, and victory over the most insidious of enemies, but it is also about relationship, kindness, and social justice. That knowledge is still fundamental to Christian education, and the Communicative cluster of dispositions facilitates the teacher as a conduit for sharing and living that '*truth*'. The Christian teacher, in partnership with Jesus, is empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak with

the voice of authority and to activate the Communicative cluster in a manner that reveals Jesus to their students.

When Jesus spoke, His students listened because they knew that He was teaching with authority, and that what He was teaching was worth hearing. The power behind that authority is reflected in the teacher who invites Jesus to be their teaching partner. Taken in this context, the Communicative cluster includes the disposition to pray for and with students, colleagues, families, and the broader school community. This is the most powerful form of communication because it connects the Christian teacher with the Divine in a partnership that provides convincing evidence of the presence of Jesus. The impact can be seen not only in terms of quality learning and learning gains but also in terms of the transformation of lives.

The ability to be a good listener is a recurring theme in the area of teaching and learning, and can be said to be an essential disposition for any teacher. Jesus *listened*. Even in His dying hour, He listened to the plea of the sinner on the cross: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (*New Living Translation* [NLT], 1996/2013, Luke 23:42). He exuded love and assurance. Similarly, the Christian teacher testifies to the peace of God and His assurance in the classroom, the playground, the staff meeting – in fact, anywhere in the school. In this way, children and peers alike know that Christ is present with them because of the evidence demonstrated by the teacher who listens to the prompting of the Spirit. They have a trusting relationship with Jesus, their partner, and develop relational trust with the children they teach, and with their school community.

The fourth representative of dispositions in the Communicative cluster is humour. When we contemplate the dispositions of Jesus, being humorous is rarely considered, yet we know that humour can overcome barriers of cynicism and uncertainty. When used appropriately, humour is a very powerful teaching tool. The humorous teacher is able to reach the student through laughter, and to dissipate tension through the wisely spoken word. Ian Paul, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, has pondered the question, "Was Jesus funny?" (2018, p. 1). Paul argues: "There are many *prima facie* reasons why we might suppose Jesus was funny. If Jesus was fully human – indeed, the perfect embodiment of humanity - then we might expect him to be funny since this is a hallmark of humanity" (p. 1). Paul's article

makes for valuable reading because it deals with an aspect of Jesus's dispositions that is rarely examined. There is logic to be discerned in his thinking when he says:

> And if Jesus is the embodiment of the divine, that might also lead us to expect him to be funny. It has been said that playfulness is the hallmark of intelligence, so we might expect the ultimate intelligence behind the universe to be ultimately playful. We get a glimpse of this in Job 38–41, where God's account of creation does focus on God's power as creator – but also on God's playfulness in the strangeness of creation. (para. 3)

When used in partnership with Jesus, a teacher's well-judged humour can be viewed as a panacea that gives evidence of Jesus in the learning environment – God created us to laugh as well as weep.

The Communicative cluster also includes the idea of voice, which refers to more than knowledge and understanding. Jesus, for example, was a voice for the voiceless in society, the voice of mercy for the poor and the suffering, for the marginalised and displaced, and for the wretched and unloved. He was and continues to be an advocate for the sinner and the child at risk alike, and He reached out to them in order to make a connection. Jesus has given Christian teachers a commission to teach and this entails being a voice for the child who needs an advocate.

The Creative Cluster

The Creative cluster is characterised by risk-taking, originality, curiosity, and problem-solving. In the context of teachers and teacher dispositions, the concept of "curiosity" has positive connotations that are associated with the desire to know and understand. Curiosity implies a questioning mind, mental acquisitiveness, and a thirst for knowledge. Jesus's teaching ministry was characterised by risk; indeed, the process of becoming incarnate was an act of remarkable risk-taking. On the cross, taking upon Himself the sins of the world, Jesus risked disconnection with God, the Father. Many times during His adult life, Jesus risked death due to accusations of insurrection and blasphemy, and He also risked rejection by those He came to seek and save. We are told: "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces He was despised, and we held him in low esteem" (NIV,

1973/1983, Isaiah 53:3). This type of risk-taking positioned Jesus not only to sympathise but also to empathise with the suffering of those He encountered in everyday experiences, and demonstrates the interconnectedness of the five DCM clusters and their components.

