

St Andrew's Cathedral School's Teaching Christianly Framework

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Abstract

This article seeks to outline the challenges faced in developing and implementing the *Teaching Christianly Framework* to an established, elite Sydney independent school. The success of its implementation has relied on strong strategic alignment to the school's mission and vision as well as building capacity with mid-career staff to work with Heads of Department who tend to be gatekeepers of change. Evidence based research and academic partnerships have allowed the project to be sustained and gain momentum throughout the process.

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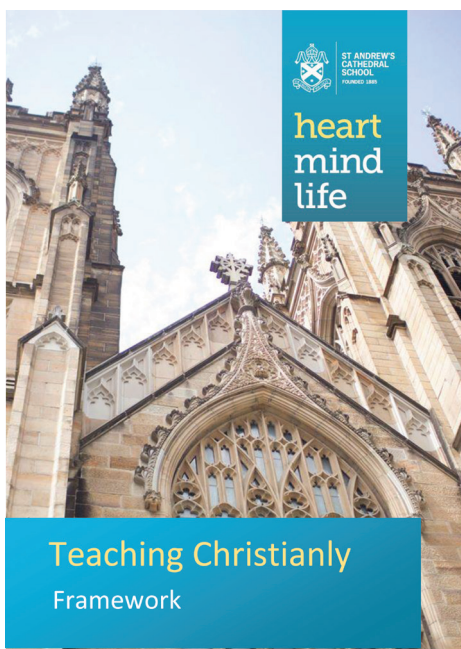


Figure 1: Policy documentation introduced TCF.

The Teaching Christianly Framework¹ (TCF, see Figure 1), the first teaching framework to be developed at St Andrew's Cathedral School, was launched to staff in January 2016². A teaching

framework seeks to inform and shape educational practices within a school across all Key Learning Areas. The framework is an outworking of the mission and vision of the school and is articulated in the school's strategic plan.

As Richard Edlin states, “All education is philosophically committed (ie., religious) as it seeks to nurture students in a manner consistent with the beliefs, reality perspectives and practices of its key stakeholders and curriculum designers” (Edlin, 2014b, p. i). If there is no neutrality in education, then it is important that St Andrew's, as a Christian school, is clear about its educational philosophy as a distinctly Christian institution.

The framework seeks to provide practical and clear approaches to Christian education for faculties and teachers. The framework outlines four broad aims (God's world, God's views, God's word and God's values) which sit on the wider biblical foundation of God's story (Creation, Humanity, The Fall, Redemption, and Restoration, see Figure 2).

Building a Vision

The framework unpacks each aim in light of

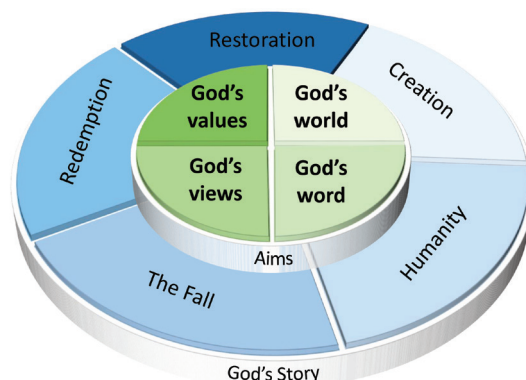


Figure 2: Four broad TCF aims emerge from five biblical elements of God's Story

¹ http://sacsconnect.sacs.nsw.edu.au/images/b/b2/TCF_v2.1.pdf

² St Andrew's has a second teaching framework called the Challenging Learning Framework launched in January 2017 which focusses on learning analytics.

God's story to assist in developing faculty vision statements for each department and to be incorporated into Scope and Sequences and programs. A program development template, professional development and support structures are also outlined within the document.

The development and implementation of the framework required considerable change leadership. This involved developing a culture of change linked to the strong mission and vision of the school. It was important in the launching of the *TCF* in January 2016, that staff were strongly supportive of the school's core purposes. During 2015, School Council reviewed the school mission and vision in developing the new strategic plan. Through numerous forms of consultation, the following were adopted:

Mission: St Andrew's Cathedral School is a leading city based, globally connected learning community which is authentically Christian.

