
THE DAYTON AGENDA

BEYOND TRANSMISSIONAL PEDAGOGIES IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: ONE SCHOOL'S RECASTING OF VALUES EDUCATION

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This article presents the efforts of one Christian school to counteract secular societal norms and foster Christian values in its students. Anecdotal observations led to an empirical study to ascertain students' thinking about values. In turn, the study results led to the school staff taking specific actions to address the realities discovered in the empirical study. These actions include movement from pedagogies of transmission to pedagogies of participation and transformation.

Those who seek to implant religion in Australian culture have historically struggled to succeed. O'Farrell says: "What is most significant historically about Australian religion is its weakness" (O'Farrell, 1976, p. 67). O'Farrell speaks of Christianity's tenuous and intermittent hold on the minds and hearts of the Australian people and its peripheral or subordinate relation to their main concerns.

The introduction of Christianity to Australia, initially through the Church of England, was part of the infrastructure of a British Convict colony established just more than 200 years ago. Because many early clergy were also magistrates, the convicts felt considerable alienation towards religion (Clark, 1969; Ward, 1970), many of whom were Irish Catholics or non-conformist Protestants. Further, the association of religion with the upper classes, who often cynically employed religion as an instrument of social oppression,

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deeply penetrated the Australian psyche (Clark, 1969; Ward, 1970). Thus, despite the considerable contribution to Australian society and culture by people of Christian faith, Australia has in fact always been a very secular nation (Clark, 1969).

This "tenuous hold" defines the central feature of the historical-spiritual context in which Christian Schools in Australia are located. Hence, Australian Christian teachers with a sense of Christian mission typically seek to communicate their message to a student and parent body that, in the main, reflects the long-held Australian suspicion of religion. A major challenge, then, confronting schools that seek to evangelize students and promote Christian values is finding a way to ensure that Christian teaching penetrates a culture largely devoid of manifestations of, or interest in, religion or spirituality (Brierley, 2001).

In the context of an essentially secularized society, and despite the best efforts and intentions of Christian educators, Christian education often appears to make little difference to the 'real life' attitudes and behaviors of students. One potential reason for this apparent lack of efficacy lies in the pedagogical approaches taken by at least some Christian educators (Cooling, 1994c). Specifically, pedagogies that focus on the transmission of Christian beliefs rather than on more active and inductive approaches to Christian education fail to address underlying values, and thus typically fail to engage the allegiance of students within and beyond the walls of the classroom (Skillen, 2000). Moreover, transmissional models also fail to engage students in religious exploration and thus in the exploration of "real-life" issues pertaining to faith and faithful values (Cooling, 2000).

An essential feature of transmissional models is the simple didactic impartation of 'correct' values through a largely conceptual and theoretical, rather than a participatory, pedagogy. This methodology does little to engage the student either cognitively or affectively, and so students remain the largely benign recipients of instruction. Similarly, transmissional models make little attempt to relate what teachers or school authorities often see as immutable values to the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary society and culture, and the resultant complex thought-worlds of students (Maple, 1997). For these reasons we suggest that the pedagogical limitations of transmissional models of Christian education represent a central potential reason for the limited impact of Christian schools on the spiritual formation and reformation of their students.

The (Lack of) Impact of Christian Schools

Astill (1998) indicates on the basis of extensive research surveys, that Christian schools in Australia have little impact on the values held by their students. His research quantifies students' responses across a range of beliefs and behaviors comprising their personal value systems. Astill indicates that the fundamental determinant of personal values is clearly the home and that these home-values are the ones that students bring to the classroom. Interestingly, Astill found very little difference between the values of Christian students in Christian schools compared with those of Christian students in secular schools and, similarly, between the values of non-believers across both types of schools. This student similarity was replicated in the values held by Christian and non-believing parents, irrespective of the type of school attended by their child, and by believing and non-believing teachers, whether they taught in a Christian or secular school. 2

Perhaps most significantly, Astill's (1998) study highlights the apparent inability of Christian schools to affect the values of their non-believing students over time, such that these values remained largely indistinguishable and unchanged from values held by non-believing students in secular schools. Across the sample of 374 non-believers in Christian schools and 382 non-believers in secular schools in South Australia, Astill found the 'value' rated most highly by both groups was hedonism, followed by self-direction, benevolence, personal achievement, and spirituality. Only in the case of the latter value was there a significant difference between groups. However, both non-believing students from Christian schools and secular schools assigned spirituality a low position in their hierarchy of important values.

