



The Leadership and Management of Three Successful Australian Christian Schools

Jim Twelves

ABSTRACT The origins of the Australian Christian schooling movement are examined followed by a brief review of outstanding leadership, the bureaucratic and collaborative styles, effective governance and successful Christian schooling. The research methodology employed was qualitative in-depth interviewing of the leadership of three case studies that were selected by a nomination process. The discussion of the findings proposed that three healthy tensions appear to be some of the keys for their success, namely, a healthy tension between the collaborative and bureaucratic styles, between task-orientation and people-orientation and between school staff and board members. Finally, the hand of God was seen as an essential ingredient for the success of these three Australian Christian schools.

The term, *Australian Christian schools*, describes a range of educational institutions mainly less than twenty five years old, that are either sponsored by local protestant churches or *ad hoc* groups of Christian parents. The schools are usually relatively small, often with both primary and secondary departments on the one campus; however, the majority are small primary schools. They are normally registered through state authorities and as such are entitled to federal and state per capita funding as independent schools. Jones' study of the origins of Christian Community Schools Ltd., one of the larger Australian umbrella organisations, identified five discrete groups illustrating both the diversity and the unity of the Australian Christian school movement (Jones, 1983, p. 1).

Six executives representing four of these organisations were asked to nominate Christian schools that in their opinion *exhibited excellent qualities in terms of their educational outcomes*. The nominations comprised schools with both primary and secondary departments, included church sponsored and parent controlled models, and schools that were either affiliated to one of the umbrella organisations or were independent. The three schools with the greatest number of nominations that accepted an invitation to participate became the three case studies for this qualitative investigation.

It was not the purpose of this study to debate or define what constitutes successful Australian Christian schooling, this was taken as a given by the nomination process. Instead, the aim was to identify some common characteristics of the leadership and management of the three case studies. While no generalisation has been possible, it

is nevertheless, rewarding to gain a deeper insight into the styles, structures and systems of three schools that represent a small but growing educational movement, which has to date, been comparatively little researched.

The schools' leadership and management showed indications of becoming increasingly *collaborative* in style together with a growing appreciation for the importance of *people-orientation* in their operations. The school boards appeared to be undergoing a transformation from *hands-on-management* towards the operation of a *governance* model. These changes had created tensions within the communities that were seen as positive and constructive by the senior leadership and it is the researcher's contention that they have contributed to the success of these schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review considers the context of the three case studies within the Christian schooling movement in Australia. It then seeks to examine some of the broader issues raised by this research namely, outstanding leadership, bureaucratic and collaborative styles, effective governance and successful Christian schooling.

In recent years Long (1995, 1996, 1996 a, 1996 b & 1997) has conducted the most wide reaching studies of this movement in Australia. Most of the schools are affiliated with the Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS) that had a membership of 237 schools in 2000 (AACS, 2001, pp. 25-32). As a group, the Australian Christian schools outsize the state education system of the smallest state Tasmania and in the late 1990's were educating more than 60,000 students (Long, 1996, p. 19).

The Christian schooling movement in Australia began in earnest between the late 1960's and early 1970's (Brinton, 1989, p. 5) as a consequence of the revival of fundamentalism across the churches (Jones, 1983, p. 93). Long noted that the most rapid period of growth was between 1978 and 1983 when approximately half of the present schools were founded (1996 b, p. 21).

There were undoubtedly many complex reasons for the development of these schools. However, the research has broadly grouped them into *pull factors*, reasons based on a distinct philosophical perspective and the *push factors*, arguments for Christian schooling based on dissatisfaction with state education or society in general. The key *pull factors* identified in the literature include:

1. The primary distinctive of Christian education is to bring children to a personal knowledge of God (Davies, R, 1957, p. 5),
2. God's requirement that parents should be responsible for their children's education (Deuteronomy Ch. 6 v.12) (Brinton, 1989, p. 6),

3. The integrity and mutual support of home, church and school (Weeks, 1988, p. 175) and
4. The aim of Christian education to transform the mind (Romans Ch. 12 v. 2). *True education trains children how to live, not just how to make a living* (Gangel, 1984, pp. 109-110).

