

# SCHOOLink

Lutheran EDUCATION Australia

## 'Respectful dialogue': teaching Christian Studies in the multi-faith context

### Context

Since their early beginnings in Australia, Lutheran schools have found themselves responding to an ever widening and ever more complex context. The small German-speaking Lutheran village primary school of the first German settlers in Australia had to learn to speak English and adapt to the mainly anglo-celtic community that surrounded it. It constantly had to respond to changes as more and more non-Lutherans and non-Christians came into its community. The Lutheran school now needs to see its context including both the global community and also the multi-cultural and multi-faith local community. Many of our Lutheran schools are enrolling increasing numbers of students from various religious backgrounds, including major world religions. If the education provided through the school is to be relevant for its students and prepare them for life in the local and global communities, then students must be helped to understand and interact with those communities.

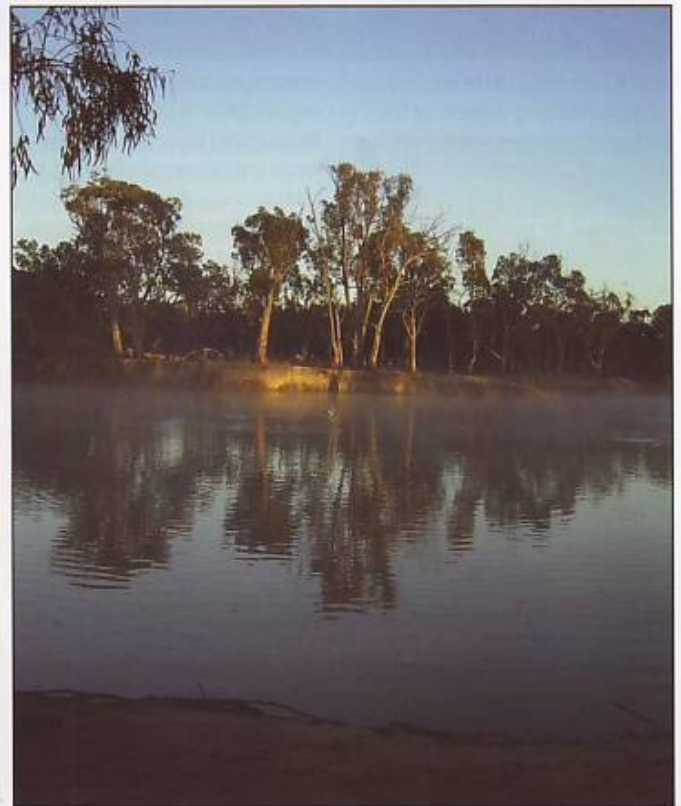
At the same time, we are moving into what could be seen as a 'post-secular' society in Australia. As Archbishop Peter Carnley argued (Age, 12/2/04,

15), since September 11 'it is not too much to say that world affairs are today being determined by religious agendas as never before.' This, he suggests, 'is making it problematic for liberal democratic societies to be able to proceed according to a purely secular agenda, as though religious issues can be pushed into the background.'

How can Christian Studies help students develop the knowledge, insights and skills to deal with this changing scene? To ignore these changes is to fail seriously in our responsibility to the students in our care. Not to address this context may lead students to reject religion as having any relevance to the world in which they live and study and in which they will continue to interact throughout their lives.

### The danger of relativism

Some teachers are rightly concerned about the danger of relativism in introducing the study of philosophy of religion and world religions into the new Christian Studies curriculum. If students are introduced to the teachings and practices of other religions, is there a danger that the witness of the school to the Christian faith will be compromised? Will all religious experience be reduced to some lowest common denominator so that in keeping with postmodernist type thinking, every individual religious opinion is as valid as any other? How do we allow students to have freedom to explore and examine, but at the same time uphold the 'truth claim' of their theological tradition?



### The danger of 'exclusive partiality'

The opposite end of the spectrum from religious relativism is what Brian Hill calls 'exclusive partiality'. He characterises this as (1994, 366):

*an intention on the part of teachers to impart their own value stance to the pupils in a manner precluding challenge. Convinced religious believers, for instance, especially if teaching in a church school, may well feel that it is in the students' best interests to implant in them those things that they most surely believe to be true, notwithstanding*

*that there are intelligent and informed people who are of contrary opinion.*

Of particular concern here is that this approach, which could be seen as a form of indoctrination, does not create and foster an atmosphere of respect, care and openness where students have freedom to explore Christianity, their own questions, faith and personal response' (*Christian Studies in the Lutheran School*).

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*Christian Studies*

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## Steering between religious absolutism and religious relativism – 'respectful dialogue'

In order to assist students to relate to their current context of pluralism, Christian Studies needs to adopt educational approaches which will encourage students from a diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds, including Lutheran theology and culture, to address issues of current concern and prepare them for a constructive life in the global community. However, at the same time, these approaches must take seriously the importance of the faith tradition of the school and uphold the necessity for that tradition to be clearly and accurately articulated.

What is proposed could be seen as a 'respectful dialogue' between the faith tradition of the school and the beliefs and values of other traditions and philosophies. Such a dialogue would employ all of the usual learning experiences and develop skills and competencies, such as critical inquiry and in-depth reflection, in common with other key learning areas.

Such 'respectful dialogue' begins with students and teachers becoming more aware through a self-reflective process of their own personal beliefs and religious ideas, and the language, images and metaphors which are used to express those beliefs. Real dialogue is possible only where the partners in conversation are certain of, and comfortable with, their own identity. They need to grow in their understanding of how these beliefs are shaped by the social and cultural context and how they form the basis for a worldview and a framework of beliefs through which they interpret reality and which helps to give meaning and purpose to life. This first step is crucial if students and teachers together are going to relate positively to the pluralism which is part of their environment in the school and general society.

For a Lutheran school, this means that it must provide a thorough grounding in confessional Lutheran theology as the beginning point for Christian Studies. Even though many students in the school may not share this confessional framework, it is the one which the school represents and which is expressed through the whole

curriculum and activities of the school. It provides a worldview which takes seriously both the revelation of God through scripture, particularly as it reveals Jesus Christ, and insights gained from interacting with God's creation.

However, our theology also recognises that God's revelation is far greater than we can fully comprehend. God alone is infinite and absolute, and our attempts to 'understand' God are always limited by our sinful human nature and the short-comings of human reason. As St Paul remarks (1 Cor 13:12), we now see only dimly in a mirror, we know only in part. God is revealed in Jesus Christ, but God also still remains 'hidden'. There is always an element of mystery about God.

As well as acknowledging that our own perception of God's revelation is always limited because of our sinful nature and that we must therefore be ready to modify our current understanding of it, we also recognise that God operates in the world through both reason and revelation and that the Christian lives in both the world of nature and the world of grace. This not only frees the Christian to operate in both the 'secular domain' and the 'spiritual domain', but challenges us to take seriously that we are in the world, but not of the world' (John 17). Since God operates in an ordered world which has meaning and purpose, it is possible to form an integrated and consistent worldview which allows us to come to terms with the fragmented nature of human knowledge.

Working from this basis in Christian Studies, and observing the appropriate developmental levels of the students, teachers and students recognise, appreciate and value the questions addressed to their religious framework by the different attempts to make sense of the world and to search for meaning. This goes well beyond judgmental curiosity about other religions and philosophies but does not imply adopting or absorbing the beliefs of others (Boys and Lee, 74). It also moves beyond developing

tolerance, patience and cross-cultural harmony, even though these are important in themselves. It allows for learning more about one's own tradition from the insights of other religious and philosophical frameworks and traditions.

'Respectful dialogue' requires open, honest, attentive, thoughtful, sensitive and empathetic listening to the questions, insights, understandings and practices revealed in other approaches to life and its ultimate questions. In doing so, we may be alerted to issues we have overlooked in our own tradition; we may find challenges to the way in which we have formed our responses, shaped by our own religious backgrounds; we may discover ways of living and celebrating life which can add new dimensions to our own approaches. We will also be challenged in 'respectful dialogue' to try to communicate our own concerns so that they can be understood and appreciated by those from other traditions and we need to be ready to answer questions which they may raise. This requires openness to the other, but faithfulness to one's own tradition (Boys and Lee, 94).

