Teaching everything christianly?

Is there such a thing as a christian curriculum? Can a school teach a christian agenda across all subjects? **Chris Parker** of the National Instute for Christian Education uses the example of Technology to say

YES

I have many fond memories of my time teaching the "technical" subjects at high school (woodwork, metalwork, design, computing etc.). The design solution suggested by Naomi one day stands out among these. It was during a Year 9 class exploring the role of technology in society that I asked the students to think up a "dream" technology. Over the years I have heard a variety of weird and wonderful suggestions ranging from things like a personal wrist watch ATM with a "limitless bank account" to various takes on the theme of teletransportation. Naomi's suggestion stands out from every other innovation suggested in these classes. After I had heard from the rest of the students who were busting to share their ideas, I asked quiet, faithful Naomi if she had one she would like to share.

She said humbly and quietly, "well mine is a little tablet that can be made cheaply and be small for transporting so that they can be transported to poor countries easily. When one of these tablets is dropped into a puddle or well of dirty water, it instantly makes it clean for drinking". I felt humbled by her Christ-like response. She self-sacrificed an opportunity to indulge herself in dreaming of something that would serve herself and she focused her technological pursuits onto serving others, in this case the poor and disadvantaged in developing countries.

This example of Naomi's might at one level seem simplistic and possibly pious. However, it should stir up our thinking about the purpose of teaching technology and particularly in teaching young Christian minds to think biblically. It should raise questions of; What

Do Christians and non-Christians see the purpose of technology differently?

is the purpose of technology? Why should Christians invent and innovate? Do Christians and non-Christians see the purpose of technology differently? How does God view our technological pursuits? What light does the gospel of Christ shed on how we understand technology and especially as we attempt to educate our young ones within the shadow of the cross?

Perhaps we need at this point to acknowledge the clash of worldview stories that enters every one of our children's classrooms everyday. Even in the classroom of the Christian school, the dominant cultural story of the western world enters through the syllabus material, (text books) the perspectives of the students who have been greatly shaped by this powerful narrative, and sometimes the Christian teacher who may have unknowingly been shaped by an element of dualistic

1977 Textbook from Bob Jones University

programming. In this dominant cultural story, technological progress and its pursuit is almost seen as a kind of saviour of humanity. It is believed that the spirit of progress and that a science-based technology (and a rationally organised society) will enable us to realise the ultimate human goal; freedom, happiness, and the comforts of material abundance – the "good life". It is a worldview story that idolises technology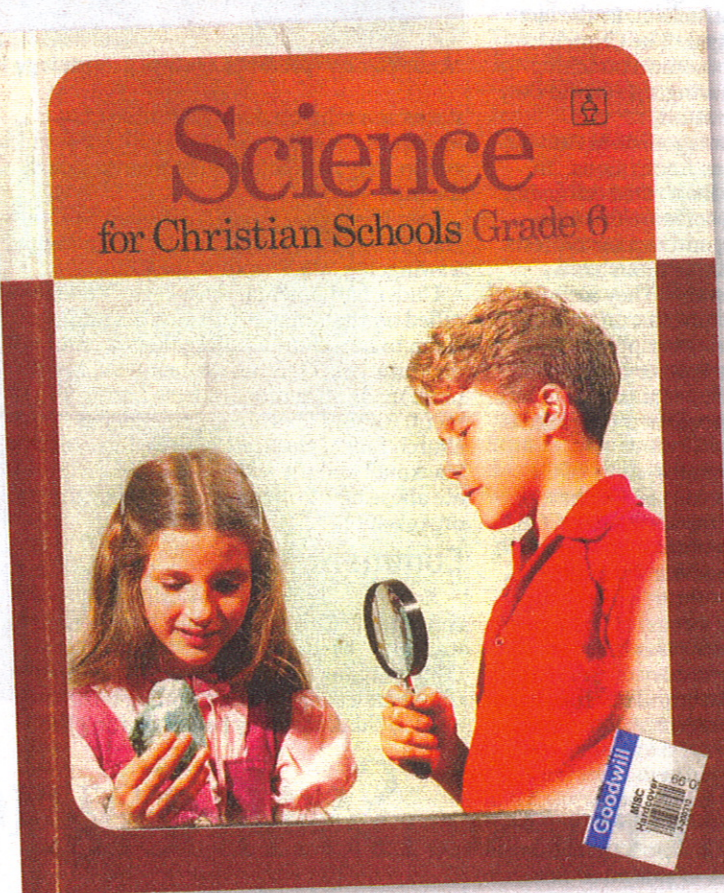 at the cost of the environment and the powerless within our midst. However, there is another way to view technology: another story, that shapes the Christians understanding of all of life. God created this world out of nothing (the ultimate design solution). There is a richness of blessing to be realized for the people God created to dwell in his world.

However the fabric of life has been tainted and distorted due to rebellion and sin. God's blue print for the world included a solution to this problem: the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The true story of the world points everything to the gospel and sees that the people of God are now to proclaim the good news of Christ and to partner together in the recreation of this damaged world.

This story is full of many rich blessings from God. Technology skills and the ability to innovate are some of these many blessings. However, like all good things distortions are possible (inevitable?). The western worldview has distorted the blessing of technology. Do we teach this in our technology classrooms? Do we nurture our young minds to be discerning about the subtle distortions? Or do we acquiesce to the shaping forces of the worldview that uses technology to self-serve, deceive and which produces materialism, idol worship and a false sense of hope for the future. This technology idolization is a strong theme of the culture that our students (and we) live, breath, learn and play in.