Possible Explanations

One likely explanation for the apparent lack of impact of Christian schools on the values of their students lies in the pedagogical approaches commonly used by teachers in Christian schools. Macnaught (1995) investigated the nature and status of transmissional pedagogical models commonly relied on to teach values in Christian schools. Macnaught contends that the transmission model of faith enculturation, which has provided the pedagogical

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 basis of religious education for generations in church- and faith-based schools and wherein the values and tenets of Christianity are passed on by didactic classroom teaching, is demonstrably ineffective in contemporary, "post-modern" sociocultural contexts. In particular, he argues that: "post-modern youth culture is highly resistant to transmission models of values education, but quite open to the spiritual dimensions of life" (Macnaught, 1995, p. 2). Amongst the most important impediments preventing a transmission model from working effectively in a post-modern context are new ways of thinking about the world typically adopted by young people. These 'new' (typically non-linear and experiential) ways of thinking lead to the rejection of 'old' (typically linear and conceptual) modes of thinking in general, and old modes of thinking about values in particular. Thus, classroom processes that attempt to transmit values often fail because these models inhibit teachers from penetrating the underlying *thought-worlds* of the young.

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 In addition, the transmission model can fail to engage *schools* and *teachers* in deep values exploration. Macnaught (1995) argues that schools themselves are often tokenistic about their own values. Macnaught contends that in many church schools, religion is domesticated to support the 'real' values upheld by such schools (i.e., the values of the market place) with public religious values statements to the contrary being largely superficial and disingenuous.

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 If such a trenchant critique has substance, Macnaught (1995) provides one clear explanation as to why some schools with an apparent religious base fail to pass on Christian beliefs and values: they simply do not want to. However, this explanation does not account for the failure of schools that *are* genuine in wishing to inculcate Christian beliefs and values to reach that goal through transmissional models. Thus, a wider explanation is needed, and for Skillen (2000), the explanation is that a transmission model simply does not work at all in the values domain. Instead Nisan (2000) argues that moral values arise in the context of egalitarian relationships that foster reciprocity and that young people shift their value positions in the light of these relationships. Thus, conceptualizing students as passive recipients of moral instruction (as is the case with the transmissional model) is highly unlikely to result in values change.

Maple (1997) makes the same point from a cognitive rather than a social-relational perspective. Maple argues that transmission

models do not offer a pedagogy that is likely to penetrate student thinking with respect to a student base that has little *conceptual* familiarity with Christian concepts. Maple (1997, see also Cooling, 1994a, 2000) argues that where many young people are two generations away from the church and its associated Christian worldview, it is unrealistic to expect that anything other than extended, purposeful contact can lead to enduring faith commitments. Superficial attempts by schools to effect real change in students will, therefore, be cognitively and conceptually ineffective—as well as being socially and relationally ineffective. 6

Cooling (2000) is similarly critical of the pedagogical failures of transmission models of religious education teaching that, in failing to make cognitive (and affective) connections between the study of religion and its values base and the interests and experience of students, contributes to active *resistance* to learning about religion and the development of unnecessarily negative reactions towards Christianity. This alienation is often aided by a lack of progression in the cognitive sophistication of religious education as students move through their schooling. In so far as religious education fails to make *progressive* intellectual, personal, or emotional demands, it also struggles to hold the interest of students. 7

Finally, Lambert (2001) adds that in order to substantially effect what students think and believe, teachers need to assist students to develop a faith perspective on popular culture that captures the imagination of students for a better future, embodies more than materialism and nihilistic play, and engages young people with a sense of belonging and community. Only under these circumstances, Lambert argues, will students be able to consistently frame real-world applications of otherwise abstracted Christian ideas and concepts. Similarly, Maple (1997) argues that young people need clear teaching concerning the relationship of faith to contemporary culture in order to equip them to critically evaluate cultural norms, and hence to form their own—yet Biblically based—values relevant to today's society.

