

Learning in disadvantage schools and more about schools and LGBT students

This month's *TCF News* has a response from Dianne Young about her experiences with LGBT students as head teacher welfare and associated issues within the school. Further comments from members are welcome, but remember the original article was about providing a safe environment for these students without debating Christian views about the sexuality of LGBT students.

The second article refers to recent newspaper reports in both Australia and the USA about student learning in disadvantaged schools. Both reports highlight the achievement gap for students in disadvantaged schools and those in more advantaged schools, including bright students compared to other bright students in more advantaged schools. These are huge issues in western countries and Australia has one of the longest tails on achievement scales. The main article draws on the research literature and personal experience to consider some strategies that might, in the longer term, turn this situation around by closing the gaps.

Also this month from the AGM, are the annual reports for 2015 of the Fellowship, a report on what was learnt from the recent seminar on learning difficulties and notice about the next seminar, and an invitation to the 2016 Getaway.

John Gore

Working with LGBT students

John Gore's article, *The challenges of LGBT students*, in April *TCF News* has stimulated plenty of discussion and controversy. I would like to share my experiences as Head Teacher Welfare and in other teaching positions I have held. I would be happy to hear the experiences of other Christian teachers.

At the school I taught at from 1983-1997 we had on occasion a School Development Day session on the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977. This was the result of female teachers taking offence at a cartoon drawn and displayed by a male teacher. As a follow up a group of teachers, including myself, were trained as Anti-Discrimination Contact Officers.

The responsibility of all schools, public, private, catholic, Christian and any other category is clearly explained with regard to LGBT students in sections 38A, 38B, 38K, 49ZF, 49ZG, and 49ZO of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977. The Act can be accessed on the internet for those teachers not familiar with the legislation. In addition to the right of LGBT students to enrol in any school they have a right to be safe from all forms of bullying and discrimination by staff and students.

As Head Teacher Welfare and in other welfare roles prior to 1998, I was responsible for writing and implementing school Anti-Bullying Policies in two schools. This included taking students through workshops on Discrimination and Harassment. There are excellent resources for schools on the Australian Human Rights Commission web site.

The school I taught at from 1998-2014 enrolled three trans-gender students. When the first trans-gender student was enrolled the staff received training from legal branch of the DET. *Bulletin 55 Trans-gender Students* available on the DET web site contains valuable guidelines.

There are many issues a Christian needs to consider when dealing with discrimination of LGBT students. The scriptures are very clear in God's attitude towards permissive homosexual behaviours as is evident in *Genesis 16-19, Judges 19:13-20:48, Romans 1:23-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:9-10*. However the scriptures also teach that Christians are to obey the laws governments put in place (*Luke 20:25, Romans 13:1-7, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 2:13-15*). Obedience to the law was the reason I did not go on strike as a teacher, I worked for the government, not the union! Obedience to the law was the reason I implemented the Anti-Discrimination Act at work.

The language students used to bully others, whether or not they were gay, would be condemned by all Christian teachers, whether used in the classroom or the playground. I consistently condemned the use of inappropriate language and explained the implications of the Anti-Discrimination Act and the school's Anti-Bullying Policy. When necessary students were explained the consequences. In a public school I had to work with two executive members who were homosexuals. Their sexuality never entered into any actions, conversation or policy of these staff members. Jesus did not shun sinners. All executive knew that I was a Christian. One of our autistic students who excelled in Maths, Science and Visual Arts dropped out of school because she was being bullied because her mother was gay. She was not a lesbian, but students asserted she was. Her anxiety levels were always very high, causing serious meltdowns in class frequently. She could not cope with the bullying.

One of the more difficult cases presented to me was a gay student in Year 12 who believed his teacher was discriminating against him. As his teacher was responsible for his assessment this was a serious allegation and difficult to deal with. The school I taught at for 17 years had *Tolerance* as a school value, so we tended to attract a greater number of LGBT than other schools in the area. Decisions had to be made to deal with their behaviour. When gay or lesbian students were seen cuddling or kissing the school rule put in place was no kissing whether heterosexual or gay. This is not discriminatory.