Throughout this process, the freedom and integrity of the student is to be respected. As students form their own set of assumptions and presuppositions about the nature of reality, their worldview, they need to do so on the basis of informed choices. This worldview will be a continually developing and expanding response to new insights and experiences and will provide the basis and motivation for living. In the context of the Lutheran school, it will also be recognised that this is a worldview determined by their relationship with God as Creator, Redeemer and

Sanctifier, and is centred on God's revelation in Jesus Christ' (Lifelong Qualities, 5). While coming to faith in Jesus Christ, or growing in that faith, will be the hoped-for and prayed-for desire of the community of faith within the Lutheran school, Jesus himself in his teaching and parables warned that the response to his call would be rejection as well as acceptance. This is a response which the Lutheran school must anticipate and respect. However, Lutheran schools owe it to their students that they are able to articulate their reasons for making their particular choices.

In all this, the Lutheran school sees itself in a servant role to those within its community. On the one hand, it will work with the attitude of St Paul, who in his mission to the city of Athens (Acts 17:16-34), did not hesitate to challenge the religious thinking of the Athenians. He commended the Athenians for their religious practices, but was also ready to witness to them on the basis of their altar 'to an unknown God' (Acts 17:23) and to quote the Athenian poets (Acts 17:28) to support his testimony as he worked within their cultural framework. However, Paul also challenges Lutheran schools, for the sake of the gospel, to work with the servant attitude to become 'all things to all people, that [we] might by all means save some' (1 Cor 9:19-23).

### Malcolm Bartsch

Dean of Studies  
Australian Lutheran College  
*[on part time secondment to Lutheran Education Australia 2004]*

# Indonesia – part of the Lutheran school family

**T**here are more than four million Lutherans in Indonesia and about 250 Lutheran schools, most of which are located in North Sumatra. One is struck by the diversity of Lutheran schools with primary and secondary schools, and others with a special focus on technical and vocational education. There is also a school for the blind and a number of orphanages with kindergartens attached. Many senior high schools are keen to establish partnerships with Australian Lutheran schools, and in some cases this enables them to gain international status.

In addition, Nommensen University, which is the largest Lutheran university outside of the USA, educates 7,000 students. This university provides higher education in twelve faculties across two campuses, one in Medan and the other located at Pematangsiantar, providing teacher education.

Indonesia is a country of contrasts. This Islamic country has a strong Lutheran presence as a result of the Rhenish Mission activity in Sumatra which began in the 1860s under the leadership of the German George Nommensen who spent over 40 years in the country. The assertive Islamic presence thus stands alongside the Christian presence, and the Lutheran schools also serve their Islamic community. Classrooms with 50 desks and an austere blackboard stand alongside vocational schools with workshop tools and banks of computers. Whilst the government funds about a third of staff salaries in many Lutheran schools, it then often establishes well resourced schools close by Christian schools.

In June I had the privilege of visiting Indonesian Lutheran schools and churches with the LCA's Mission Director, Wayne Zweck. The initiative for this visit came from the secretary of Indonesia's largest church (HKBP) who had observed that the long time connections with Australia were at a head of church level and yet both



Adrienne Jericho and Wayne Zweck with staff of Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan in Pematangsiantar

churches had significant networks of schools. In his view Indonesian Lutheran schools would benefit from contact with Australian Lutheran schools. When I returned I rather felt that our schools would benefit from contact with Indonesian Lutheran schools.

We were struck by the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff we met, no matter the resource levels in which they worked. The Lutheran churches of Indonesia value highly their schools and this is evident in the strength of the relationship between the schools and their respective churches, nurtured personally by the bishops.

One of the schools we visited was a vocational school in Pematangsiantar, which is finalising its partnership arrangement with Pacific Lutheran College in Caloundra Qld. Under this agreement the schools will support each other in education of young people through exchange of information and ideas to enhance cultural understanding. We also visited Yayasan Pendidikan Kristen in Medan, a school which is in partnership with Immanuel Lutheran College, Maroochydore Qld. This partnership has been important in assisting the Medan school serve its community. Grace Lutheran College at Rothwell has a partnership with HKBP to educate a senior student on an annual basis.

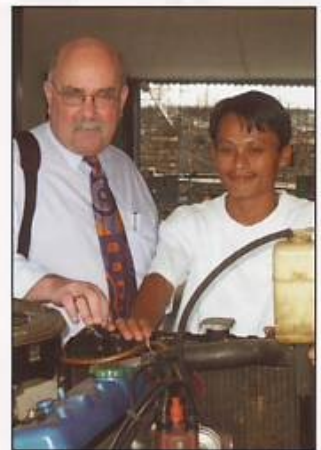
We visited the Elim orphanage and kindergarten, some of whose children have been separated from their

parents as a result of the secessionist activity in Aceh. At the Medan school for the blind we were greeted enthusiastically by the school choir. Many Indonesian children lose their sight due to the devastating effects of measles, a disease now rarely experienced in Australia due to a comprehensive vaccination program. Motivated by the love of Christ, this Lutheran school serves its diverse community, including Moslems.

Apart from direct school links, Australian Lutheran schools are supporting their counterparts in Indonesia this year in two ways. Firstly, with both LCA and LEA support, four representatives of Lutheran schools in Indonesia will be our guests at ACLE in September 2004. Their presence will add to the richness and diversity of the conference and highlight the *cross currents* faced by Lutheran schools not only in Australia but worldwide.

Secondly, this year's National Lutheran Schools Week mission project is the support of Indonesian Lutheran schools. Staff in Indonesian Lutheran schools would greatly value access in their own language to some of the resources that we have developed. It is hoped that sections of the LIFE curriculum concerning creation and Malcolm Bartsch's book *Why a Lutheran school?* will be translated into Indonesian.

I think that it is important that we have an understanding of Lutheran schools beyond our country. This knowledge



Wayne Zweck in the automotive centre of Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan in Pematangsiantar

helps us understand how others motivated by the same theology do schooling. We are also provided with opportunities to serve others with genuine need, whilst learning some important cultural lessons. Potential benefits for students and staff in both countries are boundless. Partnership arrangements, targeted projects and cultural exchanges through a range of means are all possibilities. To have such cultural experiences in our proximity is a potential blessing. Yes, our Lutheran school family extends both beyond our school gate and our shores.

**Adrienne Jericho**  
Executive Director  
Lutheran Education Australia

# LIFE: Ten years and what have we learned?



**L**IFE is the vision, first and foremost, of schools who have seen a need and asked that it be met. A dream of so many for so long is being realised. In thanking God for his obvious blessings let us commit ourselves to go forward and build on what has been achieved. We can be proud and grateful today for what has been achieved, but we know that a journey has just begun... (Adrienne Jericho, LEA Executive Director, at the launch of LIFE)

The LIFE curriculum is one of the great achievements of Australian Lutheran schools. It was the culmination of the vision of the Executive Director for

Lutheran Education Australia and the Board for Lutheran Education Australia. It came about through the cooperation of Lutheran schools across Australia and the commitment and efforts of Lutheran teachers in writing and trialling the curriculum.

LIFE is a testimony to the importance of Christian Studies in Lutheran schools. Schools invested in LIFE through levies contributed over a number of years. They then continued to support the implementation of the curriculum with ongoing professional development provided by the system.

It is hard to believe that ten years have passed since LIFE had its beginnings and that it has been actively used in schools for at least six years. As we reflect on LIFE and what has flowed from LIFE, it is important to note what we have learned from the experience.



## LIFE story

- 1993 Marlene Cooper was engaged to develop a framework for Christian Studies curriculum development. Her work is evident in the LIFE theological foundations.
- 1996 LIFE management and steering committee established
- 1996 Board for Lutheran Schools resolved the new curriculum be R-10
- 1997 writers employed and begin writing the curriculum
- 1997-1998 LIFE extensively trialled in Lutheran schools across Australia with the feedback provided by

trailing teachers and pastors being vital in shaping the final curriculum

- 1998 LIFE launched
- 1998-1999 Lutheran primary teachers received extensive professional development in the structure and implementation of LIFE
- 1999 Bands A, B, C and D are finally and fully completed
- 1999 Lutheran secondary Christian Studies teachers received professional development in the structure and implementation of LIFE
- 1999-2002 LIFE is purchased by individual Anglican, Christian Community and Parent-Controlled schools around Australia.
- 1999 LIFE being used extensively in Lutheran schools across Australia
- 2000 LIFE was sold to ELCA schools in the United States and retitled as Graceways
- 2003 LIFE formally reviewed by external evaluators

Once launched the LIFE curriculum was enthusiastically welcomed and implemented in Lutheran schools. The curriculum was a comprehensive document that supported teachers in planning meaningful and challenging Christian Studies learning experiences. It catered for the diverse backgrounds of Christian Studies teachers and students in providing a range of ways through the menu and model units that teachers could connect theology with the lives of students. As LIFE was written by practising classroom teachers it was seen as teacher and student friendly in providing great flexibility for teachers' planning and an abundance of material to cater for the diverse faith backgrounds and experiences of students. LIFE was finally our own

Australian Lutheran Christian Studies curriculum that was relevant and appropriate for our students and teachers.

