From Vision to Reality

The perceptions and practices of school leaders in

Christian Education National

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Statement of Authorship and Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees.

Abstract

Christian Education National (CEN) is an association of Christian schools started in Australia, in the 1960s by Christian parents, predominantly with a Dutch Reformed heritage. Its vision for education includes the lordship of Christ over all of life, the fact that the gospel is to inform practice, and that parents are responsible for the education of their children. CEN dedicate significant resources to supporting member schools to understand the beliefs that underpin their vision for education and to develop practice based on these beliefs.

School leaders in Christian schools have responsibilities that include an understanding of the faith perspective of their school communities and the development of school practice consistent with that faith perspective. Yet, little research has been conducted with respect to the perceptions and practices of school leaders within CEN schools.

This study was an investigation into what school leaders perceived to be the essential features of CEN schools, how they embed these into school culture and the leadership by which they do this.

The study was situated within a constructivist paradigm and informed by an interpretivist theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. The methodology adopted was case study. The case study was set within the state of Victoria and comprising ten CEN schools, with sixteen campuses, educating approximately 6500 students. Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews of an expert reference group, comprising of national office staff with responsibilities for

professional development, and a principals' group. An online survey with open-ended questions and closed statements with a Likert scale was utilised to gather data from a larger group of senior leadership personnel from participating schools.

This research found that school leaders had an awareness of the essential features of CEN as articulated in the vision statement. Despite this, it was evident that school-based leaders lacked a depth of understanding of the beliefs that inform the CEN approach to schooling. This research also found that school leaders perceived that the essential features were to be included holistically into culture. However, services and resources available to support schools in the development of culture consistent with the vision were under-utilised. While servant leadership, shared leadership, and vision-based leadership were all described in relation to CEN schools, the leadership within these schools is better understood as informed by the Christian faith rather than widely supported leadership theories mentioned in this study.

To encourage education consistent with the CEN vision for schooling, it is recommended that CEN develop a clear and comprehensive description of their distinct approach to education and work to ensure that school boards and educational leaders are educated about this. Further, it is recommended that more be done to ensure that school leaders within this school movement undertake professional development that adequately equips them to develop practice consistent with the beliefs and values of their school communities.

Statement of Appreciation

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Glossary of Terms

Association or
Parent Association
The name given to the Christian parent body in CEN school communities from which boards of governance are elected.

Calvinism or **Reformed**
A Christian tradition founded by John Calvin (1509-1564) that emphasises the authority of the Bible, God's sovereignty in all things, and the integration of faith and life (Vryhof, 2002). *Calvinism* and *Reformed* are used interchangeably.

CEN
Christian Education National. CEN is a national association of Christian schools. In 2008 this association of Christian schools changed its name from Christian Parent Controlled Schools (CPCS).

Christian School
A term applied to a relatively new group of low fee, protestant Christian schools established since World War II (Etherington, 2008; Jackson, 2009)

CPCS
Christian Parent Controlled Schools. The previous name of CEN.

CVP
CEN Victorian Principal. The group of respondents in this study consisting of the Victorian principals of CEN schools.

ERG
Expert Reference Group. The group of respondents comprising of people working directly for the national office of CEN with a role of facilitating professional development for member schools, including Victorian CEN schools.

Evangelical
A broad descriptor of Christians with a strong commitment to personal salvation and adherence to the Bible (Edwards, 2011).

Kuyperian	Beliefs that are understood to be consistent with those espoused by prominent Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920).
Lordship of Christ	Biblical teaching that everything has been created through Jesus (Dickens, 2013) who has been given authority over all things (Fennema, 2006).
NICE	The National Institute of Christian Education. NICE is a registered training provider established by CEN. It coordinates professional learning including post-graduate courses for educators.
reformed	A term pertaining to Christian worldview rather than a theological or denominational term. A reformed worldview has the Bible as foundational for all of life (Edlin & Thompson, 2006).
reformed Christian schools	A broad descriptor of schools established predominantly by Christians with a Reformed or Calvinist background.
SLT	Senior Leadership Team. The group of respondents comprising deputy principals, heads of campus, heads of school, and curriculum coordinators.
Themelic	A term used to describe low-fee Protestant Christian schools in Australia (Long, 1996).
Worldview	A comprehensive framework of basic convictions about life (Wolters, 1985).

Chapter 1: The Background and Context of the Research

1.1 A snapshot

"Christian schools declare that God's healing activity extends into every corner of our existence. There is no more vital activity than the education of children and young people for lives of service to God and His Kingdom" (Christian Parent Controlled Schools, 1992, p. 3).

Christian Education National (CEN) is an association of Christian schools established by Christian parents, employing Christian staff, and utilising a Christian curriculum to educate children from predominantly Christian families (Justins, 2002). This thesis was a study of how school leaders perceived the essential features of CEN schools as articulated in the vision statement, how they integrated these features into school culture, and their understandings of the leadership by which this is done. Noting that *school leaders* is a broad term, for the purposes of this study *school leaders* are the national office of CEN staff responsible for member school professional development, principals, deputy principals, heads of school/campus, and curriculum coordinators.

1.2 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter acquaints the reader to the research topic. The background to the research is presented and located within a subset of Christian schooling in Australia, namely CEN. A brief explanation of CEN schooling is provided including its history, beliefs and how it is understood today. As this research explored the perceptions of school leaders within CEN schools, school leadership is discussed. School leaders have complex roles (Duignan, 2012). These include developing culture. Leaders

within Christian schools are expected to have an understanding of the beliefs of their school communities, be able to articulate these beliefs, and develop practices consistent with them (Gannell, 2004). CEN schools have their own distinct educational philosophy. The CEN vision statement provides a succinct description of CEN schooling in terms that include theological and philosophical concepts associated with the Christian faith. Following this, a summary of the research in Christian education within Australia and, particularly relevant to this research, into the perceptions of school leaders of CEN schooling is presented.

Parents wanting their children to be taught according to their Christian beliefs established CEN schools (Deenick, 1991). Yet, there have been criticisms that practices within these schools have not been consistent with their stated beliefs (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2002; Long, 1996; Thompson, 2003). Subsequently, in this chapter, the research issue that was investigated, including the questions and sub-questions that guided this research are presented. The first chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis.

1.3 The Context of the Research

1.3.1 Personal context.

I am in my third year as Principal of Bayside Christian College, having previously served for six years as Principal of Mountain District Christian School. These two schools are coeducational Christian Schools located on the suburban outskirts of Melbourne. They are both Christian schools founded by Christian parents in order that their children are educated from a biblical perspective consistent with their

values. Both schools are independent schools and members of CEN, formerly Christian Parent Controlled Schools (CPCS), a national association of Christian schools.

An interest in this study arose from my involvement as an educator within CEN schools. Previous to my employment within a CEN school I had no knowledge or experience of Christian Schools. It has since been my belief that many people new to Christian schools including staff members, appear to have a limited knowledge of Christian schooling, the values that underpin these schools, and the particular distinctive approaches to Christian education that Christian schools adopt.

Christians vary in their understanding and implementation of Christian education. Some Christian schools add Christian elements into a school consistent with a particular faith perspective (Fennema, 2006). The differences between these schools and a government school may include Christian teachers setting an example of how to live through their words and actions, a school prayer, and scripture classes (Etherington, 2008). Consistent with this approach is the view "that Christian education more or less happens when Christians teach in Christian schools" (Hull, 2003, p. 203). Yet, it can be argued that employing Christian staff or adding Christian components to a secular institution does not make a school Christian (Fennema, 2006; Van Dyk, 2000). Another approach to Christian schooling, promoted by Christian schooling movements such as CEN, is to develop a holistic, biblically grounded, education that is quite different to the scientific and humanistic ideals of government schooling (Hull, 2003). This approach understands Christianity "as an

all-embracing lifestyle" (Etherington, 2008 p. 122) and, thus, seeks to integrate the Christian faith with every aspect of school practice.

All parents desire positive educational outcomes for their children. In Christian schools, in addition to academic achievements that will give students access to a range of options beyond school, many parents desire their children to have an appreciation of the Christian faith consistent within their own values. Having been involved in leadership in CEN schools, it has been my experience that communities orient around common purposes and values (Sergiovanni, 2005) and leaders play a key role in not just paying lip service to these purposes and values, but also in ensuring they are lived out in the life of the community (Buchanan, 2013b). Expressions of the Christian faith and the promotion of morality are not enough. Faith and education need to be integrated such that actions, policies, curriculum and practices, including teaching and learning, uphold the stated beliefs (Buchanan, 2011). These beliefs are to be biblically grounded, offering an alternative faith-based education to that within the government sector.

1.3.2 Christian Education National and Christian schooling in Australia.

Variously described as "Bible-based and Christ-centred" (Twelves, 2005), "fundamentalist" (Gannell, 2004; Symes & Gulson, 2005), "evangelical" (Jackson, 2009), "low-fee Protestant" (Long, 1996), and "Jesus-centred" (Long, 1996), the term *Christian School* is used in Australian educational literature to refer to a relatively new category of independent schools that has emerged since the 1960s (Lambert, 1996). Although there can be significant variance, with some schools having originated as a ministry of the local church, particularly Baptist and Pentecostal

churches (Jackson, 2009), and others under the authority of independent boards or parent associations, it is widely held that Christian schools are a distinct group (Jackson, 2009; Long 1996; Symes & Gulson, 2005). Noting that they are distinguishable from Catholic, Protestant denominational or ecumenical schools, Christian schools have also been labelled as "themelic", from the Greek word "themelios" meaning "Christ-centred" (Long, 1996). The following descriptors were used to describe a Themelic school:

- a Christian school,

- Christ-centred, particularly in ethos and curriculum,

- biblical based pedagogy,

- confessing the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible directly, or indirectly through formal associations,

- interested in and consciously confessing a Christian world view of schooling, which is perceptible as a common piety,

- schools that are "God's school". (Long, 1996, pp. 101-102)

Promoting themselves as low-fee, Protestant, Christian schools, these local, affordable, Christian schools have witnessed rapid growth over a relatively short period of time. Several factors sit behind the emergence and growth of Christian schools including parental dissatisfaction in the standards of education and the discipline of state schools (Symes & Gulson, 2005), the belief that Protestant church schools were only nominally Christian (Deenick, 1991), and parents' desire to have their children educated under the same Christian values that exist at home (Twelves, 2005). While initially the Christian school movement received little government

funding or church support (Etherington, 2008), changes in government policies including increasing funding to the independent sector and positively encouraging the establishment of new schools, have all aided the proliferation of Christian schooling (Symes & Gulson, 2005).

There are two main umbrella national organisations that individual Christian Schools are members of: Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and Christian Education National (CEN).

Christian Schools Australia (CSA) was formed in 2002 as an amalgamation of Christian Community Schools and Christian Schools Association of Queensland. A number of the Queensland schools have since left CSA and established the Association of Christian Schools (Parker, Justins, Beech, & Dickens, 2010). CSA has approximately one hundred and forty member schools with more than 50,000 student enrolments. CSA perceives itself as a "peak group serving the diverse needs of a large network of independent Christian schools" (Christian Schools Australia, 2015, "About CSA").

Founded in 1966, CEN is an Australian school network consisting of forty-three member associations that together govern sixty-five schools with more than 20,000 students. CEN schools are parent governed, electing their boards from Christian parent associations. Each school association is autonomous. Associations vary with some overseeing multiple schools, or multiple campuses of the same school, and others, one school. While schools can be found in every state and territory in Australia, the greatest proliferation of schools is in New South Wales (18), Victoria (16) and Tasmania (11). As seen in Table 1.1 the Victorian schools, where

this research was based, vary in size from a small rural primary school of approximately 50 students to large multi-campus schools with over 1000 students.

Table 1.1

Victorian CEN Schools

CEN School	2014 Student enrolment	Campuses	Year levels taught
Bayside Christian College	532	1	ELC-Yr. 12
Chairo Christian School	1181	4	ELC-Yr. 12
Covenant College	492	1	ELC-Yr. 12
Donvale Christian College	1130	1	Prep-Yr. 12
Maranatha Christian School	1028	3	ELC-Yr. 12
Melton Christian College	593	1	Prep-Yr.12
Mount Evelyn Christian College	566	2	ELC- Yr. 12
Mountain District Christian School	271	1	Prep-Yr. 12
Plenty Valley Christian College	815	1	Prep-Yr. 12
Son Centre Christian College	54	1	Prep-Yr. 6

Both CEN and CSA schools have similar conservative Protestant backgrounds. Both CEN and CSA profess to the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. A defining feature of both CEN and CSA

is the freedom to speak openly about matters of faith and belief, which is not confined to classes in comparative religions. The Christian faith and the

'spiritual' dimension of life influences many elements of the schools program and management practices. (Cross, 2014, p. 13)

Within the teaching program this can be seen in a daily devotional time, a subject on Christianity, and the integration of Christian elements in all subjects (Riding, 1996). There are several distinct differences between the CEN and CSA schooling groups. Parent associations predominantly govern CEN schools, whereas CSA schools are mostly church based. The Protestant background of each group differs with CEN being *Reformed theological,* consistent with the traditions of Calvinism, and CSA mainly *evangelical* (Justins, 2002)*,* upholding the Bible as the word of God and demonstrating a strong commitment to personal salvation (Edwards, 2011). CEN also understand that Christian schools are for the nurture of children of Christian parents and typically have enrolment policies which allow enrolment only from Christian families or a minority of children from families not professing a Christian faith, whereas other church based schools are more open in their enrolment practices allowing a greater proportion of children from families not professing a Christian faith (Parker et al., 2010).

A brief history of CEN.

The beginnings of CEN are closely associated with Dutch immigrants and the Reformed Churches of Australia. The Reformed Church of Australia was often involved in the initial set up and promotion of the parent associations that led to the establishment of schools. Despite this, CEN schools were never to be Reformed Church schools. From the outset these schools were open to families from a range of Christian denominations (CPCS, 1992). They were also to be parent rather than church governed, reflecting the early pioneers' understanding of parental

responsibility for education (Deenick, 1991). The impetus for parent run schools came from an understanding the Dutch Christians had about schooling in the Calvinist or Reformed tradition as promoted by philosopher politicians such as Abraham Kuyper and Groen Van Prinsterer (Justins, 2002). In Holland, in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a determined campaign by Catholics and Protestants for government funded schooling in support of their Christian values and beliefs. By 1917 there were government, Catholic and Protestant schools, all fully funded by the state (Lambert, 1996). By the 1950s, Christian schools were present in all parts of Holland.

In immigrating to Australia after World War II the first schooling experience of the Dutch immigrants was that of Australian government run schools. Initially it appeared that government schools would suffice, but it soon became clear that leaving God out of the classroom was regarded as insufficient and anti-Christian (Hoeksema, 1983). Christian parents "could not accept the distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' education. The Christian is called to sanctify every area of life. There can be no neutral subjects. Everything in life is related to Christ, and has significance beyond this life" (Deenick, 1991, p. 240). So, in 1953, with the encouragement of the Reformed Church, the first Christian Parent Controlled School association was formed in Kingston and Hobart. This led to the first CEN school, Calvin Christian School, opening in 1962. In 1966, the second and third CEN schools, Tyndale in Blacktown, NSW and Rehoboth in Perth, began.

The formation of a national body uniting associations and schools had its beginnings in the early nineteen sixties with the Blacktown association members desiring to connect with other associations in Australia (Hoeksema, 1983). Others

saw the need to share information and encourage each other. This culminated in the first meeting of all Australian member schools and the establishment of The National Union of Associations for Christian Parent-Controlled Schools in January 1966 (Hoeksema, 1983; Deenick, 1991). The early growth of CEN was slow. In 1973, when the first 'Education in Focus' professional development conference was held for Christian teachers, only four schools existed. Held mostly biennially, these conferences had a significant positive impact on Christian schooling, assisting teachers in understanding how to teach from a Christian perspective (Deenick, 1991). To further assist teacher development a number of Victorian parent-controlled Christian schools established the Institute for Christian Education (ICE) in 1979, offering a part-time teacher training course (Hoeksema, 1983). In 1991 ICE formally came under the control of CPCS as the National Institute for Christian Education (NICE) offering postgraduate courses in curriculum studies. In 2001 CPCS had the opportunity to join with other Christian school groups in the establishment of CSA. The decision not to join was out of a belief that the new organisation would not support the CPCS approach to teacher education and parental governance (Justins, 2006).

During the mid 1970s to mid 1980s the number of schools grew substantially such that by 1986 there were forty-six. In 1988, Parent Controlled Christian Schools became known as Christian Parent Controlled Schools (CPCS) to emphasise that Christian parents were to govern the schools. The early pioneers did not foresee the need for this emphasis as they thought that only Christian families would want Christian schools (Dickens, 2013). This name persisted until 2008 when CPCS,

acknowledging concerns about "the negative connotations of 'control'" (Dickens, 2013, p. 10), rebranded itself as Christian Education National (Parker et al., 2010).

CEN values.

Faith-based schools have an ethos and spirituality that emerges out of their particular faith tradition (McGettrick, 2005). CEN schooling has a rich Dutch Calvinist or Reformed heritage. *Calvinism* being the Christian tradition founded by John Calvin (1509-1564) with emphases on the authority of the Bible, God's sovereignty over all things and integrating faith and life (Vryhof, 2002). The beginnings of the early schools were connected with Dutch immigrants who had themselves been educated in the Dutch Reformed tradition of Christian schools (Long, 1996) and desired Christian schooling for their children (CPCS, 1992). The theological foundations of CEN schools were influenced by their Calvinist heritage with the reformational Calvinist worldview written into the CEN foundational documents "including pivotal convictions about the authority of the Scriptures" (Thompson, 2003, p. 94). Regarding the authority of the Bible within CEN,

> the Scriptures should occupy a pre-eminent place in Christian parent controlled schools. As a movement we confess in our basis, our statement of faith, that the Scriptures are "the only absolute rule for all faith and conduct and therefore also for education of our children at home and at school". (CPCS, 1992, p. 5)

The foundational values of CEN were identified in research into the then Christian Parent Controlled Schools (Justins, 2002). These are outlined below:

Foundational Values of Christian Parent Controlled Schools in Australia

Foundational Value I: Christian Parent Control

- Christian parents should control the direction and purpose of their children's education

Foundational Value II: Christian Families

- CPC schools should support Christian families in the task of educating their children
- CPC schools should be affordable for Christian families
- CPC schools should provide a protected environment for children in which the beliefs and values of Christian families should not be undermined.

Foundational Value III: Christian Curriculum

- The school curriculum should be thoroughly and distinctively Christian
- The Bible should be the foremost guide in all areas of schooling
- Christ should be central to, and honoured in all school activities

Foundational Values IV: Christian Teachers

- All courses should be developed and taught by Christian teachers. (Justins, 2002, p. 153)

Despite the strong initial connections with Dutch Calvinism, CEN is now "diverse culturally and denominationally" (Dickens, 2013, p. 9). While it has been described as "evangelical" (Cross, 2014, p. 13), CEN is better understood, theologically, as *reformed evangelical* (Dickens, 2013) a term that acknowledges

the Dutch Calvinist background of the school movement, but also the influence of other evangelical Christians who were attracted to the worldview of these Christian schools and were influential in the various debates on Christian schooling (Justins, 2002; Parker et al., 2010). This is in contrast to North American Calvinist schools "where the Kuyperian influence was nearly exclusively confined to the Dutch immigrant community and their progeny" (Justins, 2002, p. 61).

In CEN, *reformed* is often used in association with worldview (Mechielson, 1980) rather than as a theological or denominational term. A reformed worldview holds strong convictions about the authority of the Bible (Thompson, 2003), including an appreciation of the goodness of creation, acknowledgement of the impact of sin on this creation, and the restoration of the world through Jesus Christ (Edlin & Thompson, 2006).

A core feature of this worldview is the lordship of Christ. The biblical teaching underpinning this is that everything has been made through Christ (Dickens, 2013) and he has authority in heaven and earth (Fennema, 2006). In CEN the lordship of Christ over all of life is "somewhat of a slogan" (Dickens, 2013, p. 135). As Christ is lord of all, all of life is sacred including education, including the curriculum (Fennema, 2006).

Consistent with similar school movements in the Reformed tradition, CEN schools do not envisage Christian schooling as simply public schooling done better (Smith, 2001), but rather education that is grounded in the Bible. Within CEN there is a desire to integrate the Christian faith and education; to embrace a perspective where the lordship of Christ over all creation is acknowledged and the Bible is

relevant across the whole of life. Christian worldview is the means by which this is achieved (Dickens, 2013).

CEN today.

CEN uses a variety of terms to promote itself to the wider community. The CEN vision statement is a succinct expression of its beliefs and distinctive approach to Christian schooling:

> Our member associations and schools are all closely connected and defined by strong partnerships between home, church and school to promote the transforming and biblically authentic approach to education that:
>
> • Celebrates the lordship of Christ over all of life;
>
> • Positions the gospel rather than cultural forces as the primary shaper of how we think and live and
>
> • Affirms the role of parents as having responsibility to ensure their children are educated within this understanding.
>
> Above all, CEN promotes a transformational Christian worldview where Jesus' love, power and authority inform and guide all practice and community life - including leadership, management, teaching, curriculum and effective governance - in its member schools. (CEN, 2015, "Our vision")

In its literature, CEN states that member associations of CEN Ltd uphold six core values:

1. Securing the Bible's central place in the life of our associations and school communities. The Bible, in its entirety, is "the divinely inspired, inerrant

word of God, the only absolute rule for all faith and conduct, and therefore also for the education of children at home and at school."

2. Upholding a community of Christian parents having a determinative and ongoing involvement in setting the direction for the school, which, under God, educates their children.

3. Demonstrating a vibrant biblical faith, which permeates every aspect of philosophy, policy and practice in our associations and schools.

4. Engaging as a national community supported by and accountable to each other. "We do together what we cannot and should not do alone."

5. Sharing the vision of Christian education with the wider Christian community.

6. Complementing the roles of parents and the Church in the education of children for responsive discipleship, equipping them to share God's life and hope with all people and within the structures of all cultures, including their own. (Christian Education National, 2015, "Core values")

CEN has a number of mechanisms to support member schools in understanding its particular approach to Christian schooling. CEN produces two periodical publications. *Nurture* is a magazine produced four times a year aimed primarily at Christian school families. It offers stories from within CEN schools, parenting tips, and general articles. *The Christian Teachers Journal* (CTJ) is a publication that "aims to challenge Christian educators to a fuller understanding of their tasks and responsibilities. It raises issues critical to the development of teaching and learning in a distinctively Christian way" (Christian Education National, 2015, "Christian Teachers Journal"*,* para. 1). CTJ engages with teaching and learning issues from a Christian perspective. As well as government accredited

postgraduate courses, the training arm of CEN, NICE, offers resources, workshops and certificate programs. The *Certificate of Christian Education*, a one-day introductory course on Christian schooling, is offered to both staff and parents in Christian schools. A number of conferences including international, state, leadership, parent, and student are offered periodically.

1.3.3 School leadership.

Leadership is recognised as a complex human activity that can be difficult to define. Leadership is more than a role; it is a function (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). It has been argued that two main functions of leadership are that of providing direction and exercising influence (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). Within schools, leadership is often connected with specific roles such as principals, heads of school and department heads. Yet, leadership can be performed by a number of individuals and/or groups within school communities.

School leaders are recognised as having a unique position in schools with their roles described as multidimensional and demanding (Neidhart & Carlin, 2011), and even uncertain (Sears, 2006). School leaders have the task of enthusing the members of the school community around a common purpose; that is, communicating a vision to the school community (Bolman & Deal, 1994; Sergiovanni, 2005). While effective educational leaders inspire others, they also "help to create shared meanings and understandings to support the school's vision. School legitimacy and effectiveness are enhanced when both internal members and the broader community share clear understandings about students, learning and schooling" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, pp. 3-4). The creation of shared meanings is no simple task. It involves working with multiple stakeholders in the development of

the goals, the ability to clearly articulate what the goals are and why they are worth pursuing and convincing members that they are, in fact, achievable (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

To direct people to implement a vision, school leaders work with, and through, people. They are to inspire staff not just with a vision, but provide mechanisms including meetings, professional development activities and appraisal for them to reflect on current practice and see the potential of the desired practice. Successful school leaders are typically hands-on (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2005), modelling behaviour and practice that are consistent with the vision and values they espouse. They recognise that change is not often easy and work to build trust in staff, providing support, freedom to make mistakes as well as incentives to encourage the fulfilment of the vision (Sergiovanni, 2005).

School leadership is contextual (Belmonte, Cranston, & Limerick 2006). Schools vary in many ways including history, ethos, culture, size and location. School leaders can be influenced by school culture and context, but can also shape school culture over time (Ghaleei & Mohajeran, 2008). There is no one size fits all approach, with the research suggesting "the need for caution in transferring the policies and practices of leaders from one school to another without due consideration of their appropriateness in the extended or specific school context" (Zammit, Sinclair, Cole, Singh, Costley, Brown a'Court, & Rushton, 2007, p. 22). Instead, it is important for leaders to have a deep understanding of their school cultures, to act as agents for the values of their communities (Begley, 2001), and to appreciate that they have a fundamental role in shaping that culture (Laubli, 2010). Effective school leaders develop culture through actions such as engagement with

a range of stakeholders for support and alliances (Gurr et al., 2005), building collaborative structures and fostering shared norms.

In faith-based schools, such as those within CEN, students, parents and staff have expectations that leaders would demonstrate their faith through their leadership and teaching (Buchanan & Chapman, 2014; Gannell, 2004). They also need to pay attention to the values of the school and determine how these values shape school practices (McGettrick, 2005). To be effective, school leaders need to have a clear understanding of the faith perspective of their school and be able to bring that to life through all aspects of school practice including educational outcomes (Buchanan, 2013a).

1.4 Research into Australian Christian schools

This section reviews research that has included CEN and was considered relevant to this research project. Research into Christian schools has often been within a broader category of schools, as such little is known about the unique characteristics of Christian schools including those within CEN (Cross, 2014). A summary of this research is outlined in Table 1.2 below.

As Table 1.2 shows, the research into Christian Schools in Australia has produced a variety of results. Christian schools have demonstrated practices, albeit often inconsistent, reflective of the Christian faith. Concerns within research literature into CEN schools pertinent to this study have included understandings of values, the relationship between values and practice, and the role of school leaders. The outcomes of this research are summarised in distinct areas below.

Table 1.2

A Selection of Key Research Findings Regarding Australian Christian Schools

Date	Researcher	Topic	Key finding/s	School type/s
1994	Hewitt	*An exploratory study into teacher's inclusion of the Christian perspective in the classroom.*	Teachers include Christian perspective in their teaching practice, but it varies.	CPCS
1996	Long	*The development of themelic schools in Australia*	Reality does not match rhetoric; confusion of terms	Christian schools including CPCS
1997	Collins	*The integrity of leadership: Being a principal in a Christian school.*	Christian schools can produce close knit communities; parent control needs defining	Christian schools including CPCS
2002	Justins	*Christian parent controlled schools in Australia – A study of the relationship between foundational values and prevailing practices*	Prevailing practice is similar to foundational values, but it is a struggle.	CPCS
2003	Thompson	*Beyond proof texts, principles and perspectives: the struggle to practice Bible-based education.*	Despite intentions only parts of the Bible are being used in educational practice.	Christian schools including CPCS
2004	Gannell	*More than a calling: the experiences of new principals in Christian schools in New South Wales.*	New principals find their roles very demanding.	Christian schools including CPCS
2009	Berber	*The Role of the Principal in Establishing and Further Developing an Independent Christian or Islamic School in Australia.*	The principal's role in these schools surpasses that of most school principal roles.	Christian schools including CPCS and Islamic schools
2010	Iselin	*How Principals are Cultivating Sustainable School Cultures Within Christian Schools During Changing Times*	Principals use four guiding principles to assist in cultivating sustainable cultures.	Christian schools associated with either CSA or AACS
2013	Dickens	*The impact of religious perspective on patterns of schooling - a comparison of two theologically similar school systems in terms of integration of faith and learning*	Despite similarities a strong divergence of vision and practice between the systems exists.	Anglican and CEN schools

1.4.1 The authority given to the Bible.

Research into Christian schooling has affirmed the notion that the Bible is central to

Christian schools, stating "the centrality of the written word, the Bible, is what

matters in themelic schools ... The Bible is pre-eminent in most themelic publications" (Long, 1996, p. 107). The Bible is revered and understood as a pre-eminent document in CEN schools, and utilised as a guide to provide a Christian perspective in curriculum and widely used by teachers (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2002; Thompson, 2003). While authority is given to the Bible, there is evidence that many within Christian schools do not possess a deep understanding of the Bible, are selective in its application and struggle to develop biblical perspectives in their curriculum (Justins, 2002; Thompson, 2003). Thompson (2003), in particular, was quite critical noting that several educational leaders admitted:

> that the most basic structures of schooling had not been subjected to biblical evaluation when schools were being established. They believed that those structures militated against biblical foundations being laid in subsequent, more specific aspects of education, such as curriculum development. This admission by a number of experienced educational leaders represented recognition that, at the most fundamental level, Christian schooling was not Bible-based. (p. 291)

1.4.2 Christian perspectives in the classroom.

CEN promotes the integration of Christian faith and learning (Dickens, 2013). Within CEN significant resources in the form of time, money and a variety of professional development initiatives are allocated to assist teachers in the development of a Christian curriculum (Justins, 2002). Yet, while there is a commitment within CEN to developing an educational worldview in which Christ is central, a dualistic approach exists within CEN, and the integration of faith and education has been inconsistent, varying across and even within CEN schools (Dickens, 2013). There is evidence

that teachers include Christian perspectives in their teaching (Hewitt, 1994). It is also apparent that there is "significant room for improvement" in the integration of faith and learning within CEN schools (Dickens, 2013, p. 255). A reason for this may be that "teachers' understanding of the application of a Christ-centred approach to schooling remains undeveloped" (Justins, 2002, p. 235). A lack of biblical literacy may also be a cause, as evidenced by Thompson (2003):

> the Bible as the basis for education within those schools was markedly disappointing. Despite the fact that research participants were aware that proof texting – the icing on the cake use of isolated statements extracted from Scripture – was simplistic, educationally unsound and inherently unbiblical, nevertheless it was widely used. (p. 294)

CEN schools have commonly utilised a creation-fall-redemption framework in the development of curriculum from a biblical perspective. While this method is still promoted, it has been argued that, "this worldview approach to Christian perspective has been taught and practised within CEN to the extent that for some it has become 'tired'" (Dickens, 2013, p. 249).

1.4.3 The role of the school leadership.

The role of leaders within schools is complex. In Christian schools, there is an expectation that the worldview of potential school leaders will be in alignment with that of the school, and that leaders would possess a strong sense of God's calling (Gannell, 2004). Principals "see themselves as being among the main proponents for the perpetuation of these Judeo-Christian values" (Collins, 1997, p. 2). Consequently, principals act as role models of the Christian faith, as well as

providing administrative and academic leadership (Berber, 2009). Integrity is an important leadership quality. Integrity is shown in principals being able to be trusted in developing programs that support students "not only academically but also holistically (spiritually and morally)" (Berber, 2009, p. 234).

Leadership within themelic schools has been criticised (Long, 1996). A chief criticism has been the lack of consistency between vision and practice. For Long, "the themelic model is founded on a theology of patriarchy and authoritarianism which is clearly symbolised in the metaphor of lordship" (1996, p. 402) and "despite language about Jesus and servant leadership, most themelic schools are bastions of conservatism, preoccupied with the actions of those in authority" (p. 386). A key feature of Christian schooling is the connection of values of faith with school life. Long purported that this meant that "principals serve as surrogate clergy through the confusion of church with the themelic school, schooling with church mission and evangelism and teaching with ministry" and that "themelic schools are schools of confusion, fear and contradiction" (p. 418, 433).

1.4.4 Parent involvement.

A foundational pillar of CEN is parent responsibility for the education of their children. As a national movement, CEN is at "pains to evince that parents remain the principal agents in the education of their children" (Low, 2013, p. 379). Yet, in practice, Dickens (2013) found:

> there was an increasing tendency for parents to leave the running of the school to teachers and to see themselves as consumers of a private education for their children. The increasing number of parents who are not

committed to the Christian vision of the school and who tolerate rather than embrace Christian integration has exacerbated this trend. (Dickens, 2013, p. 138)

This is consistent with previous research that found parental participation in school life was dwindling and that parents, and staff, "were increasingly passive, uninformed and unenthusiastic about association membership" (Justins, 2002, p. 252).

The governance structures in themelic schools have also been criticised. The concept of parent-control lacks definition (Long, 1996). Parents have too much authority and power and staff have none, and "the language of partnership and mutuality which is used consistently throughout the themelic school system simply does not match leadership practice" (Long, 1996, p. 404). While positively affirming the potential for school communities such as these, where all members are united under common values, Collins (1997) suggested that some parents abuse their power, undermining community (pp. 290-291).

In CEN schools, school leaders expressed concerns about the concept of parent partnership, suggesting:

that inexperienced or authoritarian boards produce schools that suffer from a lack of security, stability and clear direction. Related to this was a concern that 'control' was sometimes emphasised at the expense of partnership, the result of which was a lack of consultation with staff who felt undervalued and discouraged. (Justins, 2002, p. 251)

1.4.5 Summary.

The research into Christian schools, relevant to the current project, was described according to the headings of the authority given to the Bible, Christian perspectives in the classroom, and the role of school leadership, parent involvement, and effective Christian schooling. This limited research suggests that CEN schools espouse biblical values, but there has been dissonance between the CEN vision for schooling and practice. In CEN schools the Bible is valued. Yet, Christian school staff can struggle in their attempts to integrate the Christian faith and learning. Partnership with parents, too, although valued, appears to be becoming increasingly difficult with parents joining CEN schools who do not share the vision of earlier pioneering families.

1.5 The Research Issue

Parent associations established CEN schools in order to educate their children from a Christian worldview consistent with their own beliefs (Deenick, 1991). As Christian schools, their culture is to be based upon the belief of the authoritative role of scripture (Mills, 2003). The contents of the Bible are to guide life, including educational policy and practice. A measure of school success within these schools is the extent to which the mission of the school is achieved (Berber, 2009). Within Christian schooling the task of maintaining practice consistent with their values has been a valid concern (Boerema, 2011). Christian institutions such as schools have been inclined, over time, to "the disintegration of their respective cultural distinctiveness through a process of rationalism and secularisation" (Iselin, 2009, p. 16). CEN dedicate significant resources to promoting and maintaining their distinctive approach to schooling. Yet despite this, there is concern within CEN that

this distinctive approach may be lost over time. This concern is embodied in the NICE developed *Certificate of Christian Education* student workbook, which states:

> as we have grown and become respectable and as compliance issues have become more complex, there are fewer and fewer people able to articulate a distinctively Christian view of education. Without these people in school communities; on committees; on local Boards; in State Councils and National Boards we are constantly in danger of becoming a provider of a private education product. (Parker et al., 2010, p. 48)

Further, within the research literature into Christian schooling (Section 1.4) there has been criticisms of CEN. CEN schools have not utilised the Bible well as a basis for education and school policy (Thompson, 2003). CEN schools have claimed an educational view with Christ at the centre, but found it difficult to articulate what this means in practice (Justins, 2002). Further, their terminology such as "Christ-centred" and "educating Christianly" is not adequately defined (Long, 1996), and their integration of faith and learning through Christian worldview has been inconsistent (Dickens, 2013). School leaders within Christian schools have a responsibility to ensure the Christian ethos of the school is "authentically implemented" (Gannell, 2004, p. 347). Leaders acting purposefully in presenting and re-casting the visions and values of their school communities encourage the perpetuating practice aligned with the beliefs of a community (Iselin, 2009). Consequently, school leaders need to have an understanding of the culture of the Christian school in which they are embedded. In school communities of the Christian

faith, leaders need to demonstrate a worldview that is consistent with the school ethos, particularly if they expect the same of school staff, students and families.

There has been research into the wider Christian school movement, but within CEN schools, little research has been undertaken (Dickens, 2013, p. 3). With regard to research into the beliefs and practices of CEN only two research papers have been published within the last fifteen years. In 2002, Justins found that the foundational values of the initial pioneers of CEN schools were still evident within these communities as prevailing practices. Research into the efficacy of Anglican and CEN schools found that there was a divergence in the vision and practice between these two school systems (Dickens, 2013).

It has been said that there are few explorations into "how leadership is understood and practised in the context of faith-based schools" (Striepe, Clarke, & O'Donoghue, 2014, p. 93). In Catholic schooling there is evidence of how leadership is understood and practised (Neidhart & Lamb, 2013). Yet, within CEN schools no research has dealt specifically with how school leaders understand CEN, integrate the vision and values into school culture, and the leadership by which they do this. Consequently, the purpose of the current research was to explore how school leaders within CEN schools perceived the essential features of CEN schooling as articulated in the CEN vision statement, how they implemented these features in their school communities, as well as to explore their perceptions of the leadership by which this is done.

1.6 The Research Problem

As alluded to earlier, CEN schools are a relatively new movement in Australia having begun in the 1960s through the efforts of Christian parents supportive of

education from a Christian worldview perspective that is consistent with their reformational theological beliefs (Hoeksema, 1983). CEN schools, have a set of core beliefs and educational philosophy. Implementing and maintaining schooling practice consistent with their beliefs will be an ongoing concern (Boerema, 2011). School leaders have a determinative role in establishing school culture. If these leaders are to integrate the beliefs, values and vision of CEN and develop a culture consistent with these values it is imperative that they understand these core beliefs and schooling philosophy and are able to embed these into the life of the school. As has been suggested,

> CPC schools need principals who possess knowledge of CPC schools' foundational values and practices because it is the school leader who puts the policies and procedures in place that will or will not reflect those values and who directs the school on a daily basis in a myriad of areas. (Justins, 2002, p. 262)

1.6.1 Specific research questions.

1. What do CEN member school leaders understand to be the essential features of Christian Education National schools, as articulated in the vision statement?

Christian parents desiring that their children are educated in values consistent with their own have established CEN schools. School leaders have roles that include shaping culture around shared meanings. To be true to their vision it is important that principals and other school leaders have an understanding of, and are able to articulate that vision. This research question offered participants an opportunity to

reflect on, and articulate, their understanding of the essential features of CEN schools, as articulated in the vision statement.

2. How do school leaders specifically seek to integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN as articulated in the vision statement?

    a) through staff?

    b) so that students encounter them?

    c) so that the curriculum exhibits the essential features?

    d) so that parents become more cognizant of the essential features?

In this research leaders' perceptions of the culture of CEN schools were explored. It suggested a connection between underlying beliefs and school culture. School culture encompasses many elements. To date, research into CEN schools found their practices to include parental responsibility and partnership in education (or parent control), the nurture of children from Christian families, the development of a Christian curriculum, and the employment of Christian staff (Justins, 2002). This question offered leaders the opportunity to articulate how they integrated the essential features of CEN schooling into these four acknowledged elements of CEN school practice as identified in previous research.

3. How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?

Leadership is contextual. Faith-based schools have particular beliefs and cultures. Within Christian schools, school leaders are to embody the beliefs of their communities, nurturing their own spirituality but also leading their communities in

ways that are consistent with the faith perspective of that community (Banke, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2012). This question invited school leaders to reflect and respond as to their own leadership in relation to their school communities as they look to develop practices consistent with the CEN vision for schooling.

1.7 The Significance of the Research

Christian schools integrate the Christian faith and education, seeking to develop school practices that match the espoused beliefs of the Christian community. As noted in Section 1.4, research into Christian schools, particularly CEN schools, has been limited. In this research it was evident that there is dissonance between the espoused values of schools and their practices. While there has been research into the foundational values and prevailing practices of CEN schools (Justins, 2002) this was conducted more than ten years ago and was of a more general nature. Subsequently, this research is timely providing an opportunity to explore CEN school leaders' perceptions of CEN schooling.

Christian school leaders have an integral role in developing practices consistent with the values of the school. This research examined the perceptions of the philosophy of CEN schooling as articulated in the vision statement among school leaders. It offered participants the opportunity to reflect on and articulate their own perceptions of the essential features of CEN as presented in the vision statement, how they integrated these into school culture, and their reflections on their own leadership by which this is done. The research offers leaders within CEN schools, in general, insights as to how school leaders perceive the CEN philosophy, integrate this into school culture, and understand leadership, which affords them the

opportunity to enhance their own practice as educational leaders.

