

Christmas reflections

As 2015 draws to an end, *TCF News* brings two different reflections on education.

First, Dianne Young, a long term member of TCF and its Executive Committee, reflects on her role in student welfare and the small but significant things that demonstrate how important a teacher can be in the lives of students. Her reflections will jog the memory of every teacher and help to emphasise that education is more than academic achievement. Lives are being built and teachers have a significant place in those lives.

Secondly, with my work in India complete, I have stood back and tried to reflect on what I have learnt during that time. It's not a pretty picture but amongst the sadness there are rays of hope and excitement about the achievements of some schools and students.

As we celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world, may this Christmas see peace in our families, peace in our country and peace in our world. Take time to pray for the increasing number of Christians across the globe who are being persecuted because they claim the name of Jesus. May they also know his peace this Christmas.

John Gore

Dianne Young's retirement speech (Extract)

I would like to share with you why I got into welfare. I'm going to start this story when I was at Wollongong Teacher's College. I attended the Evangelical Union meetings. At one meeting we were urged to get involved with Teachers' Christian Fellowship (TCF) and Inter School Christian Fellowship (ISCF) groups in schools. When I started teaching at Bomaderry High School I started an ISCF group. When I was at Nowra High I attended the TCF meetings organised by the principal. They had an ISCF group with which I assisted.

In 1981, we moved to the Illawarra. After two years of casual teaching I was given a "temporary" appointment to Dapto High. I started another ISCF group. I also joined the Illawarra TCF Local Group. I started attending TCF State and National Conferences and taking students to ISCF Leadership Conferences. It was at a Brisbane Australian Teachers' Christian Fellowship Conference that Dr Ralph Rawlinson, who had been head of Religious Education at the national level and was asked to be Vice Chancellor of the new University of Western Sydney, appealed for all Christian teachers to get involved with student welfare.

The next week, on the first day of Term 1, the principal of Dapto High asked all staff to put their name beside an extracurricular activity. Naturally I put my name under the student welfare committee. This introduced me to Peer Support and took me to my first Student Welfare Association Conference. Later I joined that committee. Our conferences were themed around DET Welfare priorities.

I lapped up as much professional development as I could fit into weekends and school holidays. This included Science Teachers State and National conferences, which kept me up to date in advances in Physics and Earth and Environmental Science and with the cutting edge in Chemistry and Biology. The student welfare association introduced me to

Glasser's Choice Theory. I signed up for their Basic Week and Advanced Week training. This gave me the skills I needed to work with students, parents and staff.

I had convinced the principal to allow me to chair the Student Welfare Committee while the position was vacant due to maternity leave. I became Girls Supervisor and Peer Support co-ordinator. My mentor encouraged me to run workshops every school development day. In 1997 I organised and ran the whole day for all staff around student welfare policies and practices. Sounds dry but there was a real buzz amongst staff at the end of the day and there were a lot of changes to implement as a result of the day. I was asked to go on regional committees, organise peer mediation training for schools, gender equity training for the region and assist the disability consultant. I was also a Year Adviser.

Also in 1997 I started applying for Head Teacher Welfare positions. Of course I didn't get the first one I applied for, but I was getting interviews. I developed the skill set and had the experiences schools needed. I was doing a University degree and a post graduate certificate in Gifted Education. As first Head Teacher for Welfare at Wollongong High School for the Performing Arts (WHSPA) I introduced a lot of changes. Initially all we did at welfare meetings was put students on levels, usually for 15 weeks at a time, no discussion of student needs or welfare training! Bullying was not addressed at all! Over the years, with extensive consultation with staff, parents and students, new anti-bullying, discipline and welfare policies were introduced. I could not have done my job at WHSPA without the support of the Senior Executive, a long list of Year Advisers, the school counsellors, and the Student Support Officer.