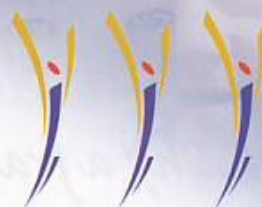
As LIFE was used in schools, there were discussions about ways it could be enhanced. LIFE was always going to be the beginning and the vision for LIFE was that it would be supported by additional material. As LIFE was received so positively, it was quickly apparent that pre-schools and senior schools were looking for Christian Studies resources and were keen to see how LIFE could be adapted for their contexts. As the world changed post September 11 teachers shared the need for greater support in considering religious belief and faith beyond Christianity in ways that provided a clear Christian Studies approach as opposed to a sociological study through Studies of Society and the Environment. Queensland schools implemented new curriculum documents for their key learning areas and shared their concern that LIFE did not provide an outcomes framework consistent with those used in other key learning areas. Concerns too were expressed that sometimes teachers became over-reliant on the model units and did not modify or adapt the units to best cater for their students' needs, interests, questions and context. Concerns and issues such as this prompted the next stage of the Christian Studies journey as we develop and trial the new Christian Studies Outcomes Framework. Again, Christian Studies continues to change and respond to the needs of its teachers and students.

## What have we learned?

As we reflect on the achievements that have flowed from LIFE, it is also important to consider what have we learned so that we will be better prepared for the future.

We have learned that we can do great things as a system of schools and LIFE





is a great example of what is possible through cooperation and collaboration. In my discussions over the years with colleagues from other Christian schools this was always something of which they were envious. We do have a system of schools that is willing to contribute to such projects, rather than act as a host of independent and autonomous schools. This collaboration is already a feature of the Christian Studies Outcomes Framework as writers were released from schools and schools have begun to trial the framework.

LIFE has prompted much discussion about the purpose and practice of Christian Studies, whether it is called Christian Living or Studies of Religion. These discussions have been robust and have strengthened understandings about our hopes, aims and approaches in the Christian Studies classroom. We have reached greater clarity in our understanding of the role and responsibility of the Christian Studies teacher in providing stimulating and challenging learning experiences. Our hope and belief are that the Holy Spirit will be active wherever God's word is studied and students given opportunities to explore the Christian faith.

LIFE has been the impetus for our schools to consider how their beliefs about the importance of Christian Studies are reflected in practice. Many schools have brought about changes to their timetabling, staffing, assessment and reporting and resourcing of Christian Studies as a result of the discussions arising from LIFE professional development. Most schools recognise that this is an ongoing challenge that will always need attention.

LIFE has helped bring about a greater recognition of the importance of theological training of all teachers and particularly Christian Studies teachers. While LIFE provided comprehensive theological support for teachers of Christian Studies it became apparent that teachers needed to be confident in their knowledge of the theological

concepts if they were to foster an investigative approach in the classroom. We have learned that if students are to be actively engaged in questioning, exploring, analysing and reflecting, teachers need to have considered the related issues and theological perspectives so that they can facilitate and guide students' investigations.

LIFE has provided opportunities for dialogue between and within schools, and for sharing between primary and secondary teachers. It has brought about greater recognition of the challenges unique to the primary and secondary context as well as the many similarities. As we continue on our journey we must consider how we can capitalise on the expertise of teachers in the primary and secondary settings for the benefit of Christian Studies and the learning experiences of the students.

We have learned that LIFE still has life in it. As we begin to embark on the next stage of the journey we recognise the enormous resource that LIFE will continue to be for teachers of Christian Studies. LIFE has a wealth of material that is yet to be fully utilised. We have learned to appreciate the importance of the context in which we teach and to recognise that it continues to change. LIFE was written to address the changes in Lutheran schools since their rapid expansion in the 70's, 80's and 90's. The world has changed greatly since then, stirring questions in students about world religions and frameworks for belief. Our students are changing and the classroom context continues to change. No other curriculum area brings students with such a diversity of needs, experience and beliefs. No other subject is as challenging to teach and lead. As we plan for the future we need to ensure that teachers are supported so their planning and teaching is relevant for their context.

We have learned that a curriculum document such as LIFE cannot bring about change in approach or pedagogy even though these may

be implicit in the document. Teachers need opportunities to explore trends and issues related to the teaching of Christian Studies and to be supported with ongoing professional and theological development.

We have learned that God has and will continue to richly bless our efforts as we seek excellence in theology and practice in Christian Studies classrooms in Lutheran schools around Australia. LIFE was always the beginning. We are still learning about the teaching of Christian Studies and seeking the best way to assist our students to explore Christianity, the Christian faith and its relevance for their lives and the world today. Christian Studies while grounded in Lutheran perspectives of Christian belief will be responsive to the changing nature of the classroom and the world in which we live. The development of the Christian Studies Outcomes Framework is the next step in this journey. We have recognised both the content gaps in LIFE and also the changing context in which we teach, and are seeking to address these through the framework. The framework is another system initiative that is testimony to our schools' belief in the importance of best practice in Christian Studies. The new framework will provide further support for teachers as they continue on the journey.

**Anne Dohnt**  
*Phil 1:3-6*



# What the new framework is trying to do [Why a framework now?]

## A bit of history

Christian Studies has always featured on the Lutheran school timetable, at both primary and secondary levels, yet the content, delivery and resourcing of this significant learning area were left to individual schools, each seeking to create a coherent program for the term of a student's attendance at the school. A significant body of material was produced with common themes evident across the school programs. The introduction of LIFE enabled schools to develop a curriculum that reflected the students' stage of development and provided teachers with a rich set of ideas grounded in the Lutheran Confessions. It was the first Australian resource in this area for Lutheran schools. Schools retained their autonomy using LIFE to develop a program reflecting the cultural diversity of their context.

The process involved in developing and trialling the framework reflects its educational focus. Twelve teachers from South Australia, Queensland and Victoria were brought together in August 2003 to write the outcomes for the framework and eighteen teachers from those states are now involved in developing units of work, teaching them and providing feedback on all six band levels. Education officers representing the three states are monitoring the trial and reporting back to the Directors and Executive Director.

The development of the Christian Studies Outcomes Framework (CSOF) document represents the next step in the journey to ensure the focus and integrity of Christian Studies in our schools. In an audit of Christian Studies conducted in 2001/2002 teachers expressed a desire for a document that reflected more intentionally the educational setting of Christian Studies – the classroom – couched in language consistent with other key learning areas (KLAs) to facilitate the integration of Christian Studies with other KLAs as well as provide a common ground for assessing learning taking place in the classroom and reporting on what students know and can do in this key learning area.

## Setting a direction

An outcomes-based approach to education places the individual student at the centre of the education process. This is reflected in the different KLA material in all states. The strongest and most positive response of teachers' trialling the framework is the freedom it gives them to develop units of work that follow the students' questions and interest in their journey of understanding and faith. The outcomes provide teachers with a clear starting point and an end point by which they can measure students' acquisition of a concept. The teachers have reported the privilege of becoming a learner on this journey of understanding and that their chief role is to listen and **provide opportunities of inquiry and reflection on the students' journey of faith.** The framework does not prescribe nor assume a particular religious stance or profession of faith. It acknowledges that students and teachers each bring a worldview to the classroom, a worldview that has been shaped by relationships, culture, family beliefs and values as well as a variety of events and experiences. The framework encourages the development of a pedagogy that respects the individual child and the choices that he/she will make in response to the Christian Story unfolding through the outcomes.

## The framework provides a sequence of learning

where the ideas and concepts within the outcomes at one band level act as the building blocks for the next band level. It allows teachers to draw on a range of resources and syllabi to achieve the outcomes. This flexibility means that schools can create unique programs that meet the needs of students at different levels. In addition, the framework includes outcomes for children attending Lutheran early childhood centres, kindergartens and preschools (Beginning band) and outcomes for senior students in Lutheran colleges (Band E). At present there are an increasing

number of resources/programs that schools can draw on in the area of Christian Studies, eg, state religious syllabi, the five strand approach developed by Peter Vardy. The framework here acts as a set of checkpoints of developmental understanding, concepts and processes for a school program to ensure that students have been given a clear exposition of the Christian Story. Teachers trialling at the new Beginning level attest to the important direction the outcomes are giving them. At these centres the children's interests direct the activities within a day. Knowledge of the outcomes means teachers can more intentionally select material that will allow them to introduce the *God-content*. It is also making them more alert to what the students are saying and doing that demonstrates the children's understanding of the concepts in the outcomes. It is an integrated approach. Two other teachers at different levels have been excited that Christian Studies has become the driver for what happens in the classroom. In planning and negotiating the unit with students teachers find that they are able to cover several outcomes from other KLAs. Using outcomes gives the activity and learning in the Christian Studies class shape and purpose.