The Present Study

This study explores the apparent pedagogical limitations of a transmissional model of Christian education in one school context. This study also explores some initial attempts by the school in

question at developing an engaging alternative to the transmissional model. This 'transformational' model, which is in its initial stages of implementation, differs from the transmissional model in that it seeks the active participation of students in the process of belief and values formation. This alternative model also endeavors to form links between a Christian ethical framework and popular culture, assisting students to critique popular culture from the standpoint of a Christian worldview.

The Research Context

Despite the apparent ineffectiveness and inappropriateness of transmissional pedagogical models in Christian education, they are notoriously hard to dislodge. Three possible reasons for this intransigence are:

- 1) transmissional models have been historically preferred in Australian Christianity (and in Christianity more widely);
- 2) transmissional models are typical in Western education (despite recent moves towards more active and participatory educational models); and
- 3) there are very few 'concrete' examples of alternatives to transmissional models extant in Christian education or education more widely.

This study does not address the first two points; however it does address the third. Specifically, this article presents an example of one school that has:

- 1) experienced difficulties transforming students' attitudes and behavior—despite the expressed Christian commitment of teachers and of many of the students involved;
- 2) gathered evidence in the form of student evaluations that documents the apparent disjuncture between students' expressed beliefs and their related values and reported behaviors; and
- 3) based on evidence gathered, begun to transform its approach to Christian education so that this approach reflects a much more active, applied and investigative educational philosophy and pedagogy.

With respect to the last two points, this article is arranged around an empirical study and a description of the school's educational response to data gathered from this study.

School Setting

St. Paul's Grammar School, Penrith, in its 25th year of existence, is an independent, interdenominational, kindergarten to year 12 Christian school comprising 1350 students and located in the western suburbs of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. These suburbs are largely dormitory suburbs for working and middle class families, many with strong aspirations towards an improved lifestyle for their children. Such families typically regard education as a key to achieving entry into careers that will deliver their children substantial material benefits and an improvement in social status.

St. Paul's student body is socioeconomically diverse, but as a moderate fee-charging school, tends to draw mostly on families with a professional, trade, or small business ownership background. School surveys indicate that approximately 25% of enrolling families regularly attend church, a figure well above the average 4% of Australians in Protestant churches each Sunday (National Christian Life Survey, 2007), but still a minority of the school's enrollment base.

There is considerable denominational divergence amongst the families active in Christian churches, including evangelical Anglicans (the Australian form of the Church of England), Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics and Anglo-Catholics, and Charismatics and Pentecostals. Developing a coherent Christian education program that resonates with these greatly varied traditions, and elicits support from parents with strong denominational loyalties, presents as a considerable challenge for the school.

While the school has no religious tests of entry for students and accepts those of any or no faith, it expects its staff to be active members of a Christian faith community. The school is evangelistic in intent, seeking that students should "know Him in whom dwells all the fullness of God" (Colossians 1:19). However, the school's intent has not always been fully realized in practice.

Empirical Study

Purpose

In response to anecdotal evidence that the school's Christian education programs were not having a substantial impact on students' beliefs, values and subsequent actions, a decision was made at senior levels within the school to survey a sample of students in order to quantify students' maintenance of ethical standards consistent with Christian beliefs, experience of positive affective states, and completion of behaviors that might reasonably be conceptualized as outcomes of students' beliefs, standards and affect. The specific purpose of this survey was to generate empirical data relating to the ethics, related emotions and subsequent behaviors of students that, in turn, might provide a basis for further investigations of the impact of the school's educational philosophy and practices on students' faith development.

Participants

Participants in the study were 110 year 8 students attending the school. The sample comprised 59 males, 50 females, and one student who did not specify a gender. Most students were age 13 years and, in the context of the New South Wales schooling system, were in their second year of high school. These students have entered elementary education in kindergarten, approximately age 5 years, and have experienced an education emphasizing the development of literacy and numeracy. Some attention will also have been paid to the sciences, social sciences, creative arts, technology, physical and health education, and, depending on their particular school background, students will have received possibly limited exposure to foreign languages. Many would have experienced minimal exposure to religious education.