This research is significant for the national office of CEN. Knowledge of the school leaders' perceptions of CEN, their practice, and leadership may provide, those responsible for future direction of the movement, valuable information to inform practice consistent with their vision for education. This feedback has the potential to influence the future professional development of CEN staff as a whole.

Leaders of faith-based school schools have to balance satisfying government accountabilities with the expectations of their faith communities (Neidhart & Lamb, 2013). This research will contribute to the body of knowledge on how school leadership is understood and practised in faith-based schooling.

More broadly, school leaders whether in faith-based or in government schools have similar roles in developing practices consistent with the underlying values of their schools. The findings of this research affords school leaders understandings of leadership practices that inculcate values into school cultures consistent with the vision of their school communities.

1.8 Thesis Structure

The thesis structure is provided below in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3

Overview of the Thesis Structure

Chapter number	Chapter title
1	The Background and Context of the Research
2	Review of the Literature
3	The Research Design
4	Presentation of the Results
5	Discussion in Light of Reviewed Literature and Results
6	Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion

In this chapter, an interest in this research, the context including an overview of CEN schools and school leadership, and a summary of the research conducted within Christian schools relevant to this project were presented. The research problem, and the research purpose were introduced. The research questions that underpin this research were articulated, the significance of the work, and an overview of the thesis were also included.

In chapter two the conceptual framework is presented through which the research questions are explored. The conceptual framework is expressed as three overlapping circles representing the three aspects of the framework: CEN schooling, school leadership, and school culture. The three aspects of this conceptual framework are then explored, in turn, through an examination of the literature on reformed Christian schools, including CEN schooling, culture, school culture and Christian school culture, and school leadership including that connected with Christian schooling.

In chapter three the research design is described. Epistemological and theoretical perspectives within the theoretical framework are discussed, as is the case study methodology. The methods used to collect the data are described, as is the approach taken to analyze the data using coding and themes.

Following collection, coding, and organizing, the data it is presented in chapter four in three sections consistent with the three participant groups: the expert reference group, the principals of the Victorian CEN schools, and the Victorian CEN senior leadership teams. In each section the data is presented under the research questions. A comparison of these three groups is then presented under the research questions.

In chapter five the data is discussed and illuminated by the literature under each Research Question.

Chapter six conveys a number of recommendations made as a result of the findings as well as suggestions for further research.

Finally, chapter seven presents a conclusion to the research.

1.9 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter the research topic was introduced and contextualised. In chapter two the conceptual framework is presented together with a review of the literature of the three key elements comprising this framework: reformed Christian schools, culture, and school leadership.

Chapter 2: The Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the literature in three areas considered pertinent to this research: the philosophical and theological underpinnings of reformed Christian schooling; culture, including school culture; and school leadership.

This chapter begins with the logical starting point of the beliefs that created and shaped CEN in Australia. CEN schools are a subset of a much larger tradition of reformed Christian schooling with strong links to Calvinism. Reformed Christian schools have particular understandings and nuances that distinguish them from other Christian schools. A number of theological and philosophical beliefs pertinent to reformed Christian schooling and how they are understood by CEN are discussed below.

Culture has, at its heart, shared visions, values and beliefs (Sergiovanni, 2000). School leaders play key roles in understanding, interpreting and inculcating values and beliefs into school cultures. In regard to this research within CEN schooling, the literature will be examined to determine whether particular cultural elements are consistent with the underlying theological underpinnings and purposes of these schools.

School leadership is a major driver in ensuring that there is congruence between beliefs and school culture (Sergiovanni, 1996). This chapter will focus on

leadership theories that have been aligned with either biblical leadership or Christian schooling contexts, with transformational, servant and shared leadership specifically expounded.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The issues identified in the literature are clustered into three areas. They are:

- The philosophy of reformed Christian Schooling;
- Culture, including school culture;
- School leadership.

The conceptual framework, below, illustrates the connectedness of the research areas under three major headings, and their subsets particular to the research problem. At the heart of this research is the concept of reformed Christian schooling that entails a search of the literature with respect to the purposes that lie behind this particular manifestation of Christian schooling, and the terminology used within it. The concept of culture embodies the beliefs, values and vision of the heart and entails a search concerning organisational culture, school culture, Christian school culture, and CEN school culture. The concept of school leadership lies between the theological and philosophical beliefs and the culture that exists. Here, leadership strategies are explored which are identified in the literature as being consistent with elements of biblical leadership: transformational leadership, servant leadership and shared leadership.
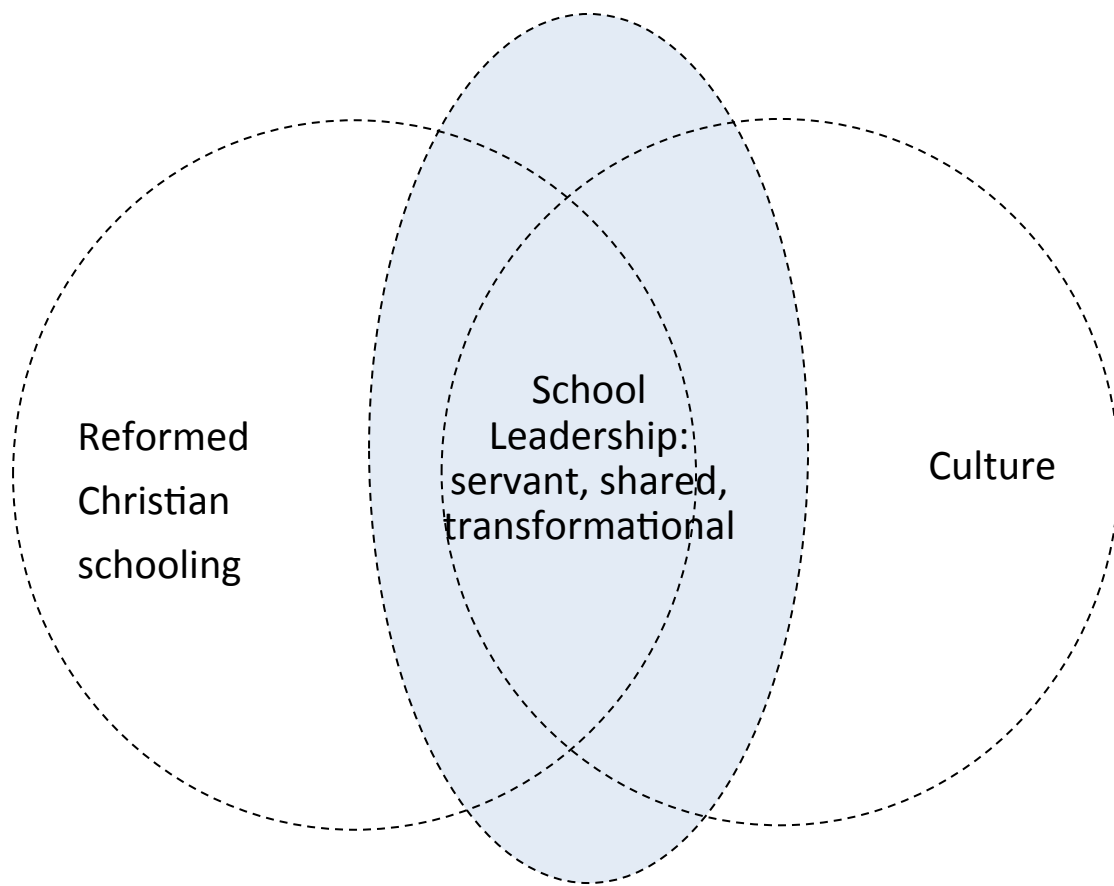
Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework

Figure 2.1 illustrates the interrelationship of the concepts of reformed Christian schooling, school leadership and culture. The philosophy of reformed Christian schooling is understood to be foundational to CEN schools. There is a relationship between the reformed Christian schooling philosophy and leadership as there is an expectation in faith based schools that leaders will embody the values of the faith they represent (Quarmby, 2010). Reformed Christian schooling has the potential to be variously understood and even change because of interpretations of school leaders. Further, school leaders have a role in influencing the culture of the CEN schools in which they work, but are at the same time influenced by this same

culture. The culture of a school has the potential to be influenced by the philosophy of reformed Christian schooling. The dotted or porous line between the three elements reflects the interconnectedness of the elements.

2.3 Reformed Christian Schooling

With strong roots in Dutch Reformed Christianity, CEN schools have similarities with, and strong connections to, other reformed Christian schooling movements in America, Canada and South Africa (Jackson, 2009). Reformed Christian schools have emerged out of a Calvinist Christian tradition with the purpose of providing an alternative schooling approach. The distinctiveness of this approach is found not in what is taught, but rather in the perspective from which all things are taught (Blomberg, 1980). Educational practice is to be based on the Bible (Van Til, 1971).

Education in reformed Christian schools includes three interrelated understandings supported by Calvinist theological and philosophical beliefs. The first is the responsibility of the family and not the state, nor church, to educate children. This is often described in terms of parent responsibility, partnership, or control. The second is that all of life is religious (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997). Notions of a dualism, where parts of life are considered sacred or holy and other parts secular, are to be rejected (Walsh & Middleton, 1984). Education cannot be neutral toward religion nor simply about religious indoctrination. Rather, education is about the integration of faith and life. The third understanding concerns educational purpose. Education is not an evangelistic endeavour. It is concerned with equipping children for the Christian life in society (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997). Christians are called to serve God across the whole of life. Reformed Christian schooling aims to equip students for service in God's world. Underpinning these three understandings are a number

of related Calvinist theological and philosophical beliefs such as *antithesis* (Fennema, 2002; Justins, 2002; Van Til, 1953), the *sovereignty of God* (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997; Justins, 2002), *revelation* (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997; Dickens, 2004; Fennema, 2002), *sphere sovereignty* (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997; Fennema, 2002; Justins, 2002), *covenant*, (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997; Justins, 2002; Vryhof, 2002) and the *cultural mandate* (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997; Dickens, 2004; Justins, 2002). These theological and philosophical beliefs and their connections with reformed Christian schooling and CEN are described below.

2.3.1 Theological and philosophical beliefs of reformed Christian schooling.

Antithesis.

The alternative school sought by reformed Christians was not simply to be public education done better with a Christian dimension manifesting itself "in 'God slots' – those moments of collective worship or bible class" (Vryhof, 2002, p. 108). Moreover, Christian education is incompatible with government education.

> Non-Christian education is Godless education. What is of most importance to us in education, which is absolutely indispensible to us, is left out entirely … If then we want a God-centred and truly Christian education we will have to break away completely from the educational philosophy that surrounds us. (Van Til, 1953, p. 437)

At the heart of reformed Christian schooling is the notion of Christian antithesis. Antithesis is concerned with religious orientation. Christians are called to live by biblical principles that are antithetical or squarely opposed to those of

people who do not follow Christ (Edlin, 2004; Van Til, 1953). Within Reformed thought antithesis does not suggest that people or institutions with the label "Christian" are inherently good, and others not good. Rather, antithesis can run "through people and institutions" (Fennema, 2002, p. 6) such that it is possible to have some elements of people and/or institutions oriented toward God and other elements away from God.

The notion of Christian antithesis is evident within CEN. Justins (2002) suggests that Fowler, an influential Christian educator within CEN (Dickens, 2013), "placed antithesis at the heart" of the CEN education philosophy (p. 43). There are two realms in human life: the realm of God's kingdom and the realm of rebellion against God. Educational practice, centred on the gospel, must take seriously the fact that we can either respond to God or, in unbelief, to a substitute for God (Fowler, 1980). The concept of antithesis helps explain why Dutch Reformed migrants to Australia after World War II were strident in their beliefs on schooling and desirous to start CEN schools consistent with their faith perspective (Justins, 2002).

The sovereignty of God.

God is sovereign over all things and He controls and sustains everything (Graham, 2009). The sovereignty of God, often spoken of in terms of the lordship of Christ, is another key belief connected with reformed Christian schooling. In discussing the theological concept of the sovereignty of God, in relation to reformed Christian schools, De Boer & Oppewal (1997) suggest that:

> Perhaps it is the tap root among other roots. ... For education and the schools it has meant that schools express not merely a secular concern. Calvinists

see ... education as embraced in the Christian's calling to apply this understanding to all areas of life. Thus, educational policy and practice are derived from this worldview, in which the sovereignty of God is the fundamental principle. (p. 281)

As previously stated, Christians vary in how they integrate faith and education. One approach to Christian schooling is to see the underlying values evident in chapel and bible classes, but not in other elements of school practice (Etherington, 2008). This approach suggests that life can be divided into sacred and secular domains. The sacred or spiritual domain includes prayer, chapel, devotional times, and bible classes. In the secular domain are the curriculum, teaching, policies, and other elements of school life (Van Dyk, 2000). Dividing life into sacred and secular domains can be considered dualistic and limiting of God's sovereignty. Acknowledging that everything, including education, comes under the lordship of Jesus Christ has always been a hallmark of reformed Christian schooling (Wolterstorff, 2002).

Within CEN the sovereignty of God is often spoken of in terms of the Dutch Calvinism or Kuyperian roots of the school movement (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2002; Long, 1996). Kuyper was a Dutch Calvinist theologian and Prime Minister of the Netherlands who had a pronounced impact on Dutch society in the early twentieth century including the establishment of government funded Christian schools (Low, 2013; Vryhof, 1999). Kuyper understood "that Christ was King over *all* of life" (Vryhof 1999, p. 100) and that all of life, including education, needed to be seen in light of this (Dickens, 2013). Kuyper's statement, "There is not an inch in the entire area of our human life which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not call 'Mine'!"

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(Dickens, 2004, p. 296), is often quoted in the documents and writings of the CEN school movement (Low, 2013).

CEN arose out of a worldview that did not separate the sacred from the secular (Justins, 2002). Understanding that the whole world belongs to God, CEN rejects notions that God's sovereignty can be "limited to 'religious' bits or spiritual parts" (Dickens et al., 2015, p. 10) of life. Christian education is not about adding faith elements to learning (Beech, 2015). Notions of dualism suggest that there are elements of life that are not created by God and under the lordship of Christ. Rather, CEN schools believe all of creation, including all of the subjects studied in education come under the authority of God. Subsequently, a thoroughly Christian curriculum reveals the integral nature of life; that God is in everything (Dickens et al., 2015).

Revelation.

Reformed Christian schools have been impacted by the Calvinist commitment to both general (the creation) and special revelation (the Bible). In reformed thought these two sources of knowledge are, "held to be in tension and interpenetration with each other, with no basic dichotomy between the sacred and the secular" (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997, p. 281). In reformed Christian schools there is a high view of the Bible (Vryhof, 2002). It is God's authoritative word. Consistent with this view is an expectation that the "grand themes of Scripture – trinity, creation, the fall, covenant, redemption, kingdom, Christ's lordship, new heaven and new earth … are non-negotiables that need to be passed on to the next generation" (Vryhof, 2002, p. 108).

Reformed Christian schools also "take a high view of general revelation" (Fennema, 2002, p. 6). The world belongs to God. God created, sustains, and is

redeeming this world. The creation, declares God's glory, and is highly valued (Graham, 2009). The creation is "good, God-given, and therefore must be affirmed, celebrated, and enhanced" (Vryhof, 2002, p. 111). Coupled with the affirmation of creation is the concept of *common grace* whereby all humans, due to God's providence, can have insights into God's truth (Fennema, 2002). As a result of this, there is much that occurs in education that is similar in all schools. Thus, while Christians need to acknowledge antithesis and be faithful to the Bible, because of common grace many practices within Christian schools will be the same as those in government schools (Fennema, 2006).

A core value of CEN is that the Bible is the divinely inspired, inerrant word of God (Dickens et al., 2015) relevant to all aspects of living and not just to ethical or theological issues (Justins, 2002). Within this context, the Bible is not applied as a proof–texting document, where isolated texts are used to support a proposition. Instead, a more macro or principled approach is taken whereby the Bible is a guide for all practices (Edlin, 2004). In CEN, creation is understood as God's handiwork. It is good (Dickens, 2004). God is not a distant god who made the world and then let it run. God's fingerprints remain on all things (Dickens et al., 2015). As image bearers of God, Christians are to participate in creation through developing culture (Dickens, 2004). Appreciating common grace, CEN schooling does not purport that Christians, or those involved in reformed Christian schooling, hold all wisdom. There are many helpful insights to be gained from what others have done in schooling regardless of their faith position (Fowler, 1990).

Sphere sovereignty.

Parents have the right and the responsibility to direct how their children are educated (Wolterstorff, 2002). Sphere sovereignty is a Calvinist belief connecting parents with education. Sphere sovereignty is a concept associated with attempts in Reformed thought to explain the whole of life from a biblical perspective. In the beginning God created the world with structures and patterns. Humans have been created as part of God's sovereign will. Humankind was given the authority of administering the creation as God's representatives. This administration of creation is a sovereignty delegated from God. As humanity has developed and unfolded creation, a wide variety of distinct yet related spheres have emerged (Hulst, 2012). Each area or sphere of life "operates within their own areas, with what are called creation ordinances, governing each" (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997, p. 281). Kuyper promoted the view that the state, church, and the family belonged to different societal spheres (Blomberg, 1980; Justins, 2002). This meant that neither the church, nor the government had the responsibility for schooling, but rather the education of children was "squarely within the domestic sphere of the family" (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997, p. 283).

With the school and church being separate spheres, there is an ideal that the school should not seek to replace the church. Reformed Christian schools are not to be places of evangelisation, "consequently, devotions, chapel services, biblical studies and encouragement toward commitment to Christ are viewed as activities that don't rightly belong in an academic institution" (Fennema, 2002, p. 7). Instead these schools have been established with the aim of assisting Christian families in the nurture of their children (Collins, 1997).

Given the centrality of the Bible it would be understandable that in Christian schools "a central place would be given to biblical studies in all years" (Holland, 2014, p. 281). Yet within CEN, and consistent with sphere sovereignty, an ideal is that students will be inculcated with a biblical worldview and there would be no need for "specific Christian instruction" (Dickens, 2013, p. 136). Further, CEN schools were not established to be places of evangelism (Blomberg, 1980; Justins, 2002) and do not have chapel worship (Dickens, 2013).

Covenant.

Reformed Christian schooling is an outworking of the concept of covenant (Berkhof, 1953). In reformed Christian thought the Bible is a book of covenants where the current generation (of adults) has, as part of its promise to God at the baptism of its children, an obligation to teach the next generation (the children) to remember what God has done for people in the past and what his people can do in response to this (Dykstra, 1999; Vryhof, 2002). In reformed Christian schools the idea of covenant is visible in parental control (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997) where parents have a determinative role in the schooling of their children through school governance.

The CEN vision affirms the responsibility of parents to educate their children. To the pioneers of CEN, parental responsibility was based on Kuyper's understanding of sphere sovereignty and the reformed concept of covenant (Long, 1996; Justins, 2002). That parents are the "principal agents in the education of their children remains a feature of CEN schooling (Dickens, 2013; Low, 2013).

As do many Christian school communities, CEN schools believe the mandate for parental responsibility for Christian education is biblical (Edlin, 1999; Fennema,

2006; Van Brummelen, 2009). Certain verses from the Bible are cited by CEN to substantiate this belief. These include:

> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut. 6:6-9)

> He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. (Ps. 78: 5-7)

> Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its recognition of parental choice in the education of children, is also cited (Blomberg, 1980; Nyhouse, 1980). Initially, parental responsibility was articulated as "parent-controlled". While "parent-controlled" was acknowledged as having "dictatorial overtones" (Hoeksema, 1983, p. 78), it was simply a means of distinguishing CEN schools from schools that are either state or church controlled.

The cultural mandate.

Reformed Christians affirm culture. They value culture and society as created by God. Although they see problems within culture they understand it as an arena for God's goodness (Vryhof, 2002). Valuing culture, the cultural mandate, the task given to people as image bearers of God to have dominion over creation (Genesis 1:28), is a component both as a basis and an outcome of reformed Christian education (Fennema, 2006).

> Rooted in the Genesis command to till the soil, exercise dominion over creation, and to shape society, the cultural mandate gives the school an aim which distinguishes it from the merely secular goals of the public school and the denominational goals of parochial schools. This aim is to be a Christian citizen, a worker in the world of politics, business, and art…to live a life in contemporary society. (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997, p. 282)

CEN schools seek to engage with the world rather than avoid it (Dickens, 2004). They affirm creation and acknowledge the sustaining of the cultural mandate as loving service to God (Dickens et al., 2015). CEN schools seek to prepare students for lives of service as they learn about and engage with this world. As Edlin (2004) suggested:

> In every vocation, young Christians should be equipped by their Christian school experience to critique the idolatrous culture in which they live and to bring God's message of hope, peace and reconciliation into that culture. This applies to the Christian in commerce, industry, service industries,

homemaking, the arts, unemployment, the military, health care and other areas. (p. 13)

2.3.2 Summary.

CEN exists in a broader movement of reformed Christian Schooling, which, in turn, exists within an even larger movement of Christian schools, all of which, despite significant variations, assert that their purposes and values are drawn from Christ. A reformed Christian school philosophy understands that following Christ calls for a different model of schooling than that of government schools. According to reformed Christian schools education is part of the covenantal responsibility of parents; not a responsibility of the state, nor of the church. Reformed Christian schooling is understood in light of God's sovereignty across the whole of life. It values God's revelation in the Bible and creation, and assists young people to fulfil the cultural mandate. CEN, as a branch of reformed Christian schooling, has been shaped by a number of Calvinist theological and philosophical concepts including antithesis, the sovereignty of God, revelation, sphere sovereignty, covenant, and the cultural mandate.

Reformed Christian schools, and hence CEN schools, have a particular schooling philosophy. If it is that school leaders are to integrate the beliefs, values and vision of this schooling approach and develop a culture consistent with these values, it is imperative that CEN school leaders understand this philosophy. Yet, it is evident that to date there has been little research into the perceptions of school leaders with respect to CEN schools. Thus, the question arises: *What do school leaders understand to be the essential features of CEN schooling?*

In the following section the concept of culture is reviewed. Culture is described, and then school culture. Given that this research explored school leaders' perceptions of CEN, the literature regarding CEN school culture was explored before a review of the research on Christian schooling in Australia relevant to this thesis.

2.4 Culture

Culture relates to norms of practice in behaviour, beliefs, thoughts, activities, assumptions and values of a shared social unit, which are handed on through social interaction (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Lombaerts, 1998; Schein, 2010). It provides the order and norms needed to give people a sense of meaning and value (Sergiovanni, 2005). Culture is constantly changing. It is dynamic, creating the rules for people to live by, but also being created by the interactions and practices of participants of the culture itself. Some aspects of culture change quickly and other elements endure. To understand culture it is necessary to examine the daily practices as well as long term structures and systems (Lee & Zaharlick, 2013).

Culture is concerned with patterning at a visible, tangible level and may include styles of dress, how people greet each other, what they discuss, and how they live. Culture also consists of less visible aspects, unspoken assumptions and beliefs (Marshak, 2006) that influence the things that we say and do. Culture, then, is a group phenomenon, being to the group what personality or character is to the individual for, "just as our personality and character guide and constrain our behaviour, so does culture guide and constrain behaviour of members of a group through shared norms that are held in that group" (Schein, 2010, p. 14). Culture suggests commonality, but sharing values and customs does not preclude individual variations. With members of a culture each having individual experiences "no

members of any culture know all the details of their culture" (Lee & Zaharlick, 2013, p. 34).

2.4.1 Organisational culture.

As with culture, organisational culture relates to the norms of practice and values or ideology of an organisation (Lombaerts, 1998). Organisational culture relates more to the informal elements of an organisation rather than the more formal (Bush & Middlewood, 2005) characterisations presented officially in slogans, or values statements (Allvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Organisational culture is deeply embedded within organisations forming a pervasive influence on all aspects of an organisation (Lombaerts, 1998) as it deals with its primary task, various environments and internal machinations (Bush & Middlewood, 2005).

Within the literature there are different perceptions as to how organisational culture operates. Organisational culture can be understood as three interrelated levels: assumptions, espoused beliefs, and artefacts (Schein, 2010). At the core of organisational culture are the taken-for-granted or basic assumptions of the organisation. These are, tightly held, guiding beliefs that have developed over time forming the character and identity of the group. At a more conscious level are the espoused beliefs or values of the organisation that guide the ways in which the organisation should work. On the surface are artefacts, physical products and behaviours such as published values, observable rituals and language. Organisational culture can also be understood in terms of hyperculture, experiences of culture held by organisational members, and anthropological culture (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). A hyperculture is a set of explicit claims about culture representing management driven representations. Mission and value statements

are typical characteristics of hyperculture. The experiences of culture held by the members of the organisation are what the members tend to think or value rather than what is espoused by the organisation itself. Anthropological culture is concerned with the deeper or tacit underlying aspects of culture and includes the understandings of the members but also looks to the non-conscious aspects of cultural practice (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008).

The understandings of Schein (2010) and Alvesson & Sveningsson (2008) suggest that culture occurs on several levels. There can also be differences between what is espoused by an organisation and the experiences of those within it. In the current research into the perception of school leaders of CEN philosophy and its integration into school culture, consideration was given to the difference between the philosophy of the organisation and the perceptions of those within it. A case study methodology (discussed in Chapter 3) was chosen as the best approach to delve deeply into the cultural perceptions of the leaders in these schools so as to unearth the basic assumptions or the anthropological culture rather than the hyperculture espoused by CEN.

2.4.2 School culture.

As within other organisations, culture in schools "is a powerful web of rituals and traditions, norms and values that affects every corner of school life" (Peterson & Deal, 2009, p. 10). The literature on culture within schooling notes some confusion between school culture, climate and ethos with these terms frequently used interchangeably (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Within this research, climate refers to measurable elements of a school, and ethos refers to what is intended, whereas:

research into culture as a concept appears to attempt to bring the two elements of climate and ethos together by offering indicators that are both measurable and yet capable of subjective evaluation, within a framework of practices that may be much more subjective, but can yield objective outcomes. (Glover & Coleman, 2005, p. 10)

Culture, then, is a complex concept that can be seen in behaviours and is generally understood as the normative glue that holds a particular school together (Sergiovanni, 2000). Yet, school culture is also multidimensional as it plays a role in how the school is organised, curriculum is developed, classes taught, in how the professional development is organised and implemented and even in the informal conversations of staff (Deal & Peterson, 2009). It is not static, simply maintained by organisational structures, but is, "in a perpetual state of flux and development and is being continually transformed" (Mills, 2003, p. 32).

Central to a school's culture are its mission and purpose, concepts and shared understandings of what is at the core of the school, and what the school strives to accomplish (Peterson & Deal, 2009). The mission and purpose can be difficult to define, but "trigger intangible forces that inspire teachers to teach, school leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and the community to have confidence and faith in their school" (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 61). To come to terms with their mission and purpose, schools often develop mission and vision statements. Visions are important in focussing people on the moral purposes of a school (Duignan, 2012). With shared visions, values and beliefs at its core, culture acts as a direction setter, steering people to a common goal (Sergiovanni, 2000; 2005). However, despite intent, school vision and mission statements are often too abstract and

vague, lacking a strong connection with the day-to-day practice of teaching and learning (Deal & Peterson, 2009). As such, "they fail to provide direction and fail to spell out the commitments that are needed for various constituent groups to make these visions work" (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 5).

Changing culture in order to get all people moving in a common direction is not simply a matter of asking followers to work harder or to make simple adjustments at the margins. It involves a re-culturing approach which might encapsulate such school aspects as improving student self-esteem, enhancing parent engagement and increasing teacher expectations of students (Davies, 2002). Positive school cultures "are never monolithic or overly conforming, but core values and shared purpose should be pervasive and deep" (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 29). One way in which education leaders grow this shared purpose is through the development of community where community provides the substance and framework for making meaning and culture building (Sergiovanni, 2000). Where community is evident, connections are strengthened and people are connected more by social covenants than by contracts. As connections are strengthened webs of obligation are created and people move toward a "sense of "we" from the "I" of each individual" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 65). Ideally, schools will develop communities of practice where teachers work collaboratively, connected by their covenantal relationships, working out of bargains of the heart and soul (Sergiovanni, 2004).

2.4.3 Christian school culture.

Christian school cultures share the same basic underlying principles as other school cultures in that when a group of people share the same core beliefs and

assumptions there is the potential to develop a culture based on those assumptions. Given their ideological foundations, it is a culture that is clearly distinct from their secular school counterparts, looking to provide consistency in its day-to-day procedures and administration based upon the Christian message (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Gannell, 2004). Built upon belief in the authoritative role of Scripture, Christian school culture is a combination of explicitly taught biblical values coupled with implicit modelling of these values by members of the Christian school community (Mills, 2003).

Within the school community, culture can be visible in a wide variety of expressions such as the patterns of behaviour of community members and daily classroom practices. A useful list of shared meanings, practices and procedures for Christian schools is offered by Roy (2008):

- a biblical Christian orientation that is reflected in the *foundational beliefs and understandings*;
- the cultural master story and traditions; the quality of language, metaphors and symbolism; and, the Kingdom ethos, values and morals;
- spiritual formation intentionally encouraged in *worship practices*, *ceremonies* and *ritual*;
- identity and belonging in the community is reinforced in the *uniforms*, *mottos*, *crests* and *identifying symbols*;
- *buildings*, *decor* and *facilities* are tangible expressions of values and priorities embraced by the school;

- *rules*, *regulations* and *procedures of management* seek to be sensitive, supportive, fair, just and restorative in the spirit of the example and teachings of Jesus;

- most important, teachers, staff and administration are supportive models of the culture. (p. 42)

Perpetuating a Christian school culture in the twenty first century can be challenging. Schools operate in a secular society (Edwards, 2011) where the Christian faith is being marginalized (Vryhof, 2004). They also have compliance obligations to the state that compete with the time needed to develop and maintain a Christian culture (Iselin, 2010; Youlden, 2008). Additionally, there are market pressures such as the achievement of educational outcomes (Neidhart & Carlin, 2011; Iselin, 2010).

2.4.4 CEN school culture.

CEN schools espouse a vision of partnership connecting home, school and church through a biblical worldview mediated approach that looks to honour the lordship of Christ over all of life. At the heart of this vision is a desire to integrate faith and learning through an approach that is described within CEN as distinctive or distinctively Christian (Dickens, 2013; Edlin, 2004; Fowler, 1980; Justins, 2002). Striving to be distinctive is not uncommon as Christian schools can have emphases or distinctive approaches that arise from their particular charism or denomination (McGettrick, 2005).

The distinctiveness of CEN is connected with the concepts of common grace and antithesis. CEN schools have practices that are distinctly Christian. Yet,

because of common grace, God's goodness in creation that can be known by all, some practices will be the same as any other school (Fennema, 2006; Fowler, 1990). Antithesis is to inform CEN schooling. Rather than maintain a secular school model, CEN schools are to be distinctive from the ground up, being antithetical, based on the Bible (Edlin, 2004; Fowler, 1990). CEN schools, then, have a "distinctive religious ethos" (Justins, 2002, p. 193), including a "'whole of life' perspective and community orientation" (Dickens, 2013, p. 132).

School culture is a multi-faceted concept that includes shared understandings of values, ethos, character, and practices. Justins' (2002) research found the prevailing practices of the CPCS schools to be parental responsibility and partnership in education (or parent control), the nurture of children from Christian families, the development of a Christian curriculum, and the employment of Christian staff. These are described below.

Parental responsibility.

CEN schooling is the responsibility of Christian parents who have a role in "guarding the schools' distinctive Christian character" (Dickens, 2013, p. 219). Historically, the term *parent control* was used to express that CEN schools were established and "controlled" by Christian parents rather than by the government or the church (Parker et al., 2010). CEN schooling and the broader reformed Christian schools are not alone in the view that parents are responsible for education. In the Catholic tradition, parents are also described as "those first responsible for the education of their children" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1998, 2229).

In CEN, the emphasis of parent control has been on responsibility "rather than the negative connotations of control" (Dickens, 2004, p.292). Parental responsibility has been exercised through the developing and maintaining of an association membership of Christian parents who are committed to the concept of Christian schooling. From this association of Christian parents a board is elected to govern the school (Long, 1996; Dickens, 2004). Regular communication between school and home, and schools being intentional about parent involvement in school life also affirms parental responsibility (Edlin, 2004). Supporting parent involvement in school life, Christian schools, including CEN schools, have often required parents to serve in the school through attendance at working bees, the canteen, library, and uniform shop in lieu of a parental levy (Fisher, 2012).

Over time, parental responsibility and involvement in education within CEN schools has changed. While there is intent to honour a culture of parental responsibility in education, there has been a trend for parents to be less involved in school associations and, thus, available for boards (Dickens, 2013). An often-cited barrier to parent engagement is the availability of parents, predominantly due to work commitments (Harris & Goodall, 2008). This has been evidenced within CEN schools in which parental involvement has diminished due to "both parents, or the only parent, working" (Justins, 2002, p. 252). Another factor in decreasing parental involvement has been that parents do not share the vision for education of the early pioneers enrolling their children in schools. While, in part, this may be due to CEN schools, like other Christian schools, attracting non-Christian families. It may also be a consequence of societal change. Christian schools operate in a pluralistic and secular society (Collier, 2013) where religious values are in decline (McEvoy,

2006; Neidhart, 2014). CEN school leaders understand this, and acknowledge the need to continually educate parents about their approach to Christian schooling (Dickens, 2013).

The nurture of students towards responsive discipleship.

An aim of Christian schooling is to assist students from Christian families to understand and practice Christian discipleship (Van Brummelen, 1988; 1990). To assist students in this, school teachers are to model a Christian lifestyle. Through their actions and words teachers demonstrate to students how to live and make choices that honour God (Scouller, 2010). Parents may choose to send their children to Christian schools because of perceptions of high moral and behavioural standards (Fennema, 2006). Yet, reducing discipleship to personal pietism or being a nice person risks suggesting that the Bible is limited to individual salvation and has little to say about the wider world (Smith & Shortt, 2002).

A key belief of reformed Christian schools is that Christ is lord of all things. Subsequently, discipleship within reformed Christian schools is not something that can be relegated to either the "spiritual" dimension of life or individual pietism. It includes responsibility and responsiveness, asking how can we live as a disciple as we participate in, and look to reform culture and society (Wolterstorff, 2002). A term used to describe this within literature associated with CEN is *responsive discipleship* (Burggraaf, 2014; Dickens et al., 2015; Thompson, 2003). Within the Christian school, responsiveness is seen when students respond positively with wisdom, discernment, creativity, love and compassion as they explore God's creation (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993). Responsive discipleship includes the sharing of the message of Jesus and is something that can be both modelled and fostered by

teachers. It includes the striving for peace, justice and harmony, or *shalom* (Plantiga, 2002), in relationship with God, the world, others and self (Fennema, 2006). In essence it appears that responsive discipleship is an umbrella term used to describe several of the key aspects of Christian schooling as

> in the Christian school, the roles of conserver, discerner, and reformer-practised institutionally and individually come together in a full-orbed life or responsive discipleship characterised by unwrapping God's gifts, sharing each others' burdens, and working for shalom. (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993, p. 18)

In Australian Christian schools, such as those within CEN, responsive discipleship "was most often thought of solely in terms of present relationship with Jesus and the community of his people and the benefits of those relationships in the here and now" (Thompson, 2003, p. 285). A former national leader of CEN, and principal of its teacher professional development training body (NICE), surmised that responsive disciples of Jesus Christ live between memory and vision:

> Christian schools should not exist to produce another generation of pew-sitters. They should be equipping young people, as they come to know the King of Kings, to be ambassadors in the world, seeking to bring his peace into all of life. This is responsive discipleship. (Edlin, 2004, p. 12)

Responsive discipleship encapsulates one of the goals of learning in CEN schools. In passing on the faith to the next generation CEN schools advocate an approach of engaging with the world rather than avoiding it (Dickens, 2013). Responsive discipleship describes this as students being invited and challenged to

be people who love God and neighbour showing that they have the mind, heart and life of Christ (Dickens et al., 2015).

Worldview and a Christian curriculum.

Schools exist for a variety of purposes. Christian parents established CEN schools with the aim of integrating their beliefs with schooling. Consistent with their Reformed heritage, CEN schools have promoted the development of a Christian curriculum that understands Christ's lordship over all of life. Yet, a tension for these schools has been the relationship between their purposes and societal expectations around academic performance (Justins, 2009). Thus, while CEN schools teach the Australian Curriculum and there is an expectation of "high academic achievement from their students, commensurate with their ability, it is their commitment to a holistic integration of Christian faith with education by which they want to be known" (Dickens, 2013, p. 220).

In teaching the Australian Government's Australian Curriculum, CEN schools do not offer significantly different curriculum content. Rather, as with other Christian schools looking to integrate a biblical approach to the curriculum, they offer a different hermeneutic (Scouller, 2010). This *hermeneutic*, or mode of interpretation, sits at the heart of Christian schooling for without it there is inadvertent endorsement of a curriculum based on societal rather than biblical values. A key ingredient of this hermeneutic is the development of curriculum through the utilisation of *worldview*, sometimes referred to as *world-and-life view*. Christian worldview is to be the "shaper and driver" of curriculum within a Christian school (Dickens et al., 2015, p. 3).

The term *worldview* is a translation of the German *Weltanschauung* and was first used by Emmanuel Kant in 1790 (Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008). In popular usage for some time, a worldview is a comprehensive framework of basic convictions about life (Wolters, 1985). Worldview beliefs can be pre-theoretical, arising from culture and can provide meaning to aspects of life (Edlin & Thompson, 2006; Roy, 2008). Worldviews are often described by the answering of basic questions about the purpose/s of existence, humanity, knowledge and life in society (Roy, 2008; Van Brummelen, 2002).

Within CEN, "worldview terminology has been a vehicle to demonstrate the relevance of the Bible to how we view all of life" (Dickens, 2004, p. 300). A Christian worldview begins with an understanding of the Bible as God's authoritative word for life and thus relevant for education (Van Brummelen, 2002). A worldview approach is not applied through every lesson, but is understood as an appropriate way to integrate biblical teachings and subject matter (Stronks & Stronks, 2014) including "where the Bible is silent on the issue under consideration" (Dickens, 2013, p. 57).

While there are variations, a worldview that has been quite useful in the Christian educational scene is that of creation-fall-redemption-restoration (Fennema, 2006; Roy, 2008; Stronks & Stronks, 2014). In research into Christian schools within the Australian context, Thompson (2003) found that, predominantly, a creation-fall-redemption worldview had been "used by Christian authors, and more recently, by Christian educators, to summarise the basic narrative-historical contours of biblical revelation" (p. 132). Christian teachers understood a creation-fall-redemption worldview to encompass: a) God is affirmed as both the creator and sustainer of the creation; b) the biblical view of sin as demonstrated in the disobedience of

Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 is highlighted; c) redemption has been made possible through Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection and ascension into heaven. With redemption, the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers who turn to God and receive the forgiveness promised within the Bible (Thompson, 2003).

In attempts to integrate the Christian faith and education within the curriculum, the Bible can be misused. Possible misuses include "proof texting; mere history stories; token moral or tacky applications; straight textbook use; or drawing out un-contextualised, simplistic, superficial (and therefore false) connection points" (Dickens et al., 2015, p. 44). A biblical worldview approach can avoid these misuses. Practically, worldview is used in the development of curriculum through asking questions such as: a) what was God's original intent for the slice of reality being studied? b) how has sin affected this part of reality? c) what actions should or could be taken to bring reconciliation or restoration to this part of reality? (Fennema, 2006).

A biblical worldview approach to education is not simply about the development of curriculum. Christian schools seek for their students to think from a Christian perspective (Brickhill, 2010), and to be able to utilise a biblical worldview to inform their lives (Van Brummelen, 1990). Yet, in research into Christian schools in the United States of America, it has been found that "Christian education does not influence the formation of a biblical worldview even when students have an active faith life and at least one Christian parent" (Brickhill, 2010, p. 76).