Vision: Our vision is to inspire students to be passionate, creative learners, who engage with the message of Christ and fully develop their gifts and abilities in order to serve in the world.

The consultations in the development of the mission and vision were realised when the Parent and Staff Surveys conducted in 2016, showed that 85% of parents and 95% of staff strongly supported the mission, vision and values of the School.

Eighteen months of consultation occurred with School Chaplains, a working party of ten Christian staff, a wider group of thirty Christian staff, Leaders of Learning (Heads of Department) and School Council. Critical friend of the project, Dr Richard Edlin, the author of *The Cause of Christian Education* and I launched the *TCF* to staff in January 2016 to K-12 staff at a professional development day. During that previous 18 month

period, the Framework drew on input from meetings with other external consultants such as Professor Trevor Cooling³, John Shortt⁴ and Beth Green⁵.

Through these consultations, it became clear that the principles of the *TCF* were a core part of the school's mission and vision. As reminded by Collins and Porras (2011), core purpose "is the organisation's reason for being" (p. 85) which guides and inspires. It is meaningful to those inside the organisation as it inspires them to action. If this is accepted and embraced by staff, then this provides clarity of decision making, as everything which is not part of the core purpose should be part of the change process. It has been a happy opportunity that as the school finished debating its vision, the staff began, through the *TCF*, to develop their own aligned faculty vision statements.

From Vision to Alignment

As Collins and Porras (2011, p. 101) also state, "building a visionary company [or school] requires 1% vision and 99% alignment." This movement from vision to strategy was very important for the *TCF* to be successful (see Figure 3). When the draft *TCF* was presented to Leaders of Learning, they were each asked to recommend a member of their department who could act as a Christian Integrator on this project. This Christian Integrator's role was to work with the Leader of Learning and the department to develop a Teaching Christianly faculty vision and trail blaze the development of

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⁵ Program Director of Cardus Education and was previously part of the international research team that developed What If Learning website (<http://www.whatiflearning.com/>). She previously directed the National Centre for Christian Education at Liverpool Hope University

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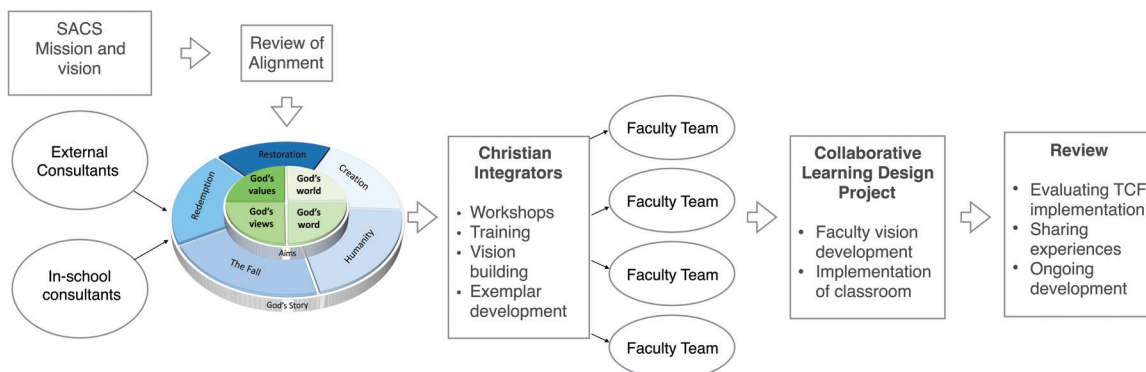


Figure 3: Development of the Teaching Christianly Framework

teaching programs which incorporate the Teaching Christianly aims.

The opportunity to be appointed as a Christian Integrator was vital in providing staff, who would not normally have a leadership role, to work on a strategic change project with a coordinator. In recent years, change management literature has noted a movement away from the notion of the charismatic leader to that of distributed leadership and shared leadership. New models of leadership practice have seen a need to build leadership capacity in schools – it is the pursuit of “engaging many people in leadership activity” (Bridges 1995, p. 8). Effective leadership is the product of debate, dialogue and discussion that results in action rather than a set of leadership tasks, responsibilities or functions that is carried out or is given. Harris (2005) sees leadership not as a set of skills but as “an organisational resource that can be maximised” (p. 8). This empowerment of others to lead provided much of the energy needed for the implementation of the TCF.