Of this sample, 90 students had attended St. Paul's for their 2 years thus far completed of high school (i.e., year 7 and year 8). Almost all ($n = 101$) students were born in Australia; nine students were born elsewhere. In their brief high school experience, students in the sample had experienced teaching in the same learning areas as noted previously, with the addition of an introductory Christian Education program focused around Jesus' parables.

For the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, history, geography and Christian living, students had been taught by a generalist teacher in mixed gender classes, grouped according to ability, and utilizing technology to deliver curriculum content. Specialist teachers had provided brief exposure to music, visual arts, drama, food technology, textiles and design, wood and metal techniques, physical and health education and languages other than English.

A total of 44 students reportedly "never" attended church, and 33 attended "a few times a year" only. Ten students reported that they attended church once a month, 7 attended almost every week, and 15 were present at church on a weekly basis. One respondent did not answer this question. Clearly, for most students, school rather than church would appear to be a more likely source of formation of Christian knowledge and values.

Measure

The Attitudes and Values Questionnaire (AVS) designed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (ACER, 2002) was administered, with the permission of parents, to the entire Year 8 cohort present on the designated survey date. The AVS consists of six dimensions: conscience, compassion, emotional growth, social growth, service of others, and commitment to God. Each dimension (Table 1 shows a sample item representing each dimension) comprised 17 to 20 propositions, to which students were required to make a response across the range of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, or not applicable. The survey has been pre-tested to establish its validity and reliability,

TABLE 1 Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) Values Survey

Dimension	Sample item
Conscience	I try to make decisions based on what I believe to be right
Compassion	I try to show kindness even when I don't have to
Emotional growth	I have strategies for dealing with my anger
Social growth	I think about how my actions will affect others
Service of others	I would be willing to join a service group to help others
Commitment to God	I believe that God cares about each of us

and has been used to the extent that national benchmarks for the survey (which are incorporated in this study) are now available. The survey was administered to students in class groups with minimal assistance provided by teachers.

Analyses

SCHOOL AVERAGES VERSUS NATIONAL AVERAGES

The average percentage of students "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" to the items comprising each dimension of the AVS were computed for males, females, and the total sample. Then, these school average results for each dimension of the AVS were compared with the national average results for each group (i.e., females, males, and both sexes combined). Specifically, for each dimension, and across each group, the percentage *difference* between the school average and the national average was computed. This difference was then compared with the average difference between school average and national average results across all dimensions for the respective group. Finally, the statistical significance of the ratio of differences for each dimension to differences across all dimensions (for each group separately) was evaluated using a chi-square difference test. The statistical significance of these ratios was estimated at $p < .05$, $.01$, and $.001$.

SCHOOL FEMALES VERSUS MALES

The same procedures as above were used to compare school male averages with school female averages on each dimension of the AVS.

Results

Summary results of the study are reported in Table 2. Females at the school reported significantly greater agreement (in comparison with males at the school) with statements reflecting conscience, compassion, service of others, and commitment to God. Males and females at the school were not significantly different with respect to levels of agreement on either emotional or social growth.

In comparison with the national average for males, males at the school reported significantly less agreement with statements reflecting social growth and service of others, but significantly

greater agreement with statements reflecting commitment to God (Table 2). In comparison with the female national average, females at the school reported significantly less agreement with statements reflecting emotional growth and social growth, but significantly greater agreement with statements reflecting Commitment to God (Table 2). In comparison with the combined national average for males and females, males and females at the school reported significantly less agreement on all dimensions except compassion, for which there was no significant difference, and commitment to God, for which there was a significant difference in agreement favoring the school (Table 2).

Discussion

A central finding of Study 1 is that, despite students at the school reporting a "commitment to God" that was significantly greater than the national average across all groups (males, females and total), this commitment to God did not appear to converge with superior conscience, emotional growth, social growth, or service of others against national averages. Thus, there appears to be an important disjuncture between students' stated commitment to God and their apparent values in other domains. It is possible to speculate on the basis of this data that any deficits in the school's Christian education programs would appear not to be in the realm of inspiring commitment to God per se, but lie rather in the articulation or translation of these faith commitments into 'real life' ethical commitments and into personal growth in the social and emotional domains. These findings correspond entirely with the studies reviewed earlier that cast doubt on the effectiveness of religious-based schools in general, and the transmissional model of education in particular, to influence the application and articulation of Christian beliefs to values formation and subsequent behavioral and personal outcomes.