At the end of a 45 year career, what has teaching given me back? There is pleasure in the thank you note from the girl you've told for two years "You will get Band 6"; it's the parent of a disabled child you see in a shopping centre who says "Thank God Di Young was at Wollongong High School"; it's the Year 9 girl walking down the footpath who yells "We miss you Miss"; it's wearing your wedding dress in a TAFE fashion parade on the arm of a handsome TAFE teacher who was a student in your first Year 8 class in 1970; it's your friend who comes back from a holiday in Manchester who mentions meeting an ex-student who gave glowing reports of my teaching; it's meeting a heroin addict in the Mall, that I had been Year Adviser to, and walks up and tells you "I'm clean now Miss". It's running into an ex-student who has completed their Bachelor of Science and Dip Ed who is doing casual teaching at WHSPA; it's the ex-student who walks past you at WHSPA Presentation Night saying "I'm a teacher now Miss, like you suggested"; it's the parent who comes up to you after Presentation Night to wish you good luck in your retirement and says "you were the best science teacher they had and the best their daughter had; the ex-student who knocks on the door and gives you eight frozen home cooked dinners; the ex-student who introduces the new Scripture teacher to you in the corridor telling her there is at least one Christian teacher at WHSPA; the school captain who prays for you in church; the ex-student who tells you he is going to China as a missionary; the student you prayed for over four years who tells you at ISCF Leadership Conference that they have decided to become a Christian; the Muslim student who is school dux whose baptism and confirmation you attend; the student whose mother died while he was at ISCF Leadership conference with you, who gave a wonderful witness to his faith to the assembled students and leaders; it's taking out to dinner, at the end of Year 12, your first ever 7A class that you taught for six years, because they had all become Christians.

Every child matters. Every parent matters. **Teachers make a difference.**

My advice to young teachers is get involved with welfare, the job is rewarding and don't take your sick leave when you don't need to, you never know when it will come in handy.

Dianne Young

What did I learn?: Seven years involvement with schools in India.

In 2007, Elizabeth and I responded to an invitation by Operation Mobilisation to visit and teach in one of their developing schools targeting Dalit children, those children of Indian families considered to be either “untouchables” or tribal. For years, the Indian system had discriminated against these groups by only providing education in the local language precluding them from access to tertiary education, which is mainly in English. Discrimination was further evident in the attendance rates and retention rates for these students. For example based on enrolment statistics, a tribal girl had only a one percent chance of reaching the end of Grade 10. To address this problem, Operation Mobilisation, known in India as, Operation Mercy (OM) was establishing 100 English medium schools for these students located in slums and remote rural areas across India.

What follows is a fairly depressing picture, so I want to qualify it by acknowledging that amongst the chaos there are OM schools that have got it right. They have focussed on English, teachers have changed their style of teaching, large numbers of students have reached and graduated from 10th Grade and these Dalit students have gone on to complete junior college (Grades 11 and 12) and been accepted into university courses on merit and some have now graduated. But in general terms:

1. Education by rote

In schools across India students learn by rote. The textbook is the curriculum, often published by the state, and learning it is essential to pass the examinations which are geared to favour those with good memories.

Understanding is not important, being able to answer the question with a predetermined answer is everything. Lessons could comprise a teacher writing the questions and answers on the blackboard and having the students copy them and memorise them. In examinations in mathematics and science where students have to demonstrate some understanding to answer problems, failure rates are high often over 50%.

2. English tokenism

In English medium schools, teachers mix English with the local language “to help the students understand” and their lack of English inhibits access to all subjects and contributes to huge failure rates at Grade 10. By not immersing students in English they deny them an English education, except the very bright students who can learn in any situation. Success in an English medium school is directly correlated with the ability of student to speak, and write in English.

3. Retention

The ability of schools to keep their students is poor. Firstly, the students themselves come from families where parents have not attended school or had just a few years of schooling. They want their children to go to school but don't understand the importance of regular attendance and perseverance. Girls often leave school from 5th Grade to do home duties and boys from 7th Grade to find work. While poverty influences these decisions, parents, as yet, do not sufficiently value education to be able to sustain student progress. In northern India, by 10th Grade it is common in these schools for Dalit students to have only five or six students remain from an initial intake of fifty. In South India retention is better.