Time must always be found for collaboration and professional development for a change effort to be successful. Each semester, faculties work on a Collaborative Learning Design Project (CLDP). In terms of Teaching Christianly, this meant that faculties worked through the facilitation of the Christian Integrator to develop their Teaching Christianly vision statement and identify how that vision assists in developing a unit of work which addresses one or more of the Teaching Christianly aims. This not only provided insights but, through their own enthusiasm, encouraged dialogue throughout the school. The distributed leadership has allowed for many conversations to be had at varying levels of the school on the change progress. This has allowed for greater dialogue and sense of trust in moving forward. Additionally, the CLDP was registered with the National Education Standards Authority (NESA) as a school accredited course, which gave the project a perceived legitimacy.

Change affects the beliefs that are important to people, which is why some change efforts can be difficult. “As a manager, you must guide people through this exercise with understanding and sensitivity” (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, p. 3). While leadership may be distributed, it can be ineffective if it does not resonate with people’s core beliefs and purposes. Fullan, Cutters and Kilcher (2005) state that people need to understand the purpose of change. This is linked to its moral purpose. “Moral purpose in educational change is about improving society through improving educational systems and thus the learning of all citizens” (p. 54). It was

important throughout this process and subsequent professional development at St Andrew’s to keep linking the framework to the School’s mission and vision as well as having the Head of School enthusiastically commit to it at staff meetings and briefings for as Edlin (2014a, p. 261) states, “to promote change, PD should tap into teachers’ core values.” It was also important to reinforce that this framework was accessible by staff from a range of religious backgrounds and, to some extent, those who were not Christian at all. The message that was constantly shared with staff was that the school upholds Christian principles and those principles must come through in all we do, including our curriculum.

Building on the development of vision comes the development of strategy. Through effective strategy, educational leaders can deliberately and purposefully align the organisational structure to its vision and purpose. Strategy “focusses on the creation of meaning and purpose for the organisation and provides an analytic framework to guide managerial practice” (Eacott, 2007, p. 359). Strategy provides for consistency and alignment. The Christian Integrators meet each term for a half day workshop to review how the framework is developing and how it is being incorporated into different parts of the school and reflect on how they are adding to the framework with their own faculty vision statements and teaching exemplar units. The group has strategic conversations, building on critical reflection and establishing purpose for actions. The group has begun to explore data on its implementation, by using electronic registers at the end of units of work where teachers indicate how they are implementing the framework into their programs. This opportunity to share experiences, resources and feedback, allows the Christian Integrators to see their contributions to the change effort and have increased ownership in the entire process.

Taking Others on the Journey

Middle management leaders in schools (such as faculty heads and year coordinators) are the gatekeepers of successful change. As they are leaders of teams of staff in schools, they can either be advocates for change process or advocates for status quo. The successful management of this group is essential for effecting successful change efforts in a school. As Stoll and Brown (2015, p. 1) indicate, “middle leaders can often be the most effective drivers of evidence-informed change and should be harnessed to do so.” The CLDP has provided Christian Integrators to work beside Leaders of Learning in developing vision statements

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and incorporating Christian aims into programs. By providing time and opportunity for Leaders of Learning to have rich discussions on the vision for their department, this has provided buy-in for them in the project and for the teams they lead.

Having the faculty Christian Integrators work alongside their Leaders of Learning has been a powerful process. The Leader of Learning works in partnership with their fellow faculty member. The fact that the Christian Integrator is a trusted member of the team is vital. As Bridges (1995) states, engaging people in change is a matter of trust. “When people trust their manager, they’re likely to undertake a change even if it scares them.” (p. 78). Developing trust is vital, both in relationships between teachers and leaders but also those between teachers. Christian Integrators and other Christian staff have been affirmed in their work on this project by the mentoring of chaplaincy staff and visits over the last two years by experts in this field such as John Shortt, Beth Green, Trevor Cooling, Ruby Holland and Richard Edlin. The latter two have served as critical friends over the last year, working with Christian Integrators on how to effectively lead the project in their faculties. The use of experts to facilitate the collaboration between Christian Integrators in different subjects and parts of the school has helped transform the knowledge that they have, into explicit knowledge that they share. Having the staff exposed to research in this area allows them to see it as a useful perspective on practice.