There have been criticisms of the use of worldview in Christian schooling. It has been argued that using Christian worldview can result in an overemphasis on cognition. Worldview focuses on "thought, intellection, cognition" (Wolterstorff,

2002, p. 107) and "tends to think about the nature and task of Christian education as the dissemination of certain *content*, or the provision of a Christian 'perspective' on how to *think* about the world" (Smith, 2011, p. 16). While this criticism is valid, at fault may be a slippage in the interpretation of worldview (Fernhout, 1997). The understanding of worldview with a focus on cognition is "a stunted step-brother of the holistic 'complex' Abraham Kuyper spoke of when discussing the Calvinist 'world-and life-view'" (Smith, 2011, p. 17). A more appropriate understanding of worldview is "as a vision of God, the universe, our world, and ourselves-rooted and grounded in the human heart" (Naugle, 2009, p. 18).

Christian staff.

CEN schools exist to assist Christian parents in the education of their children (Nyhouse, 1980). To facilitate this CEN schools employ "only Christian teachers" (Parker & Dickens, 2009, p. 25). Reportedly, employing "only practising Christian teachers" has been a criterion for school membership with CEN (Gannell, 2004, p. 287). A thorough examination of CEN documents reveals no such requirement (Dickens, personal communication, June 15, 2015). While not a requirement, Justins' (2002) research found that in practice within CEN schools "only Christians were employed" (p. 237). Whether or not all teachers employed are Christian, there is a conviction, albeit contestable, within CEN that "it is not possible for a teacher to have a different worldview, particularly a different worldview of the significance of Christ and the Bible, and teach effectively" within their schools (Justins, 2004, p. 286). Often these teachers have previously taught or been taught in different schooling paradigms (Dickens, 2013).

Generally, thinking and teaching from a Christian perspective do not come naturally (Edlin, 2004). The development of a "distinctively Christian approach to education" (Justins, 2006, p. 230), consistent with the foundational values of CEN, is "conceptually difficult" (Justins, 2002, p. 249). It requires ongoing teacher training. Teacher training has always been a priority within CEN schools (Justins, 2006). Consequently, NICE was created to assist teachers in understanding and integrating biblical worldview into their teaching practice (Dickens, 2013; Edlin, 2004; Justins, 2006). The postgraduate training offered by NICE is grounded in practice with the goal to create "prayerfully reflective practitioners" (Blomberg, 2013, p. 863) rather than theorists. To develop a culture in which teachers have opportunities to learn to think from a biblical perspective, school boards are encouraged to commit funds and time, and teachers should be required to commit contractually to training (Edlin, 2004).

2.4.5 Summary.

In conclusion, culture is a dynamic concept that relates to the patterns of practice, beliefs, and activities of a particular social group. Culture includes elements that are both seen and unseen (Schein, 2010). Schools as social organisations have their own cultures. Christian school cultures are to be consistent with biblical values. CEN schools have as foundational a distinctively Christian culture. This culture includes parents having the responsibility to educate their children, the nurture of children from Christian families, the establishment of a Christian curriculum, and the employment of Christian staff (Justins, 2002). A critical component of their culture is the use of worldview in the integration of the Christian faith and learning (Dickens, 2103). Commonly, a creation-fall-redemption worldview is used, where God is

affirmed as creator and sustainer, sin is acknowledged, and redemption and restoration has been made possible through Jesus Christ's life and death and the subsequent arrival of the Holy Spirit (Thompson, 2003). Within reformed Christian schooling, this understanding of biblical grounded Christian worldview is used to shape curriculum and encourage an approach to teaching and learning in order that students understand that Christians are to express their faith as responsive disciples.

The exploration of the literature on culture has raised questions. It is evident that CEN schools espouse four prevailing cultural practices. However, there has been little research specifically on CEN school culture from the perspective of CEN school leaders. Thus, the question arises: *How do school leaders specifically seek to integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN schooling as articulated in the vision statement, particularly through the staff, in the curriculum, so that the parent community becomes more cognizant of them, and so that students encounter them?*

2.5 School Leadership

Due to the nature of their roles, school leaders have an obligation and opportunity to shape schools according to their purposes through both their words and their actions (Sergiovanni, 1996). In this section of the literature the interconnectedness of leadership and culture will be explored. In addition, determinations will be made to align certain leadership theories with the philosophy of reformed Christian schools and these leadership theories will then be explored.

2.5.1 Leadership and school culture.

School leaders, through what they say, do and emphasise, communicate what they believe in.

> This can mean anything from what they notice and comment on to what they measure, control, reward, and in other ways deal with systematically. Even casual remarks and questions that are *consistently* geared to a certain area can be as potent as formal control mechanisms and measurements. (Schein, 2010, p. 237)

School leaders have a role in understanding and changing school cultures for the better (Fullan, 2005). However, while leaders can play a role in shaping culture, they need to remember that it can be deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of members of a school community (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Consequently, it is important, before seeking change, that leaders understand the context of their schools and acknowledge that context will play a role in determining whether or not their approaches will be effective. Leaders must also be willing to challenge the status quo. They should be willing to take risks to bring about change and build shared plans to achieve change (Kirtman, 2013).

Leadership within school communities is complex. Leaders promote ideas, and call on the individuals within schools to come together and accept responsibility for what is happening (Kirtman, 2013). As such, leaders share ideas and rally people, regardless of their differing roles within the community, around these ideas to develop an understanding of and commitment to shared leadership (Sergiovanni, 1999). Yet, ideas by themselves will not be enough. Leaders need to

be skilled in managing. They need to be honest with staff, clear in communications, follow through when making commitments, and ensure "that basic managerial functions are carried out effectively" (Fullan, 2014, p. 57).

Given the complex nature of schools, effective school leaders need to be perceptive about the subtleties of what lies beneath issues. To be successful at building the school culture leaders should pay attention to the "informal, subtle, and symbolic aspects of school life" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 1). The effectiveness of leaders will be influenced by the degree to which leaders "read and understand their school community culture: its past, its present, and its beliefs about the future" (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 197). Three processes by which effective school leaders do this are described by Deal & Peterson (2009). Firstly, they listen to the stories of the past of a school and appreciate how these affect the members of the school community today. Secondly, leaders need to examine the present, for the "values, rituals, and ceremonies are immediate determinants of actions, thoughts and moods. Although these influences may be hard to pinpoint they are never invisible to the heart or soul" (p. 198). Leaders need to gain a sense of how the current culture came to be, who benefits the most from it and who guards it. Thirdly, leaders must listen within the community for the hopes and dreams that are held for the future as "every school is a repository of unconscious sentiments and expectations that carry the code of the collective dream—the high ground to which they aspire" (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 198).

2.5.2 Leadership strategies.

School leaders need to be purposeful in their approach to school leadership. When considering leadership approaches they need to be mindful of the broader context in which they operate (Begley, 2003; Duignan, 2012). They also need to be mindful of the compatibility of their approach with the culture of the school. Charisma can be an important mechanism in the development of culture,

> but it is not, from the organisation's or society's point of view, a reliable mechanism of embedding or socialization because leaders who have it are rare, and their impact is hard to predict. Historians can look back and say that certain people had charisma or had a great vision. It is not always clear at the time, however, how they transmitted the vision. (Schein, 2010, p. 235)

Demonstrating passion, too, can be a helpful way of enthusing people. Yet, charismatic hero leadership that can be part of other organisations is not often popular within school contexts (Sergiovanni, 2000). And "passion without skill is dangerous" (Fullan, 2014, p. 125).

In an Australian study of principal leadership, successful leaders "promoted a culture of collegiality, collaboration, support and trust" and a "culture in which innovation and risk taking were encouraged and supported" (Gurr & Drysdale, 2005, p. 543). Among the seven claims of the constituents of successful leadership, Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins (2008) suggest that a select handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of leadership variance. Successful school leaders are

open-minded "flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and achievement for all), resilient and optimistic" (p. 36).

2.5.3 Christian school leadership.

Educational leaders have complex roles with external and internal pressures demanding their time and attention (Duignan, 2012). Christian school leadership is not merely leadership practised by Christians (Edwards, 2014). In Christian schooling, the complexity of leaders' roles includes expectations to

> cultivate and nurture not only their own spirituality, but also the spirituality of those whom they are called to serve. Leaders are therefore expected to combine both the professional and spiritual aspects of their lives as they serve the school community. (Collins, 1997, p. 68)

In Christian communities, leadership is associated with an understanding of God's leading or calling (Hall, 2007; Hulst, 2012). This is supported by research into Australian Christian education which has found that Christian school leaders demonstrate a belief that God had led them or *called* them to their roles (Gannell, 2004; O'Harae, 2007; Sears, 2006). A strong sense of calling motivates Christian school leaders (Sear, 2006), helping to sustain them in the busyness and day-to-day pressures of their roles (Gannell, 2004). In looking to appoint leaders to a Christian school there is also an expectation that a school board will have a process that includes prayer and discernment, culminating in a belief that God has led them to appoint a particular person (Gannell, 2004).

Beliefs inform practice. In research into faith-based schools, it was found that the understandings and practices of leaders are value-driven and that leaders' perspectives on leadership are shaped by their own philosophy or spirituality and enhanced by that of the school's affiliated faith (Striepe, Clarke, & O'Donoghue, 2014). Consistent with this, Christian school leaders' beliefs shape their vision, their relationships and the manner in which they lead (O'Harae, 2007).

Christian school leaders should be purposeful in their leadership making choices rooted in biblical principles consistent with their beliefs and the beliefs of their school communities (Brown, 2007). In research within CSA schools, O'Harae (2007) found no leader expressing self-promotion as motivation for becoming a principal. Christian school leaders recognise that their authority is not power to wield, with their roles being one among many in supporting God's plan for the functioning of a particular community (Brown, 2007).

To be consistent with Christian teachings, Christian school leaders should strive to be humble, relational, and selfless, demonstrating a commitment to others, looking to serve their interests (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Leaders should endeavour to be servant-hearted people, who lead as people who serve God and the community (Hulst, 2012), and who give of themselves, demonstrating passion for their cause. Servant leaders establish clear performance goals for community members and empower and coach people to achieve those purposes (Blanchard, 2006).

Credibility is an important facet of Christian school leadership. If people do not believe in a leader they will not believe the leader's message (Kouzes &Posner,

2006). To be believed, leaders need to embody the life they advocate (Brown, 2007; Hall, 2007; Iselin, 2010). They need to stand for something and act in a way that is consistent with their beliefs (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). At the heart of credibility is the person of the leader. Christian school leaders are first followers of Christ, before they are leaders. Credibility for the Christian leader is not simply a matter of sharing biblical messages. The words of a leader are enhanced by a mature Christian faith where actions are consistent with the message (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). The life of a Christian school leader need not be a perfect life, but it does need to be a life of integrity (Hall, 2007).

An element of a Christian school leader's role is to develop school practice consistent with a Christian worldview (Gannell, 2004). To be credible, it is important that a Christian school leader not only possesses a worldview consistent with that of their school community, but also is able to articulate that worldview and live it out, setting an example in both words and through actions (Quarmby, 2010). Consistency of words and actions is important as mixed messages "create confusion and undermine credibility" (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p. 25). Through their messages and personal contact, Christian school leaders have the task of leading parents, staff and students into a deeper understanding of the meaning and importance of their Christian perspective and how this impacts on schooling (Hulst, 2012).

To fulfil their leadership and management tasks school leaders participate in professional development. With beliefs shaping practice, it is important that the professional development of leaders be informed by a Christian worldview (Gannell, 2004). To be better equipped for their task of leading Christian school communities, it is recommended that leaders and prospective leaders undertake

either theological training or training in biblical leadership (Gannell, 2004; O'Harae, 2007).

In research into Christian schools, leadership has been aligned to transformational leadership (Abbott, 1999; Sears, 2006; Twelves, 2004) and servant leadership (O'Harae, 2007; Quarmby, 2010; Twelves, 2004). Shared or collaborative leadership or practice is also discussed (Berber, 2010; Iselin, 2011; Sears, 2006; Twelves, 2004). A self-centred autocratic or heroic leadership style is not a Christian model of leadership (Quarmby, 2010).

Transformational leadership is built on a moral foundation and emphasises moral and personal improvements rather than self-interest. The idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration of the transformational leader align with trust, commitment, justice and love that are consistent with the Bible and, thus, acceptable to Christian schools (Abbott, 1999). It has been proposed that Christian school leadership "applies transformational and servant leadership to a Biblical model that has at its heart spiritual leadership" (Twelves, 2004, p. 46). Transformational leadership and servant leadership are also consistent with the values of Christian educators (Lavery, 2013; Sharpe, 2000). The way in which biblical and theological beliefs influence the leadership of principals in CSA schools suggests that transformational and servant leadership are understood to bear close relation to the biblical concept of leadership (O'Harae (2007).

The concept of *servant* is deeply embedded in the Judeo-Christian heritage (Greenleaf, 1996) with the word *servant* (or *servants*) occurring over 750 times in the

New International Version of the Bible. This is understandable given that Jesus advocates the concept of servant hood as an aspect of leadership,

> You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:42-45)

Leaders of Christian schools should exercise servant leadership (O'Harae, 2007; Quarmby, 2010; Sharpe, 2000; Twelves, 2004). To be judged successful they need to have a mindset and practices of a servant (Quarmby, 2010). Yet, there is evidence that school leaders can tend to regard servant leadership in terms of leaders doing the hard work for others, as well as empowering others, rather than promoting the values of their schools (Ruwoldt, 2006).

Developing cultures consistent with the concept of community, Christian school leadership should be careful in its use of the Bible. Using Scripture,

> to oppress or devalue the contributions of 'subordinates' stands in contradistinction to the ethical teachings of Scripture. School administrators need to recognise that hierarchical or authoritarian models of leadership are not normative in Scripture but, rather, are a reflection of secular, modernist, organisational theory. (Mills, 2003, p. 136)

Instead, an approach should be utilised in which there is communal interdependence rather than hierarchy (Mills, 2003). This strategy is to be collaborative, encouraging delegation and empowerment of others in the community (Twelves, 2004).

2.5.4 Transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership is a conceptualisation of leadership that is concerned with morality, emotions and long-term goals (Northouse, 2015). Burns (1978) discussed transformational leadership in comparison to transactional leadership. While transactional leadership is based on a relationship where follower cooperation is exchanged for reward, such as money, transformational leadership involves leaders raising the level of motivation and morality of others by engaging with them and being attentive to their needs (Northouse, 2015). It is connected with the concept of purpose where "purposing is a powerful force that responds to human needs for a sense of what is important and a signal of what is of value" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 74). In an age of competing visions and different values, transformational leadership is not a technocratic management paradigm but rather is value-centred (Huber, 2004).

Transformational leadership is broadly understood, but known as one of the most effective leadership approaches to facilitate school improvement and reform (Clement, 2003; Leithwood & Janzti, 2005). Transformational leadership includes a number of leadership practices. The most frequent leadership practices mentioned in the literature on transformational leadership in schools are developing a shared vision and building consensus toward shared goals, providing intellectual stimulation, providing individual support, and modelling behaviours (Sun & Leithwood, 2012).

Transformational leaders are mission driven, macro focused direction setters, who use emotions and values to set the agenda for organisations and inspire followers to achieve the vision (Leithwood & Janzti, 2005; Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004). Importantly, the values espoused are not those of an autocratic leader. While transformational leaders have a role in convincing and clearly articulating a vision, this is to be achieved relationally through seeking to encourage followers to pursue the common goals of the organisation through consultation, cooperation and shared commitment. Vision within this context is shared; developed and fostered through communication and collaborative processes, which increase ownership by community members. Building visions can involve a lengthy collaborative process. Building vision creates a sense of ownership that binds people together (Barnett & McCormick, 2002). To be of motivational value individuals within the organisation need to include the goals of the organisation among their own (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010).

Transformational leaders strive to support and develop people within the school environment to become more successful (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2007). They are communicative and relational. They seek not just to win cooperation with respect to the school vision, but also to empower others to achieve that purpose. Transformational leaders do not focus purely on administering structures and tasks, rather they will coach and mentor individuals to develop leadership capacity (Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, & Collarbone, 2003). They recognise the need to work directly with members of the organisation providing support and intellectual stimulation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), challenging assumptions and encouraging creativity (Sun & Leithwood, 2012).

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Transformational leaders are careful not to publically criticise followers (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004). Leaders must be seen to be trustworthy by the followers. Leaders establish and maintain leadership credibility through the articulation and consistency of their example and actions with shared vision (Barnett & McCormick, 2002).

Transformational leaders help and shape culture within their school to enhance and sustain the performance of members (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2007). They do this through the development of group decision making practices that are highly participatory, and foster an environment in which staff work in teams toward common goals (Gold et al., 2003). They empower followers by sharing power and delegating responsibilities, demonstrating a leadership that is consultative and inclusive of members of the team (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). They recognise the need to modify practices in order to refine and develop practices that foster collaboration to ensure that understandings are shared. They offer additional support and direction as required (Stone et al., 2004).

There have been a number of criticisms of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is not clearly conceptualised and can overlap with other conceptualisations of leadership (Northouse, 2015). As stated previously, transformational leadership includes the practice of developing a shared vision. Yet, leadership that simply rallies people around a shared vision has been criticised as being too vague (Fullan, 2014). To assist followers, leaders need to ground their visions in everyday practices (Barnett & McCormick, 2004). Further, transformational leadership may improve teachers' job satisfaction (Gold et al., 2003), but has little impact on student outcomes (Fullan, 2014, Gold et al., 2003). Conceptions of

transformational leadership can include charismatic dimensions (Leithwood et al., 2010). A criticism of these conceptions is that leadership is understood as "a personality trait rather than a set of practices that can be learned" (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 162).

2.5.5 Servant leadership.

As previously stated, servant leadership was first espoused by Robert Greenleaf (1977), a manager at AT&T, as a leadership theory applicable to modern organisational leadership. Servant leadership combines two words that are often thought of as opposites, creating a paradoxical concept that has been described as "logical and institutive" (Spears, 2010), but also confusing (Blanchard, 2006). The idea of a servant as a leader came from his reading of Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East* (Greenleaf, 1977)*.* Greenleaf, contrasts servant leadership with a leadership model where individuals begin with an aspiration to lead. According to Greenleaf, a servant leader first desires to serve others, then makes a decision to aspire to lead (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Greenleaf, 2012; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004; van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010). True leadership is to be found in those who have service of employees, customers and the community as their top priority (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2010).

Servant leaders are to be the first among equals (Frick, 2004; Greenleaf, 1977, 2012). Their leadership is not about self-interest or a means for businesses to make money. Rather, servant-leader led businesses are to impact positively on employees and the community (Spears, 2010). Servant leadership focuses on others. Servant leaders engage people and build community. The emphasis on

others is demonstrated in servant leaders promoting ethical behaviour, placing a high degree of trust in their followers, encouraging the personal growth of community members and in seeking communal involvement in decision-making (Spears, 2010; Stone et al., 2004).

Servant leadership stands in contrast to leadership that is based on power or charisma to influence people. Instead, servant leaders develop influence through service. In serving others servant leaders endear themselves to followers who, in turn, positively respond by serving others (Stone et al., 2004; van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010). Developing a culture of servant leadership takes time. Some appear more naturally disposed to serve than others (Spears, 2010). Although there are suggestions in the servant leadership literature of quantitative evidence testifying to servant leadership companies producing similar or improved results in comparison to their competitors, for most people, adopting this approach just seems the right way to live (Spears, 2010). With respect to this, servant leadership is a long-term whole of life proposition that has the potential "to positively revolutionize interpersonal work relations and organisational life" (Russell & Stone, 2002, p. 154).

In a Christian context servant leadership follows the example set by Jesus Christ (Brown, 2002). In writing about servant leadership Greenleaf mentions Jesus' teaching and behaviour. Greenleaf understands Jesus to be the archetypal leader (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004). Yet, Greenleaf's *Journey to the East* inspired servant leadership concept, while resonating with Christians (Kouzes & Posner, 2006), is not the same as the leadership espoused within the New Testament (O'Harae, 2007). There is a "call to servant-oriented behaviours" (Irving, 2011, p. 119) within the Bible, particularly in the teachings of Jesus. However, the term 'servant leadership'

is not found in the Bible. Rather, as stated above, servant leadership originated in business circles (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004). For Christians, service and Christianity are inextricably linked. Jesus came to serve (Matt. 20:28; Phil 2:5-11). Christians are called to serve one another (Gal. 5:13, Eph. 6:7). Thus, for the follower of Christ servant leadership is not an optional extra (Blanchard, 2006), it is biblical (Nielson, 2007). The idea that "leadership is a service and that leaders are servants are likely the most significant Christian teachings about the nature of leadership" (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, p.123).

Christian servant leadership starts from a relationship with God. Christian servant leaders understand God's unconditional love for them. They practise habits that connect themselves with God and ensure their hearts and minds are geared towards service. They are humble, focused on others rather than themselves. Christian servant leaders have a compelling vision, which they themselves live out as well as help others to live by. With their focus on others, they look to empower them, and develop their gifts (Blanchard, 2006).

Servant leadership has been criticised as being too idealistic. Servant leadership "does not sit well with the practicalities and compromises of so much daily work" (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004, p. 111). A similar view is held by Bradley (1999), a former CEN principal, who suggests the:

emphasis on the servant aspect of leadership, whether in the mirage of Greenleaf's ill-defined concept or in the more precisely drawn biblical interpretation, runs the risk of blinding educationalists to the many responsibilities and predicaments of their leadership. Leadership sometimes

demands bold action, harsh decisions, courage and risk, ignoring the opinion of others, and the willingness to live with uncertainty and a troubled conscience. (Bradley, 1999, p. 52)

Servant leadership has also been criticised as lacking definition and a theoretical framework (Russell & Stone, 2002; van Dierendonck, 2011). Yet, Larry Spears, former President & CEO (1990-2007) of The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, suggests servant leadership theory includes ten attributes. Servant leaders listen. They seek to identify the will of the group and reflect. Servant leaders are empathetic. They are accepting. Servant leaders heal. They acknowledge hurt, and look to heal themselves and others. Servant leaders are aware, including being self-aware. Servant leaders do not utilise authority but rather look to persuade. Servant leaders conceptualise and 'dream great dreams' (Spears, 2010, p. 18). Servant leaders are people of foresight. Servant leaders are good stewards of resources. They have a commitment to grow individuals. Servant leaders build community (Russell & Stone, 2002; Spears, 2010).

Servant leadership shares several characteristics with transformational leadership. Both theories attempt to explain people-oriented leadership styles. They value followers. They emphasize listening, mentoring and empowering people. However, a key difference is that servant leaders focus on service and concern for their followers, whereas transformational leaders prioritise encouraging followers to support and follow the mission of the organisation (Stone et al., 2004).

2.5.6 Shared leadership.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the lone-ranger view of educational leadership is no longer practical or effective (Duignan, 2012). The complexity of issues and tensions within schooling suggests a level of expertise that no one leader could be expected to possess. The leader who goes it alone or who dominates is likely to find that the school becomes overly dependent on his or her leadership (Lambert 2002). Even if a principal had the necessary competencies to fulfil the multitude of roles before them, they may prefer to fulfil some tasks and not others (Conger & Pearce, 2003). Modern schooling requires a different approach, focused on both learning and sharing leadership with leaders committed to building and sustaining leadership capacity and density (Duignan & Canon, 2011).

Shared leadership is a leadership approach that has been cited as a response to the complexity of principals' work (Duignan & Canon, 2011). Rather than focus on one leader, shared leadership is about complementing principals by utilising the skills of other community members. It suggests that leadership can be enhanced when distributed amongst a group (Harris, 2008). Shared leadership touches on the notion that all teachers bring knowledge, skills and dispositions that can generate new learning and understanding given a supportive governance environment (Drexler, 2011). It is sometimes assumed that shared leadership, reflecting more democratic and collaborative practice, is the right thing to do (Bezzina, 2008). Shared leadership in itself is not a panacea for the complexity of school leadership. Shared leadership requires skilful involvement (Lambert, 2003). The key emphasis of

shared leadership is on people learning together, creating conditions and collaborating in processes that foster the growth of all community members (Duignan, 2012).

The idea of shared leadership is acknowledged by Lambert (2002) as the professional work of everyone in the school:

Today's effective principal constructs a shared vision with members of the school community, convenes the conversations, insists on a student learning focus, evokes and supports leadership in others, models and participates in collaborative practices, helps pose the questions, and facilitates dialogue that addresses the confounding issues of practice. (p. 40)

The sharing of leadership does not diminish the role of the principal. The principal is responsible for demonstrating a commitment to shared decision making through his or her practice, such as the empowerment of other school leaders. The sharing of leadership presumes that the principal believes in team-based approaches, and is able to put his/her ego aside for the sake of the group (Kirtman, 2013). An important role of the principal, in sharing leadership, is to foster a collective commitment to the fundamental ideology of the school and promote an atmosphere in which staff members are also encouraged to cultivate this in their interactions with each other and other members of the school community. This can be challenging as there needs to be alignment with the ideology of the school; too much top-down oversight has the potential to stifle the innovation of the group (Duignan, 2012).

Shared leadership aids outcomes. It builds commitment among members (Bezzina 2008). When teachers collaborate together purposefully there are greater outcomes for more students (Fullan, 2014). Utilising a culture where people collaborate together in teams aids accountability, producing more accountability for outcomes than single supervisor systems (Kirtman, 2013). Shared decision making motivates and empowers others (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2005). In providing opportunities for collaboration employees feel valued and empowered. Feeling respected, they are more willing to be participants in the growth of the school (Nash & Hwang, 2012). Planning is enhanced when community members have the opportunity to input (Duignan & Canon, 2011). Engaging with others can also reduce or even prevent problems from occurring.

There are challenges to, and limitations with, the implementation of shared leadership. Sharing leadership can result in conflicting priorities, goals, and timelines (Harris, 2009). The practice of shared leadership presumes that members have certain beliefs, knowledge, skills, and time. A lack of knowledge, skills and abilities for shared leadership, lack of goal alignment between team members or among members and the organisation, a lack of time and receptivity to the concept of shared leadership, all have the capacity to limit the efficacy of shared leadership (Conger & Pearce, 2003). Shared leadership involves trust. Creating an environment of openness and trust can be difficult and "once lost, trust can be hard to recover" (Kirtman, 2013, p. 36).

2.5.7 Summary.

In this section the relationship between school culture and leadership was explored and leadership strategies consistent with reformed Christian schools were identified and described. It is evident that school leadership is complex. School leaders have a role in influencing school culture through not simply what they say, but also through what they do. It is context bound and school leaders need to ensure that they understand the school culture through listening to the stories of the past, participating in the rituals of the school, and understanding the school community's hopes for the future.

Christian school leadership is acknowledged as having added complexity with the role of nurturing spirituality consistent with the values of the community. Within the literature it is evident that leadership within a Christian school context should be directed by biblical principles. Acknowledging the lack of research in this area, transformational, servant, and shared leadership all have elements that have been recognised as appropriate for Christian school leadership.

The complexity of the leader's role in schooling and the added task of nurturing spirituality in Christian schooling is the backdrop to a critical question of this thesis, namely: How do Christian school leaders shape the culture of their schools? A question that arises from this review of the literature requiring further consideration is: *How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?*

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter a synthesis of the literature relevant to the research problem was reviewed and presented. Literature was explored according to three themes: reformed Christian schooling, culture, and school leadership. These interconnected themes were the key components of the conceptual framework that informed this study. Developing a culture based upon this distinctive approach to schooling requires intent and understanding.

CEN emerged from a rich tradition of reformed Christian schooling with strong links to Calvinism. The philosophy and theology of reformed Christian schools including CEN was explored. In particular, a number of overlapping concepts associated with their understandings of parental responsibility for education, the religious nature of life, and purpose of education, towards a God-honouring, whole of life response, were described.

Culture is a complex but important concept related to the beliefs and practices of social groups. Organisational culture is multilayered and includes components that are seen and unseen (Schein, 2010). In culture, there can be dissonance between what is espoused as the culture and what is experienced within it. Schools, as social organisations, have cultures. CEN schools have cultures that include the employment of Christian staff, the nurture of children from predominantly Christian families, the development of a Christian curriculum, and parents having the responsibility to educate their children (Justins, 2002).

Leadership, too, is complex. The dynamic nature of both leadership and culture means that culture shapes leadership and leadership culture. Leadership,

Christian school leadership, and leadership theories or strategies pertinent to Christian schooling were explored. As to the particular characteristics that leaders would need to develop cultural norms within a Christian school context, it is evident that a Christian worldview consistent with that of their school communities is fundamental. Transformational, shared and servant leadership, having attributes consistent with biblical leadership, were described.

CEN schools are a particular type of Christian school that seek to educate according to a pre-determined philosophy. This philosophy should be evident in elements of culture such as beliefs, values, and practices within these school communities. Consequently, a number of questions emerge from the literature review relating to how CEN school leaders understand the vision of CEN and inculcate this into a school community:

- What do CEN member school leaders understand to be the essential features of reformed Christian schooling?
- How do school leaders integrate the reformed philosophy of CEN into school culture particularly through the staff, through the curriculum, so that the parent community becomes more cognizant of them, and so that students encounter them?
- How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?

This research will address these key questions. In the next chapter the research design that was used to collect data on the research questions is outlined.

Chapter 3: The Research Design

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter a review of the literature pertinent to the research problem was presented. Literature was explored in three areas: reformed Christian schooling, culture, and school leadership. In this chapter, the research methodologies that will guide the research and a justification of the research design are described. Each component of the research design is presented and connected to the purpose of this study. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the research design. Next, the theoretical framework including an epistemology, theoretical perspective, research methodology, and data gathering techniques are presented. Following this, the participants are described, then data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical issues. The chapter concludes with a final overview of the research design.

The questions that focused the research design were:

- What do school leaders understand to be the essential features of Christian Education National schools, as articulated in the vision statement?
- How do they specifically seek to integrate the CEN philosophy, as articulated in the vision statement into school culture?
- How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?

Constructionism was the epistemological lens chosen to address the research questions as it provided a voice to the stories and experiences of the participants of this research. Within this constructionist way of knowing, an interpretivist theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism was chosen. This framework was chosen, as

it understands that life is not objective. Rather, people create meaning as they interact with each other and their environments (Creswell, 2014). A case study was selected because it allowed an in-depth approach to provide insight into the given phenomenon of how school leaders perceived the essential features of CEN schools, integrated these into their respective school cultures, and the leadership by which they did this. This case study approach utilised semi-structured interviews and surveys as methods of data collection as these afforded the opportunity for the participants to provide rich explanations of their perceptions of the essential features of CEN, their perceptions of how to embed these essential features into school cultures, and of the leadership by which they do this.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Research designs do not arise *ex nihilo*. Approaches to research, including the plans and procedures for the research, arise out of the philosophical assumptions based on the researcher's understanding of reality (Creswell, 2009). There is no one fixed approach to research, but rather different ideas that rest upon different assumptions. One helpful approach to scaffolding research within a theoretical framework includes four elements for the research process: 1. Epistemology, a theory of knowledge; 2. A theoretical perspective, which is a philosophy providing a context for the methodology; 3. Methodology, which describes the approach or design lying behind the choice and use of methods; 4. Methods, which are the techniques used for data collection (Crotty, 1998). Together, they form a theoretical framework that provides the overarching direction on which to focus the research. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the elements of the research design consistent with this framework.

These will be addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 3.1

Theoretical Research Framework

Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Interpretivism
Methodology	Case Study
Method/s	Semi-structured interviews Online Surveys

3.3 Epistemology

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that explains the nature and origin of knowledge. It includes our approach to constructing knowledge and "what scientific knowledge looks like once we have produced it" (Neuman, 2011, p. 93). Epistemology is concerned with understanding and explaining, "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3), and "implies an ethical-moral stance toward the world and the self of the researcher" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 157).

There are a number of different epistemologies. These include objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. While objectivism claims that truth resides in a limited idea, constructionism begins with the idea that there can be no objective truth. Conversely, within constructionism, it would be too simplistic to say that truth is subjective (Crotty, 1998). Meaning is not discovered or revealed; rather it is a construct of the mind, developed by people as they engage with the world (Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). Constructionism suggests that different

people construct knowledge in different ways (Crotty, 1998). Thus, multiple meanings are possible for the one phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Meaning, in constructionism, is not simply imprinted nor even created and recreated in individuals in isolation. What is experienced in the social world is socially constructed (Neuman, 2011) through interactions and against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, beliefs and language (Schwandt, 2000). The fact that people construct meanings does not make those meanings imaginary or unreal. Rather, constructionism acknowledges that different people in different environments may have different interpretations of the same physical reality. The physical reality is not different, but the language, the meaning, and even the purpose of that physical reality, may be different for the different people or people groups. Thus, for the constructionist, people create meaning as they engage with the social world based on their experiences, and through the experiences and teachings of the society they are embedded within (Neuman, 2011).

This research was a study into how CEN school leaders, within the state of Victoria, perceived the essential features of CEN as articulated in the vision statement, how they ensured this understanding is evident within their school communities, and their perceptions of the leadership by which they do this. A presumption of this research was that it is possible that multiple understandings of any phenomena such as the CEN vision may exist. It was also understood that leaders within school communities construct meaning based on their own experiences, their interactions, and their settings (Creswell, 2014). Their actions are shaped by their experiences and interactions with others over time (Burbank & Martins, 2009). Their beliefs are not universally held. They have been constructed

(Neuman, 2011). Given the presumption of multiple meanings, this research aimed to allow the views of the leaders to be understood. Thus, a constructivist epistemology, aligning with this perspective was recognised as appropriate for this research.

3.4 Theoretical Perspective

Approaches to research are shaped by the different ways we view the world. A theoretical perspective is a way of understanding the world in which we live that informs the methodology, providing a context and basis for it (Crotty, 1998). It informs the research design, including the research methods and how the data is analysed. A number of theoretical perspectives exist, including positivist, interpretative, and critical (Candy, 1989). There are different understandings of positivism, with a common understanding being that "theory is universal and law-like generalisations are not bound to specific contexts or circumstances" (Candy, 1989, p. 3). Interpretivism, like positivism, is variously understood. Rather than the world, and phenomena within it, being defined by law-like generalisations, interpretivists suggest that the world can only be understood from the viewpoint of the individual (Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007). The third perspective, the critical approach, shares aspects of the interpretivist position, but suggests that it does not go far enough in its opposition to positivism and that "much human action is outside the conscious control of personal agency and is embedded in social conditions beyond the consciousness of the actors involved" (Candy, 1989, p. 7).

An interpretivist lens understands that human action is meaningful. The interpretivist's approach to research is based on assumptions involving "everyday activity, freedom, meaning interpretation and negotiation (O'Donoghue, 2007, p.

17). Within this paradigm, life is fluid and human involvement creative (Neuman, 2007). No person is truly objective; there is recognition that value judgements are different for different people.

As this study involved how school leaders perceived the essential features of CEN as articulated in the vision statement, their perceptions of how these features are integrated within school contexts, and perceptions of the leadership by which this is done, an interpretivist lens was adopted. This perspective was appropriate to explore the perceptions of school leaders as to the beliefs that lie beneath CEN schools and how they looked to ensure these beliefs were meaningfully demonstrated through everyday school activity. Given this perspective, the foci of the research were, the things that people do, why they did them, the purposes these actions served, and the meanings given to these actions by school leaders (Bailey, 2007). Thus, acknowledging that, it is through the actions of the people themselves that a deep and rich understanding of CEN was possible. At the heart of this approach was the belief that the CEN approach to Christian schooling is made known through the interactions, experiences and shared understandings of the people within it, in the variety of school settings, that comprise this association of school associations.

Interpretivism "is not a homogenous position" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 21). Rather, a number of theoretical positions sit within this perspective including hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism. Hermeneutics is concerned with interpretation. Hermeneutics holds that there is meaning in the text that is open to interpretation and with this there is a possibility of gaining an understanding of the text beyond that of even the author's own understanding

(Crotty, 1998). Phenomenology is a study of a slice of reality from the experience of an individual. It "is a critical methodology that invites us to revisit our conscious experience and open ourselves to the emergence of new meaning" (Barkway, 2001, p. 192) of a certain phenomenon. Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the interaction between an individual and the lived world of that individual. Symbolic interactionism is built on an understanding that people act "towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

3.4.1 Symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism is the position within the interpretive theoretical perspective that was chosen for this study. Symbolic interactionism is focused on the individual, and the meaning and actions they give to aspects of reality as they interact in environments. This study was concerned with the perceptions and practices, or meaning and actions, of school leaders as they interacted with the essential features of CEN. Thus, symbolic interactionism provided a means by which the researcher could "uncover people's perspectives on a phenomenon" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 20), namely the essential features, as they engaged with others in their lived world.

Symbolic interactionism is based on five central ideas (Charon, 1998). Firstly, it focuses on the nature of social interaction itself "rather than on personality, society, or the influence of others" (p. 39). These interactions are complex. They are symbolic. Societies are comprised of individuals interacting. Society shapes the individual giving them symbols, language, and a cultural platform. Yet, these interactions are not directional but rather individuals are influenced back and forth, by others, as they engage in the social world. Secondly, interactions occur within individuals as well as between individuals. People think and our thinking, at a

particular time and in a particular place, will influence how we interact. Thirdly, definitions play an important role in our lives. Our definitions or the meaning that we have constructed for a particular aspect of reality influence our interactions with those aspects of reality. Fourthly, the present plays an important role in our lives. Our interactions have more to do with the present, what we are thinking of, our definitions, and our present interactions. Fifthly, symbolic interactionism has a perspective of the individual as an active person who interacts, thinks, defines, and makes decisions in the present. People do not simply respond to their environment, they are dynamically involved in interactions; they actively shape, define, and use the environments they are part of (Charon, 1998).

It has been suggested that for the symbolic interactionist, the self is made up of the "I" and "Me" (Mead, 1934). An assumption is that the individual, is made up of "multiple selves which may exist simultaneously, or consecutively, and which change over time" (Bowers, 1989, p. 37). Context plays a role in determining which "Me" is "most salient at the time" (Bowers, 1989, p. 37). In this research the invitation letter to participate in the research outlined an interest in educational leadership within CEN schools. Further, the interviews were carried out during work hours in participants' offices. Thus, when interviewing and surveying school leaders about the essential features of CEN, how these are embedded in culture, and the leadership by which this was done, it was arguable that the most salient "Me", at that point in time, was the school leader.

To understand the perceptions of the essential features of CEN, how the essential features are embedded into school and the leadership by which this is done this study started with the experiences of individual school leaders. The

researcher entered the world of school leaders and developed theories related to their perspective of CEN schooling. This is consistent with symbolic interactionism, which begins in the empirical world and builds theory from there (Bowers, 1989).

3.5 Research methodology

Case studies are a common research methodology, with a long history in many disciplines including education (Burns, 2000; Stake, 2008). The case study has been variously described in the literature. It is the study of a case (Gerring, 2007), an empirical inquiry (Yin, 2003), "a 'catch-all' category for anything that does not fit into experimental, survey or historical methods" (Burns, 2000, p. 459), or, simply, the "choice of what is to be studied" (Stake, 2000, p. 435). For the purposes of this research, case study should be understood as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness" (Simons, 2009, p. 21) of the essential features of CEN schools, how to integrate these into school culture, and the leadership by which leaders do this.

Three conditions should be considered before choosing a case study approach (Yin, 2003). These are, the type of question asked, the level of control a researcher has over the events to be studied, and the extent to which the focus is on contemporary rather than historical events. With respect to these conditions, defining the research question is critical. Case studies are the preferred strategy when a research seeks to uncover "how" or "why" something worked, rather than "what" the something is. Case studies are also the preferred method when the investigator has little ability to manipulate events, and the focus is on contemporary phenomena in some real-life context (Yin, 2003).

As a methodology, a case study is an approach aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of something. This in-depth understanding is gained from the collection of very extensive data using a variety of sources. The main methods of data collection in case study research include observations, interviewing, and document analysis. A case study can be either quantitative or qualitative or a combination of the two, but most case studies lie within the sphere of qualitative methodology (Burns, 2000). A case study may be simple or complex (Stake, 2000). While case studies can be undertaken on the premise that the case is typical of many, case studies can also be studied to refute generalisations or as a study of the unique (Burns, 2000).

There are three main types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective (Stake, 2008). A case study would be an intrinsic study if the object of the study were more knowledge of the particular case. An instrumental case study is where a particular case is studied to provide insight into a particular issue rather than the case itself. In this situation the case is of secondary importance, acting to enhance our understanding of something else. This is an instrumental case study as the case, those involved in the leadership of CEN schools, being investigated provided insight into the perceptions of the essential features of CEN schools, practices that integrate these features into school culture, as well as insight into the leadership by which this can be done.