In addition to these *pull factors*, specifically in Australia, Long considered that the *push factors* predominated, citing the following as some of the key stimuli for the growth of Christian schooling (Long 1996 b, pp. 21-25):

1. *The Karmel Report in 1973, made possible state funding,*
2. *Increased moral permissiveness in society, fashion, arts and media,*
3. *The declining strength of the church to halt the changes in society,*
4. *The move in some states to discontinue Religious Instruction and*
5. *The drive to outlaw corporal punishment.*

Outstanding Leadership

Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be doubt that those seeking quality education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority (Beare, Caldwell and Millikan, 1989, p. 99).

Starratt (1986), Gurr (1996) and Maxwell (1993) are three examples of a very extensive literature that have identified a number of characteristics of outstanding leadership that could be used in a consideration of the attributes successful schools. Starratt recognised six *interdependent characteristics* of visionary leadership in successful schools:

1. *Leader's power is rooted in vision,*
 2. *That vision, illuminates the ordinary with dramatic significance,*
 3. *Leader articulates the vision in a compelling way so that it becomes shared,*
 4. *Leader implants the vision in the structures and processes of the organisation,*
 5. *Leader and colleagues make day to day decisions in the light of the vision and*
 6. *All members of the organisation celebrate the vision in ritual ceremonies and art forms.*
- (Starratt, 1986, p. 15)

In contrast Gurr considered seven key *competencies and behaviours* in his study of ten successful secondary principals that were part of the *Schools of the Future*

project in Victoria. In essence, the leaders were visionary analysts, with high personnel qualities, intent on delegation as they listened to and mentored key leaders within their schools (Gurr, 1996, p. 12).

Maxwell proposed a model that described the potential rise towards outstanding leadership within an organisation. He suggested that all leaders enter at Level 1 on their appointment, but only a few rise through all the stages to reach Level 5 – the outstanding leader. In some ways this model can be used as a self-diagnostic tool to assess the calibre of ones own leadership:

<i>Level 5</i>	<i>Personhood – Respect</i>
<i>Level 4</i>	<i>People Development – Reproduction</i>
<i>Level 3</i>	<i>Production – Results</i>
<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Permission – Relationships</i>
<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Position – Rights</i>

(Maxwell, 1993, pp. 14-15).

These examples illustrate three very different approaches to the study of leadership but they all recognise the significance of effective relationships with people. Gardner's 1995 study of leadership also highlighted a number of these people-centred attributes. He referred to the leader's *tie* to their audience; in other words, they are not acting in isolation or aloof from those they are seeking to lead on account of their emotional connection. However, Gardner (1995, p. 36) recognised that effective leadership value time and space away form people in his description of a time for reflection, or as he put it, *time to go the mountaintops*. He also emphasised - a readiness to confront (1995, p. 253), an ability to simplify the complex (p. 259) and having a keen concern for moral issues (p. 286). He observed that exemplary leaders tend to travel outside their homeland, while tyrants tend to stay in one place (p. 286).

These four writers are merely a very small sample from the plethora of literature that has grappled with the characteristics of leadership considered in this study.

Bureaucratic and the Collaborative Styles

K. Davies' study of a number of Christian Parent Controlled Schools in New South Wales (Davies, K. 1993, p. 1) noted that; *Many Christian schools appear to operate within an organisational structure that fits the classic bureaucratic, hierarchical model suggested by Weber in 1924*. Davies observed clearly defined chains of command that incorporated detailed control of staff.

As a result of his investigations he concluded that the *collaborative style* would be his preferred model for the leadership of Christian Parent Controlled Schools in New South Wales. The resonance with the tenor of the descriptions of outstanding leadership is quite apparent:

School leaders should seek to empower others through informal sharing, delegation and consultative decision-making. Open honest information sharing among the whole staff gives a sense of corporate belonging and enables them to effectively strive towards corporate goals (Davies, K. 1993, p. 5).

One of the hallmarks of collaborative leadership is the embodiment of the corporate vision and the ability to incorporate this vision into the day-to-day routine (Starratt, 1986, p. 15). In fact, Gardner suggests that *vision* and *leadership* are more or less synonymous. The visionary leader will *create new stories, embody them* and then *relate* them to others and thus achieve effective leadership. After all, Moses, Confucius, Jesus, Buddha and Mohammed, were all *visionaries* (Gardner, 1995, pp. 9-10).

