Worship Experiences in Church Schools: Towards a More Effective and Ethical Model

by

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Anne Faith Wright
Abstract

This study, "Worship Experiences in Church Schools: Towards a More Effective and Ethical Model", is directed to re-assessing the concept of school worship in the light of the increasingly secularised population of schools sponsored in Western societies by Christian denominations; i.e. a population in which a significant proportion of attendees may not come from a consciously embraced background of religious faith or may belong to an alternative faith tradition.

The main issues addressed were: (1) What is the nature and purpose of worship in the church school context? (2) What place can it play in the life of the school? and (3) How should worship activities be conducted, if they are to continue to occupy a place in the life of the church school?

First, the relevance of this enquiry was established through a literature survey of thought and practice in some comparable countries, and an analysis of findings obtained from empirical studies of contemporary Australian youth. Second, an ethnographic enquiry using grounded theory research methods illuminated worship practices in nine denominationally sponsored schools in Western Australia, drawing upon both staff and student perceptions.

Third, the enquiry then sought to generate a model for the conduct of school worship consistent with a biblical view of Christian worship and with the educational and ethical parameters of the school context. To this end, issues of indoctrination, education and enfaithing were also considered, leading finally to the formulation of a set of guiding principles for conducting worship activities in church schools.
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Glossary

Terms are included below which will have specific meanings in context, and will frequently occur in the study, and the following working definitions will apply.

Anglican Church: Formerly known as the Church of England of Australia, the Anglican Church of Australia continues as a synod within the Anglican Church world-wide.

Assembly: a large gathering of children within the school, usually within a designated grouping such as Junior school (primary years), Middle school (early adolescence) and Senior school (secondary years leading to graduation). At these events there is a celebration of children's work and some speeches by teaching staff. In each school, the designated year groupings attending assembly will normally run into hundreds of attendees.

Chapel: The usual term for school worship periods. Chapel may also refer to the building or space in which worship takes place. Chapel may include a variety of school worship experiences in a number of locations. The groupings of students at any one service is usually at least 100 - 300 in schools which number between 1100 and 1500 students (K-12).

Chaplain: In this context, the chaplain will normally refer to the person/s who are specifically designated and inducted by the Uniting or Anglican Church within the school. Chaplains working in a church school context usually have at least one university degree, which is commonly in theology, and are usually ordained by the denomination as priest or minister. They may have additional qualifications in education, social welfare or psychology. These persons will have primary responsibility for leading worship, oversight of the religious education (usually but not always), some pastoral oversight (or membership within the pastoral team for the school as a whole), and potentially a role which promotes voluntary community service and Christian ministries within the school. Some chaplains are also included in the executive decision making body for school management.

Chaplains in State Schools: Chaplains in State Schools in Western Australia are generally youth workers with oversight provided by Youth Care WA. Chaplains working in this context may have training within a Technical College and possibly some training in counselling or pastoral care. Within state schools, their employment will normally consist of voluntary programs held outside school timetables, and include some provision of pastoral care for students and their families.
**Church Schools** (in Australia): Those schools which are founded by a particular denomination or congregation, and represent the ethos of that particular Christian sect. In this context, the schools are church schools of the Uniting Church or Anglican Church serving students aged between 3 years of age and 18 years of age.

**College**: a term which covers both secondary and primary education: this term was devised in the nineteenth century to particularly highlight secondary education and preparation for graduation to university courses.

**Christian Education**: Education which seeks to predominantly explore Christianity and to nurture students in Christian faith development and spirituality. It may or may not focus on one particular denominational ethos, depending on the school. Christian Education programs are usually developed within the particular school, and are delivered by their own staff.

**Christian Schools**: This term is associated in the Australian context with schools founded since the 1970s in which Christian Education is given a primary focus within the context of providing overall education for primary and secondary years. While technically all schools which are faith based in the Christian tradition can be referred to as Christian schools (lower case 's'), in this study Christian Schools (upper case) will refer to those faith based schools which do not align themselves with more traditional denominational schools (or church schools) and seek to integrate what they perceive to be the Christian worldview into every aspect of the curriculum. (See also "church schools").

**General Religious Education** (GRE): Religious or Christian education which is taught on a non-denominational basis within the school context. In most states in Australia (NSW, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia), legislation has resulted in courses leading to graduation from secondary schooling which are generally focused on world religions studies. More recently there has emerged an interest in courses such as Philosophy and Ethics, which are less religious in nature, but still cover questions which explore theological issues from a philosophical perspective, such as the nature of being human, the search for meaning, and grounds for ethical decision making.

**Religion**: the organised practise of worship, buildings, festivals, and doctrines with reference to denominational, national and cultural institutions throughout the world.

**Religious Education**: Education which is focused on religion as a field of inquiry, with the aim of education in respect to all religions.
Special Religious Education (SRE): Christian or religious education which is taught by visiting clergy and lay people who represent their local church, religion or sect within the local state school.

Secular: Freedom to choose denominational affiliation with no particular Christian sect dominating the others. It also means such worship or education which avoids emphasising one particular theology; or disengages in conversations on denominationally divisive topics such as the worship of Mary or baptism, unless all possibilities are canvassed.

Secularism: a movement emerging from liberal humanism which seeks freedom from religious influence, or without religious influence.

Spiritual / spirituality: a number of definitions will be offered owing to the redefinition in every text visited for reading. Generally, spirituality refers to the quest of humans for ultimate meaning and purpose and finds expression within a chosen lifestyle. Its expressions are broadly varied and encompass those experiences described in religious traditions.

Uniting Church in Australia (UCA): The denomination of church which came into being on 22nd June, 1977 and incorporated all Methodist, and the majority of Presbyterian and Congregational churches across Australia.

The Uniting Church Schools in Western Australia (UCAWA) are as follows:

Methodist Ladies' College, Perth (MLC), a school for girls, years from Kindergarten to Year 12 (K-12).

Penrhos: Penrhos school in Como, Perth, a school for girls, years K-12.

Presbyterian Ladies' College, Perth (PLC), a school for girls, years K-12, with boys in pre kindergarten and kindergarten programs.

St Stephen's School: St Stephen's School, Perth, two co-educational school campuses in Duncraig and Carramar, Perth, years K-12.

Scotch College: Scotch College, Perth - a school for boys, years 1-12.

Tranby College: Tranby College, Perth, a co-educational college in Rockingham, years K-12.

Wesley College: Wesley College, Perth - a school for boys, years 1-12; with co-educational junior school (years 1-4).
K-12: Kindergarten to Year 12. The total years of schooling for a child in Western Australia, leading to graduation.

Worship: An act of homage or service rendered to a deity or some other entity. In the school context it will be defined as school worship or chapel periods which are undertaken specifically for the Christian worship of God. Within this context a variety of experiences and contexts will be described.

Abbreviations commonly used

WA: Western Australia

UCA: Uniting Church in Australia