Boundaries constitute a means by which to define a case (Simons, 2009). Regardless of the subject, to qualify as a case there must be evidence of a bounded system, an entity, with features within the system and other features outside of the system (Burns, 2000; Stake, 2000). Within the literature it is evident that there are

differing opinions as to when the boundaries should be defined. While usually set early in the case study research, there are instances when it may need to be established toward the end of a study (Simons, 2009). In considering boundaries of a case the researcher may consider the physical boundaries, but also others such as "people, policies and histories" (Simons, 2009, p. 29). The case for this research was those involved in the leadership of CEN schooling in the Australian state of Victoria. This was a bounded group that included national office involved in professional development, principals, and leadership team members of Victorian schools. However, the case study also had a temporal boundary. That is, the research was conducted during the 2014 school year, and should not be understood as representing the perceptions of CEN school leaders before or since that time.

A number of issues relating to case study as a research methodology are addressed in the literature, but still need to be considered by the researcher. Firstly, there is concern that a case study research approach generally lacks rigour. Specifically, issues of human subjectivity contribute significantly to this argument about rigour (Burns, 2000; Robson, 2002; Yin, 2009). This lack of rigour may be the result of poor methodological practices by researchers rather than fundamental flaws in case study as a methodology (Simons, 2009; Yin 2009). Bias is also a concern for the case study researcher. Bias can be addressed in research using a range of data gathering techniques and processes to uphold the reliability of the data (Simons, 2009; Yin 2009).

A common concern with respect to case studies is that they provide little basis for generalisations (Burns, 2000; Yin, 2009). While case studies can be useful in providing generalisations or theory building this may not be their best use (Gomm,

Hammersley, & Foster, 2009). Rather, the aim of a case study is often "to present a rich portrayal of a single setting to inform practice, establish the value of the case and/or add to knowledge of a specific topic" (Simons, 2009, p. 24). In this respect case studies proliferate and comment on the particulars of situations rather than seek to generalise (Gomm et al., 2009; Simons, 2009). A third concern is that by their nature case studies can be all consuming: be time-consuming and create large volumes of data, which, in turn, create difficulties for processing of data (Burns, 2000; Simons, 2009).

In this research project, a case study methodology was selected as it provided a mechanism by which the perceptions about CEN schools could be explored through people with influential roles within these schools, namely school leaders. It provided an opportunity to explore the "how" questions relating to a reformed approach to Christian schooling, as conceptualised by CEN, through the eyes of those entrusted with its leadership within a bounded system.

While there has been little research into the perspectives of school leaders within CEN, similar research has been conducted in faith-based Christian schooling. A case study methodology was utilised to examine the perceptions of principals of the ethos of schools in the Edmund Rice tradition and their approaches in developing culture consistent with this ethos (Tuite, 2008). A case study was also used to explore how principals, employing authorities, and clergy understood the changing nature of the principal's role in Catholic schooling (Coughlan, 2009). Consequently, a case study was appropriate for this research as it offered the researcher an

opportunity to develop a detailed description of leaders' perceptions of essential features of CEN schooling and their approaches of developing culture consistent with these features.

3.6 Data gathering methods

The data gathering methods that were used in this qualitative study were chosen for consistency with the research paradigm. In a case study a wide array of data is collected as a researcher looks to develop an in-depth picture of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2002). Data in case study research is gathered from a range of methods such as documents, archival records, physical artefacts, interviews, direct observation and participant-observation (Yin, 2009). As part of this research the following data collection strategies were used: semi-structured interviewing, and an online survey.

3.6.1 Interviews.

Interviews are an important source of information in case study research (Yin, 2003). Interviewing involves a face-to-face interpersonal encounter in which the interviewer asks a respondent or respondents to answer questions relating to the research topic. Interviews reveal more than can be assumed or seen in observations (Simons, 2009). They provide a means of getting an interviewee talking freely about a topic being "ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably" (Creswell, 2002, p. 206).

There are several variations of the interview. These include three common types: fully structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Robson, 2002). Fully structured interviews are pre-determined with fixed ordering and wording of

questions (Williamson, 2013). Semi-structured interviews have pre-determined questions, but with flexibility in wording and order (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Unstructured interviews are less predictable, more like broad areas of conversation rather than ordered questions (Hammond & Wellington, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for this research as they afforded more flexibility than structured interviews: they provided opportunity to probe more deeply into an issue and for people to construct meaning (Burns, 2000). Thus, semi-structured interviews were considered to be consistent with the constructionist paradigm and the interpretivist theoretical perspective within which this research exists. In choosing this approach, it was also understood that although CEN schools share values, the contexts and the people within each school community were different and they interpreted and constructed meaning around these values in different ways. Further, semi-structured interviews are consistent with symbolic interactionism in that it is "the interaction of the participants in the interview situation … that creates knowledge" (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

Interviewing is recognised as having challenges that needed to be considered by the researcher. Open-end interviews have been criticised for the lack of standardisation, which "inevitably raises concerns about reliability" (Robson, 2002, p. 273). Other considerations include the fact that interviewees may present what the interviewer wants to hear, the physical presence of the researcher may affect interviewee responses, and there may be issues associated with the data being "filtered" through the views of the interviewer (Creswell, 2012).

In this research there were twelve individual semi-structured interviews. Four of these interviews were with members of an expert reference group. The expert reference group consisted of school leaders who were not school-based, but rather served the CEN community nationally and had responsibilities that included espousing the beliefs and values that undergird these schools and facilitating professional development for this association of school associations. Eight semi-structured interviews were with the principals of CEN schools, within the state of Victoria, where the research was situated. The sequence in which the interviews were conducted was determined by the availability of the participants.

All interviews were audio recorded using an *iPad*. This enabled the researcher to focus on the interaction with the interviewee during the interview. The interviews were between thirty and fifty minutes in length. Following the interviews the recordings were transcribed and made available for validation and verified by the participants.

3.6.2 Surveys.

Surveys are a widely used, long standing technique in educational research (Burns, 2000; Neuman, 2011; Robson, 2002). In surveying, a researcher asks respondents to reply to standard questions under comparable conditions. There are a variety of survey methods including face-to-face, telephone and self-completion written questionnaires (Robson 2002).

As part of this research a *Qualtrics* online self-completion survey was used. The survey was offered to a much broader group of senior leadership team members within CEN schools in Victoria. Self-completion was chosen as the research

method as the research area covered a large geographical area and written surveys are considered a more efficient method than face-to-face surveys (Robson, 2002). The survey instrument included both open and closed questions that were informed by the data that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions allow respondents freedom in their responses that are not available in closed questions (Creswell, 2002). Closed questions/statements included a number of fixed items with a Likert scale (see Appendix 5). The survey was the second data collection strategy.

As with other research methods, surveys have their strengths and weaknesses. Advantages of written surveys include that they allow participants to respond without being unduly influenced by the researcher, they can be distributed relatively cheaply, and they offer anonymity to participants (Burns, 2000; Neuman, 2004).

Disadvantages of self-completion surveys include that they often have a low response rate, they can lack flexibility and, generally, the reasons for non-responses are not available to the researcher (Burns, 2000; Robson, 2002). To overcome a low response rate, in this research, a reminder email was sent to potential participants to encourage completion. Self-completion surveys have been considered prone to response bias with people with reading and writing difficulties less likely to respond. However, given that the survey was to be administered to school leaders it was not anticipated that there would be reading and/or writing difficulties.

3.7 Participants

In this case study, school leaders' perceptions of the essential features of CEN, how these features are integrated in the life of school communities, and the leadership by which this is done, were explored. Participants, for the purposes of this study, fell into three distinct groups: an expert reference group, a principals group, and a senior leadership team group.

Table 3.2

Number of Participants in Each Group

Categories of Participants	Invited to Participate	Total Participants
Expert Reference Group	4	4
Victorian CEN Principals	9	8
Victorian CEN Senior Leadership Team Members	30	18
TOTAL	**43**	**30**

The first group, referred to as the expert reference group, comprised personnel employed by the national office of CEN and who have a strategic role that includes the promotion and integration of the philosophy and values in member school communities. Namely, their roles include facilitation of professional learning for school communities in the form of events, conferences, and gatherings in support of the values of CEN.

This expert reference group included the Executive Officer for the state of Victoria, the Chief Executive Officer of CEN and two other personnel employed by the national office. Their *expert* nature thus being assumed, as each has extensive experience of working at a school level and are now entrusted with providing

leadership, including professional development, on behalf of CEN in the bounded system of Victoria. All of these participants have had extensive experience within CEN schools; three have previously been employed as principals of CEN schools. Of the four participants, one was female and three were male. These four personnel were the first to participate in semi-structured interviews.

The second group, for the purposes of this study, were the principals of all Victorian CEN schools, with the exception of myself as researcher and principal of one of these schools. As shown in Table 3.2 nine principals in total were invited to participate in this research. One declined. Of the eight participating principals three were female. Two principals had been in their position for more than ten years, four had been principals between five and ten years, two principals had less than five years of principal experience.

The principals comprising group two were not only a part of a larger national association of schools, but also part of a distinct group that meets together at least four times each year. In addition these principals meet as a subset of wider Christian school networks, with school Board of Governance chairs as part of a Victorian CEN state council, in professional development activities across all Victorian CEN schools, have retreats or targeted professional development together. Further, they participate in national initiatives such as CEN *Transforming Education* conferences, *The CEN Annual General Meeting*, and the *Christian Schools Australia National Policy Forum*. This group has shared experiences of CEN, having joined together for collegiate support and professional development, yet each has to work out their understanding of CEN within different school contexts. This group were chosen to participate in the semi-structured interviews as their roles include the community

expectation of their being able to articulate the 'whys' and 'hows' of the CEN approach to schooling at a local school level.

The third group involved in the research comprised Christian school leadership teams in the bounded system of CEN Victoria. As outlined in Table 3.3 below these participants were deputy principals, heads of primary, heads of secondary, campus heads, or heads of curriculum. To invite senior leadership team members of CEN schools within Victoria to participate in this research, permission was sought from the respective principals of these schools. Subsequently, principals from participating schools provided consent for the research and the names of thirty senior leadership team members from within Victorian schools (Table 3.2). Eighteen completed the online survey. This group was chosen because, although principals have a significant role in understanding values and ensuring their communities are true to their purposes, school leadership is often distributed with understandings shared (Lambert, 2002). Within school contexts, shared leadership assists in building commitment (Bezzina, 2008). Further, in Christian schools, leadership that is distributed has been found to assist the cultivation of sustainable school cultures (Iselin, 2010). All of the identified senior leadership team members were given an opportunity to respond to an online self-completion survey.

Table 3.3

Positions of Senior Leadership Team Members

Position of Leadership	Number of Participants
Deputy Principal	4
Head of Campus	4
Head of Curriculum	3
Head of Primary	4
Head of Secondary	3
Total	**18**

3.8 Data Analysis

Case study research can produce large amounts of data. In this research data was collected through interviews and online surveys. Data analysis is a process that assists the researcher to make sense of the data collected. This occurs through the processes of data preparation and analytical techniques such as sorting, refining, interpreting, making notes, developing themes, and re-writing. In preparation for the data analysis, the interviews were transcribed, and the surveys collated.

Data can be analysed in a variety of ways. The Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) guided the analysis of the data. This method allows data collection, analysis and interpretation to occur concurrently (Cresswell, 2002). In the Constant Comparative Method data is compared with existing data to inductively develop theory grounded in the data. This is a process of comparison and reflection that can be repeated several times (Boeije, 2002). In this research the new data

that emerged from the interviews or the surveys within each group was constantly compared with the existing data from within that group before comparisons were made across groups (see Figure 3.1).

Constant Comparative Method was chosen as it aligns well with qualitative research (Boeije, 2002). As a method of data analysis it afforded the researcher the opportunity to compare data both within the three groups of this research and also across the three groups. It also had the benefit of providing a systematic way of managing the large amounts of data generated from the three groups.
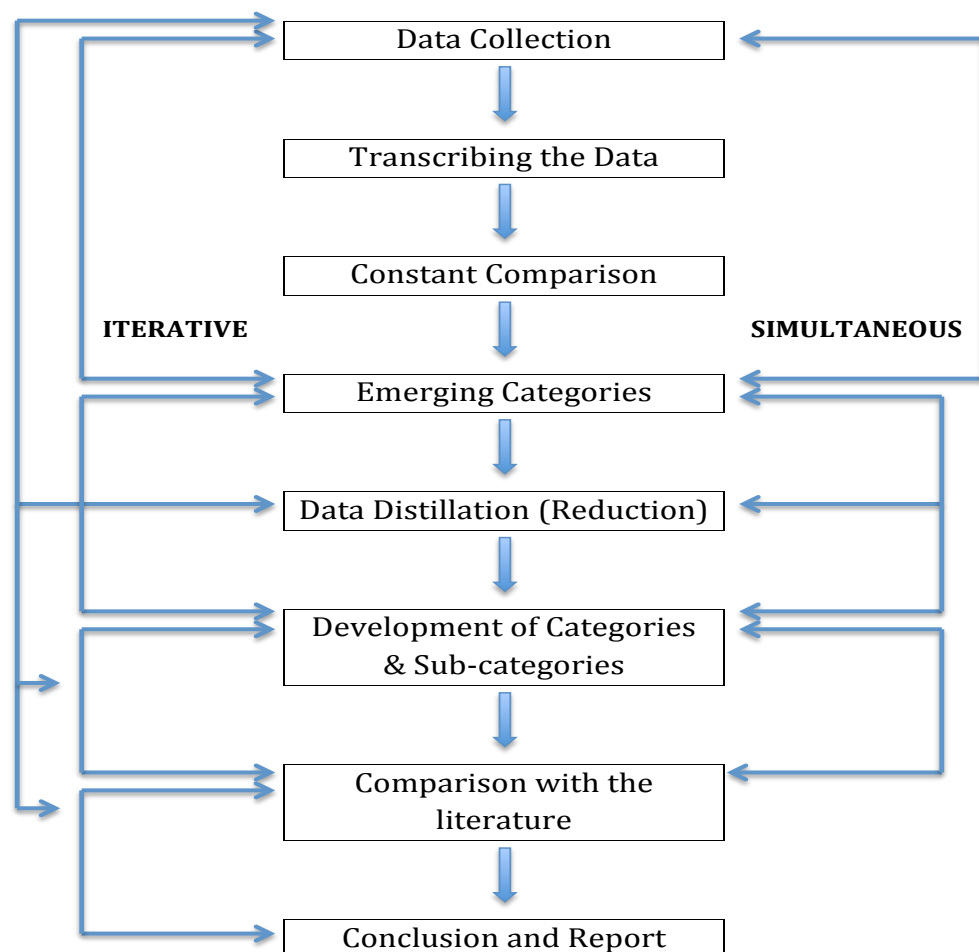
Figure 3.1 The process of data analysis using Constant Comparison

Coding is a data analysis method of reducing and simplifying large amounts of data (Bailey, 2007). The coding process is multi-layered and variously understood. The theoretical coding techniques of grounded theory as outlined by Glaser & Strauss (1967), informed this research. An issue in the process of coding is whether the codes should be predetermined by the researcher, pre-coding, or allowed to emerge from the text, subsequent coding (Creswell, 2009; Simons, 2009). The traditional approach within the social sciences and in particular classic grounded theory has been to allow the codes to emerge from the data itself (Creswell, 2009; Strauss & Glaser, 1967). The nature of the codes used in this process can vary from a few letters, to words, to symbols. What is important is that labels are attached to data to assist in organising it for further analysis. Given that little was known as to how CEN school leaders perceived the essential features of CEN, how they embedded these features into school culture, and the leadership by which they did this the codes were not predetermined, rather they emerged from the data; the interview texts. From these codes categories or themes were developed and then theory developed in comparison with the literature. This process aligns with the original approach to grounded theory which is commonly referred to as classic grounded theory (Strauss & Glaser, 1967).

Another part of data analysis is the process of memoing. After transcription the interviews were read and re-read. The written surveys and documents were also read and re-read. During this process of reading and re-reading notes were taken, and memos and reflective notes were written; this is memoing and may involve writing notes in the margins, writing comments next to the text, or separate notes. Memos can be discussions on a particular theme, rough ideas, any kind of

reflection on or thinking about the data or coding (Neuman, 2011). Memos are an important part of data analysis and should never be considered unnecessary. Memos serve several purposes including aiding the researcher in keeping the research grounded, providing a place where analytic ideas can be stored, ensuring that the researcher is not simply working with the data but is conceptualizing it (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.9 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research is variously understood. In qualitative research, trustworthiness relates to how participants perceptions have been represented in the final account (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). To demonstrate trustworthiness it is important that the researcher provide a detailed account of the methodological approach adopted in the process of collecting and analysing the data (Bailey, 2007). One approach to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is by use of four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.9.1 Credibility.

Credibility addresses the concern of rigour applied to the research (Morrow, 2005), as to whether or not it is reasonable to trust the research findings (Mateo & Kirchoff, 2009). To establish credibility within this qualitative research consideration was given to whether the findings were credible given the data presented (Merriam, 2009). To promote credibility several strategies were employed. These included triangulation, and member checks.

Triangulation is a process used in research to support the trustworthiness of the data (Robson 2002; Stake, 2000). Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour (Burns 2000; Robson 2002). Given that an over reliance on one method may distort the researcher's picture of an aspect of reality, triangulation acts as a means of cross-checking the relevance and significance of issues or testing arguments and perspectives from different angles to generate and strengthen evidence in support of key claims, thus enhancing the rigour of the research (Robson, 2002; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2000). Consequently, in this case study research into CEN schools, multiple sources and methods of data collection were used to enhance the credibility of the data. These were semi-structured interviews and an online survey with both open-ended questions and closed statements with a Likert scale.

Another common strategy for enhancing credibility is member checks (Cope, 2014). Member checks, or respondent validation, refers to the process of checking with the respondents the data that has been collected from them (Robson, 2002; Simons 2009). This may happen at a number of stages in the research, such as, during an interview. In this research to guard against researcher bias the transcripts of all interviews were returned to the interviewee for checking after the transcription process.

3.9.2 Dependability.

A criterion for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research is that of dependability. Dependability is concerned with the manner in which the research is conducted. Essentially, if the research was repeated, would similar results be

achieved should the same methods and same participants be involved (Shenton, 2004). To enhance the dependability of this research clear explanations were provided of the research design including the epistemology, theoretical perspective, the methodology, the methods that were used, and how the data was analysed (Morrow, 2005).

To further enhance the dependability of the research the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and the text of the interviews provided to the interviewees for verification. The expert reference group and principals' group were all interviewed using the same set of questions. The senior leadership team members were all provided with the same online survey that included the questions asked of the two interviewed groups.

3.9.3 Confirmability.

Confirmability is based on the understanding that research is not objective (Morrow, 2005). Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to ensure that the findings are the result of the participants' responses and not simply the views of the researcher (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004). Researchers can demonstrate confirmability "by providing rich quotes" from the participants (Cope, 2014). In this research a concern was to limit researcher bias. To aid this a statement acknowledging the position of the researcher was made. As mentioned above, the interviews were transcribed and given to the participants for verification. In addition, rich quotes from the participants were used to depict the emerging themes.

A key concern in research is researcher bias (Creswell, 2009). This research was conducted within Christian Education National schools. As a person who holds

the position of principal within a CEN school the researcher acknowledged that I have my own understandings of CEN and means by which these can be promoted within school communities. While this provides an opportunity for bias it also provides an opportunity for rich interaction between me, as the researcher, and the respondents in the process of gathering data.

In this research effort was made to focus on the perceptions of the CEN school leaders rather than the researcher's personal understandings of the essential features of CEN, how they are embedded into school culture, and the leadership by which this is done. The invitation letter to participate in the interview (Appendix 3) expressed an interest in their educational leadership. In the interview process the participants were allowed to determine the most appropriate place to be interviewed. These strategies allowed the perceptions of the school leaders to inform the research. It was also consistent with symbolic interactionism as it allowed the most salient "me" to be the school leader in their CEN school context to present their perceptions.

3.9.4 Transferability.

Transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings can be applied to other settings (Merriam, 2009). While the researcher can give suggestions as to how the findings are transferrable to another setting, it is ultimately the reader's decision (Granehiem & Lundman, 2004). To assist transferability the researcher should provide sufficient information on the participants and research context to enable the reader to decide how the findings may transfer (Morrow, 2005).

A common method of enhancing the possibility of the results being transferable is the use of rich, thick descriptions (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). When the researcher provides detailed descriptions of phenomenon or many perspectives on a theme being studied the results are more realistic (Cresswell, 2009) or credible (Shenton, 2004). In this research detailed descriptions of the phenomenon including quotations from participant interviews (Merriam, 2009) were provided to enhance the credibility and transferability of the findings.

The aim of this research was to provide insight within a particular bounded system of how individuals perceived the essential features of CEN schools as articulated in the vision statement. It also aimed to provide perceptions of their understandings of how this has been communicated and developed in the school communities within that bounded system, and their leadership by which this was done. The trustworthiness of the research was aided by the aforementioned strategies that were embedded into the design of this study.

3.10 Ethical Issues

Research has an ethical and moral concern. While there are codes of ethics in research, ultimately, ethical conduct is dependent on the individual researcher (Neuman, 2011). A primary concern in undertaking this thesis was to demonstrate due respect and appreciation of the people who contributed to this research and to uphold their dignity through practices that were ethical. This research was conducted in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Australian Catholic University. The Australian Catholic University Research Projects Ethics Committee provided ethics approval. For the ethics approval letter see Appendix 1.

All participants invited to be involved in this research were provided with a full written description of the nature and purpose of the study and the processes of the study (Creswell, 2012). Effort was made to provide this information in a written form that used language that is understandable to the potential participants rather than in a scholarly vocabulary (Bailey, 2007). Respondents were also made aware that as participants their responses would be made available to be published in this thesis, but anonymity was assured. Given that the researcher is a principal within a school in Victoria it is understood that there was a risk of subtle coercion to be involved in this research and/or researcher bias. To overcome this, participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any point (Burns, 2000). In addition, all interviewees were given the opportunity to re-examine a transcript of their interviews to ensure that it was a true representation of their views.

Research often invades the privacy of individuals. They are subject to questions about their beliefs, background, and practices. Even in agreeing to be part of a research project respondents are often unaware as to exactly what the researcher is looking for (Neuman, 2011). To guard privacy, anonymity is often used in research (Burns, 2000). Identifying people may restrict interviewee responses, may have unforeseen consequences for the identified person, and may alter the perceptions of those reading the research (Simons, 2009). To safeguard respondents the common technique of utilising pseudonyms when referring to participants and institutions was employed (Simons, 2009). These codes included an abbreviation of each of the three groups and a number. In this thesis "ERG" was

used to designate a person from the expert reference group, "CVP" for CEN Victorian Principals, and "SLT" for Senior Leadership Team members.

To further protect individuals involved, confidentiality was provided. Confidentiality practices included ensuring the data was, at all times, kept in a lockable cabinet and publishing the data in aggregate form rather than as the comments of named individuals (Neuman, 2011). While the findings of this research may be published, the data gained from it will not be made available to other researchers as the intent in gaining the data was for the specific purpose of this research. The written data shall be stored securely for a period of five years and then shredded (Creswell, 2009).

3.11 Chapter Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore what CEN school leaders perceived to be the essential features of CEN schools as articulated in the vision statement, how they integrated these features into the life of schools, and their understandings of the leadership by which this is done. In this chapter the research design was described.

The research design was an interpretivist study of symbolic interactionism within a constructionist paradigm. An interpretivist study was understood as appropriate as it enabled the researcher to examine the constructed meanings of school leaders within their particular contexts. To facilitate this research a case study methodology was chosen for its ability to develop a rich image of a particular case from multiple perspectives. Using semi-structured interviews and surveys, a case study methodology enabled the researcher to participate in the world of the three

groups of participants and listen to their constructed meanings of the essential features of CEN.

In the next chapter the data is presented in three sections consistent with the research questions. In each section the data is presented under the three groups, and a brief comparison of data from these three groups is provided.

Chapter 4: Presentation of the Results

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data that emerged from the exploration of how school leaders perceived the essential features of CEN as articulated in the vision statement, their perceptions of how they integrated this into school culture, and the leadership by which this is done.

The research questions that focused this study were: 1. What do school leaders understand to be the essential features of CEN schools, as articulated in the vision statement? 2. How do they specifically seek to integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN schooling, as articulated in the vision statement? 3. How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture? The second of the above questions was further divided into four areas of school culture, namely, staff, students, curriculum, and parents.

In this chapter the data is presented. The chapter is divided into three sections according to the research questions that focused the study. In each section the data is presented from the expert reference group, followed by the principals' group, then the senior leadership team group in themes, and where they emerged, sub-themes, generated from the analysis of the responses to the research questions. Each section concludes with a comparison of the data from the three groups.

4.2 Codes

Participants in this project were assured anonymity. To protect the identity of respondents the following coding pattern was used. Informants within the three groups are presented as "ERG" for expert reference group, "CVP" for CEN Victorian Principals, and "SLT" for Senior Leadership Team members. A number was allocated to each member within his or her respective group, in no specific order. Therefore, CVP3 denotes CEN Victorian Principal number three and SLT12 denotes senior leadership team member number 12. Any Christian Education National school identified in a participant's response has been coded "CEN" school.

4.3 What do school leaders understand to be the essential features of Christian Education National schools, as articulated in the vision statement?

4.3.1 The Expert Reference Group.

The perceptions of expert reference group members as to the essential features of CEN were ascertained in semi-structured interviews. Three themes emerged from an analysis of the data relating to the essential feature of CEN schools. These were:

- The lordship of Christ;

- Distinctive practice;

- Parental responsibility.

These themes, which included the sub-themes of *Holism, Reformational perspective, No sacred-secular division, Biblical worldview, Teacher training, Common grace and*

antithesis, Partnership, and *Governance* that emerged from the analysis of the data, are explored below.

The Lordship of Christ.

Holism.

There was consensus amongst the expert reference group that an essential feature of CEN schools is an acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is lord. Respondents suggested, "Christ's lordship rules all of life" (ERG2) or "God is in everything" (ERG1). Given this, they advocated, a holistic approach to life where the Christian faith and teachings of the Bible were to inform all thought and practice (ERG2, ERG3).

> Even though there are distinctions, there is not a part of life that God is not interested in, or lord of. What marks CEN out to me is that it has a deeply holistic integrated philosophy where it is, by definition, non-dualistic. (ERG3)

Participants argued that if Christ is lord over all of life, then, "our educational endeavours, or our endeavours in terms of the educational involvement of our children, are also subject to his rule" (ERG2). Thus, for leaders within CEN, a Christian school:

> is not just a place where we have Christian teachers and some Christian families. They would say it's a place where the whole fabric of the community and the education and the process is affected by that notion of being Christian. (ERG4)

An emphasis on an integrated holistic understanding of life has led to perceptions that CEN schools are not renowned for academic achievement (Dickens, 2013). In response to this one respondent offered the following:

It doesn't mean that we are not interested in rigour and integrity in study and seeking to have deep, engaged, authentic learning, but we don't want to have our schools, from my perspective, marked as results factories. I think that demeans the whole business of education. (ERG3)

This was the only comment on this issue.

Reformational perspective.

Expert reference group members suggested that within CEN there were connections between the lordship of Christ and a Reformed or reformational philosophy. This was "often talked about in terms of worldview" (ERG3). To one respondent, a reformed philosophy was evident "across the movement, and embedded within the movement" (ERG3). Much of this was historical within CEN as a whole, with a majority of member schools having a Dutch heritage; stemming from or being understood as having a traditionally reformed or reformational philosophy (ERG1, ERG3).

No sacred-secular division.

All members of the expert reference group suggested that within Western Christianity there was a temptation to be dualistic and "divide the secular and the sacred" (ERG1); to understand the Christian faith as a private belief rather than a whole of life reality (ERG1). This dualism was evidenced within both Catholic and Protestant Christian schooling traditions (ERG2). A school with an aspect of

practice such as a chapel service, but without attention to how faith impacts on general education was described as being dualistic (ERG2).

Respondents suggested that CEN schools were to be holistic rather than dualistic. As one respondent noted:

We are not saying that Christian education should have lots of biblical references or lots of proof texts, or be fully integrated with a biblical studies program. These things might be helpful but what we are saying is the message of the Bible, that is centred in the gospel, the message of scripture, the unfolding revelation of God, should be what is shaping the way we view things and, therefore, the way we do education. (ERG3)

Thus, respondents affirmed that if Jesus is lord then the "Christian faith and teachings of the Bible ought to impact on the way one thinks about everything" (ERG3) including schooling.

Distinctive practice.

Biblical worldview.

All respondents understood that an essential feature of CEN is to have the Bible informing and shaping school practice. The Bible is to be "foundational, but not in a way that is contriving, artificial or tacky. But our way of viewing the world arises from our engagement with the biblical story" (ERG3).

It does not just give us a set of guidelines, rules or values or spiritual insights,

it gives us a picture of a way of living and knowing, a way of shaping all that we do in life but also how we understand all aspects of life. (ERG4)

Respondents used the terms "biblical worldview" or "Christian worldview" in describing their approach to Christian schooling. A biblical worldview was described as "wearing different spectacles" (ERG1). To respondents this worldview is to shape all practices, "but not just in a morals or a character sort of sense" (ERG4), such that if "we are not asking, how does God view this? Then, we are not doing our duty" (ERG1).

The story of Jesus impacts the whole business of education, individual subjects, the way we look at the student, the way we look at the teacher. So rather than saying here is the schooling paradigm lets try and make it more Christian or lets try and add some Christianity into it, it is looking at life through the lens of a gospel centred perspective / worldview and asking, "how does that change the way we think about everything?". (ERG3)

A biblical worldview was said to be "in contrast to a secular perspective … so that when we are teaching our kids we are looking at what the world says and making comparisons to what the Bible says and allowing a biblically directed perspective to influence that" (ERG1). As one respondent explained,

We are not seeking to be separatist … rather than avoiding culture and separating ourselves from culture we seek to engage with it. To affirm those things that honour biblical norms and creational norms, but also to seek to

discern the distortions and look to God for restoration, redemption, renewal and reconciliation and those kind of things. If you like, working towards shalom. (ERG3)

Thus, a biblical worldview does not mean a complete denial of the prevailing culture.

Teacher Training.

The expert reference group suggested the employment of staff that supported the Christian ethos of their schools was not enough to ensure that the CEN vision was realised in school culture. Teacher training was also needed (ERG2).

I am not sure if you want to call it distinctive practice or teacher training; the two have a strong relationship. Within the dualistic view, and a broader Christian view, there is a notion that if you bring a bunch of Christians together they will start expressing Christian education, and I would reject that. (ERG2)

Our schools will also be schools that say we acknowledge that there are alternative metanarratives, alternative stories, and alternative culture shaping forces shaping our students, and not only our students, but our teachers too. And not only our teachers, but also our curriculum that's been mandated that we teach. Part of the distinctiveness of that aspect of CEN schools is to be training our teachers to train our students to be critical about reading those shaping influences and acknowledging that there is a true metanarrative, a true story, the biblical worldview which is anchored in the cross of Jesus. (ERG4)

Common grace and antithesis.

ERG2 and ERG3 spoke about common grace and antithesis, when explaining their perception of a distinctive approach to schooling. In arguing that Christian school practice was distinctive "sometimes the answers given by Christians are ridiculous and stupid and don't bear any sense of intelligence" (ERG2) as they fail to consider common grace. Common grace suggests that "regardless of what people's faith position is, all of life belongs to God, and God is involved in all of life and is good to his creation" (ERG3). Understandably then, "there is so much within common grace that is not distinctive" (ERG2). According to these respondents, it is better to thank God for the gifts and abilities of all "rather than thinking that only having the right perspective on God can give you knowledge or insight" (ERG3). It was also stated, "that at a broader level, the way we approach maths cannot help, but be distinctive. However, it can be difficult spelling that out" (ERG2). This distinctiveness is due to an antithetical approach of having the Bible inform practice rather than secular ideas based on the prevailing culture.

> Even though a Christian and non-Christian will look at the same material, the way they put that together and the way that they assign that ultimate meaning, the way that they use that will be in a particular religious direction either consistent with the Bible in worship of God or in worship of some other ultimate meaning or ultimate being, which I would call a substitute God. (ERG3)

Despite the lordship of Christ and distinctive practice being understood by the expert reference group to be essential features of CEN, "seeing these arise in

schools is not always evident" (ERG1). It was also the view of one respondent that the schools within CEN have become "more diverse over time" (ERG4).

Parental responsibility.

Partnership.

There was agreement that an essential feature of CEN schools is the status given to parents in the life of the community. CEN schools partner with parents in the education of their children. To respondents, "parental choice" (ERG2) and the "notion that parents have a responsibility to raise their children" (ERG4) are both biblical concepts.

> We are really serious about partnering with parents. So, understanding, first and foremost, that parents are the ones who have the primary role of educating their kids in the ways of the Lord. Therefore, our schools want to be partnering with parents in doing that. (ERG1)

> The scriptures give the primary emphasis in the raising of children to the parents, not exclusively to parents because it is a broader community than that, but how parents go about doing that within the Australian context. Largely there has been a vicarious deflection of responsibility with most people thinking that governments educate our children through this concept of free secular compulsory education. (ERG2)

One member of the expert reference group suggested that the position of parents as articulated in the CEN vision statement "has some tension in Australia because parents are not seen as being primary, but certainly within our movement

we do and, therefore, we seek to shape the way we function as communities recognising that primacy" (ERG2). As to how this occurred, the following was offered: "there are a raft of ways in which parental leadership can be expressed beyond tokenism" (ERG2), however, no examples were provided.

Governance.

A core feature of CEN is that "parents govern our schools" (ERG1), which, historically, was understood as "parent control" (ERG3). Yet, it was the view of a member of this group that parental governance was more of a feature in the "early days" and, today, some member schools have "slightly less emphasis on parent governance" (ERG4).

Summary.

The expert reference group articulated three essential features of the CEN philosophy. These were: an affirmation of the lordship of Christ over all of life, including schooling; distinctive practice, often expressed in terms of a biblical worldview; parental responsibility in the education of their children, which was evident in school governance, and efforts to maintain a partnership between school and parents. The lordship of Christ was perceived to be foundational to CEN schools. It meant that the whole of school practice was to be informed by the gospel. They understood parent responsibility as biblical, but a difficult feature to uphold.

4.3.2 The Principals' Group.

The data displayed below relates to the second group comprising of the principals of all Victorian CEN schools that consented to be included in this research. Three

themes emerged from the analysis of the data on principals' perceptions of the essential features of CEN schools. These were:

- The Lordship of Christ;

- A Biblical perspective;

- Parental partnership.

These themes, including the sub-themes of *worldview, reservations, governance*, and *challenges* are explored below.

The Lordship of Christ.

All of the CEN Principals interviewed except one (CVP3) perceived that the lordship of Christ over all of life is an essential feature of CEN schools. As one principal offered: "otherwise, why would we do this?" (CVP8). This holistic understanding was also verbalised as "God is interested in the whole of life" (CVP7), and "all of life is religion … all of life is worship" (CVP2).

Respondents argued that if Christ is lord of all of life, then "there is no subject area, there is no part of school" that does not belong to God (CVP1). The emphasis on a holistic approach was explained as "not wanting to be dualistic" (CVP1) and create "a sacred-secular divide" (CVP7).

Principals expressed concern about separating "faith from the purely academic or the rest of the curriculum" (CVP1). To one principal the existence of chapel was sign of the separation of faith and education. This principal suggested, "in another Christian school, not aligned with CEN … you'll see chapel services. I'd say in CEN you'd be surprised to see chapel services" (CVP2). Yet, two principals

discussed chapel services. In one CEN school "chapel services were held in a variety of formats" (CVP5). The principal of this school suggested "chapel services are just seen as a time of engagement where specific things which are relevant can be presented with a biblical view" (CVP5). The Principal of the other school stated:

> As part of the interview I go into a fair bit of depth on the Christian side of the school. I talk a fair bit on how we are different from other schools because we are a Christian school. We start with devotions. We pick a theme and that is broken down to a theme for each term and then each week has a verse that goes with that theme. It goes in everyone's diary and in the newsletter and the chapel service. Bible is taught as a class twice a week and we have chapel. (CVP3)

A Biblical perspective.

Worldview.

All principals, except one (CVP3), suggested a biblical perspective or Christian worldview is an essential feature of CEN schools. This was evident in the comment: "as a movement, I am sure that we are interested in a Christian worldview being presented through education" (CVP5). As to how a biblical worldview impacted individual schools another principal stated:

> An essential feature of a CEN school would be that a holistic biblical perspective was well understood by staff and leadership so the Bible is seen as a whole biblical narrative that is relevant and formational today. It is not just some sort of history, devotional book that we tap into occasionally. (CVP4)

Yet another principal suggested:

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The other distinctive is the biblical worldview that we would want to instil within the curriculum. I know there is more contemporary language, but the language that I have grown up with is the creation-fall-redemption model. The idea that God created the world, but we live within a fallen world because of sin and that God, through Jesus, day by day, is redeeming the world and one day will bring it back into its full state. (CVP7)

To respondents a biblical perspective or Christian worldview was not simply "a motherhood statement" (CVP4), but something that was essential to the "critiquing of cultural forces" (CVP6). It was to be evident across the breadth of the school including "a Christ centred curriculum and leadership practices" (CVP2).

We are primarily an education institution. We set out to do this in as genuine a way as we can from a Christian perspective. Looking to work out what that means in terms of training of staff, what that is in terms of the design of curriculum. Everything really ... conversations with our parent community, in terms of the way we conduct information meetings, how we put our marketing, our promotional material together. We also look to ask ourselves, "what is an authentic Christian view point or approach to this?". (CVP1)

One principal suggested that, while the content and learning outcomes in Christian schools were often the same as in other schools, the underlying philosophy should be different: "When we look at teaching there are similar practices as to other schools because I firmly believe that good teaching is good teaching, but it is what sits behind the practice that is different" (CVP7). This understanding of worldview was explained by the following comment:

Every part of the curriculum, not by fabrication but by ideology, ought to have its roots in the understanding that the earth is the Lord's. For example, something as complex and simple as the study of the movement of water through the vascular tissue in a plant can be studied with or without the acceptance of a Creator. When we study it with the acceptance of a Creator, we see it as a design with a message as a gift to his people. (CVP2)

Reservations.

Two principals expressed reservations with respect to the CEN philosophy. One described CEN as "conservative … not quite as broad or outside the traditional Christian viewpoint" (CVP3) as other Christian bodies. Another expressed concerns with the view of scripture as the Word of God: "There would be some problematic understandings around that for me. … It has some issues around avoiding biblicism" (CVP5), broadly understood as taking the Bible too literally.

Parental partnership.

Six of the eight principals stated that parental involvement in the life of the school is an essential feature of CEN schools. Principals understood this primarily as parent partnership. A variation of this was as follows: "we would say, 'Church, parents and the school working in harmony together'" (CVP8). There was recognition that this understanding was biblical as: "God calls parents to raise their children. He doesn't call the church to do that. He does not call the school to do that. He doesn't ask the government or any other organisation. He charges parents to do that" (CVP7).

Governance.

A key element of parent partnership within CEN schools was "parents having a role in education to the extent that there was at least some determinative responsibility being fulfilled through their Associations and the election of Boards from there" (CVP5). As one Principal stated: "of course, in the governance of the school" (CVP2) parents partner in ensuring the implementation of the shared school vision.

> So through a governance model that says it is the parents that form the board, so they don't become like other businesses that would have professional board members. They are volunteer people who come out of the Association that is tied up with that school and they are a group of people who are basically going to ask a question of what is the vision for our school. What are the parameters that we work with? And then give the educational leaders the opportunity to enact that vision. (CVP7)

Six of the eight Principals spoke about their experience of this essential feature of CEN schools. One was particularly positive:

> I think our school does a really good job of that. We are working with parents in the nurture and the growth of their children and fundamentally that is a parent's responsibility and we come along for the ride on that … We think that we have a vision that Christian parents are interested in and there is a plethora of things that happen in this school that I think we really honour that right from enrolment type of interview that I would do with new parents right through to weekly activities right through to the fact that we take the training of parents really seriously in terms of these parent seminars. (CVP4)

Challenges.