From an alternative perspective, namely the study of effective schools, Leitner's investigation into the principal's ability to positively affect student outcomes concluded that principals have *limited controls and powers to ensure student success without the collaboration and co-operation of teachers, students and parents* (Leitner, 1994, p. 236). Therefore, by implication, Leitner was extolling the virtues of *collaborative leadership* and denigrating the *hierarchical, bureaucratic style* in schools.

In his Forward to Barth's work, *Improving Schools from Within*, Sizer stressed a similar point that healthy working relationships are vital for success. He argued that people work most effectively in an organisation where colleagues *listen well* and *take one another seriously* and where there is an assumption that *everyone on the staff can and will make a difference to the whole* (Sizer, 1990, in Barth, 1990, p. xi).

It is interesting to note that well before most of the Australian Christian schools had been founded, Argyris (1964, p. 214) had recognised that leadership styles in western countries has been undergoing significant changes over time along a defined continuum. He recognised four stages:

1. *directive, firm headship leadership,*
2. *democratic leadership,*
3. *participative, collaborative, employer-centred, group-centred leadership and*
4. *no one leadership style is considered the most effective.*

He concluded that effective leaders were those who were able to adopt many different leadership styles depending on the requirements of the specific situation (Argyris, 1964, p. 215). Bolman and Deal developed this approach from the 1980's onwards. They proposed that the best way to make sense of organizations is to see them through four distinct lenses (Bolman and Deal, 1997, p. 15):

1. *Structural frame – dominated by rules, roles, goals and policies,*
2. *Human resource frame – characterised by needs, skills and relationships,*

3. *Political frame – noted for conflict, power struggles and competition and*
4. *Symbolic frame – epitomize by culture, meaning, metaphor, ritual and stories.*

They concluded that the capacity of leadership and management to operate in all these frames was essential for success (Bolman and Deal, 1997, p. 380):

Multiframe thinking is challenging and often counterintuitive. To see the same organisation simultaneously as machine, family, jungle and theatre requires the capacity to think in different ways at the same time about the same thing.

In the context of Australian Christian schools, K. Davies' work in New South Wales had identified Argyris' first stage of *directive headship* and, by implication, he was making a plea for the schools he had studied to progress through to the second and third stages of the Argyris model. In reality he may have been observing the quite natural progression in styles of leadership and management that commonly accompany growth from fledgling schools to mature educational institutions. But in the wider context K. Davies was recognising the need for the multiframe thinking of Bolman and Deal.

Effective Governance

Carver's 1990 book, *Boards that Make a Difference* has arguably had the greatest impact on current thinking about governance in educational settings, especially in the independent schools (Beavis, 1997, p. 291). It was Carver's work that opened Beavis' eyes to the third dimension of administration, in addition to leadership and management, namely *governance*.

Carver (1997, pp. 17-18) described fourteen principles that should be incorporated into an effective *governance* model. They cover the whole gamut of the board's role including aims, functions and relationships:

1. *Cradle Vision – encouraged to think the unthinkable and to dream,*
2. *Be the guardian of organisational values,*
3. *Force an external focus,*
4. *Enable an outcome driven organisational system,*
5. *Separate large issues from small ones,*
6. *Force forward thinking,*
7. *Enable pro-activity – concentrating on creativity more than approving,*
8. *Facilitate diversity and unity – having one voice without squelching dissent,*
9. *Describe relationships to relevant constituencies – neighbours, staff, market,*
10. *Define a common basis of discipline – a rational basis of board's self-discipline ,*
11. *Delineate the boards role in common topics,*

12. *Determine what information is needed,*

13. *Balance over-control and under-control and*

14. *Use board time efficiently – remembering that most members are volunteers.*

Carver's starting premise was that all was far from well with boards of non-profit organisations, including schools and colleges. Therefore, he was setting up a totally new paradigm for governing bodies as the old one was too flawed to be worth trying to resurrect. Carver's new governance model emphasised the role of being the guardian of the organisational values (2) and ensuring that the organisational outcomes conform to the mission statement (4). There is less emphasis on leadership and management *per se*, though he expected that there will always be a leadership aspect to the work of boards implicit within governance (1, 5, 6, 7) (Beavis, 1997, p. 293).