I have been told that LGBT students do not enrol in Christian schools. This is simply not true. I know of a boy at a Christian school who committed suicide because of the bullying he received as a gay student. His devastated parents had no idea that he was gay.

How is a Christian teacher to cope in this new world? It is essential to show these students the love of Christ as He would have. Only by providing a safe loving school environment can you then be in a position to teach them the gospel of repentance. On another day, I am happy to present the biological evidence for transgender children seeking gender reassignment, but that's for a different article.

Dianne Young

Retired Head Teacher Welfare, practising Christian and TCF member.

Bright students and disadvantaged schools

The article *NAPLAN: Bright kids fall behind at disadvantaged schools* (SMH 21/3/2016) outlines an analysis of NAPLAN results that indicate that *bright students at disadvantaged schools lag at least two years behind their peers from wealthier schools and struggling students from poor backgrounds continue to fall behind with each year of schooling*. The report highlights the problem for bright students at disadvantaged schools indicating that they make two and half years less progress by Year 9 than students in more advantaged schools. Even more alarming is that poor students in disadvantaged schools do not catch up and the gap by Year 9 can be as high as seven and a half years. The report recommends lifting the minimum standards benchmark as a solution.

The report also confirms other data about Australian school students that there is a very good top but the distribution shows a long tail that we seem unable to change. Many other countries have a much more compressed distribution without a long tail. In NSW, the HSC results have often been talked about in terms of postcode being the most accurate predictor of success. However, in all these cases some students continue to defy the odds and succeed. Averages can hide as many good results as they expose.

A similar study in the USA comparing school districts *Money, Race and Success: How Your School District Compares* by Rich, Cox and Bloch (New York Times 29/04/2016) indicates that sixth graders in the richest school districts are four grade levels ahead of children in the poorest districts. It also indicates that the racial gap (White ahead of Hispanic and Black) in affluent areas is high raising issues of race as well as disadvantage.

Christian teachers are concerned to bring the best education possible to students irrespective of their socio-economic, cultural or racial background. How Christian teachers address this issue is fundamental to their calling. Christians want to be excellent teachers, which is their first witness. They also want to be good examples for other teachers. Teaching well means increasing the learning of students and addressing the learning needs of every student. The question is how? This debate continues, and some things, like a different curriculum are known to have failed, so what might help? Here are five suggestions from my reading and experience:

1. Expectations

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are not less intelligent than other students but they do present particular challenges because of that background. The education literature is awash with research about the relationship between teacher expectation and student performance. If you don't expect much from students then that is what you get. Underlying this lack of expectation can be the belief that students from disadvantaged backgrounds can't learn - at least not like those from privileged backgrounds. This belief leads to setting low standards, watering down the curriculum and endless repetition.

Teachers in disadvantaged schools have the option to accept this view, verified by the lack of learning when these students first attend school, or they can raise their expectations and carry students forward. If they chose the latter, they will also need to shape, through regular communication and meetings, the expectations of parents about their children's learning so that the school and home can work together.

Without high expectations students from disadvantaged backgrounds are already in trouble. There are many individual teachers who work with high expectations, but these must be sustained across the whole of schooling for success. Without a

whole school approach, the child gets each year another teacher who may or may not share these expectations. How important is it that principals and executive staff lead the way and ensure a whole school approach to teacher and parent expectations.

Teacher and parent beliefs that result in low expectations need to be addressed.

2. Blame the victim.

One of the lessons learnt in working with extremely disadvantaged students in Indian schools who were from slums and remote poor rural villages is, that you can not change their backgrounds therefore you can't use them as an excuse for not learning. If a student lives in a two room house with eight others without electricity and is required to do either home duties or agricultural work after school, then you must build the learning around this and provide homework and remedial time at school by extending the school day and by ensuring that students get maximum encouragement. As soon as you say "Poor little boy, he's one of eight, parents never attended school, doesn't have any help at home, has to work in the fields after school and can't keep his school things together" then there is no expectation of learning, inappropriate lessons follow, encouragement disappears and the child fails repeatedly.

Disadvantage is not an excuse. We can not blame the victim for a lack of learning. It is the school and its teachers who must develop the learning environment to overcome the disadvantage and provide meaningful learning experiences that allow all students to achieve their best. This applies also to Australian schools - we can not blame the victim for a lack of learning.

