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**THE PHENOMENON OF SPECIAL
CHARACTER IN NEW ZEALAND STATE
INTEGRATED SCHOOLS**

**A NATURALISTIC STUDY OF
TWO CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
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ABSTRACT

This is a case study research project within a naturalistic research paradigm. It explores the nature, meaning and significance of the Special Character of New Zealand State Integrated schools. Utilising qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis, it focuses specifically on the cultures of two urban, single sex, Catholic secondary schools.

In the area of Catholic education, the theoretical framework for the research draws from a range of Vatican documents, contemporary international research in the field of Catholic education and the experience of the researcher as an educator in the New Zealand Catholic education system. In terms of theories of organisational culture, it has been influenced by the work of Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991), Schein (1992) and Neville (1994).

Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act, 1975, a Catholic school in New Zealand is a State Integrated school, providing an education with a Special Character. As such, it has both secular and religious purposes. As a State school, it delivers the New Zealand national curriculum in common with all secondary schools. As a Catholic school, its purpose is the development of the religious knowledge, faith and spirituality of its students within the specific context of the religious and educational tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. Under the Act, the maintenance and preservation of its Special Character is a legally binding responsibility for each school in partnership with the Crown.

Exploring the culture of each research school, this study examines those features that give rise to its distinctiveness and substance to its Special Character. It investigates the meaning attributed to the term 'Special Character' and considers issues arising from these perceptions. The process of Special Character transmission is outlined and its implications are discussed. These areas are explored through four major emergent themes, including cultural confluence, the significance of founding traditions, cultural transmission process and shared spirituality. Finally, in the light of the distinctive features that constitute the Special Character of the Catholic secondary school culture and the processes that both maintain and preserve it, a Grounded Theory of Special Character culture is proposed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 1975, the New Zealand government passed the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975), a binding agreement with a group of private schools that enabled them to receive full state aid thus relieving the financial difficulties that threatened their very existence. A requirement of the Act, however, was that the owners or proprietors of these schools had to “define their ‘special character’ in the integration agreement signed by the school proprietors and the Ministry of Education, thereby assuring them of legal protection” (Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993: 246). The term ‘special character’ has become common for those involved in New Zealand education. Yet, beyond the brief basic definitions contained in integration agreements, what is really known about its nature, its meaning and its significance for Integrated schools?

The purpose of this research is to explore those questions and, given that the context of New Zealand society and education has changed dramatically since 1975, to investigate the processes by which the ‘special character’ of State Integrated schools is sustained, developed and protected.

Twenty-five years have passed since the establishment of the State Integrated schools system. In that time, 334 schools have become State Integrated schools, receiving full Government funding. With the exception of nine proprietors, the majority of legal owners of Integrated schools are members of The Association of Proprietors of Integrated Schools (APIS), a body that acts in their combined interests in relation to funding, legislation and development, entering as required into negotiation with the Ministry of Education. A study of the Association’s membership reveals a range of religious and philosophical traditions, including schools within the Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Catholic Churches and a group of inter-denominational schools under the generic title of ‘Christian’. In addition, a number of Rudolf Steiner and Maori schools are also members. By far, proprietors within the Roman Catholic education system represent the largest single group

of APIS members. Catholic Education Office statistics from 1 March 1999 show a total of 238 Catholic schools in New Zealand. Together, these schools provide an education for 57,519 students; 47 Secondary schools catering for 25,123 students and employing 1559 teachers and 32,396 students at Primary level with a total staff of 1569 teachers.

This ethnographic inquiry investigates the Special Character¹ of two Catholic secondary schools in an urban environment, as examples of State Integrated schools. There are three major reasons for this research focus. Firstly, the Catholic education system in New Zealand has an established and long historical tradition in New Zealand; its first schools being established in the mid-1800's. Secondly, as outlined above, it represents the largest single group of State Integrated schools and proprietors. Thirdly, it is the education system with which this researcher has had most experience, having spent most of her professional life working in and for New Zealand Catholic schools.

When this study was first undertaken, the focus was intended to be the **influence** of Special Character on the culture of the Catholic school as a State Integrated school. In other words, I was seeking to define those features and qualities of the school that make it distinctive in terms of its function as an organisation. However, after two years of research, it became increasingly evident that the central issue for Special Character education is not what makes it different, but how its distinctive ethos or spirit is transmitted. It became clear that there was a need for research into the **process** through which State Integrated schools, specifically Catholic schools, preserve, maintain and promote their Special Character education.

Through this study, it is hoped that these schools will find support in their efforts to consolidate their Special Character, helping them, perhaps, to find fruitful and effective ways of responding to the ever-present demands and tensions involved in a rapidly changing educational environment.

¹ It is common practice in New Zealand Catholic education to use upper case initials for this term. This convention will now be followed throughout this thesis.

A focus on Catholic education in the New Zealand context

Since the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965), there has been renewed interest within the Catholic church in the nature of its schools; an awareness of the need to better understand their Special Character if they are to respond effectively to the changing needs of families and young people. The Catholic school has experienced the impact of specific societal changes within the New Zealand context, but also the impact of change that has affected and continues to affect the Catholic Church itself.

Within New Zealand, as it was in many Western nations, the Catholic school at the time of the Second Vatican council was seen as an extension of the home and the parish. It was meant to be an environment that supported the religious faith and practices of the Catholic family, who belonged to a local parish, under the pastoral care and leadership of the clergy and the authority of the local bishop. Its function was clear - "Catholic schools took on a two-fold task: to socialise their pupils both as New Zealanders and as Catholics" (Van Der Krogt, 1993:17). Catholic culture provided a strong sense of identity and purpose for its members. The Catholic faith - its beliefs, traditions and practices - was to be handed on to the next generation, and the school was a cultural agent of the Catholic Church, working in what was perceived as a hostile anti-Catholic social environment. However, the social face of the world was changing, and the family culture was becoming less effective or significant in the role of religious socialisation. As the General Catechetical Directory (Vatican, 1971) observes:

In the past, the cultural tradition was more favourable to the transmission of the faith than is today's. The tradition has been greatly changed and less and less can one place one's reliance on cultural continuity" (Vatican, 1971: Para.2).

In other words, as social culture changed, so too did the culture of the Catholic school. Changes of the last three decades are still making an impact, and have necessitated critical reflection on the nature of the special character and purpose of the Catholic school. Treston (1992) warns that today:

The task of clarifying the ethos and special character of Catholic schools is an urgent one, especially in the climate of critical consciousness which probes the relevance of social systems such as schools, families, health care, welfare and churches (Treston, 1992:6).

Several factors have influenced, and continue to influence the culture of New Zealand Catholic schools. The 'market place' ideology, which views the school as a 'business' whose goals and activities should reflect the interests and needs of the nation's industry and commerce has made an impact. Treston (1992) and Dwyer (1993) use the term 'economic rationalism' to describe this trend, and, with Lesko (1988) point to a resulting climate of competition between schools, as each attempts to provide training for students in order to prepare them for the workplace. "This assured competition tends to put greater emphasis on the academic dimension" (Lesko, 1988:19) bringing about a situation where:

The multi-dimensional meanings of students' lives in school are being compressed into one level of purpose in schools: training in the basics, excelling for entrance to college, or socio-economic preparation for work (Lesko 1988: 146).

Competition between schools has also raised issues of school effectiveness. Lee (1993) recalls Ruth Richardson's argument in the Eighties that "healthy competition between schools would enhance the quality of schooling and would enable parents to choose the type of schooling that was best for their children" (Lee, 1993:57). Treston (1992) and Dwyer (1993) observe a similar belief in the Australian school system. For Catholic schools, which are financially supported by Government funds, there is pressure to demonstrate that they are providing 'value for money'. Since Catholic schools claim to be providing a distinctive education, an education with a special character, it can be argued that the criteria of 'value' is the extent to which this distinctiveness is a reality in the cultural life of the school.

Catholic schools, both here in New Zealand and overseas, are facing changes brought about by the decline of religious orders (Treston, 1992; Dwyer, 1993). Once staffed almost exclusively by religious sisters and brothers, there is now a growing number of lay staff teaching in Catholic schools, as the religious orders which originally founded the schools find themselves unable to provide teachers from their ranks. This raises the issue of how the special character of the founding institution can be preserved as a vital aspect of the cultural expression of the school. It cannot be assumed that the lay staff at the school have religious reasons for working there, or an understanding and appreciation of the Special

Character of the school. Changes in the personnel of the Catholic school also impact on the industrial aspects of school administration, since staff, teaching and non-teaching, in Catholic schools today are often members of various unions and associations. Issues, such as strike action, salary disputes, personal grievance and working conditions, now challenge members of the school culture to critically evaluate the values of Catholic schools and their implications for industrial matters.

Changes in the Catholic Church

The macro-culture of the Catholic school is the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Second Vatican Council, the church itself has changed (Treston, 1992; Dwyer, 1993). The reforms of Vatican Two have resulted in new perspectives on the role of the laity, the role of the clergy, the mission of the Church, its relationship with other Christian traditions and other religions and its place within human society. The Church is facing uncertainty in its future. A lack of priestly vocations and its subsequent effects on diocesan and parish structure; concern about the falling numbers of Catholics who attend church on a regular basis; the enculturation of people of diverse ethnic and cultural background; issues of justice and equity are all matters affecting the world-wide culture of the Church. Students attending a Catholic school come from homes that echo this diverse nature of Catholicism. Treston (1992) and Dwyer (1993) point to the pluralism of beliefs and values that now exists in the families which the school serves. Tensions caused by diversity, division and uncertainty give rise to a need for a strong school culture that can provide stability and a collective Catholic identity.

The nature of the students that Catholic schools were set up to serve has also changed dramatically over the last few decades (SCCE, 1988; Treston, 1992; Dwyer, 1993). Young people today are more willing to question matters of religious faith, the meaning of life and the relevance of Church. They are exposed to a vast array of moral and ethical issues, to a plurality of beliefs and values, and a secular worldview of life. Their attendance at a Catholic school may have nothing to do with belief in the teachings of the Catholic Church or the desire to embrace the Catholic way of life. They may perceive their greatest needs to be social, academic, emotional and pastoral rather than spiritual. Their deepest concerns

may revolve around a need to gain employment in a competitive industrial and commercial environment, or a need to cope with matters of sexuality, drug use and family breakdown. The Catholic school is confronted by the complexities of attempting to meet so many different and conflicting needs, in a society that seems to have lost its anchors of family, community and church. The task of handing on a spiritual heritage is not as straightforward as it may have seemed in earlier generations. The Catholic school of the Nineties is faced with trying to achieve a goal that is not necessarily supported by the families of its students. Without strong family and community links, it may be attempting the impossible. As Treston (1992) notes "The Catholic school cannot be expected to be the major educational faith agency" (Treston, 1992:7). But this is often exactly what it is. The Catholic culture of the school may frequently be the only Catholic culture experienced by students who attend the Catholic school.

Catholic educators, proprietors, parents, diocesan education offices, school trustees and teachers are faced with a possible gap between the vision of Catholic education as reflected in Vatican documents and the reality of New Zealand church and school life. Different perceptions of the purpose and function of the Catholic school could result in unrealistic expectations amongst parents, teachers, clergy and the Catholic population in general. There may be quite different, even conflicting, views of what the Catholic school can be expected to accomplish, particularly in the area of the spiritual and faith development of young people. For example, is the school responsible for developing a sense of commitment to the practice of the Catholic faith? Is it an agency for the building up of a healthy parish membership? Is it the predominant source of ongoing transmission of Catholic traditions? Is it a community whose modelling of Christian values inspires young people to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ? Or is it all of these? It is vital under such circumstances, therefore, that Catholic school culture is authentic and effective.

Conclusion

Over the years, much has been written about the Catholic philosophy of education and it is a heritage, rich in visionary language, which sets an ideal before Catholic educators and school leaders. This research attempts to move beyond what could very easily remain as

rhetoric, to consider the relevance of this philosophical heritage and its implications for Catholic schools within the specific context of New Zealand Catholic education. It responds to a need for clarification in Catholic education and its Special Character by seeking answers to a range of broad focusing questions that serve as a 'map' for the inquiry. These are:

1. What is the nature and meaning of Special Character in relation to Catholic secondary schools?
2. What constitutes the content of Special Character?
3. How is that content explicitly and implicitly transmitted?
4. What is the significance of Special Character for the culture of the school?

Three important research features

Background of the researcher

The researcher has had a lifetime of involvement in Catholic education, both in New Zealand and in her country of origin. She has taught for nearly thirty years as a Catholic educator, and has held positions of responsibility, including that of Director of Religious Studies and Acting Principal of a Catholic secondary school. During the two years of research fieldwork, she was Secondary Adviser for Catholic schools in the Auckland and Hamilton dioceses. For many years, the topic of Catholic education and its philosophy has been a major focus of her ongoing study and the basis of many of her professional qualifications. Her comprehensive involvement has given her a tacit knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of the Special Character and nature of Catholic schools, a factor that has consistently proved to be an asset to this research. However, to some extent, it has also been a complication since the researcher has frequently needed to 'step outside' this framework in order to critique it.

Ethical issues

A major ongoing concern for this research is the question of anonymity and confidentiality for participants and their schools. Given the small size of the New Zealand Catholic education network, it is almost impossible to guarantee that readers would not recognise these schools in spite of the use of pseudonyms throughout the thesis. Recognition might simply come through the descriptions of school settings and personal knowledge of the researcher. Participants, themselves, are fully aware of this possibility, illustrated in the request of two or three that some minor modifications in relation to names and syntax be made in the relevant case studies. In addition, to protect the schools from any undue vulnerability as a result of this inquiry, the researcher consistently honoured her commitment to treat all data and details of participants as strictly confidential. However, individual members of the two research schools are not bound by the same ethical 'rules'.

The availability of research on Special Character

Since this work is the first to be undertaken at a doctoral level, it was difficult to find literature or research specifically addressing the topic of Special Character, other than two or three Masters theses. The lack of access through Massey University to Australian educational research databases was an added frustration and restriction. The researcher as a result relied heavily on studies conducted in the United States, such as the work of Bryk, Lee & Holland (1984, 1993), and in Great Britain. She also made wide use of a range of official documents on Catholic education produced by the Vatican and by New Zealand Catholic education authorities. However, on the positive side, her informal contacts, study and professional position were considerable assets to the research project, giving her access to material not usually available.

Thesis outline

Chapter Two is a literature review in two parts. The first provides an outline of the Catholic philosophy of education in the light of fundamental beliefs and values about life and human nature. Exploring the concept of Special Character as articulated in a range of

official documentation of the Church and the New Zealand Catholic education system, it identifies core values that lie at the heart of such a vision of education and the sense of purpose or mission that flows from these. Outlining those aims specific to the New Zealand Catholic educational system, it considers their implications for teachers, school leaders, students and their families. Part Two explores the concept of organisational culture, its meaning and nature. Based on the work of Schein (1992), Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) and Neville (1994) and others, it discusses the manifestations of culture and their expression in the light of a range of cultural models. Finally, it considers the significance of organisational culture for schools.

The New Zealand context of Catholic secondary schools is discussed in Chapter Three. The first section focuses specifically on the nature of New Zealand society in general and the changing context and culture of the Roman Catholic Church. It outlines the changes, conflicts and challenges that have arisen since the Vatican Council (1963-1965) and the passing of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975). The educational context is more specifically addressed in the second part of the chapter, both at a national level in terms of the trends and changes that have taken place in the broader New Zealand education system and at the specific level of issues affecting the Catholic secondary school.

Research methodology is dealt with in Chapter Four. This includes a discussion of the naturalistic paradigm within which this inquiry sits, its characteristics and the reasons it was selected. Both general and specific descriptions of the research design are provided and the personal and professional background of the researcher is fully outlined. As part of the explanation of the research process, a brief description of the two research schools is available, including the means by which the researcher gained entry and the ethical issues that relate specifically to this inquiry. Details pertaining to the data collection techniques of interview, observation, survey and documentation study and the methods used for data recording are provided. The section on data analysis presents a full account of the processes used by the researcher, their basis in qualitative research theory and their practical application to this research. Lastly, the issues of verification, reliability and credibility are covered.

Findings of the research constitute Chapters Five and Six, written in narrative form, as two case studies of the research schools. Given the size of these and the uniqueness of the 'story' of each school culture, the researcher decided to write two chapters of findings rather than the more usual one. Both chapters follow the same basic pattern, constructed around the scope of the research questions. They provide a comprehensive coverage of the individual school settings, including background material on the history and demography of the each school, formal and informal definitions of Special Character, the philosophy, purpose, values and norms implicit in the specific religious traditions upon which each was founded and operates. A range of cultural manifestations, including practices, school organisation, special events, symbols, formal and informal teaching, physical and emotional environment, modelling, and relationships are detailed for each school. Special features, such as the impact of school links and the concept of continuity are also described. Lastly, each chapter considers the effects of Special Character on the culture of the school and its outcomes for members.

Chapter Seven presents a cross-case analysis of findings from both research schools. It follows the same basic structure as the previous two chapters, in that its shape is constructed around the key research questions. In this chapter, findings in each section from each school are compared and contrasted, in order to establish areas of uniqueness and agreement in relation to the section focus. By so doing, it provides a credible and reliable foundation for the discussion of emergent themes and grounded theory that follows in Chapter Eight.

The significance of the research findings is considered in Chapter Eight, and four key emergent themes are discussed. The concept of Cultural Confluence is both proposed and explained. Its nature and influence on the culture of the New Zealand Catholic secondary school is also outlined. The second section of this chapter discusses the importance of founding religious orders and the significance of their traditions for the school. This is followed by a detailed outline of the processes involved in the transmission of Special Character content within the school culture and their implications for the organisation and its stakeholders. The concept of shared spirituality as a phenomenon and outcome of a

Special Character culture is discussed and lastly, a grounded theory of Special Character with a focus on the New Zealand Catholic secondary school is proposed.

The final chapter presents a range of recommendations based on the findings of the research and the theory of Special Character that emerged from it. Recommendations covering such areas as staffing, school review, training, induction of new members, the importance of cultural guardians, and the maintenance of school networks and links, are applicable to State Integrated schools as a general group. However, additional recommendations in relation to specific issues affecting the Catholic education system are provided in a separate section. A global recommendation to all schools follows, along with two addressed specifically to the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Lastly, a range of areas that require further research is suggested.

List of terms

- Charism** In the Catholic tradition, this term refers to ‘gift’ for the people of the Church. In relation to an individual, the gift might be a personal talent or attribute used in the service of others. In terms of a religious order, it refers to the overall philosophy and lifestyle of the group, a model of spirituality that may inspire members of the Church.
- Chaplaincy** This is a role that provides spiritual guidance and personal support for members of an organisation such as a school, hospital or group of the armed forces. Within the New Zealand Catholic school, a member of the local clergy often fills this role on a part-time basis, providing leadership in school worship. However, it is becoming more common for schools to employ a full-time non-ordained chaplain.
- Church seasons** The seasons of the international Catholic Church are officially structured around major events in the life of Jesus Christ, giving shape and substance to communal worship. They include Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time.

Community	This term is used in a range of different ways in the Catholic Church. It may refer to a group of members of a Religious Order who live in the same property, but it can also be used in relation to the Catholic Church as a whole or as a parish group. The ‘faith community’ means a particular group of believers, for example, in a school, parish or general community who pray, worship and share a common religious faith.
Congregation	This is a word used to name either a group of people gathered together in a parish for worship or in reference to the whole group of members of a particular religious order.
Diocese	A district or region within the Catholic Church under the leadership of the Bishop.
Integration Agreement	Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975), this is an official legal agreement between the Crown and an individual school that defines the Special Character of the school, specifies the maximum role of the school and the number of ‘tagged’ positions allowable on the basis of that maximum.
Proprietor	The official owner of a State Integrated school. In the New Zealand Catholic education system, it is usually the Bishop of the diocese or the Provincial or leader of the founding religious order.
Retreat	A time away from normal daily responsibilities in order to focus more closely on one’s relationship with God.
Vocation	In the lay sense, a concept of work or role that is more than a job or profession. Within the context of Christian faith, a sense of being ‘called’ by God to undertake such work or responsibilities.

CHAPTER TWO: A LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores contemporary literature with a view to understanding the meaning of 'Special Character' and its influence on the organisational culture of the Catholic school. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first explores the concept of Special Character and the philosophical foundation on which it is based. The second part presents an overview of current theory on organisational culture. This section will also explore the links between Special Character and Catholic school culture. Together, both bodies of literature serve as a conceptual framework for this research.

PART ONE: A PHILOSOPHY OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The Catholic school is an educational environment that is distinct and unique (Vatican, 1965; Catholic Education Council for New Zealand (CECNZ), 1969; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (SCCE), 1988; Angus, 1988; Roche, 1996). Its aim is the creation of a Catholic culture in an educational context. *The Catholic School* (SCCE, 1977) states:

The specific mission of the school ... is a critical systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith and the bringing forth of the power of Christian virtue by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living (SCCE 1977: Para.49).

To understand and appreciate the Special Character of the Catholic school, therefore, it is essential to identify and appreciate those characteristics of the Catholic school culture that make it distinctive, and the philosophy of life and education upon which the school is founded.

Catholic philosophy of life and the nature of the human person

Redden & Ryan (1955) define 'philosophy' as an 'outlook on life' that offers insight into the values, meanings and purposes of a particular group of people. Catholic philosophy provides a conceptual framework for understanding human existence and human purpose.

In order to understand a Catholic philosophy of education, it is first necessary to consider this philosophical base since “all education is influenced by a particular concept of what it means to be a human person” (SCCE, 1982:Para.18). As Redden & Ryan (1955) add:

To understand a particular philosophy of education, one must know something of the philosophy of life out of which it grows (Redden & Ryan, 1955:16).

In common with other Christian traditions, Catholics believe that a benevolent, creative God created the world. The Bible is revered as God’s revelation of God’s self. The First Testament reveals a God who intervened and still intervenes in human life and history, in order to enter relationship with the human race. Life is revered as a gift from this God; to be valued, respected and protected, because all life is good. Catholics believe that life continues after death; that life must be understood in the context of a reality beyond the material and physical life of the world. There is a future for humanity beyond corporeal life. The ultimate revelation of God’s love for humanity and desire for human fulfilment is what Catholics call ‘the Incarnation’. It is the intervention of God in human existence through Jesus the Christ, a person both human and divine, the Son of God who gave his life for others, was put to death but rose again after three days. He is at the centre of a Christian and Catholic worldview. His life, teachings and actions constitute a model for living that his followers need to emulate in order to find happiness and meaning in life.

A Catholic philosophy of life is founded on the concept of human persons as being inherently religious, and that a search for meaning in life is a facet of that religiosity. Religious faith is understood to be a trust-relationship with God; articulated through a unified belief system; expressed through the traditions of a church community; and lived out in the daily life of its members. This faith, a free gift from God, calls believers into total commitment to God. Belief in an intimate personal and loving God and in the humanity and divinity of Jesus calls Christians to respect all people as persons ‘made in God’s image’. In other words, human creativity; a desire for goodness over evil; an ability and desire to relate; the ability to exercise free will are all reflections, albeit limited, of a Creator God. The SCCE (1988) describes the human person as having:

Intelligence and will, freedom and feelings, the capacity to be an active and creative agent, a being endowed with both rights and duties, capable of interpersonal relationships, called to a specific mission in the world (SCCE, 1988: Para.55).

The Resurrection of Jesus invites Christians to live their lives as if there is a future beyond death, providing a reason for living and for making meaning out of their daily actions. His teaching and life demonstrate and offer a morality that will ultimately bring goodness into a troubled world. It is the mission of Christians to improve life in this world by living a life dedicated to social action, thus continuing the work of Jesus. Through their sincere commitment to this mission, the values of Jesus, as revealed through the Gospels and, for Catholics, through the apostolic tradition of the Church, are transmitted to others. Christianity and Catholicism, therefore, are not separate from daily life; faith is meant to be a dynamic part of human reality. For Christians, to be a human person is to be a spiritual person, open to the mysteries of religious meaning.

The world of human culture and the world of religion are not like two parallel lines that never meet; points of contact are established within the human person. For a believer is both human and a person of faith, the protagonist of culture and the subject of religion (SCCE, 1988: Para.51).

The nature and purpose of education

In the context of Catholic philosophy, education is more than teaching and learning. For the human person, called into a spiritual relationship with God and others, the educational process is “a genuine Christian journey toward perfection” (SCCE, 1988:Para.48). The metaphor of ‘journey’ suggests growth, uncertainty, discovery and the reaching out to an ultimate destination. As a **Christian** journey, a Christian outlook on life and learning will inevitably influence the very nature of the education provided.

The interrelationship of intellectual development, religious faith and personal growth is central to the Catholic philosophy of education. The purpose of education is the ‘synthesis of faith and culture’ (Vatican, 1971; SCCE, 1982; SCCE, 1988; Fahy, 1992); that is, the integration of religious meaning and the personal way of living. In other words, **what is**

believed should find its fullest expression in **how it is lived**. The aim of a Catholic education is to enable the student to develop a harmony between knowledge, understanding, personal values and a Christian worldview. Religion is deemed inauthentic if it is compartmentalised; separated from the realities of human culture. The development of religious meaning and cultural meaning are both essential elements in the full development of the human person. As Dwyer (1993) states:

Our faith provides us with an understanding of a reality that we use to make sense of and develop our culture. Our culture gives us ways of expressing our understanding of life and purpose of living (Dwyer, 1993:15).

In this way, the person brings all of life together in a coherent whole. Fahy (1992) writes that:

Growth in understanding of the meanings of human learning truly integrated with a religious meaning system, freely chosen, leads to maximum personal development for all peoples, no matter what traditions (Fahy, 1992:17).

This integration of life, learning and faith is the fundamental goal of a Catholic education.

“The most important element in the educational endeavour is always the individual person” (SCCE, 1982:Para.32). The aim of a Catholic education is “the gradual development of every capability of every student” (SCCE 1988:Para.99). In other words, the individual human person is the primary focus of Catholic education; the development of the **whole** human person is the goal. Whilst every school can claim to be engaged in the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic and vocational aspects of each student’s life, the Catholic concept of a truly holistic approach to education includes the spiritual nature of the person. Flynn (1992) argues that:

In view of the *spiritual nature of persons*, a completely secular education which ignores the religious aspirations of people today will be an incomplete and inadequate development of the whole person” (Flynn, 1992:16. Italics in the original).

This has been, and continues to be, a strong argument in the Catholic Church’s case for the establishment of its own schools. Whilst stating that education is a right of all people, the Second Vatican Council is adamant that “All Christians have a right to a Christian education” (Vatican, 1971:Para.2).

Education however is not only for the good of the individual; it is also for the good of society (Vatican, 1971: SCCE, 1977). As Christian persons develops skills, knowledge, maturity and moral judgement, their commitment to their religious faith demands affirmative action for the common good of other members of society. Catholic Christian education is not merely a means to gaining well-paid employment or social status. It is also intended to equip the person in the mission of bringing about a world of justice, equality and peace.

Education is not given for the purposes of gaining power, but as an aid toward a fuller understanding of and communion with (people), events and things ... Knowledge is not to be considered as a means of material prosperity and success, but as a call to service and to be responsible for others (SCCE, 1977:Para.56).

Education from a Catholic perspective is more than a human enterprise: God is also involved. Catholics, in common with other Christians, believe in a personal intimate active God who continues to work in all aspects of people's lives. Belief in the Resurrection of Christ means that the believer can anticipate the guidance and action of Jesus in every aspect of their daily lives. Life is not ended with death, but changed. As a member of the Catholic Church committed to his/her faith, each person has a responsibility to carry on the work that Jesus began. Education is preparation for that responsibility.

True education is directed toward the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult have a share (Vatican 1971:Para.1).

Finally, education is central to the mission of the Catholic Church. Flynn (1992) describes the Church's mission as:

Educational in nature: to proclaim Christ's teaching, the Good News that God has come amongst us, to all people and to show the relevance of this teaching to each succeeding generation (Flynn, 1992:18).

Education is the means through which the Christian message is transmitted. Through its involvement in education, the Church continues its evangelising goal, carrying out Christ's instructions to his first followers to 'teach all nations' the essential truths about God and life. Education, that is learning and teaching, is one of the four basic elements of the Church's identity - the other three being service, community and worship (Treston, 1992).

As the Catholic school supports Catholic parents in their responsibility of educating their children in the Christian Catholic faith, it is inherently an expression of all four elements that constitute the nature of Church.

The Special Character of the Catholic school

School as community

The Catholic school is more than an educational institution. It is a community (Vatican, 1965; Newton, 1980; SCCE, 1988; Angus, 1988; National Centre for Religious Studies (NCRS), 1991; Dwyer, 1993; New Zealand Council of Proprietors of Catholic Integrated Schools (NZCPCIS), 1995; Bell, 1996). It is a group of people bound together by a shared religious worldview; that is, a 'community of faith' (SCCE, 1982). Bell (1996) observes that:

The culture of a Catholic school expresses the core beliefs, values, traditions and symbols which provide meaning to the school community and which help to shape the lives of students, teachers and parents (Bell, 1996: 22).

In describing the school as community, Sergiovanni (1994) writes:

Community is the tie that binds students and teachers together in special ways to something more significant than themselves: shared values and ideals (Sergiovanni, 1994:xiii).

For the Catholic school community, those bonds, values and ideals are Christian, expressed over the centuries in the traditions of the Catholic Church. By adopting this enduring philosophy of education and life, the Catholic school inherits an ideology of 'community', a firm framework for the building of an authentic educational community. The Special Character of the school culture, in turn, is characterised by a concept of 'community' that draws from both religious and social understandings of the term, but expressed and experienced in the unique context and environment of each particular school.

However, the concept of the school as a **faith** community may be more difficult to establish. Within the New Zealand context, marked by a plurality of beliefs and religious experience, it cannot be presumed that all members, that is, students, families, staff, Board

of Trustees and other stakeholders are fully committed, practising Catholics, involved with the local parish church. In other words, the degree of commitment to religious faith by any individual cannot be assessed. Given the diversity of faith positions that may be represented amongst stakeholders, a non-critical conceptualisation of the Catholic school as a 'faith community' may hide a far more complex, and less than ideal, reality.

Values of the Catholic school culture

The life-long mission of the Catholic person, community, culture and church is to live out the values of Jesus the Christ as revealed through the sacred Scripture and through the living tradition of the Catholic Church. The Catholic school community teaches these values and attempts to live up to them. All schools transmit and live a set of implicit core values, but those at the heart of Catholic education are distinctive insofar as they are explicit and predetermined by the religious tradition of the Catholic Church. They permeate behaviour; influence organisation, policies and structure; and determine the quality of interrelationships. Their source and inspiration is the person and teaching of Jesus. Lesko (1990) concludes from her study of the Catholic school:

In contrast to the state school emphasis on individualism, opportunities and rewards, Catholic schools, especially since the second Vatican Council, have stressed the importance of an education founded upon Christian values and a sense of community (Lesko, 1990:18).

It is the shared nature of these values and the specific manner in which they are integrated within the school's life that gives each school its own distinct Special Character and Catholic identity.

The fact that in their own individual ways, all members of the school community share this Christian vision makes the school 'Catholic'; principles of the Gospel in this manner become the educational norms since the school then has them as its internal motivation and final goal (SCCE 1977:Para.34).

Core values that lie at the heart of the Catholic school culture include respect for the individual, truth and the environment; forgiveness and reconciliation; commitment to service; love of God and others; justice and compassion; a love of prayer, worship and community (Walsh, 1987; SCCE, 1988; Treston, 1992; Dwyer, 1993). Although these values are shared and expressed in a variety of ways by all Catholic schools, each school is

also influenced by values that find emphasis in the spirit of its founding community. The values tradition of Marist Brothers schools expresses a commitment to serving the underprivileged and the poor; the Sisters of Mercy schools seek to show compassion and the Dominican schools uphold the value of learning as the way to find truth and God.

Whatever be its origins - diocesan, religious or lay - each Catholic school can preserve its own specific character, spelled out in an educational philosophy, rationale or in its own pedagogy (SCCE, 1982:Para.39).

It is a truism that in relation to human values there is often a gap between the ideal and the reality. However, even in a situation where reality falls far short of the vision, the values are nevertheless powerful motivators.

An holistic approach to education

The Catholic school is committed to the development of the whole man since in Christ, the perfect man, all human values find their fulfilment and unity. Herein lies the specifically Catholic character of the school (Vatican, 1977: Para.34).

In Catholic education, the 'whole' person means every aspect of what it means to be human; the intellectual, creative, moral, social, emotional, sexual, physical and active, and spiritual. The school is a "privileged environment for human formation" (SCCE, 1982:Para.4). It is a place where the development of each student is nurtured and supported, enabling the person to grow and mature as a fully integrated human person. However, as Treston (1992) notes:

A Catholic school must firstly be a religious place where the many energies of the school community are integrated into a holistic vision of what it means to be a human person, created by God in God's image, living in a partnership covenant with all life forms of the earth (Treston 1992:9).

The culture of a Catholic school encourages the student to develop a personal congruence between what is valued, how the world is perceived and how the human person should relate to that world and to other persons.

In developing their spirit, their mind, their body and their character, the Catholic school can help them to cultivate a set of values and a code of behaviour, along with a capacity to make sense of their world, to make judgements and to make a difference (Vatican, 1965:Para.54).

However, each school delivers that education within in the context of its own Special Character as it translates for its own culture the significance of the particular religious perspective upon which it is founded.

Catholic schools give a *unique meaning* to education considered *as the development of the whole person* by integrating a specific religious tradition within the education they provide (Flynn, 1985:20). Italics used in the original).

By integrating religious faith, human knowledge and experience, a holistic approach to education is developed. In addition to receiving an education in knowledge, skills and attitudes based on the New Zealand national curriculum, students attending a Catholic school are also provided with an education-in-faith, through the religious practices of the school and the delivery of a Religious Education programme.

Knowledge, values, attitudes and behaviour fully integrated with faith will result in the student's personal synthesis of life and faith (SCCE, 1982:Para.31).

The aims of the Catholic secondary school in New Zealand

The National Religious Education syllabus document for New Zealand Catholic secondary schools makes it clear that the school has a responsibility to be a “genuine educational institution” (NCRS, 1991: 4). In the light of its foundational philosophy, outlined in Part One of this chapter, the Catholic school is ethically bound to provide the best educational environment it can for its students, in line with the National Educational Guidelines and the National Administration Guidelines of New Zealand. Whilst such teaching and learning take place within the normal school life of any school, State or Catholic, the inclusion of Religious Education within the normal curriculum of the school makes the Catholic school distinctive. The aims of the Religious Education curriculum are comprehensive, impacting on the whole nature of the education provided. As one might expect, they reveal strong links with Catholic philosophy, values, beliefs and vision. They are:

1. To build a school community which will provide a learning environment characterised by Christian values as expressed within the living Catholic tradition, and experienced in a New Zealand context.
2. To facilitate the integrated development of all individuals as whole persons, conscious of personal dignity, and appreciative of giftedness and cultural diversity.

3. To enable students to acquire skills, knowledge and appropriate attitudes within various fields of human learning and from a perspective in harmony with a Christian worldview.
 4. To provide opportunities for education-in-faith by seeking to inspire and nourish the growth of a personal relationship with Jesus and in him with the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.
 5. To lead students to knowledge and understanding of religious realities, in particular the Christian faith, according to Catholic teaching.
- (NCRS, 1991:4)

Aims 1-3 are general in nature, involving the whole school and clearly locating learning and teaching within the context of Christian faith and tradition. Their realisation identifies the school as a Catholic Christian culture, committed to the educational development of young people. Aims 4 and 5 more specifically relate to the development of religious knowledge and spirituality.

Aim 4 is fundamental to the Special Character of the Catholic school culture. 'Education-in-faith' is a broad umbrella term for all those aspects of the school curriculum, both within and outside the classroom, that relate to the development of the student's spirituality. It embraces the rituals, symbols, prayers, traditions and celebrations of the school that transmit the values and beliefs of the Catholic Church. For those students who profess a religious faith, the outcome of Aim 4 is 'catechesis'; that is, the further development of the faith of a believer. For those with little or no religious awareness, education-in-faith opportunities are occasions of potential 'evangelisation'. The student has the opportunity to accept or reject the beliefs of Christianity and the development of a personal relationship with God. Whatever the emphasis, the personal religious freedom of each student is respected.

Aim 5 is achieved within the domain of the Religious Education programme. This is generally a compulsory subject for all students, regardless of their faith background or religious affiliation. The emphasis is primarily on **instruction**, not evangelisation or catechesis (although these may be unconscious outcomes). The inherent differences between Aims 4 and 5 reflect a significant change in Religious Education pedagogy over

the last twenty years in New Zealand. In the past, the goals of the programme placed an emphasis on catechesis, based on the assumption that students attending the Catholic school already had an established personal faith. However, recognising the diversity of faith backgrounds of the students and acknowledging their right to religious freedom a more explicit **educational** approach to the subject has been promoted. This shift reflects a growing awareness amongst Catholic educators that faith develops within a culture, rather than exclusively in a classroom. The Religious Education programme currently uses a pedagogy that situates learning **about religion** in an educational setting, acknowledging that the appropriate context for **experiencing religion** is within the total Catholic culture of the school. This shift in emphasis does not reduce the pre-eminence of Religious Education in the school curriculum. It is understood that the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in the Religious Education class transmits the cultural heritage of the school as a Catholic school, and “the principles, truths and ethics of that programme permeate whatever the school does” (NZCPCIS, 1995:55).

Relationships and roles in the Catholic school

The Special Character of the Catholic school impacts on the relationships and roles of stakeholders. All teachers working in a Catholic school are:

Obliged to respect that character and give their active support to it under the direction of those responsible (SCCE, 1977:Para.80).

They need to be aware of the values that underlie a Catholic education and Catholic way of life. These are not to be presented merely:

As a set of abstract objectives to be admired ... they must be presented as values which generate human attitudes and these attitudes must be encouraged in the students (SCCE, 1982: Para.30).

The aims of the Catholic school are the responsibility of all members of the school culture and “it is the task of the whole educative community to ensure that a distinctive Christian educational environment is maintained in practice” (SCCE, 1977:Para.73). The quality and effectiveness of that environment are largely dependent on the quality of relationships amongst stakeholders (SCCE, 1982) based upon the school’s core values and corresponding

cultural norms. These give rise to strong expectations in terms of appropriate behaviour, and the tone of the school climate.

All teachers, whether Catholic or not, are part of this 'whole school community'. Each teacher is therefore expected to use his or her specific skills to achieve the goals and purpose of the school (NZCPCIS, 1995:55).

It could be argued that the role of the teacher in a state school may not be very different, in essence, from the above. In the context of the Catholic school, however, the teaching role is more than a job or profession. It is a vocation or ministry; that is a call to serve others, with Jesus as a role model. The teacher is understood to be a significant role model of Christian values for their students.

The witness and conduct of teachers are of primary importance in imparting a distinctive character to Catholic schools (SCCE 1977:Para.78).

They have a responsibility therefore, to live according to the philosophy, values and beliefs of the Catholic school culture; a responsibility that requires the teacher to engage in on-going personal formation (SCCE, 1977). The effectiveness of the school culture as a Catholic culture requires that teachers:

Must know what they are trying to do and why. They must be able to articulate clearly the Christian view of the human person and the implications of this view for modern schooling (Dwyer, 1986:26).

The personal religious freedom of the teacher, however, must be respected and takes priority. No teacher is required to act against his or her conscience. In spite of this, however, the nature of the teaching role within the Catholic school has personal, professional and spiritual implications for staff. For those who cannot or will not live up to the demands of such a role, there is a very real potential for internal and external conflict.

Special Character has implications for working relationships in a Catholic school. The nature of the school as a faith community and the values which lie at its heart demand an openness and willingness to work as a team; to share professional skills from the value of care and compassion as much as from the value of effectiveness. "Close relationships should be established between colleagues" (SCCE, 1977:Para.34) not merely because it makes good professional sense but also because it is a model of Christian community.

Central to the vision of Catholic education is the concept of the school as a support for parents (Vatican, 1965; SCCE, 1975). The Catholic school does not replace the family as the primary culture for the education of children (Redden & Ryan, 1955; Bridges, 1994), since:

The task of imparting education belongs primarily to the family, but it requires the help of society as a whole (Vatican, 1965:Para.3).

The Rite of Christian Baptism recognises that parents are the first educators. “Christian faith is born and grows inside a community” (SCCE, 1977:Para.53) and the first community is family. School community assists and complements that growth. The relationship between the school and the family is understood as ‘partnership’ (Ramsay and Clark, 1990) and as such, the school has a responsibility to communicate, co-operate and work with family.

The unique situation of Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand

The Special Character of the New Zealand Catholic school is unique in that it is enshrined in law. In 1975, in response to the financial difficulties experienced by the Catholic education system and other private and church schools at that time, the 1975 Private Schools Conditional Integration (PSCI) Act was passed into New Zealand law. This legislation allowed a level of State funding for private schools, but guaranteed the right of the school to provide “an education with a special character” (PSCI Act, 1975:2.1). Under the Act, an education with a Special Character:

Means education within the framework of a particular or general religious or philosophical belief, and associated with observances or traditions appropriate to that belief (PSCI Act, 1975:2.1).

On its establishment as an Integrated School, that is, a former private school, which was now covered by the provisions of the PSCI Act (1975), each school entered into a unique, specific and binding Integration Agreement with the Crown. These individual agreements consolidated the school’s identity as a Special Character school, stating in each case that:

The school is a Roman Catholic school in which the whole school community through the general school programme and in its religious instruction and observances exercises the right to live and teach the values of Jesus Christ. These values are as expressed in the Scriptures and in the practices, worship and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church as

determined from time to time by the Roman Catholic bishop of the diocese (NZCPCIS, 1995:8).

The PSCI Act (1975) guarantees the right of the Catholic school “to reflect through its teaching and conduct the education with a special character” (PSCI Act, 1975:3.1). The responsibilities of the Board of Trustees of the Catholic school are influenced by the Act. Not only does it have the normal responsibilities of governance, there is also a duty to maintain and preserve the Special Character of the school. The Proprietor of the school, that is, the local bishop or religious order, must supervise the maintenance of Special Character, working with the Board of Trustees to ensure that it is not jeopardised by its integration within the State education system.

Appointments of staff are subject to the Act. A proportion of teaching positions, determined by the school’s Integration Agreement, must be advertised as ‘tagged’; that is, they must be filled by teachers who have a:

Willingness and ability to take part in Religious Instruction appropriate to the special character of the school (NZCPCIS, 1995:17).

The requirement that a number of positions are ‘tagged’ is intended as a means of maintaining and preserving the Special Character of the school by ensuring that a minimum number of Catholic teachers are members of the teaching staff.

As cultural and educational leader of the school, the Principal is responsible for maintaining and preserving the Special Character of the school. He/she assumes the leadership of all religious aspects of the school culture, having ultimate responsibility also ensuring the delivery of an effective Religious Education programme. Under the Act, the position of Principal of a Catholic school **must** be tagged. The appointee to the role of Principal is expected to be a fully committed member of the Catholic church and able to function as a role model for the whole school community. The position of Director of Religious Studies, as the other key Special Character role within the school, is also tagged.

Non-Catholic teachers, and Catholics appointed to non-tagged positions, are expected, within the context of their personal freedom of conscience and religious belief, to do what they can to support the Special Character of the school. An assurance of this support is often sought in writing at the time of appointment.

The PSCI Act (1975) influences the enrolments of students to the school. Preference is given to those students whose families have an established religious connection with the Special Character of the school. The number of non-preference students enrolled at the school is limited to 5% of the maximum school roll as stated in the school's Integration Agreement. Since 1998, however, individual schools can apply for an extension of their non-preference enrolments to a limit of 10%.

In conclusion, the Integration Act (1975) has created a unique context for the New Zealand Catholic school culture. Its right to exist is guaranteed: its ability to exist, however, will be determined by its members and the commitment they have to its continuance.

PART TWO: THEORY OF CULTURE

If the paramount goal of the Catholic school is the transmission of a unique Catholic culture, then the effectiveness of this transmission requires not just an understanding and appreciation of what it means to live as **Catholic**, but also an awareness of what it means to live in **culture**. This section examines the nature of culture, particularly in relation to schools; the ways in which culture is manifest and expressed; and its significance in relation to schools as organisations.

Defining culture

Using a basic English dictionary, culture is defined as the ideas, customs and art of a particular society, and a developed understanding of the arts. Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) compare these two definitions of culture; from an anthropological/sociological

viewpoint as compared with an aesthetic/artistic view. In relation to the former, culture is defined as “the distinct way of life which gives meaning and order to the particular group or community” (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:177). It comprises the “beliefs, language and knowledge within which and through which the members establish and maintain their sense of identity” (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:177). In this sense, culture is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, relating to the way people live and work as a group and as individuals, within a particular setting or context. Their culture is expressed in their art, music, drama and literature, reflecting the need for members to represent the best of what is believed and lived. The latter understanding of culture relates to the fruits of that need; the artistic expression of the group’s total way of life.

Bates (1986) defines the anthropological/sociological concept of culture as social culture; the latter, he names high culture. He illustrates the significance of culture for human beings, in that:

It is culture that gives meaning to life. The beliefs, languages, rituals, knowledge, conventions, courtesies, and artefacts - in short, the cultural baggage of any group, are the resources from which individual and social identity are constructed. They provide the framework upon which the individual constructs his understanding of the world and of himself (Bates, 1986:53).

Both definitions of culture are important for understanding social groups, whether they are tribes, nations or organisations. The anthropological/sociological sense of the word enables an exploration of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. However, much can be learned through study of the artistic/aesthetic expression of the group, reflecting the group’s search for excellence and perfection. As a group modifies, evaluates and refines its social culture, its artistic and aesthetic expressions will also change. Culture, then, in its fullest sense, “is the sharing of special experiences and values - ethnic, aesthetic, artistic, moral and emotional” (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:178).

Culture is “the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action” (Geertz, 1973:145). Within the Catholic Church, culture draws together all the elements of human life and experience into a coherent whole, centred on the

spiritual nature of the human person. Geertz (1973) notes that, for members of a religious group, the power of its religious symbols lies in their ability to sum up:

What is known about the way the world is, the quality of emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it (Geertz, 1973:127).

Catholicism, therefore, is for millions of people around the world, an experience of authentic and meaningful human culture.

Organisational culture

Just as individuals in a culture can have different personalities while sharing much in common, so too with groups and organisations. It is this phenomenon that is now recognised as 'corporate culture'. Organisations are mini-societies that have their own distinctive patterns of culture and sub-culture (Morgan, 1986:121)

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing awareness of the significance of cultural identity and its influence on the development of organisations. Faced with a rapidly changing world, organisations have experienced the tension that exists between the need for adaptation to new situations and the frustrating reality of attempting to bring about that change. As knowledge and understanding of social culture grows, the reasons for such difficulties within organisations, as well as within societies, are more keenly appreciated. The power of culture within an organisation is such that the survival and well being of the group may depend upon a greater understanding of its tangible and intangible nature.

In the context of organisational theory, Edgar Schein (1992) defines culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 1992: 12).

Owens (1991) echoes these ideas and develops them further by defining culture as:

The **norms** that inform people what is acceptable and what is not, the dominant **values** that the organisation cherishes above others, the **basic assumptions and beliefs** that are shared by members of the organisation, the '**rules**' of the game that must be observed if one is to get along and be accepted as a member, the **philosophy** that guides the organisation in

dealing with its employees and its clients (Owens, 1991: 28. Bold type used in the original).

In the light of this observation, shared values can be defined as what is important; beliefs, as what we think is true, and their influence on behavioural norms as, 'how we do things around here' (Bower, 1966). What, then, is in the nature of culture that makes it such a powerful influence on people and their relationships with others?

The nature of culture

According to Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991), culture cannot be separated from people. It is people-centred and localised (Owens, 1991).

Instead, the organisation is seen as a conceptual entity, which people collectively create and maintain largely in their minds (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:172).

Developed from shared meanings, culture is a collective experience (Milliken, 1984; Morgan, 1986; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Bush, 1995). It is a group creation, transmitted to new members by the group (Deal, 1993). As people respond to the daily demands and needs of communal life, they work together to find solutions; choose the best ways of acting; and define the 'rules' which make their interdependence viable.

The culture of each organisation is both unique and distinct (Milliken, 1984; Owens, 1991; Bush, 1995). No two organisations have the same cultural elements and expressions. Although some features may be similar, others are distinctive, arising from the specific context of the organisation. Because of the uniqueness of the life of each member, no family, for example, is exactly the same as another, even those within the same tribal or genetic grouping. Likewise, individuals within an organisation demonstrate unique patterns of behaviour and values, as they interact and work together.

Culture cannot be simply imposed on a group, it arises out of the interaction of individuals with other individuals (Morgan, 1986), in a specific and unique context. It:

Comprises numerous tangible and symbolic elements (such as values, philosophies and ideologies, as well as those which are more tangible and are given behavioural and visual expression (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:173).

To attempt to change a culture without considering the people who belong to it will result in frustration and defeat. “Changes in the culture of an organisation start with people: the way we think and act, alone and together”(Dalin & Rolff, 1993:96). A powerful individual may influence the culture of the group, but cannot determine what the culture will be or how it will develop unless the other members collectively and individually allow it. Undue pressure from a dominant member may be culturally damaging to the effectiveness and health of the culture

Culture is neither static nor permanent. It is dynamic and historically based (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Living within a culture is to change it. For every person brings unique perceptions from his/her experience **within** the culture **to** the culture, and through personal interaction, influences others in the group. Values may be shared, but there may be different perspectives on why this or that should be valued. The same value might be expressed in quite different, possibly conflicting, ways. Culture is not simply handed on from one generation to another (Bates, 1986). It is continuously being tested, evaluated and modified by those who live within it. Cultures develop because as people relate to each other, they search together for ways of making sense of life. It is the fruit of past action that, in turn, directs new action.

Schein (1992) maintains that culture lies both deep and wide within the life of the organisation. It can be described more easily than defined, for its elements are difficult to isolate and understand, arising as they do out of complex, interlocking values, assumptions and beliefs. The latter are not always explicit but remain, nevertheless, a powerful influence on people’s lives (Owens, 1991; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Bush, 1995). Trompenaars (1994) metaphorically sums this up, when he states that “A fish discovers its need for water when it is no longer in it. Our own culture is like water to a fish” (Trompenaars, 1994:22). In other words, it is difficult to articulate, even identify those aspects of culture since they may be hidden from us by our own subjectivity. Described by Trice & Beyer (1993) as

'inherently fuzzy', culture remains an "all-encompassing tapestry of meaning" (Deal, 1993:6); real but intangible. Taking up this point, Morgan (1986) warns:

If one truly wishes to understand an organisation, it is much wiser to start from the premise that organisations are complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical (Morgan, 1986:322).

It follows, then, that those who wish to explore an organisation's culture should expect to encounter complexity, ambiguity and paradox. Difficult and complex as cultural study might be, patterns of coherence can be identified, offering insight into the cultural identity of a particular organisation. The ability to identify and explore those patterns is an essential prerequisite for understanding their influence on the individual and communal lives of people.

Schein (1992) observes that culture, as an implicit, rather than explicit, reality in the shared life of the group, is based on the deepest human and personal assumptions. The mystery of culture is expressed through a diverse range of symbols; rituals; myths; language and objects. Influenced by a myriad of individual and group experiences in the context of a particular place and time, their interpretation depends on the meaning attributed to them by members of the organisation.

Cultural norms, values and beliefs are highly emotional phenomenon for members (Schein, 1992). Trice & Beyer (1993) describe the essence of culture as being 'charged' with emotion. The reason is easy to see. As Neville (1994) points out "Culture is not a thing, but is composed of beliefs - deeply held, sacred beliefs" (Neville, 1994:19). When a threat to the culture is perceived, conflict and tension are likely. The strength of such resistance is an indicator of the depth and significance of the values involved.

Trompenaars (1994) observes that "people within a culture do not all have identical sets of artefacts, norms, values and assumptions" (Trompenaars, 1994:27). Whilst there may be strong common bonds, multiple cultures exist, especially when the culture is made up of a diverse range of people, undertaking complex organisational functions (Bates, 1986; Milliken, 1984; Morgan, 1986; Owens, 1991; Schein, 1992). Differences between these

sub-groups is inevitable, since it “cannot be assumed that all members and groups will share equally a common culture” (Bates, 1986:11). As Morgan (1986) observes:

In organisations, there are often many different and competing value systems that create a mosaic of organisational realities rather than a uniform corporate culture (Morgan, 1986:127).

Sub-groups, within different departments of the organisation, for example, may have their own sense of purpose; their own ‘ways of working’; and their own shared meanings, expressed through their own stories and metaphors. Retaining its unique internal coherence, each subculture reflects the particular professional and personal interests of its members (Milliken, 1984). If conflicts of interest arise, perhaps out of differences of interpretation, inadequate communication, or a clash of opposing values, the culture may suffer a breakdown in its effectiveness. Where the subcultures are unified in terms of their vision and are able to function together out of a mutuality of values, collinearity develops to the benefit of the whole organisation (Neville, 1994).

Culture is morally neutral (Bush, 1995). A culture cannot be said to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’; the critical question is whether or not it is appropriate for the organisation. Since culture determines the behaviour of individuals and groups (Trompenaars, 1994), the vital issue is the appropriateness of that behaviour to the mission, aims and objectives of the organisation and the welfare of its people. Where these have harmony and cohesion, the culture is healthy; where there is ambiguity and contradiction, the culture may be dysfunctional. Critical evaluation and testing of cultural norms is necessary; not an easy task given the complexity and dynamic nature of culture. Milliken (1984) observes that:

Culture is subtle and somewhat tenuous, and must be carefully moulded and sustained. Traditions and progress must complement each other for the benefits of constructive and purposeful operation (Milliken, 1984:72).

The task of creating a strong culture is forever ongoing, since perfection always remains an ideal, rarely a reality, for organisations as much as for individuals.

Schools and organisational culture

No one could dispute that schools are very complex organisations, dedicated to the achievement of national and local educational goals. There is a diverse range of individuals, who are members of many different groups, functioning in differing roles, with different purposes and goals. As public institutions, schools as organisations are accountable to their stakeholders for the outcomes of their activity, particularly since the advent of *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange, 1989). Teaching and learning may be the prime activity of schools in general, but it is apparent that these are undertaken in ways that are unique to each. Unique individuals, with unique perceptions, perspectives and talents, constitute the rich human resources of each and every school. For example, although there may be agreement about the nature of the principal's role, no individual school principal works in exactly the same way as another. Each has a particular concept of what it means to be a principal, bringing intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual attributes that cannot be replicated by another. If this is true of organisational roles, it is also true of the organisation itself. Each school creates and maintains its own unique culture, a view supported by Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) who observe that:

Every school ... small as well as large, new as well as old, has a particular culture, determined by the individual values and experiences which each person brings to it, the way in which its people act and interact, and the footprints they leave behind them (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991: 174).

They note that this cultural uniqueness arises from the diversity of people who are members of it; their ethnic background and origins; their talents, hopes and aspirations; their individual and shared experiences; their potential as persons; and in terms of the Catholic school, their stage of faith and spiritual development. Each school is unique geographically, even when there may be other schools within a short distance of it. Each school has its own unique plant, equipment and grounds; its own distinct relationship with its local community and its own school climate. No two schools share exactly the same traditions and cultural heritage, expressed in exactly the same way. The history and historical personages of each is inevitably different; the stories of each are unique and uniquely told. Both may have assemblies, significant celebrations and symbols, but these

will have a specific style and context; expressing different values and maintaining different norms. In short, educationalists are increasingly aware that:

Each school and college has its own distinctive culture, depending on the mix of values, beliefs and norms prevalent in the organisation (Bush, 1995:134).

Schools may be different and unique in many ways, but Dalin & Rolff (1993) note that there are several key features common to all. As it provides an education for its students, every school is concerned with pedagogical goals. These goals are complex, long-term and idealistic. They are never fully achieved; can never be completely measured but remain hidden in the mystery of the life of each student. With outcomes that are often difficult to quantify, the activity of learning is personal for those who engage in it. In spite of developments in team-teaching, the teacher is, in most situations, the autonomous professional within his/her own defined territory of subject and teaching/learning space, the classroom. This is particularly true of the secondary school, with its different subject departments. In other words, schools may be similar in many ways, but the educational work carried out in each is determined by the unique people who make up the organisation and by the dynamics of their interactions with others (Milliken, 1984).

School culture

If “cultural elements give all human organisations internal meaning, purpose and cohesion” (Owens, 1991: 110), what is the significance of culture for schools as organisations? Researchers have found that strong school cultures contribute positively to the effectiveness of the school (Owens, 1991; Neville, 1994). Owens (1991) points out that current educational research:

Indicates that the effectiveness of these organisations, in terms of students’ learning and development, is significantly influenced by the quality and character of the organisation’s culture (Owens 1991:205).

The values, beliefs and norms at the heart of every culture are determinants of the behaviour of its members. An understanding of the influence of values, beliefs and norms enables members, especially school leaders, to critically evaluate not only their actions, but also their congruence with the vision and purposes of the school. Although the school, as

an organisation, works within a framework of authoritative, structural and institutional elements, these are not enough in themselves to direct action on a day-to-day basis.

They are not the driving force or bonding glue in any organisation - particularly in those where mission and impact are ambiguous and hard to determine (Owens, 1991:110).

The 'glue' is the influence of school culture on the activity of learning and teaching. This view is supported by Cunningham & Gresso (1993) who observe that:

Structure and process are important to maintaining the organisation, but it is the culture that yields the dividends (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993:19).

The application of cultural models to the context of schooling can facilitate an understanding of the 'glue' of culture as a means of improving the effectiveness of the school (Bush, 1995).

Over the last decades of the 20th century, life has changed dramatically for students, for their families and for schools. In this age of telecommunication at the fingertip, we have also witnessed the breakdown of many social institutions - the family unit, the declining numbers who consider themselves 'religious', growing immigrant populations in New Zealand and elsewhere. In his study into the differences between government and non-government schools, Milliken (1984) questions the reasons many parents seem to be turning to the more traditional private school system, suggesting that the perceptions that parents have of the culture of these schools may be a contributing factor. He suggests that, as society grapples with the loss of cultural identity and support:

The development of school culture is of increasing importance ... when young people are increasingly in need of social and psychological support and philosophical foci (Milliken, 1984:79).

For the Catholic school, the impact of these social changes is a 'mixed blessing'. As secular interest in Catholic education grows, Catholic schools are confronted by a values-conflict. Whilst the opportunity to consolidate student roll numbers and encourage school development is attractive, Catholic schools have a primary responsibility to ensure that they live up to their Christ-centred mission of serving 'the poor', that is, those who are disadvantaged in the widest sense of the word. Their dilemma is compounded by the

difficulties of providing a religious education to non-church attending students, whose parents may have selected a Catholic education for non-religious reasons.

Educational change has brought about its own pressures on schools, resulting in a loss of confidence (Deal, 1993) in their ability to cope with the increasing demands made on teachers, students and parents. Too much change, over a relatively short time, has shaken the traditional concepts of schooling and its purpose. With the introduction of the self-management of schools (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992), there has been a shift from bureaucratic control to ideological control (Bates, 1986). Authority, educational principles and organisational structure have moved from being external to internal motivators. The Ministry of Education may still determine **what** a school is required to be and do, but **how** it is done is determined by the school itself, based on its particular cultural values, beliefs and norms. With self-management, therefore, has come greater autonomy, but it has also brought about a more public process of accountability. Dalin & Rolff (1993) note the increased influence of parental involvement, and a subsequent increasing need for negotiation and communication between family, community and school. The nature of learning is also changing, with a greater emphasis on group task, problem-solving and co-operative learning. These also have an impact on the nature of teaching.

In order to meet the challenges of change and identify potential barriers, knowledge of the cultural identity of the school is essential. The effectiveness of the change process is irrevocably bound with the willingness and ability of people to accept the change, to work for change and to understand the need for change. To attempt modifications in the day-to-day functions of the school is hard enough if the people-factor is neglected, but to bring about a philosophical change in such conditions is probably quite impossible.

Bates (1986) expresses some concerns about the theories of corporate culture being applied without critical judgement to the context of school culture. He notes that school culture is complex, complicated by several tensions not present in corporate life. Schools are complex cultures, led by highly qualified personnel whose professionalism is rooted in

concepts of collegiality and autonomy. Whilst a hierarchical structure may, at first glance, appear to be in place, the aims and objectives of the school can only be achieved through group co-operation, a strong communal vision and good communication of that vision to stakeholders. Schools may be self-managing organisations, but they are also exposed to powerful external demands and pressures, such as legislation, local community demands and expectations, and the needs and expectations of the family, the individual student and the local labour market. For example, the school may place a high value on the needs of students for social education or cultural awareness, but be opposed by parents who perceive such learning as irrelevant for the purpose of gaining a job. In the context of the Catholic school, the need to firmly establish the importance of Religious Education as a core, compulsory subject becomes an important Special Character issue when confronted by parents who have enrolled their children for non-spiritual reasons.

In brief, schools are subject to the influence of cultural politics. An uncritical, simplistic application of corporate cultural theory to the school may have damaging effects on the unique web of relationships that exist within a school. Bates (1986) warns that:

The culture politics of schooling are a much more complex process of contestation, negotiation and compromise than the high priests of 'symbolic management' would have us believe (Bates, 1986: 43).

If this is true, then the study of organisational culture in relation to schools must take into account the specific nature of culture as it exists in the school context.

Manifestations of culture

How does one gain insight into and understanding of a phenomenon as intangible and complex as the culture of an organisation? The task of culture research is a difficult and demanding one. As Morgan (1986) observes:

Our understanding of culture is usually much more fragmented and superficial than the reality (Morgan, 1986:139).