Therefore, school boards that are adopting this new approach are changing their focus towards being the spiritual leaders of their communities as they clarify the school's vision. In making this transformation in their operations they are empowering the school's full time staff to be totally responsible for the management of the day-to-day operations.

One of the consequences of the implementation of the Carver model of governance has been the increasing acceptance that the principal is truly the chief executive of the organisation. Taking this as read, Beavis noted that the *principal, the chief executive officer (CEO), will become increasingly involved with governance functions*, in addition to daily management issues (Beavis, 1997, p. 297). In other words the principal's new role would firmly straddle the operations of the board and the school.

Deal and Peterson studied the changing role of the principal within the school community. One of their conclusions was that the *stability of the principal is a vital characteristic of success* (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 42). In other words principals are much more likely to be effective in their role if they stay a significant length of time in their positions, as their presence is so vital in setting the example for human relations within the whole community (Lankshear, 1992, p. 106). This supports the landmark study *Fifteen Thousand Hours* by Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer and Ouston, (1979, p. 203) that concluded, unequivocally, that the principal's influence is considerable in creating the ethos of the school.

Successful Christian Schooling

This final section in the literature review examines some of the key characteristics considered to be significant in successful schooling and Christian schooling in particular.

Starratt espoused six core processes for the *building of a community of learning* that he believed were foundational for the development of a successful school culture (Starratt, 1996, p. 78):

1. *Learning takes place in a caring environment,*
2. *Learning involves lots of story telling,*
3. *Learning in school should relate as much as possible to home and neighbourhood experiences,*
4. *Learning should lead to some product or performance,*
5. *There should be periodic and continuous reference to an exploration of meta-narratives and*
6. *The learning community should periodically explore the really big questions: such as what does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be a community? What is the meaning of life, of suffering and death?*

Processes 1, 3 and 4 neatly accommodate the aspirations of an actively involved parent community building stronger links between home and school. Processes 5 and 6 on the other hand, link directly back to the original vision for the Christian schools, reflecting their desire to impart spiritual values and the Christian world-view in addition to academic and practical skills.

The building of a successful culture requires the active involvement of all members of the community, illustrating some resonance with the characteristics of the collaborative style. This can be illustrated by Smith's (1984, p. 53) observations of successful public schooling where he extols the values of the home-school link:

Success is more likely when home and school work together. 'Dad, I think its neat that you and mom know my principal, Mr Harber, and my teacher, Mrs Williams'. Children benefit from the sense of security that comes from knowing that school and home are working together on their behalf.

Teese (2000, p. 5) develops this in his book on *Academic Success and Social Power*, where he concedes that *some of the student's success is reliant on the continuous and informal training given by families rather than the explicit methodical instruction in schools*. This illustrates just how complex, and arguably impossible, is the task of understand a school's success. Walsh (1999, p. 3) admits that many governors in successful schools could probably suggest what generates success in terms of good standards and student behaviour but could not say *why*, at a more fundamental level, their school is the way it is, other than to vaguely suggest that it's a lot to do with the principal!

To decode success in a Christian school is arguably even more complex on account of their aims that go beyond the academic and social progress of each student. Chen's study of successful Christian schooling in Canton and Hong Kong that considered over a century of development claimed that their schools served as important catalysts for social change in nineteenth century China (Chen 1972, p. 107). This is arguably a measure of success, if it could be quantified, illustrating one of the wider missions of the school. The primary aim of these schools is to bring the

gospel message into the lives of the students, so that they can develop Christian perspectives and practice Christian living through service to others and society (Chen 1972, p. 265). Perhaps this aim be used to measure success?