Study 1 indicates substantial commitment by students to Christian beliefs and (at least some) associated values. The reflection of national benchmarks in Study 1 enabled this study to closely quantify the extent to which Christian commitments were (in this case) *not* being translated (or at least not to the extent that might be expected) into reported values, affect and behaviors held by students and typically associated with Christian belief. The study,

TABLE 2 Student Values

Dimension	School males	National average (males)	c ²	School females	National average (females)	c ²	School average (combined)	National average (combined)	c ²
Conscience	67.1	70.1	1.88	78.7**	82.8	2.59	72.1	78.0	6.29**
Compassion	71.1	74.9	3.01	82.3**	86.1	2.23	76.4	80.5	3.04
Emotional growth	71.5	74.1	1.41	70.9	77.0	5.74*	71.1	76.1	4.52*
Social growth	66.0	74.0	13.3***	70.8	80.3	13.93***	68.0	77.0	4.52*
Service of others	59.3	66.4	10.5***	74.7***	78.0	1.68	66.1	71.9	6.8**
Commitment to God	60.7	56.4	3.85*	73.9**	61.8	22.49***	66.5	59.1	9.90**

*=p < 0.05; **=p < .01; ***=p < .001.

Significances under "School Females" refer to comparisons against "School Males".

All other significances refer to comparisons between the school and national averages for males, females, and combined males and females respectively.

therefore, provides potential evidence that the Christian beliefs that may be induced by the school's teaching programs were not translating to ethical positions consistent with those beliefs.

Responses to the Empirical Study

Purpose

As a result of data gathered in the empirical study, the school introduced an innovative Christian education program designed to address the perceived deficits of previous teaching and learning strategies. This program was comprised of five key components (Table 3). The purpose of these responses is to describe these components and, thus, to provide some concrete guidance to Christian educators who may be considering adjustments to their own teaching and learning programs.

Cognitive Scaffolding of Christian Education

The first component of the new program was the deliberate cognitive scaffolding of Christian education within the school (following Cooling 1996). A sequential curriculum in Christian education has been established from years 7–10 that seeks to provide a sound and consistent theological framework within which students with little experience of Christianity can make sense of Christian concepts such as The Fall, redemption, and the lordship of Christ. This program integrates the content of Christian education classes, fortnightly Chapel, and a daily tutor time in home groups, such that an intentional, planned and systematic development of concepts occurs throughout the years 7–10. Within this structure students gradually gain independence in the understanding and application of Christian beliefs and ideas—rather than the program making the assumption that students are already familiar with these beliefs and ideas and their applications (Cooling, 1994b).

Depth of Values Education

In an attempt to redress the superficiality with which much Christian values education has been conducted (Macnaught,

TABLE 3 Responses to the Empirical Study

Area	Prior to empirical study	Post-empirical study
Theological framework	Presentation of the narrative of Bible with little consideration of student prior-knowledge or the overarching structure of the program	Sequencing of key Christian concepts. Integration of content across curriculum areas, Chapel and daily Devotions to promote program coherence
Specific values education	Piecemeal; implied rather than purposefully taught	Written into teaching programs. Staff encouraged to critique values emanating from syllabi Curriculum materials introduced to facilitate values discussion.
Cultural relevance	Student access to teachers' Christian 'sub-culture' was presumed and implied in pedagogical approaches	Attempts to relate both curriculum and pedagogy to popular culture and issues of interest and concern to teenagers
Faith in action	Presentation of the faith was largely conceptual and unapplied	Students are encouraged to apply faith in service, with service options provided Deliberate attention paid to the provision of appropriate mentors and models of faith
Faith articulation	The school taught faith in isolation from other organizations No model for continuation of the faith after graduation	Strategic alliances established with local churches Attention paid to shepherding students into sustaining faith communities post-graduation