## Enriching LIFE

The framework goes beyond LIFE in that it gives a **map whereby teachers can plot the growing understanding and mastery of concepts that belong to this domain of learning.** LIFE continues to be a meaningful and purposeful resource, but the framework has streamlined the many concepts within LIFE by organising the material in LIFE into three major strands – Christian Beliefs, Christian Living, Christian Contexts and Practices and creating an additional strand – Christianity in the World – that explores the relationship between Christianity and other religions and belief systems.

Many teachers have welcomed the inclusion of the strand Christianity in the World. One teacher commented that it was equally as important to address issues related to other world religions, ethics and social justice in more sheltered conservative communities as it was for schools in more multi-cultural, multi-faith contexts.

## On a learning curve

### The practical challenges

- Designing a clearly written and practical document that is teacher-friendly
- Using inclusive language that cuts across the educational jargon peculiar to each state
- Writing workshops for each strand
- Assisting trial teachers as they plan, write and teach new units of work
- Collating feedback from teachers
- Incorporating teacher feedback in the rewrite of the document
- Meeting the December 2004 writing deadline

The development and implementation of the framework has raised many questions and provoked a re-examination of the philosophical premise of Christian Studies. Why have the subject Christian Studies in our schools? What in fact are we doing in Christian Studies? Where does Christian Studies fit in the context of the whole Christian education offered within Lutheran schools? Surprise was registered that clear answers to these questions were not forthcoming. And so the framework has forced us on an important journey of rediscovery, a positive by-product of developing the framework.

It has become evident that the framework will need support documentation to help address the significant issues raised. One issue relates to the theological background and training of teachers. Will teachers be suitably equipped? Teachers

will have gaps of knowledge. One trial teacher reports positive personal growth as she delves more purposefully into the relevant biblical text for a unit of work. Dr Malcolm Bartsch has been employed part time to write theological papers for the twelve key ideas in the four strands. A theological map is being produced to show

how and where the key theological concepts are being addressed. In addition, there will be a series of articles to further expand understanding in each of the areas.

Some schools have expressed concern that teachers will not have time to write their own units of work while other teachers lack the confidence to do this. Developing pedagogy for Christian Studies as well as a range of appropriate methodologies will need to be a priority in the professional development made available. Teachers already have a wealth of teaching strategies made available to them through the other

KLAs. It is important to recognise which strategies are best applied in the Christian Studies context. Professional development will need to be tailored to the varying levels of support required by individual teachers. Each school will need to assess the range of support they will need for a successful implementation of the framework.

Closely linked to the above concerns is the fear that an educational process will compromise the faith formation/development of students. This reinforces the need to identify the purpose of Christian Studies and to clarify the broader context in which Christian Studies fits. It is important to differentiate the approach needed in different contexts, eg, Sunday school, youth services, worship, confirmation instruction, bible study groups, vacation care have different purposes and audiences and necessitate different approaches. Professional development will be extended to school pastors so that they can be inducted into the nature of the framework.

### BEST CASE SCENARIO

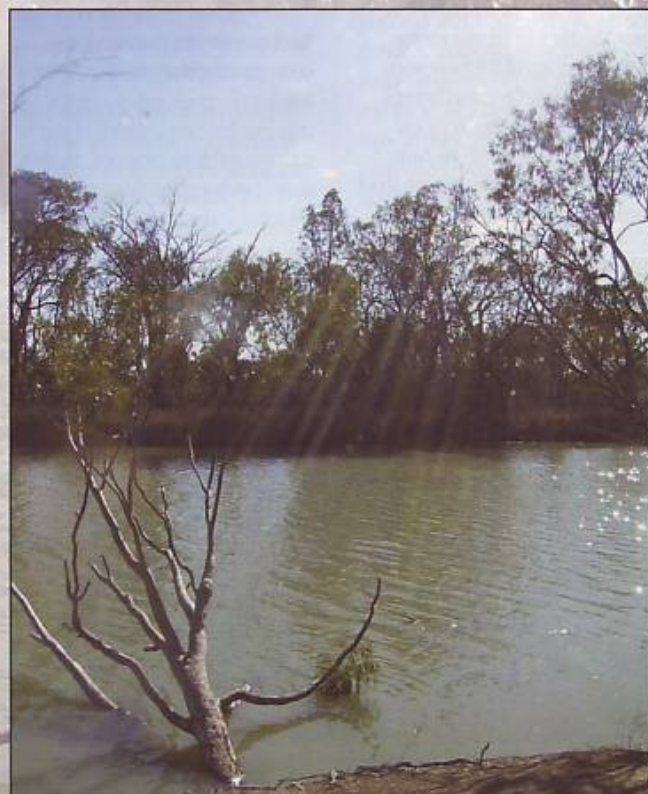
The development of the framework has proved to be a larger project than first anticipated. It is hoped that through the implementation of the framework principals, curriculum leaders, teachers, school pastors will have a clear understanding of the role of Christian Studies in the context of the whole Christian education experience, and thus be engaged in purposeful conversation to formulate a balanced coherent program for students. My hope is that Christian

Studies will be known for its rigour, integrity and its ability to engage students' thinking and learning in such a way that they will begin and continue to wrestle with how to live in relationship with God and others, responding to what is happening around them with compassion, justice and humility. Furthermore, my hope is that students will feel so respected and affirmed in who they are, no matter their response to the Christian Story, that they will always be free to ask their questions and find resources to go on their personal journey.

**Dominique Jaaniste**  
Acting National Christian  
Studies Coordinator

#### Trial teachers report:

- My students are happier
- Students are enjoying the challenge and rising to the occasion
- My students knew so much more about Judaism than I thought they would
- My students knew so little about Judaism I had to go back to the previous outcome and discuss the notion of religion
- My students have grown in confidence and are now so much more involved in meaningful discussion
- I am so much happier this term about how I am approaching a unit of work. It's not about gathering a host of activities, it's about starting with the outcome and identifying what my students will need to know and do and that has been so liberating
- I think it's absolutely fantastic that I can examine ethics with my year 3 class



# Christian Studies Outcomes Framework

## A trial teacher's experience

This year my class of year 4 students and I are trialling the Band B (Years 3-5) component of the new Christian Studies Outcomes Framework. When I was first asked to be one of the trial teachers using the framework, I was excited to be given the chance to look closely at the developments in this area. The Christian Studies Audit and other feedback had revealed the need for an outcomes framework describing the essential elements of learning in Christian Studies similar to other curriculum documents supporting the remaining key learning areas. I was keen to see how this new framework could be used, how it would influence my teaching and how my students would perceive its effects. I was especially interested to see how the framework would affect my use of the LIFE curriculum, of which I am a big fan and which I have happily been using since its launch in 1998.

Our group of six trial teachers is working within the six Bands from Beginning (Early Years) to Band E (Year 12). The four Strands are the major organisers of the framework: Christian Beliefs, Christian Contexts and Practices, Christian Living and Christianity in the World. We have been meeting each term to learn about them. Malcolm Bartsch, Dominique

Jaaniste, Louise Mason, and Angela Cooper have taught us theology and methodology, equipping and inspiring us to write units of work tailor-made for the students and teachers.

A significant change I have found through this trial is that now I am writing Christian Studies units specifically relevant to my students' prior knowledge and their individual needs. This has brought my planning and implementation of Christian Studies more in line with how I teach the other key learning areas. While the LIFE curriculum has never been prescriptive and is used as a flexible and relevant resource, I had been content to use the provided model units and had not written a Christian Studies unit since my days of gleaning ideas from resources such as *Eternal Word* and *Follow Me*. A reflection on me as a low risk taker in my learning! The framework has helped to give me the overarching direction and impetus to write units targeting my class's specific needs, while still retaining the quality of the LIFE curriculum resource.

Through using the framework, my understanding of the developmental learning outcomes and assessment sequence from kindergarten to year 12 is clearer and more informed. My own understanding of the theology within the framework strands has grown



Whole class sharing

significantly and I am doing more of my own personal research than previously. My teaching in Christian Studies has also become more flexible. We are currently working through content that is specifically appropriate to the life experiences and individual needs of the particular group I am teaching this year. I know I would go about achieving the same outcomes differently with each new class.