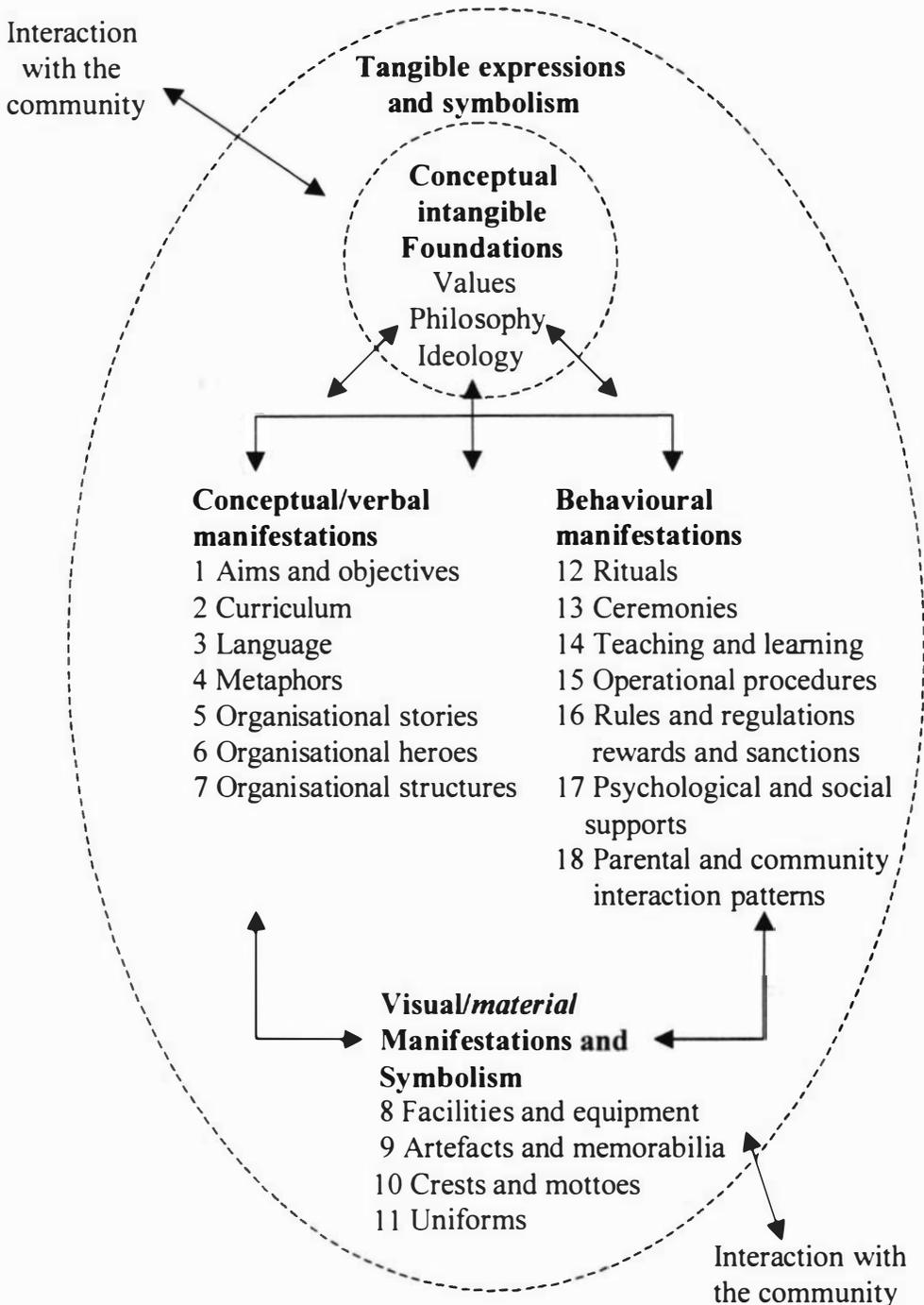
Culture is experienced and expressed in a variety of ways by the people who create and maintain it. Although complex and elusive, its manifestations can be identified and described, categorised in a range of theoretical models constructed by researchers.

Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) divide cultural manifestations into two basic categories (Figure 1). Intangible features, such as values, philosophy and ideology originate from inner space of people's lives, that is, within human nature, experience, memory and emotion. Tangible features, such as verbalised, behavioural and visual expressions, are categorised as arising from the outer space of human experience. These categories are similar to those of Trompenaars (1994) who groups features according to their implicit and explicit nature. He notes that no clear boundaries exist between cultural manifestations, however they might be categorised. They are forever in dynamic relationship. In other words, intangible features are the foundation for the tangible. The rich tradition of the Catholic Church provides many examples of the flow between both categories. The Catholic Christian concept of 'sacrament' illustrates the power of symbol, story and ritual as expressions of spiritual belief about reality and God. Described as "real, symbolic encounters" (Komonchah, 1990:920), they are ritual events, rich in their use of symbol and story, which celebrate key aspects of human life, such as relationship, service, birth, sickness and community. Catholics believe that they are complex signs of God's presence with human beings, bringing about in reality what they signify.

The complex intangible influence of ideas, assumptions, beliefs and values creates a conceptual and philosophical foundation that determines the nature of behaviour and shapes the tangible expressions of culture (Milliken, 1984; Schein, 1992; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Trompenaars, 1994). This corresponds to Schein's (1992) second level of culture, that is, the level of espoused values. According to Milliken (1984), conceptual and philosophical elements include values, philosophy, ideology, aims and objectives, metaphors, myths,

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for assessing and developing school culture

(Reproduced from Beare, Caldwell, & Milliken, 1991: 176).



sagas and traditions. However, Schein (1992) and Trompenaars (1993) argue the existence of an even deeper level of culture; that of basic assumptions. These are the unconscious thoughts, perceptions and feelings of persons that are strong motivators for action. They constitute an underlying framework for explicitly articulated values and beliefs, shared and communicated through the ceremonies, rituals, structures, and behavioural norms of the group. They are manifested in the tangible expressions of the culture.

To understand a culture, its values, philosophy and ideology need to be explored. The Special Character of the Catholic school is grounded in the authentic union of cultural reality and philosophical vision, experienced and expressed in a manner distinctive to each school. By implication, then, an understanding of the nature of the educational culture of the Catholic school requires a thorough knowledge and understanding of Catholic educational philosophy, ideology and values; in short, the Catholic vision of education.

Values and culture

Values are the basic 'building blocks' of culture. Identifying shared values is important for understanding the unique character of an organisation such as a school (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991; Hoy & Miskel, 1991; Schein, 1992; Bush, 1995). Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) seem to rejoice in their conclusion that:

We have finally acknowledged publicly that uniqueness is a virtue, that values are important and that they should be fostered and taken into account in any analysis of an organisation's purpose or performance (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:173).

As the organisation interacts with 'outsiders', external influences will impact on the shared values of the group (Bush, 1995). In fact, Bush (1995) maintains that:

The external environment may be regarded as the source of many of the values and beliefs that coalesce to form the culture of the school or college (Bush, 1995: 135).

In other words, the values of families, church, local community and ethnic groups represented within the school, together with those implicit in Ministry of Education and Government policy, add diversity and flavour to the mix of school values, creating a school culture unlike any other. However, each member of the organisation also brings a personal

value system, developed over a lifetime, into her or his relations with others. When a system of values is shared and is in harmony with the stated mission or vision of the organisation, the common ground provides criteria for judging priorities. It generates a sense of unity; creates a unique organisational identity; and determines the strength of the school's Special Character. Core values, the deepest and most strongly held, focus action and "help to determine the vision for the school or college" (Bush, 1995: 135) for students and teachers, departments, and members of the local community.

Values are guidelines for behaviour. They are the criteria against which we evaluate (and reflect upon) our actions, either proposed or taken, and on the attitudes and behaviours of others (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:180).

Values function at three different levels within individuals and groups (Milliken, 1984; Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991; Dalin & Rolff, 1993). Hodgkinson's (1978 & 1983) models of the hierarchy of values propose that values exist at a Transrational level; that is, at the level of conviction, principle, ethics and morality, requiring personal commitment and faith and strongly defended by the individual. The Rational level of values is manifest within the context of the group in the shape of norms, customs and expectations. Values at this level can be reasoned, justified and supported. The third level is the Subrational; values based on personal preference and feeling. They have an emotional base, are basic and are expressed behaviourally. People constantly move between all three levels, in a complex dynamic manner. The higher the level, the more powerful is the influence, according to Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991). Leaders need to be aware of these levels of values. The significance of a value determines the personal reaction and behaviour of an individual, since "in assigning values, we make judgements about the worth of things from our peculiar perspective" (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:181). Given that no one can assume to **know** the values out of a person may be acting, good communication and cautious interpretation are vital to maintain a healthy culture. The leader who is unaware that people function from their own unique perspective is heading for disaster!

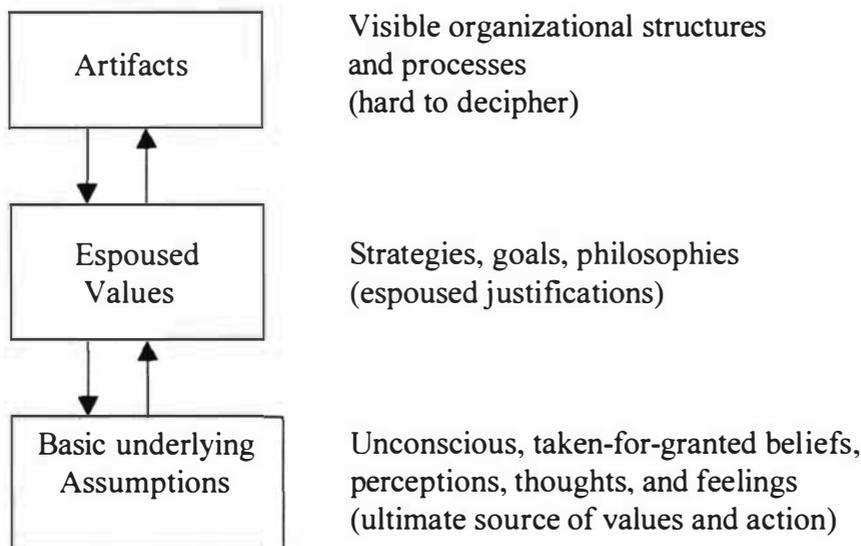
Assumptions

Whilst acknowledging the influence of values in determining behaviour and cultural identity, Schein (1992) proposes the existence of a deeper and ultimately more significant

level of culture, that of basic underlying assumptions. These take the form of unconscious beliefs, thoughts, feelings and perceptions (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Levels of culture

(Reproduced from Schein, 1992: 17).



Schein (1992) identifies six elements of human experience that are foci for deep personal assumptions.

1. The nature of reality and truth: what is real and what is not; what is authentic and what is not. Schein suggests three levels of reality: external physical reality that can be scientifically tested; the social reality that is the agreed communal experience of relationships and identity; and the individual reality which constitutes an individuals experience of life and learning. Truth can be understood as dogma; truth arrived at through rational process or pragmatism; and truth as determined by scientific processes.

2. The nature of time: concepts about how it should be defined or measured. For example, questions are raised about what constitutes 'quick' or 'soon', how time should be used, and the importance of time.

3. **The nature of space:** how it is symbolised; its significance for each person; its relevance.
4. **The nature of human nature:** concepts about goodness, evil, perfection; the significance of areas of life such as family, friendship, commitment, personal worth and character.
5. **The nature of human activity:** what is right or wrong for human persons; the importance of work and leisure; and basic personal orientation in relation to action.
6. **The nature of human relationships:** whether or not people should co-operate, negotiate, compete, respect authority or challenge it; how conflict should be resolved; and how people should express love or use power.

According to Schein (1992), these assumptions are highly complex, and deeply personal. They may develop out of a person's national culture, their basic human personality and personal history, but whatever their source, basic assumptions are fundamental to a person's view of life. They determine the meaning that each person in an organisation assigns to the symbols, norms and values of the whole group. Schein (1992) suggests that assumptions are often at the heart of group and interpersonal conflict. Conversely, when shared by others, they also have the power to unite the members of the organisation in strong cultural bonds.

The relationship of these basic underlying assumptions with the values of the group is such that:

If the espoused values are reasonably congruent with the underlying assumptions, then the articulation of those values into a philosophy of operating can be helpful in bringing the group together, serving as a source of identity and core mission (Schein, 1992:22).

There is a link, therefore, between values, philosophy and the culture of the group (Milliken, 1984; Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991; Trice & Beyer, 1993).

With ideology and philosophy, they (values) constitute the developmental base of our social culture: the common shared and agreed-upon values, philosophies and behaviours (Milliken, 1984:69).

Values, usually the deepest and most significant, are articulated through a philosophy (Dalin & Rolff 1993) giving rise to specific ideas, thoughts and a corresponding ideology. Goals and their practical outcomes are the concrete expression and experience of an integration of values, philosophy and ideology. A school with deep, communal values, a sound philosophy and relevant ideology will be gifted with a clear vision and sense of purpose. The achievement of its goals is more likely, then, to be realised. This ideal state of coherence is reflected in literature on Catholic education in its presentation of a vision of the Catholic school as, not only educating the young, but bringing them and their families closer to a sincere committed relationship with God, community and the world.

Expressions of culture

If “culture is a unique and distinct way of life” (Milliken, 1984:67), then expressions of culture will be as diverse and unique as the organisations themselves. However, patterns of behaviour, language and symbol can be identified, providing insight into the deep values and assumptions that motivate and energise the people in an organisation. Trice & Beyer (1993) argue the existence of ‘cultural forms’, grouped into the four categories of symbols, language, narrative and practices. These “consist of observable entities people use to express, affirm and communicate the substance of their cultures” (Trice & Beyer, 1993:128). Edgar Schein (1992) uses the term ‘artefacts’, to describe the symbols, objects, language, structures and processes that provide meaning for the group. Artefacts are deceptive in their revelation of culture. They are easy to see, but difficult to understand, since they may carry in them a wide range of possible meanings for those who experience them. Owens (1991) speaks of ‘symbolic elements’ which “interweave to create meaning and commitment” (Owens, 1991:22). However, the most comprehensive patterning of cultural expressions in the context of schooling is that of Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991).

Categorising tangible expressions of cultural life under the three headings of Conceptual/verbal manifestations; Visual/Materiel and symbolism; and Behavioural manifestations, Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) provide a detailed, all-encompassing

and interrelated range of experiences and practices that reflect the daily reality of the school. None of these expressions exists in isolation from the others. All reflect some aspect of the value and meaning of school life for the group and the individual. Indeed, all elements work together in a dynamic and complex way.

School culture is very much a 'gestalt' of countervailing forces, and multiple artefacts, rather than a predominance of a single focus or metaphor (Milliken, 1984: 71).

The ideal of Catholic education, as articulated in church documents, is the creation of a harmonious union of the cultural manifestations of both school and church, bringing about a symphony of cultural experience. In this way, the integration of culture, faith and life in the life of each student becomes a possibility, so that he or she might then become the fully formed person that God intended; a person living with integrity. In any human endeavour, reality inevitably falls short of the ideal, but as each Catholic school strives for excellence in terms of its Special Character, it may find guidance through a consideration of the nature of its tangible and intangible cultural expressions of its Catholic identity.

The significance of culture for schools

Beare, Caldwell & Milliken describe schools as "powerfully cultural places" (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:179) that have a profound direct effect on the lives of students and their families. As such, it is important that school leaders and teachers consider the values, beliefs and patterns of behaviour that constitute the lived reality of the school's culture. Dalin & Rolff (1993) note that the power of culture is such that "For the school to change in the way its functions, it has to change its culture" (Dalin & Rolff, 1993:96). A lack of cultural awareness and understanding of the dynamics of culture, therefore, limits the school's ability to bring about change. Effective change cannot be brought about through structural means alone. Culture runs so deep in the lives and actions of people, that it:

Must be at the centre of all administrative efforts if we hope to continuously improve organisational effectiveness (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993:33).

In short, change requires the positive co-operation of people and the building of mutual trust amongst them.

A shared understanding of cultural identity can empower the school.

The energy and spirit of the organisation, as well as its performance, is born out of culture (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993:34).

Since culture develops out of the discovery of solutions to external and internal demands (Owens, 1991; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Bush, 1995); it carries within it the potential for innovation and creative living, inspiring confidence in the future. As members adopt successful behaviours from the past and discover new ones, they are more able to discern the structures, actions and processes that best 'fit' the character of their school. Consequently, they are more prepared to engage their energies in ensuring that these are implemented. This sense of common purpose generates common commitment and effort.

Culture provides members with a sense of personal and collective identity (Owens, 1991; Deal, 1993; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Schools are very complex and diverse places by their nature, but socialisation into a culture enables members to find their place and to perceive what is expected of them. It helps them to recognise what they offer the school and what the school offers them in return. People are encouraged to own what is happening in the school; **their** school. They have a clearer sense of what it means to be 'teacher', 'student' and 'principal'. Expectations, appropriate behaviour and attitudes are communicated through cultural norms; enabling members to more easily recognise their place in the 'scheme of things'. Culture enables them to find meaning through their interrelationships and interactions as together, they generate the activity, purpose and vision of the school. Knowing 'what goes' provides a sense of security, stability and confidence.

Loyalty and commitment amongst staff is stimulated by a positive culture. As teachers work together with a strong sense of team and collegiality, they are more able to focus on and commit to common goals (Owens, 1991; Bush, 1995). Culture:

Gives rise to teachers' willingness not only to follow the rules and norms governing their behaviour in the organisation, but more than that, to accept the ideals of the organisation as their own personal values and, therefore, to work energetically to achieve the espoused goals of the organisation (Owens, 1991:28).

School leaders, as cultural leaders, can count on the support and co-operation of teaching staff, as they work together with a shared understanding of the organisation's unique character and mission (Schein 1992). The creation of strong bonds amongst the members of the organisation stimulates a desire to face problems together; to search for understanding of issues; and to discern appropriate action. A stable culture, one in which there is a strong sense of mutuality, is more ready to confront ambiguities between what is espoused and the reality of day-to-day living. When values are explicit and shared, conflicts can be resolved, misinterpretations can be avoided, energies can be more effectively focused, and schools are more likely to succeed in their task of teaching and learning. Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) exhort schools to take seriously the cultural elements they create and maintain:

Because as organisations they espouse, either directly or indirectly, a composite of values, philosophy and ideology which purports to educate intellectually, socially and skilfully the children who place their faith and their futures in the school's care and nurture (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:179).

An awesome responsibility!

Conclusion

Church literature on education presents a rich, almost poetic, vision of what Catholic schools should be and why. The philosophy, values and beliefs expressed in official Church documents have a global quality, intended to inspire and guide Catholic educators world-wide and establish a theoretical, religious understanding of the nature of Catholic education and its broad implications for schools and Church. Inevitably, given this international audience, the literature does not specify how each Catholic school system within each nation should apply the broad philosophical principles set out in various Vatican documents. It is apparent that educators around the world need to interpret these in terms of their own national reality, educational organisation and needs.

It is interesting to note that, although commonly used in New Zealand Catholic education documents and the Integration Act (1975), official Vatican documents do not appear to use

the term 'Special Character' in relation to Catholic schools. The closest reference is the use of the phrase "specific character of the Catholic school" (SCCE, 1977: Para. 33) followed by a description of the features that constitute that character. This specific character is variously defined as a 'quality', an 'environment', a 'climate' or 'atmosphere, and a 'community', but no direct links are made with the concept of school culture. However, given the emphasis in this literature on the centrality of philosophy and mission; the importance of shared values; their influence on school norms; and the significance of interpersonal relationships, the term 'Special Character' must imply more than the teaching and practices of the Catholic Church applied to an educational context.

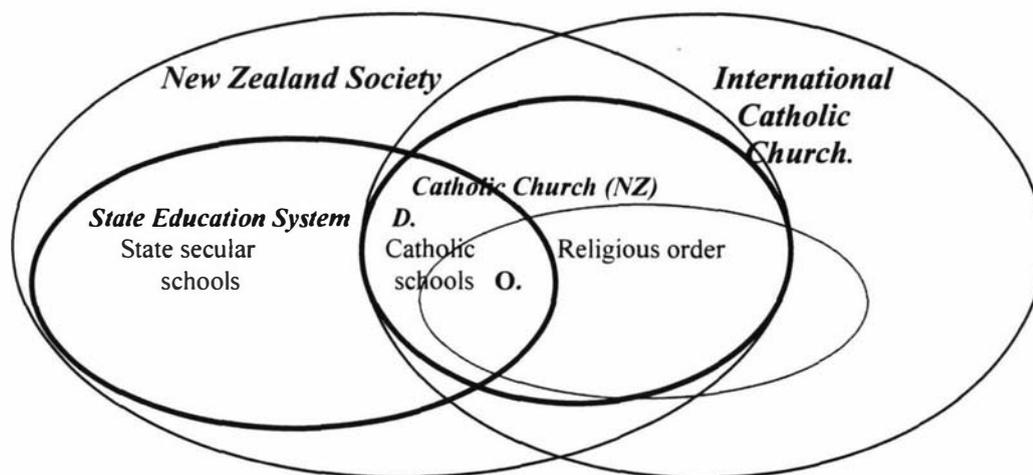
Statements from the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975) and each school's Integration Agreement indicate that a Special Character education is reflected through the "conduct and teaching" (PSCI Act, 1975: 3.1) of each school as it "lives and teaches the values of Jesus Christ" (NZCPCIS, 1995:8). In other words, the Special Character of the Catholic school relates to the communal life of the school as well as its educational activity.

In the light of theories of organisation culture outlined in this literature review, it can be concluded, therefore, that the concept of Special Character is intrinsically bound to that of school culture.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL IN A NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT

Schools constantly interact with a complex network of groups, individuals and organisations and are inevitably influenced by the general society from which these groups originate. So too, a country's national education system, with its trends, debates and areas of development, shapes and influences the nature of its schools. The Catholic school, however, is distinctive in that it has yet another contextual element, that is, the Catholic Church, experienced at international, national and local levels. It exists and operates, therefore, in a context with three or more interlocking, dynamic contextual elements, creating a unique, complex and often demanding environment (Figure 3). This chapter explores the nature of this context and its consequences for the Catholic secondary school.

Figure 3: The context of the New Zealand Catholic secondary school



Note: **D.** represents those Catholic schools owned by a Roman Catholic Diocese, under the Proprietorship of the Bishop. **O.** represents those Catholic Schools established and owned by a Religious Order, who continue to exercise proprietorship of their schools (S. O'Donnell, 2000).

THE CONTEXT OF SOCIETY AND CHURCH

Changes in New Zealand society and culture are inevitably reflected in the sub-culture of the Catholic community since the latter cannot be immune to the range of issues and problems that confront New Zealand society at any particular time in its history. What are some of the changes, issues and problems, therefore, currently shaping the social framework of nation and Church?

New Zealand society

A nation of diversity

New Zealand like many other Western cultures is a pluralistic society. An immigrant country, it has attracted people from many different parts of the world, from many different ethnic groups. Waves of immigration have made their impact on the New Zealand consciousness as new people, with new ways of perceiving the world, have settled here, bringing their own customs, religion, beliefs and values. Although in terms of the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's national identity is formally defined as bi-cultural, the experiential reality, particularly in large urban areas, is often multi-cultural. In recent times, both Pacific Island and Asian worldviews and a resurgence of Maori cultural consciousness, resulting in a plurality of values, cultural experiences and lifestyles have challenged European culture. Diversity may bring cultural richness but it also has the potential to create confusion, division and uncertainty.

It could be argued that one outcome of such diversity is a gradual breakdown in social certainty. For example, in this latter part of the twentieth century, the existence of a wide range of value systems and worldviews has raised concerns about the monopoly role of the State in the provision of education, health and social services. The increasing political influence of neo-liberalism, an ideology with a strong emphasis on individual freedom and choice, could be construed as an illustration of a shift away from what may be perceived as

the mono-cultural dominance and authority of central government. Neo-liberal thinking defines individual freedom as freedom from State intervention (Peters, Marshall & Massey, 1994). Beare & Slaughter (1993) point to similar trends in other nations around the world, concluding that the Western world, in particular, is in the midst of a paradigm shift in which:

The Western, industrial worldview based on certainty, predictability, control and instrumental rationality ... has become fractured and incoherent. Many core values and beliefs which once sustained the social fabric have decayed and are perceived as empty, threatening, problematic (Beare & Slaughter, 1993: 13).

A secular society

New Zealand society is becoming increasingly secular in nature, a result, perhaps, of its plurality of values, lifestyles and beliefs. An overview of the 1996 New Zealand census in *The New Zealand Catholic* of 3 August 1997 reveals that 24% of the population acknowledge no religion, an increase of 64% over the last ten years. The number of people who simply call themselves 'Christian' rather than identify themselves by denomination has risen by a massive 139%. These statistics suggest that more and more New Zealanders have little or no affiliation with any of the major churches.

A discussion paper, *Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life* (Rome, 1998), prepared for the 1998 Synod of Catholic bishops from the Oceania region, observes that:

There seems to be a tendency amongst the people to adopt a way of life in which religion is marginal (Rome, 1998: 10).

The Synod document continues:

The number of those leaving institutional religion and even declaring themselves atheist - or not belonging to any religion - is on the rise (Rome, 1998:15).

In short, there is a marked decline in the numbers identifying themselves with organised religion by attending a local Christian church, reflected in the growing numbers of New Zealanders who find little or no meaning for their lives in religion or church.

The New Zealand Catholic Church

A church in transition

The Synod document observes that “when social institutions in a culture experience change, the Church is challenged as well” (Rome, 1998:14). Social issues make their mark on Catholic people just as they do on other individuals and groups. As society has changed, so too has the Catholic Church. In response to a rapidly changing world, Pope John XXIII called an assembly of more than 2500 Catholic bishops and cardinals from every country in the world. The purpose of this Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was the re-evaluation of the position and teachings of the Catholic Church in relation to that world. Prior to the sixties, the Catholic Church was:

Powerful, large, denominational, and tightly structured with a very visible creed, code and cult. The bishops held the people in unity by their authority, their knowledge of tradition, and their deep sense of responsibility to their flock (McDermott, 1997: 67).

However, Pope John perceived a need to open up the Church to the modern world; to leave behind a post-Reformation mentality characterised by suspicion and isolation. The first issue addressed by the Council was the need to clarify the nature and identity of the Church. The resulting document *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (Vatican, 64) radically altered the way that the Catholic Church saw itself.

This signalled the end of a withdrawn, defensive and counter-reformation church and gave prominence to the church as a community with principles of subsidiarity and collegiality (Welbourne, 1997:1).

Since 1965, the Catholic Church has experienced a wide range of reforms involving sacraments; public worship; leadership; church structure; the role of non-ordained Catholics and religious orders; the Church’s relationship with other Christian denominations and other World religions, and the role of the Church in relation to moral issues. The changes introduced in the church after the Second Vatican Council have been too many and too much for some Catholics who have retreated into ultra-traditional models of community. For others, the changes have been too slow, too little or too late and they have left the Church disillusioned. Currently, the Catholic Church lives with an inner tension created by radical changes that have moved it far away from the church of the Fifties, but that have not

completely fulfilled the promises and expectations of the Council. Issues such as divorce and remarriage; birth control and sexuality; ordination of women and married clergy are still matters of contention and anguish for many Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church is in transition and as such lives with uncertainty, division and confusion.

A multi-cultural church

In reference to the Australian Catholic Church, Hurley (1997) observes that once “we were an Irish church and now we are a multi-cultural church” (Hurley, 1997:6). This comment is relevant also to the New Zealand Catholic Church since its historical roots are similar to those of Australia. The Irish flavour of the Catholic Church in New Zealand is changing as a result of the ongoing influx of other ethnic groups. Coup (1997) reports in *The New Zealand Catholic* of 19 January, 1997 that, in the Auckland diocese, Mass is regularly celebrated in Chinese, Croatian, Filipino, Indonesian, Korean, Polish, Samoan, Spanish, Tongan, Cook Island Maori and Vietnamese as well as in English and Maori. It predicts that “by the year 2000, more than half the Church in Auckland, the country’s most populous diocese, will be non-Pakeha” (*New Zealand Catholic*, 1997, 19 January). Although supported by their own chaplains, the influx of new communities of non-European Catholics has motivated the Bishop of Auckland to set up a diocesan commission to assist and advise him in leading this ethnically diverse church.

Declining membership

Drawing data from the 1996 census, a report commissioned by the Catholic diocese of Auckland found “a sharp reduction in the proportion of residents declaring Catholic faith” (Marketplace New Zealand, 1997: 2) even though the general New Zealand population is increasing. It suggests that the trend indicates that:

Those forming new households between 1986 and 1996 have been much less committed to the Church than their predecessors (Marketplace New Zealand, 1997: 8).

Taking into account the factors of death and emigration, the statistics nevertheless show a 5% decline in the Catholic population. These results are supported by a Church Life

Survey in May 1997 which “involved thirteen Christian denominations, 1250 congregations and 72,000 New Zealanders” (Coup, 1998: 5 April). The survey indicates that “church membership is ageing faster than the overall population ... In Catholic congregations, 68% are aged 40 or over, with people over 50 making up 49%. The lowest percentage is the 15-19 age group (8%) and the 20-29 age group is little better (9%)” (Coup, 1998: 5 April). Only Catholics from the Auckland region were surveyed, but it is reasonable to assume that a survey of the rest of metropolitan New Zealand would reflect a similar trend. The Catholic Church, therefore, is neither retaining nor attracting young people whilst it also suffers an overall loss of adult members. This decline in membership of the Catholic Church is attributed by some to dissatisfaction with the Church’s teaching on contraception, pre-marital sex, remarriage after divorce, leadership within the church and a lack of relevance to modern life.

Priesthood: a crisis of leadership

There is a critical shortage of priests in the New Zealand Catholic Church. In the context of the Auckland diocese, fifty-three priests serve parishes in the region (Coup, 1998: May 31). By the year 2001, it is anticipated that this will fall to forty-five, with a further reduction to twenty-nine within the following five years. The effect will be that by the year 2006, over twenty parishes in the Auckland diocese will have no resident priest “if the age of seventy-five is taken as the priests’ retirement age” (Coup, 1998, May 31). In a pastoral letter of 17 May 1998, Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland, bluntly communicates the grim statistics:

Over the next ten years, thirty of our current parish priests will reach retirement age. Yet our diocese has only five students currently preparing for the priesthood (Dunn, 1998).

The lack of priestly vocations over the last thirty years could be a reflection of the disillusionment of young Catholic men with the church in general, but whatever the cause, the effects are serious. Adding to the difficulties caused by natural attrition due to death and retirement, many men have also made the difficult and radical decision to leave the priesthood for personal reasons. Dennis Horton, a former Catholic priest, now married,

relates his story in the March 1998 edition of the New Zealand Catholic journal *Tui Motu Interislands*. He discusses his difficulties with celibacy as a condition of service as a Catholic priest: “I can see now with the gift of hindsight that my commitment was to priesthood not to celibacy” (Horton, 1998:6). Noting that six priests from the Auckland diocese left active ministry in 1997, he claims that:

Others are asking searching questions about the nature of priestly ministry and the present difficulties of the Church (Horton, 1998:5).

He suggests that these questions are indicators of a church in transition; a church that needs to confront a need for change in its form of ordained ministry, and expresses his belief that Catholic priests should be allowed to marry:

If it were an option for a priest to serve either as married or as celibate, then the true nature of the gift of celibacy would stand out all the more (Horton, 1998:7).

The issue centres, not only on celibacy, but also on **who** may serve the church as priest. In spite of Vatican directives that the issue may not be debated further, the issue of ordination of women is still a contentious and difficult one for New Zealand Catholics.

The ever-decreasing numbers of priests in the New Zealand Catholic Church has made its impact on the functioning of the church at parish level. The Synod document states:

Vocations are declining to the point that in some areas vocations are unable to keep pace with the number of priests who die. Such a situation means that a good number of smaller communities no longer have a resident priest in spite of a growing population (Rome, 1998: 33).

This document warns that the laity, that is, the non-ordained or ‘ordinary’ Catholic, cannot fill the gap, and that:

More attention needs to be given to coming to a clearer understanding of the roles and charisms proper to priests and laity in the Church (Rome, 1998: 33).

However, the parish is still recognised in the document as the “ordinary point of contact of the faithful with the Church” (Rome, 1998: 37). But how can these ‘points of contact’ be maintained if the parish has no serving priest to lead the local Catholic community and the

role of laity is perceived as limited? Fr Peter Murnane, a former parish priest and now tertiary chaplain, comments in *Tui Motu Interislands* (1998, March):

I have seen and shared in a lot of good in the parish ministry, but I have to ask myself whether this kind of Assembly, based on geographical divisions with each unit under the full legal control of one priest and one bishop is the best way for us to 'be Christ' in our times. Could the problem be that we have here a system which is outdated - even corrupt! (Murnane, 1998: 9).

Strong words! But perhaps, succinctly reflecting the concerns, frustrations and dismay of some who fear that church leadership, without change, will simply disappear through a process of attrition.

In response to this crisis in Auckland, in 1998, Bishop Patrick Dunn initiated a process of Pastoral planning, co-ordinated by Rev. Bernard Dennehy. The purpose of the process, which involved a series of meetings in each parish and later, between neighbouring parishes, is the identification of ways in which the talents and skills of non-ordained Catholics could be used to ensure the continuing viability of the parish as a unit. Where viability is not feasible, neighbouring parishes may be required to amalgamate. Whatever the outcome of the Pastoral planning process, however, it is certain that the current system is unsustainable. Inevitably, changes will need to be made to current parish and diocesan structures.

In conclusion, all of these issues are interrelated in terms of their impact on the New Zealand Catholic Church. None exists in isolation from the others. Who will take up the work traditionally undertaken by priests and religious brothers and sisters when the number of Catholics with an acknowledged relationship with the institutional church is also in decline? Surely one consequence must be an ever decreasing pool of talent and ability for the work of the Church.

THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

New Zealand Catholic schools serve New Zealand society and the Church by providing an alternative to secular education for the children of families who have an established relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. However, as State Integrated schools within New Zealand's national education system, they have experienced, in common with all State schools, the upheaval and turmoil of educational reform over the last ten years. This section outlines the changes that have occurred in the New Zealand education system and discusses issues that are more specific to the Catholic school.

The New Zealand education system

Prior to the 1980's the New Zealand education system was based on a philosophy that

Entailed a view of education as a public good which ought to be provided by the State at all levels from early childhood care to university scholarship (Grace, 1998: 29).

Education was not perceived merely as an individual good, but fundamental to the social, political and economic health of the whole nation. Instrumental in empowering the poor so that they could realistically aspire to and achieve an improved lifestyle, it was "seen as a universal welfare right of every citizen " (Peters, Marshall & Massey, 1994: 253).

Education was:

For the good of society where society is construed not merely as a collection of individuals but as a cohesive, intrinsically social, community (Peters, Marshall & Massey, 1994: 265).

However, the influence of New Right thinking, which has underpinned educational reforms since the late eighties, has radically changed not only the administration and functioning of the education system, but the very philosophy upon which it is based. Since 1984, a philosophical and ideological dichotomy has existed; a tension that continues to challenge New Zealanders at every level of society. As Ivan Snook (1995) observes:

There are those who wish schools to be places where the young learn to develop themselves as persons and prepare to fulfil themselves as citizens. There are others who see schools as serving the needs of the economy and preparing workers for industry (Snook, 1995: 168).

A time of reform

When the Labour Government came to power in 1984, it was confronted by an argument from New Zealand Treasury advocating radical educational reform. This was based on a belief that education should be more responsive to the “labour ‘needs’ of a changing economy and an increasingly global economy” (Peters, Marshall & Massey, 1994: 256). Treasury saw no reason why education should be treated any differently from any other service or commodity. The argument was simple; if New Zealand was to compete effectively in a competitive international marketplace, the education system had to be restructured to improve efficiency and increase accountability. Peters (1995) succinctly sums up the Treasury perspective:

The message is quite clear: in the past there has been too much emphasis on social and cultural objectives and insufficient attention paid to economic goals in our education system; henceforth, we must invest heavily in education as the basis for future economic growth by redesigning the system so that it meets the needs of business and industry (Peters, 1995: 62).

Hand in hand with the other social and industrial reforms being initiated at this time, the New Zealand education system experienced a series of formal (and, in some minds, hasty) reviews. These culminated in the release, in 1988, of the *Administering for Excellence* report (Picot, 1988), which highlighted what were perceived as serious shortcomings in the education system. Openshaw, Lee & Lee (1993) list the major concerns identified by the Picot report (1988):

Overcentralisation of decision-making; complexity; lack of information and choice; lack of effective management practices; and feelings of powerless (Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993: 268).

In 1989, David Lange, Prime Minister of New Zealand, launched his policy document, *Tomorrow's Schools* (1989), addressing the issues raised by Picot (1988) and implementing his recommendations. Boards of Trustees in each school were introduced; their members elected from the school community and given responsibility for the governance of schools in partnership with the school's professional administration. Each of these boards:

Was to set its own objectives within overall education objectives set by the state, to be expressed in a ‘charter’ which would act as a contract between community and institution, institution and state (Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993: 269).

Except for the overall allocation of financial resources and policy making that remained the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, each school was autonomous in its governance. Both the Picot Report (1988) and *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange, 1989) intensified the already existing tensions between conflicting educational ideologies. As Snook (1995) notes:

From one point of view, they devolve decision-making to the local community, encourage partnership between parents and teachers, favour democratic decision-making and promote equity. From another viewpoint, they devolve responsibility while retaining control, encourage divisiveness, make decision-making less democratic and, by promoting choice, reduce equity (Snook, 1995: 162).

A business climate

The proponents of *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange, 1989) believed that:

Schools and other educational institutions ... will be more effective and efficient if they adopt practices which correspond to those of the business corporation and the competitive market place (Ryan, 1998: 14).

This, they argued, would give parents greater choice since each school would be free to develop its own place in the market by providing an educational 'product' unlike any other. Schools deemed inefficient and ineffective would simply find the pressure from the community too hard to bear and would either close from lack of patronage or would be motivated to improve the education it provided. Codd (1993) is critical of this approach, and points to serious negative consequences which have arisen as a result of its introduction:

To encourage parental choice, school zoning regulations have been abolished leading to difference between schools in their admission criteria. Competition between schools for both students and resources has increased markedly and predictably some schools are attracting more socially advantaged students (Codd, 1993: 46).

In short, the *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange, 1989) model of education created a business and economically orientated environment for schools, bringing with it the language and principles of the business world.

Opponents of a business model of educational administration argue that Government fiscal restraints on schools' operational grants have not met the true costs of education. This, they

maintain, has resulted in a widening gap between schools whose communities have the resources to financially support the school, and those in economically deprived and disadvantaged regions of New Zealand who struggle to make ends meet. Gordon (1994) argues, for example, that the inability of schools from lower socio-economic areas to provide, from within their communities, people with the expertise to run the school as Board members means that they incur extra costs as they 'hire' the skills needed. The ability of such schools to 'top up' school budgets from the proceeds of fundraising is significantly limited by the financial difficulties faced by many of its parents. Restricted family incomes, she reports, also result in the need for schools to feed students; to provide basic materials; to address serious social issues such as violence, truancy and low student expectations and achievements. Challenging the basic principles of the reform movement, Gordon (1994) asks:

If choice inevitably means unequal access to educational opportunities, is it desirable? If competition occurs on a playing field which is distorted and tilted by a range of pre-existing social and cultural judgments, is it fair? (Gordon, 1994: 124).

Stuart Middleton (1998) shares similar concerns about the effects of reform. He maintains that reform policies have failed to take account of significant differences between schools and are based on the assumption that every school faces the same conditions as every other. Questioning the basic premise of educational reform that neglects to acknowledge such realities, Middleton (1998) believes that the need to address difficulties being faced by individual schools should, in fact, have been the starting point for reform. He maintains that:

What is urgently needed is a return to the basic principles that underpinned the reforms and a serious effort made to implement them. But this time, there must be recognition that self-management requires the tools and the resources. Where needs are different so too must the tools and the resources be different (Middleton, 1998: 11).

A time of accountability

The Education Review Office was established to assist in the reform process by conducting comprehensive reviews and audits of each school, which would be available to the media as public documents. Regular reviews of administrative and management systems, the introduction of performance appraisals of teaching staff and statistical analysis of school

results are conducted to establish the school's efficiency and effectiveness as an educational institution. Each school, therefore, is evaluated against its outcomes. The era of public accountability has arrived. Few would argue against the principle that every school should provide the best quality education it can offer for the sake of its students. However, critics claim that the underlying assumption of the Education Review Office is that all schools are the same and can be evaluated by universally applied criteria that judge the education they provide in terms of value for money (Codd, 1997).

Accountability for the sake of justice is one thing; sadly, accountability in the interests of competition and choice is quite another. In terms of the latter, public comparisons and ranking of schools based on examination results are potentially devastating for those schools who already struggle against social and economic factors which are not of their making and are outside of their control. To evaluate a school's weaknesses with the aim of identifying areas for improvement and for financing these is both valid and necessary; to criticise in order to rank the school in the interests of a competitive educational market is not.

In summary, as a result of a decade of reforms, New Zealand schools often find themselves competing with each other for a limited number of students and, subsequently, the resources that are determined by the size of school rolls. Schools are formally and officially audited but essentially must sort out their problems by themselves, with limited additional resources or Government support. In the era of *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange, 1989), every school should be treated the same and parents are free to choose the 'best' school for their child. However, this comment from Olssen & Matthews (1995) illustrates the strength of opposition for reforms that are perceived as emphasising a need for increased efficiency and effectiveness, but lack a similar commitment to equity:

Freedom and choice in the new educational market will be for those who can afford them. 'Diversity' in schooling will simply be a more polite word for the condition of educational apartheid (Olssen & Matthews, 1995: 28).

Strong language! Powerful warning!

Specific issues affecting the New Zealand Catholic education system

Religious Orders in New Zealand

The number of men and women who are members of religious orders is in decline. Both male and female Religious orders have ageing congregations and, given the smaller numbers of people seeking a Christian lifestyle as a Brother or Sister, are reviewing the nature of their continuing mission in New Zealand. The last twenty-five years have seen members of religious orders move out of their traditional roles in schools and hospitals to take up active ministry in parishes as pastoral workers or in specific areas of social need within their local communities and dioceses. As a result, they have had to confront the task of 'handing on' the traditional work of their religious congregations to people who are not members of the order. In the process, they have had to face the issue of how the 'spirit' of their founder and historical tradition might be sustained as a continuing inspiration for these new workers.

Because religious orders have seen the demographic writing on the wall, they have recognised that the spirit of their congregations will only continue in their institution if lay people give priority to them in their professional practice (Sharkey, 1997:61).

Religious orders are preparing for the time when the work in which they have invested their lives, talents and mission will be formally handed on to other Catholic people; some of whom may not have been formally enculturated into the charism or spirit of the order.

This decline has had enormous impact on the staffing of New Zealand Catholic schools. In 1975, the year that the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act was passed into law, it was almost taken for granted that a significant proportion of teaching positions in Catholic schools would be held by members of the founding religious order. It was also assumed that leadership positions in Catholic secondary schools would be held primarily by Religious, as the following reference relating to the liability of teachers to teach Religious Education from the draft proposals on Integration illustrates:

In certain integrated schools a condition of appointment of principals would normally be a willingness and ability to take religious instruction and the majority of members of Religious Orders would be likely to be willing and able to do so (NZ Tablet, 1975, 8 January).

The implication is that the teaching of Religious Education should not be considered a contentious issue since 'principal' and 'Religious' are effectively synonymous. This is certainly no longer the case.

A postal survey (Appendix A) sent to the leaders of eight religious orders traditionally associated with Catholic schools, particularly secondary schools, reveals that the numbers of Religious employed in those schools has fallen from 196 to 44 in the last ten years; a massive 78% reduction! The amalgamation of small, single sex boys' schools and single sex girls' schools throughout many areas of New Zealand has reduced the number of Catholic secondary schools associated with these orders from 52 in 1988 to 36 in 1998; in other words, a reduction of 31%. By contrast, the *NZ Tablet* of 21 May 1975 reports that 463 teachers in the 67 Catholic secondary schools of that time were members of religious orders compared with 503 lay teachers. These figures clearly illustrate, therefore, a dramatic reduction in the numbers of Religious teaching in New Zealand Catholic secondary education.

In spite of diminished involvement, all respondents reported that the reflection of their tradition and charism within their school continues to be an important feature. The following comment reflects the general tone of survey responses:

We consider that it is very important for a school to possess a spirit, peculiar to that school, that staff and students learn to make their own and learn to 'live out' in their lives. Tradition and charism give a school that special spirit and a philosophy to build on. They also help to provide a spirituality that students absorb and make their own (RO#7).

To this end, all have maintained at least informal contacts with their schools, in the form of school visits; attendance at school celebrations and liturgies; providing classroom input relating to the order's 'story'; involvement in staff development and student leadership activities. Two orders have no formal association with the schools. However, the majority has maintained proprietorship of their schools and consequently, has up to 4 representatives on the schools' Board of Trustees, although these may not be members of their religious congregation. One order has appointed a national co-ordinator to promote a Special Character partnership with schools; another encourages ongoing links with the international

activities of the order in the form of invitations to staff and students to attend overseas conferences organised for the purpose of promoting their charism.

All respondents expressed hopes that the Special Character of their schools will be preserved for future generations of the Catholic community. They believed that it was crucial that the staff, school leaders and Boards of Trustees of Catholic schools were people with a well-developed knowledge and understanding of the Catholic philosophy of education and Special Character, although some concern was expressed about the ongoing availability of such people. They hope, as one respondent writes:

That staff and parents and Board of Trustee members will continue to see that the Special Character sets the school apart and so make their decisions in the light of those principles (RO#8).

Students and their families

Doherty (1997) reminds us that:

Catholic schools were established as part of the Church's mission to assist parents in the education of their children in faith, Catholic doctrine and the practices and traditions of the Church (Doherty, 1997: 42).

However, where students and their families have no regular association or relationship with the institutional church, Catholic schools are limited in their ability to carry out this mission. Currently little research has been conducted in New Zealand to determine the reasons behind parents' decisions to opt for a Catholic education for their children. Given the decline in numbers who regularly attend a local Catholic Church, it cannot be assumed that their reasons have necessarily anything to do with the religious development of young people. Asked why they have chosen a Catholic school, the answer is likely to be 'because there's good discipline'; 'it has a good academic standard'; 'I went to a Catholic school'; 'Catholic schools teach good values' and so on. As an Acting Principal in a Catholic secondary school, this researcher has even had non-Catholic parents offer to arrange a quick Baptism in order that their child might be enrolled! In such a situation, conflicting expectations of the school is an inevitability.

Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975), Catholic schools are restricted in the number of non-Catholic students they may enrol. Currently this stands at 5% of the maximum roll as specified in the school's Integration Agreement, although since 1998, individual schools may apply to extend this proportion to 10%. The key criterion for enrolment is the family's established relationship with the Catholic Church. Parents who wish to enrol their child must provide evidence from the local parish priest to this effect. Commonly called a 'white card', this formal evidence must be produced at the time of enrolment. However, an 'established relationship' is open to interpretation. The priest may consider that baptism is sufficient evidence or that the close association of another member of the family (for example, a Catholic grandparent) with the Church demonstrates a valid relationship. Given the fact that many parishes have only one priest, probably elderly, it is unrealistic to expect that he will personally know every Catholic family in the parish out of the hundreds who attend Mass on a regular basis. Whatever the cause, the result is that most of the students attending Catholic schools have little contact with the institutional church outside of the school itself.

Statistics have shown that young people are not attending Sunday Mass in their local parishes. As a result, most of the students attending Catholic secondary schools are not familiar with many of the liturgical and religious practices of the church. The school, then, has the task, not only of providing worthwhile religious experiences for its students, but of also providing very basic teaching on its meaning for Catholics. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for students to integrate their faith, life and culture - the primary goal of Catholic education. It is equally difficult for the school to adequately fulfil its religious purpose when the lives of the majority of students are far removed from both the faith and culture of the Catholic Church. The 1998 Synod of Bishops of Oceania has expressed its concern over this situation. Referring to the school's function as religious educator, the discussion document states:

Another worrying factor ... is the situation where many youths, who were initiated into and frequented the sacraments in primary school, abandon the practice during the secondary level of education, in some cases, displaying a great resistance to catechesis (Rome, 1998: 16).

Noting that many people return when planning marriage or the baptism of their children, the document nevertheless concludes that “a great many because of cultural factors, are left with little opportunity for contact with the Church” (Rome, 1998: 16).

A high proportion of non-practising Catholic students can often create tensions within the school community. Parents who send their child to the school because of its supporting role as religious educator may find that they, as practising members of the Church, are in the minority. Their children may be confronted with the same plurality of beliefs and values as can be found in any school. The fears of these parents may well be, therefore, that the student community will function as a counter-productive influence on the developing faith of their children.

Significant numbers of non-practising Catholic students impact on the delivery of the Religious Education curriculum. Although a wide range of abilities can be anticipated in the formal Religious Education class as in any other subject, students with no experience of the Catholic tradition and its teachings can be almost illiterate in matters of spirituality and religion. A normal adolescent reluctance to learn combined with a student’s perception that religion lacks relevance to his/her predominantly secular lifestyle may create a Religious Education classroom environment characterised by student hostility, indifference and ignorance. In short, the Catholic school is faced not only with students who have little or no understanding of the nature of Catholic education, but also students who may in fact be culturally resistant to it.

The increasing diversity of ethnic groups represented in Catholic secondary schools adds another dimension to these issues, presenting difficulties with language, culture, and a whole range of different perceptions and experiences of what it means to be Catholic. Students arriving from countries such as the Philippines and the Pacific Islands may bring with them an authoritarian, institutional view of the Church, characterised by traditional piety and devotion, reminiscent of the Irish Catholic Church of the 1950’s. Students from Central Europe may have experienced a Church that has endured generations of State

opposition and oppression. Add the predominantly secular and liberal experience of New Zealand-born students and the Religious Education teacher is faced with a complex, perplexing yet richly diverse range of experiences of Catholic culture within the class. Since the subject is compulsory at all levels in most Catholic secondary schools, even the most highly trained, qualified and committed teacher can find the experience of teaching Religious Education at secondary school level a daunting task.

Teachers in Catholic Schools

The plurality and increasing secularism of New Zealand society compounded by the decreasing educational involvement of religious orders has raised difficulties in relation to the staffing of Catholic schools. As Hurley (1997) observes from his experience of the Australian Catholic education context:

Many of the teachers are not Catholic; many of the Catholics are not committed to the practice of their faith, nor equipped to catechise (Hurley, 1997: 5).

The departmental structure of secondary schools requires highly trained teachers in particular curriculum areas. Finding suitable staff is always a challenge for any secondary school, but for the Catholic secondary school, the situation is even more complex. Each school's Integration Agreement specifies the number of teaching positions that must be filled by Catholic professionals. Boards of Trustees and principals must find teachers who are not only proficient in their discipline but also able and willing to teach Religious Education and take a proactive stance in relation to the Special Character of the school. As numbers of practising Catholics decline and the teaching of Religious Education becomes more demanding and more specialised, finding the 'right' people for such 'tagged' positions can be daunting. Progress has been made with the introduction of a national pre-service course, conducted in each diocese, for teacher trainees who plan to teach in Catholic schools. The inclusion, in 1999, of Religious Education modules as an elective in the Auckland College of Education's Bachelor of Education degree is another promising initiative but, sadly, is relevant only for Primary teacher trainees.

It is not uncommon to find that the Religious Education department in many Catholic secondary schools is staffed by a minority group of Catholics on whom all things 'religious' fall. Statistics obtained from the Catholic Integrated Schools Board in Auckland reflect this situation. For example, in 1997, out of a total of 484 teachers in Auckland Catholic secondary schools, 253 were Catholic compared with 281 non-Catholic and in 6 out of the 15 colleges, the majority of the staff were non-Catholic. Of the Catholic staff, only 139 held tagged positions, that is, with a special responsibility in relation to the Special Character of the school. Only 16 staff were members of religious orders. It is interesting to note that since 1997, statistics such as these have not been compiled by a central Catholic education authority. A lack of monitoring of these trends must surely be considered a serious shortfall given the important role of teachers in the relation to Special Character of Catholic schools and the implications of a potential insufficiency of Catholic teaching staff if these trends continue.

Adding further difficulties to an already difficult position, the decreasing number of priests in New Zealand has resulted in a growing number of secondary schools that have no school chaplain. In this situation, students lose yet another link with the institutional and communitarian Church and Catholic staff lose an important emotional, practical and spiritual support.

Although often very supportive of the Special Character of the school, non-Catholic teachers cannot realistically be expected to carry out the role of **Catholic** educator. Their religious freedom and personal conscience must be respected (SCCE, 1988). However, as a minority in the staffroom, Catholic staff, deeply committed to the Special Character of their school, face unique difficulties. Decision-making within a typical secondary school is often collegial, sometimes even consensual. Yet Catholic teachers may find it necessary to strongly oppose a majority view if they perceive the latter as having a potentially negative effect on the Special Character of the school.

The significance of other Special Character activities, such as Retreat days, liturgy and prayer, may not be fully understood or appreciated by non-Catholic staff. Likewise, the Religious Education programme may be seen as an 'extra' subject, drawing time and resources away from 'real' subjects. In the light of such misunderstandings and tension, there is a danger that Catholic teachers could become emotionally, socially and professionally isolated from their professional peers or forced into a fortress mentality.

From a practical point of view, a shortage of Catholic teachers means that the workload of Religious Education teaching, liturgical preparation and all other Special Character aspects of the school life inevitably falls on fewer shoulders. Such a situation creates significant workload issues for the Catholic minority. It is particularly serious for the Director of Religious Studies whose responsibilities include key Special Character areas such as liturgy, prayer, retreats and liaison with the local Catholic community, as well as full Head of Department responsibility for the delivery of the Religious Education curriculum.

The task of educators in Catholic schools includes the formation of questioning Christians, a prophetic people who interrogate the social, political and cultural environment in light of the Gospel (Carroll, 1997: 47).

How can this be fulfilled adequately when the majority of secondary teachers on the staff may have no personal association with the Catholic Church, and perhaps even less with the Gospel? In serious situations of active antipathy of staff, proprietors have mechanisms that can be put in place to ensure that Special Character is not jeopardised. However, in reality, these are rarely, if ever, used to dismiss teachers who actively work against the Special Character of the school. Unless and until they choose to leave, the school may have little choice than simply do what it can to minimise their negative counter-cultural influence.

Leadership

A shortage of trained committed Catholic teachers impacts on the selection and appointment of principals and other senior management staff. The principal of a Catholic school, who must be a Catholic, and other senior managers who hold 'tagged' positions, are expected to be guardians and custodians of the Special Character of the school. Not only

must an aspiring school leader develop sound management skills and leadership qualities, but in a Catholic school, must also demonstrate a visible commitment to the Catholic church and the Special Character of the school. Applicants for senior management positions may be very attractive in terms of their professional experience and qualifications, but if the spiritual element is lacking, the consequences for the Catholic school can be devastating. In such situations, serious and lasting conflicts of values are almost inevitable between school management, Boards of Trustees, Catholic and non-Catholic staff, parents and parish. If the leadership of the school lacks a deep understanding of the distinctiveness of the Catholic school, then decisions made with sound educational or professional reasons may unwittingly conflict with other spiritual and religious values.

Boards of Trustees

Every Board of Trustees in a Catholic secondary school has up to four full members who are appointed by the Proprietor, the legal owner of the school and function as the official representatives of the Proprietor's interests. However, it cannot be assumed in the current context that all will be fully familiar with Church teaching on Catholic education or understand its significance for the governance of the school. The selection of Proprietor's representatives is often made on the recommendation of the principal who may or may not have used the criteria of Special Character in their consideration. The complex and demanding organisational nature of secondary schools require a contribution of business and professional skills. For Catholic schools, which are invariably small, such skills may be in short supply. The Catholic secondary school principal may be tempted, as a first priority, to seek out members of the local community and parent body who have those types of skills to offer. In addition, it is a difficult and sensitive matter to investigate the religious background and faith of prospective Board members. Given the decline in numbers of practising Catholic families, similar difficulties may be faced in relation to Parent representatives.

At present, there is a wide variation in the scope and quality of formal training in Special Character for Boards of Trustees. In view of the time commitment and demands of Board

membership, there may be a reluctance to make such training mandatory or as a prerequisite to election or appointment. Once again, the potential for value conflict within the school in such a situation is very real.

Aware of these difficulties, the New Zealand Council of Proprietors of Catholic Integrated Schools (NZCPCIS), has developed a national strategic plan, *Light New Fires* (New Zealand Catholic Education Office, 1996). This plan includes goals and objectives for preserving and maintaining the Special Character of the country's Catholic schools. Since 1997, a series of memoranda have been sent to Boards of Trustees, outlining their responsibility to ensure that staff appointments reflect the Special Character needs of the school and reminding them of the need for Board policies and procedures to reflect the Special Character of the school. Ways in which Special Character might be promoted have been suggested. In addition, the Council of Proprietors has issued a document entitled *The Declaration* (NZCPCIS, 1997) which sets out the "essential characteristics of authentic Catholic school education" (NZCPCIS, 1997). It is expected that this small document will be used as the 'touchstone' for evaluating the Catholic education provided in each school.

Special Character and accountability

On 31 January, 1998, the Executive Director of the Association of Proprietors of Integrated Schools and the Chief Review Officer of the Education Review Office signed a relationship agreement formally recognising the right of the ERO to include Special Character as an area of evaluation in school reviews. This agreement argues that, as a partner in the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975), the Crown has a responsibility to ensure that "Integration shall not jeopardise the Special Character of an Integrated school" (PSCI Act, 1975: Section 3). Given also that Board of Trustees of each Catholic school has a legally binding Charter and Integration Agreement, which define and expound the Special Character of the school, this relationship agreement argues that:

It is apparent that the Special Character and all it implies must be included in the Accountability Reviews which the Education Review Office conducts in Integrated schools, as well as in a school's own Self-Reviews (New Zealand Catholic Education Office, 1998: Section 1.6).

For this purpose, guidelines for the use of the Education Review officers were produced by the Catholic Education Office for use in audits of Catholic schools. These set out a range of indicators that relate directly to the effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school. However, since Special Character affects every aspect of education within a Catholic school and is “integral to everything that is done in or by a Catholic Integrated school” (New Zealand Catholic Education Office, 1998, 12 March), the various categories of indicators are extremely comprehensive and detailed.

This agreement raises some serious questions. How can the Special Character of a Catholic school be effectively and accurately reviewed, over a period of only three or four days, by Education Review Officers, who may not be familiar with the culture of Catholic church, its teachings and tradition? How will reviewers with no in-depth training in the Special Character of Catholic schools evaluate such intangible elements as Gospel values, beliefs, Christian witness and sense of mission? What are the implications for a Catholic school if it is publicly disclosed that its Special Character has been judged lacking in its ERO Accountability Review? What rights of reply will a school have if the basis of its dissatisfaction with a review report is the reviewer’s inability to exercise valid judgements on Special Character?

There should be no question that Special Character should be reviewed. A system of regular self-review and reporting by Boards of Trustees to their Proprietors is already well established. Proprietors also arrange for independent reviews to be conducted on their behalf. What is in question here is the suitability of ERO as Special Character reviewers and the subsequent potential for confusion and conflict. In situations outside of their expertise, it could be anticipated that reviewers would focus primarily on basic, visible indicators of Special Character such as evidence of Christian art and celebrations. There is a danger that, in such situations, a superficial review process may, in effect, redefine the meaning and scope of Special Character, losing sight of the richness, depth and human mystery that constitutes the spiritual and cultural soul of the school. Time and experience will no doubt test the advisability of such a relationship agreement!

Anticipated growth

In spite of the declining numbers of Catholics with a regular association with the institutional Church, there are strong indications of growth in the rolls of New Zealand Catholic secondary schools. Studies conducted on behalf of Catholic Church authorities predict that by the year 2000, an additional "19,648 students will be attending the (Catholic) schools" (Clapcott Consultancy, 1997, 30 July), the greatest rise being in the Auckland region. These predictions have necessitated the development of substantial building programmes in order to cater for a projected increase of students. Currently, rolls in Catholic schools show a 3.4% increase since 1997. Not only will schools require extra resources, but increasing rolls will impact on the nature of the schools themselves. For example, the two secondary schools studied in this research project are predicted to rise in the period up to the year 2006 from 337 to 800 in one, and from 792 to 1000 in the other. Such an influx of new students and the extra staff required to teach them, given the contexts from which they will likely come, will inevitably change the culture, organisation and structure of the schools.

Conclusion

Changes in New Zealand society, education and Catholic Church have brought about far-reaching effects on the culture and function of the Catholic secondary school in this country. They have raised issues in terms of school personnel, leadership, student and family needs, governance and curriculum. Catholic schools have not only confronted the same challenges as other New Zealand secondary schools, but because of their very nature and distinctiveness, they have faced additional difficulties which non-Catholic schools have not had to face. Only time will tell the effects of significant contextual change on the Special Character of the Catholic school.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

THE NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

This research falls within the naturalistic paradigm. There are two reasons for this - firstly, because naturalism is the paradigm within which this researcher has experience and secondly, perhaps even more importantly, because of her personal belief that naturalism offers a research approach that is suitable for the focus of this inquiry.

Naturalistic inquiry: A personal choice

Patton (1990) observes that “a paradigm is a worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world” (Patton, 1990:37). It is the way that the researcher makes meaning of the world, life, humanity, society and knowledge. In naturalism, the inquiry process is very personal (Patton, 1990). For example, the success of fieldwork depends largely on the strength of the relationship developed between researcher and the human subject (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Anderson, 1990; Patton, 1990; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Wiersma, 1995). The researcher’s personality, character, values and experience, therefore, are factors in the meaning that is made of the phenomenon under study; that is the ‘tacit knowledge’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:40) which the researcher brings to the investigation. Research methods, therefore, need to suit the personality, character and background of the researcher.

As a person, this researcher is stimulated by her interactions with other people, and is sensitively aware of the complexity and nuances of human dialogue. Her own life experience has taught her the need to maintain an open-ended attitude in the face of issues regarding personal meaning, perceptions of life and the world, and the uniqueness of individual thinking, feeling and acting. As a researcher, she is attracted to naturalistic research with its direct involvement in people’s lives. The open-ended nature of naturalistic inquiry ‘sits well’ with her character and background.

Naturalistic inquiry: An appropriate paradigm

Although different schools of research define naturalism in their own ways, they all basically agree that it is research conducted within the natural setting of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Cresswell, 1994; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Wiersma, 1995), often referred to as 'qualitative research'. Naturalism is based on several basic beliefs and assumptions about the study of social situations and human phenomena. For example, Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) claim that "as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its 'natural' state, undisturbed by the researcher" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:6).

Naturalism is also based on the belief that the study of social phenomenon is best conducted directly by the researcher. Lofland & Lofland (1995) maintain that:

Face-to-face interaction is the fullest condition for participating in the mind of another human being and ... that you must participate in the mind of another human being ... to acquire social knowledge (Lofland & Lofland, 1995:16).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) support this view in their argument that "realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:39). Social meaning, therefore, can best be gained from working in the natural contexts of the subjects because context is inseparable from meaning; removing subjects from their context would distort the meaning about their lives and situation that can be gleaned from the research process. To change the context is to change the phenomena and change the meaning. This is particularly relevant for research of human phenomena, which are by their nature, dynamic, interactive and complex (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). In naturalistic research:

The researcher seeks to witness how the studied others perceive, feel and act in order to grasp these settings, feelings and actions fully and intimately ... only through direct experience can one accurately know much about social life (Lofland & Lofland, 1995:3).

Strauss & Corbin (1990) observe that "some areas of study naturally lend themselves more to qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons' experience with a phenomenon like illness, religious conversion, or addiction" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:19). A naturalistic approach, therefore, is appropriate for this inquiry, since it encompasses such phenomena as religious conviction; personal commitment and professionalism; cultural values and beliefs; care

and education of the young; loyalty to the continuity of history and tradition; and the conflicts or tensions that may arise from all of these.

The characteristics of naturalistic inquiry

Naturalistic or qualitative research has several features that make it compatible with the focus of this study.

A focus on process

Not merely concerned with the outcomes of peoples' actions, naturalistic research looks at the reasons they act as they do; that is, the processes that give rise to the actions (Patton, 1990; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Cresswell, 1994). This study of the Special Character of two Catholic secondary schools requires a methodology that explores the concepts people have about the meaning and nature of Special Character; one that will shed light on the ways in which these concepts impact upon the life and activity of the school. By contrast, a quantitative approach to the research may provide information about the outcomes of such concepts, but is limited in its ability to assess the inner perceptions of ethos and culture that give rise to these outcomes. Quantitative research attempts to take a 'snapshot' of life at a specific point in the lives of the participants. It is not suited to research that has to take into account change and adaptation, that is, the dynamics of process. It is the judgement of this researcher that a quantitative approach alone would restrict the scope and depth of the study. Such an approach is likely to be limited in its ability to capture the nuances of meaning embodied in the term 'Special Character', the ever-changing influences which impact upon it and its dynamic influence on the life of the culture.

A concern for meaning

Naturalistic research has the aim "of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it" (Sherman & Webb, 1995:7). Culture is the way that people make meaning of their lives (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992). It is the way that they make sense of their world and how they respond to the issues, problems and challenges arising from their encounters with the lived reality of this world. 'Special Character' is the term used to describe the distinctiveness of the specific culture of a specific Catholic school, and the ways in which its members attempt to live and work, within the unique

context of each school. This study attempts to understand the meaning that members attribute to their experience of school culture.