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1995) and the consequent lack of impact on students' values (Astill, 1998), the School has specifically written values education into every module of the teaching program. This strategy represents an attempt to achieve a greater level of integration and application of Christian values within student lives, intentionally situating Christian values within the wider curriculum. To achieve this integration, staff are encouraged to critique values emanating from syllabus documents, and to support students' critiques of values across all subject areas of the curriculum. These parallel critiques enhance students' capacities to identify and apply Christian beliefs and perspectives within and beyond classroom environments—classroom environments that may, otherwise, be confined too narrowly to religious considerations (Cooling, 1997). Moreover, curriculum materials relating to values education have been deliberately chosen on the basis of their ability to facilitate and promote discussion and reflection whilst establishing ease of understanding. Within the scope of these materials a large number of ethical and moral issues are dealt with in ways that assist students and teachers to explore the life-application of the Christian faith and its associated values positions.

Critiquing Culture

In addition to provision of values-related curriculum resources, the School has introduced curriculum electives that examine and critique popular culture, often utilizing teenage-related media such as rock music. These electives attempt to contextualize learning in ways that enable students to connect faith issues with their real world experiences (Dickson, 1997a & 1997b). Electives offered in the middle school years 9 and 10 are followed by a new school-devised Christian studies program for years 11 and 12, which has been deliberately designed to have more leverage with 16–18 year olds than the New South Wales State syllabus, which focuses on comparative religion and Australian church history. The school-based course has been constructed around elements of apologetics, ethics, and evangelism. The ethics component, in particular, has been targeted at contemporary issues affecting teenagers, such as sexual morality, rather than more esoteric issues such as stem-cell research. These Christian studies courses also operate around a

discussion-based pedagogy where honest interaction is both encouraged and respected.

Service-Based Education

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Complementing the curriculum provisions outlined previously has been the insertion of practical community and service strands at various stages of the School's curriculum. The absence of service-based options from many schools often enables students to focus on some of the cognitive aspects of Christian belief while avoiding the relational, attitudinal and behavioral domains (Maple, 1997). The School's facilitation of these service options seeks to expose students to real human needs, and hence to promote the development of compassionate, altruistic values (Winter, 1994). A related initiative has been a systematic attempt to break into male sporting culture—which is often antithetical to faith development. The school has employed a Christian Youth worker, who is an elite sportsman, with the twin charges of pastoring youth *and* coaching sport, thus bridging the perceived gap between faith and sport. The school's strategy with respect to this appointment is to break down the tough, unrelenting, "winner-takes-all" values of a "macho" sporting culture through the agency of an elite Christian sportsman who, despite his sporting prowess, demonstrates a different set of values. The credibility afforded to him by his sporting prowess directly assists in the mediation and demonstration of these different values.

Church-School Partnerships

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A final component of the overall program is to establish strategic alliances with local clergy of various denominations in order to develop school-church cooperation and a shared vision for Christian education. This latter area is critical because, anecdotally, few parish clergy appeared to exhibit an active desire to share the missional terrain with a school, nor any vision of what may be gained by school-church cooperation. Nonetheless, fostering faith communities that extend beyond the school is clearly important if the school is to avoid narrowness in students' faith development—especially if this development occurs largely or entirely in a school

environment with few links to the Christian community beyond the school grounds.

Evaluation

A future evaluation of the initiatives undertaken as responses to the empirical study will comprise administration of the same survey described in this research to a new group of year 8 students. The same survey will also be administered to the present cohort of students in future years in order to assess whether any attitudinal changes have occurred, and which of these changes may be attributable to the school's programs. Teacher evaluations of the school's initiatives will also be sought as part of a overall program evaluation.

Conclusion

Research both here and elsewhere indicates that transmission pedagogies widely used in Christian education are typically unsuccessful in affecting students' underlying values. In a post-Christian environment, where only a minority of students brings to school a pre-developed Christian framework, conceptual, emotional, relational, and behavioral bridges need to be built by staff from the content of the curriculum to the world of the student.

The present research has provided data apparently supporting the ineffectiveness of a transmissional model in at least one setting, and has described an alternative, 'transformational' approach to Christian education. The outcomes of this latter approach remain to be fully evaluated. However, the initial description provided here may assist Christian educators to formulate their own, more participatory, approaches to Christian education.

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