I am finding that working through units written specifically for my students is initiating more high level discussion and questioning, frequent integration with other subject areas and research from a wider range of resources. To achieve the outcomes, we are using the students themselves, their families and the school, church and wider communities extensively as sources of information. This had made me even more mindful of the statement describing Christian Studies as providing '...an opportunity for teachers and students to express their faith, but does not overtly or covertly put pressure on students to do so.' (*Christian Studies Outcomes Framework*, p 8) In my class, I have heavily emphasised the right of individuals to choose whether or not to share personal information even more so this year, especially as we are talking to so many different people. We have stressed the need to respect the responses and sharing that do take

place. Last term we were exploring what faith means to people and who some Christians might be whom we could interview about their experiences. To my alarm, the students all started excitedly quizzing each other. 'Are you a Christian? Are YOU a Christian? Can I interview you?' Which wasn't exactly what I'd had in mind as far as avoiding pressure goes! So, while the students' (and my!) understanding of 'pressure' is developing, I was still pleased to note that those students who didn't feel comfortable about being interviewed were refusing politely and their choices were happily accepted with nary a batted eyelid. As the trial has progressed, I am finding my students researching widely and making carefully considered responses openly and in the security that they are in charge of the information they share and with whom they share.

I have often regarded students at year 4 level as very accepting and trusting of the information and resources to which they are exposed. This year I am hearing questions such as:

*Why are we studying Jews? What have they got to do with Christian Studies?*

*How come these two websites say the opposite about Jewish beliefs?*

*Do I have to tell the whole class about my mum's hopes and plans for me?*



An interview with principal, Gary Robertson. What does being a Christian mean to you



The responses from the students are showing their development as discerning and self directed learners.

Our group of six trial teachers was asked about our reflections on using the framework and we noted the following:

- students and teachers are generating new ideas and being challenged
- students are building onto their understanding of Christianity themselves rather than just being given information

- students are engaging in Christian Studies at a high level in and outside the classroom
- there is freedom to follow relevant tangents
- the work is owned by the teacher and students
- teachers are planning and implementing units cooperatively
- work from Christian Studies flows into other areas
- discussions are rich and encompass a wide, personally relevant range of issues

- prior knowledge and experience is highly valued and impacts planning and implementation
- teachers have a clearer understanding of the developmental learning and assessment taking place from the beginning years to year 12

The framework is still changing and developing as it is being used and feedback is taken into account. My class and I are finding that directing our own units of work, while using the LIFE curriculum, websites, texts, people

and other resources, within the guidance of the framework for learning and assessment is very rewarding.

Thanks to my fellow trial teachers: Michelle Schulz, Amanda Wakefield, Shane Jurecky, Terry Sawade, Andrew Long.

#### **Elizabeth Geue**

Our Saviour Lutheran School  
Aberfoyle Park SA

## My journey – a middle school point of view

**M**y journey along the road to being a trial teacher of CSOF

(Christian Studies Outcomes Framework) began a few years ago, at a cluster meeting for Gold Coast Christian Studies key teachers. We were asked, with words to the effect of 'In a perfect world what would you like to happen in Christian Studies?' My immediate response to this question was that we needed to bring Christian Studies in-line with other subjects, to have the focus on student and student interests and to use an Outcomes Based Approach – one that would be in line with current teaching practice and would meet the needs of our students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This is my tenth year in Lutheran education and I have fortunately had access to the LIFE curriculum during my earlier teaching years. LIFE obviously filled a great need within the school community. Yet, as with all things in education, things change and progress must be made. As a result of the Christian Studies Audit some areas were identified as being a need within schools which led to CSOF.

The CSOF has aimed to incorporate some of these needs into the framework, to allow for the development of outcomes based

education, and to allow teachers and students enhanced learning opportunities.

In creating a knowledge base, initially, I began trying to use other systemic outcomes (ie: Brisbane Catholic syllabus) and their key elements by adapting them to our LIFE materials and program. This was useful in developing language and seeing how they identified understandings of students and what they are capable of doing. It also gave me a greater understanding of what was in LIFE at the different bands. As the Christian Studies key teacher in the middle school I developed a work program that incorporated the outcomes, lifelong learning attributes and my outcomes. It was obvious to me, that all of these aspects were required to ensure a well rounded program.

From this work at St Andrews, I was asked to be involved in a steering committee for the CSOF. This then led to writing for Band D outcomes, to where we are currently, as a trial school for CSOF.

I approached the curriculum writing enthusiastically, as this is one of my passions. Originally, I was writing for Band D and in particular year 9 students. With this age group it is important to allow for flexibility in approaching subject matter while still

allowing for a range of learning opportunities.

Currently, I am still refining and adapting my approach to writing a unit of work. Despite this, I believe at the heart of each unit of work, there need to be the prospect for self discovery and opportunities to develop acceptance, respect for others and the value of each individual.

After term one, I felt that I needed to be more aware of the progression of the outcomes through the bands. It is fortunate, that I am teaching year 7-9 Christian Studies and therefore have a good understanding of students in this age group (Band C & D).

So term two began with the implementation three new units. To approach the writing of a unit I needed to consider the key ideas, knowledge and the possible processes that would lead students to demonstrate the outcome.

In considering possible assessment tasks that would demonstrate the outcomes, I believe, it is necessary to give students a range of choice and possibility to negotiate assessment. I feel that this is an essential element to the CSOF as it allows both teachers and therefore students, greater opportunity to be creative and flexible in reaching a goal.

Another key element of the process is that students enjoy learning and through this learning it is possible to create greater understanding of the students we teach and form worthwhile relationships.

I have had positive feedback about the work and units from both teachers and students. Students have gained a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. They have enjoyed the range of learning experiences (that they see it not just as *God stuff*) and they enjoyed the interaction with technology. Teachers have been impressed by just what you can do in Christian Studies, the richness of the learning experiences.

I was lucky that my experience has been one that has been fully immersed in the process of the CSOF. It will be necessary for future users to take the time to read and consider how best to use the CSOF in their schools. Yet, it is such a liberating approach to Christian Studies, (that may be for some a daunting task) that is worthwhile and essential if we desire to continue to reach the students in our increasingly obviously secular world.

#### **Julia Boulton**

St Andrews Lutheran College  
Andrews Qld

# District News – SA/NT/WA

...and a teacher's experience

## Assessing the God stuff

Last year I was invited to trial the new Christian Studies Outcomes Framework that will be implemented in Lutheran schools over the next few years. In undertaking this project I could not have anticipated the journey I would take with assessment and recording, and the effect this would have on my approach to Christian Studies.

It was a cold and wintry Thursday afternoon in Mount Barker as I crouched down alongside one of my reception student's tables to look at that person's work. There before me were four beautifully illustrated faces, each face displaying a different emotion; happy, sad, scared and angry. I took the lid from my pen and placed a tick on my assessment continuum to say that the child had achieved the desired outcome of being able to identify four different emotions. I replaced the lid on my pen and moved to the next child.

If you were to look back over my assessment records from this learning activity you would find an accurate recording of each child's ability to identify four different emotions. However, that will not give you an accurate indication of what I was trying to teach the children, nor will it inform you of the learning that was taking place in my classroom. This particular part of the unit wasn't about whether the children could identify different emotions or not and I wanted the



children to learn about how Christians believe that God created people with feelings and emotions. My assessment methods were neither purposeful nor authentic. They hadn't informed me about whether the learning goals I had programmed had been achieved and they certainly didn't assist with making decisions about subsequent teaching and learning experiences. My assessment and recording methods had failed and it was time to confront the uncertainties that I had about assessment in Christian Studies.

In any subject we are required to use authentic assessment methods to

assess student knowledge to the best of our abilities. Christian Studies is no exception. I guess I have often felt worried that in my plight to assess the *God stuff* in Christian Studies I might somehow assess the children's faith, which I have no right to do. For this reason I have been guilty of assessing the children's work without delving into the understandings they have made about Christianity and God.