The researcher as the 'primary instrument' of the inquiry

In naturalistic research, the background, experience, values and attitudes of the researcher are valid elements of the research process; the study is open to the 'personal voice' (Cresswell, 1994) of the researcher as a means of providing detail and depth of insight. Lincoln & Guba (1985) refer to the 'tacit knowledge' of the researcher, acknowledging that as the human instrument of the inquiry, he/she inevitably brings to it intuitive, affective 'value patterns' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:40). The background of this researcher and her involvement in Catholic education generally, therefore, make a potentially positive contribution to the research, although as will be outlined later in this chapter, they also presented her with some issues that needed to be addressed.

An interactive approach

As the researcher gains the confidence of the participants, and interacts with them in the context of their daily lives, he/she gains a privileged insight into the depth and nature of their culture. It requires an established trust between researcher and participant (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992); skill in conversation and verbal exploration; and respect for the dignity of each participant. This is particularly relevant to this study with its focus on cultural phenomena that are grounded in sacred beliefs and the deepest human values. The need to develop and maintain a personal trust-based relationship with the members of the school cultures remained a constant imperative for this researcher.

Context-based research

In contrast with quantitative study, which seeks to generalise from a wide range of contexts, fieldwork is at the heart of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Sherman & Webb, 1995). Quantitative research tends to utilise the tools of statistical data collection. However, naturalistic research has an emphasis on an interactive co-operative relationship between the researcher and the participants of the study in their natural context. Its data collection tools are the human inquiry methods of interview, observation and document analysis (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). For example, a study of culture requires study of the physical environment, a study of

people interacting together in their normal duties and a study of their formal and informal relationships. Quantitative research could be adequately carried out at a distance from the participants. Questionnaires can be posted; documentation can be removed. However, knowledge about meaning and purpose can best be gained from observing and talking to the people involved, within their own context. A study of Special Character and culture, therefore, necessitates fieldwork since it requires the gathering of data available only at the site of the study.

Deep and detailed description

Naturalistic or qualitative research seeks data that will enable the researcher to write deep and detailed description of the people under study (Anderson, 1990; Patton, 1990; Bodgan & Biklen, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). By contrast, quantitative research focuses on gaining width of information from which to make conclusions that can then be generalised. This research seeks instead to 'paint a picture' of two Catholic secondary school cultures, so that knowledge and understanding can be gained from comparing and contrasting the perceptions of real people in real contexts. Its aim is to provide description that will enable the audience to gain insight into the lives of the participants.

An inductive process

Naturalistic inquiry uses an inductive process, rather than the deductive approach of quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Bodgan & Biklen, 1992; Cresswell, 1994; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Data is collected without a fixed predetermined set of initial hypotheses.

One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:23).

Concepts and ideas flow out of the data itself; it has an 'emergent design' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Delamont, 1992). It is open-ended and fluid, involving multiple levels of data collection, study, reflection, hypothesising and testing. The meaning that people express in and through their experience of culture cannot easily be quantified; subtleties of perception cannot be predetermined. In research work with unique people and context, the empirical approach is limited by its deductive nature. A study of Special Character and culture requires a more fluid approach. It

requires the open-ended flexible approach of qualitative inquiry, in order to remain constantly open to a wide range of possible meanings.

In addition to the seven points discussed above, the choice of methodology for this inquiry has also been influenced by the fact that, within the New Zealand context, research into Catholic schools and their Special Character using a qualitative approach appears to be rare. As far as this researcher can ascertain, no doctoral research on the culture of New Zealand Catholic schools has been conducted within New Zealand. Previous research is predominantly quantitative in nature, utilising survey as its dominant data collection technique (Atkins, 1984; McMenemy, 1985; Walsh, 1987). This inquiry, therefore, with its qualitative focus on the New Zealand Catholic secondary school, utilises a new approach that has the potential to open up new understandings and insights. Quantitative research in the past has provided some conclusions about the effectiveness of Catholic schools and valuable information on the ways in which Special Character is expressed. However, it does not provide 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) or insights into the dynamics of school culture and its influence on the lives of people.

Conclusion

As Catholic schools in New Zealand continue to confront some demanding issues in the face of the changing context that has been outlined in the previous chapter, there is a urgent need to evaluate the significance of Special Character for the Catholic secondary school system. Quantitative research may provide valuable statistical data about Catholic schools but there is a need also for an in-depth, holistic and inductive approach to such an inquiry; in other words, research carried out within the naturalistic qualitative paradigm.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A general description

This inquiry has three basic elements that locate it within the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and the social sciences. Firstly it is situated in the natural

setting of a culture and inquiring into the ways in which the members of that culture make meaning of their world. It is based on the assumption that “every human group that is together for a period of time will evolve a culture” (Patton, 1990:68). It raises questions about the nature of this culture in order to:

Offer a detailed and comprehensive description of culture - an account of the behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and values of the people under study (Sherman & Webb, 1995:78).

In relation to the study of Special Character or distinctiveness of the culture that is the Catholic secondary school, it explores members’ perceptions and beliefs about who they are and their purposes, in addition to describing the tangible and intangible expressions of their culture. It takes “a general and holistic perspective” (Wiersma, 1995:252).

Secondly, it utilises a case study approach; that is, one in which:

The researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon ... and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time (Cresswell, 1994:12).

Patton (1990) notes that in case study, “cases are selected ... because they are of particular interest given the study’s purpose” (Patton, 1990:53). This research focuses on two specific contexts of Catholic secondary school culture, chosen for their unique qualities and distinctiveness within the New Zealand State education system. Their cultures are explored using a multiple-method approach to data collection.

Lastly, the study utilises a ‘grounded theory’ approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to research, defined as:

A qualitative research *method* that uses a *systematic* set of *procedures* to *develop* an inductively derived grounded *theory* about a *phenomenon* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:24. Italics included in the original).

This means that the theory about the Special Character and culture of the Catholic secondary school in New Zealand, outlined in Chapter Nine, emerges from the process of “systematic data collection and analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:23) itself. The value of a grounded theory approach is well expressed by Sherman & Webb (1995):

Grounded theory offers a systematic method by which to study the richness and diversity of human experience and to generate relevant, plausible theory which can be used to understand the contextual reality of social behaviour. With such understandings, educators can assess what is happening in the groups studied and plan interventions to improve the quality of education (Sherman & Webb, 1995:127).

The discovery of a grounded theory of the Special Character of Catholic schools will, hopefully, contribute to a critical reflection by Catholic education leaders on the nature and purpose of Catholic education. Through the study of two unique situations, it is hoped that light may be shed on areas of potential growth and development in the New Zealand Catholic education system.

Specific characteristics of the research design

The research design, in its simplest terms, can be described as naturalistic case study utilising a grounded theory approach. It has several distinct characteristics.

The nature of the research was deeply personal for those involved. It required sensitivity to the context of each school culture and its members. There was an ongoing need to demonstrate respect for the values and beliefs of the members of the culture, particularly because of their links with members' religious and spiritual beliefs and their sense of purpose and meaning.

It required an open approach to theory development. No formal prior hypothesis directed the study, nor could it, since the focus was on unique groups of people, bringing their unique perceptions to the research issues. Patterns emerged as the research progressed and as data was collected from a wide variety of sources.

The researcher was closely engaged with the participants. She found a need to develop and maintain a trusting and trustworthy relationship with school staff, students, parents and other significant members of the culture. Fieldwork was undertaken on site at each of two Catholic secondary schools; dependent at all times on the co-operation and support of participants.

Data collection involved three basic methods; that is, observation, interview and document analysis. A survey of Year 13 students was also conducted on each site. A more comprehensive outline of Data Collection methods is provided in a later section of this methodology.

The methodology employed was responsive. Flexibility was required, as research issues became apparent. Initial research questions, based on the literature, assisted the focus of the inquiry. However, these changed and evolved as the researcher developed greater knowledge and deeper insights into the phenomenon and its complexity. From an original list of seven questions, the focus of the study was condensed into the following four key research questions:

1. What is the nature and meaning of Special Character in relation to Catholic secondary schools?
2. What constitutes the content of Special Character?
3. How is that content explicitly and implicitly transmitted?
4. What is the significance of Special Character for the culture of the school?

The research used an integrated approach. In keeping with the advice of Strauss & Corbin (1990), data collection, data analysis and theory development proceeded simultaneously. What was discovered in turn influenced what was sought. However, as the researcher became more aware of the global nature of the Special Character phenomenon and the extent of its influence on the culture of the Catholic school, it was necessary to reframe initial research questions and the information required in order to limit the scope of the inquiry. This allowed the researcher to concentrate more deeply and purposefully on key areas of the topic. Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) refer to this gradual narrowing of research focus as 'funnel' research structure.

Analysis was an inductive process. As Lofland & Lofland (1995) observe in relation to grounded theory:

You get from data, topics, and questions on one side to answers and propositions, on the other, through intensive immersion in the data, allowing your data to interact with your intuition and sensibilities as these latter are informed by your knowledge of topics and questions. To do inductive analysis ... you begin with an open-ended and open-minded desire to know a social situation or setting: the data and yourself as an agent of induction guide you in the task of emergently formulating one or more propositions (Lofland & Lofland, 1995:185).

Sampling was purposeful and a range of sampling strategies was used. The researcher looked for unusual cases, for example, activities, roles and groups unique to each site. At times, snowballing or opportunistic sampling was utilised, that is, the selection of participants and events on the basis of opportunities that spontaneously arose from the

researcher's work in the field. Theory-based sampling, that is, the deliberate and conscious selection of participants and events because of their significance for emergent theory, were also important. Overall, events to be observed and interviews to be conducted were determined by the demands of the research focus. The researcher was guided by the advice of Strauss & Corbin (1990) to remain:

Open to those persons, places, situations that will provide the *greatest opportunity* to gather the *most relevant data* about the phenomenon under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:181. Italics included in the original).

A special characteristic of the research design was the influence of a heuristic approach to inquiry, which is based within the phenomenological approach to research and the discipline of psychology. Heuristic inquiry focuses on the question:

What is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely? (Patton, 1990:71).

Patton (1990) warns, "Heuristics is not inquiry into casual experience" (Patton, 1990:71). He observes that its uniqueness as an inquiry method is:

The extent to which it legitimises and places at the fore these personal experiences, reflections and insights of the researcher (Patton, 1990:72).

This characteristic of the inquiry involved the researcher in intense reflection into a phenomenon with which she has had extensive, personal experience, in order to gain a deeper insight into the nature of the phenomenon. She expressed these insights, observations and thoughts in a research journal, enabling her to maintain a self-critical approach to the study. Whilst not a dominant feature of the research design, the heuristic influence is in keeping with the researcher's position that the comprehensive nature of her involvement in Catholic culture and education be considered a positive aspect to the inquiry. Qualitative research recognises that the researcher brings to the inquiry the totality of self, personally and professionally. Without compromising the need for validity, reliability and credibility, the researcher's subjective experience has the potential to increase knowledge of and insight into the research topic. Indeed, as Glaser & Strauss (1967) wisely observe:

No sociologist can possibly erase from his mind all the theory he knows before he begins his search (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:252).

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

As discussed earlier in this methodology, naturalistic inquiry conducted, using qualitative methods, involves the researcher as the prime instrument of the research. However, regardless of the skill of the researcher, “it is not possible to describe or explain everything that one ‘knows’ in language form; some things must be experienced to be understood” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:195). The researcher who has, therefore, experienced the phenomenon under study, brings, as was noted earlier, an added knowledge, a ‘tacit knowledge’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to the audience. This enables the researcher to more readily empathise with the participants (Patton, 1990). Fully reflected on and disclosed for the purposes of reliability and credibility, this tacit knowledge can contribute depth and meaning to the inquiry. The researcher is more able to identify with participants and describe their experiences with an ‘insider’s view’ (Patton, 1990). In qualitative research, the researcher’s feelings, insights, experiences and her/his reflections on these become, therefore, a valid part of the research data.

Personal and professional background

The researcher’s background in Catholic education is both wide and deep. She has been involved in the Catholic school system as a child, student, parent, teacher, Director of Religious Studies, Principal, researcher and currently, as Religious Education Adviser for the Auckland and Hamilton dioceses. She has a professional background that encompasses education at pre-school, primary school, secondary school and tertiary education levels. Her membership of and activities within a Roman Catholic diocese and parish over a period of nearly thirty years have consolidated her reputation as a Catholic educator and church member.

Raised as a Catholic and educated to a Masters level in Catholic educational institutions, she has developed a deep sense of Catholic culture and education. After more than twenty years of professional involvement in Catholic schools, she has established sound relationships with other teachers, Catholic and non-Catholic; with diocesan and national leadership and with the Catholic community of her diocese as a whole. Choosing to be a Catholic, she nevertheless brings a critical approach to

Catholicism arising from her formal study of Catholic culture, teachings and philosophy, particularly as they apply to the Catholic school.

As a former Director of Religious Studies, her role encompassed, not only leadership of a Religious Education department, but also responsibility for maintaining, developing and preserving the Catholic Character of the school and the planning and implementing Catholic observances and practices throughout the school. It is a key position within the Catholic school, carried out in close association with the Principal who has overall responsibility and after six months as an Acting Principal, she can now appreciate more fully both of these important roles. Her current position as a Secondary Religious Education adviser has proved to be a significant support for this doctoral study, involving as it does, the development and facilitation of Teacher In-service courses, particularly in the area of the Special Character of Catholic schools. It has given her entry to the nineteen Catholic secondary schools in her professional areas, visited regularly for the purpose of providing support for Religious Education teachers and Directors of Religious Studies. In short, the researcher has an established professional reputation as a long-term member of the New Zealand Catholic education network. Amongst her professional colleagues, her commitment to increasing knowledge and understanding of the Catholic system of education is well known.

The researcher's lifelong relationship with Catholic education has, on the whole, been beneficial to this research project. It has equipped her to be a participant observer, that is a researcher who is able to be part of the situation, yet able to critically and objectively observe what is happening (Patton, 1990; Sherman & Webb, 1995). The multiplicity of her roles, both past and present, means that generally she is accepted as an insider, one who seeks a better understanding of the Catholic education system. As a result of her professional and personal experience, she is better able to appreciate the meaning of Catholic school culture for its members.

However, such intimacy with the research topic has, at times, led to ambiguity between her role of researcher and that of Religious Education adviser, when participants have sought advice and guidance not normally requested from an external researcher. It proved necessary in such situations to remind participants which 'hat' she was wearing at the time in order to maintain a relationship appropriate to the inquiry. The

researcher's position within the research context has also brought her some anxiety that important information or insights might be overlooked as a result of over-identification with both the participants and over-familiarity with the nature of the data. She has consistently strived to overcome such difficulties by ensuring that no data is too small or obvious to ignore and by maintaining a critical awareness of the need to keep, to the best of her ability, an objective and emotional distance from the material.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In choosing research sites, both Patton (1990) and Fraenkil & Wallen (1996) point to the need for 'purposive sampling'; that is, the selection of sites based on the researcher's judgement of their potential for providing worthwhile and comprehensive data. With this in mind, a study of the cultures of two Catholic secondary schools forms the basis of this research. Based on the judgement and prior knowledge of the researcher, both these schools offer the widest range of distinctive features that contribute valuable data about Catholic education and culture.

The sites were selected on the basis of their decile ratings, student gender, their socio-economic backgrounds, their total size, unique features, their historical and traditional elements, and their geographical location. From the researcher's assumption that Catholic schools in small provincial centres may benefit from close networks of relationships and support, it was decided that the selection of sites should be from within a large metropolitan New Zealand city. This would, in her judgement, explore Catholic school culture in its potentially most difficult and diverse environment.

At the time of site selection in 1997, both potential research sites were Year 9-13 colleges with attached Intermediates departments for Year 7 and 8 students. In order to avoid too wide a sample and because of the organisational and pedagogical nature of Primary education, the researcher made the decision to focus only on the Secondary level of each school. However, by the beginning of 1998, both schools were re-designated as Year 7-13 colleges, presenting the researcher, a full year into the fieldwork phase, with a need to review her earlier sampling decision. She decided that

her original decision should stand. However, with the hindsight that comes at the end of a research project, she now wonders if by continuing in this way, the research may have been limited by the omission of Year 7 and 8 students and staff from the inquiry.

Each school was studied as an individual unit of research over a period of twelve months. However, because of the intricacies of the entry process, the researcher's initial plan to conduct fieldwork concurrently in both schools had to be modified. As a result, the fieldwork phase involved a 'staggered' study of the schools over a total period of twenty-four months, from the beginning of the 1997 school year to the end of 1998. The advantage of this arrangement was the opportunity for the researcher to learn from practice. Fieldwork tools and research techniques, adapted and improved from earlier experience in the field, were utilised more effectively as the inquiry progressed. However, it was found that data collected over such a long period in the field had to be checked for reliability given that situations within the school may have changed over the duration of the fieldwork phase. Member checking, both formal and informal, proved to be a most effective tool for verifying the accuracy of data.

A brief description of the research schools

Champagnat College is a Decile 3, single sex secondary school for boys. It has a student roll of approximately 300 students and is situated in an inner-city suburb of a large metropolitan city. Between the 1950's and the 1970's, the ethnicity of its student body has reflected the changes that have taken place within its local community. The majority of its students are from Pacific Island families. The low socio-economic backgrounds of many of these students, combined with some difficult family circumstances, present Champagnat College with many challenges in the delivery of its curriculum. Amongst members of the school culture there is a strong sense of 'mission to the poor'. Champagnat College is a Marist Brothers school, and although the Principal is not a member of the Marist Brothers religious order, the Marist founding spirit is still a strong influence within the school.

Mercy College is a Decile 10, single sex college for girls. Its student roll stands at approximately 850 students. Set in spacious grounds on the banks of a lake, it is situated in an established urban area, dominated by the presence of a major regional

public hospital and a busy road. The area has access by motorway and city bridges to the commercial centre of the city and surrounding districts. The homes adjacent to the school are well maintained, mainly brick and tile homes, both new and old. Although it draws students from families who are socio-economically advantaged, Mercy College could not be termed 'exclusive'. The school caters for all socio-economic groups within its community. Its historical and religious traditions can be traced back to the earliest days of pioneer settlement in the region. The Mercy Sisters, who founded the school, were amongst the first missionary orders to arrive in New Zealand, after a journey of great risk and discomfort from Ireland. The school's unofficial motto reflects the strong commitment of the Mercy sisters to justice and compassion.

A more detailed description of the research settings is available in the first sections of Chapters Four and Five as part of the full case study of each school.

Gaining entry

Initially, the researcher had planned a series of steps for gaining entry to each school. She had planned to first arrange an informal meeting with the Principal of the specific school under study to discuss the research in general terms, followed by formal letters of request to each Principal, Board of Trustees and Proprietor. However, she quickly found that gaining entry is a far more dynamic and fluid process than she had anticipated. To her surprise and delight, the Principal of Champagnat College, during an informal conversation, invited her to use the school as one of the research sites! Three explanatory meetings followed with the Principal, the staff and the Board of Trustees respectively; the latter formally agreeing to the school's inclusion in the inquiry. Entry to the second research site was through an initial informal meeting with the Principal, who then arranged for the researcher to speak to staff. The Principal approved entry after consultation with the Board of Trustees and college staff. All meetings, held in both schools, provided important opportunities for introducing the researcher, setting the parameters of the research and answering queries or anxieties. Ethical issues were fully addressed at these meetings and copies of the research information sheet, interview protocol and consent sheets were provided.

Ethical issues

Two key ethical issues influenced the inquiry. Firstly, an overt research approach was used. In other words, all research activities at the sites were openly undertaken; participants being fully informed of the researcher's purpose and activity. A covert approach, that is, a research activity done without the knowledge of the participants, was for this researcher unacceptable on moral, social and practical grounds. Given the focus of the inquiry, covert activity would not be compatible with the spiritual and religious elements implicit in the research topic. In addition, since entry is not merely gained once and for all, at the start of the data collection phase, but has to be continually negotiated, this researcher believes that covert activity would have undermined, even destroyed, the trust of participants that is so essential for ethnographic case study research.

Secondly, the need to maintain confidentiality of schools and participants in order to protect them from any potential vulnerability from the research, was a matter of continual concern for the researcher. The New Zealand Catholic education system is small compared with similar systems overseas. The network of schools, groups and individuals is intimate, in the sense that throughout the country, the people associated with Catholic education constitute a relatively small interactive community. In such circumstances, maintaining research confidentiality is difficult, given that people talk and exchange 'news' whenever they meet. In spite of the fact that all names, including those of the research schools, are pseudonyms, it is almost impossible in these circumstances to completely hide the identity of the schools. The very descriptions used in the findings of this research would be, for some, sufficient to identify the sites and consequently, the names of the participants in key roles within these schools. The situation was, to some extent, further aggravated by the reasonably high profile of the researcher in her professional roles within the Catholic education system. Indeed, in the light of their concern about the issue of anonymity, two or three participants requested that some minor changes be made to the case study reports. Details of these have been filed for the purposes of research audit.

Issues of confidentiality and the protection of participants presented the researcher with an ongoing ethical dilemma. In order to maintain validity and credibility, it was important that the researcher use reliable data, yet she was aware that this might

inadvertently reveal the identity of the schools and their members. The difficulty was particularly critical when negative examples of key Special Character data were found. The researcher attempted to overcome these difficulties by honouring her promise of research confidentiality and by exercising analytical decision-making as professionally and as ethically as she could. Nevertheless, the dilemma was, and remains, a concern.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Since the focus of this inquiry is on human activity and interaction, the major data collection instrument was the researcher herself. As naturalistic inquiry, data was gathered in a fieldwork context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). In other words, the research was conducted in the natural setting of the participants and phenomenon under study. Context is everything! This was particularly appropriate in this study of the Special Character of two Catholic secondary schools, since the phenomenon itself is strongly contextual. Data was collected using three basic qualitative research techniques - observation, interviews and the study of documentation. In order to gain as wide a data sample as possible, a survey of senior students in each school was also conducted.

Data type

Culture is a complex concept that encompasses all aspects of human living and experience. The study and description of culture, is therefore founded on the collection of a diverse range of data. In this study, a variety of cultural models were used as a conceptual framework to guide the data collection phase. In particular, the work of Edgar Schein (1992), Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) and official Catholic documents on Catholic schools proved to be most useful for this phase of the inquiry process.

The range of data sought included the following:

The use and significance of Special Character artefacts; evidence of Catholic practices and traditions; rituals and ceremonies specific to the school; use of both religious and

secular symbols, such as trophies, school crests and uniform, statues, and crucifixes; display boards; formal and informal Religious Education; orientation processes for new members; structures, organisation and roles; special events and activities; school policy, personal and organisational aims, goals, hopes, fears; use of language, especially metaphor; stories; heroes; myths; founding history and philosophy; behavioural norms in the classroom, staffroom and in public; explicitly stated values from a range of different publications; values and beliefs as expressed in prayer, worship and conversation; perceptions of members; interactions and relationships between individuals and subgroups; issues; assumptions and perceptions about the function of the school, its Catholic nature, its members and the nature and purpose of education.

In brief, everything that shed light on the distinctive features of the school culture, and the ways in which members of the culture perceive and experience that distinctiveness, constituted relevant data. To some extent, these were perceived through the lens of the researcher's own experiences, memories, responses and perceptions. By journalling these impressions, they served as an explicit check against 'failing to see the wood because of the trees'. In other words, by including them as data they were acknowledged as an influence on the nature and character of the research instrument.

Observation

Observations were conducted in a variety of different settings within each school. These included: a range of Religious education classrooms; homerooms; staffroom during informal breaks and formal meetings; Religious Education department resource areas and offices; assembly hall, school offices, school entry, chapel; classrooms of other subjects; playing fields and student gathering areas; and the general environment of the site and its location.

Data was collected from observations of different events and activities. These included formal and informal occasions; normal activities such as teaching, learning, assemblies but also special events such as school celebrations and worship. Occasions that provided rich cultural data included: Founder's day; drama and cultural events; parents' evenings and meetings; special sporting events; prizegivings; feast days and other days of special religious significance for the school; Board of Trustees meetings; staff

meetings; school retreats; and major occasions of worship for the whole school and community.

Interviews

One of the best ways to elicit the meaning of certain elements of cultural experience is to talk to people and to listen carefully as they share their thoughts, impressions and stories. "The purpose of interviewing ... is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 1990:278). Inviting participants to reflect and discuss what they experience and to share its significance provides 'rich data' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). An open-ended flexible approach to interviewing was used, rather than the use of standardised interviews, following the advice of such writers as Patton (1990); Bogdan & Biklen (1992); Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) and Lofland & Lofland (1995). In such an approach, the researcher does not:

Decide beforehand the exact questions they want to ask, and do not ask each interviewee exactly the same questions ... they adopt a more flexible approach, allowing the discussion to flow in a way that seems natural (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:152).

This form of 'intensive' or 'unstructured' interviewing (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) allows the participant to freely explore areas of personal interest and special significance. It is like:

A guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee ... rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995:18).

A list of basic questions was used as a very loose interview guide by the researcher. However, interview questions were amended or even deleted, with new questions added, in response to the natural conversational flow of the interview process (Appendix B).

In addition to intensive interviewing, 'casual interviewing' (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) also provided useful data. In other words, data was collected from informal conversation, such as telephone calls, chats with participants and before and after formal interview times.

Key participants included: the principal; senior management staff; Director of Religious Studies; Religious Education department staff; staff of other departments; members of

the founding religious orders; parents; Head boy or girl; other student leaders; proprietors' and parents' representatives on the Board of Trustees; ancillary staff; and other key people who were suggested as the inquiry continued. Although most of these people were interviewed individually, focus group interviews of students and parents were also conducted.

Documentation

Rich data about the espoused values of the school can be gained from the systematic study of the school's official and unofficial documentation. This is especially true where the documentation is for public use, such as prospectus and school advertisements. A range of documentation was requested from each school, studied off-site or on-site as permitted by the school. It included: copies of school magazines; school prospectus; Board of Trustee minutes; parents newsletters; School charter; the most recent Education Review Office reports; most recent Special Character report for the Proprietor; Board of Trustee policies; each school's Integration agreement; newspaper articles and school advertisements; student report forms; Religious Education departmental scheme; Religious Education staff meeting minutes; school archives or histories; and biographies of school's founder. Documentation from each school was photocopied and filed for analysis purposes. Original documents were stored for future reference.

Senior student survey

It is impossible for any single researcher to interview all the members of a school culture. The best that can be expected is that a representative group is included in the interview process. However, in view of the disproportion of staff interviewed to students, and the importance of the cultural perceptions and experience of the latter, a decision to survey students was made. Since the term 'Special Character' is such a complex and illusive concept, this survey was restricted to Year 13 students who, the researcher assumed, would be more able to articulate their thoughts and impressions from their several years of experience as members of the school culture than younger students. The survey form was carefully constructed to cater for the different language abilities amongst the student participants and later administered by school staff on the behalf of the researcher, in a manner that maintained confidentiality.

Survey results were analysed by grouping students' responses according to topic headings suggested by the words the students used. Each point made by students in their responses was treated as a separate unit of data. Those students who offered more than one point in response to each question, therefore, were represented under more than one topic heading. The total number of responses for each topic was tallied and recorded on a matrix of results. Patterns that emerged were reported in summary notes below each survey question. After completion of this process for each question, the material was studied once again and broad conclusions were drawn from the data. The responses of each student to survey questions were then analysed by the same process as that used for other qualitative data. A sample of the Student Survey form and analysed results from each school are provided in Appendix C.

The researcher allocated a code (Appendix D) to each interview, observation, document and survey response sheet that provided data on the culture of each school, allowing her to develop a manageable ongoing system of reference and retrieval. For example, 'MCYOS #1' refers to the first observation of a full school event at Mercy College and 'CCISF #3' refers to the third interview of a staff member of Champagnat College. She also maintained an ongoing record of all interviews and observations conducted, and documents studied (Appendix E). However, it should be noted that, in the interests of participant anonymity, full reference codes have been included only in the Auditor's copy of the data collection record and that the numbers listed in column 1 (Appendix E) bear no relation to the reference codes used throughout this thesis.

DATA RECORDING PROCEDURES

Before commencing each intensive interview, permission to tape was sought from the interviewee and was recorded on the interview consent form. With only one exception, all intensive interviews were taped. Ownership of tapes and transcripts was established prior to the interview and the wishes of each participant regarding the destruction or return of tapes were noted on a separate consent form. It was the researcher's intention to note participant's use of key phrases and ideas during interviews, as well as their use of non-verbal expression and feedback. However, this technique was abandoned early

in the data collection phase when the researcher discovered that it created a barrier between her and the interviewee. By maintaining eye contact and physical empathy with interview participants, she found that they seemed more at ease with the interview experience and more open to the sharing of their perceptions, ideas and feelings. Gaining such rich, detailed data, in the researcher's judgement, more than compensated for any loss of data that might arise from her decision not to take notes during the interview process.

Fieldnotes were kept throughout the whole research process. These included descriptions of settings, activities, objects, and a range of demographic information. They also contained observations of social interactions and, as far as possible, verbatim quotations from the conversations of participants. Fieldnotes took two forms. Immediately after leaving the school, brief notes and word prompts were recorded, serving as a memory aid for the later recording of more detailed fieldnotes. In addition, the writing of fieldnotes whilst on the school campus were restricted to those times when writing was an appropriate behaviour; for example, when students were writing in class. Once again, the researcher judged that jotting down notes when no one else was similarly engaged ran the risk of altering the natural context of participants, distorting the data as a result. As soon as possible after the observation or interview events, using the brief notes as a memory prompt, a more comprehensive fieldnote was written, detailing descriptions and, as far as possible, verbatim records of dialogue. Both types of fieldnotes, however, included the researcher's own ideas, impressions, experiences and feelings in line with the following advice from Bogdan & Biklen (1992):

Because you are the instrument of data collection, it is important to take stock of your own behaviour, assumptions and whatever else might affect the data that are gathered and analysed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992:121).

DATA ANALYSIS

An inductive process

As has been outlined earlier in this chapter, qualitative analysis process is fundamentally inductive.

In qualitative fieldstudies, analysis is conceived as an *emergent* product of a process of gradual induction ... analysis is the fieldworker's *derivative ordering* of the data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995:181. Italics used in the original).

The researcher must remain flexible and open-minded to the significance of the data and the initial interpretations of it. The nature of inductive analysis is akin to a process of discovery rather than the proving of a pre-formulated hypothesis (Patton 1990). Indeed, this researcher found that the process is rather like that of confronting a 5000 piece jigsaw without access to the picture on the box! On ‘good’ analysis days, the task of making meaning from the seemingly overwhelming volume of data seemed improbable; on ‘bad’ days, almost impossible!

The inductive approach to analysis is central to this inquiry, given its location within a naturalistic or qualitative paradigm (Anderson, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Delamont, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

It utilises a constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Bodgan & Biklen, 1992; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Merriam, 1998). As Merriam (1998) outlines:

The basic strategy of the method is to do just what its name implies – constantly compare. The research begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between level of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated (Merriam, 1998:159).

The aim of the process is the generation of a ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of Catholic education, by comparing units of data; organising them into categories; exploring emergent themes and formulising a credible theory. It is hoped that such a theory will shed light on the Special Character of Catholic schools and the transmission processes that maintain and preserve it. However, it needs to be kept in mind that, although:

Still dependent on the skills and sensitivities of the analyst, the constant comparative method is not designed (as methods of quantitative analysis are) to guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results; it is designed to allow, with discipline, for some of the vagueness and flexibility that aid the creative generation of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:103).

Because of this creative flexibility, qualitative analysis “needs to be documented as a process” (Miles & Huberman, 1984:23), thereby allowing the reader to determine the degree of discipline and sound practice brought to the analysis process by the researcher. Later in this section, an outline of the analysis process used by this researcher will be provided that will allow such evaluation.

A systematic process

Bodgan & Biklen (1992) define the analysis process as:

The process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992:153).

In other words, it is a complex process of making meaning from what was observed, said and written about the phenomenon of study.

Qualitative analysis is an ongoing process throughout the duration of the research. In principle, it involves simultaneous data collection, interpretation and writing (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992; Cresswell, 1994; Sherman & Webb, 1995). However, for this researcher, the reality was somewhat different. The pressures of full-time employment, often involving travel from home, and the subsequent limitations of part-time study, necessitated a degree of compromise, on the part of the researcher, from the ideal of concurrent data collection and analysis. However, with hindsight and an overview of notes and memos, it seems that, in spite of time pressures, such 'flows of activity' (Miles & Huberman, 1984) did occur, but not always in a formal sense. Indeed, it was found that the qualitative analysis process persistently 'haunted' the thoughts, reflections and even the dreams of the researcher, at work, play and study!

The process of data analysis involves a number of key tasks. It involves:

Working with data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992:153).

The major analysis phase at the conclusion of data collection involves a series of formal steps or stages. The process begins "with specific observations and builds towards general patterns (Patton 1990:44), that is, an initial organisation and reduction of the data. Data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1984) is an exploration of patterns that allow data to be grouped and managed into observable categories using a system of data coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Merriam, 1998). In the task of applying appropriate meaningful codes to the data, the analyst may use 'indigenous concepts'

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990), that is, the use of key phrases or terms used by participants or 'sensitising concepts' (Strauss & Corbin 1990), drawn from the relevant literature.

Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework or "map of the territory being investigated" (Miles & Huberman, 1984:33) enables the analyst to recognise patterns and allocate codes that can then be categorised. To use another metaphor, this framework provides the 'bins' (Miles & Huberman, 1984) into which data can be grouped. The early stages of analysis based on a sound framework involve:

Laying out those bins, giving each a descriptive or inferential name, and getting some clarity about their interrelationships is what a conceptual framework is all about (Miles & Huberman, 1984:28).

The 'bins' used in this inquiry were determined by the researcher's study of relevant research and literature on organisational culture, especially the work of Schein, (1992), Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, (1991) and Neville (1994). In terms of developing her understanding of Catholic education, the researcher relied on a wide range of official Church documentation, at international, national and regional levels and such current research available to her. However, finding relevant current research on Special Character and Catholic schools proved to be difficult, given that, to date, no major research projects on Catholic education have been undertaken at a doctoral level in New Zealand. Adding to the difficulty, the lack of an Albany University database of Australian research in the topic area required the researcher to focus predominantly on work conducted in the United States and Britain. Particularly helpful was the research conducted by Bryk, Lee & Holland (1984, 1993) into the effectiveness of American Catholic schools. Using a combination of fieldwork and survey research techniques in seven secondary schools over a two-year period, they investigated the differences between Catholic schools and public schools, and the outcomes of a Catholic education for students. However, this research was limited by its broad, general coverage of the topic, restricted to description rather than the generation of theory of Catholic education or the nature or meaning of its Special Character. In this respect, the researcher found that her own prior knowledge, formal study and experience within a New Zealand educational context were invaluable in building the overall conceptual framework for the research project and analysis process.

The generation of theory

Categories constitute the findings of the research (Merriam, 1998) that are written as a case study narrative that provides 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of the phenomenon so that readers might gain a rich and detailed 'picture' of the topic of inquiry. However, the development of grounded theory requires that the researcher move beyond description to a level of analysis that seeks to explain the phenomenon at a theoretical level. Merriam (1998) describes this process:

When categories and their properties are reduced and refined and then linked together by tentative hypotheses, the analysis is moving toward the development of a theory to explain the data's meaning. This third level of analysis transcends the formation of categories, for a theory seeks to explain a large number of phenomenon and tell how they are related (Merriam, 1998: 192).

The making of notes or memos during the analysis process is instrumental to the development of theory (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). This researcher found that recording her ideas, thoughts, and tentative hypotheses during the whole inquiry, particularly during the analysis process, assisted her to form substantive theory, that is applicable to the specific situation of the case studies, to a more formal theory, one that may be applied generally. She followed the advice of Glaser & Strauss (1967) who suggest that:

To start writing one's theory, it is first necessary to collate the memos on each category which is easily accomplished since the memos have been written about categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:113).

The analysis process in action

This researcher began her initial analysis with transcripts of interviews conducted at the first site since these were considered the primary data source, followed by analysis of secondary sources, that is, observations and documentation. Every unit of data, that is 'chunk' of information, was coded and grouped into tentative subcategories, using the following process. She read the first transcript looking for any data that struck her as significant. Reading through once again, she underlined in pencil any key phrases, words or sentences that had bearing on the conceptual framework derived from the body of theory on the Catholic philosophy of education, theory on organisational culture and her own lived experience within the Catholic education system. She asked

herself the questions “What is this?” “What does this suggest?” and made notes in the margin summing up the meaning of each selected unit of data (Appendix F). These notations were listed as preliminary codes. Before moving to the next transcript, she reflected on her overall impression of the data, writing and filing for the next stage of analysis, a summary memo of what seemed to be key points, themes, possible hypotheses and ideas from a more theoretical viewpoint. Keeping in mind the codes that had already emerged from the first, the researcher looked for similarities and differences, as this process was applied to each transcript.

When all transcripts had been worked in this way, approximately 350 codes had been generated on the initial master list. Combining or deleting codes on the basis of their similarities or differences then reduced this list. In this way, the original list was redefined into a ‘tighter’ smaller list that, although remaining tentative, constituted a master list of categories, including appropriate and relevant subcategories (Appendix E). The researcher then analysed observation fieldnotes and documentation data using the same process, constantly checking the ‘workability’ of the categories and subcategories.

All coded material, transcripts, observation fieldnotes and documentation, was photocopied and the originals filed. Each category on the master list was allocated an abbreviation and, using the photocopied pages, this was applied to units on data. Only one category abbreviation was attached to each unit, following the advice of Merriam (1998) who argues that including data in more than one is an indication that the categories require more refinement. Tentative categories and their relationships to the research questions of the inquiry were tested by displaying them in diagrammatic form that in turn served to further refine the master list.

Once all data was coded, the photocopied sheets were cut into ‘data strips’, each separate strip or unit of data being filed under the separate categories of the master list. Beginning with the first of such files, units of data were grouped into further subcategories as these suggested themselves. Data strips were then pasted on to another sheet of paper in preparation for the second stage of analysis.

Taking the pasted sheets of paper for each category, the researcher checked each unit of data within its original context, that is transcript, observation fieldnote and documentation to determine properties of the category. Brief memos about its nature in relation to the category and its possible meaning for the research question were written as each unit was constantly compared and contrasted with others. Completing the process for each category, a memo summary of its meaning for Catholic school culture and its Special Character was written. In other words, tentative propositions were created. Where appropriate, quotes and references that illustrated or supported this meaning were included. These memos were an invaluable support for the writing of the case studies.

The analysis process outlined above involved four levels of decision-making and grouping of data. Decisions about where a single unit of data belonged were made during the initial coding process, as the researcher applied a 'name' to each. She also found that the cutting and filing process further refined her judgements, requiring decisions about the nature of categories and their relationships with possible subcategories. This was once again an element in the act of sorting and pasting. Finally, during the writing process, the researcher found that she needed to decide yet again where data, categories and subcategories 'fitted', often moving whole sections from one place to another as new perceptions, insights and understanding emerged.

Once the findings of each case study were written, analysis continued. Identifying key points arising from the study of each school, the researcher looked for data, examples, ideas and findings that related to both. By constructing a synopsis of these points (Appendix H), the findings of both research schools were compared and contrasted. This synopsis was then used as a foundation for a cross-case summary of findings from the two Catholic secondary schools.

The researcher then returned her attention to the memos that had accumulated from the analysis process. These were studied and reflected upon. Exploring and establishing "linkages and relationships and speculating" (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984: 167), she moved from the substantive question "what does this mean for this school?" to the theoretical question "what does this mean for the Catholic school and Catholic education?" Keeping in mind, the pithy observation from Goetz & Le Compte (1984)

that “assigning meaning requires bold action” (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984:196), emergent themes were identified and a grounded theory of the Special Character of Catholic schools was constructed.

VERIFICATION

Internal validity was maximised through a process of triangulation of data sources, that is, data gathered from a range of different participants, events and activities within each site, and by the use of three different methods of data collection. In other words, the use of multiple data collection methods and multiple perspectives served as a verification check. Whilst this inquiry was grounded in the qualitative paradigm, the student survey provided yet another basis for validating the data. For the purposes of checking data accuracy, informal feedback and checking of data was sought from participants as an ongoing part of the research. In this way, participants were given an opportunity for involvement in the verification process.

In addition, the researcher maintained a commitment to formal ‘member checking’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This took two basic forms. At the conclusion of fieldwork in each site, the researcher formally presented her initial impressions of the school culture to the Principals and Boards of Trustees of each school, and in the case of Mercy College, the Board of Directors. After carefully explaining the limitations of such early impressions, that is, the fact that they were not based on a formal analysis process, members were able to challenge or support the various areas raised and ask questions of the researcher. These meetings proved very useful as a check on the very broad preliminary categories and findings that had emerged from the fieldwork, providing the researcher with a general sense of their validity.

The second member checking strategy involved the sending of draft case study reports to both Principals of the research schools. Sufficient copies were sent to allow staff, Board of Trustee members and other interested parties to read and critique what had been written. The researcher invited them to feedback to her any factual inaccuracies, ambiguities or any other matters of concern that they might have in relation to what had been written. In both cases, participants and others responded enthusiastically to the

invitation, enabling the researcher to further critique and edit the work. In addition, each Principal and one or two other people of his/her choice studied cross-case analysis results. This chapter was not made generally available to other staff, given that it contained material relating to the other research school.

External validity was maximised through purposeful sampling of research units. Each site was selected by decile rating; gender; location; socio-economic and academic criteria, in order to ensure that, as far as possible, representative groups within the Catholic school system were included. The very nature of Special Character as the **distinctive spirit** of a Catholic school culture suggests that the focus of this research must, implicitly and explicitly, involve unique situations. In other words, it is difficult to determine the degree of generalizability of this research to other sites since uniqueness and distinctiveness are fundamental elements of the research topic.

Nevertheless, some degree of generalisation should be possible between the findings of this research and the contexts of other State Integrated schools in New Zealand. Like Champagnat and Mercy Colleges, each operates within a specific religious or philosophical tradition and, under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975), has a legally defined Special Character in terms of a philosophical or religious foundation. In Catholic schools, both Primary and Secondary, it is reasonable to expect a higher level of generalizability given that all Catholic schools have common ground in the vision of life, humanity and education that they share, based on official Church teaching. The applicability of this research to other situations is further strengthened in terms of Catholic Secondary schools and their common structure, organisation and activity. Lastly, there are also potential links with secular State schools that have an established school tradition and history.

To the best of her ability, the researcher has utilised rigorous research methods throughout the inquiry, maintaining an audit trail so that the credibility, reliability and validity of this research can be objectively evaluated. For example, a pro-forma triangulation table (Appendix G) was constructed and used by the researcher to check that categories were drawn from a range of data sources and had sufficient frequency within the data to support their validity and credibility as findings of the inquiry. She constantly tested her interpretations and theories against other possible explanations.

CHAPTER FIVE: A CASE STUDY OF CHAMPAGNAT COLLEGE

SETTING

The school is situated in the midst of a large metropolitan city but the large mature trees that stand along the boundary of the college grounds soften the constant hum of traffic. The college chapel has a prominent position at the highest point of a hill from which much of the inner city can be seen. The school community is proud of its chapel, one of the few in the city that can hold the whole student body. It is not only a visual point of reference, but a spiritual and cultural one as well. The red brick Administration block shares space with the residence of a small community of Marist Brothers, which forms a wing of the main building. School buildings of various ages and designs, some of which are over 50-60 years old, are located at various points on the gradual gradient until reaching the generous playing fields on the level ground below. In spite of the proximity of the busy inner city, Champagnat College makes an immediate impact with its quiet, green, lush environment.

School background

A Catholic Secondary school on this inner city site was first established by the Marist Brothers Order in 1903 and operated in the area until 1955 when another Marist school was set up in a different location, taking the original name of the school with it. Champagnat College became the new name for the school that remained. Although intended to be a 'feeder' school for the new one, Champagnat quickly developed its own separate identity as it sought to meet the needs of a changing community.

From the 1950's through to the 1970's, the area experienced great changes in the socio-economic and ethnic nature of its population. Reflecting a new wave of New Zealand immigration, the local community changed from being predominantly European to Pacific

Island, particularly Samoan. New development of the surrounding suburbs and the establishment of several Catholic secondary schools in those areas had serious consequences for Champagnat College's student roll. These schools drew students from the college's traditional catchment area and the emergence of 'white flight' in some parts of the city further reduced the school's roll. From an original roll of over 500, by 1992 this had dwindled to 180. The viability of the college was then a serious concern.

Since the mid-1990's, the school roll has steadily increased. However, a new wave of change in the population of the area from Pacific Island families to young European, mainly professional couples with no children, has brought renewed concerns about the sustainability of student enrolments, reflected in participants' expressions of anxiety about continued viability. The college now no longer reflects the socio-economic and ethnic character of the area. The proportion of European students attending the college stands at approximately 4%, a massive change from the 75% of 1978. Polynesian students now make up 75% of the school population, specifically 32% Samoan; 31% Tongan; 7% Cook Island; and 5% Niuean. The number of Asian students stands at 8%, with 6% from a range of other ethnic groups. The majority of the students travel to the school from out of the immediate area.

Roll growth has been successfully promoted by the Board of Trustees, but the school has now become "top heavy" (CCD#1:1FN). Attracting older students from the Pacific Islands and from other city schools, senior levels have continued to be disproportionately large throughout the 1990's. For example, in 1998, there were 110 students at the Year 13 level. The introduction of adult students over the last few years has added to a situation where, in 1997, over 50% of the students enrolled at the school were new, a feature that makes this college rather unique. In spite of this growth, Champagnat College still faces serious issues. The question of continued viability still lingers in the minds and memories of some long-serving staff. Government funding is an ongoing source of concern for this school. Although the introduction of overseas fee-paying students provided some financial support for several years, this is now no longer an assured source of income in spite of the

Principal's best efforts to attract students from various parts of the South Pacific and Asia. The Fully Funded Option was firmly rejected by the Champagnat Board, not only on philosophical grounds but also because of its inadequacy in addressing the college's financial needs.

The school roll now stands at 375 students. At the time of Integration, it was a Form 3-7 secondary school with an attached Intermediate. However, since 1997, in line with changes for all New Zealand Catholic secondary schools, Champagnat College has become a Year 7-13 school. It is a Decile 3 school, although the accuracy of that rating is questioned by the school leadership and its Board who argue that a Decile 1 profile would more fitting given the needs and background of Champagnat College students.

Champagnat College staff

The school currently has 24 teaching staff, with 4 support staff in administration and grounds. Of many different nationalities, the vast majority of the staff has been teaching for more than twenty years, with only three teaching for less than ten years. Their religious background is just as diverse including Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Anglican, although some participants acknowledge that their contact with these traditions is minimal. Nine teaching staff, including three who are members of the Senior Management Team, and five non-teaching staff are Catholic. In 1999, one Marist Brother taught at the school. However, the Brothers' ongoing formal association with the school is basically through their continued proprietorship and representation on the Board of Trustees. Informally, they attend college functions and the proximity of a community to the school ensures a lively, affectionate ongoing interaction with students and staff, in addition to the much appreciated and admired work of a devoted groundsman in the person of Brother Charles.

Champagnat College families

Many of the families who send their sons and daughters to Champagnat College are emigrants from the Pacific Islands, experiencing all the difficulties of adjustment that this brings. Over half of Champagnat families are unemployed. For others, financial necessity requires both parents to work long hours, frequently working from the early hours of the morning until late at night. Students coming from such a background regularly fend for themselves without parental support to see them off to school in the morning. It is a situation that also makes it extremely difficult for families to attend evening meetings at the college.

Financial restraints on families means that many students are ill-equipped for school in the practical sense of bringing the basic requirements of pens, paper and other stationery. A lack of parental support also has an effect on student work habits such as fulfilment of homework and assignments. Some students have to cope with domestic violence. In situations where families have broken down, students may live with friends or extended family.

Parents from the Islands may have had minimal schooling themselves which can make it difficult for them to cope with the complexities of the New Zealand education system, especially where English is not spoken at home. However, they have a great pride in the fact that their son or daughter attends Champagnat College. Having a student who is studying for New Zealand Bursary is something of a status symbol for them given the restrictions on the numbers of students in the Islands who are allowed to sit senior external examinations. Some want a single-sex education for their boys and the small size of the school is an added incentive to enrol them at Champagnat, confident that each student can be known personally in ways not so easy to achieve in much larger schools. However, the student survey shows that Champagnat is the school of their choice often because of Marist and family links, both in New Zealand and in the Pacific Islands.

A profile of Champagnat College students

Champagnat College students, particularly those in the senior school, seem to fall into two groups as far as their behaviour in school is concerned. Those who come to the school from the Islands to finish their secondary education have been described as self-disciplined and capable of making a fine effort in their studies. Those who enrol at the school after being in difficulties at other schools in the city tend to be very physical, high spirited, misguided and a challenge. They are perceived by staff and by their peers as being naughty and inclined to “muck around a bit” (CCIS#1:6). The difficult behaviour of these students has raised concerns about their negative influence on the learning of other students. However, they possess a natural charm and in spite of their boisterous behaviour, seem capable of stimulating highly committed and persevering action on the part of the staff and Board.

The majority of the students come from families that are deeply involved in their church. The Principal suggests that the approximately 90% of Champagnat students who regularly attend church is considerably higher than that of students in other Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand. In their private lives, many Champagnat students are lay ministers and leaders of church youth groups. They bring to their Religious Education class a sound knowledge and love of Scripture and a familiarity with prayer. Those who do not come from a strong religious background nevertheless perceive themselves as Christian in the broadest sense of the word as this comment from a Religious Education teacher reflects:

They've got a God concept and that's not how they'd say it at all. It doesn't necessarily flow through their behaviour, how one who judges from outside would expect, but it absolutely is as much part of them as their sex really (CCISF#1A: 12).

Their religious affiliation is quite ecumenical or interdenominational. Students and their families from one Christian denomination might easily move to another for weekend worship. Some of those who consider themselves Pacific Island Church may also attend Methodist, Anglican and Catholic churches from time to time. The survey of Year 13 students (Appendix C) reveals that the religious and spiritual nature of Champagnat College

is highly valued by students who believe that attendance has improved and strengthened their personal faith.

Academic work is frequently a struggle for many Champagnat College students, especially those who come from homes where no English is spoken. The problem becomes more noticeable as they move into their senior years or arrive from other schools. Often they are attempting external examination courses without the academic background to support them. As one teacher remarks, they then “hit the wall” (CCOSTS##: 7FN). The school recognises that there is a serious need to address this issue by providing alternative courses more appropriate to their learning needs and backgrounds. However, the issue is compounded by the fact that students and their parents frequently have unrealistic expectations of academic success. A teacher suggests that:

Within the families, it’s more shameful to go for the lower certificate and pass than to go for say Bursary and get 35%. That’s actually, in their eyes, a better option (CCISF#8:11).

Other staff believe that there is often an imbalance in students’ sense of priority; that many students would rather excel on the sportsfield and in their social groupings than academically. These are students who will spend hours in practice but fail to complete essential assignments. Their dream of the future is to be one day a member of the top professional league team, like some of their sporting heroes and ex-students of the school have achieved. For some students, failure to succeed during the year simply causes them to give up, to accept their failure as somehow inevitable; to slip into a kind of despondency and loss of motivation.

The school has responded to the problem by providing very high levels of individual and group learning support; student academic achievement is consistently given a high profile in weekly newsletters and assemblies; successful former pupils are invited to speak to students. However, convincing students and their parents that Bursary may not be the most suitable academic course for them is an ongoing difficulty.

The founding tradition of Champagnat College

Marcellin Champagnat, the founder of the Marist Brothers Institute, was born in France on 20 May 1789, only two months before the French Revolution. The son of a local farmer and revolutionary leader, Marcellin struggled academically in an education system which was dismally inadequate. It was this experience which convinced him of the importance of education as a means of freeing the individual from the limitations imposed by poverty. After his ordination and subsequent posting as a curate in Lavalla, he gathered around him a group of young men whom he trained as teachers. Thus began his mission of setting up schools for the poor of France and the beginnings of the Marist Brothers order.

His pedagogy was simple and relational. He instructed his Brothers to:

Be with the young; love them; lead them to Jesus; form them to be good Christians, good citizens (Mc Mahon, 1988:132).

He firmly believed that learning takes place most effectively in an environment of love, acceptance, and equality as his 'Golden Rule' illustrates:

If you want to teach young people, first you must love them; you must love them all equally (Mst#2).

This belief was deeply rooted in the character of Champagnat who is described as a man devoted to the spiritual and practical needs of his Brothers, committed to family and deeply concerned for the welfare of people. His approach to life was practical, firmly based on sound common sense; a human approach in contrast to the theoretical and theological emphasis of many of his peers at that time in post-revolutionary Europe. After his death in 1840, his Institute of Marist Brothers continued to take his educational mission throughout the world, arriving in New Zealand with Bishop Pompallier on 10 January 1838 in the Hokianga. Over the next eighty years, Marist Brothers established schools in thirteen different centres in New Zealand.

Marcellin bequeathed an original spiritual heritage to his Brothers and to the Catholic Church that continues to motivate and inspire Marist Brothers to this day. Based on a combination of personal qualities of the founder, this 'charism' or gift to the Church shapes

the distinctive vision of the Marist Brothers. It is characterised by a ‘real life’ approach to interpersonal relationships and with God; a simplicity of spirit based on the qualities of sincerity, honesty and openness; a family spirit of genuine love, tolerance, service and hospitality, and a sense of Champagnat’s mission to provide a sound education for the young, especially those who are disadvantaged.

Pope John Paul II officially declared Marcellin Champagnat a saint of the Roman Catholic Church on 18 April 1999.

SPECIAL CHARACTER: ITS MEANING AND NATURE

Naming a phenomenon is a step towards understanding it and its significance. However, when that phenomenon arises out of the complexity of human life, experience and relationships, its definition and identifying characteristics can often seem elusive. In such a context, there is always the danger of oversimplification for the sake of clarity or the temptation to merely define without reflection on its importance and meaning. Special Character of a school is such a phenomenon. Although it is a term in common usage in Catholic education, it is rarely defined or described. This section explores the meaning and nature of Special Character as it relates to the culture of Champagnat College.

Formal definition

Three important official documents provide a formal outline of Special Character and its definition in relation to the school. These are the Integration agreement, the College Charter and the Staff handbook. The first two are legally binding documents under the PSCI Act (1975). The inclusion of an outline of Special Character in the staff handbook suggests that a knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon is important for staff appointed to the school.

In these documents, Special Character is defined thus:

Champagnat College is an Integrated Catholic College in terms of the Integration Act. The Special Character of the School is that it is a Roman Catholic School for boys only established by the Marist Brothers of the Schools for the Roman Catholic community of the Diocese ... which promotes and supports the School and of which the School is part, to provide and to continue to provide Education with a Special Character, that is to say: -

The School is a Roman Catholic School in which the whole School community through the general School programme and in its Religious instructions and observances, exercises the right to live and teach the values of Jesus Christ. These values are as expressed in the Scriptures and in the practices, worship and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, as determined from time to time by the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese ... (CCD#26:4).

This statement identifies and defines such roles as the Proprietors of the school, the Board of Trustees and the Bishop of the diocese. Special Character is seen as being the foundation for all Board activity, as well as legally defining the relationship between school and Proprietor, the founding institution of the school and the relationship between school and Catholic community. This relationship is inherently related to the school's purpose which is to "live and teach the values of Jesus Christ" and affects the whole school programme, including the teaching of Religious Education and the religious practices of the school culture, in other words, the provision of an "Education with a Special Character" as defined by the Catholic Church under the authority of the bishop. Note the use of upper case initials, denoting Special Character as an entity or phenomenon with prime importance.

In summary then, the official documentation does three things. Firstly it establishes the significance of Special Character in that it must not be jeopardised, but must be maintained and preserved; a task which falls upon every activity of the school and the people who undertake the activity of teaching and learning. It names the school, that is "Catholic" and "Marist", and lastly it defines roles and relationships both within and outside the school.

Informal definition

Research participants experienced some difficulty in defining exactly what the Special Character of the school is. This was most evident in responses to the Senior Student Survey (Appendix C). In response to the question 'What do you think it means when someone talks about the college's Special Character?' nearly half of the student respondents either misinterpreted the question or chose not to answer it. This suggests that Special Character is a phenomenon that eludes simple definition.

In the absence of definition, the school is simply described as being 'different' from other schools, including other Catholic schools. There is a perception that the school provides leadership and learning opportunities that may not be available in other schools. Its Catholicity is different in that it is firmly rooted in a broad-based Christianity, rather than solely within a Roman Catholic tradition. These differences are equated with being 'special'.

The school was either named simply by its major group associations; that is Catholic, Marist, Christian or by describing Special Character and its influence on the school. Special Character is defined in terms of its distinctiveness from other schools; its uniqueness as a school, but frequently that distinctiveness was not articulated in clear terms. For example, one teacher admitted having heard the term many times, but could neither source these occasions nor remember exactly what was said about Special Character. It is an intangible phenomenon whose definition is difficult. Indeed it is possible that its very existence could be questioned and doubted. As the Principal expressed succinctly:

I don't think you can bottle it though (CCIA#4B: 3)

However, its influence is all encompassing, affecting every area of school life.

I kind of look at it as a big globe that goes over the whole school and this is the globe of this Catholic character (CCISF#3A: 34).

The concept is described in relational terms. It is understood as determining the quality of those relationships, for example "Caring for each other" (CCISF#12:10) and as a foundation for behavioural norms. It is a special quality which:

Cuts across generations, cuts across cultural barriers (CCIA#4B: 5).

It presupposes that people will strive for personal standards of “Good behaviour” (CCISF#12:10). There is a strong link with the idea of community, specifically in terms of ‘family’.

Elusive by definition, Special Character is evocative. It is experienced in symbolic action, for example the singing of the school song, and is capable of inducing strong emotion for those who belong to the culture, even when they no longer have a regular connection with school activity. It has a dynamic quality. In other words, although it transcends the efforts and influence of individuals, it is capable of change and is vulnerable to decline. Its pre-eminent function for the school is such that it is the sole justification for the school’s continued existence. Although indefinable, Special Character, nevertheless, requires articulation for its survival. It is something which needs to be made visible; something which should stand out to others.

The multiple natures of Special Character

Christian

The Special Character of the school is fundamentally Christian, but within the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. However, many other religious traditions are represented within staff and student groups. A Catholic identity however does not exclude those members who do not belong to the Roman Catholic tradition. The broad Christian foundation for Special Character ensures that the latter are encouraged to engage in all religious practices and rituals. Openness to other religious traditions and a belief that diversity brings richness to the college culture is a feature of the school’s distinctive Special Character.

Catholic

Special Character is not only inherent in the meeting of the pastoral needs of students, that is, the relational aspect of education, and their academic needs, but also in the meeting of

students' spiritual needs. Education with a Special Character has a triple purpose; relational, cognitive and spiritual. The first two are common to all schools. The third is more intentionally specific to schools with a Special Character. This is accomplished in part through the promotion and teaching of values which is integral to the school's Catholic nature, within a predominantly Polynesian context. The Drumm report (1991) "Doing Better the Things we do Well", a school review commissioned by the Board of Trustees to identify the ways in which the school might become more effective, notes that the Catholic nature of the college is integral to its continued existence:

The school is a Catholic school and in the long term that is really the only justification for its existence (CCD#20:40).

Education with a Special Character is holistic by nature. Cultural, sporting, religious and academic factors are interrelated and integrated into the whole activity of the school.

Religion, its expression and experience, does not exist as a separate entity. For example, it is common for sports teams and culture groups to pray before facing their relative challenges on the sportsfield or at a cultural festival. The all-encompassing 'umbrella' for all these activities is the value structure of the school culture, based on the founding philosophy and tradition and the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Director of Religious Studies expresses this well in his comment:

What 'Catholic' represents, basically, it's a whole, it's an attitude and value structure, based on the values and attitudes of Jesus Christ. That's what makes it special ... When we put the charisma of Marcellin Champagnat on top of it, those things combine to make the school special (CCISF#3B: 6).

Marist

"We are Marist" is how some members name themselves and their relationship with the school. The Director of Religious Studies explains:

If we could set our character as Catholic character and tradition, I think we would be missing the point. We're in the Marist Catholic tradition ... (CCISF#3A: 20).

However, this seems to be a perception more readily expressed by adult members of the school culture. Student survey results show that students are more likely to name the school Christian, Catholic, and religious than by its connections with the Marist tradition.

Special character as Marist and Catholic are interrelated; one nature cannot be divorced from the other. The Marist tradition contributes an educational philosophy that is handed on and appreciated anew by each generation of teachers and students. Sourced in the documentation of the founding Religious Order, it presents a vision of education that is focused on caring for the individual as a precondition to the activities of teaching and learning. The Marist tradition enfolds the school within a world-wide educational network constituted by all those other schools founded by the Marist Brothers. The Marist philosophy will be more fully outlined in subsequent sections of this work.

Polynesian

The school is also Polynesian which in addition provides a strong sports-focused education. Indeed, some student enrolments at the school may be attributed to the sporting prowess and success enjoyed by many of the students and the positive publicity these have attracted. The minutes of a strategic planning meeting in 1997 suggest that these two natures, Polynesian and Sporting, might prove beneficial for the future growth of the school (CCD#19:47). Thus, being identified as Catholic, Polynesian and sporting are closely related to the school's development and future insofar as these Special Character elements are articulated and marketed to outsiders. It was also suggested that the school's Polynesian identity may account for the strength of the spiritual nature of Special Character in that religion, as well as sports, is perceived to play a large part in the Polynesian culture.

Special Character as experience

Special Character is described as a feeling and an experience, highlighting its intangible nature. Its existence is authentic, given that it can be experienced by outsiders as well as by members of the school culture. It is something that can be detected and is equated with

‘atmosphere’ but distinctive from other schools. The feelings it evokes are reported as positive, affirming, supportive and able to sustain the recipient even after they have left the school, providing a “foundation of love” (CCIB#3:8) for the individual. It is deeply rooted in interpersonal relationships and experience of the personal qualities of the school’s members. A new teacher to the college describes an early experience of Special Character with depth and conviction:

I mean everyone always talks about the special character of the school and yeah, it’s just, it’s kind of like an experience, you know, like I mean, I read something about it before I started. I can’t even remember what it said. But you just, you experience it all the time. So, I mean I couldn’t define it for you. It’s just a whole lot of things ... it’s daily, just being here on a daily basis, and I mean, it’s your experience of the people ... Okay, it’s a school but it’s not the school that gives it the character, it’s the people. And, I suppose the philosophy behind the school as well, but it’s generated by the people that are here so ... it’s your experience of the people that are here (CCISF#2:6,9).

Special Character and the emotions it arouses are particularly experienced in deeply symbolic and significant activities; for example, during worship in the chapel and the singing of the school song. It brings about a reinforcement of Catholic identity that in turn evokes an experience of school spirit and a deeper sense of personal spirituality. As one student shares:

You have a good feeling in your heart that you’re Catholic and that translates, builds up a spiritualness (CCIS#1:19).

Special Character is experienced as deeply real, personal, moving and meaningful.

It’s in my bones, really (CCISF#1B: 3).

Special Character as metaphor

The use of metaphor enables people to express what they have difficulty defining. A good metaphor can capture the intangible and convey meaning in a rich and articulate way. Participants use a range of metaphors to express their experience of the Special Character of the school. There are two dominant metaphors supported by and interrelated to several other examples.