An interesting corollary is that Jesus understood that there is a world at risk of condemnation and failure to fulfil the potential that God created in them. The idea that Jesus's incarnation was a restorative act motivated by love implies inherent risk. In contemporary education, references are frequently made to children who are at risk in the context of school as a significant component of socio-cultural functioning. The risk here is of being lost to the positive influences of education; such children are at risk of underachieving, of never fulfilling their potential. Through deep reflection and studies of Jesus's example as Rabbi and Messiah, and through openness to the Holy Spirit who guides us to truth (see John 16:13), the Christian teacher can learn from and internalise His example. In this way, their influence can infuse the learning environment with a revelation of Christ-like dispositions that are activated through the clusters described in the DCM. This, of course, works hand-in-hand with an effective pedagogy that positions us as not only teachers but also learners. This is expressed in 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV, 1769/2017): "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Problem-solving is a significant secondary disposition of the Creative cluster. There is research, such as that of Keely et al. (2006) and Beda et al. (2020), that strongly indicates that the creative teacher seeks and sees multiple ways to solve problems that are not only associated with pedagogy but also with the complex dimension of human relationships. In the classroom, the creative teacher will draw upon differentiation to meet the learning needs of their students. In this context, Jesus drew upon numerous strategies: He engaged in meaningful discourse on a one-to-one basis with individuals such as Zacchaeus and Nicodemus, and made use of parables when teaching large groups, such as the crowd that followed Him on the mountain. Here, we can observe an overlap with the disposition to be open (Authentic cluster) to the needs of those around Him and to God's guidance. We know that He spent considerable time alone in communion with God through prayer, and we also know that prayer

and reflection are two of the most effective activities for Christian teachers to connect with Jesus as their teaching partner. The prayer life of the teacher and their openness to sharing prayer with their students is further evidence that Jesus is very much part of the school's learning environment.

The Committed Cluster

When examining Jesus's life on earth, it is evident that He was purposeful in His actions. This is very clear when he says, "...I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (KJV, 1769/2017, John 10:10). His mission can be found in John 3:16-17 (KJV, 1769/2017):

> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God came not into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

This demonstrates the highest level of purpose and commitment, not only on the part of Jesus but also the Father. Underpinning this mission is love. Love was the motivation for God to give His Son for the purpose of salvation, and for Jesus to endure the crucifixion so that we can experience salvation. Similarly, love for God and love for the students they teach motivates the Christian teacher, who has internalised the dispositional clusters modelled by Jesus, the Messiah.

The lens of the Committed cluster of dispositions enables an enriched understanding of Paul's statement: "When the Messiah was executed on the stake as a criminal, I was too; so that my proud ego no longer lives. But the Messiah lives in me, and the life I now live in my body I live by the trusting faithfulness that the Son of God had, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, *The Complete Jewish Bible*). Just as Paul reflected the love of Jesus, Messiah, so the Christian teacher reflects the love of Jesus to their students. They believe in the value and worth of each child they teach. From this example, it can be seen that the Committed cluster is closely connected to the Authentic cluster, which is characterised by caring, empathy, openness, and reflection.

Resilience is a significant secondary disposition in the Committed cluster. Beltman et al. (2018) maintain that: "Enhancing teacher

resilience can potentially increase teacher commitment" (p. 237). Jesus demonstrated spiritual resilience many times during His life. The Gethsemane experience is a powerful example of this, during which the Communicative cluster of dispositions was also activated as He prayed to the Father for the strength to carry out His will. Spiritual resilience, together with a strong sense of purpose, is activated in the life of the Christian teacher who is empowered to persevere with the difficult child or the challenging parent, or solve the worrying problem. Underpinning this is a calm, organised mind that is consistently guided by the Spirit. The impact of the Committed cluster is to imbue trust in the child and a sense of security because this teacher reflects the dispositions of Jesus.

The Authentic Cluster

The biblical record of Jesus as Rabbi demonstrates the essence of the Authentic cluster of the DCM. The descriptor "*authentic*" refers to the notion that 'what you see is what you get'. There is no evidence of pretence in the life of Jesus; He presents as a teacher who is open, caring, and empathic; the "I am" statements He made, as recorded in the Bible, convincingly show this. When Jesus stated "I am the way and the truth and the life", as recorded in John 14:6 (NIV, 1973/1983), He was drawing on the Authentic cluster of dispositions. This can be seen when He comforted His disciples after telling them He would be returning to be with the Father, and when He responded to Thomas's question, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (NIV, 1973/1983, John 14:5). Each event revealed His spiritual role and His authenticity. This is reinforced by the statement, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (KJV, 1769/2017, John 10:10). There are many instances in Jesus's teaching ministry where He demonstrated deep caring and compassion. Matthew 9 (KJV, 1769/2017) provides further evidence of the activation of Jesus's Authentic cluster. He had insight into the faith of the friends who brought to Him the man, sick with palsy (Matthew 9:2), and He cared about those who needed His healing power, as seen in the way He interacted with the man named Matthew (Matthew 9:9). He was open to the touch of faith from the woman who had been suffering a blood disease for 12 years (Matthew 9:20-22), and He showed great compassion and mercy to the ruler and his dying daughter (Matthew 9:24-25). Blind men and those in dire

need, such as the mute man who was possessed by demons (see Mark 5), were drawn to Jesus because of His authenticity; He was the light of the world, the Master Teacher who was and continues to be open to the needs of all humanity.