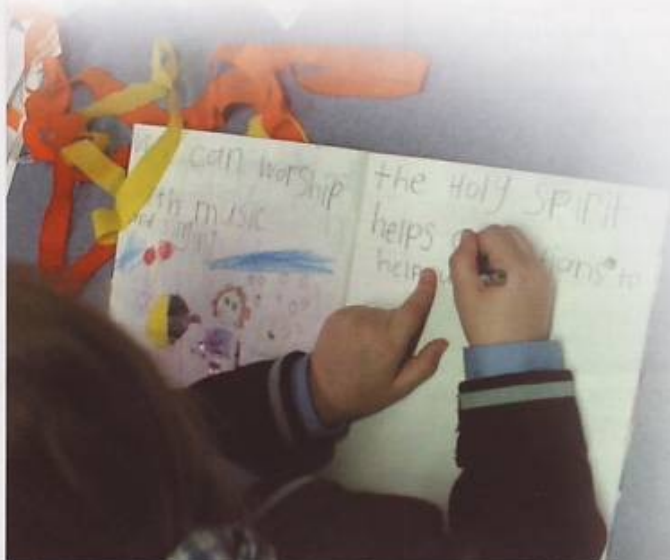
My assessment journey in Christian Studies has encouraged me to change the way I plan my units of work entirely. I am no longer tacking on a relatively useless assessment tool to the end of my units. I am now planning according to my outcomes and all the while I am considering how the children's understandings are going to be authentically assessed. Outcomes, learning activities and assessment columns appear parallel on my unit planner and are also functioning together in my mind as I plan and program.

I don't have a final assessment item or piece of work. Assessment is ongoing, it happens as I listen to the children's conversations and talk with them throughout their activities. I question

them in order to reveal a realistic understanding of the new knowledge they are forming. My assessment is not measured by their faith and certainly not by using inaccurate token efforts of assessing without delving into the children's growing knowledge of the *God stuff*. It is measured by their understandings about the beliefs of Christian people.

We all know that Christian Studies is a key learning area where we are expected to assess students' work in the same way that we assess literacy, mathematics, physical education and the like. What a challenge this is, but how exciting it becomes as you realise that the children are developing new understandings about God and people who live in faith. How much more exciting is it to know that God is sending his Holy Spirit into the opportunities that we are providing to plant and nurture the seeds of faith in the hearts of his children.

**Michelle Schulz**  
St Mark's Lutheran School  
Mt Barker SA



## Christian Studies – a legitimate KLA

At the start of this year when our group sat down to look at trialling the Christian Studies Outcomes Framework, I did so with a little apprehension. Some early discussion centred round whether this bringing into line of Christian Studies with the other eight key learning areas (KLAs) meant that Christian Studies should now be regarded as the ninth KLA. All very well, but if you are a classroom teacher this immediately sends shudders through your thinking processes of how to actually program another KLA into your already crowded weekly timetable – hence the apprehension. The fact that we, as teachers in Lutheran schools, already have a strong focus on the spiritual and Christian side of education, did not come into my initial thought process.

The reality here was that Christian Studies was now to be approached and presented as a legitimate KLA – coming into line with all other learning areas in the way it was to be planned, taught and assessed. My mind went into overdrive to work out how on earth I was going to find the extra time to fit it into the timetable.

Now there are obvious advantages in treating Christian Studies as a legitimate KLA – probably the most significant being that it can no longer be seen or interpreted as a peripheral subject, an add on, or something we just do because we teach in a Christian school. While I in no way argue that this is the case with teachers in our schools, it has been my perception, as a relatively new teacher to the system, that it does occur in some quarters. The Christian ethos, and indeed that of the LCA, is central to the reason we have our schools. It certainly is to me as a teacher in this system. Otherwise what would make us any different from any other state school?

When my teaching partner, Cheryl, and I planned our first unit for term one, we did so as one would expect – treating Christian Studies in a rather

traditional manner – as a separate, stand alone subject. As we moved through that unit with the children, it became increasingly obvious to us that, given the nature of the subject matter, we would have been much better off integrating our unit with other areas such as SOSE and English. Many of the activities and student tasks, while very definitely having a Christian focus, did at the same time cross over into other KLAs such as those mentioned above. We thought therefore, that it would be logical (and sensible – given the problem of the crowded curriculum) to use the opportunity to rationalise our teaching program by integrating Christian Studies with other subjects in our future planning.

So that was our approach as we embarked on our term two planning. Initially our unit design focussed on dovetailing Christian Studies into the other areas. While there were some aspects of that approach with which we were happy, there was one factor which disappointed us – and that stood out like a beacon. In attempting

to rationalise our time we had compromised the Christian focus of the Christian Studies unit we were planning. So we went back to the drawing board and tried again. The difference this time was that we started with Christian Studies as the focus KLA and fitted the other KLAs of English, SOSE, Science and Technology into and around our stated outcomes for the Christian Studies unit. By doing this we kept coming back to the Christian focus of the unit – something we were absolutely thrilled about.

The result was a unit of work which had a strong Christian Studies focus while integrating tasks to cater for the needs of other KLAs. The children found the work varied, interesting and stimulating, with one group opting to make a DVD for a presentation activity. Our 'integrated studies' as we called it, also saved us programming headaches. Certainly there are areas we believe we can improve upon and that we will change next time, but that's what learning is about – keeping what is good and refining what doesn't work so well.

In conclusion, there are two points that I would like to highlight. The first is the fact that our unit topic, *Christianity in the World*, did lend itself nicely to integration with other areas, and this may not always be so easily the case with other topics.

The second, and definitely the more significant, has to do with how we regard the status of Christian Studies as a KLA in relation to the other KLAs of the curriculum. Do we see it as the ninth KLA or as the first, after which follow the others. Cheryl and I know from our experience how we regard it – do you?

**Terry Sawade**

Loxton Lutheran School  
Loxton SA



# District NEWS – SE Region

## Is it Christian Studies or Religious Studies in the Lutheran school?

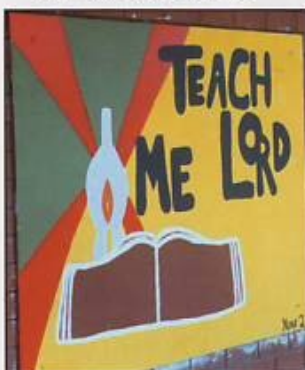
### Does it matter? (a personal reflection)

I guess it depends on your definitions. But then, where definitions look neat on paper they rarely look quite as neat in the dynamic of the classroom.

It's probably fair to say that 'Religious Studies' suggests a more objective, academic study of religious concepts and systems, whereas 'Christian Studies' seems to want to engage teacher and student in something that recognises a level of 'faith commitment'.

In my experience as a committed Christian pastor and teacher I have rationally been able to define the two as different and distinct approaches, but in my teaching practice I have been somewhat 'locked in' to the fact that

- I just can't disengage my personal faith conviction from the process of teaching God's Word, whatever the context. So I have to be 'up front' and honest about it: 'I believe this stuff! It's important to me! It is about who I am, and why I am! My whole worldview is shaped by it! And I believe it is vitally important for you, too!'
- I can't pretend that I understand any other religion or belief system fully because without the element of personal 'faith' and 'commitment' the insights that really make a particular belief



important are not comprehended by me. The history, the dogma, the rituals, the symbols – the study of these may be interesting and informative and even exciting and stimulating – but there will always be a level at which I just don't get it.

So ... whenever I teach Christianity it is always, for me, 'Christian Studies'; whenever I teach about another religious belief system, it is always 'Religious Studies'. And if I compare Christianity with another religion I am probably mixing up Christian Studies and Religious Studies, and almost certainly not being fair to the other religion.

So I have always tried to be honest about this. And I have encouraged my students to recognise that they have to deal with the same realities.

As Christian teachers in Lutheran schools we have to recognise that, from the start, we invite people to be part of a community in which we work with the belief that the Holy Spirit is active among us. We not only allow the possibility that he will create faith among those who hear the Word through worship, and teaching, and pastoral care, and casual conversation, and loving example, and you-can-fill-in-the-rest – we actually believe this to be a reality, something that we expect to happen, according to the Spirit's

timetable. We just can't define the Spirit out of the process. So, instead, we confess that this is why we teach, and worship, and care for one another the way we do.

On the other hand, we also cannot define faith in our students as part of the process. We leave that to the Spirit, and give thanks for those moments when we are able to discern or discover this faith active in learning and living. This means that sometimes we will be teaching 'Christian Studies' and our students will be engaging in 'Religious Studies'.

Or maybe a bit of both ...

I remember a student well who was a publicly professed 'atheist'. (I tried to teach her the difference between 'atheist' and 'agnostic' – so that she could allow herself a bit of room to move! – but she was happy sticking with 'atheist'.) About once a fortnight, always on her initiative, she would come and have lunch with me, and ask me to pray for her. (She would stick around while I prayed, but she wasn't praying with me because she didn't believe in any of that.)

Confused?

So what had she been studying with me?: Christian Studies? Religious Studies? Figure that one out and you

will be able to answer the question given to me for this reflection.

What had I been teaching her? Christian Studies. That much she knew and understood very well. And, yes, it mattered.