Community

This word is used so frequently in both Catholic educational literature and in the documentation of the school that it has become almost a synonym for 'school'. The community is described in relational terms. It expresses something of how people interact and behave. Indeed, the community nature of the school is perceived as determining school norms and expectations. For example, the collegiality and shared decision-making that characterised staff meetings were suggested by one respondent as evidence that the school operated as community. The Principal succinctly describes the composition of this community:

I'd say working class, multi ethnic ... Christian in the broader sense than just Catholic (CCIA#4A: 2).

The relationships between the people of this community are characterised by openness, and high levels of support, affirmation and care. The small size of the college contributes to the community 'feel' of the school. Fewer numbers of staff and students make it easier for members to get to know each other.

The concept of community is central to the Christian message. The building of strong interpersonal relationships is highlighted as one of:

the four aspects of what the Church sees as its mission (CCD#11:6).

Since Special Character is defined in relationship with the Roman Catholic church, the concept and experience of school as community sits comfortably with its legal and philosophical foundations. As a teacher observes:

... the school is a community within a community (CCISF#12:22).

Family

The community metaphor is more specifically described as family by staff, students and Board members. For example, the concept of family was identified by a significant number of respondents in the student survey as a major difference between Champagnat and other colleges they knew. It is for them, a special characteristic of the college. It is of particular interest that people whose associations with the school ranges from very brief to those who

have worked for the school for a considerable time use the metaphor. One visitor to the school describes her experience:

Our first day we felt right at home here - after a day ... (CCISF#14:7).

'Family' is by far the most dominant metaphor, with the greatest meaning for members of the school culture. People talk of 'coming home'; of being 'part of the family'; of 'brothers and sisters'; of the school as a 'family unit'. Special school activities are described as being like a 'family outing'. Although the concept of family is as comprehensive in meaning as every individual experience of family, several key elements present themselves as common threads and points of agreement between research participants.

Family means connectedness within context. There is a sense of shared identity that relates to the ethnic composition of the school and the local community. The school's family nature is possible because:

The majority of this college is Polynesian and is situated in the Polynesian community (CC31).

However, shared identity is also linked with being Catholic and Marist. The school is a family within the Catholic community and in terms of Catholic Christian beliefs. This is illustrated by the words of a staff member when recalling an incident of theft in class and the subsequent conversation with students:

You're a Marist. You're a Catholic. You're a Christian. You're in Christ's image. We're here as a family. We've got to love each other and we've got to support each other (CCISF#1B: 11,12).

The strengths of the school as family are described in terms of relationships between all associated groups. These included relationships between the school, parents and visitors; amongst staff; with members of the founding order and between students and staff. The qualities of these relationships are experienced as friendly, welcoming, accepting, supporting and caring, but also challenging as illustrated by the quotation above. The family metaphor is deliberately fostered and developed. It is not simply a coincidental characteristic of the school. People speak of the hard work of staff in developing bonds with students and assisting them, sometimes in the face of difficulties such as a lack of resources. The family nature of the school is greatly valued by staff, students and parents.

It is a unifying factor that lasts even when members have left the school and develops a strong school spirit, based on loyalty and pride in the school.

A safe place

Closely related to the metaphor of family is that of being a 'safe place' for students, particularly those whose family backgrounds are characterised by domestic violence and other social difficulties. Common ethnic bonds, a feeling of acceptance and a subsequent sense of belonging all contribute to the provision of a secure and stable environment for students. Creating a safe place is the responsibility of everyone, staff, Board of Trustees and students alike. It is formally articulated in Board policy, specifically the Students' code of conduct (CCD#21) which outlines expectations of students regarding dress and behaviour. It states:

This should ensure that our College is a safe place for all members of our College Community (CCD#21:13).

An Education Review Office report in 1997 (CCD#9) observes that:

School managers and trustees place importance on providing a safe physical and emotional environment for students. The strong Catholic character of the school provides a sound base to deal with issues of student welfare and pastoral care. This extends to home and community support for students experiencing difficulties academically and socially (CCD#9:2).

Staff and students alike describe their experience as one of feeling safe. Suggestions that the school has a problem with violence are met with a strong response.

Some people say this school is a violent school. But there are no fights around here. They (the students) come here to get away from violence (CCISF#2:7FN).

Students support this claim. For example, they report:

No enemies (CC12)

They do not fight at school (CC57)

This experience of the school as a safe place also extends to staff.

I've never felt unsafe there (CCISF#12:16).

Conclusion

Perceived in a positive light, Special Character is central to the whole culture of Champagnat College. It has an intangible, dynamic nature that defies definition, giving rise to the frequent use, by participants, of metaphor and symbol as they strive to express its substance. It is apparent that these are capable of evoking strong emotion. The strong school spirit is attributed to the strength of the school's Special Character. It constitutes the distinctive nature of the school that can be perceived and experienced by insiders and outsiders. Experiential and relational, Special Character determines roles and relationships and provides a framework for the quality and nature of those relationships. The school is named by its members in terms of the multiple interlocking natures of its Special Character. A commitment from all members of the Champagnat College culture to maintain and preserve the school's Special Character is both formally and informally expected, especially since it is accepted as being the single most important justification for the school's existence. The nature of education with a Special Character is holistic, value-centred and based upon a heritage of Catholic and Marist educational philosophy. It is fundamentally contextual in terms of location, time, and personnel. However, its substance is not solely dependent on contextual factors, and although subject to change, its basic nature remains a constant.

SPECIAL CHARACTER: ITS CONTENT

Every culture has a content of meaning, a core 'message' that it seeks to transmit to its members in order to survive. This content provides a framework by which members make sense of their lives as individuals and as a group, and as such, it is perceived as a sacred heritage, not to be compromised nor easily negotiated. Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand, as in other parts of the world, share a core content, but its relationship to the culture of each school is influenced and shaped by the unique and distinctive characteristics of that school. Distinguishable elements of Special Character content are a central

philosophy, a sense of purpose, a system of core values and norms, shaped by Catholic educational tradition and theory and the specific living context of each school.

Philosophy

Catholic

The Catholic Christian faith and tradition are strong features of the school's Special Character. Articulated in official school documentation, cultural symbols and in the personal beliefs of participants, it provides a philosophical foundation for the school culture that is seen as an extension of the mission of the Roman Catholic Church. The staff handbook (CCD#11) provides a clear outline of that mission and highlights four key characteristics. The Catholic Church is committed to:

1. Proclaiming the Word - sharing the Good News of Jesus with others.
 2. Celebrating in worship - celebrating Christ's presence amongst us in the sacraments and liturgies.
 3. Building community - emphasising the importance of working together in the name of Jesus.
 4. Serving the world - reaching out to various people in need in the wider community.
- (CCD#11:6)

This mission and the faith which underpins it is a "life style" (CCD#21:2), "a way of living" (CCD#11:7), not merely a collection of beliefs and practices. It is basically relational; at the heart of relationship with God, self and others. Board policy (CCD#21) expresses the hope that a Catholic education will:

Encourage students to recognise that Christianity is a life style which permeates their whole lives and their relationship with others (CCD#21:2)

Four features stand out in the Catholic philosophy of the school. Firstly, it is Christ-centred. Faith in the core beliefs of the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and his Redemption of all humanity is essential for Catholic Christian identity. Life is modelled on the values and example of Jesus Christ who is a living reality for believers, deeply and intimately involved in each life and destiny. Christ's values provide the ultimate 'blueprint' for the development of personal value systems:

It's actually following his example and the way he lived his life. We believe in something, the belief doesn't stop when you go outside the door (CCISF#3B: 9).

Secondly, this faith is life directing. It provides meaning for human existence and determines moral action and behaviour. God is real for believers; life is a "precious gift" (CCOSTS#1:2FN) which should be lived well for the good of others. A life focused on God's love is an integral part of developing a positive self-esteem and a life of integrity and holiness. Thirdly, Catholic philosophy is community-focused. The relational nature of Christianity demands a willingness to work together with others in partnership. A personal involvement with the Catholic Christian community is essential to the Christian lifestyle. Two of the purposes of the school's Board policy on Parish Relationships are intended:

To demonstrate to students the link between parish and school as partners in the work of education in faith.

To help students understand the importance of active involvement in parish life as an expression of being a Catholic Christian (CCD#21:8).

Lastly, the philosophy calls believers into a life of service. Indeed the Catholic Christian is the "servant" (CCIA#4C: 11) of everyone; a person who looks after the needs of others both within the Catholic community and in the wider world. A staff member effectively sums it up:

I think because the Catholic ideal is working for good, you know the code that's up in our chapel, we respect every person for what they are, and we strive to improve what is happening in our homes and in our communities and you know, spreading out as much as it can (CCISF#8:5).

Catholic philosophy therefore is central in the educational, spiritual and personal philosophy from which the school culture gains meaning and purpose.

Marist

Catholic philosophy is most specifically expressed through the vision and mission of the founding institution of the school. The school's philosophy of education, which is Catholic and Marist, is summed up in its Mission Statement (CCD#27) which states:

All students are provided with a Catholic education which is influenced by the Marist tradition. They are given an education which respects their rights, dignity and

individuality. All students are challenged to achieve personal standards of excellence and reach their full potential (CCD#27:6).

The Marist tradition however brings its own ‘flavour’, its own emphasis and focus. Marist educational philosophy is articulated in several official documents of the school; for example, in the school’s Integration Agreement, the staff handbook, Board policies and School charter. However, content may also be found in in-service material and a variety of Marist Brothers documents, as well as reflected in the comments of participants who have a long term association with the Marist Brothers and their schools.

The Marist vision of education is at the heart of the school’s Special Character. It offers students a distinctive kind of education but also a philosophy of life, modelled by members of the Order, past and present and those who accept their vision. It is actively promoted and is a major element in the mission and purpose of the school, as illustrated by the following comment from the Director of Religious Studies:

We have got to continue to spread the vision if we believe it’s important (CCISF#3B: 11).

Marist education has several key characteristics and although individual elements may not be in themselves unique to the Marist Brothers tradition, together they constitute a distinctive ‘charism’ or spiritual gift which has been handed down over generations. Marist education has a relational emphasis. First and foremost is the hope that students will develop a relationship with God, through Jesus Christ and Mary. Relationships between members of the Marist school community should be characterised by the qualities of caring, love, awareness of needs and practical support of these. Relationships should be close and lasting, open and accepting. Love for students is seen as a precondition to teaching them. As a former student reflects, paraphrasing from the works of the founder of the Order:

If you want to teach kids, first you must learn to love them, and love them all the same (CCISF#15:11).

The metaphor of school as family is a strong feature. The school’s Integration agreement notes that a significant quality of life at the school is:

The emphasis placed on family and community spirit among students, parents, staff and past students (CCD#26:18).

This family spirit is most clearly demonstrated in community-based activities and a willingness to work with others. Marist education is based on a zealous self-giving, even to the level of personal sacrifice. The following observation fieldnotes on the content of a Religious Education lesson illustrates this very well:

He brought to mind the religious fervour of the early followers of Marcellin and their similarity to other religious orders at that time. He made special note of the fact that these devotees to the discipleship of Mary were all young, and using the example of the many religious in his own family, invited students to consider what they had given to God and how they showed their commitment to serving God and the Church (CCOS#2:4FN).

The role of the educator in a Marist school is characterised by a sense of vocation with a simple, humble spirit; a willingness to work hard for the sake of students for its own sake, rather than for personal advantage or gain. To be available to and for students, to be 'present' to them, is a key feature. A member of the Religious Education staff describes this quality:

It's the doing, doing, doing. And it's not for money; it's being prepared to be there (CCISF#1 B: 3).

This teaching vocation is:

based on us all being leaders through the practices of Service and Justice (CCD#17:1).

Marist education, in tune with Catholic educational philosophy, is holistic with a focus on the issues and affairs of ordinary human life. It seeks to integrate and harmonise spiritual faith with culture and life. It promotes sound educational principles in the classroom, whilst remaining open to new ideas and innovations. Finally, it is an education with a particular focus on meeting the needs of those who are disadvantaged in any way. An extract from the Staff handbook (CCD#11) summarises this feature of Marist education:

Bias towards those most in need - a bias of time, talent and resources and a genuine affection towards student who are least advantaged materially, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally (CCD#11:9).

Personal

The Catholic and Marist philosophy of the school does not stand in isolation from the personal philosophy of its members, since people come into any situation with a lifetime of

experience and reflection. In the course of interviews and observations, participants regularly shared their own personal beliefs and opinions. These, combined with extracts from a range of school documentation, reveal some common features that make up a personal school philosophy.

Student-centred, the heart of the philosophy is a message about life. Students are encouraged to live as strong individuals who values themselves and others, open to new opportunities but remaining strong in their own personal value systems. There is a strong message to seek excellence in whatever they undertake and to be prepared to work hard, with courage, hope and faith, to achieve that goal; to face up to the challenges which may present themselves in their current and future lives. The following is an example taken from a college magazine:

This year we have been offered inspirations from a variety of thinkers, achievers and role models. Their ideas can be woven together to make a philosophy for us to live our lives by. Three strands occur. Taken separately, these are: **Dream the dream**, that is finding the inspiration, having a goal, being motivated to want to succeed. Secondly, **Believe the dream**, that is, having the commitment to follow your goal - the belief in your ability to reach for the stars. And thirdly, **Live the Dream** - the part where we are most in danger of faltering because this means DO THE WORK (CCD#6:1).

This message is echoed in the response of a student to the question “How has this school influenced your personal faith?”

A lot. Work hard, you’ll gain a lot, with faith I hope I’ll get where I’m going (CC9).

Justice and service are strong threads. There is a sense of mission; of being aware of the needs of other and of responding to those needs, making a difference in those lives. People are to be treated with dignity, respect, equality; relationships should be characterised by honesty and integrity. As one participant reflects:

I’ve got a really strong belief that it’s up to each person to make things a little bit better (CCISF#8:4).

There is a tension between the school philosophy and other current educational philosophies, particularly that associated with the introduction of a corporate model of education, which is perceived as being based on a different set of values. Competition

between schools and different interpretations of success has led to a confusion of values in Catholic education. There is a concern that current educational trends will compromise the Catholic Marist philosophy of providing an education with a bias for the disadvantaged. The 'true' nature of education, as articulated in the school's philosophy, is perceived as being at risk:

I would fear for schools in general, because I think that where you start to make schools compete with each other, you actually lose a whole basis for what schools are about in a country and a community (CCISF#12:18).

Purpose of Champagnat College

The basic purpose of the school finds its source in both Catholic and Marist educational philosophies. Firstly, it is to promote the values and practices of the Roman Catholic Church as agents of that church and its members. This it will do through a working partnership between the school, the Church, the community and national education authorities. In these terms, the purpose is clear:

Catholic schools were founded with the primary purpose of giving a Catholic education to Catholic children. That must continue to be their primary objective (CCD#11:5).

However, 'Catholic education' has a wider dimension than teaching doctrine and establishing religious practice. It involves two fundamental features; the promotion of a lifestyle based on personal faith in Jesus Christ and the Gospel message and the holistic development of the individual student. The former is summarised in the following extract from the 1996 College magazine (CCD#3):

That students leaving this school have the personal faith, courage and creativity to first 'make' and then 'take' their major life decisions out of their deep personal commitment to Jesus Christ and the values and challenges He is holding out to us all (CCD#3:1).

In this context, purpose is defined in relation to life as a journey:

As a true Marist family, we assist each other to enjoy this life giving journey of growth into the future (CCD#11:2).

Its goal is to develop the spiritual nature of the students, to offer hope and encouragement and develop them as good citizens.

This aim is closely linked with the second feature of the purpose of Catholic education: the full development of the individual, academically, morally, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually. The aim is to develop “wholly integrated people” (CCD#27:6) or “wholesome people” (CCIB#3:5); to provide an education that will enhance students’ career opportunities but also to develop a strong value system, in particular the values of justice and service and a sense of responsibility for self and others.

There is a distinctively missionary ‘feel’ to the school’s purpose that focuses once again on providing an education for the disadvantaged. This is illustrated in this response from a Board member:

I think you need to also take in people that are in dire straits ... there is nowhere else for them to go and there is no hope for them. We try to reach them and bring them in and continue to try and give them hope to begin with and to really encourage them to try and learn something so that they go out with something (CCIB#3:2).

The missionary theme is reflected also in the vocational characteristic of the teacher’s role as the following comments illustrate:

Teachers basically are professional people who see a need and they want to make a difference ... (CCISF#9:5).

I just want to build something in them that makes them feel good about themselves (CCISF#2A: 15).

The context of the school, its size and tradition, it is believed, place it in a strong position to fulfil its purpose of meeting the needs of the individual, as is its commitment to providing the best it can for its students.

Values of Champagnat College

All cultures live and act within the framework of a values system. This school has identified those values and their source. The school charter clearly states that the heart of Special character lies in the right of the school to “live and teach the values of Jesus Christ” (CCD27: 3) as expressed within the Scriptures and the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, these ‘gospel values’ or ‘Christian values’ determine, not only the

activity of teaching and learning, but also shape the lived experience of members within the culture. They provide a guideline for behaviour, morality and relationship for the Board of Trustees, the principal, staff and students and as such, they are interpreted and applied by members of the school culture in the daily context of school life.

There are four core values that can be recognised as exerting a major influence on the school culture. These are respect, acceptance, care and loyalty. However, respect for the uniqueness and dignity of the individual and the rights, which flow from that individuality, builds a foundation for the other three. Respect is expected regardless of age, gender, culture or race. It is most keenly expressed in situations of defence and protection of the individual. During discussion about possible strike action and the potential divisive consequences of such action, the following concern was expressed:

I know that there are some Union members who will not be striking tomorrow. I'd hate to think that they experienced any negative reaction from others. I think that it's important that we respect others' positions (CCOSF#3:2).

A view firmly supported by the group.

Students are challenged to change negative behaviour towards others, as these exchanges between staff and students illustrate:

I'm angry, angry, angry, because you're putting each other down! (CCISF#1B: 8)

It's put-ups, not put-downs (CCOSTS#3:8).

The link with Christian faith is made explicit:

We respect people because they're people. They're made in God's image. You will respect all races, all creeds, all religions, you know (CCISF#1B: 10).

Respect is also extended towards the sacred symbols of Christianity. Bibles are handled with reverence; using the name of 'Jesus' as an expletive causes greater offence and objection than using a 'four-letter' word.

Fundamental to respect of the individual is a basic belief in the goodness of each person and a willingness to build up the self-esteem of each person. This extends to those students

who come from difficult backgrounds and have a reputation for being ‘trouble-makers’. As staff comments illustrate:

They’re good kids, but a hard class, if you know what I mean (CCOSTS#2:1).

You know, you hear teachers say he’s terrible in that class or this class, and then you see him so proud that he’s a ‘good boy’ (CCISF#3B: 1FN).

They may be difficult but they’ve still got a lot going for them (CCOSTS#5:5).

Students are encouraged and their self-esteem is nurtured through opportunities for success in sporting, academic and cultural activities. Success is affirmed; praise is given publicly at school assemblies. The weekly school newsletter is regularly full of messages of congratulations for the sporting and academic achievements. Indeed, the full senior prize list in 1997 was included in the regular parents’ newsletter! Personal letters of congratulations from the Board of Trustees are sent to students and staff in recognition of their success. Efforts on behalf of the school are met with a spirit of gratitude. Board of Trustees minutes contain numerous examples of correspondence to individuals and groups which contain messages of recognition for acts of service and appreciation of these.

Acceptance of individuality is strong and cuts across racial and cultural barriers. A parent and a student comment:

We often have overseas Asian students stay with us so our children have been brought up to just accept other nationalities. But here, that is encouraged and we are delighted at the way the school teaches the students to accept all cultures ... it’s a credit to the school (CCOS#4:6).

At my old school, although I got along well with most people, everyone sort of stuck with their own race. But here the pride of the school is very strong and race takes a back seat. I believe that this is very good because there are many cultures represented here (CC#56).

There are high levels of care and concern for staff, students and their families, characterised by a deep compassion. The following experiences are good examples:

My grandfather died last week and I went back for the funeral, Thursday and Friday and the school sent me an enormous bunch of flowers to my flat and yeah, I was really touched by that because I mean some of the other schools wouldn’t think twice (CCISF#14:20).

He took some goods, some food left over from a camp, and he said ‘well there’s such and such around the road and I know they’re pretty hard up (CCIA#4B: 5).

She explained to me that the boy had a broken leg and that William had been dropping him home since the family had no car. She also related the tale of how Michael had visited the home to pick up the boy's father to take him to the hospital one evening. When he arrived, the boy's brother and girlfriend who lived in the house were also there. Their young baby was sick and so Michael offered to take them all to the hospital to have the baby checked out. On reaching the hospital, he gave them forty dollars from petty cash so that they could get a taxi home once the baby had been seen (CCIA#4D:FN).

Underpinning this concern lies an empathy and understanding of individual difficulties:

A kid doesn't come to school and cut everything else off from what's happened outside, so we recognise that a kid might have had a bad morning (CCISF#12:16).

I'm starting to become a bit more mellow, because I realise what tremendous pressure some of our kids are under. And we have got to work on those (CCISF#3B: 10).

A climate of forgiveness and reconciliation is one outcome from such sensitivity.

Loyalty to the school stands out amidst other values, particularly amongst students and staff who have a long association with the school. There is a sense of achievement even in the face of considerable limitations such as financial difficulties and failure. Staff speak with pride of making "real progress" (CCISF#2:6). Parents and students refer to the school as "a good school" (CCIP#1:7), "the best school" (CC#28) and as "pretty special" (CCOS#5:9). The comradeship and a sense of unity experienced by students in their sporting and cultural activities are particularly mentioned. Playing for the school takes precedence over representation for other sporting organisations.

Anger is expressed openly by staff where unfair criticism of the school is perceived or when students are disadvantaged as the following fieldnote extracts illustrate:

She seemed indignant. Her voice certainly became more animated when she related to me how the students were regularly missing the buses which left early. "These students have paid for the fare at this time. They should be able to get on the bus?" (CCISF#2:4FN).

William remarked on the comment from one of the recent ERO visitors who asked, "How do you deal with violence?" William seemed outraged by this remark and told us that he promptly pointed out to the ERO person, "We don't have violence. We work to create a safe environment for the students since they don't often have it outside of the school!" The parents nodded in agreement (CCOS#4: 6FN).

Those who exercise a negative influence on the students' potential success or are perceived as using the effects of students' difficulties as a justification for personal shortcomings are strongly criticised.

I get very angry when someone – an adult – an adult mucks their education about. We can't afford to muck about with these kids' second chance at an education. We don't have them long enough to do that. We don't have them for seven years. We get one chance to help them and that's it! (CCIA#4B: 2FN).

Well one of them was just so cynical ... when there was a lack of academic achievement in his class, he just said it was the boys. They were stupid or they didn't listen or whatever, whatever, and there was no way around it, because look at what he was dealing with and that used to p--- me off! (CCISF#12:12).

From these comments it appears that leading others into trouble combined by an inability or unwillingness to commit to personal change are important criteria at Champagnat College for evaluating goodwill and suitability for membership of the school community.

Norms of Champagnat College

There is an expectation amongst students and staff that members of the school community will support each other. This is particularly evident in student/staff interactions. Staff openly appeal to students for their co-operation and assistance in support of others whether it be information leading to the recovery of a 'lost' bag or the abandonment of a potentially violent game in the playground. As a staff member comments:

They understand you know that we've got to look after one another (CCISF#3A: 8).

Students, in particular senior students, readily support each other and overall school discipline by stepping into conflict situations amongst members of the student body. They will either bring the argument to a close or, if events are beyond their immediate influence, will call staff into the situation. Students exert peer pressure to stop what they perceive as uncaring and unacceptable behaviour. For example, if a teacher is experiencing classroom management difficulties with a class, often other members of the class will 'call a halt' to the negative behaviour of their peers.

Staff are perceived as helpful and encouraging. There is a sense of 'working together' to bring about desired outcomes in student behaviour and performance. As a staff member comments:

I think that she has come up with some understanding that the school is, sort of, if you like, bigger than her and is not against her. I think that she's got a sense that the school and, I suppose the same thing for the boy, he has got a sense that we're working together, not you know at loggerheads all the time (CCISF#8:8)

Support for each other is expressed in demonstrating respect for the other person. Students are taught that respect is non-situational; that the positive behaviour expected in one situation, for example, respect for parents should be equally appropriate for school. Respect is expressed through ordinary courtesies such as welcoming others appropriately and refraining from the use of foul language. It is perceived as reciprocal; showing respect is one way of gaining respect. Students perceive that the presence of female adult students has brought about a renewed sense of the importance of showing respect, although for some, this is a point of tension between their cultural norms and the norms of the school. For example, in many Polynesian families, daughters do not freely mix with young males who are not relatives. The proposal to introduce adult female students, therefore, caused some concern amongst the Polynesian community of the school. There are expectations that respect should be shown, not only by students for staff, but equally, by staff for students. Non-compliance by either group is strongly challenged; examples of the latter being judged unprofessional.

Religion is considered normal for the school and creates an expectation of respect for religious activities and symbols. The strong religious and spiritual background of many of the students is seen as a contributing factor in the establishment of religious norms.

They relate to the religious side of the school, although we have, I feel, some problems in identifying with our Roman Catholicism, we have no problems here identifying with faith, none whatsoever. There is faith ... strong and vibrant and ongoing and that's a real strength ... (CCISF#3A: 13).

New students, who may have some personal difficulties with coming to terms with the religious aspect of the school culture are taught the 'rules' of the school in relation to

reverent behaviour in the chapel. Staff members conduct formal induction of new students, but student peers also exercise their own informal orientation of new students in this regard.

‘Be honest’ is a frequent challenge to students. An apology for negative behaviour can ensure reconciliation between the parties concerned and is considered the courageous and mature way of dealing with the situation. Honesty is expected in every aspect of school life, particularly in relation to sporting activities. However, a casual attitude amongst a minority of staff and students to the security of personal and school belongings creates difficulties when school equipment and personal items are subsequently at risk of being ‘borrowed’ or ‘misplaced’. This casualness is perceived by members of the school administration as undermining the best efforts of others to maintain a secure, honest environment.

There is an expectation that students of the school will behave impeccably when representing the school. The strength of their personal loyalty to the school seems to motivate them to behave in a manner that positively reflects on the school’s reputation with outsiders as the following observation from a student illustrates:

My fellow students who participated in the trip behaved exceptionally well and as a result the hospitality shown by those who we met made the trip worthwhile (CCD#3:13).

Conclusion

Distinctive threads of meaning weave through the content of the Special Character of Champagnat College. They bind the theoretical foundation of the school, the ‘idea’, with its practical reality, the ‘action’. Catholic, Marist, and personal flow naturally and authentically through each other, as different coloured threads. Each can be distinguished from the others but together they create a unique pattern. For example, the significance of community, strong within the Christian tradition, is reflected in the Marist sense of ‘family’, supported by respect and support, core values of the school’s culture and brought into action through the norm of working together. Although tensions and conflicts

inevitably exist, there is overall a sense of coherence in the content of the school's Special Character.

TRANSMISSION OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

The blueprint for Special Character in the Catholic secondary school is contained in the school's philosophy, purpose, values and norms; core determinants for action that provide meaning for the culture of the school. That meaning is sustained and promoted through the school's practices; organisation and structure; its special events and celebrations; symbols and ritual; teaching; environment; and its roles and relationships. In other words, the transmission of Special Character flows through everything that the school does. This section studies each of these elements at work in the context of Champagnat College.

Catholic practices

Champagnat College documentation clearly specifies not only the priority given to Catholic practices within the school but also outlines the nature of those activities. The right of the school to worship in keeping with Catholic tradition is a central aspect of the agreement between the school and the State and is unequivocally outlined in the school's Integration Agreement:

It is agreed by and between the parties hereto that as Religious observances and Religious instruction form part of the Education with a Special Character provided by the school, Religious observances and Religious instruction in accordance with the determination made from time to time by the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of XI shall continue to form part of the School programme in accordance with Sections 31 and 32 of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975 (CCD#26:7).

Champagnat College is clearly committed to an overt demonstration of its Catholicity. The promotion of worship, prayer and other Catholic Christian practices frequently heads the lists of goals and purposes listed in Board and Religious Education documentation. Whilst tolerant of other religious traditions represented amongst the staff, student body and

families, student and staff attendance at school worship and other Catholic practices is compulsory.

Catholic practices at this school fall into two categories. Those which constitute a part of the formal organisation of the school include weekly assemblies; weekly liturgies; celebration of Eucharist at special times of the school's year, for example, Founder's day and at the beginning and conclusion of the academic year; during highpoints of the Catholic Church's religious seasons such as Easter, Special Holy days, and Christmas and Retreat experiences for students provided by the Religious Education department. Informal, but still integral to Champagnat's commitment to Catholic tradition, is the daily practice of prayer with students in ordinary classroom situations.

Formal worship

The pre-eminent focus for formal worship for the school as it is in the Catholic Church generally, is the celebration of the Eucharist or Mass held in the spacious college chapel. Champagnat schedules three school Masses during the school year attended by the whole school community, including parents and visitors as invited and available to attend. The school's multicultural nature is nowhere more clearly illustrated than at these celebrations. Visitors, often representing the college's Pacific Island network, past and present, are given a formal Maori welcome and process into the college chapel to the sound of Pacific Island drums. The Mass then begins with a welcome in many languages prepared by students. The tapa cloth, conch and flowers that adorn the altar highlight the Polynesian nature of the school's Special Character. The freedom of worship illustrated by such features raises some eyebrows as the following comment from a parent reveals:

During the Mass they play drums in there and do all sorts and I think 'Crikey!' We weren't allowed to do that when we were going to Church. You know, I mean ... they get some messages through to the young ones (CCIP#1:12).

Student participation in the Eucharist is high. The enthusiasm and energy with which they sing the school song and the National anthem in both Maori and English is quite moving as young voices, spontaneously and quite naturally break into three or four part harmony.

Respect for, and the unique quality of, worship at Champagnat is apparent in this comment from the Principal:

I think that the way they attend the chapel, we don't have too much trouble keeping their attention and in Masses, there's a total respect on most occasions. You know, there's always been one or two, and the student teachers here at the moment find, remark quite often the kids will actually say the prayers (CCIA#4C: 1).

This is supported by observations during a prizegiving celebration at Champagnat as this extract from fieldnotes illustrates:

It seemed to me that the students really 'owned' the ceremony, that it was theirs. Arthur replied 'I hope so, because we try to make it so'. This impression of mine was also confirmed by the young teacher I met outside the chapel. She commented that she had never experienced anything like it (CCOS#5:8FN).

After a similar experience during the Mass of Founder's Day, this researcher finds herself in agreement with the staff member who observed with some humour that these students may, in many ways, behave like 'ratbags' but when they sing, "they sound like angels" (CCOS#2:6FN).

Students play a significant role within the worship itself; as ministers of the Eucharist giving communion to their peers, as readers of the Scriptures and as leaders of the prayers. A liturgy committee consisting of student representatives under the leadership of the Director of Religious Studies provides opportunities for student input in the preparation of the Masses and is also perceived as fulfilling a double purpose in preparing the young people as liturgical leaders within their own parish communities.

Until the introduction of the four-term year in New Zealand schools, Easter was a major focus for school worship at Champagnat. However, the inclusion of the Easter break by the Ministry of Education into the first block of school holidays has had a limiting influence on the school's ability to provide a coherent and meaningful celebration of the major days in Easter Holy Week.

Prayer at Champagnat College

Prayer is perceived as such a fundamental element of the Special Character of Champagnat College and an important aspect of its Catholic practice that it has its own school policy.

There are several purposes in promoting prayer as a normal part of the school culture:

1. To emphasise the importance of God, Christianity and Catholicism in the life of the school.
2. To ensure that the prayer aspect of the Special Character of the school is being fulfilled.
3. To encourage the students to accept that prayer is an important part of their life as a person.
4. To demonstrate to students that prayer is not restricted to chapel, but is integral to all classes in the school.
5. To ensure that there is prayer at the start of morning class, at the start of afternoon class, and at the end of the day (CCD#21).

The policy clearly illustrates the significance of regular prayer for the development of personal spirituality, the Catholic Christian identity of the school, and the integration of these within the whole school culture. Parent newsletters contain many examples of the school as a praying community. Readers are urged to pray in times of personal distress for members of the school community, both internally and externally. For example, prayers are requested for families who have suffered bereavement; students who are sitting examinations; on one occasion for the safety of two Marist Brothers missing at sea and during local community crises. Special Chapel times for communal prayer are also a common practice as the Principal recalls in his own research thesis:

These 'special visits' occurred on three occasions in this case study period. On each of these occasions, the whole school was interrupted and called to the Chapel. One occasion, it was to announce, with prayer, the sudden death of a well known member of the wider community (CCD#1:78).

Students and staff also relate their experience of spontaneous prayer as part of the daily routine and before the beginning of sports events and festivals.

Champagnat is different from other colleges. They use to pray every day (CC#57).

I like the prayer which we do for one minute at noon every day (CCD#6:8).

We pray at lot here, before sports matches, even at sports practices. Ah, before we do anything (CCISF#3B: 1).

Students are familiar with and comfortable with praying. Classroom prayer is a normal facet of their daily life at school. They understand and practice the 'norms' of praying, such as appropriate form and content. My own observations of a class at prayer illustrates this:

Bill began with a reflection on the Book of Wisdom and the students all bowed their heads in respect. There was no chatting or mucking about, although Bill used the occasion to develop their understanding of the word 'reverence'. One student whom Bill had called to the front of the room, asked him 'is the prayer finished then, Sir?' Bill replied 'No' and the student observed that they had not yet made the Sign of the Cross. Bill told him and the others to remember that they should stay in 'prayerful mode'. They remained fairly settled then until he 'officially' told them that the prayer was over (CCOSTS#8:2NF).

It was also apparent however, that routine also has the potential to dull the practice of praying. Without innovation, an over-familiarity with routine prayer can result in loss of spontaneity and depth as observed on two or three occasions when prayers at the end of the class were 'rattled off' by students and staff alike.

Board of Trustees meetings begin with prayer, as do morning staff briefings and meetings. Prayers are offered, for example, for the friend of a staff member, during times of bereavement and as an exhortation to staff to serve others. Such reflections and their sincerity made a deep impression on one visitor to Champagnat who equated this experience to his earlier experience of the school as a 'family':

Well, primarily that impression came from the staff on the first day, where I think it was William had a reflection, and the whole process of having reflections and speaking from his heart and opening himself up to everybody else (CCISF#14:6).

Retreats

Each year, students at Champagnat have the opportunity to experience retreats, which support the formal Religious Education programme provided by the school. The Staff handbook describes retreats as an experience:

Where a more experiential approach is given to teaching the values of Jesus (CCD#11:12).

Students are taken off-site to a local community centre for a programme of reflection, prayer, group and individual activities, designed to encourage personal thought about spirituality and relationship with God. Retreats are prepared and conducted by the Director

of Religious Studies and other members of the Religious Education Department. As Brother Martin, one of the Retreat organisers and a former member of the Religious Education department, explained to a group of students:

You know how it is with some teachers ... who want you to go at 100mph all the time? Well today we will be going at about 20mph! (CCOSTS#5:2FN).

The school retreat offers an opportunity for personally affirming and supporting students in their spiritual, social and religious development. The following comments by students, who represent a range of ages and maturity, clearly illustrate their appreciation of the retreat experience:

Let me tell you this now, it was a thrilling experience (CCD#3:60).

The purpose of the retreat was to affirm one another and to grow in self-knowledge. The opportunity to pray together was enjoyed (CCD#6:7).

Remember the good times with friends at retreat (CCD#6:8).

After the retreat you have more friends than you had before and that's more than you can ask (CCD#6:8).

School organisation

The Special Character of Champagnat College is reflected in the organisational activities of the school. Some of these lie within the category of Catholic practice, such as Retreats and opportunities for formal worship, but there are several which, whilst unique to Champagnat in terms of their features, fall within the category of basic school activity. These include assemblies, Board of Trustee activity, school communication with its community, and induction of new staff and students.

Board of Trustees activity

As can be observed from previous sections, Special Character is reflected in much of the documentation of the Board of Trustees, for example, policy statements; school self-review, both internally and commissioned externally; school charter and Mission Statement. The Board of Trustees offers practical and philosophical support for Special Character, and uses

it as a foundation for decision-making, strategic planning and prioritising as the following comment from the Director of Religious Studies, who is also a member of the Board, reflects:

It (support for Special Character) comes from the Board down. The Board is very supportive of Special Character. They're struggling with it a lot in their deliberations ... (CCISF#3:20).

It is Champagnat Board of Trustees policy to make some provision for staff development in areas related to the Special Character of the college. A staff development day, combining Champagnat staff with staff from other Marist schools and focused on the Marist school character, is an example of how this provision is met. Individual staff members have been given practical and financial support to undertake further study in Religious Education. Board policies include provision for training not only for staff but also for the Board itself, although to what extent this has been followed through is unclear. However, the commitment of the Marist Brothers is visible in the creation of a role specifically for the purpose of training and developing understanding of the nature and significance of the Marist tradition and philosophy as it relates to schools founded by the Marist Brothers of the Schools.

It is also Board policy, under its Quality Management Systems, to ensure that new staff members take part in an induction process. However, apart from providing new staff with a copy of the college's Mission Statement and a Staff Manual (which includes excellent material on Special Character), there appears to be no long-term formal induction process through which new staff members are familiarised with the distinctive culture of the school. Induction of new students is a responsibility of the Director of Religious Studies and the Chaplain and this takes place early in the school year. The school house system and full school sporting events are seen as one way of communicating "what being Marist is" (CCISF#3A: 5). Once again, however, more formal induction activities between the beginning of the year and Founder's Day in late August appear to be quite minimal.

Communications

School publications reflect an integration of Special Character. For example, both the annual College magazine and the weekly newsletter to parents contain countless references to the history, tradition and philosophy of the Marist Brothers order and explicitly link this founding heritage with the Special Character of the school. The frequent use of Pacific Island art adds another Special Character flavour to both publications.

It is a formal policy of the Champagnat Board of Trustees that:

The College newsletter will continue to highlight aspects of the Special Character of the College (CCD#21:7).

The practical implementation of this policy is supported by the Principal's knowledge and understanding of organisational culture in schools, gained from his years of personal study. It is apparent that the content of the weekly newsletter is no accident but a well-planned example of culture building by the school leader as this extract from his own Masters thesis shows:

These newsletters not only averaged one thousand words in length and, by policy, covered as wide as possible a range of positive good news, but also emphasised the mentioning of individual students by name. It was also kept reasonably light-hearted, multi-lingual where appropriate and used as a vehicle for stories, legends, heroes, myths, models, traditions, spirituals, celebrations, consolations, commiserations and prayers (CCD#1:73).

High on his list of priorities, therefore, is the affirmation and encouragement of students. For example, students' names appear on a weekly basis in congratulatory terms.

Also important is the use of the newsletter as tool for the articulation of a shared heritage. The newsletter of 28 June 1998, for example, contained a short history of the Marist Brothers' involvement in education in the South Pacific and their founding of Champagnat College. The heart of their philosophy is summarised for readers:

One of Champagnat's gifts to his schools was strong family spirit (CCD#12:14).

This statement resonates with the 'family' experience of Champagnat College shared by many participants in this research.

Students are encouraged to contribute to the newsletter and college magazine and the frequency of short reports and articles about their achievements and interests included in both is evidence that they respond positively to such encouragement. The expression of spirituality as a student norm is reflected in the short prayers which often preface or conclude articles and reports as the following magazine extract from the Head Boy's Farewell Speech illustrates:

First and foremost I'd like to give thanks to the loving Lord and to our patron who has guided us safely through this year of triumphs and disappointments, losses and gains (CCD#7:10).

Assemblies

Twice weekly assemblies offer multiple opportunities for the expression and experience of Champagnat College's Special Character. Under the leadership of the Director of Religious Studies, twenty-five minutes on Mondays and Fridays are devoted, not only to the usual announcements common to most school assemblies, but also include prayer, a short teaching or reflection on Scripture, sacred song, and affirmation of school members. Its location in the chapel is important, serving as a major focal point for the whole school community as the Principal explains:

in order to focus this as the centre of our college (CCD#1:6FN).

However, the practice of combining the spiritual aspects of the gathering with other, more secular activities, causes one participant to question the appropriateness of the chapel as the permanent location for assemblies:

I was actually quite surprised that the chapel, from Monday to Friday, was always how it was and I couldn't work out why they didn't just have it in the hall sometimes, because it seemed like it wasn't in the right place (CCISF#2A: 14).

For the Champagnat school culture, assemblies also constitute a welcoming ritual for new staff and guests, in harmony with the friendly open nature of the community. This is perceived as a special feature of the college, as one student observes:

That teachers and students are very friendly, like when visitors visit the boundary of the school, the principal and staffs welcoming them in the assembly and give them honour and worships same as the students (CC#55).

A teacher reflects on this experience of a first assembly:

You just sang the school song and just an incredible amount of pride, well not for me but just ... being part, or being welcomed into the community ... so it was quite neat and it was pretty buzzy. I sort of felt quite good that I made a decision that felt right. Yeah, it was neat (CCISF#2A: 2).

Cultural inclusion is also an important feature of Champagnat assemblies. Formal greetings are conducted in several different languages, representative of the multi-cultural nature of the college culture.

Participation of students is high. They lead prayer; read from Scripture; provide music and assist the Director of Religious Studies in preparation of the liturgy. For example:

On special occasions, up to thirty students might use the microphone (CCD#1:6FN).

The enthusiasm with which the whole student body sing the school song and other hymns, including those which reflect a Marist tradition, makes a strong impression on the observer, as my fieldnotes illustrate:

The students sang with power and strength. My ears were ringing at times with the volume of the singing (CCOS#2:3FN).

Students demonstrate a sense of respect both for the spiritual content of assemblies and its location in what is perceived to be a sacred space. A long-serving member of staff highlights the significance of the assembly for the development of this school value:

Twice a week the starting point of school on Monday starts in the chapel and towards the end of the week on a Friday, you've got chapel there where the school's together and we emphasise as a school that the chapel is a special place and no matter what your religion, you would respect that as being a special place; that it's a spiritual place. I think the dignity of that building and a set of rules and values and spirituality, and a sense of ceremony, comes out 95% of the time in the way the students respond. In the simple ways, just in their singing for example (CCISF#9:9).

A student reflects a similar sentiment:

It has nevertheless put me in touch more with God. When we are in the chapel on Mondays/Fridays, I respect and reflect on God (CC#8).

Special Events

Founder's Day

The big day in the Champagnat college year is undoubtedly Founders Day. It is a time of communal celebration of the school's history, culture and identity but also of its founding tradition. Over the years, it has been modified. For example, its date, 15 August, now integrates the feast day of Marcellin Champagnat, the Marist Brothers' founder, with the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, an important day in Catholic Church tradition, and its name has changed from Champagnat Day to Founders Day, although the former still endures. However, the basic purpose and structure of the day has remained basically the same for several generations of school culture with continuity over the years provided by one of the Marist Brothers.

On this day, the whole school gathers in the hall and is seated according to membership in three houses that were first introduced as early as 1955. The names, Champagnat, Lavalla and Xavier symbolise both Marist and Catholic tradition: Champagnat, the name of the Marist Brothers founder; Lavalla, the location of the first Marist Brothers' school in France; and Xavier, the name of a famous missionary to India. Each house has its distinctive symbolic colour, its shield and its flag. On the day, students proudly wear the colours of their respective houses on colourful hats and ribbons. Staff fully enter into the fun of the occasion, with some male staff sporting school ties and appropriately coloured shirts, and females applying their house colours even to the extent of painted nails, an abundance of ribbons and coloured daisies! The whole event is charged with excitement, a sense of fun and celebration.

The morning begins with staff breakfast at 7.30am in a local restaurant, attended by the majority of the staff. At the beginning of the school day, the whole school community and visitors gather in the chapel for the celebration of Eucharist, under the leadership of the Director of Religious Studies and a group of Senior students. Afterwards, staff enjoy a shared lunch and then join the students in the hall for the afternoon's events. Prepared over two or three weeks, each house prepares two hymns for an interhouse singing competition

under the leadership of Senior student house captains and their teams. It is an indication of the priority given by the school organisation that, over the weeks prior to the day, the timetable is adjusted in order to provide 'extra' time for house practices. The competition is both fierce and good-natured. Points are awarded for good behaviour; points deducted for making fun of performers! Individual performances follow, applauded enthusiastically by the student body.

It is apparent that the whole occasion has special significance and meaning for students given that absenteeism is particularly low on this special day. It is an important opportunity for sharing in the Marist school tradition as the Principal observes:

The three houses that we've got are Marist things ... so it's deliberately structured around those and the students that don't attend those miss out something huge I've noticed (CCIA#4A: 13).

Students find the experience of Founders Day moving, exciting and enjoyable. It is a time that creates a deep sense of belonging and shared identity. The following students share their impressions and memories of the day:

My memory of this year is when we as a family remembered our brother's death and how we really miss his presence around us. On Founder's Day one of our brothers wrote a poem for him and it made me really sad that he wasn't here to celebrate Founder's Day with us (CCD3#: 10).

My most lasting memory of school this year is when my house Lavalla won Champagnat Day ... It was a fun day at the end and everyone waited for the final score, but of course Lavalla won just by one point. Everyone in Lavalla rose up in joy and tears (CCD#3:60).

On Champagnat Day when everyone in Xavier had red crosses, the teachers and leaders had Xavier badges. Then we won Champagnat Day! (CCD#7:12).

The Malaga

The Malaga has been a tradition of Champagnat College since 1974. Brother Martin, a former teacher, Board member and member of the Parent/Teacher/Friend Association, has organised and led a group of senior students and several staff, including the Principal, on a visit to Ulimasao College, Champagnat's sister school in Samoa; a college that is also run by the Marist Brothers. Students pay for the trip themselves, although raffles to cover

group costs also provide some financial assistance for them. To date, approximately twelve trips have been made.

In the early days of the Malaga, students were pre-dominantly European and the purpose of the visit was to give them an experience of living in another culture. Now, however, as Pacific Island students represent the majority of student roll, the trip offers an opportunity for mainly New Zealand-born Samoan students to see Samoa often for the first time and rediscover family and cultural bonds. Brother Martin reflects on the significance of the Malaga for many of these students:

For the Samoan boys now, it's a great incentive of 'who I am'. Many of them have come back, they say (I doubt they do it), but they know they should know their language better. They've met aunts and uncles for the first time; grandparents too sometimes (CCISF#6:7).

On reaching Ulimasao College, Champagnat college students are billeted with local students after a formal welcome incorporating speeches, dancing and song, an ava ceremony and feasting. The following days are filled with picnics, sightseeing trips and cultural events. However, at the heart of the Malaga is service and community sharing. The Champagnat groups over the years have painted the school, constructed stone walls and cleared sections. They have created artwork around the school and often provided gifts of money for a sister college that faces financial restraints. Brother Martin explains:

We go there and we paint it. I've painted that school inside, outside, inside, topside twice in fourteen or fifteen years, so it's always looked smart. We've provided money. We helped them buy a fishing boat, television set, tape recorder. You know, we've done lots of things; small little things and it isn't a case where they've sat back and said what are we getting next, cause every now and then, the Principal would say 'You're coming. We'll provide the money for the paint'. So that happened. Now for them to get school fees is a big job, so to put something extra like that, it is a big fundraising effort, but they do it (CCISF#6:16).

The Malaga makes a deep impact on those who join it. It sustains strong Marist and Catholic bonds between Champagnat and its Samoan counterpart. It affirms the Pacific Island identity of individuals and school community and reinforces a sense of mutual responsibility and service for others. Its value for and influence on Malaga participants is inestimable, but the following illustrates some feelings about the experience:

My most memorable time was being part of the Malaga to Samoa. It enabled me to experience and learn the cultural side of my ancestors (CCD#14:70).

Each member of the Malaga will have different memories to treasure and bring out in the cold winter nights, but above all we have been given the opportunity to share in a very different way of life and we are truly blessed (CCD#14:18).

We are extremely grateful for what proved to be a wonderful and most memorable visit (CCD#7:14).

The certainty of expression by so many of the group that they will return to Samoa is an indication of the value of the Malaga (CCD#5:9).

Symbols

Catholic and Marist tradition

Champagnat college culture is rich in symbolism. Traditional Catholic symbols are common. For example, the statue of the Sacred Heart, a reminder that another Marist Brothers school existed on the site prior to Champagnat college's institution, stands in prominence in the centre of the college driveway, between the chapel and the approach to the Administration block. Pictures and small statues of Mary, Mother of Jesus, are visible in several parts of the school. Crucifixes hang on classroom walls. Evidence of the school's Marist origins is most physically visible in the large white statue of Marcellin Champagnat, founder of the Marist Brothers' order. This serves also as a focal point for prayer and liturgical services, and its location in a small tree surrounded garden provides a sheltered shady place for students to sit. In addition, the chapel, which sits at the highest point of the school grounds, is a clear sign of the school's religious identity as is the Brothers' house, a sign also of its origins.

School symbols

In common with other schools, Champagnat College symbolises its philosophy, purpose, values and tradition in its crest or badge, song, and motto, but the content and impact of these common symbols is a distinctive element of Champagnat's school culture. The crest reflects the Marist devotion to Mary as patroness of the work of the Brothers. The cross

serves as a reminder that Christ died on the cross and that the duty of every Christian is to “bear our cross - life and its daily routines with love for Him” (CCD#3). Light and a sword are scriptural symbols, respectively, for the responsibilities of the follower of Christ and the truth of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God. The Kowhai represents youth and challenges the young to reflect:

How will we use this life, which like the kowhai flower lasts but a short time, then withers and falls (CCD#3)?

Above the crest, the words of the school motto are displayed. “Confortare esto vir: Take courage and be a man” (CCD#3). Originally, this was the motto of the former school on this site and as a symbol of the bonds that continue between it and Champagnat College, the motto was retained. These words have almost a sacred significance for the members of this school culture and, perceived to be an important symbol of the school, they have been translated into four different languages in the school prospectus. They are quoted frequently, not only by staff, but also by students, even those who have only attended the school for a short period of time.

They are used in many different occasions and situations, but they clearly represent several different sentiments; beating the odds; facing failure with dignity; personal qualities of self-discipline and loyalty; playing hard but fair; working as a team; faith in God and others; growth and facing the challenges of life; and as an exhortation to succeed and live up to Christian values. Students relate the sense of pride and belonging they feel when they hear these words:

‘Take courage and be a man’ makes me proud of Champagnat College (CCD#14:70).

We are brothas¹ for life, we will respect, and we will love.
Being the best, we possibly can.
And I quote ‘Confortare Esto Vir’ -
Be strong, be proud, stand tall and be a man.
Peace. (CCD#6:23).

Standing on the stage, with the school colours and covered in coconut oil - the Tongan Group performed our Tongan culture with pride, echoing in our minds - ‘Confortare esto vir’ (CCD#14:15).

¹ A colloquial term for ‘brothers’ used particularly by adolescent Pacific Island males.

It is obvious that as a symbol, the motto of this school is powerful. Also capable of evoking deep meaning and emotion, is the singing of the school song. Although its words and style hark back to an earlier period of Catholic devotion, it nevertheless is a strong symbol of belonging to Champagnat College. Sung by the whole school at each assembly, often without musical accompaniment, but in three-part harmony, the enthusiasm and feeling that the students put into their singing is extraordinary, as this extract from my fieldnotes illustrates:

I felt almost like crying at the strength of the singing. It was an awesome experience and never in the twenty-five years or more that I have been teaching, have I ever heard a school song sung with such feeling and power (CCOS#5:8FN).

Staff and students express similar experiences:

The first day when school started and I heard the school song, it filled me with pride and it is something to remember when we leave school (CCD#14:70)

It make my faith strong when we sing the school song at assembly (CC#7).

I will always remember the sound of our college song ringing out ... in the closing minutes of the game (CCD#14:31).

The foundation philosophy of Champagnat College is summarised in a College code that hangs at the front of the chapel, visible to all on entering. It articulates for students what the college community represents and the values that are important to it. Teachers, Principal and students refer to the code to illustrate important issues to others; this comment from a teacher:

They'll see on their code, you know, we respect them. They might be of another race, but you know, we respect that. That's our school code. They'll put it 'school code ways' as much as they put it 'We're Christians' (CCISF#1B: 12).

And an extract from the farewell speech of the Head boy:

To those of you who are staying at school, all I have to say is that you take a good hard look at our College code hanging there in our Chapel Wall. It's there for a reason and I hope you take it into your hearts what those reasons are. No one is perfect, but when the going gets tough, just think of those three famous words that have become so familiar to all of us - Confortare esto vir (CCD#7:10).

The code provides a rationale for behaviour as well as an expression of faith and values.

Because each person is an intelligent, moral, loving human being

And because each person has been created, called, loved, redeemed by God
And Champagnat College is a Christian, Catholic, Marist school
Therefore, we will strive:

1. To always act in a Christian manner by following the examples of Christ, Mary and our Patron Saint.
2. To build school spirit by taking part in school activities
3. To do our best in all aspects of school life
4. To treat all equally, regardless of race or belief.
5. To build trust and understanding by honesty and friendship
6. To encourage each person to reach his potential by praise and support.
7. To be helpful and considerate to all.
8. To respect the other person's point of view.

The code is in effect, an effective, sincere and powerful statement of values and norms for school members.

Special symbols

In addition to these symbols which are drawn from Catholic Marist sources, the school community has created symbols of its own. For example, the Sid Stone, a large piece of granite set into the ground of a small garden was erected in memory of a long-serving member of the Parent/Teacher/Friend Association. A student leader related the following experience when he first arrived at Champagnat:

Once, one day, I put my foot on this stone and this junior who's about three years younger than me came up to me saying 'Hey! What are you doing, that's the school spirit you're standing on' and I was really ashamed (CCIS#1:9).

For members of the school community, it represents one person's commitment, devotion and loyalty to the school and is to be treated with respect and reverence by staff and students alike.

The use of drums in liturgy; the presentation of a kava bowl as an offering during celebration of the Eucharist; the conch; the welcome message in five or six different languages above the main door to the Administration block; the art work presented by students to the school and the colourful mural on the back wall of the chapel are all examples of the richness and diversity of Champagnat college symbolism. All are

evocative in cultural meaning for members of the school community. All transmit a powerful message about what the school is and values.

Teaching

A range of official documentation of the college states quite unequivocally that the whole curriculum should reflect the Special Character of the school. For example, the school charter identifies the responsibility of the Board of Trustees to prepare and implement a policy to ensure that:

Within the requirements of the New Zealand curriculum goals and objectives, the curriculum of the school reflects the Special Character of the school as provided in the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975 and the Integration Agreement (CCD#27:10).

This policy states that its purposes are:

1. To ensure that the curriculum reflects and promotes Christian values.
2. To ensure that the school programme allows for Catholic practices and traditions (CCD#21:2).

Resources used in the wider curriculum are expected to be “in harmony with the Special Character” (CCD#21:7). In addition, the curriculum in general should provide students, within sensible restraints, opportunities to learn about and engage in service activities. A good example of the fulfilment of these requirements is sport within Champagnat. Not only does sport provide students with a chance to develop worthwhile physical skills, but it is also perceived as an opportunity for building self-esteem, self-discipline, a sense of self-respect and respect for others, as well as the development of leadership skills in service of peers. However, the major source of teaching and learning of Catholic religious tradition is within the Religious Education curriculum.

Religious Education programme

Religious Education is seen as an “integral part of Champagnat College education” (CCD#2:2) and as such is compulsory for all students. The programme is based on the National Religious Education curriculum approved by the Catholic Bishops of New

Zealand. The Religious Education department strives to meet students' learning needs in Religious Education by using a team approach. Senior classes, for example, are combined into two groups: a Year 11 and 12 grouping and a Year 12 and 13 grouping. In this way, students with learning difficulties are catered for, as are those who require more of an academic challenge. The introduction of Unit Standard assessment is also seen as a way of providing achievable external qualifications in Religious Education and appears to have increased student motivation to succeed in the subject.

The name 'Christian Living', which Champagnat applies to Religious Education, has interesting connotations. It is a name that was in use several years ago before the introduction of the current curriculum and highlights the faith development aspects of Religious Education rather than simply the acquisition of knowledge and skill in the Catholic religious tradition. This emphasis is reflected too in the college's goals for Religious Education:

1. To lead students to a better understanding of the person and message of Jesus.
2. To empower the students so that they can develop a stronger relationship with Jesus.
3. To help students to appreciate the mission and teaching of the Catholic Church.
4. That all students are challenged to live by Christian values in a world of ongoing change (CCD#10:4).

Although knowledge and skills are obviously necessary aspects of the programme in the above, the development of a strong personal faith is more explicitly stated. In this school, therefore, it could be assumed that the Religious Education programme uses a more life-orientated approach than academic; that Religious Education is about the teaching of values, of strengthening personal faith and character. For example, Dawn, a member of the Religious Education department shares her impressions of how students at Champagnat perceive the subject:

It shows you how to live, you know, the right way. It gives you reasons for living a good life. It helps with living. Now, they saw RE as that. It gives you a chance to talk about stuff that's important. It gives you a chance to work together with people in group stuff and there should be more group things going on, this kind of thing ... no one said it was not relevant. They saw it, the fact that they said it, gave them tools for living (CCISF#1B: 12).

Religious Education is seen as a means of changing students' attitudes and lives. It presents them with a worldview that will enable them to reach beyond the difficulties they currently face in their lives outside the school: a hope that resonates with the school motto. Referring to students whose lives are limited by family and social violence, William, the Director of Religious Studies, has the following to say:

We work very very hard in RE on trying to break the cycle. We talk about how we can make a difference and how Jesus would have acted and how we can make a difference as Christian people. That message does get through to some, but it's an incredibly hard message so it's really difficult (CCISF#3B: 10).

It is interesting that both of the teachers quoted above are highly regarded by students and by their colleagues as this comment from a student illustrates:

It has again been a great year for me in Religious Education. The lessons with Mrs Francis and Mr Robinson have been full of laughter, and fun was never absent, but there was always a serious intent (CCD#14:10).

In general, it is apparent that relationships between Religious Education staff and their students are very positive, with high levels of awareness of and empathy for students' needs and difficulties being demonstrated by teaching staff.

Teaching approaches used in the Religious Education classes demonstrate an emphasis on integrating faith development, knowledge and personal growth. The Staff Manual makes this explicit:

Religious Education (or RE as it is commonly referred to) is taught in a way that tries to relate the values of Jesus, to the times and situations of the students TODAY. They are challenged to review their behaviour and understanding in the light of Jesus and his teachings (CCD#11:12).

Scripture is not only studied but is also a focus for discussion, personal reflection and prayer. Hymns are not only sung and enjoyed by students, but by focusing on key phrases and words, the teacher develops their understanding of the spiritual meaning implicit in the song. Teachers in this department are skilful and innovative. They draw key teaching/learning points from stories about sporting heroes, discussions around cultural concepts and traditions familiar to the students and also from the occurrences and situations

which crop up in daily school life. The following extract from my observation fieldnotes provides an example of a skilled Religious Education teacher in action:

‘Now take Zinzan’ he opened. ‘A great man! But he did something that he told people afterwards he regretted’. Several boys nodded. It was obvious to them what William meant; less obvious to me! I suspect that Zinzan must have fouled in some way in the game, perhaps losing his temper with an opposition player. ‘What should you do if someone abuses you?’ William asked the class. They offered a range of answers ‘turn the other cheek’ said one boy. ‘What do you mean by that?’ asked William. ‘Just don’t hit back’. ‘Right’ approved William. ‘Don’t lose your cool’ he added (CCOSTS#5:4FN).

This lesson on the importance of self-discipline was integrated with a lesson on the beginnings of the Catholic Church in New Zealand!

The diversity in religious backgrounds of the students at Champagnat creates some difficulty for the teaching of the Religious Education programme. Some students arrive with little or no formal education in religion. Teachers can encounter indifference and disinterest from students for whom religion is an irrelevance. They may find students within their classes who know nothing about Christ, the Christian story or Church. The National Religious Education syllabus presumes to some extent that students in a Catholic secondary school bring with them some prior learning in religion, but at Champagnat College, this can be not assumed. Adding to the difficulty, students with strong, personal faith and extensive knowledge of their religion and traditions sit alongside these students in the Religious Education class.

Informal teaching

The teaching of the values and morals integral to the Christian lifestyle happens in many unstructured ways at Champagnat College. Staff and students refer to the ‘Champagnat College Way’ as a point of reference for and a measure of behaviour. For example, the care of younger students by seniors, the expectation that students will behave when representing the school in public, and the unacceptability of ‘put-downs’ and violent games are communicated frequently in class, during assemblies and in daily interactions. The Principal, a gifted storyteller, demonstrates great skill in relating Christian teaching to the ordinary events of life. It is a skill shared by many of the staff at Champagnat.

Environment

Although the physical environment at Champagnat is somewhat spartan, participants describe the school as peaceful, tranquil and relaxed. The emotional climate is characterised by a warm, friendly, happy atmosphere. There is a positive feeling about the place that is immediately experienced by visitors and newcomers to the school. As one visitor remarked to the Principal:

I very much liked the warm and secure feeling your school generates in the middle of a very impersonal and bustling city (CCD#14:3).

And this observation from a teacher:

You feel it when you walk in. I, sort of, go by my instincts and you definitely feel it (CCISF#2A: 9).

The emotional climate sets the stage for the development and maintenance of friendly, positive relationships between members of the school community. One has the impression that interpersonal relationships take precedence over organisational and structural matters. In other words, people come before business. My own experience in the field illustrates this:

I was impressed with the casual nature of the gathering. Teachers were mingling with the students but there was no sense of their directing the events. The students simply stood around and listened to what was going on. It appears to me that this is a significant element of the student/teacher relationships. Students are almost expected to behave and teachers keep a very loose supervision on them (CCOS#2:2FN).

The tone of the meeting was very relaxed, broken by many occasions by story telling, very informal with business matters almost seeming to be popped in as they went. They shared with me their belief that the school's strength was its relationships and the commitment of people to the school (CCOP#1:2FN).

Several participants commented on the friendly open atmosphere of the school; an emotionally 'comfortable' place for school members and visitors alike. Participants share their impressions:

My last school was a special character school and I was very comfortable with the way of life there but in the five months that I've been here I have felt just as comfortable and will find it very hard to leave (CCD#56).

The happiness of the students and our behaviour eg students around the school were very happy and the teachers also take care of our attitude like respect to others and stopping smokes, drinks etc (CC#54).

It's a very peaceful and tranquil environment and I think being a smaller school you have the advantage of achieving a lot more than a bigger school (CCIB#3:2).

In short, the emotional environment at Champagnat is perceived as conducive to building a dynamic Christian community where people are priority.

Modelling

Structured

The provision of suitable role models is a major tool in the transmission of the Special Character of Champagnat College. The need for students to meet and hear a range of people who have successfully achieved their dreams is explicitly discussed in the college's School Charter, its policies, its Staff Manual and the Religious Education Scheme. For example, in its outlines of the Religious Education Programme, the latter notes that:

Teenagers need good role models to inspire them in living lives that are full of goodness and hope (CCD#10:6).

Opportunities for role modelling are systemised at the college. The college magazine and weekly newsletters frequently contain short items that outline current achievements of past and present members of the wider school community. Champagnat College's assemblies provide regular explicitly planned opportunities for exposing students to a wide range of appropriate and meaningful role models. Indeed they are described by the Principal as a:

Vehicle for producing suitable models for students to emulate (CCD#1:74).