In each example, Jesus uses people's physical needs to teach them spiritual lessons. His teaching was transcendent and included the important element of reflection, as He led individuals to consider the deeper question of faith and their relationship with God. This is a key point in the context of the Christian school environment. As a result of having activated the Authentic dispositional cluster, the Christian teacher is able to gain insight into the deeper needs of their students. This is achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit, who Jesus promised would guide us in our thinking, decision-making, actions, and the way we relate to our students. This correlates with the work of Howard Gardner (2008, 2020) and the theory of multiple intelligences, particularly the areas of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential intelligence, while it also adds a Christian dimension to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. In that document, Maria Siwak (2018) states, "As educators, we are committed to life-long learning and we aim to ignite passion and curiosity in our students" (p. 3). This connects smoothly with the Passionate cluster of the DCM.

The Passionate Cluster

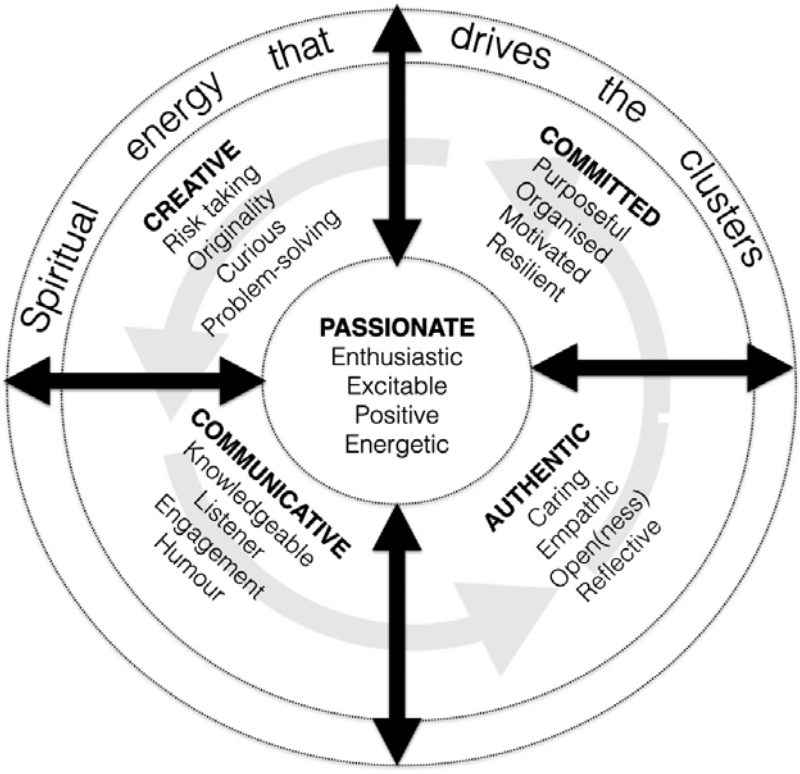
In the context of the DCM, "*passion*" is defined as the psychic or spiritual energy that drives the dispositional cluster. The Passionate cluster is characterised by secondary dispositions such as enthusiastic, energetic, excitable, and positive, but if it is to function effectively, there must also be an acknowledgement of the importance of peace, rest, stillness, reflection, and connection with a power source that transcends self. In the context of Christian education and an environment where Jesus is manifest, that source of transcendence is the working of the Holy Spirit. In order to better understand the Passionate cluster, it is important to know how the language of this cluster of the DCM has been used.

The statement "Teachers who change lives are invariably characterised by their passion and their enthusiasm" (Day, 2004, p. 59) resonates strongly with the research of Hattie (2015) and Kottler et al. (2005), who maintain that "Passionately committed teachers are

those who absolutely love what they do" (p. 149). This idea was later iterated by Yin et al. (2019).

The use of the DCM as a lens for examining how Jesus can be manifest through teachers in the Christian school environment leads to a reconsideration of the function of the Passionate cluster in relation to the other four dispositional clusters. This is particularly true when we take into account the idea that it includes the notion of transcendence, a dynamic that connects the individual to a power external to self, that power being the Holy Spirit. The idea of being energised by this power suggests the need for a further emphasis on the relationship between the Passionate cluster and the other four dispositional clusters in the model: Creative, Committed, Authentic, and Communicative. This new approach is represented in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 The Modified DCM, Designed to Reflect the Place of the Passionate Cluster in the Context of the Christian School Environment (adaptation of Faull, 2008)