It would be anathema for Christian schools to be contemplating their success without a consideration for and an honouring of God in the daily lives of the communities. In Australia, Horsfield enjoined his readers to *let go and let God* as he encouraged the daily use of prayer in the life of the school (Horsfield, 1990, p.21). Rose observed that the growth of one of the schools in her North American study of Christian schooling was always *changing in accordance with the working of the Holy Spirit* (Rose, 1988, p. 74). Starratt (1993, p. 47) also acknowledged the work of the Holy Spirit in education:

The leader must come to know that the power does not rest in the person or the office but in the Holy Spirit who speaks through us all with an eloquence surpassing our limited minds and hearts. A leader in a Christian School, then, ultimately has to trust the source of all light and life to guide our limited sight into the way.

In summary, the literature recognises the importance of outstanding visionary leadership characterised by the collaborative style. School boards, previously preoccupied with day-to-management are being transformed into governing bodies as the role of the school principal becomes increasingly recognised as the CEO. The principal holds a pivotal role in the building of successful Christian communities, while the hand of God is also recognized in their success.

THE THREE CASE STUDIES

Pseudonyms have been used for the schools and the people involved, protecting their anonymity. All three schools were co-educational day schools comprising both primary and secondary departments with total populations within the range 500 to 700 students.

Case Study One

Bethlehem Christian College was founded in the 1970's by an association of Christian parents, under the Christian Parent Controlled Schools umbrella. The chairman of the Board, David Maxwell, the principal, Beryl Yates and her deputy Barry Henderson have all been with the college for nearly ten years. The general manager, Henry Rothwell, on the other hand, has only been there for three years.

Case Study Two

Nazareth Christian College was also founded in the 1970's as a church sponsored school and is affiliated with the Australian Association of Christian Schools. Larry

Swallow has been council chairman ever since the council's inception and his son, Robert Swallow has been the general manager of the sponsoring church for about three years. The principal, Stephen Pullman, has led the college for about fifteen years and the deputy (secondary), Jane Roys, has been in the college for over ten years.

Case Study Three

Jerusalem Christian School commenced in the 1980's under the governance of a parents association and like Bethlehem is one of the Christian Parent Controlled Schools. The chairman, Fred Johnson, has been in office for nearly five years. The principal, Peter Duncan, has been with the school for over five years and his deputy (secondary), Jonathan Charles for over ten years.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Eleven semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted across the three schools in Semester 2, 1999. The main objective was to elucidate a deeper understanding of their leadership and management as well as an attempt to discover the schools' perceptions as to why they had been deemed to be successful. Table 1 presents the distribution of the in-depth interviews:

Table 1 Case Study Interview Schedule

Case Study One	Case Study Two	Case Study Three
Board Chairman	Council Chairman	Board Chairman
Principal	Principal	Principal
General Manager	General Manager (church)	Deputy (secondary)
Deputy (curriculum)	Deputy (secondary)	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION – SOME KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THREE AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

All three schools were characterised by a number of healthy tensions. *Collaborative* leadership was more evident than the *bureaucratic* style, *people-orientation* was nearly as strong as *task-oriented* operations and the Carver Governance Model for Boards of Non-Profit Organisations (Beavis, 1997, p. 291, Carver, 1997, pp. 17-18) was replacing the hands-on-management by the school boards.

1. Healthy Tension between collaborative and bureaucratic styles

The *collaborative* style is typified by leadership that trusts all the staff by involving them in the discussions relating to the future direction of the organisation (Drennen, 1992, p. 143). In contrast the *bureaucratic* style emphasises *tight control* and *directive leadership* that tends to create *antagonistic adaptive behaviours* typified by higher than expected absenteeism and high turnover (Argyris, 1964, p. 59-60).

Many of the interviewees wished that they could model the *collaborative* style more effectively but they actually found clear remnants of the *bureaucratic* in their *modus operandi*. Henry Rothwell, the general manager of Bethlehem Christian College, illustrated this tension when responding to a question about the initiative he expected of his staff:

I try not to be directive, I am not an autocratic manager or leader, I do expect participation and their response. As I have said before, if some decisions have to be made they have to be made.

An example from a leader perhaps more comfortable with the *collaborative* style was Stephen Pullman, principal of Nazareth Christian College. He seemed to demonstrate the least tension of the interviewees when describing his current approach:

My style changed from me making the decisions to me working with the other key players in the school. Call that what you want to, I would call it a team approach, I am not out there making the decisions without any consultation or reference to any one else....