For several years, guests have included politicians, artists, actors and other entertainers, clergy, people involved in business, law, medicine, and sporting heroes. There have been both male and female visitors, representative of many different cultures. However, guests from a range of Pacific Island cultures have been predominant among assembly guests, reflecting the Polynesian character of the school. It is not uncommon for approximately 30-

40 assembly guests to visit Champagnat College in a single year. The message they bring to students is best summarised in this short extract from a college magazine:

Into this Chapel we welcomed throughout the year some 32 assembly guests from our community in the hope that by observing role models of our various cultures we may be encouraged by their example to continue to strive for our dreams (CCD#5:1).

Unstructured

There is a second level of role modelling within the college; one which is unplanned and non-structured, yet integral to the culture of the school. This is modelling by members of the culture itself. Positive role models, particularly amongst staff and students, reinforce not only the school's core values of service, justice and commitment to God, self and others, but are a test of credibility for those who teach those values, as the Principal reflects:

All need to be seen to practice what they are preaching (CCD#1:80).

Students are quick to pick up inconsistencies between what is said and what is done by those in leadership and authority. The responsibility to be publicly credible for consistency between values and action is most keenly applicable to teachers of Religious Education as the Staff Manual states:

It is important that not only should the RE teacher be teaching about Gospel values, but he/she should be teaching in a manner that is in keeping with Gospel values (CCD#11:12 Underlining in the original).

These are sentiments that are central to the Judaeo-Christian ethic. For members of the Champagnat school community, people who live by the values they represent are in a sense a testimony to the relevance and validity of the College Code as a value and moral blueprint for the school.

These 'informal' role models come from a range of groups within the school. Inevitably, staff and students predominate, but members of the Parent/Teacher/Friends Association and Board of Trustees also feature. Five Multiserve awards for Service to Education have been awarded to members of the school community; an exceptional number given that even two

awards for one school is extremely rare. Commitment and service are high on the list of qualities represented in these people. For example, one person, whose association with the school has spanned 13 years, travels nearly 140 kilometres each round trip to attend meetings at the school, frequently on a weekly basis; another 80 year old exemplar, who has since retired, visited the school three times each week over a period of 18 years, to provide student learning support in Mathematics and Reading and there are numerous examples of others who have demonstrated their love of the school, care for staff and students, and commitment to both.

Student role models abound. Past pupils of the college, whose lives have been characterised by problems similar to those faced by many of the current students, present a message of hope, personal determination and courage. Students are reminded that problems can be overcome and that they too have the potential to succeed. One former student, a guest at assembly, told of how he lacked direction for many years after leaving school, aiming for an ambition which was unrealistic. Eventually, after confronting his own confusion and lack of personal commitment, he undertook study in law and is now a successful solicitor who continues to maintain his association with the college. The first adult student of the college, a woman, wrote to the school prior to graduating with her degree. She writes:

Before any structure can stand, a solid foundation must be laid and this is what Champagnat did for me ... Go beyond the dream and have a goal. Achieve the goal and realise the dream. It's great (CCD#12:14).

Current student leadership at Champagnat is also an important source of modelling for their peers. There is a strong sense of 'peer power' in action at school events. Skilled in the art of peer leadership, these young people are both mentors and heroes for younger students, particularly if this is combined with sporting success. However, knowledge of one's culture, hard work on behalf of others and commitment to the everyday duties of student leadership are also perceived as admirable qualities.

Influential role models, who reflect the schools' values in their lives, are represented in the staff at Champagnat College. Participants describe several teachers in very positive terms,

and highlight qualities that they believe are admired and valued by other members of the school community. The following extracts from a range of interview transcripts illustrate these perceptions:

He's a Christian man, an overtly Christian man. Not a "hallelujah!". He wants to do the best for his boys because that's his role (CCISF#1B: 24).

She's been there for me when I've been hard and she just gives me so much love (CCIS#1:22).

He's the kind of teacher that if you need help with something he's always really willing to help you in playtime or lunchtime. He doesn't say 'Oh look! I've got to go to the staff room. Can we do this some other time?' ... He's always thinking of the other person before himself, you know (CCIS#1:22).

He's always there. He listens. He cares about the kids and he's got a sense of humour (CCISF#8:6).

He has such a fantastic way with the kids and he can get them to do anything he wants without bullying and that is a real strength (CCISF#12:5).

She's very frank, very open, very honest, you know. I can trust her for anything (CCISF#13: 16).

Common to all these people are qualities such as commitment, service, care and respect. They are perceived as people who listen and act for the benefit of others. However, their most distinctive quality is a passion for the school and its students, which is demonstrated in their willingness to go beyond what can be reasonably expected of their role as teachers.

This quality is particularly reflected in the character and work of the Principal. He is acutely conscious of his responsibility to be a "suitable role model for staff, students and parents in a Catholic school" (CCD#21:4) as Board policy states and describes this element of his leadership as a "privilege" (CCIA#4A: 21). He is perceived as the one who sets the standard for others. His actions illustrate his willingness to serve others with great generosity and compassion. He frequently visits the homes of students to speak to parents on their own 'ground'. He makes arrangements to lessen the financial burdens for students and their families. His door is open to all and he regularly works in excess of 100 hours each week on behalf of the school, a source of some anxiety for his staff who worry about his workload. Staff participants describe him in the following ways:

He doesn't see things in little pieces (CCISF#12:4).
He is so utterly devoted to making this school the best that it can be and I really admire that (CCISF#8:6).

He cares. He genuinely cares about each and every one. He'll do anything, just pretty amazing (CCISF#2A: 10).

The Marist Brothers are perceived as important role models for the school, particularly those who live in community within the school grounds. Members of the school community see them as people who exemplify the Marist spirit in their commitment and devotion to their work, however menial. That they live by their religious vows is perceived as a witness to sacrifice for the sake of others and they bring lessons from the past insofar as they represent generations of Brothers whose whole lives were committed to the work of education. In this, the presence of the Brothers in the school site provides a continuity of Special Character philosophy and values; that presence is "the very strength and the very core of what the Marist Brothers are about" (CCIB#3:4). They are described by participants as "humble" (CCIA#4C: 3), as a "mentor, a teacher for me" (CCISF#1A: 2); and as welcoming (CCIS#1:24).

An outstanding example of such role modelling of service and sacrifice is Brother Charles. In his mid-seventies, he is still at work in the school in his capacity as groundsman. Described as resourceful, self-motivated and humble, Brother Charles is admired for his great sense of fun, his willingness to work hard and his prayerfulness. The following comment is a good illustration of how he is perceived and the contribution he makes to the Special Character of the school:

He brings a great sense of work and purpose. The kids see him and know that he is man doing a job. He's doing it properly. He's doing it well and he just doesn't do it once; he does it every day, every week, every month, every year since God knows when. It's stickability. It's purpose. He has faith. They see him coming out of the chapel after praying. They know he's a Brother, the way he treats the kids with great respect. His own personal humility (CCISF#3A: 39).

Relationships

Relationships are at the heart of Champagnat college culture. Teaching about values, articulating philosophy and establishing positive norms cannot in themselves bring about cultural maintenance and growth. These elements need to be grounded in daily reality. At Champagnat, reality for the members of the school culture is experienced fundamentally in countless opportunities for interaction and interrelationship. The student survey reveals that the existence of positive relationships within the school is by far the most distinctive aspect of its culture as experienced by students. The quality of those relationships is one of the most significant indicators of the college's Special Character. As a relative newcomer to the school observes:

Okay, it's a school, but it's not the school that gives it the character, it's the people. And, I suppose the philosophy behind the school as well, but it's generated by the people that are here so ... it's your experience of the people that are here (CCISF#2A: 9).

In other words, human meaning must come from human interaction and experience.

Interpersonal relationships between individuals and groups at Champagnat can be described as respectful, caring, supportive, friendly and open, empathetic, accepting, committed, intercultural and inclusive. These are qualities that closely reflect the Catholic Marist philosophy and the central values of the school. They create and sustain a strong positive emotional environment as the following comment illustrates:

The other things about being Marist is that apart from the spirit, they look after each other. They genuinely relate to one another. They feel comfortable. There is a comfort level here (CCISF#3A: 8).

What then are the relational qualities that create this 'comfort level'?

Quality of relationships

Champagnat College is a friendly place. It is a characteristic of the school that is noticed almost immediately by visitors and newcomers to the school. One teacher fondly recalls her first day:

I couldn't believe how lovely everybody was. Everyone was so incredibly friendly, because I had come from a such a big school where you don't even get to know people unless they're in your department or unless you strike up some sort of common ground with somebody along the way. Basically, you had 'Hey, how are you doing?', you know. 'Have a cup of tea' and that's about it, and you never get to know anybody. So, my first day was really great to meet everybody and everyone seemed happy that I was there as well and everyone was very sharing ... The first day when I met the kids was quite neat as well. I suppose they were, you know, keen to see who was coming and I thought I might have a few problems with them, but they were very, very welcoming (CCISF#2A: 2).

There is an expectation of friendliness and openness between both students and staff that lays a trusting foundation for mutual joking and teasing. Teachers have no hesitation in using humorous names for and with their classes. Students appear to enjoy the familiarity that this implies and respond with delight. The following extract from my fieldnotes is a good example of this fun-laden interaction:

The class was lined up outside the room ... William greeted them 'Hello, you HORRIBLE BUNCH!' he shouted. They all laughed and replied 'HELLO, SIR!' in deep voices ... William turned to me 'They're quite horrible, you know' and the boys laughed again. 'Right, in we go. The door is already open, I think. Well done with those socks' William observed and I noticed that a couple of lads quickly pulled up their socks to the required height just below the knee instead of rucked around their ankles (CCOSTS#3:3).

After observing the lesson for some time, these were my final impressions:

I have never seen a teacher with so much ability in raising interest, enthusiasm and eagerness to participate. The class was peppered with jokes and quips which raised peals of delighted laughter. It's no wonder that William has no discipline problems in his class; the students have too much fun to miss (CCOST#3:7).

Friendly teasing seems to affirm the students who seek more of the same from the teacher. In spite of sometimes rowdy classroom behaviour with teachers, they will take the trouble, at the end of the lesson, to thank them for teaching them. As one astute student notes as his best memory of the school:

Mr B, our class teacher, being a superior support to us; letting us joke around with him. That is what might have got the class close together as a group (CCD#3:66).

This friendliness between staff and students is build upon personal acceptance and respect for the individual, whether they are student or staff. There is a climate of emotional safety. As two teachers explain:

They can just be themselves. They can be individuals, but they know that they'll be accepted for that, and I mean, I know some of them; some of them misbehave and of course there are consequences. But everybody feels that they are safe (CCISF#2A: 3).

I think it's the lack of threats and that sort of stuff. It's not like 'Do it or I'll kill you'. It's a different thing (CCISF#12:5).

High levels of care and support mark relationships of staff and students at Champagnat College. The small size of the school ensures that individuals are well known. Teachers share their knowledge and understanding of students' backgrounds, their learning, social and physical needs, providing immediate feedback that enables them to care for students. Staff are sensitive and empathetic to the individual situations of students and will strive to meet their needs, even if it is just the provision of a much-needed pair of school socks. Students are called "our kids" (CCIP#1:11) and students respond with confidence in that care, as the following illustrates:

In this school, it can help me a lot because of the way of the teachers. They were friendly and being nice to everyone even if a Samoan, Palangi, Chinese etc. And the students were not afraid of asking anything we want (CC#54).

He knew that he could come and that he would be helped, so they obviously feel secure enough to, you know, open up and share their problems with teachers (CCISF#2A: 3).

She'll sort of stay there with you and tell you what's really good and what's really bad (CCIS#1:24).

Students are prepared in turn to support staff in simple practical ways, including moral support for the teacher's plight in managing a class whose boisterous behaviour is causing some difficulty. By contrast, some students take advantage of the friendly climate, just as some teachers are unable or unwilling to relate to students in any other way than formally or distantly. A teacher and a student recall experiences that illustrate this point:

We know that you're going to use us in a way that no other kid will ever use their teacher. But you're going to use us that way and you're going to abuse us and we know that and we know that you know it. But we're still here and we're still going to keep helping you (CCISF#1A: 16-17).

I was having real trouble with Maths and I went at the start of lunchtime and I said "Sir, can you please explain this?" "Oh, very quickly; just one minute!" and then he put me off. And I thought "I can't understand this in one minute!" and I really need help with this, but he just, it wasn't an issue for him. And to me, that's not really Champagnat College Code sort of spirit (CCIS#1:23).

However, Board minutes reflect the overall sense of responsibility that staff feel for students, especially the most vulnerable:

He emphasised our responsibility to the students, including those that have come to us from the Pacific Islands for their senior years. He advised that he felt that we must bite the bullet and help these students (CCD#22:1).

A system of home visitation has been put in place, which although difficult to implement and sustain, is seen as having the potential to bridge any gaps between home and school. Simple problems with students can be dealt with swiftly, building effective support systems for students outside, as well as inside the immediate school environment.

Students relate well to each other. They describe their peers as 'mates' or 'brothers and sisters', with friendships often crossing cultural and racial barriers after a period of mutual assessment of group influence and power. Particularly strong are the relationships amongst the various Pacific Island groups within the college. During times of interschool cultural festivals, students from one island commonly join the cultural group representing another.

New students are quickly assimilated into the school culture as a result of the care and acceptance of other students who have informally supported them during their adjustment period. Three students from overseas share this experience:

At this school everyone cared for me (CCIS#1:25).

I still shudder to think what might have happened if the boys in this college were not so friendly and helpful (CCD#7:26).

I enrolled at Champagnat college and on my first day I was very much afraid, thinking that the other students wouldn't be friendly to me. But when I talked with them, I realised that they are really friendly and good (CCD3: 54).

Students are supportive to each other, help each other in class and have a strong sense of camaraderie, particularly on the playing field. This support extends beyond their immediate peer groups. There is a positive relationship between older and younger students and between genders. The enrolment of adult female students for example, is perceived as having modified male student behaviour and academic motivation. Respect for female

students is both a cultural and school norm. Indeed, some student participants express their disapproval of peers who 'show off' for the girls.

Bullying is rare and is almost exclusively initiated by new students who do not fully understand or accept the school's non-violence norm. However, two participants expressed their belief that peers may also negatively influence each other, especially new students to the college. This may take the form of a reluctance to 'shine' academically or the adoption by normally well behaved students of more boisterous classroom behaviour as the following comments illustrate:

Here you have kids that are quite intelligent but they're too scared to show it in class, because they've been put in class with a lot of sporty, disruptive kids who in class are not really in tune or on task most of the time (CCISF#15:2).

There are too many influences in this school from the other guys which can drag you down (CCIS#1:13).

Relationships between staff are characterised by a sense of good humour and support. Aware of the need for consistency in their dealings with students, staff are prepared to share responsibilities and sometimes roles, for example, in discipline matters. As one long-serving staff member puts it:

He supported me. Now that's the absolute, absolute rule! (CCISF#1B: 18).

Given the small size of the staff, and the impact of Special Character values and norms, some participants believe that staff share many ideas and opinions in common with their peers and that positive relationships are both necessary and possible within the staffroom. There is a desire to know each other better and this is encouraged by the celebration of personal special events, as my fieldnotes suggest:

I met Grant in the staffroom and before beginning our interview, congratulated him on his birthday that day. I noticed that there was a flower and leaf arrangement on the kitchen partition with three photographs on it - one of each for the birthday people that day (CCISF#9:1FN).

However, the staffroom is not without its tensions. General disagreements between people with strong views; anger at what is perceived by individuals as unfair criticism and heated discussions during times of crisis, such as possible strike action and school change, all

create a tense atmosphere at times. However, the Champagnat staff appear to have an ability to face these times, work through them and still maintain a very collegial working relationship with each other.

Special features of Special Character transmission

Two features of the Special Character of Champagnat College stand out and are worthy of mention. Whilst not capable of transmission themselves, they appear to be supporting factors which strengthen and reinforce the transmission of Special Character within the school culture. The first of these features is the existence of strong links between the college, its members, the community and its founding tradition.

Linking

The significance of maintaining strong links with external as well as internal groups associated with the school is made quite explicit in the Staff Manual in the Principal's introduction that defines the school community.

Our family is made up of all members of our College community - students, staff, Board of Trustees, PTFA, our Proprietors the Marist Brothers of the New Zealand Province, the local Marist Brothers Community, students' parents/guardians, former students, local Catholic Parishes, the Catholic Diocese led by our Bishop, all the past and present individual families of the above people, plus associated Marist schools, clubs and families spread throughout the globe ... From this massive network our College draws its strength, inspiration, vision and spirit (CCD#11:2).

The school maintains close connections with all of these related groups, particularly through its weekly newsletter. This small document is frequently crammed with items of interest and news about the active Old Boys Association, other Catholic schools in the district, family news and the activities of various members of the Marist Brothers communities in and around New Zealand. Visits to the school by former students and staff are regular, often informal and many former students and their families continue to support school events such as the Fair and Founders' Day. It is not uncommon for new enrollees at the school to be the third and fourth generation of Champagnat students in their families.

A major characteristic of the linking network is its Pacific Island representation. Links between the college, the Marist Brothers and the Pacific Islands are strong. Families in the islands send their sons and daughters to Champagnat to complete their senior school education and to sit New Zealand Bursary, an opportunity not always available to them in their homeland. They have established connections with Marist Brothers' schools in the Pacific Islands and because of this relationship, these students are able to enrol as Preference students, that is, as students whose families have an established relationship with the Catholic Church.

These strong Pacific Island links are reflected in Board membership, where six members are Pacific Islanders; in the school's general environment which is rich in Samoan and Tongan art and artefacts; and in school activities such as cultural groups, celebrations and particularly the Malaga. The school code and goals have been translated into Samoan and Tongan and students can be seen wearing lavalavas in Champagnat school colours. Important Pacific Island visitors are welcomed at the college. These have included the King of Tonga and the Samoan Prime Minister, a former student of the school. However, what makes this linking distinct from other schools with a large Pacific Island student body is its interrelationship with Marist Brothers' connections. One is closely entwined with the other. Links between the Pacific Islands and the Marist Brothers are reflected in the school's shared spirituality, that is through shared faith, church practice, communal prayer, worship, customs and relationships.

Continuity

The second important feature of Champagnat college's Special Character transmission is continuity. Philosophy, values, norms and traditions are handed down from one generation to another. Marist and college artefacts are symbols of this continuity; symbols of the endurance of the Catholic Marist 'story'. Marist Brothers have maintained cultural continuity through the work of their members on the teaching staff and support staff. They fully accept the importance of preserving their charism and tradition within the school, but

inevitably their practical visible involvement has diminished as their numbers have decreased over the years.

Continuity is maintained through members of the current staff who have spent decades of their professional lives at the college. Their knowledge of students and their families is a major supportive factor in the work of teachers, as a teacher rather wryly observes:

We have a sense of continuity in that the little boys that are coming in now, I've taught their bigger brothers or their uncles and ... Oh, my God! In a few years, I will have taught their fathers! (CCISF#8:2).

People who have been educated and trained in the Catholic education system currently hold key Special Character roles. They are well equipped to continue within that philosophy. The Principal and the Director of Religious Studies are both former Marist Brothers, whose training and religious formation has been indelibly influenced by that tradition. Their passion and commitment to Catholic Marist education is summed up best by the following very personal sharing from the Director of Religious Studies:

I've still got the Marist tradition. That is something that will never leave me and that's why I'm at a Marist school. I think God chose me to return to Marist education and I'm really pleased that he chose me to come here because I think he did and I believe in the Marist way completely (CCISF#3B: 11).

Continuity is also ensured by parents who have continued to serve on the Board of Trustees, within the general activity of the school, and as members of the Parent/Teacher/Friends Association long after their own children have left the school. Some have continued that service for over twenty years, only to be followed in service by others in their family. The Principal recalls one such person:

A mother who helped in the tuckshop, at one stage her family had five generations you know in the tuckshop at one point, the little grandkid, and then the daughter, and then herself, and her Mum and her mum. There's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 generations! (CCIA#4B: 1).

Continuity is perceived to be of major importance to the preservation of the college's Special Character. Without continuity, the distinctive nature of the school will eventually die. The Director of Religious Studies passionately describes what for him would be the worst future scenario for the college:

That people who believe in the Marist way left and did not pass on the vision and the vision crumpled and our history died; we had no sense of history of who we are and where we came from ... We talk about Champagnat college: the history of it; who was here; when the buildings came; do you know where the green chairs came from; and so on and so forth; what is the school that we link back to; why are the Marist Brothers important. We've got to continue the vision (CCISF#3B: 11).

Many at Champagnat College would undoubtedly agree with that sentiment.

Conclusion

It is apparent that no single vehicle for transmission of Special Character stands alone in Champagnat College. It is as a whole that they achieve their effect, for without such integration, there is a danger of contradiction, ambiguity and loss of continuity. Effective transmission of philosophy, values, beliefs and norms requires the conscious co-operation of all members of the Champagnat college culture and a commitment to the full integration with everything that the school does. However, the more intangible relational aspects of transmission have equal, if not greater, impact on the integrity of the Special Character of this school.

THE EFFECTS OF SPECIAL CHARACTER ON THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL

The all-pervasive nature of Special Character must surely affect the nature and quality of Catholic school culture, particularly where transmission of that Special Character is an effective and powerful characteristic of the school's conscious and subconscious activity. After all, Special Character, fully integrated with the whole culture of the school, does not merely add another dimension to school culture. It shapes and sustains it, and its influence is perceptible in the ways in which members relate to that culture; in its basic functions and in its ongoing influence on the health of the culture and the development of its members. This research presents several distinct effects of Special Character on the culture of Champagnat College.

Bonding

There is strong evidence that people associated with Champagnat College make strong emotional bonds with it; bonds which endure even when this association has ceased for many years. Comments such as “it will be hard to leave” (CCIS#1:30) and “they keep coming back” (CCISF#1A: 17) are frequent. Participants, themselves, use the word ‘bonding’ to describe this phenomenon and perceive it to be a characteristic of Marist schools. The nature of bonding varies in its influence on different groups within the culture, the relationships between them and the quality of emotional ties. It occurs amongst past and present students, staff, parents and the Marist Brothers.

Bonding amongst and between students is centred on the quality of the friendships they make whilst at Champagnat. As ‘brothers’ who share not only the same ethnic background but also membership of, for example, sports teams, students value each other. Qualities admired by the student body are a commitment to hard work for the sake of the ‘team’; dedication to the same goals; courage in adversity; reliability, determination and above all, loyalty to each other and the college. The pride that they have in their school is a strong feature of their bonding, as the Director of Religious Studies observes:

The kids feel a great love of Champagnat. They feel it while they’re here. They feel it after they’ve left ... I feel very little disaffection towards school. The kids, they’re proud to be here when they’re here. They love it. They feel at home (CCISF#3A: 13).

A Year 13 student supports his perception:

I’m actually here because I sort of want to be here ... this place - it does do something and it’s sort of hard to leave to be honest (CCIS#1:30).

The bonding which takes place, often very quickly amongst new students, may last for several years as this long-serving teacher remarks:

Our kids have that they are part of one thing, part of Champagnat college and that doesn’t go away. You know, they come back. They’ve been out of school for eight years, they come back. I’ve had a student that I taught probably seven years ago, maybe eight years ago, dropping around to my house, saying “Look, Miss. You always wanted me to get my driver’s licence and now I have” so after you leave you feel an ongoing sense of belonging to Champagnat (CCISF#8:3).

Past students keep in close touch with the college. The college chapel and hall have been venues for birthday celebrations, weddings, baptisms, haircutting ceremonies, wedding anniversaries, and funerals. According to participants, on one memorable occasion, the chapel was used for the funeral of a local State high school student who had been tragically killed in a fire. A teacher observes that:

all those things mean that this is a lived-in place (CCISF#8:16).

Ex-students regularly contribute their professional skills for the good of the college. News of their activities and successes over the years is a feature of the school's weekly newsletter. However, much of the ongoing contact between past students and the college community is informal. Parents who work in the school tuckshop have this to say:

They come back to visit us. They pop around and say "We were just in the school, so we thought we'd pop in and visit. And we always tell them 'Don't forget to come back and visit us' ... if they ever go near the school, they always pop in and say 'Hello' and stop and have some tea or have a little chat and buy something off the tuckshop (CCIP#1:11).

The Director of Religious Studies also relates this experience:

We're getting a lot of say, old boys from two or three year back hanging around the place a lot, in good times and in bad, which is quite good ... They follow the college, and find out what's going on, and a few of them do it. They network among their friends and their relations, so it spreads around the community quite quickly (CCISF#3B: 18).

Bonding amongst staff and parents is reflected in the years of service many have given to the school. Champagnat College staff stay for a very long time. For example, several staff have been employed at the college for between seven and twenty years. The love of these people for the college is strong as these remarks reflect:

The Brothers as I said before, taught me the value of commitment; that it's not a job, it's a vocation and that's why I do it (CCISF#3B: 22).

I really love Champagnat and it's a whole thing; it's a whole parcel, not little bits cause there's lots of it that I don't like (CCISF#1A: 22).

The workload that they are prepared to undertake is often a matter of anxiety for their colleagues. One woman shares this concern:

He works too hard. He puts in about 100 hours in this place and if you come in here in the weekend, you would find him working then too (CCISF#7:1FN).

Qualities of commitment and dedication are respected and admired by others, as is their willingness to make personal sacrifices for the good of Champagnat students. Even when they leave, staff are remembered by the college community. Prayers are said for them in times of sickness and bereavement. A member of the Board sums up this devotion of many members of the Champagnat college staff:

There are people here who would do far more with somebody than other schools are prepared to give, you know. They're prepared to walk that extra mile, pastorally and academically, to help someone (CCIP#3:2).

Champagnat College like other New Zealand Catholic schools has a Parent/Teacher/Friends Association (PTFA). The work they do is not unlike that of other parent/teacher associations, but the years of service provided by some members is clear evidence of the close bonds that have built up between these people and the college community. Some members have served the school for over twenty-five years, often as members of both the Board of Trustees and of the PTFA. Although membership is promoted by the school, the group has very few members. One participant described her involvement as a “sort of extended family thing” (CCIP#1:2), almost a “kind of family hobby” (CCOP#1:1FN). Activities, such as the college fair, are successfully undertaken primarily by:

Contacting the ‘usuals’ of the parent body who have always helped in the past (CCOP#1:1FN).

The bonding of these individuals with the school is, therefore, a necessary support for a college faced with the ongoing difficulty of encouraging largely non-involved parents to become more active in their relationship with the college and its activities.

School Spirit

Although all schools would claim to have a strong school spirit, the spirit of Champagnat College is perceived by members of the school community as a strength of the college culture. Respondents in the Student Survey repeatedly mentioned school spirit as a special feature and closely linked it with the quality of the relationships they experienced. Students, staff, parents and Board members refer to “the Spirit of Champagnat” with

confidence that its meaning and relevance is apparent to all. It is perceived to be one of the school's most outstanding features; one which makes it unique and distinguishes it from other schools. It enhances the school's public reputation:

Throughout the city, Champagnat college is known for its strength of spirit, and new students often comment that the spirit of Champagnat is the first they hear of our school (CCD#3:1).

There is a firm belief that it is the strength of that school spirit which attracts students from other areas of the city and motivates them to enrol at the school.

The Spirit of Champagnat College is a dynamic transforming force within the school culture. Integrated with every aspect of the culture, it sustains its members and motivates them to work together for what is perceived as the common good, for example, on the sportsfield where it is seen as fostering a sense of fair play:

Let's face it, we've got a history of good sportsmanship. People can't really take that away, can they? That's embedded into the spirit (CCIS#1:10).

However, the influence of the college spirit goes further than competition. It embodies and represents the values of the school, particularly in terms of how its members relate to each other, such as sharing, caring, and respect. Fundamentally, it is seen as a key factor in establishing and maintaining the 'family' identity of the group. It evokes a sense of pride in the school, in ethnic culture and in personal image. The following comments reflect its impact:

Every time you mention the Champagnat Spirit to students, they feel this togetherness in terms of sports or something, you know. Proud that they are becoming part of that, so that has got a very strong influence on the students here (CCISF#13:7).

The spirit of the boys, it's still there and once you're a Champagnat boy you're going to be loyal to it until you go to your grave ... when they talk about their sports and when they go out into the public, they're so proud to be 'I'm from Champagnat' sort of thing (CCISF#15:9).

It has a strong hold on you, like a strong spirit has entered your life (CC#55).

It's almost like you have to have that spirit to survive everything. If you're at Champagnat, you're safe because your with Pacific Island people here. Outside of that, you really need

to get back into that spirit because it's familiar; it's loving, warm and you can relate to it (CCIB#3:4).

The school spirit has a bonding influence on members. It is most poignantly experienced in highly symbolic occasions, such as worship in the college chapel, in the singing of the school song and particularly in the proclamation of the school motto at public gatherings and in school publications. It is in fact like a unique legacy of the school culture, to be nurtured by each generation and eventually handed on to the next. The college's student leadership adopts this task as an element of their responsibility to and service of the college.

Senior student leaders reflect this in their farewell speeches:

The Champagnat spirit is unique, for it means different things to different people and right now, it is clear with me; right now that is clear with our seventh form, and on your last day at Champagnat college, it will be clear with you - if you let it (CCD#5:22).

And with this, I say to you all, this uniqueness that our spirit has should always be cherished and should always be remembered; as special moments in your lives; as special moments we shared at Champagnat college (CCD#14:6).

New students are taught about the Champagnat Spirit; its nature and the expectations it makes on members. In a sense, not knowing and understanding the meaning and significance of the school spirit is something which distinguishes those who fully belong to the culture and those who are in process of becoming full members. However, Champagnat Spirit is not determined or shaped by any one group or individual. Each member of the college community contributes to the school spirit through his or her actions, attitudes, beliefs and life experience. New members at every level of the school are welcomed into and quickly accepted by the culture, making their own contribution to the spirit that embodies the unique identity and nature of the Champagnat College culture.

Teachers' work: Beyond the Call

Teaching is a busy, often arduous, profession today, but at Champagnat, many staff have demonstrated a willingness to work in ways and at levels which exceed what can reasonably be expected of them. They show a willingness to offer levels of support to students and the school generally which is recognised by their peers as 'beyond the call of duty'. Cultural group uniforms are not only made by staff, but one teacher also

screenprinted them with the assistance of senior Art students; sports uniforms are washed and transport provided to and from events; some even spent their own time during holidays to freshen the paint in various areas of the school. These same people spend long hours each day at the school and over holiday periods. Their motivation is exceptional as the following comments reflect:

You know they give so much; way beyond what they have to give (CCISF#1B: 4).
I feel like I can give more to these kids than I could give to someone who's really fortunate, which sound really stupid. I suppose I sort of want to give more (CCISF#2A: 11).

You know, it's not being done because it's their job ... they don't wait to be told my somebody else that they have to do something (CCISF#14:8).

This broad interpretation of their roles as teachers at Champagnat is reflected in their descriptions of themselves as a "backstop for these kids" (CCISF#9:11) and as similar to being "elders, support teams" (CCISF#1A: 21) for their students.

Such commitment has its cost for these teachers. The task of continually trying to motivate students, some of whom have no or little expectation of success, is described as exhausting. Teachers describe their experiences:

It's very much a giving thing. Everything that you put down or in front of them gets gobbled up, absorbed. But what is the saddest thing of all is a sense of disappointment probably a large percentage of the time (CCISF#9:11).

The staff here work incredibly hard to try and help the kids along, and myself as well. I've never never had such a battle with kids to try to get them to finish things. I've never had that before. I've had to battle with some, but not with the whole class, and some students just don't finish things and then it just spirals and the others see what's going on (CCISF#2A: 4).

My biggest problem is that I'm working about ten hours a day, flat out all the time and I'm only just keeping abreast of most of the things I have to do, and I keep on thinking it's going to get easier next week. It never does (CCISF#8:12).

The small size of the school is seen as a contributing factor in the heavy workload of staff since it inevitably results in fewer people being available to undertake all the tasks and responsibilities which need to be shared. However, this does not fully explain the degree of willingness and dedication demonstrated by these staff members. Their descriptions of

what they gain from working at Champagnat are good reflections of their attitudes to their jobs:

A kid who you've been struggling with months, you know, the light goes on and maybe they, I suppose, they trust you. They actually trust you and you help them achieve or that you're actually on their side, you know. And that's pretty neat when they trust you. It's pretty cool (CCISF#2A: 11).

I love it. It is stressful, very stressful and I get tired and cranky, but I've got good support at home from my family, so it's well worth it. It's the most satisfying job I've ever done (CCISF#8:1).

One little successful thing every day and some major ones during the year and some major stories to tell over a period of time and I've been here twenty years and haven't had a moments boredom in the entire time (CCISF#4C: 14).

Not all staff at Champagnat are able or willing to work in this exceptional way. A 1997 Self-review report indicates a need to:

Set up processes whereby teachers are more accountable for their performance and that of their students (CCD#17:6).

Students too are quick to pick up on staff inconsistencies as the following comment about general discipline illustrates:

You've got some staff saying one thing and a lot of other staff saying another (CCIS#1:9).

One area of staff involvement is non-negotiable at Champagnat college: all are expected to support the Special Character of the school. Board policy states:

Champagnat College will reinforce staff understanding that they reflect the Special Character of the school (CCD#21:6).

This policy makes explicit the expectations that the college has of all staff employed there. Their behaviour, actions and attitudes, professional and personal, are all reflections of their support for Special Character and are integral to the effective transmission of it. They are expected to attend school worship, to support the Religious Education programme, especially in relation to retreats, which takes their students from their normal classes for a day, and to encourage classroom prayer. Their discipline of students should reflect the values of the school in that the dignity of the individual is respected by ensuring justice for all. These expectations apply to all staff, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

Generally, staff at Champagnat accept these expectations and are supportive of the Special Character of the school. The quality of that support, however, is perceived as being somewhat passive on the part of some that have little religious background themselves. Others are more overtly supportive, demonstrating that support in their willingness to assist the Director of Religious Studies; by displaying Christian symbols in their teaching areas; and giving time and energy to Special Character practices and activities. The following comments from these non-Catholic staff reflects their attitude to Special Character:

If you're going to work at a school that is basically a group other than your own, you actually have to like them and you have to see value in their life, and their values and be comfortable with them in a situation that's not what you're used to (CCISF#12:13).

I would absolutely support, you know, any sort of special nature or Special Character things that the school is involved in. I think that's really important for me to support that. And I'm supporting that whole-heartedly. I'm not pretending to support those things, but I do support those things because I think they're really valuable and really precious and they do as a side effect make my job easier in the school because it is easier to work at a school where everyone's pulling the same weight (CCISF#8:9).

At times there's some hard decisions that I have to make. Things about myself, but in terms of going supervising students in the chapel, it's part of me, part of my job. So whether I believe it or not, whether I believe in what's going on there or not is immaterial. I'm there to see that things run smoothly (CCISF#13:12).

Staff support for Special Character is seen as vital. Without such support, the work of the school as a Catholic school is seriously undermined as the Director of Religious Studies observes:

They have got to have a very positive attitude towards the students in any matters of Special Character whatsoever, and if they don't it's detrimental of Catholic Character (CCISF#3A: 19).

Staff who do not develop an understanding of the importance of Special Character soon find other employment as the Principal observes:

So some start and never, ever get it. Others start but leave fairly rapidly within say three years because they know that they can't cope or that it's worn them out and they really need to get out. They just walk (CCIA#4B: 8).

Finding staff who are able to fulfil Special Character expectations is an ongoing issue for this school, as it is in many Catholic secondary schools. As the Marist Brothers'

involvement with the school has declined, the Principal has looked for well qualified teaching professionals who bring, not only an understanding of Catholicism and a supportive attitude to Special Character, but an ability to relate to the Pacific Island nature of the school and its community. Without such people, Special Character work has increasingly fallen on enthusiastic and committed Catholic members of the staff.

Personal and spiritual development

People at Champagnat believe that the school provides its students with opportunities that they may not experience elsewhere. By attending this school, they believe that their chances for future employment or training are enhanced. The Student survey found that students regard improved academic achievement as one of the most important ways in which the school has helped them. Opportunities for greater involvement and participation in sport, in school and church leadership are also seen as being more available to students, enabling them to develop new worthwhile skills and personal strength of character.

The provision of opportunities for personal change is seen as a special characteristic of the school culture and its activities, especially in the sense of empowering students to change negative attitudes and behaviours which have caused them serious difficulties in previous schools. Students share their experience:

It's made me who I am. I used to be a person who would have ended up at prison but I got into sports, school activities and changed my ways (CC#6).

I used to be a bully and an unsettled kid in my younger days. But somehow, I've changed in big ways. I am now well satisfied in my school (CC#51).

I used to be a problem before ... who would have thought that I would be a prefect, you know. Who would have thought that I would have been a good boy at school (CCIS#1:25).

The Special Character of the college brings about a kind of healing, a 'recuperation' (CCIB#3:3) of these students. They are given 'another chance' (CCISF#12:6) to achieve in practical and personal ways. This is how two teachers describe these 'second chance' students:

We have a lot of kids who come to us we know with very bad names who have survived and done well at Champagnat because they've been given another chance (CCISF#12:6).

We're making reasonable citizens out of them ... Because of the Special Character and the Catholic nature of the school we're helping them, I think, to make then reasonable citizens with a set of values ... A few get lost on the way, but they'll come out the other end, for want of a better term, and they will be reasonable citizens who in most cases you don't hear anything about getting in trouble with the law later on, but when you saw them back in third and fourth form, you wondered where they were going to end up (CCISF#9:7).

However, the majority of students enrolling at the college for their senior years are young people who have experienced academic failure at their previous school or have come to Champagnat straight from the Pacific Islands. As the Principal observes:

I think they're coming because in some cases, like the ones I've had today, they're coming from schools where they've missed those exams. They're not getting improvement and it's embarrassing to go back to their other school ... The students from the Islands often come along here for a chance, their only chance, not second chance (CCIA#4A: 4).

Students at Champagnat College frequently, but not always, bring a background characterised by religious practice and personal faith. However, the Special Character of the college is perceived by a large number to enhance that faith and stimulate its development, and provides supportive evidence of the effectiveness of the school in its efforts:

Encourage students to recognise that Christianity is a lifestyle which permeates their whole lives and their relationships with others (CCD#10:2).

Student survey responses reflect a belief that the school has helped respondents to become more involved in their faith and in their church; to develop as more spiritual people, as the following extracts illustrate:

It has helped me get in touch with my spiritual life (CC#1).

It's given me hope and I understand a bit more about my religion (CC#18).

It gives me courage in my personal faith. There were things I experienced that I didn't (CC#15).

This school has really changed my life, meaning that I get to learn and know more about God (CC#48).

I think of the good things that my life is going through. My faith has grown (CC#9).

These comments are all the more remarkable given the fact that many of the survey respondents have only attended the college for their senior years.

Spirituality and faith are seen as being integral elements affecting everything that the school does, colouring everything that happens and providing students with meaning in life. Special Character is judged an advantage over other schools and justifies the continued existence of the school.

It's given me insights on things I didn't quite understand about being a Catholic school (what it really means). Catholic schools have an extra advantage that other schools don't have. I support them 100% (CC#42).

Let's face it, were you not the slightest bit religious, you still kind of got that spirituality over the school ... you draw from it. You can use it to back things up - what we do and stuff, and probably if it wasn't a Catholic school, I actually wonder or not this place would be here at all (CCIS#1:19).

The Director of Religious Studies supports these perceptions and firmly believes in the spiritual benefits that the school brings to its students:

Champagnat college in all its ways can be a tremendous influence on the life of people who have been here. I know that sounds a very kind of up-market statement and a bit kind of rash, but it's true. Champagnat does influence these kids. They believe in this place (CCISF#3B: 18).

Conclusion

The nature and meaning of Champagnat College's Special Character is rich, dynamic and complex, creating a distinctive culture that effectively integrates its traditional, communal and individual values, culminating in the highly symbolic significance of 'school spirit' for its members. It colours and shapes their perceptions of the school, engendering strong emotional bonds, high levels of nostalgia and a deep loyalty that endures in their lives. The influence of Special Character features on the culture of the school appears largely dependent on the support of individuals and groups within the school and their levels of personal and communal acceptance; their power being both enhanced and diminished by their actions, attitudes and values. It is apparent that Special Character content serves as a

strong, integrated and significant point of reference, providing a source of stability for the activities of the school. As the school continues to respond to contextual factors, such as changes in personnel, external issues, and internal demands, it ultimately shapes the living, creative and unique cultural meaning that lies at the very heart of Champagnat College.

CHAPTER SIX: A CASE STUDY OF MERCY COLLEGE

SETTING

Mercy College is situated in the midst of a busy city, surrounded by commercial and residential areas. Two State secondary schools are close and at 8.30 each morning, the footpaths are swamped by hundreds of students on their way to school, creating a colourful, if stressful, sight for motorists. The residential area is well established; homes and gardens appear well looked after, suggesting that people have a pride in their environment. High-rise buildings of the city's commercial centre and the nearby public hospital are clearly visible, dominating the skyline around the college.

Driving along the major road adjacent to the school, where traffic constantly flows throughout the day to and from nearby shopping facilities, the immediate impression of the college is one of space and solidity, enhanced by the mature trees lined up behind a wire netting fence. There is a deceptive feeling of space from the spread of open grassy areas surrounding the college, hiding the reality of the 'ad-hoc' nature of the college's buildings and classrooms that easily confuses the casual visitor. However, in spite of the almost erratic juxtaposition of blocks and buildings that constitute teaching and administration areas, several shady areas complete with picnic tables and carefully maintained flower beds give the school a relaxed, comfortable feel. The Mercy Sisters residence, standing nearby the main gates and administration building, is testament to the college's continuity with its foundational past. The college setting, particularly the lake that borders the college grounds, is perceived by participants to be a unique and valued resource, enjoyed and appreciated by members of the college culture and an asset to be openly promoted to outsiders.

The college property is a mixture of the old and the new. A large gymnasium, assembly hall, a Food and Textile block and newly built Art facility testify to the commitment of the Board of Trustees and Board of Proprietors to provide the best learning resources for students. By contrast, some teaching areas are small and narrow corridors linking various parts of the school are obviously inadequate to cope with the student roll growth that the college has experienced over several years; an ongoing source of frustration for staff and students alike. The staffroom is furnished with modern tables and chairs although several general purpose tables also cater for the working needs of busy teachers; large windows lead into a private patio/garden area for staff relaxation. It is evident that much thought and effort have gone into providing an environment that suits the dual nature of a staffroom in relation to the professional and recreational needs of college staff.

School background

Although the school was not founded until 1957, the land on which it is built has been associated with the Mercy Sisters' order since the turn of the Twentieth century. The first religious order to work in New Zealand, the Mercy Sisters were bequeathed the land by the daughter of one of the early pioneers of the region. By later purchasing part of the original farm, the Sisters ensured that land was available for the establishment of a Catholic girls school in an area already experiencing steady population growth. College documentation relates the tale of the little cross drawn on an original map of the property beside which was written the following promise "Someday there will be a school here" (MCYD #25:9). This dream of the Mercy Sisters was brought to fruition by a Sister who was given the "awesome task" (MCYD #38:4) of starting up the college with 15 students and "no classes for several months" (MCYD #38:4). The school for the next 6 years was staffed entirely by Mercy sisters until the appointment in 1963 of the first lay female teacher. The college became a State Integrated school in 1981. Since then, the college has been provided with new facilities in response to the changing educational needs of its students and the demands of roll growth. In 1991, on the retirement of the last Mercy order principal, the current lay principal was appointed. Today, no Mercy Sisters teach at the college.

Although the geographical area is well served by several large State secular secondary schools with in excess of 1500 students each, Mercy College, a Decile 10 school, is the only Catholic girls' secondary school in the district, drawing its students from a range of socio-economic groups. One effect on the school, in relation to its demographic context, appears to be a strong perception amongst participants that it is a small school in 'stiff' competition with other "good schools" (MCYIA #5:8).

Mercy College currently enjoys a positive reputation in its contributing area. Student survey responses (Appendix C) indicate that this reputation is a major factor in parental selection of the college for the education of their daughters. The school has maintained a stable student roll since its foundation but over recent years, it has experienced further roll growth. For example, between 1997-1999, it has grown from a roll of 803 to one of 867 students. Consequently, the college has a very large waiting list for students wishing to enrol and an enrolment policy has been established for prioritising enrolment applications. Students who have attended the four local Catholic primary schools in the catchment area are given the highest preference for entry, followed by students whose siblings attend the college or have done so in the past. If any places are left after these two priorities are met, then Preference students at State colleges are accepted, with non-preference students being considered after that point in the enrolment process. The result of this enrolment policy has been that a very low percentage of Non-preference students attend the college. There is also a stable student body from Preference families who enrolled at the Year 7 or 9 levels. The ethnic background of students is 78% Pakeha; 3.5% Maori; 2% Samoan; 1% Tongan; 0.5% Other Pacific Islands, that is, Niuean and Cook Island; and 15% Asian. It is the largest Catholic college for girls in New Zealand.

Roll growth has put pressure on the use of space in Mercy College and creates frustration for staff and students alike. Every available teaching space is fully utilised throughout the day with classes for such subjects as Religious Studies being conducted in science and art rooms in spite of the very different teaching/learning approaches required in these different curricular areas. In response to growth needs and new curriculum demands, Mercy College

has established a Development Foundation (1998) with the aim of making the college a “much more cohesive place” (MCYIA #4:4). In joint venture with the local Catholic boys’ secondary school, the Foundation hopes to raise two million dollars to fund property development. Future planning includes a new Administration and Entry for the college; a new Religious Education Centre and Chapel; extensions to the existing library; creation of a staff workroom and an outside Drama area; the enlargement of the Year 7&8 teaching block and renovations to the college hall.

Mercy College staff

The majority of the 58 teaching staff at Mercy College are very experienced teachers, drawing on teaching backgrounds spanning 15-20 years or more, supported by 11 ancillary staff. Currently, there are only 4 male teachers on the staff. The school has experienced few major staff changes since Integration. A core of long-serving teachers at the college, who have taught there for 8-15 years, provides stability. Several teachers have had associations with the college, which date back to their own education at the school, or that of their sisters, daughters and even grandchildren. Most staff are Catholic or from other Christian denominations.

Mercy College families

The family background of the majority of Mercy College students is described as basically “middle class” (MCYISF #5:2; MCYISF #8:11). The student roll represents a wide range of socio-economic groups, including daughters of successful business people and others from families on welfare benefits. Student survey results suggest that parents are attracted to the college because it is a Catholic school but also because of its reputation for academic success, its focus on the education of young women and the relatively small size of the school compared with other secondary schools in the area. The following response is typical:

My parents were looking for a school with smaller classes and a more ‘personal’ approach. My sisters attended this school and were very happy here (MCY #11).

However, as this Board member observes, parents may also consider other issues when choosing a school for their children:

I mean I know of very good Catholics who attend church every Sunday but wouldn’t dream of sending their children to a Catholic school because they think they’re underfunded (MCYIB#2:11).

Students and their families struggle with the issues common in New Zealand society at this time; family breakdown, financial and employment uncertainty and the temptations of drugs and alcohol. As a girls only school, staff are constantly aware of and sensitive to the possibility of eating disorders amongst students.

Although many parents may not themselves have a regular association with the local Catholic parishes, their preference for Catholic education is reflected in the enrolment of their daughters at Catholic primary schools and, in due time, their choice of Mercy College for secondary education. However, there is a concern amongst staff that some students are enrolled at the school with the parental expectation that the college will provide for the spiritual and religious development of their daughters, with minimal involvement by themselves. Others suggest that parents are attracted by the lifeskills and values education implicit in the holistic approach of Catholic education, although this is not borne out in student survey results in that only one student cited the availability of values education as the reason she was enrolled at the college.

A profile of Mercy College students

The majority of the students at Mercy College are co-operative and well behaved. Younger students appear to be comfortable with matters of faith and competent in religious practices, although the student survey indicates that the majority of older students do not sustain a regular association with a local parish except for Mass on special Church feastdays. Of the 25 students in the survey who named themselves as Catholic, only 8 indicated that they

regularly attended church. On the whole, a need for communal worship is perceived by them to be met by religious practices of the college. Students seem to have a strong spiritual identity and openness to the development of personal spirituality and prayer, although a few older students express open hostility to the Catholic Church and its teachings. Generally, students believe in God and the basic principles of Christianity. The following responses highlight the general attitude of students to religious practice and faith:

I don't actually go that often except with school, because I believe that no matter where I go, God will be there with me and I'm not that good at praying (MCY#47).

I don't attend church regularly and have not been confirmed. This is because I am not sure I believe 100% in what the Catholic Church stands for, but I believe 100% in God and his basic principles (MCY#20).

I rarely attend church (only ever with school) but I personally struggle to decide what to think of religion and its meaning in my life (MCY#24).

Mercy College students achieve high standards of academic performance. In senior external examinations, results have consistently been higher than the national standard. In 1998, 94% of students achieved University Entrance and in 1999, 22 scholarships over 9 subjects were awarded to students at the college; 29 students gaining an 'A' Bursary and 25 a 'B' Bursary, placing the college in the top 20 New Zealand schools in terms of academic achievement. Students at all levels of the school appear motivated to succeed. They show a willingness and ability to work co-operatively with their teachers and peers, and participate in classroom learning with enthusiasm and confidence. They are focused, personally disciplined and goal-orientated, appreciative of the skill and support of their teachers.

The founding tradition of Mercy College

Catherine McAuley, an Irish woman who responded to the needs of the poor in her country in the 19th century, founded the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. Born in Dublin, into a wealthy Catholic family, on 29 September 1788, Catherine's early years were happy ones. Her father, a craftsman and landowner, was a man devoted to his faith who committed his time and money to helping the poor of his district. When Catherine was five years old, her

father died, leaving a widow and three small children. Catherine's mother was a member of the high society of 19th century Ireland. She continued her affluent lifestyle to the point where, on her death in 1798, the family fortune was gone, leaving Catherine and her siblings homeless and destitute.

After their mother's death, Catherine, her sister and her brother were fostered by a series of different Protestant relatives. Eventually, Catherine was adopted by the Callaghans, an elderly Quaker couple whom she cared for until their deaths. In gratitude for her devoted care, she was named the sole beneficiary of their considerable estate. Catherine by this time was 44 years old, and saw her inheritance as a means of realising her dream of establishing a home for the sick, poor and abused of Dublin, particularly women and children who were the victims of domestic violence. The house, built in a fashionable residential area of the city, was completed in 1827 on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy and Catherine, accompanied by two young women, began the work she was convinced that God had called her to do.

Catherine had no initial intentions of founding a religious order, but in her early fifties, she was advised, even pressured by Church authorities, to establish a congregation in order to provide stability and security for her work. At the age of 52, she entered the Presentation Sisters, being fully professed on 12 December 1831. This date marks the beginning of the Religious Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. Striving to achieve their primary goals of caring for the poor, for the wellbeing of women and children, the sick and dying, the Sisters lived and prayed together, going out each day to carry on their work. They became known as the 'walking nuns' as a result of their being seen each day, walking in the streets of Dublin. For Catherine and her Sisters, it was important to offer care and compassion to people within their own environment; to respect their dignity and privacy. Within five years of Catherine's death in 1841, convents had been established in Ireland, England, Australia, and America. Eight Mercy Sisters, under the leadership of Mother Cecilia Maher, accompanied Bishop Pompallier to New Zealand in 1850. They worked with Maori and new settlers, establishing orphanages, schools and hospitals.

Catherine is remembered for her strong sense of social justice. She challenged oppression wherever it was found and advocated for the poor and powerless.

Mercy for Catherine wasn't sentiment, it was action, a concrete healing response to a perceived need (MCYD 30:1).

Always a sensible woman, Catherine demonstrated competent down-to-earth business and administrative skills. She was a woman of courage and compassion, sensitive to need and innovative in her response. Her love of life, fun and humour is reflected in her own words:

We can never be unhappy while we love and serve God faithfully (MCYD #30:2)

She was a risk-taker, whose faith and trust in God gave her all the security she needed to carry on her work. For her, the work she had undertaken was a privilege and a source of deep fulfilment as she reminds her Sisters:

It is a special favour of God to be made the servants of His suffering poor and teachers destined to train little ones in His knowledge and love (MCYD #30:2).

Catherine was an exceptional woman. Her life and qualities have, for the last 150 years, inspired other women to carry on the work she began; an exemplar for the 14,000 Mercy Sisters around the world today. Mercy Sisters can be found working in Ireland, Australia, Vietnam, South Africa, Chile, Peru and Jamaica. In 1968, Mercy congregations in Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin and Wellington founded the Federation of Sisters of Mercy (New Zealand) whose 432 members serve the people of New Zealand, Western Samoa, Fiji and Tonga.

SPECIAL CHARACTER: ITS MEANING AND NATURE

Formal definition

Both the Integration Agreement and the older version of the Mercy College Charter (the school is currently engaged in a process of Charter review and has produced a newer draft version) provide a detailed definition of Special Character. These state that the school is:

a Roman Catholic school in which the whole School community through the general School programme and in its Religious instructions and observances, exercises the right to

live and teach the values of Jesus Christ. These values are as expressed in the Scriptures and in the practices, worship and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church as determined from time to time by the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese ... (MCYD #47:5).

This same paragraph, which is also included in the college's Prospectus and Staff Handbook, is a generic definition which was applied to all Integration Agreements of Catholic schools in New Zealand following the introduction of the Private School Integration Act (1975). More specific to Mercy College is the preceding paragraph which links the college and its Special Character to the Sisters of Mercy in this particular diocese.

The paragraph states:

The Special Character of the School is that it is a Roman Catholic School for girls only established by the Roman Catholic Religious Order of Women known as the Sisters of Mercy for the Roman Catholic community of the Diocese of ... which promotes and supports the School and of which the school is part, to provide and to continue to provide Education with a Special Character (MCYD #47:5).

This paragraph is included, in full, in the college's original Charter. It is interesting to note that, in the interests of brevity, these paragraphs have been omitted from the new draft currently under consideration; a draft that lacks many of the rich statements relating to the college's Special Character quoted in this case study.

The school's existence and continued existence, as these paragraphs illustrate, are firmly embedded in its membership within the wider Roman Catholic community of the area, and in the commitment of the Sisters of Mercy to provide a Special Character education for the benefit of that community. These roots provide the key to defining the Special Character of the college; remove either its Catholic identity or its Mercy heritage and the Special Character of this particular Catholic school will undoubtedly be changed. The first paragraph defines its Special Character as a **Catholic** school; the second defines its Special Character as a **Mercy** school. Together and individually, both provide the essence of its identity, its relationship and its function as a New Zealand State integrated school.

Informal definition

For participants at Mercy College, Special Character is something intangible yet very real in their experience of life at the college. It is defined as something that makes the college distinctive from other secular secondary colleges in the area, particularly in the area of interpersonal relationships. Members perceive it as a foundation for developing positive interactions between members of the college culture, creating strong bonds between them.

The difference between Mercy College and other schools is rooted in its nature as a Catholic school. The relational strengths of the college arise from an imperative to behave in keeping with the teaching and life of Jesus Christ. They are, in a sense, both a responsibility and an outcome of being a Catholic Mercy school, as the following comments explain:

I see it from the point of view of being different. It's something that we do. It's not what we have; a core of it being the person; the individual being acknowledged, respected because they are and the fact that we have the sanction to or the opportunity to celebrate rituals ... Yeah, it's difficult. It's a very difficult concept to explain (MCYISF #9:9).

Why we're doing it is the difference, because that's what we stand for. We are supposed to stand for the Mercy charism. People expect us to be different, to be more caring and sometimes I think we're too caring, but that's what we are and that's who we are and that's what we stand for. That's what makes us different (MCYIB #12:17).

In the context of Mercy, it essentially refers to the fact that we are a Catholic school and because of this, we are different from State schools. We are expected to behave in a more Christian-like manner (MCY #9).

The nature of the difference between Mercy College and other schools is perceived as "something special" (MCYISF #9:10) that is difficult to capture in words. The student survey, however, indicates that the term itself is a familiar one, given that the majority of respondents were able to define it as something that makes the school distinctive, linked with the school's religious and spiritual identity.

The multiple natures of Special Character

Catholic

To be 'Catholic' is the first imperative of Mercy College as the following extract from the original college charter illustrates:

In providing this education the Board of Trustees acknowledges that this integrated school exists to provide a Catholic education ... (MCYD #49:3).

Being Catholic brings both responsibilities and advantages to the school. Its Integration agreement requires that the school reflects its Special Character in the education it provides; a requirement which is translated in the Staff handbook as a responsibility to:

maintain a Roman Catholic perspective in the Curriculum (MCYD #25:66).

A student participant reinforces this position when she observes:

We have masses, church liturgies. "It's Catholic" - we are influenced by what the Church teaches (MCY #37).

However, the Catholic identity of the school is perceived as influencing more than basic curriculum. It determines how people are expected to behave towards each other; how the college culture is perceived and evaluated by the local Church community and the public in general; and shapes expectations of educational standards. In other words, being 'Catholic' permeates every aspect of college life and activity. The Special Character of the college is, at its most basic level, 'Catholic' as the Principal so succinctly observes:

Well, I mean, you can't call yourself a Catholic school, can you, if you're not working on the Special Character (MCYIA #5:8).

A shared Catholic vision brings advantages to the college. It creates a strong school culture according to some participants, who point to the advantages of having a common sense of purpose and mission amongst members of the college community; strengths which are attractive to parents, both current and prospective. It provides what participants have described as a "more rounded education" (MCY #41), catering for the widest range of human learning needs, including the spiritual. A 1998 Education Review Office report observes that:

the school is a positive learning environment which affirms holistic education and encourages creative teaching (MCYD #14:11).

The following, very personal, comment from a staff member illustrates the value she places on this dimension of Education with a Special Character and its uniqueness:

It offers as far as I'm aware, the only place in our society where you are living in an environment which is totally moulded by the teachings of Jesus. In every other work environment you could be in or be educated in, you might hold those values and you might live them yourselves, but you are not going to be protected by that huge vision that the school has for what's important in life; a place where people's relationship with God, their spirituality is nurtured, still not just acknowledged, but nurtured. So that to me, that's the most exciting thing about being in a Catholic school. Here if you are a Catholic who is committed, you are able to live in that environment and work in that environment (MCYISF #13:11).

Mercy

Founded by the Sisters of Mercy, the philosophy and work of this Religious Order adds another dimension to the Special Character of the college. The Mercy tradition, which is perceived as relevant and dynamic, provides a historical and philosophical basis for the activity of the school and its cultural life, highlighted through events, symbols and the core values of compassion and justice. It adds another layer of distinctiveness. The college's Integration Agreement supports this position when it notes that:

These Sisters bring to the School the special characteristics of their Order (MCYD #47:1).

It is a tradition that must be preserved if the Special Character of the college is to be maintained and preserved. One teacher passionately observes that, in terms of the college's Special Character, the Mercy dimension is:

what makes us tick and kind of like the blood that runs through it (MCYISF #4:11).

The Special Character of the college, therefore, has multiple complex interrelated dimensions. Situated contextually in terms of geography and gender, it is basically Catholic and Mercy in its nature as the following comment from the Head of Religious Education summarises:

You'd have to start by saying it was a Catholic school. It's girls' school. It caters for students from Year 7 through to 13. It was established by the Sisters of Mercy and all those things are going to bring something to what the school is about (MCYISF #6:1).

Special Character as experience

The Special Character of the college is described repeatedly by participants as an atmosphere or feeling within the college culture that permeates its communal life and activity. It is described as something which "tends to rub off on other people" (MCYISF #15: 2). It is an "added dimension" (MCYISF #5: 8), a "spiritual dimension" (MCYD #14: 2) or "Christian spirit" (MCY #37) that "links students and teachers together" (MCY #41). The following comments from students and teachers illustrate their experiences of the intangible yet powerful nature of the Special Character of the college:

There is a deep spirituality there and amongst the staff. Whether they believe or not, they get caught up in it (MCYISF #3:7).

The girls strive to do their best in the atmosphere, the culture that they're actually put into. They go out of their way to do things for people ... Yeah, I think the girls get caught up in what Mercy's all about, the non-practising Catholics as well. I think just the caring, the sharing, being involved, liturgies at school; things they wouldn't experience out in their normal way of life. Just those sorts of things. I think they can get very caught up in what we're all about (MCYISF #15:3).

To all these people, we thank you for your words of wisdom, understanding and constant smiles. Mercy has provided us with a unique atmosphere which reinforces the issues of social justice and community spirit (MCYD #46:7).

It's a spiritual experience in a way. So I think that's what makes a difference, and the place felt, you know ... You know how you get a feeling for a place? It feels warm (MCYISF #14:4).

Definitely is a special school. I mean it has its Special Character that comes through. I feel particularly in the outside, I feel that quite strongly (MCYISF #10:2).

It's almost tangible, one of them said to me last night. It's almost tangible (MCYIA #4:19).

Special Character as metaphor

Community

Mercy College is perceived as a community, bonding people together with a sense of common purpose and belief arising from a common Catholic identity. Characterised by close, friendly relationships, the community experience is one that is affirming, supportive and accepting of people, regardless of age, status or position. Although the student roll stands at nearly 900 students, there is a strong perception of the school as a 'small' school and a belief that the school's size is an important reason for the development of its close-knit communal life. Given the fact, however, that Mercy College is currently the largest single sex Catholic secondary school for girls in New Zealand, perhaps the quality of its relationships might be the reason the school 'feels' small, rather than the other way around.

This sense of community is most keenly experienced through spiritual events, rituals and symbols unique to the Special Character of the college. Named as both a Mercy community and Catholic community, it includes not only students and staff, but extends to the local and church community. A common identity binds members together, reinforcing a strong sense of mission and service as these fieldnote extracts from observations of college end-of-year rituals suggest:

She compared the Mercy community as being like the ripples on a pool "far greater than the 800 or so we can see here" (MCYOS #13:2FN).

Community is vital. We have talked about what it means to be community during this year. Our Mercy community is about to change. Whenever anyone leaves, the community is changed (MCYOS #14:1FN).

Community is valued by the Mercy school culture. It has to be nurtured and developed, with each member or group taking responsibility for maintaining a positive experience of community for everyone. However, community experience is not valued simply for its own sake, but is an integral part of being a Catholic school as the college prospectus indicates:

Parents and pupils share in the responsibility of creating a Christian community in which students can experience some sense of Church (MCYD #12:8).

Newsletters to parents reinforce this theme:

Please continue to support us in prayer in this important work that we do. A Catholic school builds a strong community by your ongoing support (MCYD #2:9).

Family

The Mercy College community is described as a ‘family’ by its members and perceived as a contributing factor in its distinctiveness. Focused on the importance of people, the college culture nurtures the individual by caring for them and encouraging them equally. Members speak of experiencing the school as a “welcoming place” (MCYISF #6:4) where people “feel at home” (MCYISF #4:6).

Evidence of Mercy College’s family nature is found in the seemingly insignificant actions of staff and students as the following comments reveal:

Well, I suppose again, it’s maybe in body language rather than verbal. When you see staff watching out. Being in the staffroom and hearing them talk about the girls (MCYISF #3:3).

A real care for the individual; accepting each person as themselves and a real care of the community. A real care of each within the staff, as well. I guess it really come up to care, I think, and back to the individual (MCYISF #11:2).

The quality of the family experience is deeply valued by members of the culture and lies at the heart of its Special Character. The following comments illustrate the significance of the strong positive interpersonal relationships implicit in the family metaphor:

This school is like a family. You know everyone and care for each other. It is like no other college I know, everyone gets along. I’ll be sending my kids here (MCY #23).

