

In this edition of *TCFNews*, Page 7, *Blast from the past*, features a 1998 article by Brian Astill about whether public and Christian schools make a difference to the values held by students in schools in Adelaide.

Values are often a major talking point in discussing the differences between religious and non-religious schools. During the 1990s, all states and territories developed statements about the values in public education. In NSW *The values we teach* has served that purpose and has recently been replaced by a new Discussion Paper, *The Values of NSW Public Schools*.

While these statements make explicit the values generally held in the Australian community, many non-government religious schools have made a point about the values they stand for and how they believe they provide a better education. The expansion of these schools would suggest that, at least amongst Christians, protecting Christian family values has been one of the motivating factor in choosing to leave the government system.

While not wishing to enter into a debate about whether improved academic performance results, which is rarely claimed as the main reason, the article challenges the influence of schools, government and non government, Christian and non-religious, to change the values of students.

The research indicates that the values of students from non-Christian backgrounds attending religious schools are not changed and the values of students from Christian backgrounds are not changed by attending government schools. The conclusion that schools have very little influence on students' values and that the home is the dominant source of values may surprise some and for others confirm what was already suspected.

What is also interesting about the research is that the values of Christian students are different to the values of the non-Christian groups whether in religious or government schools. This finding further enforces the point being made that homes not schools are the prime source of values for students.

In saying this, one should not be confused between values and behaviours or even values and attitudes. The traditions, culture, rules and ethos of schools can influence how students behave and the attitudes they express to particular events, ideas and people in given situations. Behaviours and attitudes can be superficial and easily modified by peer behaviours and attitudes. What people value is deep seeded and not easily changed. Many parents can testify to concern about the behaviours and attitudes of their children when teenagers and note that in their twenties there was a return to family values which had outlasted the teenage aberrations.

While there is much talk in the community about core values and the values that underpin schooling, what values are demonstrated at home appear to be far more influential. As parents we need to be sure that we are consistent in word and deed. If we say that they are valuable and spend little time with them; that other people are important but spend most of our time chasing dollars; that we care for the environment but change no consumer habits; that prayer is important but find no time to do it; then what values are being taught. One of the important aspects of being a teacher as well as a parent is to establish credibility as a significant adult by being what we say we are.

While the findings of this research should encourage Christian parents who wish their children to have a government school education, they also place emphasis on the role that our homes play in developing the values of our children. At some point in the development of every child their values will be challenged and some children will grow to accept other values. But this will not occur easily or through the influence only of a particular school. Values can change over time, but it is a long process, even when behaviours and attitudes appear sometimes to be out of step with values.

From my perspective the results emphasise that, whether a child is in a government or a non-government school, it is the work of Holy Spirit that will make a difference to his or her values. Christian teachers in both government and non-government schools need to look to work with that same Spirit to make Christ known to students. While greater opportunities might exist in Christian schools to promote this work, one

should not underestimate the power of the Spirit to bring young people to a saving knowledge of Christ, nor the opportunities within government schools to support this work.

TCFNSW comprises Christian teachers from both government and non-government schools. It aims to encourage Christian teachers, in whatever capacity they work, to be capable professionals who are credible to young people and able to show the love of Christ in their work situation. We want to recognise the validity of the work of Christian teachers in every situation to which God has called them. *There is one body and one Spirit...* (Ephesians 4:1-6) The focus is not the unproductive debate about which of these situations might or might not be better and for whom but how each Christian might serve God wherever they are placed.

You may like to share your perspective on these matters with members of TCFNSW through this newsletter. *TCFNews* would like to publish letters and opinion from members on the matters raised in this article.