K. Davies' study of Christian Parent Controlled Schools in the Australian state of New South Wales (1993, p. 1) observed that many schools were operating the bureaucratic, hierarchical model. Perhaps this is the backdrop against which Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem have begun to forge a new era of collaborative leadership and management.

This bureaucratic culture was also noted a decade earlier in the American Christian school context by Peshkin in his detailed study of Bethany Baptist Academy. As an illustration of the school's culture he observed some aspects of the teacher's behaviour towards their administrators (Peshkin, 1986, pp. 82-3):

- 1. Obedience is all-important,*
- 2. There was to be no griping, it only disrupts the school's harmony, unsaved persons and carnal Christians gripe,*
- 3. The school saw griping as a disease that causes unhappiness, discouragement and demoralisation that spreads from person to person and destroys the organisation and*

4. *They quote the Bible in support of their view (1 Corinthians 1 v.10) claiming that agreement is paramount.*

Peshkin observed how they sought to maintain the laudable attribute of organisational unity but apparently at the expense of healthy debate and teamwork while perpetuating the hierarchical, bureaucratic culture.

While K. Davies and Peshkin politely observed the Christian schooling movement, Bennis (1994) offered, albeit from a secular standpoint, a clear judgement on the bureaucratic style suggesting that there is a more effective way to manage people:

...you're not going to attract or retain a (good) work force under silly and obsolete forms of bureaucratic or command and control leadership. You cannot release the brainpower of an organisation by using whips and chains. You get the best out of the people by empowering them, supporting them, by getting out of their way (1994, p. xiii).

How would this view have been received in Bethany Baptist Academy? Other writers also had derogatory things to say about the bureaucratic style, for example Beare and Slaughter (1993, p. 78):

A business that operates on bureaucratic lines cannot compete in a post-industrial economy which guarantees survival only to those firms that are flexible...and which encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, which value creativity, rather than conformity, which give their members the power to take local decisions and to exercise initiative and which regard the people in the organisation more as partners than property.

In contrast to the discredited bureaucratic styles perceived to be prevalent in the Australian Christian schools by K. Davies (1993, p.1) and Long (1996, pp. 38-42), the collaborative style has been advocated by a number of researches in a wide variety of organisational contexts. For example Johnston (1997) conducted three case studies of secondary schools in Victoria that had been identified by knowledgeable people as having the characteristics of exemplary learning organisations. Her doctoral thesis addressed the question - *What are the characteristics of schools and principals which are perceived to be successful learning organisations?* This is how she described the principals of her three-exemplar schools (Johnston, 1997, p. 282):

The principal was clearly influential but, at the same time, was regarded as a team player. She was particularly adept at demonstrating what the current reality was while exposing the school to a vision of what it could be. She articulated the creative tension gap and indicated the way forward. In the process the school was infused with an energy and optimism not often seen in schools at this time.

What an inspiring and challenging description! A learning institution in touch with the real world, focussed on the future and inspiring all members of the community to reach for their potentials. While this study made no reference to Christian schools *per se*, the relevance for their leadership is obvious. Unless Australian Christian school can be described as successful as a learning institution, as well as in their spiritual focus, they can't be described as truly successful.

The leaders of Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem all knew what style of leadership and management was most effective. They recognised the limitations and inflexibility of the bureaucratic style and were being influential in the establishment of the collaborative style in their schools. This study concurs with the feelings of Sizer who observed that improving schools were characterised by collegial and collaborative leadership (Sizer, 1990, in Barth, 1990, p. xi). Therefore in keeping with the perspective of some of the literature, the three case studies appeared to be moving towards the inclusive, consensual, collaborative approach.

2. Healthy Tension between *task-oriented* and *people-oriented* leadership

Andersen (1990) observed that there was a tension in the Australian Christian schools between *task-oriented* and *people-oriented* leadership. He proposed a bipolar model that firmly linked these two aspects to the bureaucratic and collaborative styles respectively:

1. *Bureaucratic Model of Management Leadership*
2. *Leadership Style - a Caring Oversight of a Communal Institution.*

He went on to suggest that in fact the bureaucratic *task-oriented* style was little more than *management* dominated by hierarchical systems, processes and procedures controlled by an overbearing *task-oriented* leader. Andersen argued that the second style was to be preferred and in this regard he believed that the principal had a vital role to play in building a sense of community. He said that this could only be achieved through *leadership* that genuinely cared for the individual. Andersen was clearly advocating the collaborative *people-orientated* style of leadership that was effectively building a sense of community (Andersen, 1990, p. 32).