I don’t think you judge a school, even though it is a very beautiful environment that we’re in, you don’t judge a school by it, the buildings (well some might) ... you judge it by the people that you meet ... (MCYIS #1:9).

I guess it’s just the caring culture of people, and trying to instil good basic Christian values in students and other members of staff ... I guess it’s an approach to people; the way you approach people; how you talk to people; what you do for people (MCYISF #15:2).

Because I actually found this very much more relaxed than where I came from. I actually found it very nice to have this cohesiveness. Of course, in every school, every school’s going to have its problems, but I don’t think they carry on so much here ... I don’t think

grudges are held. I think they are sort of things that come out, usually come out open in the staffroom and then done with (MCYISF #10:3).

That those kids are individuals and really as though they belong to something that's bigger than this school and that is, if you like, the whole thing to do with the Christian Catholic ... and you can follow the layout from that. But they must belong together, belong and be supportive and part of something that's bigger than a school and that's the whole spiritual thing (MCYIA #4:18).

“What makes the school what it is” (MCYISF #11:3)

At Mercy College, Special Character, at its most basic level, is seen as determining and shaping all activity of the college culture, including the development and reinforcement of key values, classroom teaching, communal ritual and a focus on service within the school and the wider community. It needs to be experienced in every activity, lacking authenticity and credibility if reliant on verbal articulation alone:

There has to be an understanding of what that Special Character is intellectually, and I think it also has to be picked up by the way it's put into practice in the school, cause if it's only an intellectual idea and not practised, it won't develop. I think that for those things, it also has to then be relayed to the students, both by preaching it and teaching it and doing it (MCYISF #13:6).

I guess for me the Special Character is ... I find it really quite hard to define what it is ... and you know, it's not just a faith, going to Church and having liturgies ... it is more doing things like collecting money or looking after the children of that (primary school we support) and that kind of thing (MCYIB #2:15).

Participants expressed very strong views about the centrality of Special Character to the continued existence of the college, as the following responses to a question about the significance of preserving Special Character demonstrate:

It's vital because at the school if ... we haven't got the Special Character, there's no need for the school to be here. I see the Special Character as vital for the school's existence.

It's what makes the school what it is. Without its Special Character, we'd just be a normal school (MCYISF #11:3).

Oh I think it's essential if the school is going to continue as a Catholic school and a Mercy school that it is maintained otherwise it's empty to have that in your title if you're not doing something about it. It's very important (MCYISF #13:5).

I think it'd be just another school. There won't be, it won't be special (MCYISF #4:14).

Special Character, therefore, is the driving force behind the school's whole existence and the single most critical justification for its continuance as this extract from a newsletter suggests:

All the work we do is underpinned by the Special Character at Mercy College. I ask for your support and prayers in this important task (MCYD #2:8).

Conclusion

Mercy College provides a stable learning and teaching environment for its members; one that is clearly valued by them and by outsiders. As members of this community of articulate women, teachers and students appear to be not only aware of the significance of its Catholic Mercy nature, but are able to express their appreciation of its influence on the school. Their attempts to define the Special Character of Mercy College suggests that it is a term with which they are familiar, albeit one that eludes simple definition; one that stimulates their thoughts and motivates their actions. The quality of interpersonal relationships appears to be, for them, the greatest indicator of the impact of the college's Special Character on the nature and activity of the school and a factor by which its authenticity is established. It is apparent that for Mercy College participants, Special Character is a very real, yet intangible, phenomenon that needs to be preserved if the college is to retain its prime justification for existence.

SPECIAL CHARACTER: ITS CONTENT

Philosophy

Catholic

Mercy College provides an education that is founded on a Catholic philosophy of education. A range of school documentation, including the Staff Handbook and the College Development Plan, clearly indicate a belief that the school is an "integral part of the Catholic Church and community" (MCY #33:5) and the New Zealand Catholic education

system. The philosophy underpinning the Catholic vision of education is described as a “heritage” (MCYIB #1:9), a “treasured tradition” (MCYISF #6:16) which provides the school with a framework for its work; a foundation for the whole school curriculum.

Three elements of this philosophy stand out at Mercy College. First and foremost, a Catholic education is founded on and finds its inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It seeks to promote, through its Special Character education, a range of Gospel values such as “love, freedom, justice and tolerance, particularly towards those who are disadvantaged” (MCYD #39). These values constitute the ‘touchstone’ for behaviour, action and decision-making.

Secondly, Catholic educational philosophy promotes an education focused on the individual development of every student in all aspects of human life, a holistic education. The Mercy College entry in “Excellence: NZ Education Directory 1998” presents a very clear summary of its adherence to this vision:

It is the school’s intent to provide a ‘whole person’ education in a Roman Catholic and Mercy environment. Therefore, the Board of Trustees and staff are committed to giving students an education which respects their dignity, rights and individuality as well as challenging them to achieve personal standards of excellence and reach their full potential (MCYD #39).

Lastly, the Catholic education provided by Mercy College invites students to develop a personal faith that will shape their lives. By integrating students’ spirituality with learning and life experience, each informs and supports the others. In this way, each student may be fully developed as a person, whose faith enables her to live in harmonious relationship with God and with others. To this end, education at Mercy College is a “way of life” (MCYISF #7:11), a “life of faith” (MCYD #8:1) centred on the “general worldview that goes with the Catholic Church” (MCYIB #3:9). Faith and religion do not stand outside of normal human experience, but by permeating the whole school culture, each student is provided with the fullest experience of belonging to the culture of the Roman Catholic Church. This was illustrated during a Dedication Mass at the beginning of 1998, when the uniqueness of each

student, her life, ability and circumstances were symbolised during a time of prayer and worship. The following extract from fieldnotes describes the occasion:

After the school prayer had been read, rather hurriedly and nervously by the other co-head girl, the student head of the school council explained the meaning of the gifts that were about to be brought forward. She mentioned flowers as representing the gifts of each student, but I couldn't at first understand which flowers she was referring to – was it the flowers behind the altar? All became clear, when twenty or so students marched up the centre aisle carrying music stands to which were pegged large sheets of white paper covered in paper flowers with students' names, symbols and other writing on them ... They were a burst of colour and the energetic and lively way in which the students filed into the sanctuary and around the altar was quite beautiful in its simplicity. They placed their 'flower' stands in front of the altar and at each side and the whole area became a riot of colour (MCYOS #3:4FN).

Mercy

The Mercy philosophy of education is a heritage clearly valued by the school culture. Its prime focus is the provision of an education that is committed to the development and empowerment of women as the school's Mission Statement reflects:

Mercy College is committed to educating and empowering young women to strive for excellence in accordance with the values of Jesus Christ, Catholic and Mercy traditions (MCYD #48:1).

As two teachers observe, a Mercy education provides young women “with a vision of what they can do” (MCYISF #6:7) and creates “a really positive school for girls” (MCYISF #14:9).

Young women who receive a Mercy education are exhorted to “make a difference” (MCYD #36:1). Education is more than the acquiring of qualification and skills, although these are important. It is about “empowerment for life” (MCYOS #15:2FN). Hand in hand with that empowerment and subsequent opportunities for personal success, is the mission to make a difference to the lives of others as this comment from the Principal indicates:

You don't just have a duty, you have a responsibility to go out and make a difference. You are from an area where in fact, you are, on the whole, in a different situation from many unprivileged people in this country, in the world ... 95% of you go on to tertiary education. You're going to have all this education and you have the opportunities to make a difference and that's your part of the Mercy charism; the ones that 'go out and make a difference' (MCYIA #4:6).

In other words, given opportunities to develop as successful young people through the commitment and hard work of others, students are taught that they, in turn, have the personal responsibility to care for and serve others. The story of the founder, Catherine McAuley, and the example of generations of Mercy Sisters, consistently provides a source of inspiration and motivation for staff and students as the following comment illustrates:

what you see in their lives is not just the things they do but what motivated them. It has to be something that would encourage the girls to make a difference themselves. That's what I would hope for. It's not just knowledge that's going to be stuck in their heads ... but that would become the motivation for the way they live in the future (MCYISF #6:8).

The principles that lie at the heart of a Mercy education are reflected in this extract from the college prospectus:

Scripture defines and depicts *mercy* as “faithful love: God’s primary attribute. To be a person of mercy is to respond affirmatively to all that is human and to seek the basic potential for good, beauty, truth and love in everyone. Mercy goes hand in hand with self-dignity, respect for the dignity of others and a willingness to promote just social structures which celebrate the dignity of all (MCYD #12:4).

Students are encouraged to develop their skills and talents so that they can succeed in whatever life direction they choose, confident and strong in their personal spirituality, equipped to ‘make a difference’ in the world. To this end, those involved in providing a Mercy education are motivated to do the best they can to support the learning and development of each student.

Personal

The Mercy educational philosophy and the personal philosophy of participants are drawn together by several strong thematic threads that appear to be logical developments of the Mercy charism’s core message outlined above. This philosophical coherence suggests that there is a high level of personal acceptance of the Mercy vision amongst members of the school culture.

Firstly, there appears to be an assumption amongst members of the school culture that students attending Mercy College are destined for future leadership roles within their lives. For example, the Principal notes in the brochure prepared for a Combined College Development Appeal 1998 that:

Tomorrow's leaders - our graduates who leave Mercy College true to the Mercy Charism and determined to make a difference need all your support through the Appeal (MCYD #38:4).

The college development plan, "Mercy College 2000 and Beyond", projects a future for the students of the college in which:

women are likely to be involved in leadership roles (MCYD #33:10).

Through the availability of leadership opportunities within the college, students are nurtured as future leaders in society. Leadership is described by students and staff as a "privilege" (MCYD #8:10) and an "honour" (MCYIST 2:34). It is perceived in terms of service to others, not merely as a personal good, and as a result, students are encouraged to take initiatives, particularly where these initiatives are focused on the care of and service to others.

Social Justice is a dominant thread in the Mercy College philosophy of education. Students are encouraged to make the best of the opportunities they are given as a means of preparing themselves for living up to their responsibility to the community and society as a whole. This theme is symbolically expressed in gifts of food, gathered from amongst the student body and presented during whole school liturgies where they are reminded of "their responsibility to use their talents for the good of others" (MCYOS #15:2FN). The Principal reflects:

They need to know that they are part of the bigger community and that they should have respect for each other and everybody else in it. They need to know that they should be reaching out to help (MCYIA #5:13).

The right to a quality education is also perceived as an issue of justice focusing on the individual and her needs as a person. This sense of responsibility for students and its links with justice are reflected in this short statement from a teacher:

We are dealing with lives not a commodity (MCYD #34:23).

In this sentiment, Mercy College is committed to encouraging students to reach their fullest potential. Consequently, striving for individual personal excellence is valued and affirmed.

Implicit in the Mercy College philosophy is a sense of respect for the mystery of each person and a recognition that each is “going through a journey of discovery of who they are spiritually” (MCYISF 9:10). Participants express the hope that the education that students receive at the college will support them in the development of a strong faith and value system that will influence students’ decision making and lifestyle. Acknowledging that faith development is a very personal, free choice, the Head of Religious Education shares a hope that students will discover their own meaning in belonging to the Catholic Church:

I mean everybody’s got their own free will and conscience but you’re at least opening them to the possibility of living their lives within that relationship with God and then living it out in the way they treat other people and what their ideals are and how they motivate themselves. You hope that you’re encouraging them to maintain a connection with the Church ... (MCYISF #13:11).

Purpose of Mercy College

The purpose of Mercy College is drawn from an integration of both Catholic and Mercy educational philosophies. It can be summed up as the holistic development of each individual and the promotion of a Christian lifestyle as a way of making meaning of life, to be achieved by maintaining a culture permeated with a Catholic Mercy Character that recognises the centrality of Jesus Christ in the lives of human beings. These dual aims are articulated in the college prospectus and the Staff Handbook:

We aim to foster in every student a sense of her worth and dignity as a Christian woman, empowering her to realise her potential in the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional and cultural aspects of life (MCYD #12:7; MCYD #25:13).

The hope is that:

A young woman will leave Mercy College a fully developed person of integrity, initiative and caring awareness (MCYD #12:4).

Students are encouraged to set and strive towards their own personal goals of academic achievement. The college aims to support them in their development of strong values from which they might draw their motivation to live as citizens who value their national heritage

and are capable of acting responsibly in society. To this end, the college aims to provide a high quality education, designed to meet students' needs, both now and into the future.

Equally important, the student who attends Mercy College will be educated in the Catholic Christian faith tradition and encouraged in the development of a personal faith and spirituality, based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Her faith education will include gaining knowledge of the Catholic religious tradition, participation in worship and prayer, and Christian action. The hope is that by experiencing a sense of belonging to a Catholic Christian school community, she may continue to develop her relationship with God in the community of the Roman Catholic church; a hope which is expressed in the Staff Handbook 1998:

Parents and pupils share in the responsibility of creating a Christian community in which students can experience some sense of Church (MCYD #25:11).

A similar hope is shared by a Board member who:

emphasised the importance of students experiencing what Church is themselves and have a sense of celebration of **themselves** as Church (MCYIB #4:6FN).

The school, therefore, sees itself as a place “where people’s relationship with God, their spirituality is nurtured” (MCYISF #13:10). As one teacher explains, the ideal realisation of the school’s purpose would be:

That every girl who leaves the school would be committed to her faith. Would go out, you know, wanting to take her faith into the next millennium. That every girl would treasure that. That would be an ideal world. That she would live it out in a generous spirit (MCYISF #6:15).

The aims and goals of Mercy College reflect a strong sense of mission. The message students receive from so many directions is one of service, responsibility for others and striving to be the best in order to serve more effectively. The meaning and nature of that mission is outlined in this extract from the College prospectus:

Practising mercy is a call to action, and the choice to be merciful will express itself in peace and justice. Mercy College has an educational commitment to the intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual growth of its students. Through this commitment, we have the mission and the means to inform the conscience of our community where economic, religious, sexual and ethnic biases exist (MCYD #12:14).

Values of Mercy College

Founded on the Mercy tradition and philosophy, Mercy College, consciously and subconsciously, promotes a range of core values that serve as a point of reference for action, decision-making and the determination of cultural norms. The college's development plan, 'Mercy College 2000 and Beyond' (MCYD #33), lists a range of core values that serve as a 'blueprint' for the education provided at Mercy College. Truthfulness, integrity, tolerance, and honesty are amongst the list, together with caring, generosity, industriousness, tolerance and self-motivation as attitudes to be nurtured; values and attitudes reinforcing those of family and community. Ironically, competitiveness is also included; an attitude that somehow seems out of place alongside the above. Several values, however, appear to be more dominant within the Mercy College culture than others.

As indicated earlier, one of the values that stands out in Mercy College is social justice, although this seems to be understood in a communitarian sense, for example, in terms of respect for the rights of others, rather than in a purely political way. Defined as a Mercy value, modelled by Sisters associated with the school over its history, social justice is valued by students and teachers as an integral part of being a Catholic Mercy school, as these comments reveal:

the character of the school has so much to do with social justice, not just outside the school, within the school and like, just the need to help other people other than yourselves. Yeah, anyone (MCYIST #2:11).

It's important to me that bicultural issues are recognised and are dealt with (MCYISF #5:5).

I think really, the one that's come across really strongly, respecting others, valuing yourself so that you can value others and a very strong sense of social justice, social action. I believe that's part of, the strong part of the Mercy charism; the reason why the work of the order ... starts with caring for people who are in need in society and I think that's a very strong focus here (MCYISF #13:6).

It's a school that when I first came here the thing that impressed me with Elizabeth was that - her commitment to justice (MCYISF #9:1).

The importance of social justice is expressed and reinforced during the normal events and routines of school life as the following extract reveal:

Sarah feels embarrassed seeing Tom picking up litter in the morning and again during Period 5 - not one of the values of this school - an elderly gentleman picking up after young students. The system is not working. Ideas for improvement were - That we know what our litter areas are/Student attitudes (why should another girl clean up after these girls) ... (MCYD #18:2).

We are responsible for you, so we need to know where you are. That's fair enough, isn't it? (MCYOS #7:2FN).

A study of social justice issues are part of the formal curriculum, particularly in Religious Studies. Increasing students' awareness of the problems and issues confronting society is seen as an important part of their social and spiritual development. It is a value that underpins decision-making, including that associated with student enrolments, staff appointments and Board activity. For example, it lay at the heart of the college's debate and decision-making processes arising from the Government's proposal to pay teachers' salaries directly to individual schools, called the Fully Funded Option, or more commonly, Bulk Funding; a contentious issue for teachers and Boards of Trustees across New Zealand. Amongst Mercy College staff, opponents to the proposal saw it as part of a New Right agenda that would ultimately disadvantage schools in poorer areas of New Zealand. This was a concern also for the Board but, after a lengthy and vigorous discussion, they came to the conclusion that there was no implicit injustice in the proposal and, with only one abstention, voted in favour of adopting the Fully Funded Option for Mercy College. Both 'sides' of this highly charged debate at Mercy College, therefore, considered principles of justice as the basis for their position.

Mercy College is a place where people are welcomed, accepted and supported. A Board member, an overseas exchange student and a staff member reflect their appreciation of the care that characterises relationships at the college:

If you look at a school like Mercy College and you think it has everything, no social problems; nothing like that. But that's not the case, but because of the Special Character there's such love and good in the school (MCYIB #1:2).

My school in Norway: people care mostly about themselves; purpose is to look 'cool' and be accepted by everyone. In Mercy College, everybody cares so much about each other and acceptance is based on personality and actions - not appearance and way of speech. I have learned to be helpful and friendly to all people (MCY #40).

Showing your Christian ways, general Christian ways across all sorts of denominations. Yeah, that's basically what Mercy College's all about - caring, caring and sharing with other people (MCYISF #15:4).

New staff comment on the levels of "individual caring for each other" (MCYISF #12:13) that they find in the staffroom and in their association with management. Staff are sensitive to the needs of the wider community. One participant shared her memory of working with new immigrant families who were having to cope, not only with a new language, but also a new culture. Staff members organised afternoon tea and orientation sessions for these people, to support them in their adjustment to New Zealand society and introduce them to other members of the school community. She notes:

It was in response to a need that we saw at that time and something we should maybe be on the lookout for again (MCYISF #6:4).

The school is prepared to "go the extra mile for a lot of students" (MCYISF #12:3) although, as this participant observes "sometimes I feel we go too far for some students" (MCYISF #12: 3). In her opinion, the care given to those students may at times result in negative effects on the rights of others. She notes, however, the consideration shown to students whose families face financial stress. This is reflected in the Staff Handbook where staff are cautioned:

Make sure there is no clash with tests, visits, retreats or other events and that undue financial burden is not placed on any group of students because of a multiplicity of events (MCYD #25:125).

Support of those in need is most apparent in times of crisis or distress:

You go out of your way to like, take them into the sickbay. Go and get the counsellor ... make sure they're not left on their own ... we had an incident of a girl, who had written things ... what was going to happen in the weekend. At the time, the counsellor wasn't here, and the Principal went out of her way to chat to this girl, and we went out of our way to sit with her and I went out later in the day and I took her with me to make sure someone had contact with her, every minute of the day while she was here at school. Just to keep an eye on her. Just those sorts of things (MCYISF #15:3).

This level of care is recognised and valued by parents as a significant element of the college's Special Character:

Well they do value the educational aspect, but they do value the fact that the girls are being cared for and do feel safe, no doubt about that. And part of it is a lot of the parents have the same feeling as I do, about coming in through the foyer. I know they would, you know and that gives them a feeling as well 'It isn't just a school; it's a school that actually really does care about my children' and they do; the teachers do (MCYISF #8:15).

The focus at Mercy College is on the individual student and her needs, communicating to students and staff that, in this school, people are valued. There is a conviction amongst members that each student is a uniquely spiritual person who should be treated with respect and dignity. The Staff Handbook clearly expresses the significance of respect in terms of its pastoral structures:

Form teachers may consult or be consulted by members of the guidance or discipline networks. A flow of information is important - always on the understanding that the dignity of each person is respected, that confidences are not irresponsible or thoughtlessly shared and that the integrity of the school's system is maintained (MCYD #25:113).

In disciplinary matters, the consideration given to each student is perceived as a necessary requirement of respect for individual dignity, often resulting in a much more complex process than if 'action and consequence' were predetermined by inflexible pre-set rules. Students who have infringed school rules are given the opportunity to be reconciled, not merely punished for their behaviour.

Yeah, it's that whole thing about a forgiving society. Those kids that we've got in on the drugs, they may muck up again, but you've got to forgive them and give them another chance ... as long as they don't affect the rest of the school too much (MCYIA #5:4).

We make a lot of allowance for students. Again, it's about fairness, about justice, about equity (MCYISF #12:2).

The respect shown to students is inclusive:

They're all equal and all valued by staff and by each other or they're encouraged to feel that (MCYIB #2:7).

You know, any of you not Catholic, or you don't believe totally ... you're still respected within the school. You come here respecting what other people's faiths are and stuff like that (MCYIST #2:15).

I think they're more free to be who they want to be. They realise that freedom here and I think quite responsible with that freedom as well (MCYISF #10:7).

These values and their benefits are apparent to students who comment:

The teachers pay special attention to each individual and so does the Dean (MCY #12).

Seeing how students and teachers treat each other with respect and dignity made me want to treat everyone else the same way. If I ever needed help, I could easily gain help from a student or teacher, so when I am asked upon to help anyone, I will do it with no reluctance (MCY #32).

Respect for the individual is evident in the basic politeness that characterises teacher and student interactions. The following extract illustrates how an important value can be reflected in simple ordinary language. During a parents' meeting, one participant, expressing her frustration at the slowness of students to return raffle books, suggested that:

'bad classes' would need to be phoned. The Principal corrected her with humour but firmness. 'Not bad classes just poor results!' (MCYOP #1:3FN).

In Mercy College, excellence is valued and success is affirmed. As one staff member observes:

Well there is a positive atmosphere. I think that there's basically a good work ethic in general (MCYISF #6:3).

High academic achievement, sporting and cultural achievements are valued and publicly recognised in newsletters and assemblies. The school's reputation for success attracts interest from parents in the area, sometimes as a higher priority than its Catholic nature. There is a sense of pride in the school's success in competitions, national examinations and performing arts as two students note:

(The) school does have a lot of pride in its students and their achievements (MCY #37).

Everyone's acknowledged. Like everyone's success in sport and music and stuff, it's always acknowledged like in the newsletters. Like even maths competitions and stuff and we actually put it on the noticeboard so everyone knows who's doing well in the school. So they know how they're going and just an update (MCYIST #2:18).

Such is the strength of this perception of the school as successful, that when asked in interviews what concerns or fears they had for the school, many participants were initially unable to identify any specific areas. The following comments are typical:

I suppose, can't really think of any concerns. I think they're doing extremely well (MCYISF #3:17).

Probably a bit idealistic, but I'm not sure what I'd like to change (MCYIB #1:16).

No, no problem really (MCYISF #15:11).

Norms of Mercy College

Some ways of behaving are such an integral part of an organisation that they become unconscious norms of the culture. At Mercy College, it has become an "automatic thing" (MCYIA #5:8) to support each other; an expectation which extends to all groups, staff and students alike. Participants express their admiration for the level of concern that staff and students demonstrate for others.

It's an expected thing. It doesn't matter if it's a person you have nothing in common with or, you know, it might not be your friend outside the school in the staff but there's that whole feeling of people offering to support and that's a very tangible thing for me (MCYIA #5:8).

You do have a clear value system. That you will go the extra mile because that's what's expected, and again with the students, they will actually work with each other and do things for each other (MCYISF #12:18).

Staff cover for colleagues who are sick; students gather spontaneously for prayer to support a grieving friend; cards, gifts and meals are tokens of concern for and empathy with distressed members of the community.

An extraordinary example of support as a norm of the school was a tragic accident just outside the college gates. One morning, just as many Mercy College students were walking to school, a car, driven by a young mother and carrying a young child, was involved in a head-on crash. The woman was killed; the child, in great distress. Several Mercy students witnessed the accident, and were the first on the scene to offer assistance. Although deeply

shocked, senior students were outstanding in the way in which they handled an extremely traumatic situation. The college community immediately 'geared into action' to care for students who had witnessed the accident. Staff from the Pastoral team were quickly freed by colleagues to assist; college facilities were made available for the care of other local witnesses, and the use of police and emergency services; students in other classes prayed for those involved. Offering the highest level of support was obviously the 'natural thing to do'.

A clear message communicated to members of the Mercy College culture is 'be your best self', reflected in the college's high standards of dress, behaviour and performance for its students and its staff. Teachers provide well planned, organised programmes and it is apparent that sound classroom routines and clearly articulated expectations have created a stable environment that enhances learning. There is evidence that staff and students work well together as this extract from a 1998 Education Review Office Report suggests:

Teachers communicate high expectations of work quality and achievement to their students. Students respond well to these expectations (MCYD #14:12).

During fieldwork observations, this researcher was frequently impressed by the work habits and independence of students:

As we waited, three young (Junior?) altar servers helped two elderly priests set the altar. What struck me was their efficiency and their self-reliance (MCYOS #3:2FN).

The students obeyed these instructions without any fuss, groups of students clustered together. They were very quiet and focused - this struck me as exceptional; in my experience, there is usually the need for some students to be 'settled' by the teacher (MCYOS #7:3FN).

The associate confirmed that this class was very capable and enjoyed organising things themselves (MCYOS #8:5FN).

High standards seem to be achieved without undue pressure or duress. Students are expected to take responsibility for themselves, reminded that success ultimately rests on their own efforts. A student teacher shares his observations:

I never saw anyone push. It was very much, you know 'If you want to do this, we can achieve this' and, you know, all the information fed to them. But I don't think there was that huge academic, you know, drive, drive, drive, 'this is all you've got in your life and

this is what we've got to do'. But there are so many smart girls anyway who are involved in the sports teams; they were doing all sorts of things in school, and so I don't think it was driven. But the opportunity was there and that's the culture of the school for them to do well (MCYISF #14: 10).

This view is supported by students:

they make you focus on what you want out of life. I mean they know that, well you know, you can't say that Mercy College is only seven years at most, you know. You've got the rest of your life and so they make you think about that and what you want to get out of it ... they really make you think about it, look at it and do your best to get what you want ... (MCYIST #2:23).

They've taught me to respect myself, to respect others, moral values and education, a good education you know and just to set goals. I can be what I want to be, go and achieve what I want to achieve. I just have to set my mind to it and I can do whatever I want to do; I'm a woman (MCYIST #2:23).

They've told you that you could if you want to ... don't let anything hold you back (MCYISF #2:23).

Students at Mercy College are expected to follow the rules. The school is described by participants as 'strict'; by others, as 'firm'. There are established routines such as an expectation that behaviour during assemblies will be appropriate and that the correct uniform will be worn. Staff supervision and monitoring is generally low-key but the expectations listed in the Staff Handbook are firmly enforced. Some participants express frustration with what they perceive as unnecessary or inappropriate application of rules, but others view the strong discipline apparent in the Mercy College culture as providing a level of security and protection for students:

The strictness in uniform and doing homework has given people structure (MCY #28).

It's quite strict rules in the school. You know you've got to wear sandals, right and things like that and they get growled at if they don't. I usually, I actually see that as a protection to them ... it gives them a regular routine that a lot of them haven't got in their lives (MCYISF #8:7).

On the whole, students appear to respond to the discipline standards at Mercy College without rancour. It is simply expected of them and, although there are inevitable exceptions, students generally respond with a spirit of co-operation, as several extracts from fieldnotes illustrate:

I made my way to the hall where I saw that the students were quickly filling the seats without anyone obviously supervising them. They were, from my experience of students of this age, fairly quiet and self-controlled (MCYOS #13:1FN).

When the bell rang, the reliever and I made our way to the Year 9 RE class. Students were already in the classroom and waited with little indication of raucousness or misbehaviour ... as she spoke to them and took the roll, the students made no attempt to misbehave or take advantage of her lack of knowledge of them (MCYOST #4:2FN).

I noted that the assembly was hushed as they listened to the singing. Indeed, considering the number of students who were waiting, there was an incredible, in my judgement and experience, low level of restlessness and noise (MCYOS #3:2FN).

Although during the on-going lesson, some chatted and frequently called out answers, my impression was of a class at ease and familiar with their teacher. No heavy discipline was required, I suspect, but the teacher was obviously very much in charge. She brought students back from chatter with the simple technique of saying their name (MCYOS #5:6FN).

A participant shares a similar experience:

Well you could see by the way people act and the way they react and I mean, I think you saw that with the girls too, because, you know, they knew what was right and what was wrong and you only had to say to them 'Hey' in class and they'd stop what they were doing if they were mucking around (MCYISF #14:6-7).

Religion is a normal part of life at Mercy College. Students demonstrate a high level of skill in preparation of liturgy and eagerly contribute to prayer times during class and Form time. Without prompting from staff, they show reverence during school worship, and in their use of Scripture. The sharing of spirituality is seen as bringing an intimate quality into interpersonal relationships, creating trust and openness between staff and students. As one teacher explains:

It's just accepted so I think that's good because it does let you feel faith and just to listen to faith (MCYISF #4:15).

Conclusion

The philosophy of Mercy College provides members of the school culture with a firm foundation for the values and norms of the school. As a college for young women, it is

obvious that the Mercy educational tradition is imbedded in the consciousness of both staff and students, reflected in the values that they hold and the expectations that they have of self and others. Social justice is quite clearly the mainspring of all action, inspiring members to adopt as their own, a mission of service and self-improvement. From this value flows the imperative to care for all people, with a spirit of compassion, integrity and honesty, establishing in turn, a school culture that deeply reflects its dual identity as a Mercy and Catholic. Seen in this light, the goal of excellence is grounded, not merely in individual ambition or career outcomes, but as a core requirement of living as a Christian.

TRANSMISSION OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

Catholic practices

The Mercy College Integration Agreement clearly sets out the school's right to provide the practice of worship and prayer associated with its relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. It states:

It is agreed by and between the parties hereto that as Religious observances and Religious instruction form part of the Education with a Special Character provided by the school, Religious observances and Religious instruction in accordance with the determination made from time to time by the Roman Catholic Bishop of the diocese ... shall continue to form part of the School programme in accordance with Sections 31 and 32 of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975 (MCYD #47:7).

In other words, the right to offer and participate in Catholic religious practices is central to the school's nature and its Special Character education. As such, these constitute an integral part of the culture of the school, an essential element of its nature as a Catholic educational community and a natural element of college's relationship with the local Catholic parishes. The original college charter notes the importance of the Catholic spiritual traditions when it states that the school:

Seeks to develop a school community of faith through prayer, worship, the sacraments and Christian service to others (MCYD #49:5).

Catholic practices, such as prayer, worship, use of symbols, and observance of the liturgical seasons, create links between members of the school culture and the Catholic Church. The support of local clergy in the provision of worship opportunities is something valued by the college and helps strengthen the school's relationship with the local Catholic community. The liturgical seasons of the Church provide a framework for the school year, highlighting the Gospel story as events in the life of Jesus Christ are remembered and celebrated. Throughout the school year, major Church seasons and feasts are celebrated with liturgies, for example, Ash Wednesday, Easter and Christmas. Informal practices, such as assembly and classroom prayer, are well established and students and staff have the opportunity to attend a weekly voluntary Mass. A retreat experience, each year, is provided by a team of Religious Education staff for each form class, and is considered an important experience in the spiritual development of students.

Formal worship

The celebration of Eucharist or Mass is the central form of worship in the Roman Catholic Church. At Mercy College, the Dedication Mass at the beginning of the school year, the Mercy Day Mass, celebrating the founding tradition of the school and Leavers' Day Mass are the highpoints of the school's communal faith expression and experience, marking significant phases in college life. Held in the local church, the whole school is required to attend these celebrations. They are joined by large numbers of parents; representatives of the diocesan education office; Board members and Proprietors. There is a sense of formality and reverence throughout each ritual. Students are well behaved; no giggling, whispering or shuffling of feet. Amongst the student body, there is an overall sense of quiet containment without pressure and a high level of participation in the service. The prayers, readings, songs and symbolism draw their content from the key event being celebrated, skilfully blended into a major theme for the Mass. Although the Director of Religious Studies and other Religious Education staff are primarily responsible for the preparation of the celebration, other members of staff are very supportive and contribute according to individual talents and gifts.

Recognised within the Catholic Church as the most significant expression of communal identity, the school culture builds its own 'flavour' into its celebration of Eucharist, illustrated in the story of the 'flowers' described in the previous section. Unique school traditions have developed in the context of these Masses. The procession of food baskets donated to local community groups; the carrying of the Mercy candle and its prominence at the front of the church; and the selection of hymns, including the school song, are facets that maintain a sense of continuity with the celebrations of former generations of students. The school is open to innovation, such as liturgical dance and the use of creative art, which may in their turn become 'new' traditions, reflecting the changing context of student's lives and Church.

Students play a major role in the liturgical leadership of Mercy College celebrations. Each year, several students are trained and formally commissioned as Ministers of the Eucharist, assisting the clergy in the distribution of Communion. A student liturgy group, under the leadership of the Director of Religious Studies, helps in planning and preparation, and the music leadership provided by a very talented liturgical choir is a unique and valued component of full school liturgies. It is apparent that students are competent and confident in their liturgical leadership roles as the following extract from fieldnotes suggests:

The seventh form student, who was co-head girl, then formally welcomed the celebrants, the Board of Trustee members, the staff, parents and students to the Mass. She spoke very well - loud clear voice, few signs of nervousness or uncertainty about her role (MCYOS #3:3FN).

I had to smile at the very unsmiling formal way that each approached the front of the sanctuary - made her formal bow and carefully laid her basket on the altar railing; then turned with serious face and returned to her position alongside her companions. Each did her task perfectly and with grace (MCYOS #9:2FN).

These celebrations are greatly valued by staff and students alike. They are described as 'awesome' (MCYISF #4:10), 'most moving' (MCYD #2:2) and 'pretty emotional' (MCYD #46:10). They blend the school's Catholic and Mercy natures, maintaining a harmony between the founding faith tradition and the ordinary experience and activity of this unique school culture.

In addition to these three key worship events, Mercy College provides a Mass each week during lunchtime. Although voluntary, approximately forty students regularly attend the liturgy. Each Wednesday, the Mass is given priority over other lunchtime events as the following extract from the Staff Handbook outlines:

Teachers are asked to arrange activities around the Mass where this is possible and should avoid giving any indication that the Mass is of less importance than other activities (MCYD #25:130).

Organised by staff from the Religious Studies Department, and celebrated by the college chaplain, the prayers and readings blend the current liturgical seasons of the Church with current events in the school; for example, prayers are offered for grieving families and for the sick. The lunchtime Mass, held in the Audio-visual room, has an informal nature. Students and staff members sit together on the steps intended for watching film or video, the priest addressing them in a manner not possible within the larger, more formal, church environment. In spite of the location and its normal purpose, the celebration of this Eucharist creates a quiet reflective and prayerful space for students and staff.

Special Church seasons are highlighted during the year through a range of school liturgical activities. The Stations of the Cross, which remember the stages in the suffering of Christ, are a tradition of the school during Holy Week, organised in partnership with the local Catholic boys' secondary school. Celebrated in a nearby parish church and attended by members of the local Catholic community, the Stations or stages are rendered in song, Scripture readings, dramatisation, reflections and prayers written by Year 13 students. A school-based liturgy during Holy Week is also provided for the college community. Christmas is celebrated with an evening Carol service at a parish church, prepared and organised by the Head of the Music department and members of the school choirs. Both of these events maintain valued links between the college and its local Catholic community. In addition to these seasonal celebrations, student representatives of the school take part in the annual World Day of Prayer, an interdenominational service held in the local area.

Prayer at Mercy College

Opportunities for prayer are varied and numerous at Mercy College. Perceived as an essential element of a Catholic Christian lifestyle, it is a normal part of daily life in the college. Staff briefings begin with prayer and/or reflections, although differences can arise in how prayer is distinguished from a sharing of views or thoughts. Prayer is shared at the beginning of Board and Parent/Teacher/Friends Association meetings with members taking turns at selecting and preparing the prayer prior to the meeting. This is considered an important part of Catholic tradition and a sign of the Special Character of the college, particularly since Mercy Sisters have left the college, as this long-serving staff member observes:

Since the Sisters have gone, we've been much more aware of Special Character and much more concerned with making sure that there are prayers at formal meetings; that there are prayers at dean assemblies; that's come a lot more to the fore because we're really working to maintain that Special Character but I think we've lost a lot with the Sisters going (MCYISF #11:2).

Prayer is maintained as a routine part of Form times and during classroom activities. Traditional prayers are a ready resource for students and staff, in addition to a weekly prayer sheet prepared by the Director of Religious Studies. Mercy College students are very willing and able to pray spontaneously, composing their prayers with confidence and linking them with the ordinary events of their lives. Acknowledging that teachers may bring different degrees of comfort, competence and familiarity with prayer, the Staff Handbook provides them with clear guidelines and suggestions. The prominence of prayer within the school culture ensures that students are competent and ready to 'take over' from the teacher in providing daily prayer, creating a sense of mutuality, belonging and partnership:

Initially, before I rang this school, I was just a little conscious that perhaps I might not fit in. That quickly wiped away, so I really did feel I fit in here even though I'm not Catholic myself. And in the classroom, we do a liturgy at roll time, and I was very comfortable doing it because, I think, the class took over. It was a student member in charge of that, so they took care of that area for me and I went with it and I say my own prayers now, when I feel like I need to. I'm starting to feel more now that I actually wish that I could inform myself more because I see my students in front of me or making the Sign of the Cross and then saying the Hail Mary ... and sometimes I feel that perhaps I should have a way, in which I can join in as well and show them how ... cause I do genuinely feel that I am part of the group (MCYISF #10:4).

Participants believe that the maintenance of daily prayer is a necessary means of maintaining a Catholic Mercy school culture. The following comments from two teachers reflect the significance of prayer in the culture of the school:

I'd be very wrong if I was not starting any of my classes with a prayer or focusing on some prayer (MCYISF #5:5).

You know, they'd be praying for each other, that they'd do okay. They'd be praying for their older sisters to do well in exams and for each other to do well in sports on the weekend. So this is the whole idea too; the whole idea of integrating prayer and ritual in their lives so it becomes an everyday normal thing. They can pray for anybody and they can pray for whatever they want, you know and they get this sort of community thing going (MCYISF #14:8).

Retreats

Each class, from Year 9 to 13, is given an opportunity to take part in an annual Retreat experience. Structured around such central themes as Discipleship, Justice, Acceptance and Friendship, students engage in prayer, liturgy, reflection, and relationship building, with plenty of action and games to encourage maximum participation. Retreat days are held in the crypt of the local parish church. Each class is accompanied by their Form teacher, significantly increasing the level of personnel resources allocated to the event; an indication of the commitment to retreats by the school administration. In the past, retreats were organised and led by an outside team of people experienced in youth ministry. Such teams, however, are no longer available within the diocese and, given the importance of the retreat experience for the spiritual development of their students, three members of the Religious Studies Department, including the Director of Religious Studies, have taken over the role. Working co-operatively and contributing their own unique skills, the staff team has been commended in school documentation for their commitment and hard work. In spite of the extra workload involved, the Director of Religious Studies observes:

It is my belief that because we know and love our students we are able to better provide the spiritual dimension that a school Retreat should and must have (MCYD #19:2).

Her evaluation is supported by feedback from staff and students:

I've heard a lot about their retreat ... The retreats are powerful. They really love the retreats, the meditation that they do (MCYISF #8:10).

It provides us with an opportunity to get to know each other better, and it's a time to reflect on the importance and impact of God/the Church in our life (MCY #1).

Again there have been superb evaluations returned from the students. The school based team who are running the retreats have been most successful and I am most appreciative of the amount of work that has gone into promoting these successful opportunities for students. I was able to visit a Retreat this time and was most impressed with the way the girls were responding to the content (MCYD #22:3).

School organisation

Mercy College is highly structured and well organised, under strong leadership. There is an almost palpable sense of purpose; a 'getting down to business' kind of energy. Although some participants express a degree of frustration with the structured environment, others perceive it to be an appropriate channel for building a strong Special Character; one which creates a secure and stable culture. The philosophy, values and beliefs underpinning Mercy College's Special Character are integrated in and articulated through its systems and structures, such as school schedules that contain dates of student retreats, special feastdays in the Church's year and special school events. Fortnightly newsletters to parents regularly contain references to student achievements and activities; the normal content of secondary school newsletters, but these are also used as a means of highlighting Special Character elements such as the Church's liturgical year, parish events and their interrelationship with college life. Illustrations reflecting the Christian tradition add to their Special Character tone. The college produces a magazine at the end of each year; a polished publication with contributions from students such as reports on retreats, special events, service activities, and creative writing with a spiritual focus. The full school assembly provides another opportunity for reinforcement of the college's Special Character. It has:

The primary purpose of bringing the school together in a formal setting for prayer and communication, which is led by the Principal (MCYD #17:4FN).

Beginning with prayer and reflection, frequently prepared and presented by student representatives, the college assembly celebrates the successes of its members and its communal life in general. The Principal is skilled in her use of key phrases associated with the Special Character of the school; for example 'make a difference' is an expression that

she regularly uses to encapsulate the Mercy sense of mission. She is very conscious of her responsibility to transmit a sense of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the college and suggests that, as the first lay principal of the college, such a responsibility lies heavily on her role as school leader.

Mercy College Proprietorship

The Special Character of every Catholic school is ultimately under the authority of the Proprietor who may be the Bishop of the diocese or the religious order that founded the school. However, Mercy College has a proprietorship that is quite unique. In order to ensure continuity and the preservation of Special Character of its schools and hospitals, the Sisters of Mercy established the Mercy Charities Trust Limited which set up each school as a limited company under the authority of an appointed Board of Directors. Consequently, the Board of Directors of Mercy College Limited has a responsibility to ensure that the interests of the Mercy Sisters are represented. The following fieldnotes of an interview with a Mercy Sister, also a Board member, outlines the arrangement:

This allows every school to govern itself and gives each more autonomy. She added that this board had members drawn from the parents, Sisters and people very loyal to the college who have an “ingrained Mercy charism. This takes the burden off our leadership team, getting very qualified people there”. This board is responsible for Special Character and property (MCYIB #4:3FN).

In addition to membership of the Board of Trustees, the Principal also serves as a member of this Board of Directors, ensuring effective channels of communication and consultation between the two groups.

Board activity

Special Character is central to the all activities of the Board of Trustees at Mercy College. The school charter makes it quite clear that the prime responsibility of the Board of Trustees is to:

Ensure that the school reflects in its teaching and conduct the Education with a Special Character as specified in the Integration Agreement for the school (MCYD #49:3).

Members of the Board are committed to this responsibility and recognise that Special Character needs to influence all their work on behalf of the school and its proprietors.

Special Character provides a foundation for decision-making, whether it be in the area of disciplinary matters, staff appointment or finance. Two Board members reflect on the influence of Special Character on Board deliberations:

They just say ‘Well it’s part of our Special Character, we should do this. We must consider our Special Character making this decision ... Cause it comes in a lot, cause it comes into things like when we have our budgets, we have to ensure that we have enough money for that sort of thing and it comes into a lot of our decision-making. I mean for example, when we’re talking about Bulk Funding; it was a big issue, you know, about the Special Character of our school and how we should not just consider us, but other schools (MCYIB #2:9).

In all the decisions we make, Special Character is very much in everybody’s mind; everybody sitting around that table, so I don’t actually have a special role to say “Hey! Remember the Special Character” because everybody is on the same wavelength where the Special Character comes into it ... Even the finance, we have to think about the equity issue. We’re giving out money and we’re looking at where the money has to be distributed. Even that’s Special Character (MCYISF #11:7).

Meetings begin with prayers for guidance in the task ahead and are conducted in a spirit of co-operation and common purpose. Committed to building positive relationships between the Board and the rest of the school community, members believe that consultation and communication are important. A system of regular reports from the Principal, Director of Religious Studies and Student representative ensures that the Board is kept informed of Special Character events and issues. Board members attend school celebrations. As one Board member points out:

It’s a question of solidarity with the school, that the teachers see us there (MCYIB #4:5FN).

The membership on the Board of two Mercy sisters is greatly valued by other members. Their deep understanding of and insights into the Mercy charism provide almost a sense of security for other Board members, who value the clarity of their thinking on Special Character issues.

One area of concern, expressed by a Board member, is a need for members of Boards of Trustees of Catholic schools to undertake on-going training to increase their understanding

of the nature and meaning of Special Character and the position of the Catholic church in relation to issues affecting education. Also important, in her opinion, is a need to thoroughly critique Board documentation to ensure that Special Character elements are made explicit. She adds:

Every policy should have something about Special Character. I ask myself “Where is this policy different from other schools? Where is anything linking in these policies?” (MCYIB #4:3FN).

This is an area currently being addressed by the Mercy Board, given that some departmental and Board documents lack adequate reference to the Special Character of the school. Given the strengths of this Board, this lack of Special Character content suggests that it is somewhat taken for granted rather than from any lack of relevance in the eyes of Board members.

Induction and professional development

There is an increasing awareness by participants of the need to preserve the college’s Mercy tradition through ongoing staff development and induction of new staff and students. The college is fortunate in having access to a resource person appointed by the Mercy Charities Trust who provides inservice and support for Mercy order schools. Staff sessions include input and reflection on the philosophy, values and mission of the Sisters of Mercy in relation to their work in New Zealand education. In addition, some staff have the opportunity to attend national and international conferences and seminars, organised by the Sisters of Mercy for their schools. Participants have a positive attitude to professional development in this area, and welcome further opportunities to explore their role as educators in the Mercy tradition. The need for “regular consciousness raising” (MCYD #25:66) of staff is important as one teacher observes:

Maybe it’s been easy for people who’ve been in the school for a long time; who’ve worked with the Sisters; who have been inculturated into a Catholic environment. It’s part, it’s part of us, but we have to ensure that the traditions are maintained when we leave. I think that’s part of the responsibility that we need to be looking to now, so that people coming into the school from now, might carry it on (MCYISF #13:6-7).

Induction of new staff is both formal and informal. Early in the first term, new teachers attend a diocesan-wide inservice day for all teachers new to the Catholic education system. Individually, they also meet with the Principal who shares the ‘story’ of the establishment of the school by the Mercy Sisters, liberally sprinkled with stories and myths that add texture to the college culture. Working systematically through the Staff Handbook, the newcomer has an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification of his/her new role as a Mercy College teacher. Each Head of Department continues the induction process through the departmental meeting structure. Teachers who join the school during the year, however, rather than at the beginning of the academic year, tend to miss out on much of the formal induction process. In spite of these formal and semi-formal induction opportunities, participants suggest that induction of new staff occurs through some kind of “osmosis” (MCYISF #12:6) process; that Special Character and its implications for new teachers is somehow “picked up” (MCYISF #9:6) informally through staffroom dialogue and casual conversation.

Given that the student intake is drawn from up to 26 different primary schools, enrollees in Year 7 are provided with a comprehensive induction process throughout their early years at the school. The fact that the majority of these students comes from local Catholic primary schools and is consequently familiar with Catholic culture and faith is considered an advantage. Except for an orientation assembly at the beginning of Year 9, there is little ongoing formal development of students’ knowledge and appreciation of the Mercy tradition at secondary levels. The Head of the Religious Studies department, recognising this need has plans to introduce more Mercy content into the Year 9-13 Religious Studies curriculum.

Special Events

Mercy College Day

In July each year, staff and students of Mercy College celebrate their uniqueness as a community with a full day of activity. It is a time to focus on the traditions, identity and nature of the Mercy college school culture; “a chance to let off a bit of steam” (MCYOS #9:9FN) and “an opportunity to have, like, heaps of fun” (MCYIS #1:16). In short, it is a day for celebrating the Special Character of the college, as the following participants reflect:

It brings together the school as a community and support base (MCY #20).

They brought a unique glimpse of the unique character to me. I'd never seen anything like that before (MCYISF #10:6).

The day begins with a full school celebration of Eucharist in the local parish church, attended by guests, Mercy sisters and parents. Students play major roles as readers, leaders, choir and ministers of Eucharist. Gifts of food, collected over the days prior to the celebration, are formally presented during the liturgy. There is a quiet prayerfulness during the service; a sense of reverence touched with a happy anticipation of the revelry to come later that afternoon. On returning to the college, staff enjoy a combined morning tea/lunch, courtesy of the New Zealand custom of 'bringing a plate'. Students and form teachers gather in their classrooms for a shared lunch. There is an air of informality around the school as people mingle freely and informally with each other. Teacher supervision is discreet, but there is no hint of trouble from students. As one teacher observes:

This is one day when we never have a problem with absenteeism. They love this day (MCYOS #9:5FN).

The afternoon is taken up with the annual traditional Talent Quest, each class performing an 'item' for their peers and staff. Parents and guests are not invited to this aspect of the day. It is a special time of relaxation and fun (at times quite raucous!) for students and staff only. The college hall buzzes with energy. Peers greet student performances with loud cheers of appreciation, with much stamping of feet. The noise in the college hall is deafening! Yet,

the behaviour of students remains within the boundaries of acceptability. Staff confidently claim that “they’ve never had trouble on Mercy College Day” (MCYOS #9:9FN).

The highpoint of the concert is undoubtedly the Staff item; one predetermined by college tradition. Every year, a new variation on the story of Cinderella is performed. In 1998, for example, Cindy Soccer, a spoof on Cinderella as a footballer at the World Cup was the theme of the moment. The Principal plays a major role, much to the enjoyment of students. Dressed for the part, staff enter into the spirit of the occasion; each character played for maximum effect, as the following extract from fieldnotes illustrates:

The staff performed with great gusto, making complete fools of themselves for the sake of the students’ enjoyment. Rebecca was indeed a star, she played it to the hilt and when she and the DP had their tussle with her being sent off with a red card, the whole school was in an uproar! (MCYOS #9:8FN).

At the end of the concert, students and staff are quite noticeably physically exhausted by the events of the day, yet to this observer’s eye, they also seem refreshed by what they have shared together. It is easy to see why so many participants refer to Mercy College Day as a core experience of the Special Character of their college.

Leavers’ Day Mass

Held at the local church, Leavers’ Day Mass is a full school celebration marking the transition of Year 13 students to lives beyond Mercy College. Hymns reflecting a theme of ‘moving on’ to new opportunities are carefully selected and over the years, some have become enshrined as school traditions. Symbolism is rich. School leavers process into the church with the Principal at their head. Student leaders ceremoniously present badges to those who will be taking up leadership roles and responsibilities the following year. Each leaver lights a candle representing the Light of Christ that she is entrusted to bring into her future role and relationship with others. A song is sung by the choir in honour of the new graduates of the college. The whole occasion is formal, prayerful and full of meaning. A deeply moving experience, affection is openly displayed between students and staff. The following fieldnote attempts to capture the mood of the occasion:

When the Mass had formally concluded, Rebecca took the lectern. She said with some feeling “I’m so proud to be a part of this community!” It was obvious that she was deeply moved by the liturgy. There were tears all around - I even noticed two or three mothers wiping their eyes with tissues. I must admit that I too found the prayerfulness and the meaning of the ceremony deeply moving. I felt a lump in my throat as I saw these young women express their excitement about the change that was about to happen in their lives, but also tinged with sadness at what they were leaving behind (MCYOS #14:2FN).

The following extract from a poem written by a Mercy College student illustrates something of the significance of the day as a celebration of culture.

It was what we shared
Bared our naivety
It was that laughter
Fulfilled our memories
It was the prayers
Discarded our anxiety
It was those smiles
Undid our sadness and agony
It was those tears
Bound us as one unity
It was the love and care
Cherished our friendship
And it was the Leavers’ Day
That distanced our physical distance (MCYD #46:9).

Coin trail

Each year, students gather on the playground at the front of the school. Each form group has the task of designing and creating a chalk drawing on the concrete upon which coins gathered by the class are then strategically and meaningfully placed. The event has all the excitement and anticipation of a competition, each drawing being judged on its merits as an original symbolic representation of the theme of Giving. Money donated by students is sent to Caritas, a Catholic international relief agency and to Mercy College’s sister school in Apia, Samoa. The whole school participates under the leadership of the Student Council. Taking their task very seriously, much effort is invested by students in the careful, artistic use of a limited supply of coloured chalk. Prior to the event, one teacher jokingly observed that no chalk could be found in any shop in the district and that students were ‘warned’ to guard their supply carefully from the unwelcome attention of ‘rival’ groups. The whole occasion is characterised by good humour, intense concentration from the most competitive

and a sense of teamwork. It is a very unique way of highlighting the value of generosity and service whilst creating an experience of common purpose and communal identity.

Symbols

Catholic and Mercy tradition

Ensuring that the whole school environment reflects the college's Catholic and Mercy Character is a priority of the Principal and her staff. Crucifixes are displayed in classrooms and other teaching areas and a range of sacred art, both traditional and modern, is evident around the college. Parents' newsletters contain illustrations and Scripture references associated with the liturgical seasons of the Catholic Church. It is the Principal's belief that displays of religious symbols are an important representation of the college's Special Character, communicating to all that enter the school that the education it provides is distinctive. She notes:

You can't walk in here and not notice something about religion around the place (MCYIA #5:7).

Photographs and paintings of Mercy Sisters, who served the school as principals since its foundation, reinforce a sense of continuity with the Mercy charism and emphasise the timeless qualities of service, commitment and sacrifice. The large statue of Mary and child focuses attention on the Mercy devotion to Mary as exemplar and guide for Christians, succinctly articulated in the Mercy motto, *Maria Duce – With Mary as our Guide*.

Students are obviously familiar with Catholic and Mercy symbols and use them in art, writing, prayer and liturgy. The use of candles is popular during class prayer times and major liturgies. Mercy College students are quite clearly highly skilled in the creation of new symbols as observed in their designs for the Coin Trail.

School symbols

In common with other schools, the college philosophy, values and heritage are symbolised in the school crest, uniform and motto. Laminated cards listing Mercy College goals are displayed in every area of the school, a constant reminder to all of what the school is striving to achieve. School awards and trophies focus attention on the qualities and attributes most admired and respected by members of the school culture, including some that are specifically related to Special Character. Each year, a little gold pin in the shape of a dove is presented to a student from each class in recognition of her contribution to the spirit of her form group. This is a popular and much sought after award. At a senior level, the presentation of an award to that student who demonstrated an “outstanding contribution for promoting the Mercy Charism” (MCYOS #15:4FN) is greeted with loud acclamation by the assembled community as one of the highest honours bestowed on a student by the college.

Mercy College senior students add their own touch to the symbolic heritage of the college. Each year, Year 13 students undertake the task of producing a lasting symbol of their membership of the school culture. One of these symbols, a Mercy College Student Prayer, written by seniors after a comprehensive consultation process with the whole school community, has become part of the school tradition, read during major liturgies and presented to school leavers at their final assembly. The prayer encapsulates school values, mission and tradition and is highly valued as a symbol of Mercy student leadership and service.

It is interesting to note that although the official school motto is *Maria Duce*, staff and students frequently quote a Scripture passage from the Book of Micah that has become an unofficial motto of the college. It reads:

Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God (MCYD #10:5).

Proclaimed with strong voice and firm commitment, it appears capable of evoking feelings of pride, loyalty, personal and communal empowerment. An indication of its significance for students was the decision of 1998 school leavers to reject their original plan to produce

a T-shirt, with suitable logo, as a souvenir of their time at the college. Instead, they opted for a simple silver ring, inscribed with the Mercy symbol and the Scripture reference for Micah. Displayed prominently above the entrance to the assembly hall, these few phrases from Micah symbolise for its members the best of what the school culture represents and strives to be.

Special symbols

The school foyer is not only a central and informative space within the college, but is also an important Special Character symbol. Paintings and photographs of former principals and Board of Trustees are reminders of those who formerly served the school. A painting of the founder of the Mercy Sisters links the school with its historical roots. A laminated copy of the Declaration of Authentic Catholic Education, produced on behalf of the Council of Proprietors in 1997 that hangs on the foyer wall, reinforces the college's Catholic educational purpose. Its identity as a New Zealand school is symbolised in a displayed facsimile of the Treaty of Waitangi. However, the foyer space itself has symbolic meaning. Bouquets of flowers used in major school liturgies are carried back from the church and laid before the large statue of Mary as an ongoing reminder of what has been celebrated. During times of bereavement, flowers are laid at Mary's feet, and a candle is lit during exam times to remind students to pray for the success of their peers. The quotation from Micah is plainly visible above the entrance to the hall, a symbol of the Catholic Mercy mission of the college.

Ironically, another important symbol of the college is something missing from the school environment. Participants speak wistfully of their desire to have a college chapel for the use of students and staff. Grateful for the generosity of the Mercy Sisters' community in making their own small chapel available to the college, they look forward to the time when the implementation of the Mercy College Development Plan will provide the college community with its own special place of prayer. It is apparent that a chapel is perceived as an important symbol of the daily spiritual life of the college, as the following staff member reflects:

I mean if you had a chapel here, it could become an integral part of the school week, the life of the school ... if it was an integral part of the day or their week, I guess maybe the focus will be a little stronger for some of them (MCYISF #15:10).

Teaching

School documentation including the College Charter (original version), Staff Handbook and Prospectus, states that:

Religion, including moral education is integral to the curriculum (MCYD #12:8).

In other words, the whole curriculum should reflect the values and philosophy of Catholic and Mercy education, the foundation upon which all teaching activity is based. Whether formally through the Religious Education programme or more informally through integration with other subjects and other teaching opportunities, such as that evident between Health, Technology and Religious Education, there is an expectation that Special Character elements will permeate all teaching and learning. For example, Justice as a theme of Religious Education programme might also be included in the content of other subjects, such as English and History. Appropriate curriculum integration is perceived to be an important means of reinforcing the values and beliefs central to the Special Character education ensuring that a “well rounded” (MCYIA #4:4) coherent education is provided for students.

Religious Education programme

The Mercy College Staff Handbook and Prospectus note that:

The Religious Education programme is founded on belief in:

The sacredness, uniqueness and developing nature of the human person.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The intrinsic worth of the living Catholic tradition

The value of a community of staff, students and parents, searching together to integrate culture with faith: and faith with everyday living (MCYD #25:11; MCYD #12:8).

Based on the National Religious Education syllabus approved by the Bishops of New Zealand, the programme is designed to meet students’ needs and interests. At this school,

students also have a unique opportunity to learn about Christian spirituality and engage in a range of traditional spiritual exercises. Students who are not Catholic are expected to participate fully, in keeping with the college's policy on Equity:

The sensitivities of non-Roman Catholic students are respected in the Religious Education Programme (MCYD #17:4FN).

The presentation of achievement awards in Religious Education during annual prizegiving ceremonies reinforces the academic status of Religious Education at Mercy College.

Religious Education teachers are committed to, and commended for, high standards of professionalism, demonstrated in sound curriculum planning and their ability to provide a challenging academic Religious Education programme. The ability of its members to work as an effective team, sharing resources and 'best practice' are strengths of the department. They provide student-centred activities and student work of a high quality is displayed around the school. They have developed relationships with their students that are characterised by cordiality and mutual respect.

Mercy College students demonstrate a familiarity with formal Religious Education from their years at local Catholic primary schools, evident in their solid grounding in Scripture, Church teaching and tradition. This prior learning enables them to work critically with new knowledge and concepts in their secondary years, maximised by teachers through the use of debate and discussion in their teaching approaches.

In Religious Education, or Religious Studies as it is known in Mercy College, students generally seem to appreciate the opportunity to discuss their ideas in an atmosphere of personal freedom and respect. Students do not hesitate to take what they perceive to be their 'own position' in relation to Religious Education and official Church teaching. They take full advantage of the opportunity to articulate their thoughts, demonstrating openness to learning about the moral, spiritual and religious issues confronting people today. However, positive as the majority of students might be in relation to Religious Studies, it is

clearly a subject that can give rise to a range of 'mixed feelings', as the following responses indicate:

I was never a keen churchgoer and I find religious studies classes really pushy. Really trying to influence the Catholic way over issues eg abortion (MCY#33).

Just from what I get from the kids: they have to be here and they have to do Religious Studies and it's not going to help them in their future, it's something they've got to do ... I could have the same kids in my (other subject) and I'll have religious studies and it'll be totally different. Like in the (other class), they'll be keen as you know because it's an option, they get to choose, they want to be here, but Religious Studies? "Oh, just come in here. We'll tip our bag down. We'll sit here and yak with our friends" (MCYISF#4:3).

I think they tend to rebel. It doesn't matter what their upbringing or how strong parent views are ... they still rebel against things like religion. I mean, it's quite interesting really, talking to them about it, because even though at time they'll be in denial and all sorts of things, when the chips are down, they'll turn to prayer (MCYIB#1:13).

By contrast, the following comments from a range of Year 13 students express the personal value they place on the Religious Education programme:

Having a religious studies program operating within the school, especially the seventh form syllabus, gives an extra dimension to the education gained here. It gives an opportunity to discuss in a class group situation, several issues which are highly relevant to the world we live in, in order to better our understanding of the topic. This situation does not occur in others schools that I have been to (MCY #49).

I have always believed in God and I don't think that Mercy College has influenced me one way or another on the issue, but it has given me an education on religions that have allowed me to come to my own opinions (MCY #22).

I presume that Religious Instructions are RE classes and therefore I believe that they are necessary for we do attend a Catholic school and this is part of its education and school Character (MCYD #11:1).

The tone of these comments suggests that students recognise that religious faith is personally and freely chosen, not enforced. Religious Education teachers reflect a similar sentiment in their perceptions of their role as religious educators. One speaks of enabling students through the delivery of a sound Religious Education programme to "make an informed choice" (MCYISF #12:15); another believes that the Religious Education programme and its teachers are instrumental in developing students' values and faith. She notes:

The way the programme itself builds a sense of respect for others and a concern for others, I hope that will reflect it ... I hope that we are helping to nurture that and develop that all the way through (MCYISF #13:3).

In common with many Religious Education teachers in other Catholic secondary schools, Mercy College teachers find that teaching Religious Education is a challenging task that makes great demands upon their time, energy and personal faith. This can be particularly difficult in terms of teaching workloads; for example, the majority of Religious Education teachers at the college are involved in other departmental areas, frequently in the role of Teacher in Charge or Head of Department. Only one person, the Director of Religious Studies, is a Religious Education specialist, teaching only that subject.

Motivating and involving students who may be well informed but simply reject religion and church can add to the difficulties. It is especially difficult in relation to those who, like the 2 students out of 49 respondents in the student survey, may be quite hostile to religion. For students such as these and their parents, a lack of conviction in the benefits of a fully challenging academic approach to Religious Education can result in low levels of co-operation and involvement. The strength of commitment to their subject amongst Religious Education staff, however, and their belief in its relevance for students' lives, are illustrated in the efforts they make to develop students' knowledge and understanding, encouraging them to think critically about the content of the programme.

Informal teaching

Informal teaching about matters of faith and religion takes place through the ordinary interactions of school life. Core values of the school and the Gospel are reinforced and consolidated through such organisational structures as the Deans' network and Form Teacher roles within the school. Celebrations of Sacraments, school liturgies and assemblies are informative as well as spiritual occasions, exposing students to Christian values, Scripture and Church tradition simply through their participation. Informal conversation and interactions with staff, especially those with a strong personal spirituality, are also times of informal teaching. As these staff members share their own personal

philosophy, values and beliefs, students' understanding of morality, personal development and human nature is further developed.

Environment

Mercy College members are proud of the physical setting of their college, openly expressing their appreciation of its beauty and serenity, as this comment from the Principal reflects:

It's a wonderful site, a magnificent site" (MCYIA #4:3)!