### Mark Greenthaner

Pastor, Outer Eastern Lutheran Church, Croydon & Lilydale  
The Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School, Croydon  
(and formerly School Pastor at Luther College, Croydon)

## What are Lutheran Schools trying to achieve in Christian Studies?

Malcolm Bartsch writes,

*'The church believes that Christian education involves and concerns all of its members at every stage of their life, from baptism to the grave. It defines Christian education as all those influences, activities, institutions which have the aim to produce the harmonious development of the whole of a Christian's gifts and endowments for use in society and for service of his fellowman.'* (Why a Lutheran School? (p 133))

I believe Christian Studies provides harmony for the various school experiences that combine to assist the development of a student's gifts and talents. This is an important consideration when organising the school Christian Studies program.

Schools today talk about the 'packed' curriculum and teachers often complain about not having enough time to do everything. The structure of our primary schools though, provides us with great opportunity to enhance our teaching programs through the integration of a number of subjects, thereby encouraging students in the translation of skills and understanding across the curriculum. This obviously enables teachers to achieve greater efficiencies of time but more importantly, it allows for teachers

and students to draw the significant links between student learning in Christian Studies and their other learning.

I think it is important for teachers to use class, school and church worship services as mediums to promote the idea among students and their families that belonging to God's family will benefit them socially, emotionally, physically, spiritually and academically. The Christian Studies program should be instrumental in reinforcing this. It should provide the secure and supportive forum through which students are encouraged to ask questions and experiment with their ideas and understandings about their faith.

There can be a tendency, driven by local demand and/or opportunity, that schools become too focused on one area of school life, often at the expense of other areas of student development. Christian Studies can provide the balance; it can act as the vehicle that carries with it the clear message of the school's mission; that of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which at the centre of our very being encourages and promotes the holistic growth and development of those within our school communities.

If Christian Studies programs in our schools assist in closing the gap between a school's vision and mission and realities of life then our schools will become increasingly enriching institutions preparing our staff, students and the parent group for the onward path of Christian lifelong learning and continued personal and professional growth.

**Bruce Were**  
Good Shepherd College  
Hamilton Vic

### What does it take to be a Christian Studies teacher?

In my drawer sits a hand made bookmark. It says 'I am reminded by God'. The maker of this gift is no longer in my class, at my school or in my community but when I see it I am reminded to pray for him. His parents were atheists who chose a Christian school as a way of informing him of different beliefs and letting him make his own choice. I pray that in some way our time together may have had some effect on him and his family and that the words of his bookmark may indeed ring true.

What does it take to be a Christian Studies teacher? Is it any different from being a teacher of any other KLA?

A Christian Studies teacher certainly needs a knowledge and understanding of the subjects to be taught and an ability to share, guide and impart this knowledge to students. However, Christian Studies is the one key learning area that can have a life-affecting, life-changing, and life-after-death effect in students' lives. It is here that we have an opportunity to introduce students to who God is and what he has done for us. Therefore a

Christian Studies teacher has an enormous responsibility and a challenge placed before them. No other KLA has such a life-affecting understanding under-girding it.

A Christian Studies teacher must 'be prepared' not just with lesson plans and activities but 'be prepared' to go on a journey with students, to move through uncharted waters, not so much in terms of understanding what God says but how and where students may need to go as they seek understanding and learning through questions and answers. As a teacher guides, challenges and moves through the content of the curriculum, their own personal experience and understanding will be reflected in the relationships with those around them and in their expression of their relationship with God. Teaching Christian Studies leads us on our own faith-journey as we prepare and plan for the particular areas to be taught.

Being a Christian Studies teacher takes being a loved child of God, a forgiven child of God. It means having a love for God and a love for all people as his children. It takes being someone who is continually growing in faith, someone who shares their faith through their attitudes and actions. (*Knowing that*

*we are not a perfect person, a saint-like person or a person with all the answers*)

It also takes prayer. Prayer that God will guide us as we prepare and deliver our lessons, prayer that he will open the hearts of our students as we share the journey of learning and understanding, prayer that God will care for our students no matter what their life situation or where they are in their journey.

We cannot tangibly assess the effect of Christian Studies. We cannot measure the depth of understanding, the faith of the students or the long term effect of Christian studies. We can but pray that God will use the time we, as Christian studies teachers, have shared and the journey we have been on to bring our students to a knowledge and belief in him. Please encourage and support those around you who teach Christian Studies.

**Diedre Priebbenow**  
St Michael's Lutheran School  
Tarrington Vic

# District News – Queensland



**Christian Knowledge at Grace Lutheran College, Rothwell**, is seen as one of the many contributors to the education of the whole person, providing a framework for the individual student's spiritual development. Based on the LIFE program our course is a spiraling one, in that units studied in year 8 are revisited and developed in later years. As such, the program supports various strands across several key learning areas, especially those relating to English and environmental studies. However, the program differs from other KLA's in that our primary purpose is to instill in our students a sense of God's place in the world, to teach them the Christian gospel and enable them to reflect on its meaning for their lives. We hope to engage our students on a spiritual journey in a search for personal meaning that will continue throughout their lives. We want them to yearn to know Jesus better and for this reason it does matter that our program revolves around Christian Studies rather than Religious Studies. Teachers of Christian Knowledge carry enormous responsibilities to develop kind and open relationships with students, deliver stimulating and intellectually rigorous lessons and be accountable in the way they themselves live their lives.

*Lois Kissick*

**H**ere in Queensland we have eight schools and two early childhood centres trialling the new Christian Studies framework. We also hold every second year a Christian Studies conference for all teachers, directors and principals, early childhood to year 12. The second conference drew some 130 people to St Peters last year. Because of distance, key teachers (P-12) meet once a year at an annual conference and there are other workshops held regionally or at schools on demand throughout the year. It has been inspiring to see year 12 teachers sitting with preschool teachers discussing philosophical positions regarding education and the teaching of Christian Studies, and learning from each other in the process.

*Schools were invited to submit just a paragraph or two telling very briefly their own Christian Studies story – enjoy them!*

**Religion at Redeemer Lutheran College, Rochedale** : In teaching and learning at Redeemer we seek to engage students as co-researchers in description, interpretation, critique and reflection on the world views of society, and on their own personal life journey using a biblical theology.

From years 6-10, students are taught essentially from LIFE materials, the Christian faith. What is it to be a Christian and to practise Christianity? We cover subjects like prayer, worship, Christian service and the church. We ask the question: How does the church live out its creed of love and peace? We talk about codes of conduct relating to real life issues like food, exercise, success, sexuality and relationships. In years 11-12, students examine other religions and the outworking of Christian faith in establishing a good life in society. They deal with vocation, suffering, death and dying, and marriage. They study Mark's gospel as well as Romans and Revelation and contemporary applications. The final study is a semester of ethics.

As I see it, getting higher student engagement involves overcoming three problems. The first is a problem of subject status. This needs persistent challenge in our secular society. The second is the perception of indoctrination. This is overcome by owning (this is what I believe) and grounding (this is what Christians believe). The third is the problem of pedagogy because the teaching of religion is unique with its own needs.

*Geoffrey Butler*



## **Christian Studies at St Pauls Lutheran Primary School, Caboolture:**

Combined with worship, devotions, school Sundays and Care and Share, Christian Studies helps our school community to teach and witness to salvation through Jesus Christ. The school and its congregation need these and other strategies and activities beyond Christian Studies if we want to draw unchurched parents and families into the Christian family. There is a danger that Christian Studies, without trained Christian teachers will teach facts but not build faith. The daily prayers of the Christian community are needed so that the work of the Holy Spirit does bear fruit through this curriculum and the school's mission is progressed. The LIFE curriculum remains the main curriculum resource because of the organisation of content, teaching guides and teacher friendly layout. Measuring the success of the global aims of the Christian Studies program is as difficult as assessing someone's faith and we don't do that.

*Gilbert Lohe*

## **Christian Studies/ Religious and Values Education at Immanuel Lutheran College, Buderim:**

At Immanuel, we use two terms for this subject, which is compulsory for all students from preschool to year 12. While it is called 'Christian Studies' from preschool to year 10, we offer 'Religious and Values Education' (RAVE) in the last two years of schooling. The name change in the last two years reflects the fact that the focus of study moves beyond the predominant Christian doctrinal approach to incorporating other religious and philosophical outlooks. With the Outcomes Framework gradually being introduced, it may be necessary to reconsider name changes to reflect all strands of the framework. That remains to be decided in the future. For the moment the department is called Christian Studies (CS) and it oversees the school-based programs as well as the QSA subject 'Study of Religion'.