Five Principals spoke of tensions and difficulties in developing and maintaining parent partnerships. The idea that parents have the responsibility to educate their children was "held dearly, but not always communicated well, or, maybe, the practice that you have does not reflect that well" (CVP6). Communicating with parents an "understanding of, and valuing, the concept of parent partnership, which is in our vision statement, is challenging" (CVP1). To one principal, parent partnership "sounds good, but I am not sure how accurate it is" (CVP8). Another suggested that it is "an increasingly difficult thing to get" (CVP2). Reasons for challenges included the perception that many Christian parents do not have a "reformational theology underpinning their own worldview" (CVP2), and the "busyness of people, particularly families" (CVP6) "in a user pays society, with a double income" (CVP1). Another added:

> Even in working with parents, with the majority of mums working now that's even harder than it's ever been. Even Christian parents will say that they know the school is safe. I know my child is going to get taught well…even, biblically; phew … I can go to work. I don't have to be involved I don't even have to back that up at home … because I know you've read the Bible at school, and even done devotions, and prayed so that's ok. I don't have to do that at home. I think that happens with some parents. (CVP8)

Summary.

Principals described three essential features of CEN schools. These were the

lordship of Christ over all of life, biblical worldview shaping school practice, and parent partnership.

Principals believed that the lordship of Christ was to impact on schooling. Whether CEN schools should have chapel services was contested. While noting that biblically worldview was an essential feature, there was evidence that principals questioned elements of the CEN approach to schooling. Principals were, for the most part, enthusiastic about, but finding it difficult to maintain, parent partnership,

4.3.3 Senior Leadership Personnel.

Senior leadership teams included deputy principals, heads of school, and curriculum leaders from Victorian CEN schools. Three themes emerged in the data from the open-ended questions relating to the essential feature of CEN schools. Senior leader team member responses to closed statements 1-3 in the online survey (Appendix 5) were consistent with the open-ended responses. The themes:

- Christian worldview;

- Parent partnership;

- The Lordship of Christ

are explored below.

Christian worldview.

Fifteen out of the eighteen respondents suggested that an essential feature of CEN schools is to have the Bible informing and shaping school practice such that "students might become responsive disciples of Christ both whilst at school and as

they prepare to go out into the world" (SLT12). Respondents understood the Bible as "a guide for instruction, and for devotional purposes, and a framework for understanding and developing curriculum" (SLT12). Terminology that expressed this varied with "Christian worldview" (SLT2, SLT6, SLT8), "Christian perspective"(SLT3), "biblical perspective" (SLT4), "biblical worldview" (SLT12), "centrality of Christ" (SLT10), and "Christ-centred" (SLT4, SLT11, SLT13, SLT16, SLT18) appearing to be interchangeable terms. Regardless of the exact phrasing, respondents offered two expressions of how Christian perspective was to be seen. On the one hand, it was understood that the whole school, in both "thought and practice", was to be shaped by the Gospel (SLT7, SLT9, SLT12, SLT17). Alternatively, curriculum and pedagogy (SLT2, SLT3, SLT8, SLT10, SLT11, SLT13, SLT14, SLT16) were to be developed and implemented "through the lens of a Christian worldview" (SLT6).

Parent partnership.

School leadership team members perceived that working with, or supporting, parents is an essential feature of CEN schools. Of the fourteen respondents that suggested this, thirteen specifically used "partner" or "partnership" in relation to parents. Previously described as "parent controlled", respondents understood that CEN schools exist to "offer affordable education to parents who want to partner" (SLT12) with them "in educating their children to know and love God and each other" (SLT7).

The lordship of Christ.

School leadership team members understood the lordship of Christ to be an essential feature of CEN schools (SLT9, SLT11, SLT16). CEN schools were shaped by the gospel, "rather than surrounding cultural forces or latest trends"(SLT9), with

all practices "from whom we employ to what, and how, we teach" (SLT7) being understood as "coming under the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ" (SLT12). As one school leader stated:

> CEN schools celebrate the lordship of Christ in all areas of school life. His lordship is seen as influencing all components of thought and practice and as such is not limited to certain components of study or action (e.g. a chapel service). (SLT9)

Summary.

Senior leadership team members suggested that CEN had three essential features. These were a Christian worldview that shapes school practice, parent partnership, and an affirmation of the lordship of Christ.

4.3.4 Comparing the three groups.

Table 4.1

A Summary of Themes of the Essential Features of CEN schools

Question	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
What do school leaders understand to be the essential features of Christian Education National schools, as articulated in the vision statement?	The lordship of Christ	The lordship of Christ	The lordship of Christ
	Distinctive practice	A Biblical perspective	Christian worldview
	Parental responsibility	Parent partnership	Parent partnership

As displayed above in Table 4.1, there was a high degree of commonality with respect to the essential features of CEN schools between the three groups.

Respondents from the three groups all suggested the essential features of CEN schools are the lordship of Christ over all of life including schooling, distinctive practice shaped by a biblical worldview, and an appreciation of partnership between school and parents. Differences were also apparent between the groups as evidenced by the sub-themes. The expert reference group suggested links between the lordship of Christ and a reformational philosophy, whereas there was no mention of a reformational philosophy from the senior leadership team group. The expert reference group connected distinctive practice to teacher professional development. The other two groups did not. Both commonalities and differences will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

4.4 How do school leaders specifically seek to integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN as articulated in the vision statement through staff?

4.4.1 The Expert Reference Group.

Two themes emerged from an analysis of the semi-structured interview responses to how schools integrate into school the essential features through staff. These were:

- Leadership;

- Professional Development.

These themes, which included the sub-themes of *Visions and understandings*, *Scholarly conversations*, *Post-graduate training*, *CEN initiatives*, and *Missed opportunities* that emerged from the analysis of the data, are explored below.

Leadership.

There was consensus that school leadership is critical to the integration of the essential features of CEN into school culture. Two expert reference group members made extended comments on its importance. One stated:

> You might get a teacher from time to time who is very passionate about Christian perspective on education but then that person is often a lone voice so, unless it comes from the top, it is very hard to permeate through the school. (ERG2)

According to expert reference group members it was not enough for leaders to understand the vision they had to demonstrate excitement and motivate others towards it (ERG1).

Visions and understandings.

Respondents spoke of the school leadership needing to share visions and understandings (ERG1, ERG2), and to promote these among school staff.

> If the school is going to express that faithfulness, distinctiveness and develop this particular direction it needs its core leadership to have an understanding of and ability to express the core vision and direction of the school in a clear, cogent, strong, faithful manner. (ERG2)

> Principals need to be constantly sharing the story of creation-fall-redemption, and transformation with their teachers in staff meetings and in devotions, when opportunity arises in conversation. Teachers need to be clear on what

the leadership team believes and need to see a very clear strategy as to how they are playing that out in the school. (ERG1)

Professional Development.

Scholarly conversations.

To integrate the essential features, or philosophy, of CEN into the life of the school, the expert reference group suggested there needed to be regular tailored professional development, in teams, to encourage "scholarly conversations" (ERG3) about Christian schooling. Whole staff professional development days and staff meetings were both spoken of as opportunities for teaching staff to be trained to understand, and then be able to implement the CEN philosophy into school culture. Spending time reflecting on the Bible is important:

> There is no A to Z of how to create the perfect Christian school. It is in the actual working together faithfully. I give this as a basic: I think staff need to regularly get together around God's Word as they start stuff. (ERG2)

Post-graduate training.

There was consensus that teaching staff "need to be engaging in postgraduate studies" (ERG3) in Christian education. Within CEN the primary means for this is its training arm, NICE.

> Part of the CEN vision in Australia where over 90% of our teachers are trained in secular institutions to be teachers. … CEN said we cannot simply put these

secular trained teachers into our schools and expect them to teach Christianly so CEN said, "we need to set up a training institute". So, hence, NICE was created. (ERG4)

While training teachers through NICE was understood by members of the expert reference group as important, there was general recognition that their understanding was not universally shared across CEN schools. As one respondent noted, "it would be wrong to say that it is a uniform understanding across CEN, but certainly amongst the core leadership of CEN and most of the movers and shakers in the movement" (ERG2). It was also suggested that to ensure teachers complete post-graduate studies in this area, "a school leader and board members have the capacity to make these things a requirement" (ERG3).

CEN Initiatives.

Beyond post-graduate study, all participants in this group spoke positively of the one day *Certificate of Christian Education* course which "is delivered to teaching and non-teaching staff, deliberately designed to be accessible to all of those engaged with Christian school communities" (ERG4), and is a "fantastic springboard for principals" (ERG1). Two participants commented on the *Christian Teachers Journal*, a quarterly publication of NICE that includes "scholarly kind of work based on thoughts and insights into Christian education" (ERG3) and is understood as "another mechanism that principals use as discussion starters in their schools" (ERG4). The professional association of teachers, CEPA (Christian Educators' Professional Association) was also described "as an important kind of way of grounding the vision" (ERG3).

Missed opportunities.

When asked how school leaders should integrate the essential features of CEN into school culture expert reference group members acknowledged that there was an inconsistent response across CEN schools. Only a "small percentage of schools" (ERG1) adopted a holistic approach in embedding the CEN vision into school culture. In many schools there were gaps (ERG4). As people employed by the national office, the expert reference group understood part of their role was in providing strategies, resources, and ideas to maintain the vision in front of all stakeholders (ERG3, ERG4). Offering support was viewed as critical, for example, when schools employed "new principals who have no idea about CEN's vision and mission" (ERG1). Yet, respondents expressed frustration that resources were underutilised (ERG1, ERG3, ERG4).

> It is difficult for CEN National to talk into other areas of the school as we are an association of [school] associations. So, CEN has no authority. If we had authority then you would be saying as part of your, let's say we are a system of schools and CEN is your authority, then you'd be saying you need to implement this into the life of your schools. (ERG1)

Summary.

Expert reference group members suggested leadership was important for the essential features to be embedded into school culture through staff. They understood that staff benefit from professional development that engages them in scholarly conversations aimed at developing practices imbued with Christian perspective.

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Those offered by NICE, or CEN's national office, were recommended, but were not always embraced by schools.

4.4.2 The Principals' Group.

Principals were asked as to how school leaders integrate into school culture the essential features through staff. Three themes emerged from an analysis of the semi-structured interview data. These were:

- Christian staff;

- Professional development;

- Leadership.

These themes, and the sub-themes of *Post-graduate training*, and *CEN initiatives* are explored below.

Christian staff.

Principals understood that the integration of the essential features of the CEN philosophy into school culture required all employed staff to be adherents of the Christian faith. In employing staff, principals looked for Christians who were "actively attending church" (CVP3).

> We can't have people who go to church occasionally and are cool with God, but have no idea as to what that means. So part of the task when you interview people is to drill down to what they really think, not what they think you want to hear. (CVP8)

Professional development.

Principals did not believe that being a practising Christian meant that teachers automatically understood reformed Christian schooling. With most teachers "being trained in a secular university ... with a secular worldview … we almost need to un-teach and then re-teach" them (CVP7). Time should also routinely be set aside for professional days "which is not for individual preparation, that time is set aside for developing distinctively biblical curriculum in teams or clusters" (CVP4), or the "capacity to teach from a biblical worldview" (CVP7). Further, after staff attended professional development days that assisted them in understanding how to teach from a Christian perspective, they were then asked to share with other teachers to generate conversations on how to "teach Christianly" (CVP1). Time within meetings was given to this task. A principal recalled a recent meeting:

> We looked at the school's core values, vision and mission statement and asked them to reflect on what that means for them in their role and then asked them to reflect on our culture and what that should look like. (CVP6)

Post-graduate training.

Principals connected this "re-teaching" with training resources offered by CEN. Five principals spoke of the importance of "linking in nationally with CEN" (CVP1) through post-graduate studies with NICE. To encourage participation in this training, four of the eight principals described a variety of "sticks and carrots" (CVP4) including paying for teachers to undertake studies (CVP8), and, in some cases, having it linked to contracts of employment, and offering additional salary increments for the completion of a number of Master of Education units (CVP1, CVP4, CVP6). One principal noted:

We are not just after any teachers, or teachers who have a wonderful academic record. We are looking for teachers that will commit to this sort of training because the curriculum we offer and the vision we have requires it. (CVP1)

Other principals were less forthright with staff. In one school staff were "welcome to" participate in NICE study, but few did (CVP5).

CEN initiatives.

In addition to post-graduate professional development, principals understood the NICE developed *Certificate of Christian Education* to be "a brilliant tool to define the creation-fall-redemption model, but also … to understand the history of Christian schooling" (CVP7). Five principals utilised this course to educate the non-teaching staff, the staff as a whole, or as a resource for teaching staff induction. Principals also spoke of the biennial *Victorian CEN intensive* (conference) in which all CEN Victoria schools joined together for a range of professional development activities including NICE post-graduate subjects.

Leadership.

Principals suggested integrating the essential features of CEN into the school culture also required leadership. They expressed that there should be an "expectation" (CVP8) that teachers have thought through the connection between their teaching and a Christian perspective. Teachers were then made accountable to this informally through conversations with school leaders (CVP4, CVP7), or more formally through the cyclical appraisal practices in schools (CVP8). Principals spoke of the need to have the CEN philosophy before staff as part of an "everyday conversation"

(CVP1), or "an ongoing conversation; not something that you can do once and you've got it" (CVP8). For one principal, developing a staff culture in support of the essential features of CEN meant there were times when staff needed to be reminded of the importance of working within the CEN vision for education. This principal suggested that it was important:

> not to tolerate people going outside of this. So calling into question a teacher who may think that what they want to do is more important than the school's overall vision and mission … by not saying anything you are saying it's OK. (CVP6)

Summary.

Principals suggested that it was not enough to simply employ staff that profess to be adherents to the Christian faith. Staff required professional development in support of a reformational understanding of Christian schooling, and accountability structures to support their classroom practice. Engagement with NICE varied. In three Victorian schools participation in NICE post-graduate studies was a contractual requirement.

4.4.3 Senior Leadership Personnel.

Senior leadership personnel provided their perceptions on how school leaders integrate into culture the essential features of CEN through staff. Three themes emerged from an analysis of the data. In addition, senior leader team member responses to closed statements 4-5 in the online survey (Appendix 5) were consistent with the open-ended responses. The themes were:

- Christian staff;

- Professional development;

- Leadership.

These themes and the sub-themes of *NICE*, *Professional learning*, *Visions and understandings* are explored below.

Christian staff.

The integration of the essential features of CEN into school culture requires the employment of Christian staff. Senior leadership team members remarked that staff were not simply to support the Christian ethos of the school. All staff had to be "church attending" (SLT4) or "practising" (SLT8) Christians.

Professional development.

Fourteen of the eighteen respondents suggested that staff required professional development to understand, and to integrate the CEN philosophy into their practice.

NICE.

Four participants from the school leadership team members' group suggested post-graduate studies through NICE as a means of equipping staff to "develop a Christian perspective on education" (SLT12). Schools have different approaches to these studies. In some schools staff were simply "encouraged to do NICE training" (SLT8). Other schools had a requirement for staff to complete a number of units of a Master of Education within a set time limit detailed in "the contract for new teaching staff" (SLT16). The *Certificate of Christian Education* course offered by NICE was also endorsed as a valued professional development activity all staff should undertake (SLT8, SLT10, SLT17).

Professional learning.

To integrate the essential features of the CEN philosophy into school culture staff should be equipped "in the development of curriculum" (SLT18), and to "teach from a Christian worldview perspective"(SLT2). Leaders understood that this was not a simple task. Professional learning time needed to be allocated where "Christian worldview, partnership with families and biblical foundations are presented and discussed" (SLT16). Respondents suggested that teamwork was important (SLT12), advocating professional learning teams "that integrate biblical worldview into each area" (SLT15) be established within schools. Leaders also suggested that support and encouragement be given to staff to attend professional development events for Christian teachers such as CEN state intensives, induction days, and national conferences.

Leadership.

School leaders understood that keeping a regular focus on the essential features of CEN was an aid to its integration into school life. Regular cyclical gatherings such as morning staff devotions and meetings were seen as opportunities to "encourage staff to think about how the message of the gospel impacts all areas of their teaching/administration practices" (SLT7).

Visions and understandings.

Leaders needed to be intentional in their approach to this and set directives and explicit requirements for staff. Respondents commented on the importance of regularly restating (SLT11) or revisiting the mission or vision statements of the

school (SLT13) as part of keeping an ongoing conversation going among staff as to how their Christian faith impacts their practice.

Summary.

Respondents suggested that staff be adherents of the Christian faith and be engaged in professional development, which is supportive of the CEN philosophy. Professional development offered by NICE was suggested.

4.4.4 Comparing the three groups.

Table 4.2

A Summary of Themes of the Integration of the Essential Features Through Staff

Question	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
How do school leaders specifically seek to integrate into school culture the essential features through staff?	Leadership	Christian staff	Leadership
	Professional development	Professional development	Christian staff
		Leadership	Professional development

All three groups noted the importance of staff participating in professional development in support of the integration of the CEN vision. In all groups this was connected to post-graduate studies with NICE, and a variety of CEN professional development initiatives. Members from each group were positive about the NICE's *Certificate of Christian Education* as a means to educate staff. The data from the expert reference group and principals' group revealed differences between these two groups. The principals' group discussed the employment of Christian staff. The expert reference group did not mention this. The expert reference group expressed

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frustration that CEN resources to support staff development were often underutilised by schools. Yet, principals did not suggest there was an underutilising of CEN resources. There was commonality in the data from the senior leadership team group and that of either both or one of the other two groups.

4.5 How do school leaders specifically ensure that students encounter the essential features of CEN?

4.5.1 The Expert Reference Group.

The expert reference group were asked to respond to the above question during semi-structured interviews. Three themes were evident from an analysis of the data:

- Uncertainty;

- Holistically;

- Dialogue and questioning.

These themes are explored below.

Uncertainty.

All expert reference group members expressed doubt as to whether students understood the essential features of CEN, and biblical worldview, in particular. Statements included "we assume kids pick it up" (ERG3) and there is "hopefulness that it is happening among the students" (ERG4). To one respondent, the language and emphasis of CEN which was that of parent partnership with school, meant that students were "the forgotten part of the partnership … most of the time" (ERG2). Another suggested that the main focus of training within CEN was the adult

community: "we rely on the assumption that we train our teachers really well, we equip our leaders really well, we continue to re-envision our parents really well, and that that will flow to students" (ERG4). A third view was that understanding came with maturity:

> Students do not know what they are experiencing until they look back on it when they are older. Because I talk to people now who have experienced Christian education and they look back and say they did not understand what teachers were talking about when they spoke of things like 'worldview', but now they get it. (ERG1)

Holistically.

Expert reference group members suggested that the essential features of CEN were to be evident across the whole life of the school. This included the way that students were understood, teaching programs, the set-up of classrooms, and discipline (ERG2, ERG3). While camps were noted as "one of the best ways in community to experience what we are on about" (ERG1), the essential features of CEN should be seen in the everyday experience of students (ERG1, ERG2).

Dialogue and questioning.

Respondents advocated approaches that engaged students and allowed them to have ownership of their learning (ERG2). They rejected any notion where students were viewed as passive in education (ERG2, ERG3). Instead of being "the recipients", students should be empowered "to be active players in their own education" (ERG2). The integration of the CEN philosophy was to be more by conversation than teacher transmission of information, with students having the

freedom to wrestle with faith and express doubt. Students should be listened to and invited to consider, "how should a Christian respond to this?" (ERG3). Specifically, it was suggested that school leaders should develop "worldview type courses" (ERG1), for students, "particularly in the senior years" (ERG4).

Summary.

Expert reference group members expressed concern that students within CEN schools do not understand a biblical worldview. It was their perception that students should encounter the essential features holistically, across the life of the school. Engaging students in programs with a Christian worldview perspective was suggested as a way forward.

4.5.2 The Principals' Group.

Four themes were evident from the data that emerged from principals' responses during the semi-structured interviews in response to the question as to how students encounter the essential features of CEN. These were:

- Holistically;

- Aspects of practice;

- Modelling;

- Uncertainty.

These themes are explored below.

Holistically.

Principals suggested that the essential features of CEN schools should be evident to students holistically across school life. That is, "through the curriculum documents" (CVP6).

> Generally, through the education. Kids have devotions every morning. We also try and meet different things through different programs. It has to be Christian based or it has to at least have an understanding of what God says about this particular issue … it permeates through everything, so nothing that we do is … bereft of God … nothing that does not acknowledge him. (CVP8)

Aspects of practice.

Through aspects of school practice students will encounter a variety of aspects of the essential features of the CEN philosophy. Examples offered by principals included teaching biblical studies (CVP3, CVP5, CVP8), chapel services (CVP3, CVP5), worldview courses (CVP4), and student leadership initiatives (CVP1). Schools also utilised a number of externally developed and/or implemented character development programs such as *Character First* (CVP8) and *PeaceWise* (CVP2) and certificate programs in Christian ministry (CVP1, CVP8).

Modelling.

Teaching staff have a responsibility to live out the essential features of CEN in front of students whether in the playground or classroom (CVP6). They are to act as role models so that "the students can catch the vision of Christian education by seeing the way teachers act and react" (CVP7). One principal suggested that for students,

"the most powerful thing is what a teacher says. When they are demeaning or sarcastic to the kids that kills their testimony" (CVP3).

Uncertainty.

Two principals expressed doubt as to whether students understood the CEN vision of schooling.

> One of things that I have noted in my six years as Principal is having past students apply for positions and asking them what they thought our school was on about when they were students and I am not sure that they have been able to articulate that clearly. (CVP7)

Another, was sceptical as to whether schools were educating students to understand a biblical worldview:

> Have they actually got the skills and ability to critique culture? Do they have that ability to think through life from a biblical worldview? … I think we expect sometimes, because we have mentioned something or have some key questions on a wall, that somehow kids have picked that up rather than having mechanisms to feed that back to us. ... You have to be in dialogue with kids about stuff. You need to ask questions of them about their understanding of a Christian response to a topic and how it might impact on them…those conversations, actually checking in with kids along the way is important. (CVP4)

Summary.

Principals understood that students encounter the essential features of CEN through their engagement with staff, and the teaching and learning program. While principals suggested that students should encounter the essential features holistically, it was evident that certain elements of school life lend themselves to this more readily. Concern was expressed as to whether students understood this philosophy.

4.5.3 Senior Leadership Personnel.

In the online open-ended survey senior leadership team members suggested how students encounter the essential features of CEN. In addition, senior leader team member responses to statements 6-7 within the online survey (Appendix 5) were consistent with the open-ended responses. Three themes emerged from an analysis of the data. These themes were:

- The curriculum;

- Holistically;

- Aspects of practice.

These themes are explored below.

The curriculum.

School leadership team members suggested that students should be exposed to the essential features of CEN through the curriculum as a whole (SLT10, SLT11). Five respondents spoke of this exposure in terms of biblical worldview. A biblical

worldview was, at times, to be explicit and, at other times, implicit (SLT15). As one leader wrote:

> We promote biblical values that encourage them to serve and love each other, as well as being faithful and responsible learners. In every area we teach, we encourage them to see that Christ holds all things together - even Maths! (SLT8)

While CEN schools are understood to present students with "the truth of the Gospel" (SLT6), leaders also suggested that students should be "encouraged to question and explore matters of faith" (SLT6), with teacher support.

Leaders believed that through the establishment of a nurturing Christian environment students would come to a fuller understanding of the nature of God.

> [Students] … have the opportunity to develop gifts and talents through curricula activities such as sporting excursions, excursions, music tuition, soiree performances, the camping program, elective classes, subject choices and opportunities to serve the school community i.e. clean up Australia Day. Also, nurturing relationships in classroom cultures, which are supportive, which provide space for the ideas of others to be shared and actioned (class meetings) as well as provide opportunity for feedback. Learning opportunities, which engage the learner and create a sense of awe and wonder about God's creation…It is our hope the students come away with a greater understanding of who God is and what He has to say about this area of His creation. (SLT14)

Holistically.

The essential features of the CEN philosophy should be evident holistically, across the whole of school life, including both policies and practices. Examples offered by senior leader team members included pastoral care (SLT18) and restorative discipline (SLT12). As one senior leadership team member explained exposing students to the essential features of CEN was multifaceted and included honouring their diversity:

> We aim to take into account the diversity of our students and work with them in developing their gifts and sharpening their skills. This is done in a host of ways, such as differentiation in the classroom, opportunities for leadership/exposure in areas of interest/gifting, careful monitoring of student progress using a variety of methods, learning assistance for students who need extra support. (SLT8)

Respondents also noted students are to be educated about all aspects of life as they are "continuously presented with the truth of the Gospel" (SLT6, SLT10).

Aspects of practice.

While students were exposed to the essential features of CEN across the life of the school, senior leadership team members were aware there were some times when it would be more evident than at others. Seven respondents specifically mentioned class or student devotions as a time when students would explicitly encounter the CEN philosophy (SLT2, SLT6, SLT8, SLT9, SLT12, SLT16, SLT18). School days began with classroom devotions. These times were understood as a time "to focus on a range of topics including Christian character" (SLT16), and to "emphasise the

centrality of faith in the life of the school" (SLT2). Assemblies and chapel were similarly viewed (SLT5). Christian or biblical studies classes were understood to expose "students to the values that the school stands for" (SLT11).

Summary.

Leaders perceived that students should be exposed to the essential features of CEN across all of school life, but noted there were times when this would be more evident than others.

4.5.4 Comparing the groups.

Table 4.3

A Summary of Themes of How Students Encounter the Essential Features

Question	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
How do school leaders specifically ensure that students encounter the essential features of CEN?	Holistically	Holistically	Holistically
	Uncertainty	Aspects of practice	The curriculum
	Dialogue and questioning	Modelling	Aspects of practice
		Uncertainty	

While language varied, all three groups suggested that students should encounter the CEN philosophy through the curriculum, or the school as a whole. Data from the expert reference group and principals suggests there was uncertainty as to whether students understood the essential features of CEN. The senior leadership team themes and data within these themes were consistent either with both or with one of the other two groups.

4.6 How do school leaders specifically ensure that the curriculum exhibits the essential features of CEN?

4.6.1 The Expert Reference Group.

Two themes emerged from an analysis of the expert reference group members responses to how school leaders ensure that the curriculum exhibits the essential features. These were:

- Holistically;

- Dualism.

These themes are explored below.

Holistically.

There was an expectation among respondents that the curriculum should exhibit the vision of CEN. One suggested, "if you embrace the vision and are serious about living it out, then you see it in the fabric of the school … you see it unfolding in the classrooms" (ERG1). As to how the vision of CEN is integrated into curriculum, a member of the expert reference group advocated a holistic approach:

> It is alive in the program and curriculum in different ways. Ideally, a Christian rationale would be evident in every subject, in every curriculum document in every area. At every stage, or level, it would ooze a Christian perspective from its basic assumptions and that would flow out into the teaching and learning. (ERG4)

Respondents suggested that curriculum development was a shared enterprise. Shared leadership was important with teachers' motivation to develop curriculum consistent with a Christian or biblical perspective aided by the enthusiasm of the leadership team (ERG1). Leaders were also to set aside regular time for a "team-based, macro" approach and some "external input" (ERG2).

Dualism.

There was a perception that not all teachers understood the CEN approach to curriculum.

> Many churches do not speak about an all of life approach. Sometimes our Christian teachers can be very dualistic in their thinking, "I live a very faithful life. I live a devoted life to Jesus, but I teach Maths or I teach Art and it is about colour mixing or the history of art", but there is no real Christian perspective. That is a very dualistic notion. (ERG4)

Summary.

Expert reference group members believed that the curriculum must be communally developed and encapsulate an integrated holistic Christian perspective. It was noted that not all teachers understand the CEN approach to curriculum; teachers can be dualistic.

4.6.2 The Principals' Group.

Two themes were evident from an analysis of the interview data on principals'

perceptions of how school leaders ensure the curriculum exhibits the essential features:

- Holistically;

- Inconsistent integration.

These themes, and the sub-theme of *Through a biblical lens*, are explored below.

Holistically.

Principals suggested that the essential features of CEN should be evident holistically within the curriculum. For principals, education was "underpinned by a biblical worldview so … the gospel should be presented as something that covers all areas of learning be they academic or co-curricular" (CVP5). Schools may have slightly different ways to approach this, but responses indicated that it involves time, teamwork, and discussion (CVP1, CVP4, CVP6, CVP8). As one respondent offered: "we spend a fair bit of time, and support and curriculum resources to make sure that those conversations are happening" (CVP4). Another commented:

> You really want to have the staff engage with what it means to have the gospel central to all of the things that you do … it might be that we are looking at a particular focus such as special needs or differentiation of the curriculum, it might be through them looking at their curriculum documents, how they bring a Christian worldview to bear on their curriculum documents. (CVP6)
>
> Through a biblical lens.

Several principals included the importance of utilising worldview questioning in the

development of curriculum.

> We always say to teaching staff when we read your curriculum for this level, for this area, regardless of where the Australian Curriculum sits or whatever, there should be a flavour, a fragrance, it should be clear and obvious it shouldn't be artificial, but it should be worked in … you should be asking yourself where is the logical, appropriate, but clear statement that this is God's world. (CVP1)

Another principal suggested that staff were asked several questions as they developed their programs including, "how does this fit into our curriculum? And, how does this serve our bigger questions?" (CVP4). A rationale for questioning was suggested by one respondent:

> As a college we embrace the Australian curriculum, or in Victoria, AusVELS, ... and we are saying in terms of drilled down learning outcomes, they are good and well thought out learning outcomes. But the challenge for us is saying, what are the philosophies that sit behind that? You actually have to make some decisions as to what is included and what is not. We have been using a particular framework, the *Understanding By Design* (UBD) framework has actually helped our staff ask a series of key questions: What are the key learning outcomes that our biblical worldview can talk into quite strongly? ... and that starts to shape the basic platform of the units of work that we are doing. Sometimes that comes easily and sometimes it doesn't. (CVP7)

Inconsistent integration.

While acknowledging that a Christian perspective should be evident across the curriculum, principals also noted that this has proven difficult to achieve. One principal suggested that about half of the teaching staff in his or her school were able to successfully integrate the Christian faith within curriculum documents (CVP8). Another suggested that over time parts of the curriculum tended to lose their Christian perspective and needed re-writing (CVP4). This same principal noted that the creation-fall-redemption worldview framework had become "a little narrow and people were finding it difficult" to use as a means of applying the biblical narrative to curriculum documentation. The biblical literacy of staff was also an issue (CVP5).

Summary.

Principals believed that the curriculum as a whole was to bear witness to the CEN philosophy. This is facilitated by a culture in which staff were consistently being asked to reflect on whether or not their practice is aligned with a biblical perspective. Despite aspirations, principals also suggested that staff do struggle to embed the essential features into curriculum. A barrier to this may be the creation-fall-redemption model.

4.6.3 Senior Leadership Personnel.

One theme emerged from the analysis of the data relating to how senior leadership team members perceive that school leaders ensure the curriculum exhibits the essential features. Senior leader team member responses to closed statements 8-10

in the online survey (Appendix 5) were consistent with the open-ended responses. This theme was:

- Holistically;

This theme is explored below.

Holistically.

The integration of the essential features of CEN into school culture required the curriculum to reflect the Christian perspective of the school ((SLT4, SLT6, SLT11, SLT15, and SLT16). Respondents again varied in their language with "distinctively Christian" (SLT12), "biblical reference point" (SLT6), "biblical worldview" (SLT5), "Christian worldview"(SLT6, SLT9, SLT16), "full biblical story" (SLT10), "Christ-centred" (SLT4), "biblical perspective" (SLT15), "biblically directed" (SLT14), and "Christian Foundations" (SLT18) used to describe or used in conjunction with the curriculum.

Leaders believed that setting aside regular time for teachers to discuss and develop curriculum was necessary as they grappled with the notion of "teaching Christianly" (SLT13).

As to the relationship between Christian perspective and curriculum, one leader offered:

> Before we begin each unit, we carefully consider how our unit fits within the whole story of the Bible, and how it informs a head, heart and hand response that allows us to love and know God, and to love and serve our neighbours. We aim to teach an integral curriculum where we place an emphasis on "In

Christ, all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). We think carefully about how curriculum, assessment and pedagogy work together in conveying our big idea, taking into account the diversity of our learners. (SLT8)

Leaders acknowledged their requirement to teach the mandated curriculum and looked to integrate the philosophy of CEN through their instruction:

Curriculum is distinctively Christian. It is developed within the guidelines of Australian Curriculum and covers content, but the perspective will have a distinctively Christian approach and fundamental beliefs and values will permeate. Many good educational practices, theories and systems are used, but these are always put against the grid of a Christian perspective. (SLT12)

Summary.

Senior leadership team members suggested that the essential features should permeate the curriculum, and staff need resources, particularly time, to ensure that this happens.

4.6.4 Comparing the groups.

Table 4.4

A Summary of Themes as to How the Curriculum Exhibits the Essential Features

Question	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
How do school leaders specifically ensure that the curriculum exhibits the essential features of CEN?	Holistically	Holistically	Holistically
	Dualism		

All three groups understood that the CEN philosophy should be evident holistically across the curriculum. To ensure that this happens the expert reference group suggested that schools needed to ensure that teachers worked collaboratively in developing curriculum. Principals and senior leadership team members understood the importance of utilising a biblical worldview as a lens to critique curriculum.

4.7 How do school leaders specifically integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN so that parents become more cognizant of them?

4.7.1 The Expert Reference Group

The expert reference group were invited to suggest how school leaders ensure that parents become more cognizant of the essential features of CEN. From an analysis of the interview data, two themes were evident:

- Intentionality;

- Challenges in maintaining partnership.

These themes, including the sub-themes of *Continuous communication*, and *Seminars, workshops, resources* that emerged from the analysis of the data, are explored below.

Intentionality.

Continuous communication.

Expert reference group members understood that school leaders needed to continually educate parents as to the essential features of CEN. School leaders "should be doing that right from the outset … when they come into an interview

there should be very clear detailing of what our schools are about" (ERG1). Respondents suggested that school events such as information sessions should be worthwhile and include information about, and a rationale for, school programs (ERG2, ERG4). School newsletters were understood as a valuable tool in the education of parents. Newsletter editorials should make connections between the Christian faith and areas of school life rather than simply contain biblical insights or discrete Christian devotional pieces (ERG2).

Seminars, workshops, resources.

Respondents suggested that parents should be educated about the essential features of CEN schooling through a range of educational initiatives including "a new parents dinner", (ERG1) or "parent vision conferences" (ERG3). It was noted that some CEN schools hold a "series of seminars and workshops on Christian schooling" (ERG4) for parents, which can be "a condition of enrolment" (ERG1). With respect to evening events for parents the *Certificate of Christian Education* was, again, mentioned by all respondents as something that "has been pivotal in regaining and training parents around the vision" (ERG3, ERG4). In addition there was "a magazine that we share among parents. And it is also a vehicle for training" (ERG4).

Challenges in maintaining partnership.

Expert reference group members commented that there were barriers to maintaining parent partnership. Parents were understood to be busy people (ERG4). One expert reference group member suggested that the CEN vision was "probably being eroded a little" with "generational change" (ERG4). The following comments were illustrative of the barriers faced:

Sometimes, parents think that partnership is all about going on an excursion. But it is actually about supporting the school in its vision and mission and for Association members having a say in the direction of the school. (ERG1)

I think that although philosophically we have a fairly good understanding of parent partnership, we still struggle in Western 9.00 to 3.30 timetabled, suburban, post industrial … In the characteristics of our society, parents tend to deliver their kids to be handed over to a set of professionals and then to pick them up at the other end of the day. That is a model that has been around for the past two hundred and fifty years and we have bought into that model. But parts of its structure run counter to parent partnership and I think that is highly problematic for us because our philosophical understanding of parent partnership can be reduced to rhetoric, which would be a shame. (ERG2)

Summary.

Expert reference group members suggested that school leaders need to be intentionally educating parents about the values of CEN through written communication and parent events. They suggested resources that had been developed to support this. They also noted that there were barriers to improving parental understanding that included a changing demographic.

4.7.2 The Principals' Group.

Four themes were evident from an analysis of the interview data on principals' perceptions as to how school leaders look to educate parents to the essential features of CEN. These were:

- Intentionality;

- Practical partnership;

- Association Meetings;

- Workshops.

These themes are explored below.

Intentionality.

Respondents shared several common understandings and approaches to educating parents to the purposes of their schools. Principals understood that, while educating parents can be "the hardest part" (CVP1), parent-partnership has to be more than simply rhetoric:

> We really want to partner with our parents and we want to overcome the 'us and them' and the 'I drop my kids off, I pay good money, write a report for us and let us know if there are any problems' mentality. (CVP1)

> Principals spoke of the need for communication with parents to be explicit and continuous. While parental involvement was valued it was more important that parents understood what the school stood for and how this was different to other approaches to education (CVP4). To educate parents, it was suggested that at any event where parents come together, "it is important that we repeat ourselves regularly about what we are on about as a school ... the school's vision, mission and core values" (CVP6). That is, there is always a message of "this is who we are and this is what we do" (CVP8).

For respondents the enrolment interview was an opportunity to "tell parents who we are and what the difference is and … how it will be different in our expectations of students and parents" (CVP8). Likewise, all but one (CVP7) of the principals spoke of the newsletter, or more precisely the "editorial" within the newsletter (CVP5) as "one of the ways that we seek to educate our parents" (CVP6). Within these schools it was used "fairly strategically" (CVP4) in educating parents about the vision or to "guide their understanding" (CVP2). Letters sent home by teachers, the school website, and other promotional literature (CVP1, CVP4) were also used to educate parents.

Principals expressed an understanding that parents were "time poor now" (CVP7), and schools need to "be creative" (CVP8) in their efforts to educate them. One principal commented:

> The conventional ways to develop parent partnership have not worked. So we do lots of emailing, phone calls. We have parent partnership meetings within the first two-three weeks of school where the teacher interviews the parent … trying to give the parents the understanding that their opinion on their child is valued. (CVP2)

Practical partnership.

Principals spoke of the involvement of parents in the everyday life of the school. One principal said "at enrolment we are explicit in saying that we want to have you as parents on site" (CVP2). Another suggested that their school approach was to "keep

looking for ways to get parents here and a part of what their kids are doing" (CVP4). Involvement included "opportunity within the classrooms, camps" (CVP1), "canteen, working bees" (CVP4).

Association meetings.

Three of the eight principals suggested that parent association meetings were times to educate parents (CVP1, CVP5, CVP6). For one principal (CVP5) association meetings were the primary vehicle to "present what our foundational purposes are and how we view education" as "we don't look to engage parents about what the school is about beyond the association meetings". To another principal (CVP1), despite attempts to promote association meetings by providing hospitality and guest speakers, it was only "a fairly small percentage of the school community" that attended.

Workshops.

Two principals presented a desire to do more in terms of educating parents as to the purposes of the school. One said, "I'd love to do workshops with them, but it is too hard at the moment (CVP6). Another stated, "We believe that we are deficient in this area" (CVP1), but also spoke of visiting another school to improve practice. With respect to workshops one principal (CVP4) mentioned a parent seminar program, elements of which are based on the *Certificate of Christian Education*, run by the school over two nights and compulsory for new parents. This included:

> The biblical understanding of their role as parents, how does the school assist
>
> them, what is the difference between partnering and consuming a product ...

We talk about integral curriculum and what that looks like. We talk about our new curriculum documents, our transformational document…we pick out bits of that … we even talk in that first parent seminar about what we understand a Christian to be and how we define that here, particularly for our parents who might not be Christian. (CVP4)

This principal commented further:

We are blown away with the responses we get. If anything they go away more affirmed in the choice that they have made ... It is a real winner in terms of getting understanding of what we mean in terms of parent partnership. (CVP4)

Two principals spoke of their school boards in relation to educating and enthusing parents towards a deeper understanding of CEN. One principal (CVP5) suggested, "the board have periodically stated that they'd like to do more in this area or even run evenings when anyone is enrolling or seeking enrolment … the board ask me to get involved in this, but it is their initiative". Another principal also mentioned that the school board was examining how to build "engagement and understanding" (CVP7) among their parent community.