The college grounds are dotted with tree-shaded areas that encourage one to sit, talk and enjoy the company of others. There is a comfortable feeling about Mercy College. Emotional barriers between members of the culture seem to be minimal and people appear to enjoy working together, in a friendly, relaxed way, to create the best climate for success. People know each other well and appreciate each other's company, as these teachers observe:

There's a lot of love here and you become aware of that as time moves on. I really, really enjoy the girls (MCYISF #5:2).

The kids say everybody knows us and that's what makes me feel I belong because everybody knows me. A seventh former who came back ... she said to her mother "I just feel this is where I belong and I feel I belong here". I think it's a really nice, I think it's a really nice compliment to us that they are where they feel comfortable (MCYISF #12:5).

The staffroom is a welcoming place, where teachers are prepared to take time to chat, laugh and share mutual concerns. Students seem confident in their acceptance by staff and appear relaxed, yet focused, in the formal classroom environment. One teacher explains:

I felt that people are not so conscious they have to be defensive or they have to watch that, cause so and so's going to try to pull a trick; pull the wool over teacher's eyes. There's no need to feel like you've had a bad day when you come here, I think. There's a general feeling that usually things go quite well ... I think what makes me happy is that knowledge that there are people who are showing interest in the common goal if you like. You feel supported. Well, I always feel supported (MCYISF #10: 2,6).

People have a sense of pride in the emotional climate of the school. It is perceived as a strength of the college, attractive to students and parents alike. As one young teacher observes:

Their environment's good. It's good for the adults and it's going to be good for the kids (MCYISF #14:13).

Modelling

Structured

The staff and administration of Mercy College are very aware of the need to provide a range of positive role models for their students. The original college charter states as one of its goals, the need to:

Enhance learning by providing role models, such as girls, women and people from different ethnic groups in positions of leadership and authority, and boys and men as caregivers so that children can understand the meaning of equity in behaviour they observe from day to day (MCYD #49:13).

The sincere living-out of Gospel values in the lives of significant people, it is believed, adds authenticity to the Christian message and communicates to students that the Christian lifestyle is relevant and worthwhile. As one teacher notes, positive modelling of core values is central to the transmission of the college's Special Character:

I think it's really important to model to the girls, caring and tolerance and also modelling the standard of excellence and everything that goes with the Mercy charism. I think it's really important (MCYISF #11:3).

In particular, members of the Religious Education department and Year 7 & 8 Homeroom teachers are perceived as being responsible for representing what they teach. The Head of Religious Education observes:

I think students are very quick to pick up if they see any discrepancy between what you preach and what you do and they will be more critical of an RE teacher I think than, for example, of a Science teacher, if they believe that the RE teacher is not respecting everybody (MCYISF #13:10).

She believes that appropriate modelling is even more necessary given the decline in the number of people attracted to membership of religious orders:

They see that people who live lives just like theirs, who cope with families and children and everything else, still have those same ideals about the way they live and still have a prayer life and a commitment to the Church (MCYISF #13:8).

Stories and articles about people associated with the college who have succeeded in their chosen fields are a regular feature of newsletters and college magazines, a means of inspiring and motivating students to seek their own highest potential. Messages of success and achievement appear to dominate and a range of people have been invited to the college to provide seminars on goal-setting and how to achieve. A visit of a representative from a Catholic youth service organisation, for example, encourages Mercy College students to give their time and energy to help others, highlighting the value of service. Christian role models are included in the content of the Religious Education programme, in the shape of stories about famous Christians. The observance of the Church's feastsdays provides yet another focus on the importance of historical Christian heroes and heroines. A mentoring system, particularly for Maori and Polynesian students, has been set up to provide inspiration and support for students.

Unstructured

The Mercy College community provides plenty of opportunities for students to see ordinary people living out personal values and those of the school. Service to the college, commitment to social justice and a love of God feature amongst the latter, as the following farewell speech from a staff member for a retiring Chairperson of the Board of Trustees illustrates:

Your priorities ... have always been very clearly expressed: the Gospel values, the Catholic story and Mercy tradition, but above all the quest for quality in education, stemming from your own delight in learning. I learned two very important things from sharing the Board table with you; that it is not enough to believe in something passionately; one must always be prepared to do the homework, know the facts and argue dispassionately; and that the formal procedures are what translate inspiration into useful action (MCYD #7:4).

Staff and students speak enthusiastically about those qualities and strengths demonstrated, for example, by the college's senior student leaders. Past and present students are admired for their personal faith and love of God. Their willingness to translate that faith into care of others; their ability to critique whatever is happening in the light of the college's commitment to justice and, as one participant puts so clearly, their ability to "embody what this school's about" (MCYISF #5:9) make them stand out amongst their peers. Admired and respected for the ease with which they relate to others, they are described as "well-rounded" (MCYIS #1:9) people, showing ability academically, socially, spiritually and culturally. They are gracious to others, personally disciplined, comfortable with themselves, their faith and their relationships, people who have a "certain aura" (MCYISF #4:13) about them. One such young woman is described thus:

She has got time for everyone; anyone who wants to speak to her, she's got time ... she works hard. She's academically very able ... she is a really good leader ... she just behaves appropriately. She walks to Mass every Sunday. She's a minister worker and she's not a square. She's not different. Everybody loves her (MCYISF #9:10).

The Mercy College student council appears to be a natural forum for the development of positive student role models:

The School Council is made up of representatives from every form in the College. The President and Vice-president are elected annually by staff and students. The Council meets regularly and is responsible for organising school festival days as well as making recommendations to the Principal on a variety of school matters (MCYD #12:15).

Senior members of the School Council see their responsibility as one of representing the interests and concerns of their peers, yet are realistic about their impact as one member notes "we're not talking about ground breaking" (MCYIS #1:4). Many of the issues they take up on behalf of students are fairly mundane, including such matters as the provision of toilet paper and hand towels. However, they are key organisers of fundraising events and have shown initiative in their response to overseas and local needs. As role models for other members of the college culture, these young women represent, according to participants, what it means to be a Mercy College student.

Many staff, both past and present, are considered exemplars of the Mercy College Special Character in their dedication, their passion and their enthusiasm for their work. Particularly

admired are those staff members whose deep personal spirituality is their source of inspiration and wisdom. Perceived as people deeply involved with the whole life and activity of the school, they are known for their willingness to work hard on behalf of their students and their peers. As one staff member observes:

It's not a job. It's a life. If you like, a vocation (MCYISF #10:9).

Their encouragement and guidance are valued. As these comments from two students reflect, these are people from whom others learn:

The staff's genuine concern for the well being of each pupil which reflects on us and we pass it on to our peers (MCY #48).

The teachers try their best to be good examples to use and to treat everyone equally as we should (MCY #13).

She actually exudes everything a Christian should be and where she comes from, her faith, what she teaches the girls at Mass and all those sorts of things. But it's just a person, staff member who quietly does her own thing ... she very quiet and in her own way, but she's always very caring (MCYISF #15:5).

When one thinks of (her), one thinks of a deep spirituality, an amazing sense of humour and a perceptive clear-sighted vision which enables her to visualise what she wanted for others and herself (MCYD #8:5).

Now, she's not perfect; she has her faults, but she is prepared to think about issues and discuss them and make decisions and lead and I think that's what you really need in a good school ... and she's very strong in the faith herself, and she's outwardly committed to the faith and I think she's a good role model (MCYIB #1:4).

Mercy Sisters associated over the years with Mercy College are remembered as "amazing" (MCYISF #3:2), "incredible" (MCYISF #12:12) and a "presence" (MCYIA #4:23). Admired for their commitment and willingness to make personal sacrifices on behalf of their school, the Sisters are considered living examples of Mercy values and educational philosophy. Although appreciative of the contact that remains between the college community and the Mercy Sisters through guest speaking opportunities and the location of a Sisters' house within the college grounds, several participants expressed their sadness that they are no longer able to maintain a regular physical presence in the college. The deep sense of loss for the unique contribution of the Mercy Sisters is rather wistfully expressed in this comment from a student:

I think we feel that we sort of need our nuns back (MCYIST #2:19).

Two past Principals of the college feature as Special Character role models, especially amongst staff who taught alongside them as colleagues or related to them on an informal basis after their retirement. Sister Elizabeth is remembered with great affection and almost a sense of awe, especially for the manner in which she was prepared to stand up for the interests of the college and her willingness to stand by the most vulnerable of her students. Staff describe her faith, energy and vision:

I think she's been a very good role model for the school, because she's got a very deep and committed faith but she's very much for the empowerment of women and I think that that's a really good combination because she, you know, she sort of has a philosophy "Girls can do anything" and I think that's really, I think, that's a good role model (MCYIB #1:9).

She's a very articulate, got really strong beliefs but not only has she got strong beliefs, she lived those beliefs ... and she never compromised her beliefs, so you could actually see the Mercy philosophy there. I mean okay she, of course, had her bad points as well as we all do, but to me she was the person that I learnt what Mercy charism was about (MCYISF #1:4).

Sister Elizabeth has been a wonderful example of one person's ability to make a difference and to have an influence for good (MCYD #7:3).

The founding principal of the college, now deceased, is still admired and respected by staff, remembered for her resourcefulness and hard work. This is illustrated in the story of the ice-block sticks. In order to raise much-needed funds for her school, which began with fifteen students and little else, she produced homemade ice-blocks that were then sold in the college tuckshop. One condition, however, was attached to purchase of an ice-block:

You had to put the sticks back in a little container so she could boil the sticks and re-use them (MCYISF #6:14).

She is credited with building up the college from almost nothing. Her college obituary from 1995 when she died at the age of 87, notes that:

Everywhere at Mercy College, despite the growth, there are constant reminders of (her), a woman with no resources but who, with hope, vision, courage, pragmatism and profound faith saw the vision and carried the Community with her. It is said that (her) education philosophy was far ahead of its time - she was a firm believer in an enriched curriculum and a sound career base ... She is remembered as a person of tremendous caring with an awareness of a person's need which evoked loyalty and a willingness to go the extra mile. She is also remembered for her twinkling sense of humour and her humility. Without (her) vision, Mercy College would not be the school that it is today (MCYD #7:1).

Relationships

By far, the most effective transmission of Special Character is through the impact of strong interpersonal relationships on the Mercy College culture. The college charter (original version) highlights the priority given to the pastoral care network and the need for teachers to be trained in the skills required for such work. Although it is inevitable that some students will occasionally face reprimands and, in serious cases, suspension and that relationships amongst a few staff will at times be strained, numerous indicators point to a stable, communal network of relationships. Mercy College has, as a result, a happy supportive environment where people are treated as unique individuals, worthy of respect and trust.

Quality of relationships

All participants speak confidently of the care, concern and affection displayed between students, staff and their relative peer groups. Support is available to students in a multitude of ways, from that needed to sort out interpersonal difficulties between students to practical initiatives to support students facing financial restraints or health difficulties. The following comments from students illustrate their appreciation of this kind of help:

I have noticed that many may have been helped in the same way as myself, especially with friendships and academically. There is so much support and respect for students, which really brings out the best in each student (MCY #42).

Teachers have helped those who are in trouble at home, or personally down and I feel that those who needed help couldn't have that one to one basis if in a large school (MCY #37).

The way that if a student goes through something hard, the school will support her. For example a student lost her father and everyone prayed for her and her family ... Again, I use the example of my friend's Daddy who suddenly died. The school gave her such a lot of support. It was in her sixth form year, but they still allowed her to do Sixth Form Certificate even though she had missed quite a few days (over 25 which is the limit) (MCY #21).

Teachers genuinely care about their students. After surgery, I was unable to get up stairs. Classes were shifted to accommodate me. Teachers sent homework for me when I was in hospital, helped me to catch up afterwards (MCY #11).

Students openly display affection for their teachers. Spontaneous hugs are not unusual. Interactions are frequently informal in tone yet do not cross the line into inappropriate behaviour. Relationships within the classroom are warm, close and friendly, particularly with Form teachers, a role that the Staff Handbook defines as:

The lynch pin of the pastoral system and the focus of the form group's identity within the level of the school (MCYD #25:113).

Teachers show an interest in their students, in their activities and achievements; a quality that does not go unnoticed, as these comments from students reveal:

They don't have to be involved ... they don't have to do all this to help you, but they just do, because they just (have) a genuine care for you (MCYIST #2:12).

Knowing that people care about you, it's good, like personally and specially when teachers and office staff and the grounds people all greet you and say "Hi, how are you? How's it going?" (MCYIST #2:8).

And they know us on a personal basis. Yeah, we're not just like a class of Seventh formers, you know, we're individuals. It's like even the teachers that teach the junior school and use the school, they don't teach us; we're still friends with them and we talk ... we also play Playstation with them, you know (MCYIST #2:6).

Students, in their turn, offer their support to staff. They are willing to help and show genuine interest in their teachers as people. One teacher reflects her appreciation of such warmth:

The girls come in and say "Hello, Mrs A. Hello, Mrs A". That to me, just that little thing probably more than anything else, that tells me what Mercy College's about and the kids will want to stop and have a chat "You know, Mrs A, we're doing this. What do you think of this?" I think that's lovely. I think it's the way the girls respond as well. I think that probably for me, more than anything else, is the way the girls respond that I don't have to ever feel aloof ... I can be quite relaxed when they talk to me. It's not equal to them but it's good respect, if you know what I mean (MCYISF #11:11,12).

Relationships are characterised by a spirit of co-operation, gentleness and acceptance. Between students and staff, there is an attitude of openness and trust, laying the groundwork for a confidence amongst students to actively seek help and support. The Principal observes:

I think the kids find the staff very approachable and they tell them all sorts of things about their lives and what's going on in their lives and I think they know that they'll get support ... They also find them fairly generous in their own time and helping them out with extra

work and that sort of thing, but they're prepared to talk to staff about most things. They can always find somebody (MCYIA #4:13, 14).

Staff are sensitive to the needs of their students at Mercy. The library, for example, has a monitoring system to pick up "heavy borrowing" (MCYD #10:2) on books about such issues as teenage suicide. A homework room is available one day each week for students who have difficulties in finding appropriate time and space in their own homes, assistance being provided by Year 13 students and the Year 9 Dean. Students are treated with respect, invariably addressed in a courteous manner by staff, encouraging reciprocity and creating an atmosphere of "overall respect" (MCYISF #8:8) between staff and students.

One relational feature clearly valued by students is the fact that they are well known by staff; that each is "called by name" (MCYISF #9:3). Attributed by participants to the small size of the school, students perceive this to be a distinctive strength of the school culture and a sign of the interest and concern that marks Mercy College relationships. The following students share their views:

The small classes mean you receive more individual attention and you know pretty much everyone within your form (MCY #11).

The fact that the teachers know most of the students personally - this would not have been possible if there were 1600 students in the school (MCY #9).

The teachers know your name and are interested in your work, future and life (MCY #36).

The people - everyone gets along with everyone and people know you by name (MCY #13).

The close familiar nature of relationships is a quality of the college upon which members place a high value. A long-serving teacher at Mercy College expresses an anxiety, shared by other participants, that such a valuable feature of the college culture could be lost if the college were to grow too big, too quickly:

Well, the size that it is at the moment and I know that it's going up and I hope it will grow no bigger. It's big enough as is possible, small enough as it's possible to know every girl within the school. When I walk around the school I can say "Hello, Sarah. Hello Maria. Hello whoever" and I can address most of the girls by name, whether or not I've taught them, so therefore a student coming in here doesn't get lost in the masses ... I think one of

the things very special about this school, it is possible to know every student so therefore every student is an individual and not one of the masses (MCYISF #9:6, 10).

The nature of relationships between students is summed up in the claim that “everyone knows everyone” (MCY #36), illustrated in the following comment from a student leader:

We had a girl fall down the stairs at Mercy and everyone in the school knew and was asking about her the next day ... it’s just being aware of other people around you (MCYIST #2:13).

For many students, strong bonds of friendship have been developed over their years together at local Catholic Primary schools, consolidated during their time at Mercy College. However, teachers speak of the difficulties experienced by a few students as a result of such close long-term peer friendships:

When the rest of the class are talking about what they did in camp in Form Two, she still feels an outsider when they go back that far, but that’s a negative aspect of not coming through the school from Form One (MCYISF #6:11).

She said she didn’t really get on with the other girls. Lovely little girl. Perhaps that’s something that we do need to address (MCYISF #11:7).

In spite of the inevitable tensions and strains common to adolescent relationships, Mercy College students generally relate to each other in friendly, inclusive ways; ready with welcoming smiles, showing interest in each other’s activities. Senior student respondents express their appreciation of the friendships made during their time at the college:

Because it is a small school you really get to know a lot of people, especially everyone else in your form. As it goes from intermediate, you generally go right through up to 7th form with many of the same people, which I think is good. You make good friends here (MCY #18).

The people, especially the friends I have made. Most of the people I am friendly with here I have grown up with, I know many of my classmates from Form One or even Primary school. I feel a part of this school because everyone is so caring (MCY #4).

Students appear at ease with their peers, confident in their acceptance. They “stick by each other” (MCY #39), particularly when a friend is distressed or in trouble. Seniors play important roles in maintaining a climate of support amongst students. A Peer Support system “set up in the school to help integrate the third formers into the school community” (MCYD #12:15) encourages the development of friendships across different year groups,

building a sense of belonging and loyalty amongst students. Students affirm each other's achievements. They pray for each other in times of distress and celebrate special times in each other's lives, as a Junior Form teacher observes:

They're very caring and you can always tell when there's somebody's birthday cause they're always wandering around with flowers and they hug and kiss each other (MCYISF #4:4).

The following responses from the student survey highlight the strengths of student relationships:

People are mostly friendly and giving. When someone is upset, there is always other students or teachers ready to comfort them (MCY #39).

Everybody is very friendly and helpful to new foreign people, not hard to make friends. Girls are extremely nice persons and care a lot about others and the school (MCY #40).

The sisterly relationship between some of the students has provided support when people have been through hard times. I know of students who have been helped through things as serious as anorexia and sexual assaults (MCY #8).

Going through the usual teenage girl friendship problems, there was a lot of support for me from the guidance counsellor, teachers and other girls. Also because I've been here so long, you know the girls so well - that could be a bad thing too, but most of us girls mature together and have solid friendships (MCY #21).

It's taught me that no matter what I want to get out of my life, I have many people backing me up (MCY #47).

The Mercy College staffroom is "different. It's happy" (MCYISF #6:3). It has a "very friendly feel" (MCYISF #10:1). Staff appear to enjoy each other's company, taking full advantage of any opportunity to celebrate together with a genuine sense of fun. School events, such as Mercy College Day, are invariably turned into staff social occasions, complete with dressing up and having a laugh together. The following fieldnote recalls a typical example:

I had noticed earlier that a large table had plates of savouries and dips and chips etc on it. There was a notice on the table that told people that the "morning feast" was provided as a sign of appreciation by the student teachers ... As teachers gathered, the DP came to her feet and explained the source of the morning tea. "There's a few of us on the staff here who are keen trampers" she said, "and we do quite a bit of singing. So folks, let's show our appreciation to the student teachers". Another teacher took up the tune and the whole staff (or most it seemed to me) sang "For they are Jolly Good Fellows". There was a

wonderful sense of togetherness from a group of professionals who related as a real team with each other; a real sense of celebration in their singing (MCYISF #5:3FN).

This impression of openness, friendliness and acceptance is reinforced by this observation from one of those same student teachers:

It was, has to be the most welcoming and warm experience I've even had ... after being at two teaching experiences before and going to the school and having the Principal come up and shake your hand and welcome you on board. And having everybody else say if there's anything you can do. It was just, it was lovely. It was like a little family unit and I went with three other guys from college and we were amazed ... everybody was sort of warm and friendly, not all the time obviously because you have those ups and downs, but just the idea of welcome aboard, if there's anything we can do, you know, and you're part of the team. Yeah, it was just lovely (MCYISF #14:3).

Professionally and personally, people are co-operative and willing to work together as a team. Mercy College is a:

Community where everybody's working; everybody feels that they have something they can validly contribute to the way we're all working (MCYISF # 6:9).

There is a "sense of freedom and individuality" (MCYISF #10:2); discussions marked by honesty, frankness and openness, even in situations where "you know that it's not going to be liked, you say it" (MCYISF #9:7). Indeed, where a few tensions between staff do exist, these appear to be based on differences of opinion, different perceptions of what is good for the college and as a result of the normal stresses of school life, rather than on irreconcilable personal issues.

Staff are sensitive to the personal needs of their colleagues. In times of sickness, bereavement, stress and 'work overload', they offer emotional and practical assistance:

If anyone's ill, we do go the extra way. There's a group of people that will take food around to the house, and when a parent dies then we do visit and we do make sure that there are people at the funeral and we do make sure that people are looked after (MCYISF #11:3).

Like last year, we had a staff member who was sick and there was a roster put on for taking dinners around to the house each night so that she didn't have to cook and things like that. Would that be all that much different from just women helping women, rather than being Catholic? I know there's a real caring thing, but again I'm not sure if it's sort of down to just being a Catholic school or women and Catholic (MCYISF #12:3).

Mercy College has a commitment to the concept of partnership with its community, acknowledging that “parents are the first educators of their children” (MCYD #49:5). Communication with families is maintained through fortnightly newsletters and information evenings. A Drug education seminar over three evening is one example of school-based opportunities offered to parents to develop their own parenting skills. Parental support is valued by staff who acknowledge their generosity in assisting with Sports teams, working ‘bees’ and donations of food and money when requested. The college Parent/Teacher/Friends Association is an energetic, busy and congenial group, working enthusiastically on behalf of the school. Parents, in general, appear most interested in maintaining contact with the college in those activities that directly involve students. For example, attendance at full school Masses and prizegivings is high, often with ‘standing room’ only and a considerable number attend evenings such as the Art Exhibition where students’ work is on display.

The college is open to parental feedback. As a Board of Trustees member notes:

If we get complaints, then that’s good because I think if people aren’t happy, I’d much rather they complained and brought it out in the open (MCYIB #1:7).

Parents are consulted formally through four-yearly surveys:

Which provides representatives from the Mercy College community with the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness and the relevance of the curriculum delivered at the college (MCYD #17:3FN).

In this way, the Board of Trustees tries to ensure that parental views and concerns are reflected in school policies. Special areas of interest or concern are surveyed by the Board; for example the Health syllabus and the Fully Funded Option or Bulk Funding of schools. A low level of response from many parents to such consultation initiatives, however, is a matter of some concern for staff and Board members. The issue of how a greater level of parental involvement in the life of the college can be stimulated is an important one, in the light of the school’s commitment to the development of a sense of partnership between parents, school and the local community.

Special features of Special Character transmission

Linking

Mercy College maintains close links with a range of related groups and institutions. Locally, it draws the majority of its students from Catholic Primary schools. Student siblings often attend these schools; brothers moving on to the local Catholic Boys Secondary school, sisters eventually enrolling at Mercy College. Student survey results indicate that attendance at a local Catholic primary school is perceived as an advantage for gaining entry to the college, especially in the light of continued roll growth that necessitates a long waiting list. According to students, they have been enrolled because their mothers and sisters are 'old girls' of Mercy College.

Links with other Mercy schools are sustained through activities, events and celebrations within a network of Mercy schools in New Zealand, in partnership with the Mercy Sisters. For example, students at the college supported the Mercy Rose campaign and contributed original prayers for inclusion in the Mercy school prayer book, published under the title "We have Hope". Close relationships are maintained with the Mercy Sisters through their Proprietorship of the college, the Mercy Charities Trust and the Special Character seminars, in-service days and international conferences open to staff from a range of Mercy schools that they provide. Although each school reflects different communities and needs, these professional development opportunities are greatly valued by the staff who are able to attend. Informally, Mercy sisters are invited to all major school celebrations and liturgies, and the location of a community house within the college grounds is perceived as maintaining an important physical link with the Sisters.

A regular association with other schools in the New Zealand Catholic education network is maintained through the Principal's membership in Catholic principals' associations in addition her attendance at national seminars and conferences. The school joins with others throughout New Zealand in celebrating Catholic Education Day.

Continuity

Participants voice a deep concern that the Special Character of the college should be maintained and preserved, a belief that the Mercy vision of education and tradition must be kept “alive” (MCYISF #4:14). The Director of Religious Studies passionately observes that in the interests of the college, it must be preserved:

Because the school wouldn't be the school without that history. We have the Mercy tradition within the school so it must be held and part because it's part of our history but the other part is the recognition of what those women before us did, you know. They gave their lives to God, you know, and to serve us and that means we need to be constantly reminded (MCYISF #7:1).

The strength of this conviction is reflected in the following response from a teacher to a question about the worst scenario that could confront the school. Her emphatic reply is:

Ignoring the past and letting it die (MCYISF #7:6)!

The task of maintaining continuity in terms of the Mercy educational philosophy, values and beliefs is understood by participants to be a challenging one:

Because schools are made by the people that are involved and if you've got people that carry tradition that are no longer there, there is a weakness; the link is not there and it's not articulated so easily and clearly (MCYIB #3:11).

It is a task made all the more difficult when Special Character features are to some extent taken for granted, as the following responses reflect:

I think that's actually going to be quite a challenge for schools in the future because like the schools I grew up in it was obvious and it was in our lives but I think that's diminishing all the time. It's actually going to become harder to preserve it (MCYIB #2:11).

I don't know if I was all that much aware of it and that, sort of, in Special Character, basically it was because we knew we were a Catholic school because there were plenty of nuns then and there were plenty of nuns teaching (MCYISF #12:2).

Mercy Sisters are keenly aware that their practical involvement with their schools will continue to decrease over the next few years, expressed very clearly in this extract from the Staff Handbook:

As we, Sisters of Mercy, move on, the task of keeping Mercy College faithful to its Mercy spirit and traditions falls to lay staff, teachers whose dedication to the principles and ethos of mercy has already been amply proved (MCYD #25:10).

In their turn, participants readily acknowledge that the task of preserving the college's Special Character is now their responsibility. They note that, to be effective, new people will need adequate training in the Special Character of the school, given that many of the staff who originally worked alongside the Sisters are also ageing. A long-serving staff member explains:

I came into this school when there were still two nuns and Rebecca was here ... there were probably three nuns when she first came and there was some of us who had been here ten year or more and we're a bit like the disciples. Like we've seen them here. If you could compare the nuns to Jesus, we've seen them in action and we know what their concerns were and I guess without realising it, a lot of it has rubbed off on to us, but we're not going to be around for ever, so to me we have the responsibility to do the best we can to ensure that the people who are here beyond us have learned the message ... otherwise the message would be lost or altered and so that's a concern. If it's important, which I think it is, we have to do something to ensure that it continues (MCYISF #6:16).

The establishment of the Mercy Charities Trust and the Mercy College Board of Proprietors is seen as a positive step in the right direction. The position of Mercy Schools co-ordinator and the resources she develops are considered important assets, essential for ensuring that staff understand the significance of Special Character and the contribution that they can make. As one staff member notes:

It will take very aware staff which I hope that we've got now, so I think it will take more Special Character days (MCYISF #11:8).

Conclusion

It is clear that within Mercy College, the transmission of its Special Character has a high priority that is recognised by staff, Board members and students. To this end, the practices, activities and unique characteristics of college life reflect a permeation of Mercy Catholic tradition, providing the members of the school culture with a coherent framework of meaning. It is also apparent that Special Character transmission is influenced by all the normal tensions and difficulties faced by any school. Indeed, it could be argued, that it is these same tensions that give it a durable realistic quality and add to its authenticity as a lived phenomenon with the culture. The emphasis on relationship and role modeling

suggests that the intangible means of transmission have the greatest, most enduring impact on members, supported by a structural framework that reinforces effectiveness.

THE EFFECTS OF SPECIAL CHARACTER ON THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL

Bonding

People associated with Mercy College develop strong emotional bonds with the culture and the various groups that are part of it. These bonds are reciprocal, engaging both members of the current culture and those who are no longer active within daily college life. The college, for example, has several very generous benefactors amongst families whose daughters either currently attend the school or have done so in the past. These people provide ongoing support for the college's vision of education through their financial assistance and personal commitment to serve the college and its interests. Former staff of the school are not forgotten after they leave. Representatives of the current staff are freed from their responsibilities to attend funerals of past staff, including Mercy Sisters, or members of their families,. There is almost an assumption that this is something that calls for the support of the whole school, illustrated in practical rearrangements enabling those staff closest to the past member to be present. The funerals of former students and their family members are important too, students of the college often accompanying staff to support their peers.

'Old girls' of the college keep up an informal ongoing relationship with the college culture, although attempts to establish a more formal past-pupils association with school leavers has not proved successful. Former students, now mothers, renew their contact with the college when they enrol their own daughters, confident in the quality of education they will receive. Some go on to renew and strengthen their bonds through service on parent groups and Board of Trustees.

Students seem to develop the strongest bonds with the college, a relationship that appears to linger even after leaving the school for another. The Principal shares a typical conversation with students who return to Mercy College after having ‘tried’ another school:

Are you absolutely sure you want to do this cause these are the reasons you left, weren’t they? What are those you want to come back for and they end up giving me a summary of what the Special character’s are. Almost always, they will say things to do with staff/student relationship (MCYIA #4:13).

The enduring nature of friendships established during students’ time at Mercy College is illustrated in the following fieldnote extract:

Narisa emphasised the depth of commitment that Mercy staff and students made to each other; a commitment that often continues into later life. By illustration, she noted that a former student who was now living in Christchurch had made the journey to this city in order to support her friend whose mother had just died. Narisa smiled as she recalled her pleasure at this recent funeral, in spite of the sad circumstances, of seeing her ‘old’ students again (MCYISF #6:2FN).

Staff too recall visits, telephone calls and gifts from former students who feel a need to express their appreciation of the care and support shown to them. Another observation fieldnote describes such an occasion:

Robyn was talking to a girl dressed in mufti. As I joined them, the girl handed Robyn a dozen yellow roses and said “That’s to thank you for everything you’ve done for me”. Robyn seemed quite delighted by the gift. I asked if she was a leaver. “No”, Robyn told me, “she left quite a while ago during the year” (MCYOS #14:3FN).

Senior students, in their final days as members of the college culture, share a deep sadness on leaving the security of Mercy College. These poignant comments reflect their loyalty and pride in the college; their appreciation of the friendships made during their time as students:

I know the only school I’ll ever take my children to will be a Catholic school as I want them to learn all the things I did at this age (MCY #37).

It’s been a part of my life since I was born and like a family member, I love it with all my heart, even though it’s pretty stupid a lot of the time and there’s a lot about it I want to change (MCY #8).

What makes it hard for us to leave is not necessarily the building or the learning, it’s just the people we’re going to miss and the environment that kind of got you going in school (MCYIST #2:9).

I will call myself a Mercy old girl (MCYIST #2:27).

School spirit

Members of the Mercy College culture do not appear to use the words 'school spirit' with any great frequency in documentation or discussion. However, they speak readily of the special 'atmosphere' or 'tradition' of the college. Two features of this school spirit that stand out are firstly, a sense of energy and purpose in the college environment; people appear to be busy, motivated and focused, committed to maximising opportunities.

Secondly, members of the college culture appear to have a high degree of sensitivity to issues of need, responding in many generous, innovative ways.

A spirit of opportunity

'Opportunity' is a word that frequently appears in Mercy College documentation and in discussion with staff, students, Board and parents. Committed to the education of young women, the Catholic Mercy education provided by the college is founded on the belief that, as a matter of justice, every student has the right and the responsibility to develop her unique potential as a learner. Every student has the personal freedom to choose her own life direction; the college's role being one of providing the best educational environment through which that choice might be exercised. This spirit of opportunity is reflected in the student-focused nature of the Charter (original version):

To provide students with learning opportunities that will develop a body of knowledge, skills and attitudes empowering them to make informed decisions about the range of options beyond school. At all times to:

Develop student awareness of their own needs alongside a consciousness of their civic responsibilities.

Encourage self-awareness and personal growth, developing in the students a high level of self-esteem and encouraging all staff to participate in this development (MCYD #49:8).

Students' eyes are opened to the challenge and excitement of a self-determining life, highlighted in the following range of comments from students and staff:

Friends have been offered opportunities also such as 'The Spirit of Adventure' and various courses. This school has allowed people to 'open up' and become more confident. Also by offering activities such as 'Peer support', younger students get the chance to talk to 'older and wiser' people (MCY #39).

It has provided me with many opportunities to learn life experiences. It also has given me many examples of the variety of people who live within the college's community. It has also taught me to deal with different situations (MCY #49).

I see it as a place where kids are valued, where students have the opportunity to be whoever they want to be and I see it as a place where kids have got the opportunities to excel. Yeah, they're encouraged to excel but they're also given many, many opportunities that they would never get anyway (MCYISF #9:2).

Leadership in the area of Special Character is encouraged; for example students may offer their service as Ministers of the Eucharist, responsible for distributing communion to the college community in worship. As outlined in earlier sections, they also play a large role in liturgy as readers, prayer leaders, and acolytes and in liturgy preparation. Religious Studies has equal status with other subjects, being a focus for several college trips to Europe, in addition to Art History and Classical Studies. In 1998, the celebration of Easter in St Peter's Square was deemed by students to be a high point of their trip.

A college scholarship for Music was awarded for the first time in 1998, covering the costs of tuition for the Year 12 recipient. In future years, it will be offered to a student in Year 7 or Year 9 to support her in the development of her talent. The Principal speaks proudly of the high level of student participation in music. The availability of several performance groups within the school provides them with opportunities for membership in the school orchestra, chamber orchestra, several choirs, barbershop quartet and concert band. The Mercy College community is proud of its musical strengths.

Over 70% of Mercy College students regularly participate in organised sport. The prospectus lists 19 different sporting activities available in the college. Individual students have gained places on national teams in their chosen sport and college teams have successfully competed at local and regional levels. A sports administrator has been appointed to the college, through Hillary Sportfit funding, but the generous support of staff, senior students, former students, volunteers from parents and local community has ensured that sporting opportunities continue to be maximised.

All students at Mercy College have the chance to sit national external examinations. As outlined earlier, in the Setting section of this case study, students gain good grades. A member of the Board comments:

It seems to give a good education to the girls that are there and as far as I can tell, I mean in the statistics that come out for the school's bursary, Mercy College does very well and I hope that's because everybody gets the opportunity to sit exams, you know. And I'm assured that that's the case because I know that at some schools, they don't let people they don't think are going to succeed, they won't let them sit exams (MCYIB #2:3).

Academic interest and success are developed by internal and external competitions with a curriculum emphasis. For example, a Mathematics Week, run in conjunction with Careers Week, provided a range of school-wide activities focused on the importance of developing skills in Mathematics, conducted in an enjoyable, non-threatening way. Mercy College students have been very successful in competitions at a national level in Design, Science and Drama. Each year, they have participated in the college Fashion Parade, organised by the Parent/Teacher/Friends Association, students showing initiative in gaining support for the event from local businesses.

A spirit of service

Mercy College students are encouraged to respond to the needs of others and are supported in these initiatives by staff and school leaders. Response to social need is understood as a natural consequence of adopting a Christian ethic and in many ways, is considered a valid indicator of the authenticity and credibility of the Special Character of the college. A spirit of service gives substance to its philosophy, values and historical heritage, and enhances religious faith. As one student shares, the college has "brought to life the more practical side of Christianity" (MCY #49).

As mentioned earlier in this section, baskets of donated non-perishable goods are regularly presented to local community support groups, particularly the local rest home. Service groups such as Amnesty International, Students Against Drunk Driving and the youth division of the St Vincent De Paul society are well established at the college, attracting a 'healthy' membership from amongst the student body. However, the Student Council

appears to be the dominant service-focused group at Mercy College, initiating and organising the majority of activities and events, such as mufti days, raffles and competitions, sausage sizzles; even a lunchtime concert provided by the college's own Year 12 band. The Coin Trail is a major source of service funds, used to support the work of Caritas, an International Catholic Aid agency, and the work of Mercy Sisters in the college's 'sister school' in Samoa. A predictable process appears to have developed in the school; students hear of a need; commit themselves to it; consult the school leadership and then decide on an appropriate strategy for fundraising. The following is a typical example. A Mercy Sister, on visit to New Zealand and working in a Samoan village, shared with students her concerns for the health of children affected by a lack of vitamins in their diet. The response was both spontaneous and immediate; notices were posted around the school that simply stated:

Vitamins for Samoa. Please give your gold coin donations to your student council rep asap. We need to raise at least \$800 to cover the costs of vitamins in the Samoan village for a year. There are only 801 students in the school and some will be absent so we would really appreciate donations over \$1 (MCYD #16:1).

And another service tradition is born! Students have raised contributions, ranging from the hundreds to thousands of dollars. They have sent donations to the local hospice, the Riding for Disabled group in the area, in response to media reports of famine or disaster in various areas of the world, for child sponsorship in the Philippines, World Vision and the Forty Hour Famine, and Caritas. Students annually support the Cancer Society's annual appeal on Daffodil Day; the Heart Foundation's Jump Rope for Heart; Save the Children Fund, New Zealand Plunket Society and various Mercy hospitals and child health organisations.

An example of the college's spirit of service is its long association with a small state primary school in another part of the city, a relationship that developed by chance. Several years ago, a Mercy College teacher happened to sit beside the principal of this school during a professional meeting. As they chatted together throughout the day, she learned from the principal of the financial difficulties the school faced in providing some of the basics for learning such as pens, paper, pencils and books. On returning to school, the staff member shared the story with senior students who quickly decided that they would help.

Since that time, Mercy College students have donated books and other basic materials, eventually deciding that a donation of money that the primary school could utilise according to their own priorities might be the best form of support. In 1998, a \$400 donation was used to purchase new library books. Over the years, a warm friendship has developed between the two schools. A sense of companionship between two very different school cultures has been consolidated through visits and letters, reflected in this letter of thanks from the primary school principal after a visit of her students' choir and cultural group to Mercy College:

Thank you so much for the wonderful hospitality we experienced as visitors to your school and the encouragement and enthusiasm with which our pupils were received. You cannot know what a special day it was for our youngsters, who would seldom have experienced performing on a stage in front of such a large audience. Staff members from my school all commented on the positive and genuinely caring reception the children were given and what a supportive and appreciative audience you were. It did wonderful things for the self-esteem of our children - and our staff! ... Not many schools experience Christmas on the 10th August, but we think we did (MCYD #39:19).

Her letter was accompanied by several written by children who attended the day.

Teachers' Work: Going the extra mile

Staff of Mercy College are expected to be professional "in all aspects of school life" (MCYD #25:25) including the development of positive relationships with students, colleagues and school leadership. Their teaching is expected to be of a high standard ensuring the maintenance of a safe supportive learning environment for maximising student achievement. It certainly appears that the majority of staff strive to live up to these expectations.

They are competent and skilled in the classroom; prepared to share their personal talents beyond those related to their professional responsibilities. For example, staff use their skills in music, singing, drama, liturgical dance and a wide variety of other activities such as defensive driving, sport and fundraising, frequently working in partnership with students. They demonstrate a close collegial spirit with their peers; a sense that they are working

together to achieve the same goal; that is, the full development of each student to her highest potential. Many Mercy College teachers are committed to life-long learning; several are engaged in further tertiary study. They are admired particularly for their focused professionalism, their skill in personal and professional organisation and their commitment to excellence. These qualities are demonstrated in the hard work invested on behalf of students, contributing to the overall academic success for the college community, as the following comments observe:

Exam passes are very high and I don't believe we have any different population to any, very ordinary school. I feel the difference is being staff, the huge amount of work that they do and it's that dedication (they now think part of that is the Catholic Character) that they have in themselves, that hard work ethic and they get the girls on board, you know, they do, really hard (MCYISF #8:12).

The staff here are very focused and goal-orientated ... they like to get on with the job (MCYIA #3:2FN).

Each person in their own right is wanting to improve all the time. I don't think there's one person who sits back and lets things happen; they're all in it together. Special development, they're all in it improving techniques in classrooms. They're all in it getting best results from kids. They're all in it challenging kids to achieve better and that's, I've often thought about why we do so well, because I think we're the best performing Catholic school in New Zealand and there must be a reason for it (MCYISF #9:5).

Perhaps, one answer for the participant above can be found in the willingness of Mercy College staff to "go out of their way" (MCYISF #4:6); MCYISF #15:3) to offer support to their students. Participants from the Board, students and staff share their admiration for those teachers who make themselves available to students beyond normal professional expectations:

Teachers are running tutorials for the girls to come back to. They've given their home phone numbers and "if you've got a problem, give me a ring. If I'm not there, I'll ring you back" and they're making themselves available at times when the girls can go back and discuss any problems they have. But the girls never need to do that, but they know it's there and I think that's really a sign of committed staff, you know, giving up their own time and it's not just through the week, it's through the weekends as well (MCYIB #1:6).

I am absolutely astounded the amount of time staff are prepared to give of their own to help students through. I mean, one department, there's one particular teacher that the HOD has actually gone in to the room, taken her away at lunchtime and shut the room down so he could let her have lunchtime (MCYISF #12:5).

Having experienced being at another college, the difference is extreme at Mercy College. The teachers are willing to do anything for you and give up their time to help you. Whereas at the other school, it was like more of their job and they were more disconnected and didn't care to much ... Other people I know and my friends have been helped in many ways. The school offers good guidance and help with anything that is bothering you or you can't do. This year the teachers have gone out of there way to help us achieve our goals and the support has been tremendous (MCY #23).

If it wasn't for one particular teacher at this school, I would probably you know be in my second year working full-time at McDonalds instead of about to sit bursary (MCY #8).

Amongst teachers, there is a perception of teaching as a vocation; an inner 'call' or conviction that "this was the right thing to do" (MCYISF #5:1), characterised by a "strong sense of service" (MCYISF #5:1). These teachers are admired by their peers as people whose spirituality is a model for others; their participation in college prayer and worship, including the weekly lunchtime Mass, signs of their deep love of God and their commitment to serving others. The presence of strong faith role models and access to spiritual guidance are considered by participants to be an important aspect of the spiritual development of students. In this light, they believe full-time college chaplaincy would provide a faith 'presence', a symbol of religious commitment that might help in reinforcing the relevance of faith to students' lives.

Key Special Character positions at Mercy College, particularly those of Principal, Director of Religious Studies and Head of Religious Education, are crucial to the preservation and promotion of the college as Christian, Catholic and Mercy, as the following comments explain:

If it doesn't filter from the top, it will never be at the bottom (MCYISF #15:8).

I think clear vision, you really do need a clear vision ... to be held by the principal but it also has to be held by key staff and then it has to be relayed in some way to everybody (MCYISF #13:10).

Mercy College's Principal is a woman of strong conviction; a person who exudes a great pride in the college and admiration for staff and students. She is a person who has dreams for the school; a person who believes passionately in what the school represents and is

continually striving to achieve. As the following remark indicates, strong Special Character leadership is important:

I think she holds up ideals very strongly. I think she runs a tight ship. Yeah, I think she's a good strong leader. That's what you must think of the school principal. You've got to be ... hold up the ideals and be good administratively (MCYIB #3:3).

The Director of Religious Studies and Head of Religious Education are also people who are strongly committed to the Special Character of the college. They exemplify the best qualities of Mercy College staff, carrying out their responsibilities with obvious skill and vision.

The importance of Special Character is keenly appreciated by members of the college culture who recognise that their role within the school requires that they provide effective and active support for the philosophy, values, beliefs and practices which the college represents. Teachers recognise that Special Character needs to be fully integrated as one participant explains:

I suppose in a way that the Special Character must come through in the teaching, must come through in the class, must be allowed to live in the classroom (MCYISF #10:5).

The privacy, dignity and religious freedom of non-Catholic staff are respected but the expectation that they actively support Special Character, for example by attending major liturgies, is clearly communicated to them. Indeed, a prime criterion for appointments to the staff is an applicant's willingness and ability to meet such an expectation.

The Special Character of the college is supported, particularly, by a core group of staff who are considered by others to be knowledgeable about and dedicated to the Special Character of the college. Associated with the college culture over a lengthy period, they are people who have "sort of grown with it" (MCYISF #11:2). However, several participants express concern about the future availability of teachers with the ability to teach Religious Education or with an understanding of Catholic educational philosophy that informs them of the significance of being a staff member in a Special Character school. In the light of

this concern, they believe that professional development in Special Character for all staff needs to be an ongoing priority at the college.

Mercy College staff are realistic about the personal costs of deep commitment to and belief in the worth of a Special Character education. They acknowledge that such a commitment draws on personal faith, spirituality, emotional and physical energy, particularly those people who bring a strong sense of mission and enthusiasm for the vision of the school. In the light of the relatively small size of Catholic secondary schools by comparison with its State counterparts and the subsequent 'sharing of the load' amongst fewer people, there is a grave danger of 'burnout' for such teachers.

In general, staff, at times, feel under pressure, of being on a "treadmill" (MCYIA #4:12), intensified by their passion for Special Character and their nature as "people who have an idealism about what they want to do" (MCYISF #6:16). There is a belief that staff need to care for their own spiritual needs, perhaps through the provision of staff retreat or reflection days. However, in spite of these concerns, teaching at Mercy College brings an "immense joy" (MCYISF #7:13) to participants, a sense of doing something meaningful and worthwhile. The Head of Religious Education expresses her feelings about her role and the rewards it brings:

It's a satisfying job. It's a rewarding job. It's demanding. When I'm tired, I think, I wish I just had a nice easy job, no demands made on me. But really, responding to challenges is a priority in life and there are lots and lots of challenges. You're educating academically but you're also influencing the whole person and in a Catholic school you can do that, very freely, well I can. Not just teaching a branch of knowledge - I'm very enthusiastic about the branches of knowledge that I teach - but if you get the opportunity you hope to influence them to be what your ideals are for people. As I said before, working in an environment that believes in what it teaches, which are the things I believe in, that's a big plus. I have taught in the state system and I'm not knocking it, its just that this was a bonus for me. I feel very at home in this environment. I hope that doesn't mean I've got too old and I should be moving on (MCYISF #13:14)!

Personal and spiritual development

Staff, Board members and students share a conviction that the school makes a significant contribution in the lives of its members. Senior students believe that the college has enabled them to develop personally, giving them new confidence in themselves and others. As one student leader reflects, it is an appreciation students develop over time, in tune with their growing maturity:

When you're younger, you always go "Mercy College. No, I don't like it here. I hate it here". As you get older, you start to appreciate it ... you learn to appreciate it. There will be some who didn't like Mercy College... I can't think of any specific ones, but it's been overshadowed by how much I've enjoyed it (MCYIS #1:14).

An observation borne out by a younger student, who on meeting this researcher for the first time, loudly proclaimed "this school sucks" (MCYOS#4:4)!

Students speak of their appreciation of the educational benefits they have gained, anticipating that these will enhance their future career opportunities. They believe that they have developed important skills and a "high quality education" (MCYD #14:19) enabling them to value themselves and others; to set and reach realistic goals and develop confidently as people and as women. Participant responses suggest that Mercy College students can and do look forward to the future with hopes of success:

Okay, it's given me a lot of confidence, probably because of the smallness of the school and possible because it's an all girls' school ... and when I go out now, I'm not going to be shy. I probably came in as a very shy kid; going out as a very loud kid, but, no, that was good and the values you get taught, it's all within; you can't complain (MCYIST #2:24).

Definitely made me grow in terms of what I am today and what I can become tomorrow (MCYIST #2:23).

Knowing that my talents, whatever they are, will be appreciated and supported has given me the confidence to use my talents and enabled me to grow as a person and develop my own set of ethics and opinions in a 'safe' environment (MCY #41).

It has made me more of a 'unique' person ie I have been able to be me without having to change to meet others expectations. I have definitely grown whilst at the school to become an independent and happy young woman (MCY #22).

These perceptions are reinforced by a comment from a Board member who observes that Mercy College gives its students:

Self-respect, self-esteem; helps them be proud of who they are, proud as women; a sense of achievement; fulfilling their potential. That's what is offered. Whether they take it or not is another matter (MCYIB #4:4FN).

The college offers some students an opportunity to change; personally, academically and socially. One such student expresses her gratitude for the chance to modify prior negative behaviour and to experience new success in her life:

This school has put me on the strait and narrow. Before I came here I was really naughty, getting into trouble all the time. But for some reason, it all stopped and my academic record has risen so much. I have set my goal to go to law school next year. If I was still at my other school I doubt I would be even at school (MCY #23).

The development of personal value systems is nurtured. Student participants share a belief that the education they have received has made them more open and receptive to others; to value and respect differences and develop strong interpersonal relationships and stable friendships. A staff member and a Board member express a hope that the values the college represents will bear fruit in the lives of students after they leave:

I think it's the value it instils in the girls; a life of long commitment, the family values, the caring, sharing values, looking out for one another. They're values you take with you for the rest of your life ... As I say, it instils values, Christian values in girls who perhaps don't experience it out there with their family and I would say that later on when they become involved, or touch on wanting to become a Christian, they've always got that background in being involved at school and knowing a little bit about where it goes and what to do with it and all those sorts of things (MCYISF #15:5).

I think they do come out with a different attitude to them; different view of the world, definitely ... It's an attitude of integrity, of honesty and caring for others and a sense of tradition (MCYIB #3:13).

Mercy College provides a sound, comprehensive education in religion and in human spirituality. Students value the knowledge that they have gained about the Catholic faith tradition, but also the opportunity to think critically about human and moral issues. However by contrast, the following comments from two students reveal hostility towards personal conformity to a Catholic Christian lifestyle,

I believe in some of what is said, but I disagree with a lot of the beliefs and how we are just supposed to accept what is said (MCY#25).

I now definitely do not ever want to become a Christian as I do not believe in the whole God (Jesus) thing and think that they are (the Church) not really in touch with the rest of the community (MCY\$34).

Students at Mercy College clearly hold the view that religious faith and spirituality are freely chosen personal options as the following responses illustrate:

I don't go to Church outside of school. However, I don't feel that this excludes me from having a relationship with God, because I am Catholic and I do believe in God and I express my faith in my own way (MCY #22).

I take what I want from the beliefs and make my own decisions on what I believe. I go to Church most of the time and participate (MCY #35).

I go to Mass every Sunday and actually enjoy it! I respect the Church but don't always necessarily agree with some of the rules or the ways things are done (MCY #28).

I am a practising Catholic, attending church regularly on a Sunday. I also see the Church as a source of recreation, playing in music groups, going to Youth groups (MCY #9).

The majority of students consider themselves fortunate to have been supported in the personal practice of their faith, confident that they have been part of a culture where others share their values and beliefs. Special Character rituals and practices have, for them, reinforced their faith and given them a sense of belonging. However, such spiritual bonding appears to apply more to their membership of the Mercy College Catholic culture rather than to a parish culture, as indicated by student survey results that show that only 8 students consider that they have a regular association with local Catholic parishes. The following responses are typical expressions of their views:

I am not a catholic [sic] at all, but have been attending this catholic school for 7 years. I have attended numerous numbers of catholic masses and liturgy and find it very 'peaceful' and 'relaxing'. I find out that I'll find comfort with 'God' and the Catholic Church ... Attending School Masses and liturgy made me understand and know the catholic procedure quite well because it is the 'only' faith I have even been in touch with. I could say that I rely on it now (MCY #32).

I am a regular attender at church and feel that God and my faith are very important on my life and in my success in life. Without my faith I feel I would miss out on a big part of life and 'knowing' myself ... because I have had the opportunities to participate more within masses and in prayer, I have come closer to God (MCY #42).

I am not afraid to tell people I am a Catholic and this is what I believe (MCY #4).

I'm not catholic, but have been brought close to the church through my teaching and Mass etc. I now regard myself as catholic personally even if I aren't ... This school has given me a great deal of options as to the faith I should choose. They don't push you, yet they give knowledge and beliefs of the catholic church. The school has challenged us to question our faith (MCY #23).

I don't know if this school has really influenced my personal faith. I am still a really typical teenager - I believe, but don't practise often. I believe because I have been brought up with it. I will go back to the church when I am older. I will also bring my children - if any- to being catholic (MCY #21).

It allows you to discover your own beliefs by not forcing you to believe in what they believe. It has made me believe in it more, because I know I personally formed that faith (MCY #12).

It is interesting to note that for some students, the college has given them a new courage in relation to their faith. Others value the opportunity to explore the options of religion and faith, and yet for others, the school is perceived as basically reinforcing a faith that already exists.

Conclusion

The effects of the rich Special Character features of Mercy College on its members are wide ranging. It is clear that bonding amongst members gives rise to an environment that nurtures, supports and sustains them personally. They share a sense of purpose and commitment, leading to an intangible, yet real sense of school spirit, embodied in the diverse nature of their communal energy and activity. Different members appear to gain, from the Special Character culture of the school, different benefits, according to different personal needs and goals. Teachers give generously of their time and talent, gaining a high level of professional satisfaction in doing the best they can for the good of students and their families, convinced that their contribution can 'make a difference. Some students value most the educational opportunities they have received; others, the development of enduring friendships. For some, the school has given them a chance to reach confidently for a future they believed would be beyond their reach, enabling them to develop new skills and a new awareness of their need for personal discipline.

It is clear from students' comments, however, that when it comes to evaluating the outcomes of the school's effectiveness in promoting a Catholic Christian lifestyle, no one can predict the individual choices of students in terms of their faith and religious practice. In short, the long-term effects of the Special Character education provided by Mercy College will ultimately be determined by each and every student as she responds to the challenges of her own context and time.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

SPECIAL CHARACTER: ITS NATURE AND MEANING

The findings of this research show that Special Character is a phenomenon that characterises the uniqueness of each Catholic school culture; something which makes the school 'different', 'special' and 'distinctive' from all others. It is formally and uniformly described in key documentation, such as the School Charter, Integration Agreement and Prospectus, using what appears to be a generic format with additions specific to each school and its founding heritage. However, the significance of Special Character is implicit in such documents rather than explicit, in that they refer to the school's right to reflect the teachings and values of Jesus Christ through its teaching and religious practice. Other than this, they do not specify the features that constitute the concrete differences between the school, as a State Integration school with a Special Character, and other schools within the New Zealand State education system.

Participants in both Champagnat College and Mercy College express some difficulty in personally defining the phenomenon, but nevertheless are emphatic about its importance for the continued existence of their schools. This suggests that the phenomenon is largely intuitive, subconsciously grasped by members of the cultures, although its meaning, for some participants, has clearly been influenced by their study and knowledge of Catholic education philosophy as articulated in official Church documents. There is, overall, a strong general agreement amongst participants that the core source of the 'difference' that is Special Character is to be found in the faith and practices of the Christian religion, specifically that of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Special Character nature of each school is multi-dimensional. It draws not only from the traditions of the Catholic Church, but also the specific religious order which founded

each school and the unique current culture of the school. Perceived as capable of building a strong inclusive school culture, it provides a base for the development of common identity and purpose. As Catholic, it offers a holistic education for its students based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ; a vision of life that permeates every aspect of the school's culture, creating a spirituality experienced and shared by members. As Mercy or Marist, another rich cultural dimension is added to the culture of the school, bringing its own educational philosophy, values and beliefs, and expressed in ways that are unique to each school culture and its context. This founding tradition is capable of being transmitted over and between generations of members; an intangible process, in the main, that occurs unconsciously through the dynamics of daily life and activity. Tradition links the school with a worldwide network of other schools and institutions that work under the umbrella of the founding religious order. The Catholic and Founding dimensions of Special Character are interrelated with current cultural reality, interpreted by each generation. Findings reveal a firm conviction amongst participants, including students, school leaders, staff and parents, that the distinctive features of the school that constitute its Special Character, including its historical traditions, must be preserved and maintained if the school culture is to remain true to its nature.

Described as an 'atmosphere' or 'feeling', Special Character nature of each school is capable of evoking strong emotion. It is most keenly experienced in intangible, yet powerful ways such as ritual, celebration, special events and symbolism and determines the quality of relationships that are perceived by members as strong, supportive and precious. Illusive in definition, participants use metaphor as a means of expressing their understanding of the nature of their school's Special Character. 'Community'¹ and 'family' are most frequently used, implying strong bonds of care, friendship, affirmation and acceptance between members, regardless of status, role, ethnicity or gender. People 'feel at home' in the school, an experience quickly appreciated by visitors and newcomers to the school culture. It is interesting to note that participants in each school strongly believe that

¹ The use of this metaphor in relation to the Catholic school is discussed more fully in the next chapter where emergent themes of the research are explored.

compared with other schools. In addition to these common metaphors, as members struggle such positive relationships are a unique characteristic and strength of their particular school to encapsulate the Special Character of their college culture, they have developed their own key phrases that pop up again and again in their language. Champagnat College is a 'safe place'; responsive to the needs of its students; each member co-responsible for creating a place of security and stability for others. By comparison, Mercy College is a place of 'opportunity' where people can 'make a difference'. Members of this school attempt, also, to define the significance of the phenomenon; it is something that determines the very nature of the school, 'what makes the school what it is', and a driving force for all activity.

Summary

This research has shown that the phenomenon of Special Character is a multi-dimensional, intangible reality for members of the school culture, one that makes the school distinctive and unique from all others. It is most easily described and explained through the use of metaphor, particularly 'community' and 'family'. The quality of relationships between members of the school culture is perceived as a unique strength arising from the Special Character nature of each school, reinforcing a sense of belonging, of common identity with others, and stimulating loyalty and school pride amongst members. Justifying the existence of the school, the distinctive features that give substance to its Special Character nature must be preserved and maintained by members of the culture.

SPECIAL CHARACTER: ITS CONTENT

Philosophy

It is clear from the findings that, as Catholic schools, the education provided by Champagnat College and Mercy College is based on the worldview and educational philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church. However, this foundational philosophy is integrated with another: the founding tradition of the religious order that established the

school contributes, in its own right, a more specific core philosophy of life and education which shapes the culture of all its schools. These combined, interrelated and mutually supporting philosophical foundations provide the school with a system of core values and beliefs that in turn determine school norms and practices. The content of Special Character therefore is revealed in a study of the basic philosophy, values, beliefs, norms and activities of each school.

It is apparent that the Catholic nature of both schools, reflected in school documentation and participants' responses, is such that all school activity, in effect, is an extension of the mission of the Roman Catholic Church. Worship, prayer, service, building a sense of community and partnership with others are all keystones of the Church and therefore of the school. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the blueprint for decision-making, action and behaviour. Values such as social justice, tolerance, love, freedom, and respect for the dignity of each individual are core Christian values, inspiring and motivating members of the school culture. The school is intended to be a culture in which members may experience the best qualities of Christian community, encouraging them to live lives of faith in Christ, and inviting them to committed membership of the Roman Catholic Church.

Each founding tradition brings a philosophy shaped by its own distinctive charism or gift; its own philosophical 'flavour' that guides the school culture and is modelled by its members, particularly by members of founding specific Religious order. This philosophy lies at the heart of the school's mission and purpose. The Marist foundation for example, brings a family focused orientation, and a commitment to support the disadvantaged of the society it serves. As a Mercy school, Mercy College seeks to provide an education that will empower women, develop them as leaders and inspire them to use their personal gifts and talents in the service of other people and society. However, in spite of some philosophical differences, findings reveal strong common themes of service, love and compassion. Both schools highlight the importance of developing strong supportive emotional climates, emphasising the importance of taking personal responsibility for the care of self and others. In a sense, the core philosophy of each founding tradition contributes a vision of life and

education, and presents an idealistic image of the human person in relationship with God and others.

Research findings reveal another philosophical dimension interacting with those of the Catholic Church and the founding institution. Each school culture is made up of unique individuals who bring their own philosophies of life and education based on their unique life experiences. It is significant that on the whole, these individual personal philosophies bear a close resemblance to and reinforcement of the Catholic, founding philosophy that officially underpins school activity and culture. For Champagnat, there appears to be a focus on encouraging students to show courage in the face of adversity; to face up to life's challenges with faith and hope; to value themselves and others as unique people whose dignity should be respected. In Mercy College, women are presented as potential leaders, utilising their gifts in the interests of social justice and making the best of all opportunities. Once again, however, the findings show common content between even these personal philosophical positions. Striving for excellence is common to both schools, as is commitment to justice. The work of both schools is perceived in terms of a mission to care for others. Both aim to encourage and nurture in students a strong personal religious faith and spirituality which will continue to influence their adult lives. Each philosophical dimension, therefore, appears to work dynamically with the others to define and clarify the basic core purpose of each school.

Purpose

Champagnat College and Mercy College are united in the common purpose of promoting the Christian lifestyle, in particular the values, beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. However, the specific way in which this is done is influenced by the vision of the founding heritage. Each seeks to work in partnership with its community to provide an education that will develop the whole person; that is, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, socially and physically. The purpose of both schools is the development of each student as a responsible and responsive citizen, who will make a positive contribution to society.

Participants, who have a religious background in the Catholic Church or in another Christian denomination, share a hope that the education provided by the school will reinforce Gospel values in the lives of every student, enabling them to appreciate Christian community and enhance their personal faith and spirituality. It is apparent from the findings that a significant cross-section of participants, including members who have little formal background in Catholic educational philosophy or experience in a Catholic school, has a strong sense of mission, consciously and unconsciously linked to the educational purposes of the Roman Catholic Church. It is also clear from participants' responses and expectations set out in school documentation, that those with views or beliefs in opposition to those implicitly and explicitly grounded within the school's Special Character philosophy, will experience a degree of cultural alienation.

Values

In terms of the core values of each school, there is much common ground between Champagnat College and Mercy College; not surprising given that these shared values are founded on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ as portrayed in Scripture. This research reveals a basic belief in the goodness of each person; that each individual member of the school culture is unique, entitled to be treated with respect and dignity. This does not however, imply that the core values of these schools exist in some kind of stasis, a stable state of unity of purpose and action. The implication of such values as justice, respect, freedom and truth, requires daily interpretation; a need for discernment by and dialogue between members in order to decide how they might be applied in specific concrete situations. This is highlighted in the discernment process that occurred in Mercy College in relation to the Fully Funded Option issue, and in Champagnat College, in the discernment of who should be enrolled as a 'second chance' student and its implications for the rest of the school culture. Another example of 'values in action', is the approach of both schools in relation to matters of discipline. Perceived in the light of the value of the individual, subsequent action is determined by a spirit of reconciliation and a desire to motivate change in the behaviour and attitude of the 'offending' student. Other values common to both

school cultures are acceptance of each person; respect and reverence for religion and its practices; compassion and care of others, honesty and hard work. A sense of justice appears fundamental to the operation of each school, expressed through interpersonal relationships and in the response of members to situations of hardship and individual circumstances. It is reflected in the exercise of school systems and policies. Loyalty and pride in the school is evident in Champagnat College and Mercy College. Success and achievement are affirmed.

Norms

Several core norms stand out in both schools as each strives to interpret its values within its own unique cultural context. Students are urged to set high standards in terms of personal character development, academic performance and sporting achievement. They are urged to set themselves clear goals and to strive to attain them. Supporting others within the school community is taken as a norm in both schools and applies to all groups, including staff. Working together as a team is valued both for its community-building benefits and as a reflection of the school's Special Character. However, some norms are more school-specific. For example, in Champagnat College, it is expected that students will represent their college with pride and loyalty when in public; to behave inappropriately in public is not only perceived to be an individual shame but a reflection on the integrity of the whole school community. There is also strong positive peer pressure at work amongst students who take initiatives to deal with conflict in their ranks. Although these traits are also reflected in the Mercy College culture, other more dominant norms appear. For example, there is a strong 'message' to staff and students alike that they should strive to be their personal best, expressed through their willingness to follow the rules of the school and take personal responsibility for themselves and their work. Initiatives are encouraged and supported in the school, especially in response to the needs of others.