The secondary dispositions that populate the Passionate cluster may seem to be hyper in nature, but it could equally be argued that this is not the case. They can manifest in a controlled, measured

manner that is not restricted to emotions but also relates to motivation and relational engagement. There is much clarity in what Paul states: "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline" (NIV, 1973/1983, 2 Timothy 1:17) – and this strengthens the argument for placing the Passionate cluster at the centre of the DCM, when we examine the dispositions of the Christian teacher as proof that one is reflecting Jesus in the learning environment. In their research paper *The Dispositions towards Loving Pedagogy*, Yin et al. (2019) propose that the "pedagogy of love" or "loving pedagogy" (p. 2) comprises nine aspects, "each of which links directly to three fields of psychology, religion, and philosophy" (p. 2). These nine aspects are: passion, kindness, empathy, intimacy, bonding, sacrifice, forgiveness, acceptance, and community. All aspects fit effectively into the five clusters of the DCM. Kindness, empathy, intimacy, and bonding, for example, meld well with the secondary dispositions in the Authentic cluster; sacrifice and forgiveness could be placed into the Committed cluster; and acceptance and community, which are relational, are consistent with both the Authentic and Communicative clusters. Yin et al. conceptualise the role of passion in terms of balancing "the ideal of love" (p. 2) and suggest that of the many definitions of passion, one of the simplest – "the pleasure found in doing something" (p. 22) - may be the most effective. The language used in their article to describe passion aligns closely with the Committed and Authentic clusters of the DCM. Given the context of the Christian school environment and evidence of Jesus's presence, this love of pedagogy is seen to be embedded in the practice of the effective Christian teacher, and is manifest in overt patterns of behaviour that are in keeping with all five clusters of the DCM.

From the perspective of the modified DCM (see Figure 3), we can see that Jesus epitomises the Passionate cluster. The etymology of "passion" takes us back to the Latin *pati*, Late Latin *Passio*, and Middle English *passion*, and is associated with suffering and endurance, particularly that of Christ leading up to the crucifixion. The subsequent nuances and changes in context have meant that the word has taken on different meanings. Rachel Weisbrot (2018) discusses this in an informative blog where she states that "…one can see how *passion* has gradually but significantly evolved from an explicitly religious term concerning suffering to the modern equivalent of *enthusiasm* or *love"* (para. 2). If we synthesise the original meaning

with the definition used in the DCM, we can see the richness of this primary disposition and why it can be interpreted as being central to the DCM. Jesus's passionate sacrifice motivates our enthusiasm, energy, and overt positivity as we take on the role of disciple and servant. The motivation for Christian teaching operates at two levels: The first is to effectively teach students so that they experience quality learning, and the second is to reveal Jesus and facilitate a relationship with Him.

Jesus's example clearly demonstrates that He was passionate about teaching and about revealing His Father to those with whom He engaged. This is evident in passages of Scripture such as the prayer for His disciples, found in John 17:25-26 (NIV, 1973/1983):

> Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

The corollary is that Christian teachers reveal Jesus in the learning environment. Jesus connected to His Father through prayer, reflection, and teaching about Him, and in the same way, the Christian teacher connects to God through prayer, reflection, and following the example of the Master Teacher. Activated through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Communicative cluster draws the teacher into engagement with their students, to listen to student feedback and the expression of their needs. The activation of the Creative cluster of dispositions enables the teacher to take risks in order to meet those needs, and the Committed cluster adds motivation, purpose, and the essential secondary disposition of resilience, which provides staying power for the challenges of teaching. Following the example and teaching of Jesus, the Authentic cluster is activated so that the teacher is able to mirror the caring, empathy, and openness so lovingly demonstrated by Him. Finally, at a time when there is so much to sap their physical, emotional, and spiritual energies, the Passionate cluster is activated to energise and uplift the Christian teacher. The secondary dispositions that indicate excitement and spiritual energy come from connection with God, through the Holy Spirit.

It is in partnership with Jesus and through the working of the Holy Spirit that effective Christian teachers are able to activate these

dispositions. They reflect the patterns of behaviour Jesus modelled as the Master Teacher, are motivated by the same beliefs, and are imbued with the same enduring values as Jesus. Hand-in-hand, they walk the paths of the learning environment, changing the lives of children.

Concluding Remarks

We are living in one of the most challenging times in the history of our world; a time of rapid change where education is required to foster independent, creative, and critical thinking. It is a time of knowledge explosion, when students are exposed to so much information that they frequently "switch off" in order to cope; a time when that "still, small voice" seems to be drowned in a malaise of freneticism, competition, and fear; and a time that calls for teachers who not only have the prerequisite expertise and knowledge to positively impact student learning but who also are able to activate the dispositions revealed by Jesus, the Master Teacher, in a Christian learning environment that speaks not only to the development of the mind but also to that of the character.

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