We are fortunate at Immanuel that, thus far, we have had a good amount of time allocated to CS on the timetable. While it is not always quite the same number of lessons as those given to other KLA's, it is still such that it provides opportunity for students to receive continuous instruction/exposure to questions pertaining to the framework of living. For this I am grateful, because whenever I go to conferences and listen to colleagues from other systems, it is obvious how much they

year for more time to make a difference in their students' schooling. Staff from CS have equal access to PD opportunities, department meeting times, budget allowances for resources, etc. A slight drawback can arise when staff teach predominantly CS, which, since there are somewhat fewer lessons on the timetable, means that they can land with a large number of students to get to know, whose work they have to mark and whose reports they are responsible for. That is something always to be mindful of. The other aspect of CS teaching that is different comes as a result of 'outside' perceptions that this subject is less 'important' than others, resulting in restless behaviour in the classroom. CS staff, I believe – and I know that Immanuel is not alone in this – deserve a medal for the energy, enthusiasm and commitment they bring to every unit they teach! This brings me to another point. CS/RAVE has a lot to do with building rapport with the students. Of course this is true for other subjects, but in CS/RAVE it is vital. Every lesson can bring about in-depth discussion of central issues. In fact, it would be hoped that students feel comfortable, so that staff always work towards an atmosphere of openness, care and mutual respect.

#### Content highlights

- Year 4 is trialling the outcomes framework, with more year levels to join in future
- Expansion of looking at World Religions already in the junior school is happening (year 4 Judaism; year 6 as part of their unit on multiculturalism)
- More Ethics/Values units are being developed: year 7 (environmental ethics), year 8 (what shapes personal values?); year 12 (Science and Ethics)
- Peter Vardy will conduct a student seminar for the second year in a row for year 12s of independent schools on the Sunshine Coast on 6 August

- Year 11 RAVE have the opportunity to do electives this term, since their classes all run at the same time, which evidences our commitment to focusing on student need/interests
- In year 11/12 students are not expected to do homework: all tasks are compiled in such a way that they can be completed in lesson time only; care is taken not to focus too much on pen and paper tasks (see picture of poster work done by year 11 students: they had studied four religions and had to represent the beliefs of these abstractly and/or symbolically with a written explanation to accompany poster)
- Good success with guest speakers: Imam visit, Kurbingaibah (centre for Indigenous Awareness, Kippa Ring) visit, nun from Chenrezig (Buddhist retreat centre, Eudlo)
- More and more P-12 planning of units will happen as time progresses – I have already been involved more in year 4 this year, and am assuming that whole-school program will have to be written to incorporate outcomes framework

CS in the junior and middle school years is taught both as distinct units and as part of integrated units. I have not found staff to disadvantage CS in favour of other KLAs in this regard.

This a quick snapshot of Immanuel Lutheran College!

*Kathrin Koning*



#### Christian Studies at Good News Lutheran School, Middle Park

is seen as an important and valued KLA. It is what sets our school apart from others.

Teachers endeavor to provide meaningful activities for their students that involve rich tasks and deep thinking. 2004 has seen the participation of four teachers in the Christian Studies Outcomes Framework trial. These teachers are given release time each term to develop units of work around the new outcomes appropriate for their year level. These units are then being trialled in their classrooms. The support shown in enabling this to happen shows that Christian Studies is very important to our school and an integral part of learning.

*Astrid Neldner*

#### At Pacific Lutheran College, Caloundra,

teachers across P-5 have been involved in trialling the Christian Studies Outcomes Framework in 2004. Working within the framework has provided rewarding and positive experiences some of which are:

- Christian Studies is now inline with other KLAs which are written in outcomes
- There is much more flexibility and lateral thinking in planning
- Units of work build on children's prior knowledge and culture and link issues and concepts into their context
- Units of work are open ended and extend and challenge children's thinking as they construct their own views
- Children have the opportunity to investigate and respect that different people have different views

*Sue Zweck*

#### Global Aims for Christian Studies at St Peters Lutheran College, Indooroopilly: During the compulsory years of schooling in the Christian Studies learning area, students develop the knowledge, processes and attitudes necessary to:

- become self-directed, insightful investigators and learners who are able to explore the Christian faith and understand its relevance for life
- understand better the purpose, meaning and significance that the Christian faith and other forms of spirituality have for the lives of individuals and communities
- identify the patterns of belief and the ways in which these have been influential in shaping their own lives and interpreting their personal experiences
- appreciate the various aspects of human experience that have prompted and continue to prompt the development of both religious and non-religious interpretations of life
- cultivate a respect and understanding for the different religious views they are likely to meet in the communities to which they belong
- develop a commitment to personal beliefs, attitudes and values in ways that maintain a respect for, and a sensitive appreciation of the beliefs, attitudes and values of others
- give generously of their time and energy to undertake activities and projects which benefit others and improve the quality of life in their communities
- engage in practical activities and employ strategies that promote peace, justice and reconciliation in the world
- develop leadership skills and interpersonal skills that will create a safe, inclusive and respectful school community

# District News – Queensland cont.

## Course details

**Year 9:** Christian Studies is a compulsory subject in the curriculum at St Peters. Students in year 9 are introduced to the text *Key Christian Beliefs: Faith for Living*, and explore the way these beliefs influence the lives of Christians in various local and global contexts.

**Year 10:** Students in year 10 engage in an in-depth study of the gospel of Mark, investigate the origins of various Christian denominations that constitute the Christian church throughout the world, as well as explore the beliefs and practices of some sects and cults in contemporary society.

**Year 11:** Christian Studies in year 11 and 12 aims to be a subject that creates a classroom ethos within which students can grow to understand and discuss the religions of the world. Dialogue and discussion are central to the subject. Students are required to study indigenous Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity. They also have an opportunity to examine aspects of the Semitic religions: Islam or Judaism, as well as aspects of the eastern religions: Hinduism or Buddhism. Students also choose a theme for an in-depth study across a number of these religions.

**Year 12:** In year 12 students will explore how people from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds create meaning and purpose in life. The course will respond to the question: What is a worldview? Initially it will provide a working definition for the term worldview. Students will discover how a worldview can be understood as a way of making sense of human experience, or a way of interpreting the experiences of life in a meaningful manner. Questions about the meaning of life are understood to be ultimate questions and ultimate concerns. The course will introduce a variety of worldviews for consideration, analysis and critique.

All year level courses are designed to fulfil the outcomes prescribed in the *Christian Studies Outcome Framework* for the LIFE Curriculum.

Neal Nuske



## Redeemer Lutheran Primary School at Biloela

has eight classes from Prep to year 7 and they have all been trialling the new Christian Studies Outcomes Framework. In the first term, we set aside two days for teachers to plan their units cooperatively with the CS key teacher. In second term, Dominique Jaaniste's help was invaluable when faced with planning from the very new strand of Christianity in the World. Overall, many excellent teaching and learning opportunities have arisen from the units of work undertaken so far. Second semester has seen the CS key teacher take long service and maternity leave, so it is hoped that the remaining teachers have learnt enough about, and are comfortable with, how to plan effectively from the outcomes framework to continue without her. The degree of success in third term will determine whether the trial will continue into fourth term. Provided there is continued support from LEO, there is no reason why the trial should not successfully run its full course considering the commitment and professionalism of the teachers involved.

Brenda Lipsys

## At Trinity Lutheran College, Ashmore, we are

involved in the trial phase of the Christian Studies Outcomes Framework. Rachel Schilling (primary) and Lucas Von Hoff (middle/senior) are members of the CSOF writing team and have had a significant role to play in presenting the framework to the P-12 curriculum committee. At Trinity we are implementing the trial in Beginning Band (Prep), Band A and Band C/D.

Across the college, teachers are working with one of two models. Those teachers in the trial are working within the outcomes framework, while other year levels continue to use the LIFE curriculum in its current format. Teaching staff are fortunate to have the support of two pastors across the college, with one based permanently in the primary school

Meryl Siggs

*Diversity and yet common themes too – Christian Studies remains a challenge, as schools strive to adequately resource it, and to support teachers new to the teaching of the subject. Key teachers are showing remarkable leadership in supporting the teaching of Christian Studies and principals are encouraged to meet regularly with Christian Studies curriculum leaders. Lutheran Education Queensland also supports the teaching of Christian Studies by resourcing a significant video library which is available on line in all schools; schools are also given an annotated list of all videos, including their alignment with LIFE units.*

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A joint publication of the national and district offices of Lutheran Education Australia.

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A full list of references relative to these articles is available from LEA National Office.

## Acknowledgements

Photos used on pages 14, 15 & 16 supplied by Immanuel Lutheran College, Maroochydore Qld.

We thank Shawn Zeppel for the photos used on pages 1, 2 & 7.