The three case studies all understood this tension between *task-oriented* and *people-oriented* leadership and management. On balance though, in their own analysis, they tended to think that *task-orientation* was given slightly higher emphasis. However, each school recognised the vital importance of the *people* perspective for effective organisational health. Jane Roys, the secondary head at Nazareth Christian College, spoke most openly about this dichotomy within her own life:

There are some days when I am totally task oriented, yes I think that's my style of leadership, but the next week I have forgotten the tasks and it's the people. Perhaps this is one of my problems; I can't decide which I am!

Similarly, Barry Henderson, Bethlehem Christian College's deputy principal was a self-confessed *task-oriented* leader. However, he too recognised the vital role of *people* in any organisation:

I am strongly task-oriented. I want to see the thing finished, the goal developed and implemented and so on, but I have come to realise, I know enough about leadership now, and done many leadership courses that unless you have that second circle driving you, then in a sense, you become a fairly callous sort of a leader.

None of the three schools seemed to be particularly surprised to have been nominated as a successful Christian school. It is interesting to speculate as to whether this might have been due in part to their transition towards collaborative leadership, along with the growing importance of *people-orientation* in their communities. Despite struggling with the tensions, none of the interviewees wanted to return to the bureaucratic hierarchical management of their schools' past.

3. Healthy Tensions in Board Relationships

Laffin (1995, p. 2, cited in Beavis, 1997, p. 290) observed that in many Australian Christian schools there was *tension and conflict between boards and principals to the extent that sometimes they were seriously dysfunctional*. Andersen (1995) took this aspect of Christian school life so seriously that while commenting on the *dissension and indecision* he had observed, he strongly advocated that such schools should *close* rather than struggle on giving the Australian Christian schools a bad name:

If they are conformed by external pressures or weakened by internal dissension or indecision it would be better to close down and devote the considerable energies involved elsewhere...Better to strive for fewer but better examples that can be luminous within and without as salt and light to the surrounding world (Andersen, 1995, p. 12).

There were no signs of poor relations in Nazareth; here the strength of the board - principal relationship was actually seen as one of the keys for the school's success. However, Bethlehem and Jerusalem both admitted that the board - staff relationships had been strained in the recent past and that they were proactive implementing strategies for improvement.

The staff in these last two schools had both requested of their boards that their working conditions be covered by a Certified Agreement – an Australian government initiative designed to greater regulate pay and conditions of employees. This was raised in the mid-1990's in Jerusalem and resulted in a *major division* between the

staff and the board. Jonathan Charles, the deputy (secondary), described the relations in that period as *pretty nasty*. These frayed relations occurred because the boards could not agree to their staff's request. It was understood that the union would have been involved in their negotiations. The fall out from this in Jerusalem saw nearly half the secondary staff resign over a number of years along with the election of a new board. Clearly this represented serious tensions in board relations.

The chairman, Fred Johnson, explained what he felt about the Certified Agreement issue and the potential for union involvement in their Christian school:

Whilst the staff respect the current board, and whilst there can be a trust with the current board, their argument is; what happens when the current board goes? That is where they want protection...I find it hard to work with unions in a Christian school environment, when we are so philosophically opposed...as Christians we should be able to resolve issues.

Despite the strained relations of the past, the boards at both Bethlehem and Jerusalem were at pains to improve relations between themselves and their staff. At Bethlehem they had just instigated a bi-annual staff/board forum for *staff to raise any issue they were concerned with*. Other board initiatives have included a focus group, social meetings several times a year. Recently it was suggested that each board member should be provided with a photo album of all staff members with a brief resume on each person.

It seems as though the strained relations seen in Bethlehem and Jerusalem could partially reflect the fact that the boards' operations have seen such a marked change over the last ten years. In the past the typical school board of a small fledgling Australian Christian school was hands-on-daily-management, with little energy or expertise in governance.