3. The resources issue

Changing the pattern of results for students in disadvantaged schools will require additional resources. Everyone knows that and the Gonski Report provided a blueprint to redress some of these issues. It has been corrupted not only by a lack of commitment to full funding by the Coalition Government but by both parties not being prepared to bite the bullet on redirecting funding thus ensuring that no school (private schools) will be worse off. Hence the budget demands have become too great and neither side is willing to take the electoral risk of ensuring that disadvantage schools get the resources they need sometimes at the expense of private schools.

Schools have already had benefits from Gonski funding and the key question is what are they doing with these resources. Some activities and spending could be nothing more than changing deckchairs on the Titanic - you are still going down with the ship. A few key areas for spending areas could include:

- (a) Additional teacher training, especially in the early years, and particularly in relation to learning problems and programs to address them. There are too many students with learning difficulties slipping past teachers who don't understand the problems and simply don't know what to do. Identification needs to be supported by special help and programs.
- (b) Additional teachers to supplement the teaching of English to ensure higher standards of reading and comprehension by all students. In the English medium schools in India, English was the key to learning. Those who were good at English did well while others fell further behind. It is not different in Australian schools.
- (c) Pay tutors for students who need the additional work in reading, comprehension and basic mathematics.

(d) Set up courses for parents to help them help their children.

4. Pedagogy

Whose fault is it if a student doesn't learn? Yes, the teacher. No, not the student, their background, culture, race or poverty. Providing a safe environment at school is essential, but schools should not overdose on wellbeing (welfare). It is not their primary role to solve personal, family and community problems - their core function is learning - to teach and ensure learning.

More than ever, teachers need to share ideas and be open to new ways of teaching so that every student learns - we already know that they can learn. The good teacher says, how can I explain this differently or, what are different examples or activities I could use to help my students understand, and not, I will repeat that again, and again

5. Enrichment

Bright students in disadvantage schools need enrichment not more of the same and not being given work from ever higher grades. Once ensuring high achievement at their level, these students have a lot of energy to put into other school activities - sport, the arts, debating, inter school exchanges, competitions. They need the school to enrich their lives with opportunities to learn outside the basic curriculum.

Teaching in one sense is easy, but getting students to learn is hard. The Christian teacher, who wants students to learn and achieve to their potential, will have high expectations and communicate them to both the parents and students, will not blame the students or their backgrounds for a lack of learning, will use whatever resources are available to focus on the students' learning to raise their achievement, especially in reading and comprehension, will seek alternative pedagogy to ensure learning has occurred for all students and provide enrichment for brighter students.

In these ways the achievement gap between students in disadvantaged and more advantaged schools might be closed and brighter students in disadvantaged schools reach their potential.

John Gore

2015 Secretary's Report

Seminar

The input at the half-day seminar *Are you up to standard? BOSTES requirements* given by Jan Donaldson (Senior Policy Officer / Teaching Standards with Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards NSW) was well received. 72 attended. This course was registered in partnership with Australian Catholic University. This allows participants to record it as part of their professional learning accreditation. Thanks to Russell Bailey for initiating and co-ordinating this.

TCF Promotion

- Ken Silvester attended Katoomba Christian Convention Men's Conference in August to promote TCF. Some good contacts were made.
- An article *Teachers Need Support* was submitted to *Southern Cross* and *Eternity* magazines but it was not published in either magazine.

Communication

- John Gore continued to be the editor of *TCF News*. Without his dedication and time given to the task this main form of communication with members would not occur.
- Colin McKay continued to faithfully maintain the TCF website.
- Thanks to both John and Colin for their on-going voluntary roles.

Activities

- The annual bushwalk on 22nd January 2015 was from Waterfall to Heathcote via Karloo Pool which was a great spot for lunch and a swim.
- Illawarra Local Group met for share and prayer throughout the year.
- The *Get Away* was held on 26th-28th June again at Kihilla, Lawson. 11 members attended and enjoyed the fantastic warm weather and fellowship. Thanks to Harley for leading the Bible studies, Brenda for the music and Andrew for leading the bushwalk. There was a loss of \$565 as the minimum number of 15 was not reached. This was covered by TCF.