Teaching technology Christianly is not about producing Luddite graduates. Teaching any subject Christianly seeks to teach students to recognise and rejoice in the blessings from God and to discern and resist the distortions of the truth as they proclaim the gospel as redemptive partners in the task of re-creation. A Christian technology curriculum will be one that embraces technology while teaching discernment and proclaims the truth about living in God's world—a truth that Naomi had rightly found in the gospel of Christ.

A detail shot from Mel Boreham

Malcolm Williams spe...
Sydney artist Mel Bore...
about her current worl...

David Hastie Eternity's education writer says we will be living in two worlds for some time. He asks whether we have built a truly christian curriculum yet? His answer is

NO

A lot of claims are made about what a Christian education does for your child. One of the biggies is English, maths, science etc are taught from a Christian worldview. Check out the latest AIS guide to "Which Christian School" and you'll see it in all its glossy glory.

The Vatican has issued several thunderously serious (*Gravissimum educationis*, *Gaudium et spes*) pronouncements about "permutation" of Christianity through curricula. The same idea is found in almost all of the promos for Anglican and other old elite protestant schools, just a bit less thunderous. Newer "Christian schools"— Christian Education National (CEN) and Christian Schools Australia etc— boast a market advantage here, with much more pointy language about "integrated Christian curriculum", "teaching Christianly" etc.

But beyond the gloss, all is not well in curriculum land. A lot of faith-based schools do a lot of Christian things fantastically: pastoral care; RE programmes; active social justice (particularly the Catholics); evangelistic mission trips (particularly CEN).

But when you step into maths, better leave your Bible at the door. In most classes, faith is like a mirage, floating above curricula: it vanishes when you get close to actual lessons.

After thirteen years teaching in Christian Schools, and three years of Doctoral research into this, I'd love to be proved wrong. But so far I have found it is happening right across the country.

The boffins call it dualism, living simultaneously in illogically separated worlds: having Christianity in some parts of the school but having it mostly absent in the 'core school map' of academic knowledge. Many have argued (C.S. Lewis and Karl Barth included) that this is caused by a shortage of Christian teachers.

However, while this is certainly going to stuff things up (and Christian schools that employ non-Christians only have themselves to blame), dualism still rears its head in schools that are fanatical about Christian staffing.

Rod Thompson found in his research "*Beyond Proof Texting*" that Australian 'Christian curriculum' mostly equals sticking a Bible verse here and there in a teaching programme, never to be referred to again, or, worse, forced to fit a lesson in a way that completely mangles its biblical context. He reckoned this had a lot to do with what he called "biblical illiteracy" amongst Christian teachers, let alone the non-Christian ones.

His idea of "biblical literacy" is a bit strict, but he has a point.

However the problem goes much deeper. Before we start asking how to teach a Christian worldview in say, "English", we need to first workout what a Christian worldview of "English" is. Wait up, we need to first work

It needs a whole christian bag-full of big brains doing research

out what "English" is: angry authors have been chucking dictionaries at each other of centuries ... Hold it, perhaps we should first work out what the purpose of "education" is. Argh dammit now we need to first work out what "knowledge" is, and "society" should be from a Christian perspective. Imagine we crack this. But what applies to "English" is going to be entirely different for "geography", or "economics" and so the whole messy business starts over. You see, it is easy to say to harried little teachers "teach Christianly". It is a supremely complex exercise to do it thoroughly, and it has never been done in this country in any organized way. No-one has written—let alone read—the book on teaching English Christianly, or any other subject area for that matter.

Yet university boffins have been thinking about the Christian approach to maths and English and so forth, but what they have to say very rarely trickles into schools. Worse, most faith schools operate within a secular credential system run by governments. In other words, they are not writing their own curricula, but always reacting to an existing non-Christian one.

Having said all this, it would be unfair to say that tries at Christian curricula never happens: it is always happening in little ways, like unpredictable desert wells. Pacific Hills Christian School attracted judicial wrath for trying to teach Intelligent Design in science in 2007. About 100 members of the Association of Christian Schools English Teachers (ACSET) meet annually. The Sydney Anglican Education Commission launched the "integral" project in September last year, but this is in very early days. In fact, in most Christian faith-based schools, someone is chipping away at the topic, running a staff day, getting faculties to review their programmes. So the grand project of Australian Christian education has finally got its hard-earned political clout, with its multipurpose halls. It has been led by a tough generation of tough "builders".

Now it needs a whole Christian bag-full of big brains, doing research, writing books, running courses, setting up (or influencing) universities. We need a whole lot of mission-minded managers to get it really cashed up. But until then, real Christian curricula will remain just a mirage, shimmering above the dry but very real desert of secular education.

Mad... Hair...

Just now Mel Boreham has a w... sion for hair. Human hair! In th... she's been exhibiting various hai... 3D sculptures in Darlinghurst a... dington and her works have bee... behold.

My background is in sculpting... heavier, weightier and tradition... (mostly stone and clay). It's so e... ate sculpture with permanence... ness. But Mel's work is ephemer... and works of exquisite finery th... the light and catch your attentio... you think about the lustre and p... hair lends a person.

But the purpose is not just ab... ances. There's a deeper reason f...

Mel: We're all part of a netwo... ent relationships that include fr... and partners. These relationship... sadly don't always last.

My focus was to confront the... how destabilising separation ca... symbolises the mess that's left b... cut, hair is no longer neat but in... everywhere into everything. Ou... to clean up.

The continual growth and sev... hair mirrors the often destructi... of our human relationships. Ou... something we desire and perfect...