Now there are very positive moves towards the implementation of the Carver Governance Model for Boards of Non-Profit Organisations (Beavis, 1997, p. 291, Carver, 1997, pp. 17-18) or a similar model. This move has included the redefining of the role of the principal, with all three schools now referring to their principal as either a modified, partial or virtual Chief Executive Officer, he or she being the single figure through whom the board work in the life of the schools. While it is quite evident that this process is not complete all three schools have embraced the changes quite enthusiastically suggesting that it is certainly well underway.

Beryl Yates, the principal at Bethlehem Christian College, spoke of her experience with her board:

I think that the school has evolved...the hands on role of the board in the past when the school was very small (has changed) to realising that they have to

take their hands off, and that has been a bit hard for some board members, who under the old parent controlled understanding felt that they should know everything, and to some extent felt that it was their right and their responsibility to be involved in the bits and pieces.

...The CEO is responsible for the staff but when it comes to senior management the board also has input there. We have modified the governance model, as we would certainly have the two Heads of Schools coming to the board from time to time and there is certainly a lot more contact between the board and the staff than in a normal church school operation...That is what I mean by a modified CEO model...we have set up what we call High Level Policies, that control the principal and keep tabs on the direction and the financial matters of the school and all those sorts of things. When we were working through the CEO model those policies were developed by me and then they went to the board for their approval. The reality is that I am the paid employee and they have all got their jobs to do, they have not got thousands of hours for working through policies or anything like that.

Here, Beryl identified a number of the key issues pertinent to the effective introduction of the governance model in her college:

- 1. The tradition of board members being heavily hands on will take time to be redirected towards the new model.*
- 2. The governance model has not been accepted in totality – it has been modified to meet local needs.*
- 3. The principal, despite being accountable to the new model, introduced it.*

It seems as through the tangible changes in the leadership and management of the schools' boards can be seen as a picture of the deeper philosophical changes underway in the very ethos of the schools' communities. The schools seem to be consciously turning their backs on the bureaucratic structures with the emphasis on management and are beginning to embrace the principles of collaborative leadership, empowerment and teamwork.

Under this new model, the principal and their staff have been given much more freedom and responsibility to manage the school within the governance guidelines set by the board. This change in the leadership and management climate has perhaps encouraged the collaborative style to flourish within the school communities. Here staff, who see each other every day, have taken on the challenges of the new style and begun to find a wealth of ideas and resources amongst their own number typical of the collaborative people orientated approach. If the board keep their own vision focussed on the *big picture*, the principal and the staff should be able to concentrate

on the translation of the board's vision into a day-to-day reality that will deliver successful Christian schooling for the students. The findings of this study certainly suggest that this has been achieved to a significant degree in the three case studies under review.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The eleven leaders of the three successful Australian Christian school studied clearly recognised the potential tension between the bureaucratic and the collaborative style and were at pains to model collaborative leadership wherever possible though some still struggled with finding the extra time it demands.

Each of these three schools were busy vibrant communities nearly bursting out of their physical boundaries. The leaders were very focused handling the innumerable tasks to hand but they recognised the vital ingredient of people-orientation and understood the link with the collaborative leadership style.

Two of the schools had experienced recent episodes of marked tension between the staff and the boards over attempted implementation of Certified Agreements and as a consequence were now concentrating on rebuilding strong lasting relationships for the future.

The modification and subsequent implementation of the Board Governance Model illustrates the shift from board management to governance. This current philosophical shift can be seen as a mirror reflecting the more intangible changes in leadership and management styles.

Finally, all these schools recognised a further ingredient for success. Notwithstanding all the combined wisdom and experience of the experts, the most intangible factor of all, the hand of God, needs to be present in order to be assured of success. Larry Swallow, the chairman of Nazareth Christian College concluded his interview with these words:

It has been miraculous the way that the school has survived...I think it's because the church prays for us that we survived...Prayer is a major thing.

It is the writer's heartfelt desire that some of these ideas can be adapted and applied by the leadership and management of other communities for the ultimate benefit of the students in Australian Christian Education, the cause of Christian schooling and the good of society at large.

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