Membership

- There were 146 members as at 30th December 2015. It is with sadness that 2 long standing faithful members passed away throughout the year. Minnie Wells had been a member since 1947 and Anne Wray who was a former TCF Secretary for over 10 years and a wonderful friend to many members. They are now enjoying their rewards.
- In addition, there were 3 new members from Redeemer Baptist School and 1 resignation.

Financial update

- Missionary support: \$950 was distributed to missionary members - Wilfred & Sally Morrow, Suzanne Rowe and Ian & Jill Cochrane.
- Membership fees were decreased from \$45 to \$35.

Thanks

- to John and Elizabeth Gore for another year of providing TCF with an office and internet connection at no cost.
- to Ken and Bronwyn Silvester for hosting Committee meetings.

Committee

The members continue to meet regularly to carry out the activities of TCF. Their faithful service and commitment is greatly acknowledged and appreciated. There were 8 Committee meetings held in 2015. The following show the number attended.

Andrew Poyitt (Vice President)	8	Pam Griffin (Secretary)	7
Dianne Young (Treasurer)	8	Lyn Searle	4
Karen Allsopp	7	Ken Silvester	8
Harley Mills (President)	3	(resigned in April 2014, co-opted in November and attended another two)	

Pam Griffin.
Secretary.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts of the fellowship have been audited. This is an abridged summary and the full accounts are available from the office.

Statement of Receipts and Payments for year ended 31 December 2015

RECEIPTS

Membership fees	5,065
Donations	3,560
Conference fees	800
Getaway fees	1,485
Interest and other	<u>383</u>
	<u>11,293</u>

PAYMENTS

Salaries	4,268
Office costs	638
Stationery, printing and postage	1,354
Fees	332
Conference Costs	1,111
Getaway	2,943
Missionary Support	950
Gifts	<u>693</u>
	<u>12,289</u>
Deficit	<u>996</u>

Net worth as at 31 December 2015

27,807

Dianne Young
Treasurer

2016 Getaway 15-17 July

It would be great to see you at Kihilla Conference Centre from 2016 for a weekend of fellowship, fun, eating, bushwalking and chatting by the log fire on the crisp winter nights in the Blue Mountains. John Gore will prepare the discussions and they are sure to be interesting and stimulating.

The fully catered weekend is \$150.

For inquiries and an application form contact Dianne Young m: 0414 447 996
Email: dianne.young63@gmail.com

Ten things I learnt from the TCF seminar on occupational therapy strategies 14 May 2016

1. Handwriting is important for developing students' learning. The act of forming letters and words when handwriting helps to develop the mind supporting both reading and written communication. It is a different thought process to typing!
2. Students need to develop their writing skills so that letter formation is fluent and **automatic** rather than a painful struggle.
3. When we teach handwriting we need to demonstrate, monitor and correct **on the spot** the direction of letter formation rather than just letter shape, size, speed or regularity.

4. Correct pencil **grip** is vital to stop cramping and fatigue but only early correction will have much hope of causing a permanent change in grip.
5. Short **daily** handwriting practice is necessary to develop good handwriting skills, speed and endurance.
6. Even **High School students** need to be able to write fluently and neatly rather than just type.
7. Coloured margins for young writers can remind them about line return and therefore where to start their next line.
8. Five to ten minutes each day for Primary age children is needed to develop **fine motor skills**. ie. specific and structured activities promoting pincer grip, strength and tactile sense. Such things as squeezing balls, using tweezers, thumb to finger touch, finger games with eyes open and then closed, etc
9. Preschool and Infants age children should be **handwriting** rather than keyboarding because of the neurological differences in these skills and their corresponding affects on reading and thinking.
10. Learning touch-typing after handwriting is a valuable **time saving skill**.

Harley Mills

Half day seminar - 20th August 2016, 9-12.30pm

Creating language friendly classrooms: supporting the oral and written language of students with additional learning needs.

Speaker: Dr Julia Starling.

Julia is a Speech-Language Pathologist who has a private practice in Sydney. The majority of her cases are school-aged children and adolescents with language-based learning difficulties. She is President of Learning Difficulties Coalition.

Venue: Chester Hill North Public School

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