Summary.

Principals suggested that schools needed to communicate with parents often and intentionally as to their purposes for schooling. Association meetings and parent workshops were two methods that were used to assist parents in their understanding of the essential features of CEN. It was also evident that principals' perceptions

varied. One principal was very positive, two wanted to do more, and one principal believed that educating parents to the essential features of CEN was the responsibility of the board.

4.7.3 Senior Leadership Personnel.

Senior leadership team members were invited to offer their perceptions of how school leaders educate parents to the essential features of CEN through an online survey. Two themes emerged from the analysis of the open-ended responses. In addition, senior leader team member responses to closed statements 10-11 in the online survey (Appendix 5) were consistent with the open-ended responses.

These themes were:

- Intentionality;

- Practical partnership.

These themes, and the sub-theme of *Communicating the message*, are explored below.

Intentionality.

School leadership team members recognised parent partnership; it was "highly valued" (SLT12). Respondents acknowledged CEN schools as respecting "the importance of parents in the education of their children" and as being "committed to working with parents in partnership" (SLT4). Yet, beyond these affirmations, few respondents from this group articulated how this was evident in their communities.

Communicating the message.

Communication with parents was understood as supporting the integration of the essential features of CEN into school culture. Responses suggested regular communication was important. Staff had to be available to meet with parents and keep communication "open" (SLT10). School leaders advocated using the school newsletter, as well as general teacher letters to "explicitly talk about Christian education" (SLT15) or to "reinforce various aspects of the vision statement" (SLT11).

Meetings such as information nights (SLT5, SLT9, SLT11, SLT16, SLT18), parent-teacher meetings (SLT5, SLT11, SLT16), dedication and thanksgiving services (SLT11), enrolment interviews (SLT16, SLT18) were all spoken of as mechanisms to communicate to parents the "values and vision that the school has for their children" (SLT11). One leader spoke of parent seminars "at which they hear and discuss the ideas behind why our schools exist, such as the place of the Bible, parent partnership, integral curriculum, worldviews …" (SLT8) as valuable in integrating the CEN vision into school culture

Practical partnership.

Beyond advocating open communication, there were few suggestions from senior leadership team members as to how parents partnered with the school. One leader wrote of the involvement of parents through the association and the school board.

Schools have an association, which maintains and celebrates the essential heritage of the school and tradition and vision and mission. The school has a

board of governance, which is from the parent body. The board ensures that the school holds true to the vision and mission. (SLT12)

Two leadership team members commented that "parental participation in classes" (SLT13, SLT14), and that "attending camps/excursions, working bees, open days, office support, etc." (SLT8) was encouraged. It was also noted by another school leader team member that, contrary to the rhetoric of CEN, there "have not been many opportunities for parents to partner other than traditional parent/teacher meetings, open days etc. Parents are quite passive here" (SLT17).

Summary.

Senior leadership team members valued parent partnership and advocated school leaders use a range of mechanisms to communicate explicitly about Christian schooling. It was evident that parent participation in school life varied

4.7.4 Comparing the groups.

Table 4.5

A Summary of Themes as to How Parents Become More Cognizant of the Essential Features

Question	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
How do school leaders specifically to integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN so that parents become more cognizant of them?	Intentionality	Intentionality	Intentionality
	Challenges in maintaining partnership	Practical partnership	Practical partnership
		Association meetings	
		Workshops	

The three groups all agreed that school leaders needed to be communicating with parents often and intentionally as to the CEN vision for Christian schooling. The expert reference group and principals both acknowledged difficulties in maintaining parent partnership, and suggested a number of ways to educate parents. The senior leadership team data was consistent with either one or both of the other groups

4.8 How do the school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?

4.8.1 The Expert Reference Group.

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interview data relating to expert reference group perceptions of leadership in CEN schools. These were:

- Christian perspective;

- No "one" style;

- Servant leadership;

- Vision.

Comments under these themes are outlined below.

Christian perspective.

Respondents suggested that as with other areas of the school, Christian perspective "must permeate" (ERG1) school leadership. School leaders should be people who "desire to serve the Lord using their gifts" in service to their communities (ERG2, ERG4). As to what constituted Christian leadership, it was suggested that sacrifice is "inherently Christian" (ERG3), and modelling "Jesus is lord of all aspects of life" (ERG4) was important.

No "one" style.

Respondents perceived that different leadership styles were evident within CEN schools (ERG1, ERG4). The following is illustrative of this view:

> There are so many different types of leaders. You can also get the very pastoral leader who is loved by all, usually not then as articulate or strategic. … It is not like you would look for a set of characteristics and say that is what makes a successful leader. (ERG2)

Having noted this, the same respondent offered, "I am not an advocate of a lone ranger form of principal-ship".

Servant leadership.

The notion of servant leadership was evident within CEN schools. Respondents understood servant leadership to be about identification, compassion, and service to the community.

> I am first a servant before I am a leader and then I seek to do my leadership in a way that serves God that serves the vision of the organisation that I lead and ultimately serves the people in that community. (ERG3)

It was also suggested that there was a misconception of servant leadership within Christian schools with some members of school communities understanding it to mean leaders needed to serve them by being highly consultative and allowing themselves to be "walked over" (ERG1) by others. As one respondent offered, "sometimes love demands that we be tough so sometimes the most loving thing we can do is to sack them" (ERG1).

Vision.

Respondents suggested that CEN school leaders should be people of vision and have a clear understanding of purpose, as well as a plan for the future (ERG3). They needed to be people of integrity, able to embrace, or have passion for the vision and be able to articulate it. Failure to articulate the vision was "a liability for a leader" (ERG2). Leadership should not be based on, or around, an individual, but revolve around a team with shared understandings and practices. Respondents were not in

favour of the "charismatic or the singular insightful visionary leader who can articulate things very well, but isn't leading a team" (ERG2).

> Some leaders are very visionary directional and charismatic leaders who say this is where we are going and this is the language we'll use and my perception is teachers under that kind of regime will use the language and talk the talk and do what is required of them. But my concern is whether they are really engaging and understanding the vision, and embracing it or whether the sheer power of the charismatic and dynamic leader so determines the way they speak that they are not understanding it and, therefore, fully implementing it in a way that is real and vital and sustainable. (ERG3)

This same respondent (ERG3), citing Barnett and McCormick (2003), suggested that visionary or transformational leadership "without a degree of transactional kind of management, … the research shows was actually counterproductive. The teachers were less engaged with the vision, less motivated, less satisfied".

Summary.

In reflecting upon their leadership, respondents noted the importance of Christian beliefs permeating practice. While they perceived that leadership practice varied within CEN schools, they suggested that school leaders be people who uphold and articulate CEN's vision. Servant leadership, although misunderstood at times, was described as being evident within CEN.

4.8.2 The Principals' Group.

Four themes emerged from an analysis of the data provided by the Victorian CEN principals interviewed to the above research question. These were:

- Shared leadership;

- Vision;

- Service;

- Faith.

Shared leadership.

Principals valued shared leadership practices. They perceived themselves as collaborative, empowering, and looking to develop, and work with, leadership teams.

> I am very much a team player and what I look to build is a team of Christian leaders because I think that will be the greatest investment … spirituality and in every facet of what our school is trying to do. (CVP1)

Principals "valued the wisdom of others" (CVP1) and understood that it was "important that leadership is delegated" (CVP6), even if it was to ensure one person is not "dealing with all of the issues" (CVP6). Respondents saw the importance of leadership teams being united and working together (CVP7). Yet, there could be challenges to being collaborative as one respondent suggested, "You cannot do everything so the opportunities where you could show servant leadership or collaborate with teachers … you are making choices about your time and priorities all of the time … otherwise you would just be run ragged" (CVP4).

Vision.

Principals understood that they had a significant role in upholding the vision of the school. Schools were thought to function well if the board chair and the principal had a "shared vision" (CVP1). Principals perceived that they were to be strategic in their communications and explicit in making connections with the school's vision (CVP2). They spoke of the need for a shared understanding of the vision with school leadership teams (CVP2, CVP7, CVP8). Yet, there was also acknowledgement that, as a Principal, "you need to be the voice and make the proclamations"(CVP7):

> My job is to make sure the picture and the vision of the school is prominent; the key messages keep being put out there. I think that is simply my immersion in CEN over a period of over twenty years. (CVP4)

Principals understood a correlation between the Christian vision of CEN and their own leadership. As one principal stated, "if you are on about parent partnership you need to be out there having a conversation and you need to be visible and real" (CVP4).

Service.

Principals believed that leadership involved serving their communities. This was expressed as a response to God (CVP7), or belief in the concept of servant leadership (CVP1). One principal perceived that "the vast majority of our principals within the CEN movement" were variations of a servant leader; without which "you have a damaged leadership model within a Christian school context" (CVP1). Serving at various community events was understood as an element of servant leadership.

One way I have tried to do that is by going to all of the working bees because I think it is really important to signal to the parent group that I am a leader that doesn't mind the hard work, will roll up their sleeves. (CVP4)

Faith.

Respondents described connections between the Christian faith and leadership practice in broad terms.

Whatever I read or think about in terms of leadership I would need to subject that to biblical truth…I have heard people say that your Bible practices are all very well up to a point, but then you have to be practical…I don't believe that for a moment. (CVP2)

Several principals spoke of being "called" by God to their positions. As one offered, "I don't get the idea of why am I here … if God puts something in front of you then you step up and he is going to have to be the one that supports you through it." (CVP8). Principals understood connections between their day-to-day actions and their Christian beliefs. As one principal said, "We dare to believe that Jesus is God incarnate. We have to follow it through … I need to have the ability to lead each of these people at their point of need" (CVP2).

Specific leadership practices such as team-based approaches were perceived by respondents to be consistent with Christianity. One principal commented, "I am very aware that I am a fallen human being. I am aware of my shortcomings … that are a God given conviction. I am not able to do it all by myself" (CVP1) and "if all decisions need my explicit approval then I think I am a very poor leader of any

school, but of a Christian school in particular" (CVP1).

Reliance on God was also evident. One respondent suggested, "I cannot get there without God holding my hand and giving me wisdom" (CVP3). Another offered:

> As a principal you have to make choices constantly … you have twenty five people ask you what do you think I should do with this and you have to constantly make decisions so if my stability is not in Christ, and I am not constantly relying on him, then those decisions are going to be horrible. (CVP8)

Two principals struggled to articulate the connections between their faith and leadership. One principal admitted not thinking about leadership strategies (CVP8). Another principal said, "I can't think of my Christianity impacting on my leadership. I can't articulate my style very well" (CVP6).

Summary.

Principals' perceived that their leadership practices were shared, consistent with servant leadership, and that they had a role within their schools of upholding and articulating a vision for Christian schooling. While understandings and the ability to articulate relationships varied, principals understood there to be connections between their Christian faith and leadership within CEN schools. A sense of God's calling, and reliance on God were two such connections.

4.8.3 Senior Leadership Personnel.

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the data from the open-ended online survey questions answered by senior leadership team members. Senior leader team member responses to the closed statement 12 in the online survey (Appendix 5) were consistent with the open-ended responses. The themes were:

- Varied approaches;

- Servant leadership;

- The impact of faith.

These themes are explored below.

Varied approaches.

Senior leadership team members suggested that a variety of leadership strategies existed within CEN schools. Leaders promoted shared understandings, "based on prayer and biblical teachings" (SLT5). Leadership structures within CEN schools were understood to be a "flat(ter) structure rather than hierarchical" (SLT8) and leadership developed through "encouragement for staff to take on leadership in their areas of strength" (SLT11).

Shared leadership was evident in CEN schools (SLT6, SLT15, SLT17, SLT18), with leadership described as team-based, distributed, and having "a collaborative approach to decision making" (SLT17). According to respondents, transformational leadership was practised with leaders knowing their school's vision and promoting clear visions for their communities (SLT5, SLT12). It is also

noteworthy that not all leaders were reflective as to their own leadership. As one leader noted, "quite often I find myself just doing rather than thinking" (SLT8).

Servant leadership.

Eleven of the eighteen participating school leadership team members suggested that servant leadership was evident in CEN schools. Three described leaders as "servant hearted" (SLT5, SLT6, and SLT 8). Servant leaders were understood to "lead by example with great wisdom" (SLT12), and to build "on the skills of staff" (SLT4).

The impact of faith.

Respondents perceived connection between their Christian faith and leadership. School leaders were described as committed, displaying integrity, and understood as "Godly people of faith" (SLT12) who "take the Bible seriously in the decisions that are made" (SLT2). As with other areas of life, the Bible was understood to "permeate every area of leadership" (SLT12).

> The word of God informs all aspects of school life and personal life and needs to be the pivotal doctrinal basis of setting curriculum to guiding your family. Prayer is key to hearing from God and leaders must submit themselves diligently to hearing from God in all matters, no matter how big or small. (SLT17)

The Christian faith was understood to influence the self-perceptions of participants, keeping them "humble and grounded" (SLT13). It also encouraged them to "search for the gifts and talents in others" (SLT10), and to "think of…the ways in which they can contribute" (SLT4) in their communities. Leaders wrote of the

importance of prayer, and of reading and reflecting on the Bible. One leader wrote:

> I am at my best as a leader when I am spending time reading God's Word and
> meditating on his teaching daily. The Spirit empowers me to do my role each
> day. I need to daily hand over struggles and concerns so that I do not carry
> them. Without faith in the living God, I could not do my role with any integrity
> and love. (SLT8)

Being Christian meant that leaders believed that they needed to serve or be the
"servant leader as taught by Jesus and modelled in the pastoral images" (SLT2).

Summary.

Senior leadership team members witnessed a variety of leadership strategies within
CEN. These included shared practices, servant leadership, and transformational
leadership. Respondents understood their Christian faith as impacting on their
Christian school leadership.

4.8.4 Comparing the groups.

Table 4.6

A Summary of Themes From the Three Groups

Question	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
How do the school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?	Christian perspective	Shared leadership	Varied approaches
	No 'one' style	Vision	Servant leadership
	Servant leadership	Service	The impact of faith
	Vision	Faith	

Respondents in all of the groups described connections between the Christian faith and leadership. Respondents suggested that leadership varies within CEN schools. In all three groups leaders commented on the need for vision and the presence of servant leadership.

4.9 Chapter Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the data that emerged from an exploration of how school leaders perceived the essential features of CEN as articulated in the vision statement, their perceptions of how they integrated these features into school culture and of their own leadership by which this is done. In response to the research questions, the expert reference group, principals, and senior leadership team personnel presented their perceptions. There was a high degree of commonality across the three groups as well as some differences.

In chapter five the data presented in this chapter will be reviewed and discussed in light of the literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion in Light of Reviewed Literature and Results

5.1 Introduction

In this thesis leaders' perceptions of the essential features of CEN schools were explored. Leaders described how they integrated these features into school culture and their perceptions of the leadership by which they do this. The three questions used to focus the study were:

1. What do school leaders understand to be the essential features of CEN schools, as articulated in the vision statement?

2. How do school leaders specifically seek to integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN schooling, as articulated in the vision statement?

3. How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?

There were three groups of participants in this study: an expert reference group, a principals' group, and a group comprising senior leadership team members. As previously noted, individuals within these groups were coded ERG#, CVP#, and SLT#, respectively.

In the previous chapter, the data that emerged from this research was presented before a comparison of the three groups was made. Specifically, the data from each group was explored in themes and sub-themes generated from the analysis of the responses to the research questions. In this chapter,

the commonalities and differences that emerged from the data are described, discussed and illuminated by the literature relevant to the three questions that focused the study. Further, an issue of dissonance between the perceptions of the expert reference group and those of school-based leaders that was evident across the first two questions is examined and discussed.

5.2 The Essential Features of CEN Schools

Christian parents established CEN schools to provide Christian education consistent with their Dutch Calvinistic heritage. The CEN vision is informed by a number of underlying philosophies and theological concepts associated with the beliefs of the founding parents. The CEN vision celebrates the lordship of Christ over all of life, positions the gospel itself, rather than cultural forces, as the primary shaper of the way people think and live, and affirms the role of parents as being responsible to ensure their children are educated with this understanding (CEN, 2015, "Our vision").

Respondents in this research were asked what they perceived to be the essential features of CEN schooling, as articulated in the vision statement. As evident in Table 5.1, their responses revealed a high degree of commonality. Consistent with the vision of CEN, respondents perceived the lordship of Christ over all of life, biblically informed distinctive practice, and parental responsibility for education as essential features of this school movement. The themes that emerged, and the commonalities and differences between the groups, are discussed below.

Table 5.1

Leaders' Perceptions of the Essential Features of CEN schools

Groups	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
Themes	The lordship of Christ	The lordship of Christ	The lordship of Christ
	Distinctive practice	A biblical perspective	Christian worldview
	Parental responsibility	Parent partnership	Parent partnership

5.2.1 The lordship of Christ.

The sovereignty of God, over all of life, lies at the heart of reformed Christian schooling (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997). Within CEN, God's sovereignty is also expressed as the lordship of Christ. The lordship of Christ is embedded in the vision statement (CEN, 2015, "Our vision"). Participants in each of the three groups of leaders understood that an acknowledgement of Jesus Christ's lordship was an essential feature of CEN schools. In describing the lordship of Christ participants used "Jesus" or "God" interchangeably. Two respondents spoke in terms of God's sovereignty (CVP2, SLT6), whereas fourteen of the thirty respondents mentioned Christ's lordship. This is consistent with the language used in the CEN vision statement.

Faith-based schools often have particular emphases that emerge from a distinctive approach to the faith (McGettrick, 2005). In reformed Christian schools the sovereignty of God, or Christ's lordship, has been described as the "tap root among other roots" (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997, p. 281). The sovereignty of God was important to the founders of CEN, "providing a

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rationale for approaching the whole enterprise of schooling from a Christian standpoint" (Justins, 2002, p. 48). Respondents suggested that they acted out of this belief. The sovereignty of God was described as the reason for developing and sustaining Christian schooling. As one principal commented, "if we don't preach that Christ is Lord of all we might as well give up" (CVP8). Another respondent suggested that CEN "celebrates the lordship of Christ in all areas of school life" (SLT9). Thus, the lordship of Christ was understood to be more than an affirmation; it was a belief that was to impact on every aspect of school life.

> The lordship of Christ is expressed in our educational endeavour … therefore, we use the term holism. We would see that it covers everything across the school yard: curriculum, pedagogy, leadership, our community, the way in which we interact with our community, the role that students, parents and staff all play … the examples are countless. (ERG2)

As previously noted, there are distinctive approaches to a faith that, in turn, impacts on the practices of faith-based schooling (McGettrick, 2005). The vision of CEN states that Jesus is lord. Respondents in this research agreed with this statement. Jesus' lordship was affirmed as a particular emphasis within CEN schools and provided a reference point for their approach to education, informing decision-making and practice. Concretely, this means that Christianity within CEN schools is not to be evident simply in certain aspects of practice, but holistically across the whole of school life.

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Heritage.

As stated in Chapter 1, Dutch immigrants who arrived in Australia after World War II seeking to establish schools consistent with their own Reformed beliefs began CEN schools. It was their view that Australian education was "predicated on a division between private religion and public education" (Low, 2013, p. 268). Instead, they looked to establish schools based on God's sovereignty over the whole of life, as they had previously experienced in Holland (Justins, 2002).

In CEN, the sovereignty of God has often been discussed with reference to the Dutch Reformed heritage of the school movement's founders (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2002; Long, 1996; Low, 2013). An expression of this belief that has been used within CEN is Abraham Kuyper's statement from his famous speech at the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam on October 20, 1880, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" (Dickens et al., 2015, p. 72). This claim has been foundational to CEN together with the understanding that school is not value neutral. Rather, Christian schooling is to be built holistically out of a belief that God is sovereign over all aspects of life including schooling.

Few respondents linked the sovereignty of God with the Dutch Calvinist or Reformed heritage of CEN. While one principal (CVP2) cited the above Kuyperian quote word for word, only two other respondents, both from the expert reference group, mentioned the Dutch or Reformed heritage. The

composition of the CEN schooling movement has changed over time. Its beginnings had strong links with Reformed Christianity and those attracted to their theological positions. Over time CEN has also become attractive to non-Christian families (Dickens, 2013). The makeup of Christian families, too, has changed, such that it now represents a "wide variety of Christian denominations and theological persuasions" (Dickens, 2013, p. 142). That only one of the twenty-six school-based leaders expressed the lordship of Christ with reference to the Reformed heritage of the school movement suggests that the theological and philosophical beliefs that underpin these schools may be at risk of being lost as schools move further from their roots. These beliefs bring increased depth and meaning to the vision statement and their absence from respondent answers warrants consideration as to whether or not CEN needs to be more intentional in educating their constituency about the heritage and beliefs that underpin their approach to schooling.

No sacred-secular division.

In discussing Christ's lordship across all areas of life, expert reference group members and principals purported that life should not be divided into sacred and secular domains. In Western society the Christian faith can be considered as a private and sacred part of life, removed from the public, secular part (Etherington, 2008). This division of life into sacred and secular domains, or dualism, is evident within faith-based schools when there is a separation and emphasis of faith practices and programs distinct from the academic or secular parts of the curriculum (Beech, 2015). As one member of the expert

reference group explained in discussing faith-based schooling with separate educational and faith practices:

> You don't talk about how faith impacts on your general educational practice … if you are going to talk about it in curriculum, you will talk about some of the obvious religious aspects, creation in the teaching of science, ethics where it becomes relevant in the humanities, not much else. (ERG2)

Chapel was used to distinguish between an integrated holistic approach to Christian schooling and a dualistic approach that separates life into sacred and secular domains. According to a senior leadership team member, in a holistic approach to Christian schooling the lordship of Christ "is seen as influencing all components of thought and practice and not limited to certain components, e.g. chapel services" (SLT9). A similar point was made by a principal in explaining how the lordship of Christ should be evident across the life of a CEN school:

> I would expect to see a Christ-centred curriculum, leadership, practices, every task, like maintaining gardens to dismissing staff, to be done in a considered way where it is intentionally and actually an act of worship. All of life is religion. All of life is worship ... I'd say in CEN you'd be surprised to see chapel services. (CVP2)

For CEN schools the lordship of Christ extends over all of life, including education. CEN schools are not to be copies of government schools with the addition of Christian staff and a few Christian components (Fowler, 1990).

Rather, they are to be schools where faith and education are thoroughly integrated. The concept of sphere sovereignty places the responsibility of education with the family and not the church (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997). Subsequently, it can be argued that devotions, bible classes and chapel do not belong (Fennema, 2002). Yet, despite assertions that "in CEN there is no chapel" (Dickens, 2013, p. 135), and the statement of principal CVP2, two principals described chapel services as a regular part of school life. For these principals (CVP3, CVP5), chapel provided students with times to engage with issues from a biblical viewpoint.

CEN believes in an integrated holistic approach, where the Christian faith is evident "beyond the employment of Christian teachers, the use of chapel services, and the study of the Bible." (Justins, 2002, p. 212). An aim of a biblical worldview approach is for students to be inculcated with a biblical worldview (Dickens et al., 2015). Many CEN schools have enrolment policies that allow a proportion of students from homes not adhering to the Christian faith. Whether or not they are from Christian families, many students in CEN schools do not have the biblical literacy to understand the connections between the Christian faith and education in the classroom (Dickens, 2013). For these students the school may be their only connection with Christianity. Biblical studies classes and chapel services with an explicit biblical focus (as practised in other Christian schools), have the potential to enhance the spirituality of the school (Youlden, 2008), and the biblical literacy of students. Thus, chapel can aid the development of a biblical worldview.

The presence or absence of chapel within CEN schools is not the issue. To be consistent with sphere sovereignty, arguments either for or against chapel can also be readily employed in relation to biblical studies classes and class devotions. At issue is whether CEN schools are honouring their understanding of the lordship of Christ across the life of the school or segmenting practice into sacred and secular domains. If chapel services were the primary mechanism through which issues were presented with a biblical view (CVP5) this would suggest that the Christian faith is not being integrated across the life of the school, and be inconsistent with the understanding that Christ is Lord over all of life.

It has been previously noted that CEN schools, with their focus on an integrated holistic understanding of the lordship of Christ, have not been known for their academic achievement (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2009). This notion is consistent with other reformed Christian schools, which tend to describe their task of developing the whole person with less emphasis, within their literature, on academic achievement (Boerema, 2006). Only one respondent (ERG3) spoke about CEN being criticized for not emphasizing academic achievement. Other respondents tended to mention the academic nature of schooling more broadly, connecting it to the holistic all of life approach of CEN schooling (CVP5), or in arguing against the artificial and dualistic separation of faith and education (CVP1).

5.2.2 Biblical worldview informed practice.

The language of biblical worldview or Christian perspective pervades CEN. Twenty-six of the thirty respondents affirmed this, describing either the gospel, or Christian perspective, or biblical worldview-mediated practice as an essential feature of CEN schools. In Christian schooling faith is not to be peripheral; it is at the heart of the school (Fisher, 2012). Respondents from each of the three groups rejected dualism, where life can be divided into sacred and secular parts. They suggested that the Bible "is not some history, devotional book that we tap into occasionally" (CVP4). Rather, the Bible and the Christian faith is to impact on the "way we think about everything" (ERG3), "all practices" (SLT7), "all that is done" (ERG4), "all aspects of the school" (CVP2) such that "Christ is not just found in devotions or in a meeting, but in the very fabric of the school itself" (ERG1).

CEN, like other branches of reformed Christian schooling, originated because the pioneers understood all of life as religious (Deenick, 1991). God is sovereign, and is creator and sustainer of all. In CEN, the vision statement suggests that in thought and practice schooling is to be informed by the gospel rather than cultural forces (CEN, 2015, "Our vision"). Christian school leaders have a responsibility to develop culture consistent with the beliefs of their communities (Gannell, 2004). Understanding underlying beliefs aids the development of practice. It is encouraging that such a large majority of respondents, from all three groups, articulated biblically informed practice as an essential feature of CEN schools. This is consistent with the values of CEN as documented in the vision statement.

CEN has a history of utilising Christian worldview as a medium to integrate faith and education (Dickens, 2013). In CEN, Christian worldview is understood to be "like a pair of spectacles through which we understand our purpose and the purpose of Christian education" (Dickens et al., 2015, p. 4). Respondents from each group identified with this imagery describing worldview as a "lens" (ERG3, CVP1, SLT6) to view the world, or like "wearing different spectacles" (ERG1). A common Christian worldview framework employed within CEN schools has been one based on the theology of creation-fall-redemption (Thompson, 2003). The threefold worldview approach, emphasised in CEN, has distinguished the movement from other Christian traditions that divide schooling into religious and non-religious education (Low, 2013). Respondents in each of the groups (ERG1, ERG3, CVP4, CVP7, SLT17) specifically mentioned a creation-fall-redemption biblical framework, confirming that it remains prevalent within CEN schools.

Professional development.

The expert reference group associated teacher professional development with the biblical worldview approach of CEN. The principals and the senior leadership teams did not. Expert reference group members have responsibility for overseeing the professional development programs of CEN. It is possible the perspective of the expert reference group can be understood positively, as a belief that professional development is a necessity in the development of practice or, negatively as self-preservation. Historically, CEN has included an emphasis in its literature that teachers need professional development to develop practice consistent with their Christian beliefs (Edlin,

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2004; Hoeksema, 1983; Justins, 2006). Consistent with this CEN created its own training institution offering accredited post-graduate training as well as non-accredited professional development programs (Dickens, 2013). Expert reference group members believed that teachers needed to be trained in how to read and understand the Bible and discern worldviews (ERG2, ERG4).

That teacher training in a biblical worldview is an essential feature of CEN is highlighted by a moment within the broader history of Christian schooling in Australia. In 2001, the then CPCS, chose not to join other Christian school groups to create a new and larger Christian schooling entity. A reason provided was that "the new organisation would not have given sufficient support to Christian teacher education of the kind being provided by NICE" (Justins, 2006, p. 230). Thus, within CEN, it is held that integration of faith and education, especially in curriculum, requires teachers to undertake Christian or biblical worldview training (Edlin, 2004).

> Many teachers struggle with this challenge. For most, their secular training, which is equally immersed in worldview voices that are rarely acknowledged, has not equipped them to discern the many voices of secularism that populate the curricula, text books and online resource sites. (Dickens et al., 2015, p. 68)

With only the expert reference group perceiving teacher training in a biblical worldview as an essential feature it highlights that this aspect of CEN's approach to schooling may not be as high a priority as it has been in the past.

Common grace and antithesis.

Respondents, particularly from the expert reference group, understood that the language of Christian distinctiveness in education can be problematic. In describing their approach to education several respondents affirmed a view that CEN schools have not inherited all wisdom. Rather, due to common grace, helpful insights and God-honouring practices can be evident in schools regardless of their faith position (Fowler, 1990). Aiming to develop schooling practice from a biblical perspective does not mean that in art, for example, only Christian artists are to be studied (ERG1).

CEN schools celebrate and explore the whole of creation and encourage students to develop a biblical worldview as they learn (Dickens et al., 2015). Expert reference group understandings of the distinctiveness of Christian schooling were connected with their antithetical religious position of using a biblical perspective to inform practice (ERG3) rather than accepting the cultural norms of the society in which they are embedded. Using the example of art, this means that a variety of approaches and artists are to be studied, with all critiqued from a biblical worldview. This was consistent with the antithetical position of other reformed Christian schools, and the vision statement of CEN.

Two expert reference group members (ERG2, ERG3) and one principal (CVP2) spoke of common grace and antithesis. Another member of the expert reference group as well as an additional principal broadly alluded to the concept of common grace. As with other theological and philosophical beliefs,

the concepts of common grace and antithesis bring a depth of meaning to the belief statements of CEN. CEN has its own distinct approach to Christian schooling, which has been shaped by common grace and antithesis. The absence of these concepts from the majority of respondents' answers cast doubts on their level of awareness of the theological and philosophical concepts that inform the CEN vision. Thus, consideration should be given as to whether or not CEN needs to be more intentional in educating people within member schools, especially their school leaders, about these theological and philosophical concepts underpinning CEN schooling.

Diverging understandings and practice.

Biblical worldview is synonymous with CEN. Worldview has been the primary vehicle for the integration of faith and education within CEN schools (Dickens, 2013). Yet, teachers' use of biblical worldview has been inconsistent (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2002). In this research, despite the almost unanimous view that biblical worldview informed practice was an essential feature of CEN schools, all members of the expert reference group suggested that the concept was not well understood, nor consistently implemented within schools. Their perception was that understandings of the vision varied, and appeared to be becoming more diverse over time. Schools also varied in how they integrated faith and education, and did not universally value the teacher training provided by NICE. This dissonance between the recognition of biblical worldview as an essential feature and its implementation was evidenced by several principals' comments. Two principals questioned the theological position of CEN, labelling it "conservative" (CVP3, CVP5). One expressed

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concern that the CEN understandings of scripture as God's word and their worldview-mediated approach to education could lead to *biblicism*, broadly understood as taking the Bible too literally. Yet, while CEN emphasises the centrality of the Bible for education, it is not in a literalist sense (Low, 2013). Worldview, as promoted by CEN literature, seeks to avoid a number of misuses of the Bible (Dickens et al., 2015; Edlin, 2004), including its use as a textbook, or for proof texting. As an overarching framework, worldview acts "as a "hermeneutical key for cultural engagement" (Wolters, 2009, p. 110), utilising a macro view of the Bible rather than focussing narrowly on individual biblical passages (Roy, 2008). Consequently, the CEN worldview approach is unlikely to lead to biblicism. A more appropriate criticism of worldview would be a lack of emphasis on the Bible and the potential of replacing scripture with a schematized framework (Wolters, 2009).

A misrepresentation of CEN's worldview-mediated integration of faith and learning was also evidenced by the comment, "if we actually looked at the learning outcomes of our school and neighbouring independent schools there wouldn't be significant difference … but it is actually what drives them that is distinctive" (CVP7). CEN schooling is prefaced on the notion that education is not value neutral (De Boer & Oppewal, 1997). It is true that the underlying philosophy is distinctive, but learning outcomes are not value-free. Within the CEN movement there has been a tendency to be "wary of mandated curricula and educational paradigms" (Dickens, 2013, p. 222). With Australian schools obligated to follow the Australian Curriculum, much of the content from school to school is similar. Yet, the Australian Curriculum presents an understanding

of the person and society from a secular perspective (Graieg, 2015). As part of a worldview-mediated approach the religious orientations of the curriculum are to be exposed through worldview questions and discussed, and a Christian response presented (Fennema, 2006). Thus, the learning outcomes within a Christian school should include a critique of the religious orientations of the curriculum, and refer to a Christian response. Understood this way, a worldview-mediated approach assumes that, although the content may be similar, the learning outcomes could not help, but be different.

5.2.3 Parental responsibility and partnership.

As indicated in Chapter 1, Christian parents with a Dutch Calvinist heritage, established CEN schools. They believed that, as parents, schooling was their responsibility and not that of the church, or the government. In this study, respondents from each of the three groups of leaders perceived parental responsibility as an essential feature of CEN schools. This was consistent with the CEN vision statement, which also affirms parental responsibility in the education of children in the Christian faith (CEN, 2015, "Our vision"). An emphasis on parents understanding the biblical mandate to raise their children in the Christian faith is a distinguishing characteristic of faith-based schools (Boerema, 2006). Respondents from each group also described parental responsibility for the education of their children as either 'biblical' or 'scriptural' (ERG2, CVP7, SLT18). In CEN, a number of biblical verses such as Deut. 6:6-9, Ps. 78:5-7, and Eph. 6:4 are cited in support of parental responsibility (Edlin, 1999; Fennema, 2006). However, no respondent cited a biblical verse to support his or her position.

As was the case with the lordship of Christ, there was little connection between the respondents' comments on parental responsibility and the Dutch Calvinist heritage of the movement. Only one respondent hinted at the underlying philosophy and theology of reformed Christian schools. In describing schooling as the responsibility of parents, and not of the church, or the state (CVP7), a principal alluded to the concept of sphere sovereignty. Thus, once again, respondents affirmed the language of the vision statement. Yet, the absence of biblical citations and direct references to the philosophy and theology underpinning parental responsibility suggests that these underlying concepts may not be known or are superficially understood. Again, this warrants consideration as to whether or not CEN needs to be more intentional in educating their members about the heritage of their approach to schooling.

Although the understanding of parental responsibility was consistently aligned to the Christian faith, one respondent (ERG2) also cited the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. While this view is not exclusive to CEN schools, it is mentioned in the literature of CEN schooling (see Blomberg, 1980; Justins, 2002; Nyhouse, 1980) in support of parental choice.

Parent control.

In this research four respondents used the term 'control' in relation to parents. With respect to parental involvement in CEN schooling, the word "control", although meant to focus attention on the positive role of parents, has had negative connotations (Dickens, 2013). Previously, CEN schools were

described as parent-controlled. To the pioneers of CEN schools, parent-control was consistent with sphere sovereignty and, in particular, that parents had the responsibility for schooling. Parent control was a "defining feature" (Justins, 2002, p. 129) of CEN schools. The awkwardness of the terminology was overcome when Christian Parent Controlled Schools changed its name, in 2008, to Christian Education National. As twenty of the thirty participants spoke of 'partnership', it is a possibility that in changing the name of this school movement, the language with respect to parent responsibility has subsequently changed. The perception of respondents, that CEN schools operate in partnership with parents, as evidenced by the number of respondents who noted this essential feature, is significant as it is consistent with the "Kuyperian notion of sphere sovereignty that places education squarely within the domestic sphere of the family" (Low, 2013, p. 283).

Parent governance.

Within CEN schools, Christian parents form associations and elect boards (CVP5) to set the direction of the school (ERG3). Whereas previous research has suggested, "executive staff, particularly principals had serious concerns with the way that parent control was manifest in their schools" (Justins, 2002, p.185), this was not evident in this research. While one principal stipulated that it was the school board's role to educate the parents towards a deeper understanding of CEN (CVP5), this principal did not suggest any governance issues existed.

Respondents from all groups viewed parent partnership positively. Parental governance was the chief manifestation of parental responsibility and partnership. One principal noted the importance of partnership at a governance level: "if the board chair and the principal do not understand a shared vision then governance and operations blow apart" (CVP1). All members of the expert reference group, together with five of the eight principals and one senior leadership team member spoke of the role that parents play in the governance of CEN schools. Given that the roles of senior leadership teams and school boards do not often intersect, it is unsurprising that only one member from this group mentioned governance in relation to parent responsibility.

Challenges in maintaining parental responsibility.

Principals, in particular, endorsed the notion of parental responsibility. It was "held dearly" (CVP6). Yet, maintaining parental responsibility as an essential feature of CEN schooling was "challenging" (CVP1). It was the perception of several principals that parent-school relationships can, at times, be adversarial (CVP1, CVP2, CVP6). This is not unexpected given the rising expectations of governments and communities towards schooling (Duignan, 2012). Further, parents are often busy (CVP6) and with changes in society, such as the increasing number of single parent families (Neidhart & Carlin, 2011), and work commitments (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hornby, 2011), parental involvement in schooling can be difficult to obtain. Principals understood this and described part of their role as needing to overcome

barriers and creatively look to educate parents about the CEN vision for schooling.

Respondents from the expert reference and principals' groups both perceived that some Christian parents do not understand or accept their responsibility for education. One respondent (ERG2) suggested that the Australian system of education, where the government assumes responsibility for education, had led to a "vicarious deflection of responsibility," making it difficult for CEN to argue for, and maintain, parental responsibility.

Although established by Christian parents with a Dutch Calvinist heritage, CEN schools have always been open to Christians from any denomination (CPCS, 1992), and, over time, have become attractive even to parents not of the Christian faith. This diversification of the CEN community appears to be one factor in the dilution of the value of parental responsibility. A principal noted, parents chose a Christian school for a variety of reasons including a "cheap independent education" (CVP7), and not, in the first instance, because they valued Christian schooling. Another principal suggested, "parent partnership is an increasingly difficult thing to get. There would be a significant number of our parents who, although practising Christians, wouldn't have the sort of reformational theology underpinning their own worldview" (CVP2).

While the diversification of the CEN community may be a factor, the decline in understanding, and appreciation, of the importance of parental responsibility for education may also be a consequence of societal change

with respect to religious values. Christian schools operate in a secular society (Edwards, 2011) where it is evident that religious values are in decline (Neidhart & Lamb, 2013). Consequently, it has been suggested that there is "a growing disinterest among Christians to engage in theological thinking and discussion" (Dickens, 2013, p. 147). Thus, it may be that the value of parental responsibility is being diluted by the impact of secularisation on society including those within the Christian faith.

Parents can choose faith-based schools because of their ability to inculcate values into their children (Vryhof, 2004). Initially, in establishing CEN schools, parents looked for Christian educators to partner with them in their task of educating their children in the Christian faith. Within CEN, parental responsibility has not been something to be avoided or passed on to others (CPCS, 1992). Nonetheless, it is clear that the value of parental responsibility has been eroded. Today, it appears that, at least some Christian parents are willing to abdicate their responsibility to teach and nurture the faith of their children, transferring this responsibility to the Christian school (CVP8).

CEN earnestly desires parents to honour the biblical mandate to be responsible for the education of their children (Low, 2013). Over time parents have become less involved in the running of these schools (Dickens, 2013). While parental responsibility for the education of their children remains an important value to leaders within CEN schools, parental responsibility and involvement in schooling are proving difficult to foster. Practical realities such as the changing shape of families and work commitments are barriers to this. It is also evident that the concept of parent partnership has shifted from

Christian parents seeking educators to partner with them in the education of their children to Christian school educators needing to educate parents to their biblical responsibility for the education of their children. This changed relationship may be a consequence of several factors including less homogenous school communities and a decline in religious values in our communities.

5.2.4 Summary.

CEN schools exist because the pioneers believed everything in life is related to Christ, including education (Deenick, 1991). In establishing CEN, Christian parents were convinced that education in Australia was based on an artificial sacred-secular dichotomy that was not faithful to the message of the Bible (Hoeksema, 1983). Instead, they desired an education in which all practices created a community based on the lived experience that expresses Jesus is Lord. While respondents from each group considered the lordship of Christ an essential feature of CEN schools, it was, for the most part, conceived differently from the conception of the early pioneers and the underlying theology and philosophy of reformed Christian schools. Few respondents described this essential feature in relation to the Reformed or Dutch heritage of these schools. Further, as the enrolment demographic of CEN schools has broadened (Dickens, 2013) its expressions of Christian schooling appear to have diversified. Yet, school leaders remain wary of the tendency to divide life into sacred and secular domains. Keen to avoid this, they continued to promote a holistic approach to schooling consistent with the lordship of Christ over all of creation.