Evidence is also crucial to develop trust in the framework. Staff are beginning to use end of unit electronic registers to record how the *TCF* is being implemented in units of work and to what extent some aims are implemented more frequently than others. For research and evidence based collaboration to be meaningful, time and place to plan needs to be carefully resourced. Additionally, teachers need to be provided with opportunities to make connections with research partners and other critical friends. “Collaborations between practitioners and researchers potentially can make a real difference to students’ learning experiences and outcomes” (Stoll, 2015, p. 6). These practices also need to be sustainable so that the change that is intended and effected is built to last. This has been the case at St Andrew’s where professional learning has been implemented through the role of collaborative research groups, of which the *TCF* is one area. Teacher teams not only develop a Teaching Christianly rationale/vision and implement the aims in programs, but they also use research, collect data and present their findings to their colleagues. This allows for teachers to explore professional learning that is relevant, meaningful and shared with others.

Conclusion

The development and implementation of the *TCF* has meant distributing leadership effectively amongst influential teams and team members to have maximum effect throughout the school. Without this, the task would have been insurmountable. The project has required the effort to be sustainable by considering the school environment. It has been critical to align the project to the school’s new mission and vision in order to convince staff of the project’s moral purpose.

The journey has not been without its challenges and has involved many hours of consultation and numerous revisions to the *TCF*. Aligning the comprehensive nature of the Bible to four aims and God’s story has been very demanding but also extremely rewarding. Every conversation has added more and more clarity to this framework which seeks to integrate the Christian worldview in accessible, significant and relevant ways in all areas of curriculum and stages of education.

Collins (2001) states that it is important to create a culture of genuine respect, trust and credibility, noticing the contributions of others – both real and potential. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) indicate that in their study “more than three-quarters of teachers who demonstrated sustained commitment said that good leadership helped them sustain their commitment over time” (p. 60). In deciding who was going to be critical to sustaining this change effort, it was decided that middle management as well as Christian Integrators who were mid career teachers were the ones who were key change agents. Mid career teachers are characterised by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) as having less frustration, being more aware, more tolerant, calmer, able to laugh, willing to try new things, confident, open and questioning (p. 71). Change efforts seem most likely to be supported by these groups. These staff have been constantly engaged in the change process and given a voice and opportunities to lead and contribute.

The *TCF* continues to be implemented in 2017 with more faculties developing rationale/vision statements and units of work implementing the aims. The framework continues to develop as more voices are involved in the discussion, and evaluation shows how the framework is being implemented. Reflections include surveying the Christian Integrators involved, having termly workshops and plenary time, as well as introducing electronic registers at the end of units of work for staff to indicate which parts of the framework they have taught in the unit of work and describing examples. These show the Christian Integrators developing greater confidence in their leadership role and its

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Educational Administration

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impact in their faculties, as well as the various ways the framework is being implemented across the school.

We continue to explore how the TCF is consistently implemented across the school, how we induct new staff members, how it aligns closely with the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile, and how it acknowledges Aboriginal culture and spirituality. The last factor is important to St Andrew's as we have an Aboriginal school on campus, called Gawura. Dealing with all these challenges will require further partnerships with other schools as we learn from their experiences in these areas. What remains clear is that ongoing prayer, alignment with the school's Christian mission and vision, coupled with creativity, persistence and a focus on building relationships through trust and acknowledgement are vital to the future of the framework.

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Brad Swibel Biography

Brad Swibel is Deputy Head of School of St Andrew's Cathedral School, a coeducational Anglican day school of over 1250 students situated in two high rise buildings in the heart of Sydney's CBD. In 2016, he launched the Teaching Christianly Project across the entire school.