Also of concern is the attitude of teachers who accept the drop-out rates. Students not coping with the demands of schooling are not encouraged to remain. Their attendance gets worse, they are unable to cope because of the work they have missed and are effectively forced out of schooling. The individual does not have the value that is given to each person in western countries. Even Christian teachers do not fight to keep students at school and are happy to teach the few bright ones that remain. Retention is not a priority. This problem also exists in the government schools and only in some high fee paying schools is retention considered an issue, mainly to secure an income flow.

4. Teacher quality

The teachers employed by OM are poorly trained, if at all, and adhere to traditional rote teaching which is all they know. The typical teacher has a university degree where study may have been in English or at worse they may have only English as a subject to 10th Grade. They have no teacher training like a Dip. Ed. or B. Ed. With this background they teach all primary subjects and can get some teaching in specialist areas once the school goes to Grades 7 to 10. They are poorly paid and receive only half or less the salary that a government school teacher receives. They aspire to be employed into a government school and so teacher attrition is high.

As a Christian organisation, OM has a long tradition of its staff being sponsored or giving up salary to do God's work. But when you start 100 schools there are not the Christian "missionary" teachers to meet the demand. In this lies another problem. As the schools expand, there is pressure to accept more and more teachers who do not hold Christian beliefs. Mainly Hindu in background, they have to fit into the school culture and must in some ways change it.

Principals are also poorly equipped to take on the role, although OM is putting some resources into their training. An additional problem is that the schools have a manager who starts the school and manages its development. A principal is not appointed until the school reaches about 5th Grade. Most managers have no educational background and the school develops by compounding the experiences of the teachers employed. When a principal is appointed, it is likely that the manager chooses someone that will not threaten his control. Principals struggle to exert any educational authority and bring about changes that they themselves don't understand.

5. Resources

OM has been focused on buying land, constructing buildings and paying teachers. The textbook is the only resource in most schools. Where sponsors have provided additional resources like maps, charts, atlases, science equipment and chemicals they have been largely ignored. If rote learning is all you need to pass exams why bother with other student centred strategies involving resources.

6. Class size and early childhood years

As English medium schools, it is difficult to accept students into the school past 1st Grade unless they have been taught in English. This means that as the classes lose students it is hard to replace them. To counter this problem, fifty to sixty students are accepted into a kindergarten class and the least qualified teacher given to that class. In most schools there is a Lower and an Upper Kindergarten with students commencing at three and half years in some cases. Often the learning, including English is negligible by the commencement of 1st Grade.

7. Organisational change

To address the issues posed by a large number of schools being developed quickly, OM has applied a western business model to improve efficiency and to give a stronger financial basis for its work. While remaining dependent on overseas donations and a child sponsorship program, it has increased the fee structure of its schools moving from token fees to substantial amounts for their clients who are mainly from very poor backgrounds. A result has been a loss of students and they don't seem to understand the "total revenue" effect of fee increases. Significant people have also been lost by restructuring positions and resignation and problems compounded by the government expanding their English medium schools, sometimes in the drawing areas of the OM schools. The current national and some state governments are very inclined to act in ways that make registration of schools run by Christian organisations difficult and to deliberately start non-fee paying government schools as opposition.

The Indian government is in the process of implementing access to education for students to the end of 8th Grade. There is a national curriculum which encourages student-centred teaching and examinations that require understanding, but it is not compulsory and schools have to apply to do it. Schools are being built and teachers are being employed. But there remain issues of quality for both the government and private schools of India.

There are still millions of students who are not attending school at all, retention is a huge issue especially for girls who face barriers founded in the attitude to the girl child which is firmly entrenched in the Hindu religion. Until the 0-6 sex ratio improves to reflect changing attitudes, it is hard to believe that girls are going to get the education they deserve.

John Gore

Annual bushwalk - all welcome.

Wednesday 20th January 2016

Bundeena to Jibbon Beach Headland to view the Aboriginal rock carvings. It's an easy walk for all ages.

Bring your lunch, water, hat and sunscreen.

Meet us at Bundeena Wharf car park at 9.30am.

At the entrance to the National Park where fees are collected, state that you are going through to Bundeena. You do not have to pay the entrance fee when going to Bundeena.