The findings from this research suggest that a biblical worldview pervades CEN. Respondents' language was consistent with that espoused by CEN. A biblical worldview-mediated approach to education is intimately linked with teacher training. The expert reference group understood this. Other respondents from the remaining two groups did not. Further, the expert reference group suggested that the understandings and practice of biblical worldview are not consistent across CEN schools. Views of principals, who question the theological position of CEN, or appear not to understand the connections of biblical worldview and curriculum, support this.

Christian parents, predominantly with a Reformed Calvinist background, began CEN schools. They understood their biblical responsibility to educate their children and acted upon their beliefs. Respondents' answers suggested that CEN school leaders broadly understand parental responsibility for education. Parental governance was affirmed by respondents in this research and remains a key feature of CEN schooling. Despite willingness on the part of school leaders, maintaining parental responsibility is proving difficult. There are a number of reasons for this. There are many expectations of schools. Parents are busy, and the clientele of CEN schools has changed over time such that the views of many current parents do not appear to be in keeping with those of the early pioneers (Dickens, 2013).

CEN school leaders perceived the essential features of CEN schools to be an affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ across the whole of life, distinctive practice underpinned by a biblical worldview, and parental responsibility for education.

5.3 The Integration of the Essential Features into School Culture

School cultures are multi-dimensional (Peterson & Deal, 2009) and dynamic (Mills, 2003). School leaders have roles that include ensuring school culture is consistent with the vision and underlying values of their schools (Buchanan, 2013b). In CEN schools, culture includes parental responsibility and partnership in education (or parent control), the nurture of children from Christian families, the development of a Christian curriculum, and the employment of Christian staff (Justins, 2002). Consequently, the question that invited leaders to describe the integration of the essential features of CEN, as articulated in the vision statement, was divided into four components of CEN schooling, namely, staff, students, curriculum, and parents.

5.3.1 Through staff.

Table 5.2 presents the themes that emerged from an analysis of respondent answers to the question: How do school leaders specifically seek to integrate the essential features of CEN as articulated in the vision statement into school culture through staff? There was a high degree of commonality among the three groups. There were also differences. These commonalities and differences are discussed below.

Table 5.2

Leaders' Perceptions of How They Integrate the Essential Features of CEN Into School Culture, Through Staff

Groups	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
Themes	Leadership	Christian staff	Leadership
	Professional development	Professional development	Christian staff
		Leadership	Professional development

Leadership.

Staff are influenced by school culture, and, at the same time, influence it (Deal & Peterson, 2009). All three groups suggested that leadership was integral to staff understanding and developing practices aligned with the vision. A starting point for respondents was for school leaders to value the CEN vision for schooling. As one respondent (ERG2) noted, Christian school leaders are entrusted with the responsibility of developing practices consistent with the vision of their communities (Buchanan, 2013b). It is difficult to develop a Christian school culture without leaders having a vision for it.

To be credible, leaders need to embody the life they advocate (Hall, 2007). Respondents demonstrated awareness that "mixed messages create confusion and undermine credibility" (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p. 25). They suggested that leaders be able to describe the vision of the school, show passion for it, live in accordance with it, and have skill to achieve it.

Culture is a complex phenomenon. "Wrong" cultures are more likely to absorb leaders, one by one, rather than be changed by them (Fullan, 2014, p. 32). Consequently, respondents suggested that developing a culture consistent with the school vision required leadership to be distributed (ERG1, ERG2). Within schools, leaders needed to work together, possess shared understandings of the vision, be able to articulate that understanding, and demonstrate possessed strategies to implement that vision in the school community. A key element of this was regularly restating the vision and connecting practice with the story of the school (SLT11, SLT13).

Respondents were cognizant of the fact that culture is dynamic and multidimensional. Culture is layered and, while there may be artefacts and espoused beliefs that suggest a certain culture exists, there is a deeper level at which basic assumptions will inform practice (Schein, 2010). Consequently, respondents expressed concern about rhetoric or "clichéd expressions" (ERG3). One principal (CVP4) had reservations about a "top-down" approach. Instead, this principal suggested staff needed to capture the vision before it could authentically permeate through the school. Thus, leaders understood for culture to be aligned with the vision of CEN, there needed to be shared understandings and mutual obligations among staff (Sergiovanni, 2000). One way to do this was for the leaders to ensure that the vision was grounded in the practices of the school and engaged with regularly (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Members of the expert reference group acknowledged this, noting that followers needed to see that leaders had a "clear strategy" (ERG1) to implement the vision.

The employment of Christian staff.

Leaders in Christian schools often argue that there aren't enough Christian teachers to fill vacancies so they compromise and employ non-Christians who are willing to support the Christian ethos of the school (Jackson, 2009). According to principals and senior leadership team members in this research, employing staff that support the Christian ethos of the school was not enough; they needed also to actively practise the Christian faith. As stated earlier, it has been said that a requirement of membership with CEN is that member schools employ only Christian staff (Gannell, 2004). While this is not currently a criterion for membership (Dickens, 2015), CEN school leaders were adamant that their school staff be regular church attending Christians (CVP3, SLT4, SLT8). This is consistent with other Christian schools (Fisher, 2012). Thorough recruitment processes, including referee checks, were used to ensure that staff were actively involved in their local church communities (CVP8).

Professional development.

Respondents understood that educational practice consistent with the vision of CEN required more than simply employing teachers who described themselves as Christians. An impediment to the development of an integrated holistic approach to Christian education has been that teachers have often been trained in secular universities and then teach within Christian schools from the same secular perspective (Lawrence, Burton, & Nwosu, 2005). These teachers, in general, are not familiar with the practice of connecting their faith with their teaching. Consequently, they can be dualistic in their

thinking, creating a false distinction between what is sacred and what is secular (Collier, 2013).

Teaching in Christian schools requires a different mindset (Fisher 2012). Respondents understood that it was unrealistic to expect teachers who have been trained in secular universities to instantly be able to teach from a Christian perspective. Teachers, new to Christian schools, "often have not had to think about the perspectives embedded in course outlines, resources, and generally accepted methodologies (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 171-172). To develop practice consistent with the Christian faith teachers need professional development (Collier, 2013; Neidhart & Carlin, 2011). Respondents understood this suggesting that teachers needed professional development or "re-teaching" (CVP7).

Respondents suggested that there was no "A to Z of how to create the perfect Christian school" (ERG2). Rather, professional development, however understood and implemented, needed to be comprehensive. A consistent theme was the alignment of professional development with the purposes of the school. The vision and mission of the school needed to be ever present before the staff team (ERG1, CVP6, SLT11). The practice of teachers is enhanced when they are given time for collaboration with colleagues in professional activities to improve student outcomes (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Respondents suggested that professional learning time needed to be allocated for teachers to work collaboratively in understanding and developing practice consistent with a biblical worldview (CVP4, SLT16). Meeting times were not to be focussed on administration. Instead, they were to provide

opportunities for teachers to share and develop practice (CVP1). Participation in seminars, such as the NICE developed *Certificate of Christian Education*, and CEN new staff induction days were encouraged. One respondent (SLT10) suggested that the biennial combined Victorian CEN school three day professional development event, known as the "state intensives", had assisted staff in implementing a culture reflective of the CEN vision.

All of the expert reference group, five of the eight principals, and five of the eighteen senior leadership team members mentioned post-graduate training with NICE. Respondent comments suggested that leaders varied in their valuing of this training. In at least three schools, teacher participation in, post-graduate training with NICE was contractual with a certain number of Master of Education units of study needing to be completed, within a set time frame, as well as financial incentives given for the completion of units. In commenting on the importance of training with NICE, one principal (CVP4) suggested that approximately one third of staff (including the principal) had been awarded a Master of Education through NICE. In other schools the onus was more on the individual teachers being "welcome" (CVP5) or "encouraged" to participate (SLT8). Regardless of the approach, in most instances, the school paid the subject fees. It was also evident that, as part of their professional development, teachers were provided opportunities to share their learning with other members of their teaching teams.

Despite the rhetoric, all expert reference group members suggested that the support services and training programs offered by CEN or NICE were underutilised by schools. One respondent (ERG1) lamented that because

CEN is an association of school associations, and not a system of schools, it was difficult to get consistent practice across CEN. Teacher involvement in post-graduate training with NICE varied from school to school. Comments from principals confirmed this. One principal (CVP3) bemoaned the challenges of working with teachers who had been trained in secular universities, yet also stated that teaching staff had not participated in post-graduate studies with NICE, nor even the one day *Certificate of Christian Education* seminar. Another principal (CVP5) suggested that the school board was "fairly insistent" that teachers engage in training provided by CEN and NICE, yet numbers were low. This same principal described how teacher professional development included other Christian organisations that presented a "wider perspective" and "a more liberal view of the scriptures" than CEN. With respect to establishing a school culture consistent with the vision through staff, a senior leadership team member commented, "make everybody attend CEN conferences and workshops which are often out-dated teaching practice" (SLT1). To this person, at least, it would seem that CEN professional development was not highly valued, perhaps because of the delivery methods.

To develop teaching practices consistent with the vision of CEN, schools have historically advocated a biblical worldview-mediated approach. Yet, practice varies from school to school (Dickens, 2013). Aware of this, members of the expert reference group suggested that school leaders and boards had the opportunity to insist that teaching staff engage in professional development such as that offered through NICE. They were also acutely

aware that as an association of school associations CEN did not believe they had the authority to make this mandatory.

Consistent practice across CEN is reliant on the leadership of individual schools understanding and believing in the CEN approach to education as articulated in the vision statement and establishing practices in support of this. It is evident that the support services, including the post-graduate training offered by NICE are variably valued. Understandings of theology may be a contributing factor as well as delivery methods. Shared practice across schools is not consistently evident and may only become so if CEN can find ways to ensure that all schools engage in the professional development offered. A starting point may be seeking feedback on the resources, and professional development currently being offered by CEN.

5.3.2 Students.

In Table 5.3 the emerging themes are presented from an analysis of respondent answers to the question: How do school leaders specifically ensure that students encounter the essential features of CEN? All three groups understood that students encounter the essential features of CEN holistically across school life. Other themes were less common as illustrated in Table 5.3. Commonalities and differences from the data are discussed below.

Table 5.3

Leaders' Perceptions of How Students Encounter the Essential Features of

CEN

Groups	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
Themes	Holistically	Holistically	Holistically
	Uncertainty	Aspects of practice	The curriculum
	Active not passive	Modelling	Aspects of practice
		Uncertainty	

CEN schooling was established because of the belief of the founding

Christian parents that all of life is religious, and that parents have a

responsibility to provide an education for their children that is directed by the

gospel. A goal of CEN schooling is to inculcate a biblical worldview in

students and to equip them to think and act biblically as disciples of Christ in

contemporary society (Dickens et al., 2015). To develop cultural practices

consistent with their beliefs about education, CEN offers support, resources

and training to the leaders, staff and parents of member schools. With no

mention of students, it is unsurprising that a member of the expert reference

group should describe students as the "forgotten part of the partnership"

(ERG2).

A holistic approach.

It was the perception of respondents from all groups that students encounter

the essential features of CEN holistically, or across all of school life. Several

of the answers to this question lacked specificity. These respondents spoke in

broad terms suggesting that biblical worldview or the "truth of the gospel" (SLT6) permeated school practice such that nothing is "bereft of God" (CVP8). There are many elements to schooling. School leaders perceived that students would encounter the vision of CEN in pastoral care, discipline, excursions, leadership, service and performance opportunities, as well as in the classroom.

Staff in Christian schools are expected to honour and respect students, model a Christian lifestyle, provide guidance on life choices as well as foster learning (Scouller, 2012). Principals, in particular, understood the importance of modelling to students, both in and outside of the classroom environment. To students, "the most powerful thing is what a teacher says" (CVP3). Young people can "catch the vision" (CVP7) from teachers. In Christian schools teachers need to practice as well as proclaim the message of the gospel (Neidhart & Carlin, 2011).

Modelling, as the main means of integrating faith and education, is insufficient (Shortt, 2014). The God of the Bible is interested in individuals and their relationships with him and their fellow man. However, the message of the Bible is not simply one of individual pietism or the development of virtues (Smith & Shortt, 2002). If the words and actions of teachers are not coupled with policies, practices and a curriculum that reflect the gospel, then students will be presented with a truncated gospel within a dualistic approach to schooling. The words and actions of staff in Christian schools are vital, but should be understood as a component of a holistic integrated approach to Christian schooling.

The curriculum.

Respondents perceived that students encounter the CEN vision for education through the curriculum, and teaching practice. The curriculum is to foster "a sense of awe and wonder about God's creation" (SLT14), and encourage students "to serve and love each other, as well as being faithful and responsible learners" (SLT8). Through the curriculum, it is envisaged students would gain understanding of God and the connectedness of the Christian faith within all aspects of life (SLT10). They would also have practical opportunities to respond to what is taught (SLT13).

A task of Christian teachers is to invite students to be faithful to the message of the gospel (Van Brummelen, 2009). In CEN schooling, this faithfulness to the gospel message has been connected to the concept of responsive discipleship (Thompson, 2003). Discipleship is not about a privatised faith. Rather, it includes the exploration of creation and culture, and opportunities to respond in ways consistent with the biblical story (Dickens et al., 2015). Senior leadership team members understood discipleship to be informed by a biblical worldview, sometimes implicitly and, at others times, explicitly (SLT15). In the classroom the "Bible is central rather than tacked on" (SLT12). The classroom was also understood as a safe environment for students to question and explore faith (SLT6). Two principals (CVP4, CVP8) noted that the integration of faith and learning in the classroom was not consistent through the years of schooling. It was their view that, with primary trained teachers generally more adept at integration, the vision of CEN was more evident within the primary years than within the secondary years.

The CEN vision suggests that the gospel informs practice within CEN schools. With curriculum central to schooling it is understandable that respondents perceived students should encounter the vision of CEN within the classroom. The comments of principals that the integration of faith and education is more prevalent in the primary years than the secondary years suggests that, as well as practice being inconsistent between schools, it is also inconsistent within schools. Reasons for this may include how member schools structure curriculum and differences between primary and secondary teacher education. The observation of differences between primary and secondary year levels adds another layer of complexity to the establishment of consistent school-wide integration of faith and education within CEN schools. Consequently, examining this issue further may be of benefit to CEN school leaders who look to develop and maintain practice consistent with the vision of CEN.

Aspects of practice.

Despite the holistic approach, it was noted that certain aspects of practice within CEN schools demonstrate their Christian distinctiveness more than others. Although the Bible informs school practice, it "firstly" (CPCS, 1992, p. 18) has a role to play in the devotional life of students. Principals and senior leadership team members agreed with this, suggesting that class or student devotional times, assemblies, chapel, and biblical studies classes were occasions where the Christian faith was more explicit. Programs, either developed or provided by external providers, such as *Character First, Peacewise,* and the *Vetamorphus* Christian ministry course were also utilised

by CEN schools to develop a Christian culture among the student body. The heritage of CEN schooling is one where the gospel is to penetrate every aspect of school life, but schools are not meant to replace the church. Despite this, it is evident that staff within CEN schools find it easier to integrate their faith and education when the message of Christianity is explicit such as occurs in student devotional times and biblical studies classes.

Uncertainty.

Principals and the expert reference group members appeared sceptical as to whether students understood the essential features of CEN schooling. Students in leadership positions may exhibit understanding (CVP1). In general, though, there was "hopefulness" (ERG4), or a "hunch" (CVP4) more than certainty that students, in general, were equipped to be responsive disciples who understood the essential features, and had, for example, formed a biblical worldview. While it was suggested that students are more able to articulate a biblical worldview after they graduate (ERG1), one principal commented that previous graduates of CEN schooling who applied for positions within CEN schools were not able to clearly articulate an understanding of biblical perspective or worldview (CVP7). Two principals suggested they were aiming to develop student survey tools to gather data from students, to establish whether or not they understood a biblical worldview (CVP4, CVP5).

Previous research has suggested that Christian schools do not appear to be influencing the development of a biblical worldview of students (Brickhill,

2010). Acknowledging that this could be true in CEN schools, one respondent (ERG1) suggested that schools should develop worldview courses for students, particularly, in their senior years. Yet, seeking to inculcate a biblical worldview in students, through developing senior school programs may not be enough. Rather, if the training of students to understand and apply scripture to their lives is a priority, biblical worldview instruction should begin in the primary years and continue through the life of the school (Brickhill, 2010).

CEN schools aim to inculcate a biblical worldview in students as part of equipping them for life (Dickens, et al., 2015). It is of concern that principals and members of the expert reference group are uncertain as to whether students "get it" (ERG1). Describing students as the "forgotten part of the partnership" (ERG2) suggests that school leaders in CEN perceive there to be an issue. Examining the extent to which the underlying beliefs of these schools are actually manifested in the lives of students is a positive first step in addressing this issue. Having respondents follow through with their intentions to review this area of schooling practice by surveying students may result in useful data that assists school leaders in understanding how students actually conceive the CEN approach to schooling, particularly with regard to a biblical worldview.

Active not passive.

Students in CEN schools report that the Christian faith is integrated in the educational programs (Dickens, 2013). Yet, despite teachers talking about faith, we cannot presume that students will think "Christianly about their

learning and their place in the world" (Lawrence et al., 2005, p. 47). Respondents from the expert reference group suggested that within CEN schools there might be an issue of pedagogy (ERG2) where teachers defaulted to transmitting information to students as passive learners. Transmission pedagogies are "typically unsuccessful in affecting students' underlying values" (Collier & Dowson, 2008, p. 215). Recognizing this, the expert reference group suggested approaches that were "much harder work" (ERG2). They understood students to be active in their own education (ERG3), constructing meaning from their learning experiences. Teachers needed to "listen to kids a lot more" (ERG3). Rather than simply being the recipients of instruction, students should be exposed to culture, worldview training (ERG1), and given opportunities to participate in conversations, express doubt, and question (ERG3). Integrating faith and education is not a simple task. It involves more than transmission. Engaging students in higher order thinking on the issues of faith and culture from a biblical worldview involves developing trust and connection between students and teachers (Stronks & Stronks, 2014).

5.3.3 Through curriculum.

In Table 5.4 the themes are presented that emerged from an analysis of respondent answers to the question: How do school leaders specifically ensure that the curriculum exhibits the essential features of CEN? A common theme was that the curriculum as a whole was to reflect the essential features of CEN schools. There were also differences. The themes, commonalities and differences are illustrated in Table 5.4 below, and then discussed.

Table 5.4

Leaders' Perceptions of How the Curriculum Exhibits the Essential Features of CEN

Groups	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
Themes	Holistically	Holistically	Holistically
	Dualism		

All of life is religious. Education is laden with values and meanings (Blomberg, 1980). Consequently, school curriculum is not value neutral. In attempts to integrate their Christian faith and education, CEN schools have historically used worldview terminology to demonstrate a connectedness of the Bible and life (Dickens, 2004). The language of respondents varied in describing this. Nonetheless, it is apparent that school leaders understood that the Christian faith must be evident in the curriculum of CEN schools through a biblical worldview-mediated approach.

A holistic approach.

Respondents from each group were positive about curriculum development. Curriculum documents are to have a biblical perspective that highlights a biblical position on that particular part of the curriculum (ERG4). According to respondents a Christian perspective was also to be evident in assessment practices, in considering the diversity of learners and the influence of pedagogy (SLT8). Several respondents mentioned the obligation within schools to implement the Australian Government's Australian Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum presents a challenge to Christian schooling. It is

secular, and offers a reduced view of the person, which is different to the way personhood is understood biblically (Graeig, 2015). Christian schools hold to a different worldview. The direction of a Christian school "differs from the prevailing one that champions economic utility, consumerism, and progress through science and technology" (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 172). Respondents understood the importance of critiquing the Australian Curriculum from a biblical perspective. Leaders suggested that *Understanding By Design* (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) was a useful curriculum-documenting framework for it enabled them to ask questions consistent with their biblical worldview when formulating units of study.

Establishing and maintaining a culture, where teachers develop and implement curriculum imbued with biblical worldview, is not a simple process. Despite intentions to develop a biblical perspective for curriculum units, many teachers find teaching from a biblical perspective challenging (Fisher, 2012). Respondents from each of the three groups suggested that a culture where the curriculum demonstrates a holistic integration of faith and education requires shared understandings and engagement (ERG2, CVP4, SLT8). A biblical approach to curriculum does not offer significant new and different content from that of other schools. Rather, it offers an understanding of "creation in its fullness" (Scouller, 2010, p. 54). Respondents integrated the essential features of CEN through the curriculum of their schools by dedicating time, support and resources for teaching teams to work collaboratively.

Principals understood that accountability was necessary for the curriculum to be aligned with the vision of the school. Practices that fostered accountability were variously described. Two principals suggested that all teachers were regularly required to describe how their curriculum demonstrated a Christian perspective (CVP1, CVP7). Another principal (CVP8) used an appraisal process, which included school leaders reviewing the curriculum of teachers.

The holistic approach to the integration of faith and education suggests that curriculum should be informed by the Bible. Within CEN, a biblical worldview is the primary means for this integration. It is not applied to every lesson (Stronks & Stronks, 2014). Rather, it is applied more holistically, providing a Christian perspective to the curriculum (Roy, 2008; Van Brummlen, 2002). Principals in this research understood this. They also understood that to develop practice there needed to be both time for staff to work collaboratively to plan (CVP4, CVP6), as well as mechanisms such as appraisals to keep staff accountable (CVP8). Appraisals, when focused on the school's vision and values, provide a means to enable constructive feedback and to assist teachers to deepen their understanding of practice consistent with the vision (Neidhart & Carlin, 2011).

Inconsistent integration.

Previous research into CEN schools has found that the integration of faith and education has been inconsistent (Dickens, 2013). Principals and members of the expert reference group noted that inconsistent practice exists, both within schools and among schools. Teachers can be dualistic in their thinking and

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fail to integrate faith and education (ERG4). One principal (CVP8) perceived that about half of the teaching staff demonstrated the ability to integrate their Christian faith into the curriculum. While it should be natural for Christians, thinking and teaching from a Christian perspective does not always come easily to teachers (Edlin, 2004). A lack of biblical literacy in teaching staff contributes to this (CVP5). Although advocating a Bible-based approach to education, many Christian teachers do not possess a deep understanding of the Bible and struggle to develop biblical perspectives in their curriculum (Justins, 2002; Thompson, 2003). Thus, the integration of faith and education through the curriculum necessitates equipping teachers with skills, and communal time to develop their practice.

5.3.4 The parent community.

In Table 5.5 the themes are presented that emerged from an analysis of respondent answers to the question: How do school leaders specifically integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN so that parents become more cognizant of them? As with other elements of school culture, there were both commonalities and differences in the leaders' responses. These are illustrated and discussed below.

Table 5.5

Leaders' Perceptions of How, Through Their Leadership, Parents Become

More Cognizant of the Essential Features of CEN

Groups	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
Themes	Intentionality	Intentionality	Intentionality
	Challenges in maintaining partnership	Practical partnership	Practical partnership
		Association meetings	
		Workshops	

The CEN vision statement affirms the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children are educated according to biblical values. Respondents value the concept of parent partnership. Yet, there are barriers to partnership, including parents being "time poor" (CVP7), and "generational change" (EGR4). As with other elements of culture, school leaders have the opportunity to encourage parent partnership consistent with the vision and mission of their schools. Three proactive strategies that build parent involvement are communication, participation and governance (Adams, 2008).

Intentionality.

CEN school leaders from each group understood that to develop a school culture consistent with the vision they had to be intentional in educating parents (ERG1, CVP4, SLT5). To clearly explain to parents their vision for schooling, Christian school leaders devoted attention to developing materials (Fisher 2012). Finding effective means to communicate with parents was

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important and schools needed to be creative. The enrolment interview was considered one of the best mechanisms to develop understanding of the essential features of CEN schools because it provided the opportunity to address parents one to one and gave opportunity for questions to be answered. Information nights, the school newsletter, letters to parents, and school websites were all used by schools to educate parents about the CEN approach to schooling. Respondents from all groups advocated using the newsletter editorial strategically to reinforce aspects of the vision because it readily enabled them to connect school practice with a biblical worldview.

Resources, workshops, and challenges.

The expert reference group suggested a number of resources and strategies are available to aid communication on the essential features of CEN schooling. These included the *Certificate of Christian Education*, parent visioning conferences, and the publication *Nurture*. Further, it was suggested that all schools should be engaging parents in a parenting course connected with the values of CEN (ERG1). Respondents from the other two groups did not mention using these resources, supporting the view of the expert reference group that resources are underutilised. Instead, it appeared each school was, for the most part, working independently. One principal (CVP4) described at length how the school had developed a parent seminar program held over two evenings that all parents were required to attend during their first two years at the school. This was perceived as successful in engaging parents, with the school receiving positive feedback on the program. Others were more aspirational. Two principals (CVP1, CVP6) suggested that they

were looking to develop parent courses to build engagement. While one of these principals suggested that it was "too hard at the moment" (CVP6), the other principal (CVP1) had recently visited a Tasmanian school to learn about what was understood as a successful parent seminar program. Yet another principal suggested that, in the future, they would encourage parents to undertake the *Certificate of Christian education* course facilitated by CEN (CVP7).

Resources are available to schools to support parental engagement. CEN produce a number of resources. Yet, the *Certificate of Christian Education* was the only resource mentioned either by principals or school leadership team members. CEN schools appear to adopt differing approaches to engage parents. Only one principal spoke positively about successfully engaging with parents. For the most part, principals' answers suggest that schools are working individually on an issue that is common to all. With parental partnership being an essential feature of CEN schools, it would benefit schools to work collaboratively with CEN to try to duplicate the success that is perceived within some school communities.

Practical partnership.

CEN schools were established to be "owned and operated by Christian parents" (CPCS, 1992, p. 2). In many schools parent involvement was mandatory with parents required to spend a minimum number of hours volunteering in the school, or paying money in lieu of service (Justins, 2002). In previous research that included CEN schools, it was found that ample

opportunities existed for parental involvement, but many parents did not make use of these (Mohajeran, 2006).

The participants suggested that parent participation was welcomed. Principals, in particular, noted that they looked for opportunities for parents to be involved in the everyday education of their children (CVP1, CVP2, CVP4). Parents assisted in classrooms, excursions, camps and working bees. No expert reference group member spoke of parents practically participating in school life. The senior leadership team perspectives varied considerably. Several suggested that parent partnership was highly valued. This was mostly described in terms of communication between home and school and attendance at school events. Only three of the eighteen senior leadership team respondents suggested ways in which parents actively participated in school life (SLT8, SLT13, SLT14). Further, two respondents from the same school suggested that parents did not have a shared understanding of the school's vision for education (SLT1) and that parent participation was very limited with parents being "quite passive here" (SLT17). This is consistent with the understanding that, as schools have become more complex, and with parents who do not share the vision for Christian schooling of the early pioneers joining CEN schools, participation in school life has dwindled (Dickens, 2013).

Association meetings.

CEN schools began with the establishment of Christian parent associations. From these, board members were elected to govern schools. These parent

associations remain a distinct feature of CEN schools, meeting at least yearly to elect board members, fulfil statutory obligations, provide reports to the parent community and promote parent partnership. Four of the eight principals described board governance and association meetings as important elements of the culture of CEN schools. Three principals (CVP1, CVP5, CVP7) spoke specifically of board-driven approaches to parent engagement. In each of these schools the boards were concerned about the level of parent engagement and were looking at mechanisms to address this. One of these principals (CVP5) was quite adamant that this was a responsibility of the board, describing it as "their initiative", and not "operationally driven" by the school leadership. In this school, association meetings were the primary means of educating parents to the purposes of their school. It was not apparent that parents were engaged beyond this. Only one senior leadership team respondent (SLT12) spoke of either the board or the association. To this respondent the board was integral to ensure that the mission and vision of the school was maintained.

5.3.5 Summary.

School leaders are responsible for integrating the essential features of CEN into school culture. Within CEN, this culture includes Christian staff, students from predominantly Christian families, a biblical worldview-mediated Christian curriculum, and parental responsibility and partnership (Justins, 2002).

Staff are crucial to the development of a culture consistent with the essential features of CEN schools. Respondents agreed that, with teaching

staff being educated in secular training institutions, professional development was necessary for teachers to learn to teach using a biblical worldview-mediated approach. Despite this being recognised by members of the three groups, it was the view of the expert reference group that support services including professional development were varyingly appreciated and often underutilised.

Respondents from all of the three groups suggest that students encounter the essential features of CEN schooling holistically. This is consistent with an appreciation of the lordship of Christ, and the development of distinctive practice through a biblical worldview-mediated approach. However, both the expert reference group and principals were sceptical as to whether students understood the essential features of CEN. They suggested that, while teachers may be able to develop practice imbued with Christian worldview, there is uncertainty as to whether students were able to recognise this for themselves and articulate it.

The espoused culture of CEN schooling is one where Christian perspective or biblical worldview is integrated into the curriculum. Leaders realise that to develop embedded practice requires time, resources, collaboration, and accountability. The implementation of the Australian Curriculum framed from a secular viewpoint presents a challenge for Christian educators. It was evident that the integration of faith and education in the curriculum was not consistent across CEN schools.

Christian parents established CEN schools. An essential feature of CEN schooling is parental responsibility for the education of their children. Respondents affirm parental responsibility and partnership. They are intentional in engaging parents through communication and by providing practical opportunities for participation in school life. However, barriers exist that challenge parent partnership. Parents are busy. Some parents do not share the beliefs of the early pioneers. Additionally, not all schools appear to be actively seeking to engage parents.

5.4 Perceptions of Leadership

In Table 5.6 the themes are presented that emerged from an analysis of answers to the question: How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership, as they implement the essential features into school culture? Respondents' understandings of leadership demonstrated both commonalities and differences. These are discussed below.

Table 5.6

Leaders' Perceptions of Their Own Leadership As They Implement the Essential Features into School Culture

Groups	Expert Reference Group	Principals	Senior Leadership Teams
Themes	Christian perspective	Shared leadership	Varied approaches
	No 'one' style	Vision	Servant leadership
	Servant leadership	Service	The impact of faith
	Vision	Faith	

It has been argued, "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and manage culture" (Schein, 2006, p. 11). In Christian schools, leaders have the responsibility to develop culture in ways that are consistent with the faith perspective of their school communities (Gannell, 2004). This question provided the opportunity for leaders from the expert reference group, principals' group and senior leadership team members within this study to describe how they perceive their own leadership as they implemented the essential features into school culture.

In response to this question, it is noteworthy that respondents offered very broad statements connecting their faith and leadership and, often, appeared reluctant to talk of their own leadership. One member of the expert reference group surmised that CEN leaders struggled to manage the complexity of their roles and did not take the time to reflect on their leadership (ERG1). With respect to this, five participants, from either the principals or senior leaders team groups, commented on the busyness of their positions. Three of these leaders suggested that they were often "just doing" (SLT8) and had not spent time reflecting on leadership strategies.

5.4.1 The Christian faith and leadership.

Christian school leaders lead faith communities. Their roles are complex and include both educational practices and spiritual development consistent with their faith (Banke, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2012). Respondents understood that they were, first, followers of Christ (SLT15). To be credible, leaders need to articulate an understanding of Christianity and set an example, or embody the

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values of the community, through action (Iselin, 2011; Quarmby, 2010). Respondents suggested that their faith impacted on leadership. Biblically based beliefs, a reliance on God, or Christian perspective informed leadership practice. More specifically, principals and senior leadership team members suggested that spending time reading the Bible (SLT8), or in prayer (SLT5), or being informed by the "golden rule" (CVP3) impacted on their leadership. Modelling of the Christian faith is understood to be an important aspect of Christian school leadership (Banke, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2012). Respondents from each group commented on this, suggesting that Christian school leaders led with Bible-based integrity, grace and humility, following the example of Jesus Christ.

In Christian communities, leadership is often associated with a sense of God's calling (Gannell, 2004; Hulst, 2012; O'Harae, 2007; Sears, 2006). Principals and senior leadership team members described being called, or being led by God, to their positions (CVP2, CVP8, SLT7). Three principals also expressed a degree of surprise with being in a leadership position (CVP1, CVP2, CVP8). Two commented on their "shortcomings" (CVP1) or flaws (CVP2); whereas one said, "I don't get the idea of why I am here" (CVP8). As was found in previous research into Christian schools, respondents' sense of call, coupled with a reliance on God, helped sustain them in the busyness and pressures of their roles (Gannell, 2004).

Understandings of leadership in faith-based schools are, "to some degree, distinct from the ways that educational leadership has been traditionally conceptualised" (Striepe, Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2014, p. 91). The

leadership of respondents in this research was informed by their faith. This is important, for to be credible, a leader needs to be believable (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Being believable in a faith-based school context warrants leaders embodying the life that they advocate (Hall, 2007). Thus, the faith of a Christian school leader must be evident in both word and deed. Given their responsibilities for nurturing the Christian faith in an educational setting, it is of particular concern that some principals lacked the ability to describe connections between their faith and leadership. School leaders in any setting have responsibilities. As educational and administrative leaders these responsibilities include engaging in professional development in educational practice, administration and leadership (Starratt, 2004). It is important that CEN school leaders involve themselves in professional development that allows them to reflect on their own leadership and learn from the research and experience of others within their field. Such professional development has the potential to provide insights into leadership and culture and enrich the practice of leaders.

5.4.2 Servant leadership.

Leaders of Christian schools are encouraged to utilise servant leadership (O'Harae, 2007; Quarmby, 2010; Twelves, 2004). Three out of four expert reference group members, four out of eight principals, and fifteen out of eighteen senior leadership team members suggested that servant leadership was evident in CEN schools. Servant leadership was variously described. Respondents understood the basic notions of servant leadership: leaders are first servants, and that leadership is based on service, rather than the "sheer

power of the charismatic or dynamic leader" (ERG3). Servant leaders fulfil their leadership "in a way that serves God, serves the vision of the organisation, and ultimately serves the people in that community" (ERG3). Further, servant leadership was also connected with building community, developing "the skills of others" (SLT4), and compassion. In discussing their leadership, several principals expressed humility; saying they were uncertain as to how or why they were in their leadership roles. It appeared that, as with servant leadership, they had served in community first, and were perhaps considered to be first among equals (Greenleaf, 1977), and were then invited to lead or to apply to lead.

Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) is a recognised approach to leadership, within the literature. It is also understood as biblical (Nielson, 2007). Given this, servant leadership goes hand in hand with being a Christian leader (Blanchard, 2006), following the example set by Christ (Brown, 2002). In this research, while contemporary understandings of servant leadership were acknowledged, respondents also spoke about "servanthood" (CVP1, CVP5), and leaders having a "servant heart" (ERG2, SLT5, SLT6). It was further understood to be what Jesus taught (SLT2), or "the model that Christ gave us" (ERG1). Despite the overlap, the contemporary understanding of servant leadership is not the same as the biblical concept (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; O'Harae, 2007). In differentiating, one respondent suggested that servant leadership within a Christian context involved the acceptance of pain or "the sacrifice of the leader" (ERG3).

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Respondents from all groups perceived a connection between Christian schooling and servant leadership. Although there were variations, leaders within CEN schools, were "more often than not … servant leaders who led by example" (SLT12). One principal went so far as to say that leadership without service would be a "damaged leadership model within a Christian school context" (CVP1).

Some members of the expert reference group expressed concern about misconceptions of servant leadership. In research into Lutheran schools, it was found that the understandings of servant leadership by deputy principals were limited with some respondents suggesting that servant leadership was about providing assistance to others (Ruwoldt, 2006). Expert reference group members suggested that their Christian school communities understood servant leadership in a similar way. Servant leadership was "much abused and misunderstood" (ERG3). Respondents suggested that school leaders found it challenging to lead staff effectively because of the expectation to serve. Some followers expected to be served. Leaders had the potential to be "walked over" (ERG1). This misunderstanding was evident in comments by a principal who equated servant leadership with "being up at the staffroom every lunch time, cleaning up, and doing the dishes" (CVP4).

The commonality of responses suggests that service and servant leadership is evident within CEN. While there are similarities between how respondents understood this and Greenleaf's servant leadership, the understandings of servant leadership of respondents from the three groups appeared to be informed by faith. This is consistent with previous research

into faith-based schools that found "the connection between values and practice was made explicit through the value of service" (Striepe, Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2014, p. 91). The fact that respondents understood the concept of servant leadership from their faith perspective rather than contemporary leadership practice is inconsequential. However, it is of concern that some within Christian school communities, including leaders, misunderstood biblical notions of servant leadership. Christian servant leadership begins with a relationship with God; it is a matter of the heart (Blanchard & Hodges, 2008). A community should not impose servant leadership on leaders. Nor should servant leadership be reduced to physical activities. Rather, Christian servant leadership emerges in people who have an identity in Christ and, because of this, are willing to serve God and a community through their leadership.

5.4.3 Shared leadership.

Shared leadership is leadership that is distributed, or shared, laterally among members (Harris, 2008). Six out of eight principals in the current study and ten out of eighteen senior leadership team members spoke generally about shared leadership in relation to Christian school leadership. Previous research has suggested sharing, or distributing, leadership is used to develop and perpetuate a Christian school culture (Iselin, 2011). Although the expert reference group did not specifically describe leadership as shared, or collaborative, two respondents (ERG1, ERG2) did mention that team based leadership enhanced the cultivation and maintenance of a culture consistent with the vision of CEN.

At the heart of shared leadership is an understanding that leadership is "not the preserve of an individual" (Harris, 2008, p. 173). Principals recognised this, professing that wisdom was not to be found in any one individual. Respondents were not in favour of a "lone-ranger" (ERG2), or a "superman" (CVP1), or the "sheer power of the charismatic or dynamic leader" (ERG3). Shared leadership was also about valuing others. Respondents noted that individual leaders brought different gifts to a leadership team and working together enhanced leadership and decision-making. One principal (CVP1) acknowledged that another member of the leadership team was more widely read and could better lead curriculum development.

Shared leadership is often cited in response to the complexity of schools and the nature of principals' roles (Duignan & Canon, 2011). With the complexity of leadership roles, including the volume of issues that leaders faced, principals and senior leadership team members favoured the sharing of leadership. Being more democratic and collaborative, shared leadership can appear as the right thing to do (Bezzina, 2008). CEN leaders understood this. The complexity of principals' roles was a contributing factor, but it is also possible that faith played a part with leaders demonstrating humility and valuing others' gifts and wisdom.

5.4.4 Vision.

Respondents from the expert reference and principals' groups perceived that vision was an important aspect of leadership within CEN schools. For the expert reference group, leadership was not to be based on "the sheer power of the charismatic and dynamic leader" (ERG3), or "the singular insightful

visionary leader" (ERG2), but around a commonly held vision. Leaders needed to be people of integrity. Presenting a vision, although important, was not enough. Vision "concerns tasks and it always concerns people" (ERG3). Leaders needed to support staff by providing resources to assist them in developing practice consistent with the vision. They needed to be able to work within a team to develop shared understandings. Several principals suggested that while the vision is to be shared by leadership teams, it is the role of the principal to be the main communicator of the vision of schools (CVP4, CVP7).

Transformational leadership is concerned with values and long-term goals (Northouse, 2015). Transformational leaders inspire people to believe in a vision and empowering people to achieve this same vision (Leithwood & Janzti, 2005). In describing the articulation of vision, and the need to build shared understandings, two of the thirty respondents mentioned transformational leadership. Despite not being articulated as such, it was evident that respondents' perceptions of vision-based leadership, emphasising shared practice in support of a common purpose, and supporting staff to that purpose, were in some ways, similar to elements of transformational leadership.

Vision is an important aspect of leadership within CEN schools. Respondents did not advocate approaches to leadership that relied on an individual charismatic leader. Rather, schooling was to be based on a shared vision that was to be regularly brought before the school community. This vision was not to be abstract. Leaders' roles include translating, "lofty aspirations into specific, actionable steps" (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p. 26).

Respondents acknowledged that they needed to live in a manner consistent with the vision and also make the vision tangible for followers (ERG3). The vision-based leadership described by respondents was similar in language to that of transformational leadership. Yet, only two respondents mentioned transformational leadership. A reason for this may be that, despite being unfamiliar with this widely supported leadership strategy, transformational leadership bears qualities similar to that of biblical leadership (Abbott, 1999; O'Harae, 2007; Twelves, 2004). In essence, while school leaders perceived themselves to be acting in accord with the Bible in their leadership, in promoting a biblical vision for schooling and building trust and commitment to this vision, their practices were similar to those of transformational leadership (Abbott, 1999).

5.4.5 Summary.

School leaders have the opportunity and responsibility to actively shape school culture. In this section respondents were invited to reflect on their own leadership, and its connectedness to the CEN vision. Respondents also perceived that their faith impacted upon leadership. While this was variously described, faith permeates leadership practice in CEN schools and thus aligns with the vision of CEN. Respondents across the three groups connected servant leadership with CEN schooling. Understandings of servant leadership appeared to be based on the Bible rather than the contemporary leadership strategy. Members of the expert reference and principals' groups, in particular, noted the importance of vision. Leadership within CEN schools is not about individuals. It emerges from a shared Christian vision for schooling.

Respondents from the three groups, again, appeared to base their understandings on the Christian faith rather than on widely supported leadership literature. This suggests that faith, more than leadership literature, informs the understandings of leaders within these CEN schools. However, it could also be argued that participant responses reflect a lack of understanding of educational leadership theories and that CEN school leaders are simply using their experience, including their Christian experience, and intuition to guide their practice and not professional learning on school leadership.

5.5 Understandings and Practice: The Perspectives of the Expert Reference Group

The members of the expert reference group work directly for CEN. As part of their roles, expert reference group members promote the CEN vision for schooling, facilitate professional development, and the use of resources in support of the member schools. In the findings on the perspectives of the essential features of CEN and their integration into school culture there was evidence of some dissonance between the perspectives of the expert reference group and that of school-based leaders, as represented by the principals and senior leadership team members. The expert reference group members demonstrated a greater depth of understanding than the school-based leaders of essential features of CEN and of the philosophical and theological beliefs that underpin these features. The expert reference group maintained that the essential features were not well understood or implemented within schools. The expert reference group also suggested that

the services, both resources and professional development, designed to aid understanding and practice, were often not appreciated and, consequently, underutilised.

A concern of Christian schools is the degree to which beliefs shape practice (Boerema, 2011). CEN schooling has a distinctive approach to schooling based on a number of underpinning philosophical and theological beliefs. The concerns of the expert reference group, evidenced by questions about understandings, consistency of practice, and use of resources, suggest that the distinctive approach to schooling of CEN is not being realised. A contributing factor may include a changing demographic. The CEN school movement has grown in both the number of schools and their size. Christian schools have become attractive to non-Christian families (Dickens, 2013). The percentage of people within CEN schools with a Dutch Calvinist heritage has fallen. Subsequently, the CEN group of schools is now "diverse culturally and denominationally" (Dickens, 2013, p. 9). Diverse denominational understandings of Christianity have the potential to dilute the distinctive culture of CEN schooling.

CEN schools have also not been immune to the increased expectations of government, community, and parent accountabilities. These priorities take time and energy and have potential to divert school leaders away from their efforts of developing and maintaining the distinctive culture of CEN schooling. Additionally, society has changed and religious values are declining. Consequently, as CEN schools have grown, become more complex and increasingly forced to focus on compliance, there are "fewer people able

to articulate a distinctively Christian view of education" (Parker et al., 2010, p. 48).

Previously, in this chapter, it was suggested that CEN should consider being more intentional in the education of their community about its heritage. Yet, the expert reference group perceived that existing professional development and resources available to member schools were not appreciated and utilised. This perception suggests that there may be issues with the quality of resources, and/or the delivery of these resources. Thus, the professional development offered may be a barrier to CEN educating and supporting member schools. Subsequently, in considering professional development to enrich understandings of the essential features of CEN and the philosophy and theology that underpin these features, it may be worth exploring whether any barriers exist that may prevent this and subsequently how these may be overcome.

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter the findings were organised under the questions that informed this research. The commonalities and differences from the three groups of leaders who participated in the research were described and discussed. In the next chapter the research findings will be presented, recommendations made, research limitations addressed, and a final conclusion presented.

Chapter Six: Findings and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the findings from the three groups of school leaders who participated in the research were described, discussed and analysed drawing on the literature informing the three questions that underpinned the study. In this chapter, the research context, purpose, and design are reflected upon. Following this, the limitations are addressed and the findings are presented in response to the three research questions. Recommendations related to this research are then offered, as well as suggestions for further research.

6.2 Context and Purpose of Research

In chapter one of this thesis the context and purpose of the study were introduced. Christian Education National schools were described as a relatively new Australian Christian school movement having begun in the 1960s through the efforts of Christian parents wanting to educate their children from a Christian worldview perspective consistent with their own Reformed beliefs (Deenick, 1991; Hoeksema, 1983). As with similar school movements in the Reformed tradition, these beliefs include an affirmation of God's sovereignty over all of life, the Bible informing school practice, and biblically directed parental responsibility to educate their children. Within CEN there is an understanding that this distinctive approach to education requires professional development (Justins, 2006). Consequently, CEN have dedicated resources for this purpose including the establishment of a unique

training arm, the National Institute for Christian Education, to educate the staff within member schools.

School leaders have roles in shaping school culture consistent with the beliefs of their communities. In faith-based schools, leaders' roles include the integration of the particular beliefs and values of the community through all aspects of school life including educational outcomes (Buchanan, 2013b). To integrate these beliefs into school culture it is important that school leaders first understand them and determine means by which to embed them into the life of the school. Yet to date, there is little empirical evidence as to how leaders perceive CEN, and how they develop school culture consistent with the vision of this Christian school movement.

In the limited research into CEN it has been found that the practices of CEN schools are, in general, consistent with the foundational values (Justins, 2002). There have also been some criticisms. These include the inadequate use of the Bible as a basis for education and policy (Thompson, 2003), and of inconsistency in the integration of faith and learning through Christian worldview (Dickens, 2013; Justins, 2002). Subsequently, this research has provided an opportunity for an investigation into CEN schools; in particular, to explore what CEN School leaders perceived to be the essential features of CEN schools as articulated in the vision statement, how they integrated these features into the life of schools, and their understandings of the leadership by which this is done.

In chapter two the conceptual framework, was presented. This framework encapsulates reformed Christian schooling, culture, and school leadership and forms the basis through which the research questions were explored. A review of the literature highlighted that CEN has a distinctive approach to schooling informed by a Reformed Christian heritage.

Culture is understood as complex and layered. It includes elements, some of which are seen, while others are unseen. Likewise, organisational culture exists at several levels and it is possible that differences exist between what is espoused and what those within organisations experience. Previous research has described the CEN school culture as including parental responsibility for education, the nurture of children from Christian families, a Christian curriculum, and Christian staff (Justins, 2002).

School leaders have roles in shaping culture. In Christian schools leaders have the added responsibility of nurturing the Christian faith. CEN have a particular approach to education based on a number of underlying beliefs and values. It is the role of school leaders to understand the beliefs and values of their school community and to embed them into school culture (Buchanan, 2013b). Transformational (Abbott, 1999; Sears, 2006; Twelves, 2004), shared (Berber, 2010; Sears, 2006; Twelves, 2004), and servant leadership (O'Harae, 2007; Quarmby, 2010; Twelves, 2004) were described as leadership strategies appropriate for Christian schooling.

6.3 Research Design

This research was a study into how school leaders perceived the essential features of CEN schooling, how they incorporated these features into school culture, and their perceptions about the leadership by which this was done. As the purpose of the research was to explore the perspectives of school leaders, an epistemology of constructionism was chosen. According to constructionism, meaning is embedded and experienced in the social world (Crotty, 1998) and multiple meanings of phenomena are possible (Creswell, 2003). The theoretical perspective chosen was interpretivism. Given variations of interpretivism exist, more precisely symbolic interactionism was the interpretivist approach taken. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the interaction between an individual and the world in which that individual lives (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism was an appropriate lens for this research that sought to gain insight into the perspectives of school leaders who engage with communities and construct meaning based on their experiences and social interactions.

The research methodology selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the research purpose was a case study. This was appropriate as a case study methodology can help to develop a rich image of a particular case from multiple perspectives (Simons, 2009). Research participants comprised three distinct groups. The first group, referred to as the expert reference group, comprised four personnel employed by the national office of CEN whose responsibilities include providing professional learning for school communities in the form of events, conferences, and gatherings in support of the values of

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CEN. The second group in the bounded system for this case study were the principals of all Victorian CEN schools, except me as researcher and principal of one of these schools. The third group included those involved in Christian school leadership in the bounded system of CEN Victoria, excluding the principals, who constituted the second group.

The data gathering strategies used in this research were semi-structured interviews and surveys. The expert reference group and the principals' group participated in semi-structured interviews. These interviews helped to inform the survey that was distributed to the broader group of school-based educational leaders who constituted the third group. The data gathering strategies were chosen as they enabled the participants to express their own perspectives of the essential features of CEN, how they embed these into school culture, and their perceptions of the kind of leadership by which this was done.

6.4 Limitations and Delimitations of the Research

Limitations are potential weaknesses that are an unavoidable part of the research design (Punch, 2000). This study was limited to the perceptions of school leaders that were involved in Victorian CEN schools during the year of 2014. Thus, the research undertaken provides evidence of the perceptions of CEN school leaders, but an incomplete picture, as it is the perceptions of those who agreed to participate in the study within the defined boundaries. Although multiple strategies were utilised in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings representing the perceptions of school leaders,

it is possible that different findings would emerge from research involving different participants.

The approach to data collection presents another potential limitation. The semi-structured interviews, and the online surveys occurred within a limited time frame. On a different day their perceptions may have been different. Consequently, there may be elements of the perceptions of the essentials features of CEN, the embedding of these into school culture, and the leadership by which they do this, that were not shared by participants in this study.

Delimitations are the boundaries or defining limits applied by the researcher (Punch, 2000). This study was set within the context of the sixteen CEN school campuses in the state of Victoria, Australia during the year 2014. It could be argued that the research could have included all CEN schools and, therefore, more school leaders. This was considered impractical in the time available for this research. Instead, throughout this study, it was made clear that the study was confined to school leaders associated with Victorian CEN schools.

6.5 The Research Questions

In this section summaries of the findings from the three research questions are presented.

6.5.1 Research question one.

The CEN vision affirms the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life, the gospel rather than cultural forces are to guide school practice, and parents are responsible for the education of their children (CEN, 2015, "Our vision"). In the literature it was evident that CEN schooling is part of a wider movement of reformed Christian schools that are informed by theological and philosophical beliefs associated with their Reformed heritage. The first question sought to understand participants' perceptions of the essential features of CEN, as articulated in the vision statement. The question was: **What do CEN school leaders understand to be the essential features of Christian Education National schools, as articulated in the vision statement?**

Table 6.1

Summary of Respondents' Views About the Essential Features of CEN Schools

Essential Features of CEN	Expert Reference Group Members	Principals	Senior Leadership Team Members	Total
Lordship of Christ	4	7	5	16
Biblical-worldview informed practice	4	7	15	26
Parental responsibility for education	4	6	14	24
Total in group /overall	**4**	**8**	**18**	**30**

CEN school leaders understood there to be three essential features of CEN schools. These were the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life, biblical-

worldview informed practice, and parental responsibility for education. These are consistent with those espoused in the CEN vision statement.

The lordship of Christ over all of life underpins the CEN approach to schooling. For principals and expert reference group members life was not to be split into sacred and secular domains. Therefore, within schools, the Christian faith was not to be confined to religious instruction classes or chapel. Rather, because Christ is lord over all of life, they advocated a holistic integration of faith and learning where the Christian faith could permeate all aspects of schooling.

Believing that all of life is religious, the Bible is to inform practice within CEN schools. Respondents from each group specifically mentioned a creation-fall-redemption worldview framework as a vehicle for this. Despite the almost universal identification of biblical worldview as an essential feature, leaders' understandings and practices varied. The expert reference group connected biblical-worldview informed practice with professional development. Principals and senior leadership team members did not. The expert reference group perceived that biblical worldview-mediated practice was not well understood, nor consistently implemented within CEN schools. This perception of dissonance between the expert reference group and the school-based leaders and between language and practice was evidenced by the divergent comments of principals who either questioned elements of, or could not adequately describe, the CEN approach to biblically informed practice.

Christian parents, who understood their biblical responsibility to educate their children, established CEN schools. School leaders understood this. They described parental responsibility for education primarily in terms of 'partnership'. The main expression of parental responsibility was parental governance. However, maintaining parental responsibility as an essential feature was proving difficult. It was the perception of principals, in particular, that work commitments, the busyness of family life, and lack of understanding of the biblical responsibility of parents to educate their children were all eroding this essential feature of CEN schools.

Despite the shared acknowledgement of the three essential features of CEN, there existed considerable dissonance between the convictions of the expert reference group that represents the national office staff of CEN and those of school-based leaders. The expert reference group suggested that the essential features were variously understood. This view was supported by the findings where the expert reference group recognised that the essential features emerged out of a rich Reformed heritage and underlying theological and philosophical concepts. On the other hand, school-based leaders' comments were more often broad, lacking a depth of understanding of the essential features and without reference to the underlying Reformed heritage.

Previously, in the NICE developed *Certificate of Christian Education Student Guide,* concern was expressed that, as schools have grown and become more complex, fewer people were able to describe their distinctive approach to schooling (Parker et al., 2010). The lack of depth of school-based leaders' understandings, as well as the divergent views of principals,

evidenced in the findings, supported this assertion. Moreover, the findings suggest that the beliefs that underpin the vision and philosophy of CEN schools are at risk of being lost.

The vision for CEN schooling has been informed by a number of theological and philosophical beliefs connected with the Reformed tradition. These beliefs are rich in meaning and act to form a basis for holistic gospel-driven practice that honours the lordship of Christ over all of life and supports parents in their biblical responsibility to educate their children. School-based leaders' underdeveloped perceptions of the essential features suggest that the espoused vision statement of CEN is more of a cultural artefact that is more a remnant of the past than a deeply understood set of rich, tightly held, statements informing practice within schools. This is an issue which, if left unchecked and if it has not already happened, has the potential to compromise the identity of CEN schools. To address this issue and foster their distinctive approach to Christian schooling, it may be necessary for the chief executive officer of CEN, together with the principal of NICE, to give consideration to new ways of clearly articulating the reformed Christian schooling beliefs that underpin the CEN philosophy for schooling. Further, there is merit in these national leaders of CEN educating the leadership of member schools as to the importance of this heritage and how it can provide a depth and richness to their expression of Christian schooling in practice.

Table 6.2

Summary of Research Question 1, Findings and Insights Drawn From the

Findings

Research question one: What do CEN school leaders understand to be the essential features of Christian Education National schools?	
Findings	**Insights Drawn from the Findings**
CEN school leaders understood the essential features to be the lordship of Jesus Christ, biblical worldview informed practice, and parent responsibility for education.	Leaders perceptions of CEN were consistent with those espoused in the CEN vision statement.
The expert reference group described the essential features in language consistent with the Dutch Reformed heritage, and associated theological and philosophical beliefs, of the school movement.	CEN has a distinctive approach to schooling.
Principals and senior leadership team members understandings of the essential features were often broad and were not described with reference to the heritage and underlying philosophical and theological beliefs of CEN	The dissonance between the understandings of the expert reference group and school-based leaders suggests that this distinctive approach is at risk of being lost over time.
Parental responsibility for education was valued, but proving difficult to maintain.	Despite the essential feature of parental responsibility of CEN being valued, it is evident that it is not held, to the same degree as when these schools were established.

6.5.2 Research question two.

Culture is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon. In the literature it was found

that Christian staff, students from predominantly Christian families, a Christian

curriculum, and parent partnership are all components of CEN school culture

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(Justins, 2002). Research question two sought to understand the perceptions of school leaders as to how they integrated the essential features of CEN into the above aspects of CEN schools. The question asked: **How do school leaders specifically seek to integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN schooling as articulated in the vision statement?**

Perceptions of the integration of the essential features through staff.

Respondents understood that leadership was integral to the integration of the essential features of CEN in school culture through staff. By what they say and do leaders influence culture (Schein, 2010). Respondents understood that to develop a culture consistent with the essential features, school leaders and boards needed to believe in and support the vision of CEN. Further, school leaders were to embody leadership consistent with the vision, and establish strategies to implement it. The employment of Christians was understood to be an important foundation for the establishment of a Christian school culture. However, these staff, often trained in secular institutions, were generally ill-equipped to think and teach in a manner consistent with the approach espoused by CEN. Consequently, leaders needed to be purposeful in providing professional learning opportunities for teachers to develop their practice, including time to share their learning and to collaborate with colleagues to develop curriculum and practice consistent with a biblical worldview.

CEN's training arm, NICE, was recognised by respondents from the three groups that comprised this study as a professional development provider that is utilised by them to develop practice consistent with the vision. Despite this, members of the expert reference group perceived that schools variously engaged with the services and training of NICE. Respondents' comments confirmed this. NICE's *Certificate of Christian Education* was endorsed by school leaders in each group. Yet, only one principal alluded to having completed a post-graduate course through NICE. Further, school practices varied with some advocating all teaching staff engage with the services and training of NICE as a condition of employment, whereas other school leaders appeared not to value the services and training offered by NICE to assist teachers in practice consistent with the CEN vision.

NICE has a mission that includes articulating an understanding of, and developing practice consistent with, a biblical worldview (Justins, 2006). Post-graduate programs are commonly grounded in practice, aiming to equip teachers to be good practitioners rather than theorists (Blomberg, 2013). The underutilisation of NICE suggests that schools are using other means to train their teachers to teach from a biblical worldview or not training them at all. Establishing the reasons for the underutilisation of NICE should be a priority of its board and principal. Overcoming any shortcomings, perceived or otherwise, of CEN's training arm has the potential to deepen the understanding and improve the practice of the CEN approach to schooling within member schools.

Perceptions of how students encounter the essential features.

Respondents from the three groups understood that students encounter the essential features holistically, across the life of the school. Accordingly, the actions of teachers, school policies, practices, and curriculum all provided opportunities for students to encounter the vision of CEN. This view is consistent with an affirmation of the lordship of Christ over all of life.

It was the perception of respondents that teachers were to invite students to be responsive disciples of Jesus Christ. For students to encounter the essential features, the curriculum as a whole was to foster exploration of, and a sense of wonder in, God's creation. Through their practice teachers were to encourage students to see the connectedness of the Christian faith and life. Although respondents purported a whole of school approach, the findings suggested that school leaders perceived that students encounter the essential features in particular aspects of practice where the Christian message was more explicit. These aspects of practice included devotional times, assemblies, chapel, biblical studies, and programs developed or provided by external providers.

CEN schools aim to inculcate in students a biblical worldview to assist them to become responsive disciples across the whole of life (Dickens et al., 2015). Yet, members of the expert reference group and principals were sceptical as to whether students understood biblical worldview. Given the rich tradition of using biblical worldview as a means to integrate faith and education (Dickens, 2013) within CEN this is difficult to comprehend. In

explaining their comments it was suggested that there was simply no data, and it could only be assumed that students actually understood a biblical worldview. Alternatively, respondents suggested that the focus of the school movement was more concerned with assisting Christian parents, leaders, and teachers in developing Christian schooling than ensuring students were able to articulate and understand a Christian perspective or worldview. Additionally, pedagogy may be at fault. Instead of transmission strategies or direct instruction, teaching and learning needed to invite students to be more actively engaged with the curriculum. Thus, instruction needed to be balanced with time to discuss aspects of faith as well as practical opportunities to serve. While there is validity in each of these explanations it is clear that leaders agree that more needs to be done to ensure that practice matches the rhetoric and students in CEN schools are actually being equipped to be responsive disciples and can articulate and understand a biblical worldview.

Perceptions of how the curriculum exhibits the essential features.

School leaders from the three groups understood that the curriculum as a whole was to exhibit the essential features of CEN. They advocated a biblical worldview-mediated approach that critiqued the Australian Curriculum from a Christian perspective. It was their understanding that implementing curriculum imbued with a biblical worldview involved allocating time, support and resources for teaching staff to work collaboratively around shared understandings. Further, principals suggested that linking curriculum development to teaching staff appraisal processes held staff accountable to the alignment of the curriculum with the essential features of CEN, and thus

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aided practice. Members of the expert reference group and principals perceived that the practice of integrating the Christian faith and education was inconsistent within CEN schools. This finding supports previous research into CEN schools (Dickens, 2013).

Perceptions of how parents become more cognizant of the essential features.

The CEN vision statement affirms parents' responsibility to educate their children from a biblical perspective (Dickens, 2013). Leaders from the three groups valued the concept of partnering with parents in education. They were intentional in communicating to parents understandings about Christian schooling, utilising a range of resources including newsletters and information nights. Principals and members of the expert reference group noted that there were barriers to engaging parents. Many parents were busy, and unavailable to participate in school life. The parent population of CEN schooling has also changed over time; it is less homogenous. Additionally, Christian schools operate in a pluralistic and secular society (Collier, 2013) where religious values are in decline (Neidhart, 2014).

The expert reference group advocated the use of resources specifically developed to support member schools. Principals and senior leadership team members did not mention these resources. Rather, efforts to engage parents varied from school to school. Despite examples of good practice, few school leaders appeared to collaborate with colleagues and learn from other schools. Likewise, perceptions of parental participation in school life varied. Principals suggested that they actively encouraged parents to be involved in the

everyday life of the school. However, responses from the senior leadership team members suggested that parent involvement varied markedly from school to school. Established by Christian parents, the maintenance of parent associations from which parent boards are elected remains a feature of CEN schools. Principals suggested that board members were concerned about parental engagement and were looking to address this.

Table 6.3

Summary of Research Question 2, Findings and Conclusions

Research question two: How do school leaders specifically seek to integrate into school culture the essential features of CEN schooling as articulated in the vision statement?	
Findings	**Insights Drawn from the Findings**
Through staff	
The expectations of leadership, the employment of Christian staff, and professional development aid the integration of the essential features through staff.	Intentional leadership that included professional development from a biblical worldview aided the integration of the essential features of CEN into school culture.
The services and professional development offered by CEN's training arm, NICE, that could assist biblically informed practice were not uniformly appreciated and underutilised.	It is incongruous that leaders recognised teachers needed worldview training yet underutilised the training offered by NICE.
So that students are exposed to them	
Students are exposed to the essential features through aspects of practice in which the Christian message is more explicit rather than holistically. Expert reference group members and principals suggested that students may not understand biblical worldview.	CEN advocates a holistic biblical worldview mediated approach to education. It is almost incomprehensible that students would not understand biblical worldview.
Through the curriculum	
School leaders advocated a biblical worldview-mediated approach to the curriculum. The practice of integrating the Christian faith and education was inconsistent.	Despite their efforts, the implementation of a biblical worldview mediated approach to curriculum remains under-developed or a work in progress in CEN schools.
To the parent community	
School leaders value and endeavour to foster parent partnership. Parent partnership and practices to engage parents varies from school to school.	Societal pressures, a changing demographic and the failure of leaders to learn from best practice compromises parent partnership.

6.5.3 Research question three.

Leaders in faith-based schools have roles that include integrating the faith of their community into school life (Buchanan, 2013a). The literature reviewed for this study suggested that servant leadership (O'Harae, 2007; Quarmby, 2010; Twelves, 2004), transformational leadership (Abbott, 1999; Twelves, 2004; Sears, 2006), and shared leadership (Berber, 2010; Iselin, 2011; Sears, 2006; Twelves, 2004) have been aligned with Christian school leadership. This question sought to gain insight into the understandings of school leaders as to how they perceived their own leadership in integrating the essential features of CEN into school culture. The question was: **How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?**

In faith-based schools leadership includes the combination of education and leadership influenced by the particular faith of the school community (Buchanan, 2011). In this research, school leaders suggested that their leadership was informed by the Christian faith. Additionally, they believed that the essential features of CEN were integrated into school culture through leadership that can be described as servant leadership, shared leadership and vision-based leadership.

The leaders of CEN schools considered themselves first to be followers of Christ. They understood that their faith, to some degree, shaped their practice. Specifically, principals and senior leadership team members believed Christian practices including Bible reading and prayer aided their

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leadership. Leaders from each group also described a sense of being called by God to their role. Not all leaders were able to describe the relationship between their faith and leadership. Several leaders' comments were broad; while others suggested they lacked the time to reflect on their own leadership.

School leaders perceived servant leadership to be evident in CEN schools. Servant leadership is recognised as an approach to leadership initially conceptualised by Greenleaf (1977). Servant leadership is also a biblical concept. While perceptions of servant leadership varied, respondents' conceptions appeared to be informed by the Christian faith, understanding that Christ taught and modelled service, rather than that conceptualised by Greenleaf of which they seemingly had no knowledge. Although in favour of servant leadership, members of the expert reference group expressed concern about misconceptions of the concept within the Christian community.

Principals and senior leadership team members advocated a shared approach to leadership within CEN schools. Members from both the expert reference group and principals spoke against individualistic charismatic leadership. Instead, they acknowledged that people had different skills and gifts and that working together often enhanced leadership and decision-making.

Respondents also understood that vision played a significant role in the integration of the essential features of CEN into school culture. They encouraged the practice of sharing a vision for education and encouraging and empowering people towards that vision.

Thus, a finding of this research is that respondents perceived that the essential features of CEN are aided by leadership that embodies the Christian life and includes shared leadership, service, and constantly and intentionally encouraging people to embrace a vision for Christian schooling. These findings are similar to those of previous research into Christian schools where it was found that leaders develop sustainable cultures through embodying the life they advocate, telling the cultural story of the school, distributing leadership and being intentional about leadership succession (Iselin, 2011).

A finding of this research is that CEN school leaders' perceptions about leadership were often broad. Several were unable to articulate their own leadership, with one suggestion that the busyness of leadership can prevent adequate reflection. Essentially, these leaders demonstrated a lack of understanding of leadership theories and of the kind of leadership appropriate to lead CEN schools. This suggests that leaders within CEN schools have not adequately engaged in leadership professional development. Knowledge of leadership theories, and opportunities to reflect on these theories as leaders engage in practice, have the potential to enhance leadership in schools, assisting communities in developing practice based on vision.

Table 6.4

Summary of Research Question 3, Findings and Conclusions

Research question three: How do CEN school leaders perceive their own leadership as they implement the essential features into school culture?	
Findings	**Insights Drawn from the Findings**
The Christian faith, rather than contemporary leadership theories, informed the practice of CEN school leaders. Leaders' reflections on their own leadership were often broad. School leaders understood that the essential features of CEN are integrated into school culture through servant leadership, shared leadership, and vision-based leadership.	Leaders in CEN schools consider themselves Christians first and then leaders. Their faith informs their leadership most readily through service / servanthood. CEN school leaders can struggle to reflect on, and articulate their own leadership suggesting a lack of leadership development training.

6.6 Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the findings. They are presented in relation to the three components of this research, namely: the essential features of CEN, the integration of the essential features into school culture, leadership in CEN schools.

6.6.1 The essential features of CEN.

Bring clarity to the identity of CEN.

CEN has a distinctive approach to education associated with their Reformed Christian heritage. It is recommended that the National Board and Chief Executive Officer of CEN facilitate the development of a comprehensive description of their distinctive approach to education and the theological and philosophical understandings that lie beneath these. This has the potential to provide member schools, and leaders within these schools, with greater depth and clarity as to how CEN is envisioned.

Educate school leaders to the essential features of CEN.

That the National Board and Chief Executive Officer of CEN prioritise educating those entrusted with leading school communities, member school boards and school-based leaders, to better understand the essential features of CEN schooling. If leaders are to shape school culture according to their distinctive approach to the faith, it is important that these leaders have deep understandings of the vision and values of CEN.

6.6.2 The integration of the essential features into school culture.

Review the professional development offered by NICE.

CEN has long promoted biblical worldview-mediated practice. School leaders in this research acknowledged that teachers require professional development to develop teaching practice consistent with the vision of CEN. Yet, the

resources and professional development offered by NICE, particularly post-graduate courses, were not uniformly valued and utilised. Consequently, it is recommended that the Chief Executive Officer of CEN conduct a thorough review of the professional development programs and resources offered by NICE.

Bring more focus to student learning.

CEN understands that the gospel rather than cultural forces are to inform practice. NICE provides resources to assist teachers to teach from a Christian worldview. In this research, leaders expressed uncertainty as to whether students could articulate the essential features of CEN, or understood a Christian perspective. Subsequently, it is recommended that the professional development provided by NICE includes a focus on student learning to ensure that students actually understand and are being equipped to be responsive disciples of Jesus Christ.

Develop worldview courses for students.

CEN schooling began because Christian parents wanted their children educated from a Christian perspective consistent with their beliefs. CEN schooling is often spoken of in terms of a partnership between parents and the school. Leaders expressed uncertainty as to whether students had understood the Christian perspective of CEN and could articulate a biblical worldview. Given the rich heritage of CEN in the use of biblical worldview this is of serious concern. It is, therefore, recommended that CEN develop resources to support student understandings of and the ability to articulate a

biblical worldview. That is, resources that can be used within schools, that explicitly teach worldview to students, are developed.

Prioritise parental engagement.

Parental responsibility and partnership is an essential feature of CEN. Preserving this essential feature requires sustained and coordinated effort. It is recommended that NICE develop resources for member schools based on exemplars of practice in the engagement of parents.

6.6.3 Leadership in CEN schools.

Facilitate the establishment of an educational leadership development framework.

That the National Board and Chief Executive Officer of CEN facilitate the establishment of a leadership development framework for leaders and aspiring leaders working in CEN schools. This framework would include a range of initiatives and professional learning opportunities to assist leaders within schools and school communities in developing leaders.

Professional development within principal employment contracts.

That CEN guide member schools to ensure that principals are equipped to lead Christian schools. Specifically, that CEN recommend that the professional development clauses within contracts of employment include adequate times for reflection, professional learning in educational leadership theory and practice specifically for Christian schools.

The professional development of school leaders.

Christian school leaders have complex roles that include developing practices consistent with the beliefs and values of their school communities. It is recommended that school leaders undertake ongoing professional development that includes leadership informed by the Bible and consistent with CEN's approach to Christian schooling, such as post-graduate courses offered by NICE or equivalent. This has the potential to enhance the capacity of school leaders to lead their schools in developing practices consistent with a biblical worldview, as well as to set an example to staff regarding professional development expectations.

6.7 Recommendations for future research

This research has raised a number of issues about the essential features of CEN schools and how these features are integrated into school culture.

Christian parents founded CEN. Schools are parent-governed, with parental partnership an essential feature. Over time the parent population of CEN schools has changed. In this research, leaders reported that barriers existed to parental engagement. Research into parent perceptions of CEN and how schools seek to engage parents may benefit schools in understanding both the barriers to parent engagement and effective means of engaging parents in these communities.

CEN schools exist to partner with parents in the education of their children towards responsive discipleship. The professional development of

educators aims at assisting them to teach from a biblical worldview. Yet, the findings of this research suggest uncertainty as to whether students understood the essential features of CEN schooling. Researching the understandings of students has the potential to assist CEN schools as they aim to develop school cultures consistent with their vision for schooling.

Leaders in faith-based schools have complex roles that include both educational outcomes and the development of a culture consistent with the values of the school community (Buchanan, 2013a). Leaders require professional development (Buchanan, 2013c). Researching leaders' understandings of the professional development they believe they require and the professional learning they undertake has the potential to assist the CEN community to ensure that leaders are equipped for the complex task before them.

6.8 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter the research context, purpose, and design were discussed. The limitations and delimitations of the research were addressed and the findings presented in response to the three research questions. In addition, recommendations related to this research were made together with suggestions for further research.

In the final chapter a conclusion is presented.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

As argued in Chapters 1, 2, and 5, CEN has a distinctive approach to Christian schooling. This research sought to study the perceptions of Victorian CEN school leaders. Symbolic interactionism was understood as an appropriate interpretivist lens by which to do this, as it focuses on the meaning an individual gives aspects of reality. To understand the perceptions of these leaders the researcher entered their world and developed theories based on their perceptions of CEN schooling. As a result there is evidence of leaders' perceptions about the essential features of CEN, how to embed them into school culture, and the kind of leadership by which this is done.

This research identified that school leaders were aware of the essential features of CEN, as articulated in the vision statement. The expert reference group understood that the essential features were informed by a number of underlying theological and philosophical concepts associated with the Reformed heritage of CEN. They also linked biblically informed practice with professional development. School-based leaders' perceptions of the essential features lacked specificity and only one of them actually connected the essential features to the Reformed heritage of CEN. Additionally, there were principals who questioned elements, or demonstrated a lack of depth in understanding of the CEN approach to schooling. Thus, it appears likely, over time that, the theological and philosophical beliefs informing the CEN approach to schooling are at risk of being lost.

School leaders in general perceived that the essential features of CEN should be embedded holistically into school culture. Intentional leadership that

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included targeted professional development of staff aided this. They valued parent partnership but perceived difficulties in their engagement of parents. School leaders expressed concerns as to whether students actually understood biblical worldview and the essential features of CEN. Given the emphasis on biblical worldview within CEN schools and its use in teaching and learning this is almost incomprehensible. The findings suggested that the resources developed by NICE, in support of biblically informed practice, were not uniformly valued and, consequently, were underutilised. Clearly this is a barrier to consistent practice across CEN schools.

According to this research, leaders perceived that their Christian faith informed their leadership practice. However, statements were often broad and some leaders confessed that they had not reflected adequately on their own leadership. This suggests that leadership development may be an issue within CEN schools. Despite this, servant leadership, shared leadership and vision-based leadership were all described in relation to CEN school leadership.

The establishment of CEN schooling is largely the result of the work and vision of Christian parents with a Reformed heritage. Over time the community that is CEN has changed. The Christian parent population has become denominationally diverse. Schools have grown in size and, in many instances, opened their doors to families who are not faithful church attending Christians. Further, both education and society have changed. The changing face of education, with increased accountability and compliance, can consume the attention of school leaders. Religious values are on the wane

and secularisation on the rise. Furthermore, CEN remains an association of school associations, limiting the ability of the national office staff to assist schools in developing practice consistent with the vision. Consequently, the lack of depth of understanding of the essential features evident in this research, as well as the inconsistent practice within CEN schools, are understandable. At this juncture CEN is in a vulnerable position. To maintain its identity as a distinctive Christian schooling movement it is critical that CEN reflect on its beliefs, its structure and its professional development strategies before it simply becomes merely "a provider of a private education product" (Parker et al., 2010, p. 48).

Finally, this research has provided rich data on how CEN is perceived by the leaders of CEN schools as they attempt to embed their distinctive approach to education into school practice. Consequently, the findings and recommendations of this research provide support for the enhancement of practice that looks to honour the vision of CEN as it partners with parents in the education of their children from a Christian perspective.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

Principal Investigator: A/Prof Kathleen Engebretson
Student Researcher: Mr Christopher Prior (HDR student)
Ethics Register Number: 2014 40V
Project Title: From Vision to Reality: The perceptions and practices of leadership personnel in
Christian Education National schools
Risk Level: Low Risk 3
Date Approved: 01/04/2014
Ethics Clearance End Date: 31/12/2014

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 31/12/2014. In order to comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis. If an extension of time is required researchers must submit a progress report.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to ACU HREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. Failure to provide permission letters to ACU HREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

Researchers who fail to submit an appropriate progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and advise us by email at your earliest

convenience. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:
1.   All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2.   Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.
3.   All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress / Final Report form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/research/support_for_researchers/human_ethics/forms

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/research/support_for_researchers/human_ethics/forms

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Kylie Pashley
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Dr Nadia Crittenden

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University

Appendix 2: Permission letter to Principals

9ᵗʰ May 2014

XXXX
XXXX
XXXX

Dear Principal

I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree at Australian Catholic University (ACU).

As part of this degree I am conducting research under the topic *'The Perceptions and Practices of Leadership Personnel in Christian Education National'*.

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of leadership personnel (Principals, Deputy Principals, Heads of School, and Heads of Teaching and Learning) of the Christian Education National (CEN) education philosophy as articulated in the CEN vision statement and their perceptions of how they enable this vision within a school community. With school leadership personnel having an integral role in developing practices consistent with the values of the school, this research is significant in that it has the potential of enhancing an understanding of the philosophy of Christian Education National and how it may be integrated within the life of these schools.

To undertake this research, I am writing to you to seek permission to conduct research in your school by inviting your leadership personnel to be involved in an online survey of approximately thirty minutes duration. The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (Ethics Register Number: 2014 40v).

In addition to this introductory letter I have provided you a Participant Information Letter that outlines the research.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and thank you for taking the time to consider this request. Should you desire to grant permission, please write to me, Chris Prior, PO BOX 37, Frankston, 3199.

Yours Sincerely,

Christopher Prior

◆ACU

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER (Groups 1 and 2)

PROJECT TITLE: The Perceptions and Practices of Leadership Personnel in Christian Education National.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Kath Engebretson
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Christopher Prior
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Education (EdD)

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
The aim of this research is to investigate how leadership personnel (Principals, Deputy Principals, Heads of School, and Heads of Teaching and Learning) perceive the Christian Education National education philosophy as articulated in the CEN vision statement and their perception of how they enable this vision within a school community.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Christopher Prior and [if appropriate] will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Associate Professor Kath Engebretson.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
This research involves the collection of the personal perceptions of people regarding their understanding of Christian Education National. To prevent these perceptions being identified pseudoynms will be employed and all information treated as confidential.

What will I be asked to do?
As a participant in this project you will be interviewed once in a mutually convenient location. This interview will take approximately an hour and be guided by the following questions:

- What do leadership personnel understand to be the essential features of Christian Education National schools?
- How do they specifically seek to integrate the CEN philosophy as articulated in the vision statement into school culture?
- How do the school leaders perceive their own leadership and how is this consistent with the vision statement of CEN?

The interview will be digitally recorded.

1

What are the benefits of the research project?

This research has the potential to benefit individuals by enhancing their understanding of the education philosophy of Christian Education National and how it may be integrated this within the life of these schools.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results from this study may be summarised and appear in a relevant educational publicationor may be provided to other researcher, but only in a form that does not identify participants in any way.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Participants in the research will be provided with a copy of the results.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson
Faculty of Education and Arts
Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 4115 DC
Fitzroy Victoria 3065
Ph.: 03 9953 3292
Email: Kath.Engebretson@acu.edu.au

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2013 xxxx). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: res.ethics@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

In order to participate in this research please sign both copies of the Consent Form and return the researchers copy to Chris Prior, PO BOX 37, Frankston, 3199.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Prior
Student Researcher

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Appendix 4: Consent Form

ACU education

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: **From vision to reality: The perceptions and practices of leadership personnel in Christian Education National.**

NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Associate Professor Kath Engebretson

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: Christopher Prior, Doctor of Education (EdD) student

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in a one-on-one interview for approximately sixty minutes that will be digitally recorded, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....

SIGNATURE ....
DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): ....
DATE:............................

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ....
DATE:...............................

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Appendix 5: Senior Leadership Team Likert survey responses

Statement		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	The school promotes a strong connection between home and the school	0	1	0	3	13
2.	The gospel is central to the operation of this school	0	0	1	4	12
3.	The Bible is used to provide a Christian perspective to the curriculum	0	1	0	7	9
4.	All staff at this school profess to be practising Christians	0	1	0	3	13
5.	Staff have opportunities to participate in CEN conferences	0	0	1	3	13
6.	Devotional times are the main instrument for promoting the Christian faith in the school	1	4	6	5	1
7.	Christian discipleship in the student body is encouraged	0	0	1	12	4
8.	Increasing enrolments is more important than providing a Christian curriculum	6	8	2	0	1
9.	The Christian beliefs of the school do not influence the way the curriculum is developed	11	5	0	1	0
10.	The curriculum at this school over emphasizes academic subjects	1	14	1	0	1
11.	Parent involvement is valued in the school community	0	1	0	6	10
12.	School leaders consider the Christian beliefs of the school in the formation of policy	0	0	0	5	12