Summary

Each school has an integrated philosophy with three clear dimensions arising from its Catholic identity, its founding tradition and the personal philosophy of individual members of the culture. These three philosophical elements work together as a framework for the school's activities, shaping the core values of the culture. Interpreted by the school in the light of its own unique context, these values set the norms of the school. Some are unique features of the school culture; some are in common with the other research school.

TRANSMISSION OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

Participants in Champagnat College and Mercy College firmly believe, as mentioned earlier, that the school's Special Character needs to be upheld within the current culture and preserved for future generations. To this end, documentation from both schools insists that the Special Character of the school be integrated throughout the life of the whole school. In other words, the Catholic, Mercy or Marist Character should be reflected in all features of the school culture, including its activity and practices. It is perceived that the integrity of the school as a Catholic school rests on the effectiveness and authenticity of this integration.

Catholic practices

The promotion of Catholic practices within each school is a fundamental expression of its Special Character and in this respect, both school cultures are very similar. The liturgical year of the Catholic Church provides each with a seasonal structure based on the life of Christ and the Church. Each college celebrates important Church feasts with prayer and worship, although differences exist in the exact shape of these celebrations, determined to some extent by demographic features of the college culture, the availability of a college chaplain and individual strengths of school personnel. Each school holds three full school

celebrations of Eucharist, at similar times in the school year. Whilst maintaining a respect for religious freedom of its members, each school considers attendance at important events of communal worship compulsory for all members of the college culture. Student participation is high. In each school, students take an active and significant part in liturgical leadership and a liturgy committee is open to student membership. Participants describe these key worship events as deeply moving and significant.

Prayer

Prayer, as a normal part of the school day, is perceived by members to be vital for the development of Christian community and personal spirituality. Students in both schools are comfortable with prayer; reverence is expected and respected. They demonstrate a competence in spontaneous and formal prayer traditions, frequently linking daily prayer with significant events and situations in the communal life of the school and those in the lives of individual members. Some staff are skilled and relaxed about daily prayer with students, in staff morning reflections and at the beginning of meetings. However, in both schools, it is apparent that not all staff and students experience this 'comfort level', particularly those who have little religious background.

Retreats

Each school provides an annual retreat experience for students at every level of the school, and in both cases, this is prepared and presented off-site by the Director of Religious Studies with support from Religious Education Department staff. A focus on personal spirituality, relationships with God and with others, expressed through prayer, reflection and activities is a feature of the retreats. Students from Champagnat and Mercy College testify to the worth of such days and appear to greatly value the retreat experience.

School organisation

The leadership of Champagnat College and of Mercy College is very aware of the need to reflect Special Character through organisational structures. To this end, they have ensured that school communications with their respective communities include illustrations, prayers, events and school activities that have a distinctive Special Character 'flavour'. Assemblies are important culture-building activities in both schools, although once again, the style and content of these varies in line with the contextual features of each school. Both, however, incorporate a basic structure of prayer, reflection, Scripture readings and hymns reflecting the Catholic Christian identity of both schools. The Catholic/ Mercy or Marist Character of both schools is evident in the activity, practices and priorities of Boards of Trustees, and in the case of Mercy College, the Board of Proprietors. Meetings begin with prayer and reflection; provision is made for on-going staff development in Special Character; and core philosophies, values, beliefs and norms form the basis of decision-making.

Induction and professional development

This research has found that induction of new members to the culture of the school is both formal and informal. New staff are assisted by the inclusion of key Special Character documentation in the Staff handbook or manual, supported by input from the Principal and/or members of staff who bring an in-depth understanding and involvement in Special Character matters. It should be noted, however, that in both schools, formal induction is of a limited nature. The focus is strong at the beginning of the school year, but new staff or students joining the school later in the year receive minimal formal orientation.

Staff development time, usually in the form of a whole staff in-service day, is set aside for formal Special Character input and reflection. A co-ordinator appointed by the respective proprietors is available to assist in the preparation and delivery of such days; a sign that proprietors are keenly aware of the need for staff development in the founding tradition. This is particularly important in the light of the inevitably decreasing involvement of

members of the Religious orders in their schools. It appears that in both schools, much of the induction into the Special Character of the school culture is informal and relatively subconscious. Student induction is also fairly minimal across all levels, emphasis being given to incoming Year 7&9 students. However, in both schools, key staff are aware of the need for greater on-going formal induction and are in the process of planning for this in future years. The remark from one participant that people learn about the Special Character of the school through a process of 'osmosis' is a graphic, but seemingly accurate, description of what takes place.

Special events

Full school celebrations and special events are significant means of transmitting the culture of any school. At Champagnat College and Mercy College, these events are shaped by the 'stories' of the founder and founding institution, interpreted by the current membership of the school community and endowed with renewed meaning. The respective Founder's Day is celebrated in quite unique ways in each school, but the focus appears common to both; that is, the celebration of the identity, history and tradition of the school culture in the light of its founding hero/heroine. Senior students and long-serving staff provide an important sense of continuity as they engage other newer members in the traditional rituals and activities. High levels of participation by both staff and students reinforce a sense of ownership and belonging, and participants in both schools speak of the emotive nature of such experiences. It is apparent, when comparing other special events, that each culture has, over the years, developed its own deeply meaningful cultural experiences that serve to highlight the core values of the school. For example, Champagnat College has its Malaga, with its Pacific Island bonds and commitment to service; at Mercy College, the Coin trail and Leavers' rituals celebrate both service and the empowerment of women as leaders.

Symbols

The religious and spiritual nature of these two Special Character schools is very evident in the skill of members in the use of symbolism and their understanding of these. The school motto has almost sacred significance for staff and students. Although obviously different, reflecting different founding traditions, each motto has become a 'rallying call' expressing the heart of the founding vision, capable of evoking loyalty and pride in the school. The singing of the school song at assemblies, school celebrations and for students of Champagnat College, even on the bus ride home from a sporting event, is a deeply emotive experience of cultural identity and unity. Beyond this, other key symbols relate more specifically to the unique nature of each school culture; Champagnat College and its College Code; Mercy College, the foyer and lack of a chapel. Students competently and creatively develop symbols to express their thoughts and are obviously familiar and comfortable with traditional Catholic symbols, utilising them in daily prayer and worship.

Teaching

The Religious Education curriculum in each school, compulsory for all students, is the formal means of integrating Special Character in college life. It provides not only for the development of knowledge, skills and practices in relation to the Catholic religious tradition, but is instrumental in the provision of opportunities for the development of the personal spirituality and faith of students. Both departments base their programmes on the National Religious Education syllabus, approved by the Bishops of New Zealand, but these have been adapted to suit local contexts and needs. For example, at Champagnat College there is a broad life-orientated approach to formal teaching; whilst at Mercy College, a more academic subject approach is utilised. Significant differences in the religious backgrounds of students attending each school appear to account for the different approaches. The response of students to Religious Education also varies between the schools. At Champagnat College, students appear to be more accepting of traditional Catholic Christian teaching; students at Mercy College display a more critical approach to

religious issues and programme content. In both schools, the Religious Education staff have key roles in promoting and upholding the Special Character of their schools, and undertake their responsibilities with passion and commitment.

Informal teaching of core values and beliefs occurs mainly through informal interactions between students and teachers, reinforced by the norms of each school. The 'Champagnat College Way' is a deeply meaningful phrase for staff and students, which serves as a touchstone for behaviour, attitude and action; an unofficial, but readily accepted and understood code encapsulating the heart of the college's Special Character. At Mercy College, sacred values and beliefs are both promoted and modelled by highly respected members of staff, known for their deep personal faith and spirituality, supported also by the Pastoral Care network of the school.

Environment

The physical environments of Champagnat College and Mercy College reflect the Special Character of each school, bringing a concrete reminder of the school's history, tradition and rationale for current goals. For example, at Champagnat, the green sheds and the Religious Education block serve as a symbol of the early development of the college. At Mercy College, the pressure on space is a constant reminder of the growth of the student roll from its humble beginnings with 15 students and the founding principal. Special environmental symbols have unique meaning for each culture; the Sid Stone at Champagnat, a symbol of devoted service to the school; the cross on an early map of the property at Mercy, a symbol of a dream that became a reality. Photographs of former principals, students and staff; historical artefacts of the school and the order; paintings of the founder, all create links between the current school culture and its past, reminding members that the Special Character of the school has endured and remains relevant. The location of community houses for members of the founding orders are treasured reminders of the commitment and dedication of earlier founding staff and visible symbols of the Special Character relationships between the current school cultures and its proprietors.

Constantly referred to in school documentation and by staff, the story of the founder provides, for each school culture, a symbolic meaningful framework for its philosophy, values and beliefs, highlighting personal qualities to be emulated. Creating a sense of belonging, it reminds members of the original vision and purpose of its historical roots. It names the school and defines the heart of its mission; for example, Champagnat College's commitment to those students most disadvantaged, bringing them hope and security; Mercy College's dream of empowering young women to succeed in order to make a difference.

Modelling

Structured role modelling, that is, deliberately integrated into the organisational life of the school and non-structured modelling as the informal sharing of values, attitudes and beliefs that occur during ordinary interactions between people, are important means for the transmission of the philosophy, values, beliefs and norms of each school. Participants believe that such modelling serves to authenticate the 'Special Character message' for students and others, bringing rigour to any evaluation of school culture. College magazines, newsletters and assemblies are all ways of presenting appropriate role models of Christian living and school success. These appear to be relative to the particular vision and ideal of each school culture. For example, at Champagnat, students are presented with heroes/heroines from a Pacific Island background; at Mercy, stories, news items and talks by successful women, especially graduates of the college, are more evident. In both schools, however, the provision of such role models is deliberate policy; planned and integrated with school structures and organisation.

Unstructured modelling; that is, unplanned and unconscious, appears to be an important feature of Special Character transmission, reinforcing the more formal strategies employed by the school to teach values, beliefs and norms. Primarily provided by a range of members within in the school community, it is the fruit of positive interpersonal relationships. Participants share an understanding of the importance of such modelling of cultural ideals for students' personal and spiritual development and the overall health of the culture. They

believe that consistency between values and action is an important means by which insiders and outsiders will critically evaluate the Special Character of the school. In other words, they acknowledge its importance as a test of credibility for the school culture in terms of its values and beliefs, and can readily name key members, staff and students, who are exemplars of what the school represents. For participants in both schools, members of the founding religious order, particularly former staff, are the most significant, valid and credible models of the philosophy, values and beliefs of the Special Character culture of their school.

Relationships

The quality of interpersonal relationships evident in each school appears to be a powerful and significant means of transmitting the Special Character of the school culture. The findings of this research has shown that the maintenance of positive relationships in the lives of participants is an important indicator of the effectiveness of formal articulation, grounded in the daily reality of school life for students and staff. Members of both schools perceive them as 'happy' places, where people are welcomed, cared for and supported. Relationships between staff and students are described as warm, close, and friendly, giving rise to positive bonds that enhance teaching and learning. In both cases, the quality of such relationships is believed to be a distinctive characteristic of the school, drawing inspiration from the qualities and values of the founding hero/heroine. It is interesting to note that participants in both schools attribute the positive nature of relationships to the relatively small size of the school in contrast with large State secular schools in the region that have rolls in excess of 1500 students. The size of the Champagnat College school roll at just under 400 students would seem to support such a view. However, in the case of Mercy College, a question must be raised about the factual reality of the perception in terms of the nearly 900 students who attend the college.

Students at both schools speak with pride of the close friendships developed through their membership of the school culture. They appear at ease with each other, regardless of ethnic

or socio-economic background, building strong bonds that endure even after leaving the college. Staff relationships too are regarded as positive; people work together as a team, committed to a common purpose - the educational and personal empowerment of their students. Although tensions arise in these schools as in any school, there is an honesty and openness in their professional and personal interactions. This is particularly evident at Mercy College where staffroom relationships are characterised by a great sense of fun. Staff and leaders of both schools express a desire to build a stronger partnership with families. Although the level of parental involvement at each school varies, both are endeavouring to increase family participation in school life in keeping with the spirit of their charters and school policies.

Special features of Special Character transmission

Two features of the schools appear to support other transmission strategies. Firstly, each school has strong links which seem to enhance and strengthen their traditional connections with the Catholic Church, the founding order and the community they serve. For example, Champagnat College has a vibrant 'old boys' network, operating on formal and informal levels. In both colleges, past pupils are generous in their practical support of the school, frequently visiting as guest speakers at assemblies or simply 'catching up' with staff on a spontaneous informal basis. Champagnat college's Marist Character enables it to sustain close relationships with other Marist schools in the Pacific Islands, a feature which is also common to Mercy College and its Mercy connections, both in New Zealand and internationally. It is common too for past students to enrol their sons or daughters at the colleges, or to encourage other family members to do so. Both Principals are active members of various Principals' associations, maintaining positive professional working relationships with others in the Catholic and State educational networks.

Secondly, a sense of continuity is evident at both schools. Long-serving staff are considered an asset to Special Character, preserving stories, traditions and symbols and bringing these to life for each new generations of staff and students. Especially important

are those staff members who are trained and experienced not only in Catholic education but also in Marist or Mercy education. Each school has artefacts that link the present with the recent and distant history of the order and college life. The presence of Sisters and Brothers as members of Boards of Trustees consolidates a sense of continuity with the work, values, philosophy, traditions and goals of those who dedicated their lives to the colleges. Participants obviously value this continuity of educational vision. There is a passion for preserving the traditional foundation of the school's Special Character, and participants express their concern that the decline in active involvement of members of the founding Religious Order may result in a loss of this vision. Indeed, this was perceived as the worst possible future scenario for their schools.

Summary

It is evident from findings that a range of strategies is required to integrate the multi-dimensional nature of the school's Special Character with the reality of current school culture. Transmission activities are all interrelated, creating a dynamic philosophical foundation for the life of the college. Some strategies are conscious, planned 'events' which are a normal part of school organisational and educational activities; for example, prayers before meetings; Special Character content in newsletters. However, others, such as modelling and relating, are fundamentally subconscious, growing out of the lived experience and interactions of members of the culture. No one transmission method appears to carry the full 'story', but all build on each other. They are interpreted in different ways by members of each school culture, and made relevant for the different contexts of the schools.

THE EFFECTS OF SPECIAL CHARACTER ON THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL

The influence of Special Character on the culture of each school gives rise to four major outcomes, which are distinctive enough to warrant attention and are common to both

schools. The first three appear to create a cultural environment that enhances the learning of students, bringing them a sense of hope, success and achievement. The final effect is one closely related to the ultimate aim of both schools to develop young people with a Christian perspective on human life, faith and spirituality.

Bonding

The first feature is the high degree of emotional bonding that appears between members of the cultures, which participants believe to be a unique characteristic of and strength of their school. Bonding occurs across all groups, students, staff, past pupils and parents. It is expressed in the long service of many people in teaching, membership of parents' groups and other school support networks. A distinctive feature of both schools is the great love of the school that members feel, expressed through their commitment to the care and support of its community. Students speak of their appreciation of the hard work of staff on their behalf, and the care, acceptance and support of their peers. Dissatisfied students, who leave for other schools in the area, frequently return after a brief absence. In both schools, it is normal for staff and students to attend funerals of past pupils, staff or their families and the level of support given to those in bereavement or other distress is both generous and practical.

School spirit

Secondly, the school spirit of Champagnat College and Mercy College stands out as a feature of their cultures. Although very different, each college has a distinctive atmosphere that embodies its core values and basic philosophy, inspiring its members. Champagnat College community members are very conscious of the school's distinctive spirit, believing it to be a particular strength of their school. The 'Spirit of Champagnat College' is understood even by the newest members as something to be respected by everyone; something which guides behaviour and action; something precious to be handed on to

others. Mercy College members do not use the expression 'school spirit' so succinctly, but the dominant use of the word 'opportunity' in conversation and documentation and its links with school values suggests that it is an accurate indicator of Mercy College spirit. Service, too, is a strong feature of this culture. Students are encouraged to take initiatives to serve, to make a practical response to the needs of people in New Zealand society and internationally. It is a feature handed on to each generation of students through the student leadership structure of the school. Both of these indicators of Mercy College school spirit whilst not formalised as at Champagnat college nevertheless resonate with the message of the unofficial school motto from Micah and the dominant school mission to 'Make a difference'.

Teachers' work

The philosophical foundation of both schools appears to influence staff attitudes to their work. Teachers and other staff seem to be motivated by an inner conviction of the worth of their service to the school, rather than merely by contractual obligation. This creates a working climate characterised by a willingness to exceed normal professional expectations, illustrated in the outstanding levels of care and support extended to students and their families. Although some staff are considered more passive in relation to the Special Character values and norms of the schools, there is, in each school, a core group of highly committed, enthusiastic staff who are passionate about the school culture and its aims. Differences arise in the ways such high level of professionalism and devotion are expressed in each school culture arising from different contexts and needs. At Champagnat College, for example, staff members are respected for their willingness to go 'beyond the call of duty' in offering practical compassionate help to students in need. At Mercy College, staff are admired for the extra work they are prepared to invest so that students can achieve success. In both contexts, teaching is considered more than a job; it is a 'calling', a vocation characterised by a spirit of giving and self-sacrifice, modelling the Catholic Christian Mercy/Marist ethic. However, common to both groups, is the high price of such commitment. Participants relate their concerns about heavy workloads, emotional and

physical exhaustion and the dangers of 'burnout'. The relative small size of the schools is perceived to be a factor in teacher workload. In both schools, staff are expected to actively support the Special Character of the school. Concerns are expressed, however, about the continuing availability of Catholic teachers in the future, able and willing to play a major role in the maintenance and preservation of the college's Special character.

Personal and spiritual development

Both schools have the ultimate aim of developing each student as a human person, confident in themselves and others; hopeful about their future career paths and inspired by strong values, a deep faith and personal spirituality. Students at both colleges testify to the personal growth that they have experienced since attending the college. They speak of gaining confidence in knowledge and skills and of making real progress in academic performance. They perceive their school as having provided them with the best learning opportunities, reinforced by the energy, commitment and hard work of staff. Some express a belief that the education they have received has changed their lives. Although students from the two schools differ in terms of their attitude to and relationship with the institutional Church, they acknowledge that their own personal faith in God has been strengthened. With only a few exceptions, students clearly value the Religious Education they have received, believing that, as a result of these programmes of study, they are more able to make a free personal faith choice. The development of strong interpersonal relationships, in addition to significant personal and spiritual growth, appears then to be the dominant benefits of the Special Character education provided by both colleges.

Summary

According to these findings, the Special Character nature of both school cultures creates a positive environment and a sound basis for learning. It establishes a clear system of values and norms that enhance the development of positive relationships between groups and

individuals, motivating them to work in partnership to achieve common goals. Benefits for students extend beyond educational and academic achievement. A Special Character education develops in them a perception of human life and relationship, that, participants hope will continue to influence them into their future adult lives.

CHAPTER EIGHT: EMERGENT THEMES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR A GROUNDED THEORY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER CULTURE

This chapter discusses four major themes that emerge from the findings of this research. These themes are linked in content and focus with the four key questions listed in Chapter One that have provided an overall guiding framework for the research. Firstly, the nature and meaning of Special Character as a phenomenon is examined through an exploration of Catholic School culture, specifically the complexity that ultimately shapes each school, giving it a distinctive Special Character. Secondly, the significance and influence of foundational traditions as the culturally integrated content of Special Character are examined. The dynamic of cultural transmission in the Catholic school is discussed and, lastly, shared spirituality as a Special Character cultural phenomenon is considered. The final section of the chapter addresses the significance of Special Character for school culture and ties together all four research questions. Finally, it proposes a grounded theory of Special Character culture in New Zealand Catholic secondary schools.

CULTURAL CONFLUENCE: RIVERS OF MEANING

Bryk, Lee & Holland (1993) in their study of Catholic schools in the United States, observe that:

Anyone who has recently spent time inside Catholic high schools finds it difficult to ignore the distinctive atmosphere in many of them (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993:127).

This intangible sense of distinctiveness is consistently reflected in the responses of participants in this research inquiry. In both schools, members from a range of groups describe their school as 'different' in the sense of being 'special', reflected also in their use of metaphors such as 'community' and 'family' to capture something of their experience. Indeed, the frequency of such perceptions suggests that the concept of the Catholic school

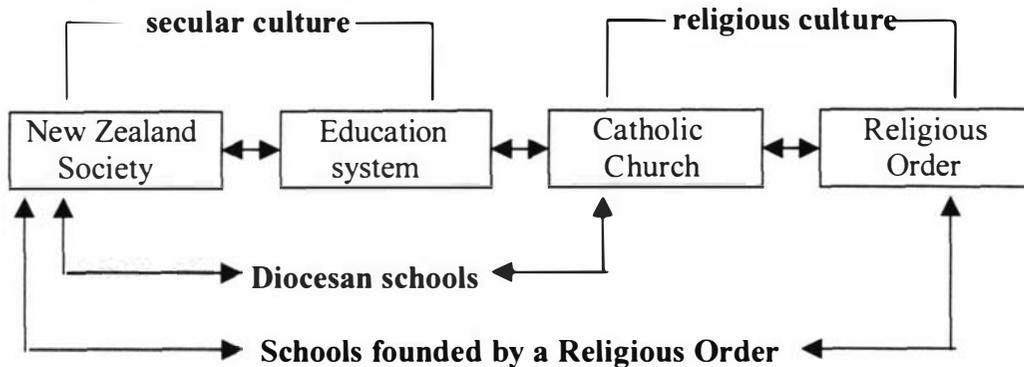
as somehow different and distinctive from those that are not Catholic appears to be, for these members, more than a perception; it is a belief.

If as discussed in Chapter Two, each school has a unique culture, then it follows that no two Catholic schools can be exactly the same. The distinctiveness that constitutes the Special Character of each must involve, therefore, more than a **Catholic** character since that is common to all Catholic schools. It must be a phenomenon that takes into account the uniqueness of its culture. What, then, is the nature of the phenomenon that shapes and influences this school ‘with a difference’? The findings of this research suggest that the Special Character of each Catholic school is a special kind of school culture: a culture that is not only unique from all other schools, but unique in the particular way that it is Catholic. In short, if the **Catholic Character** of the school culture makes the school Catholic, then it is its **Special Character** that makes it **uniquely** Catholic.

The Special Character of each school is shaped by a **confluence** of cultures; a dynamic interaction of several unique, yet interrelated, contributing cultures that influences it in its own context of geography, personnel, time and history. Each contributing culture brings its own distinctive features, giving substance to the school’s Special Character and layers of meaning for its members. Like rivers flowing together, it is difficult, if not impossible, to discern the separate elements of each, perhaps accounting for the difficulties encountered by members of the Champagnat and Mercy college cultures when asked to define their Special Character.

Cultural confluence, as a feature of the Catholic school, comes about through the complex interrelationship of, and dynamic tension between, religious and secular contributing cultures, integrated into the experiential reality of each Catholic school culture (Figure 4). In other words, the confluence of founding religious cultures with the educational and societal cultural dimensions of the New Zealand school creates a school culture with a Special Character. In this respect, each Catholic school shares the phenomenon of having a culture with a Catholic character, yet retains its uniqueness in that its culture also has a Special Character.

Figure 4: The secular and religious cultures of the Catholic school



(O'Donnell, 2000).

The cultural dimensions of New Zealand society, its education system, the Roman Catholic Church, and the religious order that established the school all influence the individual school, interacting with the individual and communal experiences of members. Each brings a philosophy of life and education; a system of values, beliefs and norms; a definition of purpose; a set of goals and objectives; a heritage of rituals, traditions, myths, heroes/heroines and symbols. Their combined influence within the lived reality of the school culture provides members with a “blueprint for seeing the world in a particular way” (Whiteley, 1995:19). Together, they create a school culture that provides:

The framework of beliefs, expressive symbols and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings and make their judgements (Geertz, 1975:145).

School culture with a New Zealand Character

No organisation exists in a vacuum, and schools are no exception. They owe their existence to the communities from which they draw their students and, in providing for the education of these students, they work within a complex network of groups, individuals and organisations. The New Zealand Catholic school, therefore, is influenced in general by New Zealand society and the local community in particular. The demographics of Champagnat and Mercy Colleges clearly illustrate that the racial, ethnic mix of students attending the schools mirrors the communities from which they draw their students; their

financial resources, in turn, affected by the incomes of its parent population. In other words, whatever is happening within that society and community inevitably affects the school culture. Socio-economic, health, employment, family and community issues, expectations of students and parents, all make an impact on the school as an organisation within the wider culture of society. The fact that each school in New Zealand is designated a Decile rating by the Ministry of Education is a clear acknowledgement that societal features influence the life and activity of the school culture. In addition, the policies of the New Zealand Ministry of Education provide a framework of educational philosophy, values and goals for Catholic schools as State Integrated schools. In this sense, current educational culture and trends contribute their own features to the culture of the Catholic school.

A school culture with a Catholic Character

New Zealand's societal and educational dimensions are hardly unique to Catholic schools; they influence all school cultures in State education system. However, unlike its secular counterparts, every Catholic school culture has a Catholic character, shaped by its membership within the international, national and local culture of the Roman Catholic Church. The latter is, for the Catholic school, a macro-cultural dimension, bringing to the school culture a philosophical foundation, systems of values, beliefs, norms, traditions and symbols, and a distinct sense of purpose. For example, Convey (1992) notes that:

Catholic schools do more than simply teach academic subjects. As faith communities with formal programs of religious instruction, Catholic schools strive to develop in their students a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith, a commitment to full participation in the life of the church, and a set of values which will influence students' lives (Convey, 1992:342).

At least in principle, the contributing Catholic culture is pre-eminent and justifies the existence of the school as Treston (1997) explains:

The ethos of a Catholic school is rooted in a two thousand year old tradition of being Catholic Christian. The Catholicism of the school is not an optional appendix to the identity of the school but a fundamental reference point for its ethos and the shape of its education (Treston, 1997:16).

This statement is supported by Reck (1991) who argues that:

The mission of the church and the religious formation of the students are central to the identity of a Catholic school (Reck, 1991:29).

Catholic culture determines the nature of the education provided by Catholic schools and subsequently gives each school culture its Catholic character or nature. The outcome of a Catholic cultural dimension fully integrated into the life and activity of the school is the provision of a “value-orientated” (Hornby-Smith, 1978:135) education which has a humanistic, communitarian vision (Strike, 1999).

The culture of the Roman Catholic Church, therefore, is the dominant cultural dimension for a school that identifies itself as Catholic. As a Catholic school, the school culture displays features common to all Catholic schools. For example, the school cultures of both Champagnat College and Mercy College have obvious basic Catholic features such as prayer, Eucharistic worship, Catholic artefacts, devotion to Mary, to name but a few.

The cultural dimension of the founding Religious Order

For Catholic schools owned by a Roman Catholic diocese, under the proprietorship of the bishop, the Catholic cultural dimension shapes the Catholic character of the school culture. However, for schools founded by a religious order, there is a further religious cultural dimension. Each religious order, a subculture within the international Roman Catholic macroculture, contributes its own distinctive cultural features to the school. The founding religious order of a Catholic school brings a philosophy, values, beliefs, norms, traditions, stories, symbols and purpose, developed from its historical religious vision of Christian Catholic life. Champagnat College, for example, has a Marist character; Mercy College, a culture shaped by the Sisters of Mercy. Indeed, findings reveal that a very comprehensive range of both Catholic and Religious Order cultural features are fully integrated within the cultures of the two research schools (Table 1), including, as Bryk *et al* (1984) note, those that:

Extend to the core of the institution – the perception of the students, parents and staff about the nature and purpose of the school and the ways in which these groups interact with one another (Bryk *et al*, 1984:21).

Table 1: The integration of Catholic Character features in the Catholic secondary school culture.

(Adapted from Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991).

CONCEPTUAL/VERBAL MANIFESTATIONS		
<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Integration within the two research schools</i>
1. Aims/ Objectives	Intentions, aspirations and focus; provide a sense of purpose and determine priorities.	All the educational aims as defined by the National Education Guidelines, but also the aims of the syllabus document for Religious Education (1991) and an extensive range of other official Catholic church documents.
2. Curriculum	What is formally taught, but also the 'hidden curriculum' of drama, sports, clubs, and interest groups.	Teaching of Religious Education; inclusion of prayer, worship, retreats and other religious practices; church-related groups.
3. Language	Verbal and non-verbal; the 'right' words in terms of context and group membership; can also include jargon, slang, gossip, slogans, jokes and humour, songs, gestures, and signs (Trice and Beyer, 1993).	Use of religious terms and language e.g. Eucharist, Reconciliation, rite, liturgy, soul, God, worship, sacrament; use of formal prayer, hymns, sign of cross, genuflection.
4. Metaphors	Unconscious, complex comparisons which people use to attribute meaning to their culture.	Reference to the school as 'caring community', 'family' and to Brothers as a 'living Marist presence'; staff and students as 'faith models', 'witnesses'
5. Organisational stories	Myths which explain aspects of great significance for the values and beliefs of the school: sagas focusing on heroic figures from the school's past; potential instruments for bringing people together in strong emotional bonds.	Stories about the founder of the religious order associated with the school e.g. Marist Brothers/ Marcellin Champagnat; Mercy Sisters /Catherine McAuley.
6. Organisational heroes/heroines	Role models; people from the past and present who represent the values, achievements and ideals of the school.	Famous and admired people from church tradition and history e.g. Jesus Christ, saints, Religious founder, past principals, 'Old Boys/Girls'.
7. Organisational structures.	Patterns of roles and relationships, such as committees, decision-making bodies, meetings.	Proprietor's representatives on the Board of Trustees; Director of Religious Studies; Special Character sub-committee of the Board; leaders of prayer groups, mission groups, Eucharistic ministers and Liturgical groups; Bishop; Proprietors; Catholic Education Office; Chaplain.

VISUAL/MATERIEL MANIFESTATIONS AND SYMBOLISM

<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Integration within the two research schools</i>
8. Facilities and equipment	Allocation of space, resources and settings.	Availability of a Chapel, prayer room; funding and staffing for Religious Education; allocation of funds for liturgy, retreats and chaplaincy.
9. Artefacts and memorabilia	Uniforms, awards, school magazines, flags, pictures, trophies, display boards, networks.	Awards for Religious Education, religious art in classrooms and assembly areas, display of liturgically appropriate symbols e.g. palms, purple cloths, crucifixes, posters, statues of Sacred Heart, Mary
10. Crests and mottoes	Formal and frequently displayed in school prospectus, letterheads.	Distinctive in their reference to spiritual themes, reflecting the particular 'charism' or focus of the school's founders e.g. Mercy – <i>Maria Duce</i> (With Mary as our guide); Marist – ' <i>Confitare esto vir</i> ' (<i>Take courage and be a man</i>)
11. Uniforms.	Provide a sense of common identity and belonging.	Uniforms which display religious crests and mottoes.

BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Integration within the two research schools</i>
12. Rituals	Developed out of people's experiences; enabling people "to act out and reaffirm their values and beliefs" (Owens 1991:121)	Communal worship, such as Mass, Rites of Reconciliation, Liturgy on Ash Wednesday, Easter liturgies, Class prayer liturgies, Assembly prayer.
13. Ceremonies	Public celebrations; special occasions; filled with symbolism and meaning.	Mass as an integral part of prizegiving celebrations; commissioning of school student leaders; Founders day celebrations.
14. Teaching and learning	How and what is done: resources allocated; methods of evaluation and assessment: reporting to parents and other stakeholders.	Inclusion of Religious Education as a credible and valid part of the curriculum and as a school department; training and professional development opportunities for teachers of Religious Education; yearly reports on Special Character to the Proprietors of the school; Religious Education assessment within the National Qualifications Framework, inclusion of Religious Education in reporting to parents.
15. Operational procedures	The way in which conflict is addressed and resolved: procedures for communication, decision-making; performance appraisal and staff development.	These areas considered as matters of justice, community building and forgiveness; school values made explicit in terms of school policies and in relation to the school's special Catholic character; development of a school strategic plan for Special Character.

BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS (continued)

<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Integration within the two research schools</i>
16. Rules, regulations; rewards, sanctions	What is considered 'right' and 'wrong'; who or what is worthy of praise.	The values of service, care and compassion, mutual responsibility are represented as modelling Christ and explicitly stated as the goal of every student; public recognition of student service to the community and church.
17. Psychological and social supports	How people are cared for; systems of support; roles that provide care for the human person.	Inclusion of Chaplain and Director of Religious Studies on Pastoral care teams; practical care for those in need; school system for providing uniforms at no charge; policy of waiving school fees for those in financial difficulties
18. Parental and community interaction patterns	Contacts with stakeholders through school meetings, parent/teacher evenings; Access to principal, teachers and school.	All normal school/parent/community interactions but also: Use of parish bulletins for school/family communication; Invitations to Proprietors, Religious orders in the school district, Parish priest to school functions; family attendance at school liturgies.

In each case, it was found that the Catholic and Religious Order dimensions provide each school with an original historical expression of spirituality and faith, and a rich unique experience of its religious character, embodied in the specific philosophy, mission, traditions, symbols, stories and heroes contributed by each culture.

Together, all four contributing cultures, societal, educational, Catholic and founding order, blend in a complex, multi-dimensional way to create a core cultural framework for the life of the school and its activity. However, as Bates (1986) reflects, culture is:

Not simply a pre-formed set of beliefs, values, mores and understandings which are passed on from one generation to another as if they were objects. Rather, culture is constructed and reconstructed continuously through the efforts of individuals to learn, master and take part in collective life (Bates, 1986: 10).

The personal dimension

It can be expected that each member of a culture works within a philosophical and cultural framework that has been shaped by his or her unique life experience. Trice and Beyer (1993) comment:

People bring anticipation, expectations and assumptions to any situation from their past experiences, their social dispositions and their cultures (Trice and Beyer, 1993:82).

Each brings a view of life and education that inspires and motivates them; providing them with a framework of meaning for their individual lives and work; a view of human worth, citizenship, life, success and failure. In other words, members of the school culture bring their own personal experiences, values, beliefs, individual views and convictions about the nature of education into the communal life of the school culture. Although the confluence of contributing dimensions provides a cultural framework that defines **'what should be'** in general terms, these may be applicable to many different schools. The experiential reality of each school culture, however, determines **'how things are and why'** in the context of the school's unique demography and cultural membership. It is the complex interaction between the contributing cultures and their interpretation and application by individuals and groups within each unique Catholic school culture that develops and maintains the Special Character of that school.

The dynamic interplay between the philosophical and experiential elements of each cultural dimension; that is, between the Catholic, founding order, societal, educational, and the personal lives of members, may be, to some extent, a conscious reality for the school, particularly in times of conflict or tension. However, given the complexity of the phenomenon of Special Character culture, much of its nature will remain a largely unconscious experience for members, lying in the area of 'Basic Underlying Assumptions' (Schein, 1992:17); that is, "unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings" (Schein, 1992:17).

Multiplicity of cultural perspectives

This research suggests that individual members of the culture, or subcultures within the school, may perceive its Special Character from the perspective of different contributing cultural dimensions. A person for whom the Catholic dimension is dominant may define the school's Special Character in terms of a traditional body of Catholic teaching and practice, perceiving the purpose of the school as teaching Catholic doctrine in order to develop students as future adult Catholics. Success in external examinations may be for them an important but, nevertheless, a lesser priority. Others working predominantly from the societal dimension may consider preparation for work and good citizenship to be uppermost. When the educational dimension is dominant, for example, a person or group may be most keenly interested in the school's external examination result ratings compared with competitors. Certainly, in these research findings, student survey responses imply such a diverse range of positions (Appendix C). Some perceived the Special Character of their school as relating predominantly to the nature and quality of personal relationships; others to faith and religious education and still others to the opportunity for academic achievement.

A dominant perspective of Special Character is not necessarily a distorted view. It is possible to hold a different perspective from other members of the school culture, yet still be accurate. However, unless all cultural dimensions are considered, it is likely to remain an incomplete image of the Special Character of the school in its fullest and richest sense. There is also the danger that a diversity of perspectives, if held by different subcultures within the school, may hold, if unappreciated and addressed, the potential for confusion, conflict and a subsequent loss of cultural energy.

The interplay of contributing cultures

Each cultural dimension of Special Character exists in creative tension with the others. Each brings its own set of core values, beliefs and norms. Each determines purpose. If in harmony, all dimensions contribute to the uniqueness and richness of the school culture, making it a relevant, effective reflection of the community it serves. This is illustrated in

the Mercy College debate on the Fully Funded Option. As an issue, it had both social and educational elements. Yet, members approached their discussion and decision-making from the basis of the values implicit within the religious dimensions of their school culture, enabling them to reach a conclusion that, if not fully satisfying all members, was in harmony with the Special Character of the school.

It could be argued that if one dimension were to dominate the whole school culture or if two were diametrically opposed, then the Special Character culture of a school could ultimately become distorted, losing its integrity with its founding philosophical roots and creating tensions within the school community. A Catholic school, for example, that gives priority to examination passes over the faith and spiritual development of students may in fact be failing to live up to its true nature, in spite of the fact that academic success remains a positive worthwhile pursuit for any school. A school culture, which fails to challenge bullying and violence that may be characteristic of its societal dimension, will be counterproductive to the promotion of the Christian values of respect and concern for each individual. Each school culture, therefore, needs to be constantly engaged, consciously and subconsciously, in a process of self-critique and evaluation as it attempts to reconcile the multiple effects of all its contributing cultures with the pre-eminent cultures of the Catholic church and that of its founding religious order.

Where each dimension 'fits' in harmony with the others, the school culture has a dynamic and relevant Special Character, creating meaning for its members. For example, in Champagnat College, where some students come from backgrounds of violence and family difficulty, a factor of its social dimension, there is an emphasis on meeting life's challenges with courage. Bullying in the school is almost non-existent as students and staff work together and creatively to create a safe environment valued by all members, where people are accepted as 'family', a special focus of its founding Marist dimension. The Mercy College culture encourages its students to take full advantage of every learning opportunity and to set high standards, an aspect of its educational dimension. This is in harmony with the goal of 'making a difference' in their own lives and those of others, and with the promotion of a vision of compassion and justice that are integral elements of its Mercy

dimension. Both of these core ‘messages’ are articulated in the respective mottoes of the schools, summing up a basic philosophy of each school culture in the light of the specific living tradition of its founding Religious Order. A balanced confluence of contributing cultures and the creative tension between them shapes, therefore, not only the culture of the Catholic school, but the education it provides; that is, an education with a Special Character.

Special Character culture as a dynamic phenomenon

Special Character culture, like all school cultures, is a dynamic phenomenon; subject to change and interpretation. Although the core cultures of the Catholic Church and the founding religious order are in a sense non-negotiable ‘givens’ for the school culture, Morgan warns that:

Culture is not something that is imposed on a social setting. Rather it develops during the course of social interaction (Morgan, 1986:127).

Core religious cultures need to be interpreted, articulated and experienced within the specific current contexts of each school. For example, Champagnat College may have a Catholic Marist character, but it is still unique from other Catholic Marist schools in other places and times. As members respond to their individual and shared perceptions of reality, they draw from the vision provided by its contributing cultures to address current needs and challenges.

External contextual factors impact on the Special Character culture of the school. For example, the declining numbers of clergy in the Roman Catholic Church has limited the availability of ordained chaplaincy as a support for the faith and religious development of students in both Champagnat and Mercy Colleges. In Catholic schools facing similar restraints, school liturgical practices have been modified and the appointment of non-ordained people to the role of college chaplain is becoming more common. Special Character culture, therefore, is, to some extent, constantly being re-shaped and articulated with the changing ‘voice’ of the individual school culture, as each generation brings its own needs, expectations, challenges, hopes, dreams, gifts and attributes.

Special Character culture and the problem of definition

The multi-dimensional nature of Special Character culture may in some ways account for the difficulty that many people have in defining the Special Character culture of their college. This research found that there is some confusion as to the exact meaning of the term, in spite of the fact that it is used with great frequency in Catholic school documentation. Official Catholic educational documents, such as those issued by the Vatican, offer little clarification with regard to a clear definition of the culture of Catholic schools. A key Vatican document, *The Catholic School* (Vatican, 1977), for example, refers to culture as 'a set of beliefs', 'a way of thinking', 'traditions', 'common experience' and 'values' (Walsh, 1987). The term 'Special Character' is variously used in relation to Catholic and/or founding traditions; to different elements of culture and, on other occasions, to the current culture of the individual school. Frequently, little or no distinction is made between 'Special Character' and 'Catholic Character'.

Rather than defined, the phenomenon of Special Character is more usually described. This research, and reflected in studies conducted overseas (Hornby-Smith, 1978; Newton, 1980; Convey, 1991; Bryk *et al*, 1993) found that participants frequently utilise metaphors such as 'community' and 'family' to express their understanding of the Special Character culture of the school. In many ways, these metaphors reveal their own response to and experience of the school culture. However, this begs the question – what does 'community' or 'family' mean for different people with different backgrounds and experience? There seems to be an assumption that these metaphors, and others, mean the same thing to everyone. Similar assumptions appear to be made in relation to core values of the Catholic school culture. For example, justice and service stand out as strong foundational values within Catholic schools, but once again, the interpretation of these in terms of subsequent actions or norms appears to be taken for granted by members of the school culture. This suggests that not only is the nature of a Special Character culture intangible, but that it is also intuitively known; that an understanding of its nature is sourced deep within the consciousness of those associated with it.

In spite of a lack of conscious articulation of what it means, this research found that Special Character is nevertheless perceived to be precious and sacred for members of the culture; powerful enough to evoke passion and conviction and a source of inspiration for the school culture as a whole. It is valued therefore, albeit for non-critical intuitive reasons. For Champagnat and Mercy Colleges, the need to preserve its Special Character is seen as a non-negotiable imperative; its loss, a disaster for the school culture.

Summary

Special Character is the cultural distinctiveness that arises from the confluence of religious and secular cultures and their philosophies with the lived reality of the unique school culture. Its religious nature emerges from its membership within the Roman Catholic Church and its relationship with its founding institution or order. Its place within New Zealand society and education system provides its secular nature. All four come together in the unique cultural context of the school and its members. Each contributing culture brings its own distinctive features, working in creative tension with others to shape the uniqueness of the individual Catholic school. Catholic and founding order dimensions are not simply additions to the school's cultural and philosophical 'mix' but act like a complex catalyst, exercising a dynamic influence on the other dimensions. A Catholic philosophy of life and education integrated within the culture makes the school 'Catholic'; that is, gives it a Catholic Character. The integration of a Mercy or Marist cultural dimension gives it a Mercy or Marist Character. It is the dynamic 'mix' of all dimensions which makes the school culture distinctive, not only from other New Zealand schools, but also distinctive from other Catholic, Mercy or Marist schools.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOUNDING TRADITIONS

All Catholic schools are founded on a Catholic philosophy of life that contributes "an overall religious perspective" (Vatican, 1988: Para #57) to the school culture. It is a perspective that includes:

Respect for those who seek the truth, who raise fundamental questions about human existence. Confidence in our ability to attain truth, at least in a limited way ... The ability to make judgements about what is true and what is false, and to make choices based on these judgements ... Lively dialogue between culture and the Gospel message (Vatican, 1988: Para #57).

It brings to the school a “coherent statement” (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:185) of values and “provides a theoretical or conceptual focus for the school’s activities and reflects a set of formally espoused values” (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:185). Each founding tradition, Catholic and religious order, contributes a vision of what it means to be a human being (Strike, 1999); of what it means to live in relationship with God and others; and provides models of Christian living, based on the lives of its heroes and heroines. It presents an ideal; a dream of how things should be, to inspire, encourage, affirm and challenge members of the school culture. The life and activity of the Champagnat College culture reflects a vision of education as a means of freedom from poverty, illustrated in its commitment to providing a ‘second chance education’ for students, and its courage in confronting the difficulties this may present for the school. In its turn, Mercy College gains inspiration from the dream of educating young women so that they can make a positive contribution to society, to help create conditions where human dignity and justice might flourish.

It needs to be acknowledged that powerful as the ideal may be, it is still an ‘image’ of perfection, not a reality as Milliken observes:

There are relatively few schools which manage an accurate and consistent match between espoused philosophy and actual operational behaviour (Milliken, 1984:76).

As the communities of these two research schools strive to live up to their founding vision, they encounter all the struggles, conflicts, stresses and tensions inherent in any group of people who live and work together. The vision however, gives them, at least a touchstone for dealing with those issues and, at best, a shared motivation to address them together in communal and organisational life.

A vision of human life

For Catholic school cultures, the original source of a meaningful vision of human life is the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, interpreted and expressed through the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. For schools established by a religious order, the life and work of the order's founder contributes another visionary dimension, based on that of Christ, as an inspiration for the school culture. Marcellin Champagnat's life, for example, was characterised by a devotion to and love of the young people of his time, who were deprived of an education. His concern inspired and motivated him to establish schools, providing educational opportunities that could change difficult lives for the better. His values attracted others, who lived in community with the aim of continuing his work, modelling themselves on his example. That vision of care for the educationally disadvantaged is still a vibrant reality in the Champagnat College culture, interpreted in the light of its own unique context, and tempered by the cultural reality that faces it and its members.

A vision of education

In the light of research findings, founding traditions provide the Special Character school with a 'theory' of education; an ideology described as:

Shared, relatively coherently interrelated sets of emotionally charged beliefs, values and norms that bind some people together and help them make sense of their world (Trice and Beyer, 1993:33).

It is an ideology that has endured over generations; a rich and complex tradition or heritage handed down to each school, in its own time and context, as a foundation upon which to build. It presents the school with:

A set of conceptions about what schools are for, what is good for students, what makes sense about teaching and learning and how everyone involved should live their lives together (Sergiovanni, 1994:86).

Reflecting on the key features of the Catholic educational ideology as outlined in the research of Bryk, Lee & Holland (1993), Grace (1995) has this to say:

This inspirational ideology celebrates the primacy of the spiritual and moral life; the dignity of the person; the importance of community and moral commitments to caring, social justice and the common good (Grace, 1995:160).

Commenting also on the findings of Bryk *et al* (1993), Strike (1999) clearly supports the claim that:

The inspirational ideology of Catholic schools is, in part, responsible for their success in creating strong and effective communities (Strike, 1999:57).

The power of founding traditions

Founding traditions link the past, future and present realities of Special Character culture. As individual schools struggle to live up to the founding vision, its values and philosophy, applying these to current contexts and needs, its members share in the making of history and the creation of heritage for future generations. Indeed, Bates (1986) observes that:

Learning a culture, living a culture, changing a culture is ... to take part in the processes of history (Bates, 1986:10).

Founding traditions transmit an image of an 'ideal' education, school culture or community, based on the lessons of history and the wisdom of tradition. They provide a fundamental guide for the future activity of the school culture; a reference point for decision-making and action. Founding traditions, as Bryk *et al* (1993) observe:

Have the essential character of all living traditions: the ability to bring meaning to action and thereby transcend the instrumental intent of action. They represent the ideals to which members of the community aspire, while at the same time recognising that they may never fully achieve them (Bryk *et al*, 1993:145).

Providing an education with a Special Character is a shared mission. Each founding tradition presents a 'master plan' of life and education, expressed within a framework of values, beliefs and norms translated into action by each generation of school leaders, staff, students and parents. This research found that its constituent vision and mission seem capable of inspiring and motivating the members of the culture. It draws energy and action from inner conviction, rather than from contractual obligation, as can be seen in the high levels of personal devotion to the school demonstrated by staff in both research schools. It has the potential to create strong emotional bonds between members of the school culture (Milliken, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1992); a point strongly supported by research participants who speak highly of the strong positive quality of interpersonal relationships in their schools and the impact they have made on their lives.

Determinants of purpose

Founding traditions determine the ultimate purpose of the Catholic school culture. Official Catholic education documents indicate that, at its most fundamental level, the aim of the Catholic school is the transformation of human lives. In short, it involves more than the provision of an education in knowledge and skills; it is concerned with the promotion of a lifestyle based on Christian principles, transmitting a worldview that, at its best, is in harmony with that of the Catholic Church and the founding order. In this sense, the Catholic school culture is a primary agent of the Catholic Church in the handing on of its culture, faith and practice to another generation. It works in partnership with the Catholic community to offer students a 'way of life' modelled on that of Christ and of the founder of the religious order. Bryk *et al* (1993) express the hope of the Catholic school community that:

Students should know the message, experience it while at school, and ultimately live it as adults (Bryk *et al*, 1993:147).

The goal of Catholic schools encompasses every aspect of teaching and learning. It influences the very nature of the education the school provides, which Strike (1999) attributes to two key values:

The first is a commitment to the intrinsic worth of academic learning. In this tradition, knowledge is of value because of its capacity to illuminate and enrich human experience and because of its effect on character. Second is the value of a shared life lived in a caring and just community. These values inform the sense of purpose in Catholic schools and help create a sense of community that diminishes competitiveness and emphasises the importance of the achievement of everyone (Strike, 1999:57-58).

In the light of such values, both research schools provide an education that is holistic, involving all aspects of being human, including the spiritual. Focused on the individual, they aim to nurture and develop the person, not just the mind. It is a future-orientated education, developing the person for life; spiritually, socially, intellectually, physically and emotionally. It is clear from this research that a Special Character education is firmly founded in the concept of 'common good', rather than education as an individual right; success being framed in terms of the development of the person for the service of others. In addition, each founding tradition weaves its own distinctive pattern into the educational purpose of the school. For example, the Mercy philosophy of Mercy College seeks to

develop a self-determining woman with a sense of responsibility for self and others, striving to live a life of compassion and service.

Sources of values

Founding traditions not only name the culture, they determine its core sacred values. For example, in both research schools, justice and service appear as core values that can be traced back to the Gospel, along with others such as care, compassion, tolerance and respect for individual dignity. These values, in turn, give rise to non-negotiable school norms. Responding to need and supporting each other, for example, are highly valued by members of research schools. The impact of such values and norms is such that they are apparent even to outsiders or newcomers to the school.

Core traditional values shape the quality of relationships between members of the school culture. They create a culture where people have primacy, founded on the assumption that people are basically good. The dignity and uniqueness of each individual is of paramount importance; a feature that influences attitudes to school organisation, discipline, interactions between various groups and individuals, and attitudes to work.

Shapers of roles and responsibilities

The integration of founding traditions within the school culture determines the roles and responsibilities of members in two ways. At the most basic level, it determines the very existence and function of some key roles, such as ‘tagged’ positions. For example, the position of Director of Religious Studies is unique to schools that provide an education with a Special Character. The responsibility of the school leader in a Catholic school extends beyond that of a principal in a secular school. For example, he/she is the spiritual, as well as cultural, leader of the school, responsible for maintaining and preserving the distinctiveness of the Special Character culture of the school; for promoting and nurturing its vision within the internal and external school community.

The concept of leadership vision has been the subject of numerous books and seminars; for example, in the work of Starratt (1995) and Sergiovanni (1992, 1994). In these and in other works, principals are exhorted to be the visionary leaders of their school, responsible for articulating that vision for others and inspiring them to work together to achieve its aims. For the Catholic school, however, educational vision is not found solely in the leadership of the school. It comes from the tradition that founded the school; in general terms, the Catholic Church; in specific terms, the religious order that established the school. Surviving the rigour of history, it brings to the school a strength developed from the processes of interpretation, adaptation and application within different contexts to meet different challenges and needs. If the leader of a Catholic school leaves, the vision endures, picked up and promoted by his/her successor. The Catholic school leader is the guardian of the vision, not its source; a feature it must be acknowledged that is shared by some secular schools with a long established tradition.

It is clear from research findings that the founding traditions of the Catholic school shape the culture's formal relationships with its external community. For example, it operates under the legislative and religious authority of its Proprietors, who are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their school's Special Character is maintained and preserved. Relationships are built with other Catholic schools, and other schools associated with the founding religious order as can be seen from the Special Character staff development opportunities provided for Champagnat and Mercy colleges by their respective proprietors. These networks provide the individual school culture with practical and moral support, enabling members to explore more fully their identity as a Special Character school and its implications. Belonging within the culture of the Roman Catholic Church, each school has both formal and informal relationships with the parishes, deaneries of Priests and members of the Catholic worshipping communities of its catchment area.

Not only are Catholic schools an integral part of the parish life which surrounds them, but they are also bonded to a world-wide Church (Ramsay and Clark, 1990:184).

Thus, a school with a Special Character culture has a much more complex system of formal relationships than those of state secular schools.

At a more integral level, the founding traditions influence perceptions of role and personal responsibility. Teachers of both Champagnat and Mercy Colleges describe their role in terms of vocation; far more than a job, a calling. This supports the findings of Bryk *et al* (1993) who found in their study of Catholic schools in the United States that:

Many teachers describe their work as a kind of ministry and their role as one of shaping young adults (Bryk *et al*, 1993:97)

It is a sense of ministry and mission that appears to develop in staff a set of personal expectations and professional standards that extend beyond those normally associated with teaching responsibilities. Although not the exclusive domain of Catholic schools, such an approach to teaching appears to be a norm of the Catholic school culture. It develops a strong collegial relationship amongst staff, characterised by a sense of direction, teamwork, common purpose and mutual support. There is a 'witness' component that arises of the dynamic and passionate involvement of people and groups with the core features of the school's Special Character culture, inspiring loyalty amongst members.

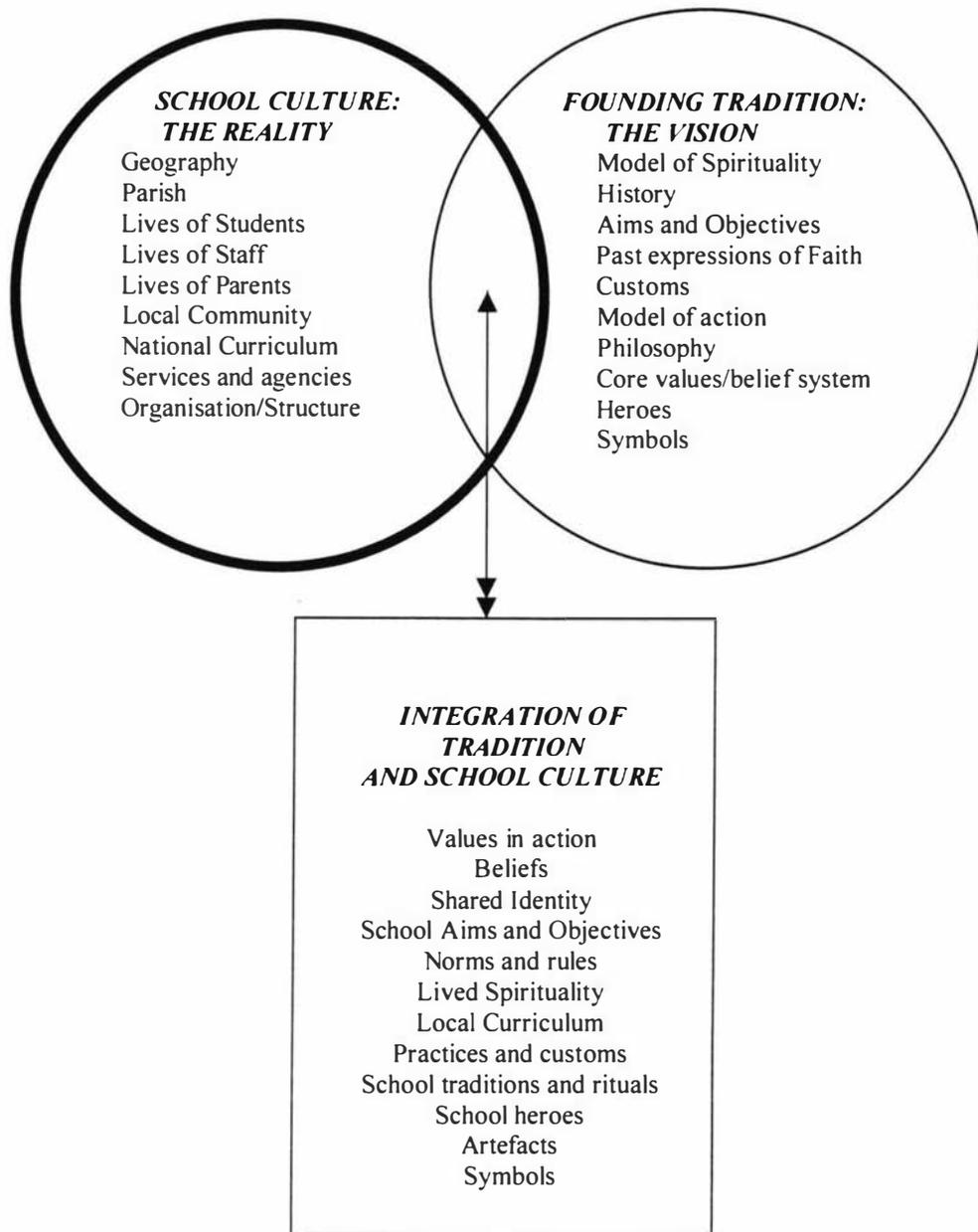
Those staff members who cannot or will not support the core values, beliefs and norms of the founding traditions and their philosophies may experience both internal and external pressure to conform. For example, teachers who hold philosophical or religious views, values or beliefs that differ radically from those of the dominant Catholic culture of the school inevitably find themselves in situations which heighten or reinforce a sense of separateness or disunion with other members. If overt in opposition to the maintenance of the Special Character culture of the school, such teachers may encounter a strong negative reaction from peers. Given the impact of such a negative working environment, research participants note that they often leave the school of their own volition. In the light of the passion expressed by core members of Champagnat and Mercy staff for their school's Special Character, it is probably fair to conclude that a refusal to support the Special Character culture of the school would likely become a source of conflict and tension for all.

A cultural framework

Founding traditions provide a framework of customs, rituals, symbols, activities and events, myths, stories and exemplars (Figure 5). Interpreted and reshaped according to specific contexts of time, place and membership, traditional cultural elements create a rich and relevant experience of culture. Some core features of the founding traditions can inspire a sense of common identity, belonging, stability and continuity in the Special Character culture of the school as they are translated into meaning by each generation. This is illustrated by the importance of the Champagnat College Code with its emphasis on personal courage, dignity and respect. So too, the Mercy College leavers' rituals celebrates the 'going forth' of a new generation of educated young women and the handing on of leadership responsibilities to Year 12 students. In addition, significant symbolic events of the Catholic Church or of the founding story of the religious order, integrated into the school year, provide a coherent experience of continuity with the past.

It became very evident in this research that the content of the founding traditions of Champagnat and Mercy Colleges are core points of reference for their activity, organisation and decision-making. Their Boards of Trustees have clearly made a commitment to provide an adequate allocation of resources, such as staffing and funding, showing also that they appreciate the significance of Special Character content in the future development of the school. In general, school policies and systems contain reference to the Special Character culture of the school. Indeed, as one Board member pointed out, this is considered an important function of Proprietors' representatives on Catholic school Boards of Trustees. Founding values and beliefs are touchstones for self-critique and external evaluation of the school, including the performance of its leadership, staff and Board of Trustees. These factors, however, raise the question of how Boards of Trustees, Principals and staff can adequately serve the Special Character of their school if their knowledge of its founding cultures and understanding of their significance for the governance, administration and activity of the school is inadequate.

Figure 5: The contributing features of founding traditions and their integration with school cultures



(O'Donnell, 2000)

Although local diocesan education offices provide some basic training for Boards of Trustees, it is usually of a general nature, covering the principles of Catholic education and the Catholic Character of schools. However, such training is not mandatory. Most schools, in this researcher's experience, provide staff inservice time on the specifics of their Special Character. Without similar 'in-house' opportunities for Board members, the two most influential groups within the school community may have quite different levels of understanding in relation to the specific nature of their school's Special Character, perhaps even opposing or conflicting perceptions of its importance for the operation of the school.

Indicators of integrity

The sincere integration of the founding traditions throughout the life and activity of the school culture is a measure of its authenticity as a Special Character school. This is illustrated very clearly in the strong conviction of members of the research schools that the ongoing integration of a Special Character vision within the life and activity of the culture is the single most important justification for the existence of the school. Without such integration, the Catholic school will still be a school; it may still be an excellent very successful school, but in the view of research participants, it would have failed to fulfil its foundational purpose. In short, it would cease to be a school with a Special Character culture.

Summary

For Catholic schools in general, the Roman Catholic Church is the pre-eminent cultural influence. For schools with an association with a religious order, two mutually supporting founding traditions are fundamental to their identity and function; that is, Catholic tradition and that of the religious order. The effective authentic integration of both these traditions within the whole life of the school is an essential feature of Special Character school culture. Religious founding cultures determine the core vision, that is the 'ideal', and the mission or purpose of the school. They influence the nature and function of key Special Character roles and perceptions of and attitudes to work. Values, beliefs and norms sacred

to the school culture, handed down through transmission of the founding traditions, shape the quality of relationships and provide a framework of symbols, rituals, customs and artefacts. Founding traditions are not static. They are re-interpreted by each generation to meet their specific challenges and needs. In this way, they retain their freshness and relevance from generation to generation. Their preservation is a sacred task for members who believe passionately that it is necessary for the very existence of the school.

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION PROCESS

Culture is transmitted to new members (Bernstein, 1977; Schein, 1992, Deal, 1993) and is continually reinforced in the lives of existing members. A powerful influence on the educational outcomes of the school and the individual lives and experiences of its members, culture:

Involves all dimensions of life in schools. It determines individual needs and outlooks, shapes formal structures, defines the distribution of power, and establishes the means by which conflicts are dealt with (Deal, 1990:128).

Transmission of Catholic culture

The Catholic school is concerned with the socialisation of young people into a Christian lifestyle, as expressed and experienced within the culture of the Roman Catholic Church.

Its aim is:

The transmission of values for living. Its work is seen as promoting a faith relationship with Christ in whom all values find fulfilment (Vatican, 1977:Para #53).

As such:

The Catholic school finds its true justification in the mission of the Church; it is based on an educational philosophy in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony (Vatican, 1988: Para #34).

If an authentic and harmonious integration of faith, culture and life is to happen in the lives of those associated with Catholic education, then the transmission of school culture must, implicitly and explicitly, involve the effective transmission of its founding traditions. In other words, this research argues that the Special Character culture of the New Zealand

Catholic school is a fusion of the content of founding traditions with the all the elements of the unique living culture of the school. The philosophy, ideology, values and beliefs which constitute the founding vision of Catholic education are integrated with the daily reality of the school culture (Ramsay and Clark, 1990) in such a way as to shape the “shared meaning, shared understanding and shared sensemaking” (Morgan, 1986:128) of its members. In so doing, a culture with a Special Character is authentically maintained, sustained and preserved.

This research has found that the transmission of the multi-dimensional culture of the Special Character school, and all the unique features, both religious and secular, that make it distinctive, is a complex dynamic process. “The enculturation aims of the Catholic school are deliberate and multilayered” (Bryk *et al*, 1993:318), employing strategies and approaches that are consciously and deliberately used by key members of the school culture to transmit and integrate the content of founding traditions. However, other transmission ‘vehicles’ are unconscious, arising out of the mystery of human relationship and interaction (Schein, 1992). All serve to articulate and express the philosophy, system of values, beliefs and norms that constitute the core content of the Catholic school culture. “Literally, every aspect of school life affords an occasion for teaching” (Bryk *et al*, 1993:318).

The transmission process

Key transmission processes fall into two categories; the **structural** and the **non-structural**. These categories are loosely based on Bernstein’s (1977) theory of educational transmission in which he argues that schools function as transmitters of social culture. He identifies two categories of transmission function: the ‘instrumental order’ of school relations which “controls the transmission of facts, procedures and judgement involved in the acquisition of specific skills” (Bernstein, 1977:54) and ‘expressive order’ as that which “controls the transmission of beliefs and moral system” (Bernstein, 1977:55). Although Bernstein (1977) is addressing the far more global issue of the purposes and function of education within society, his delineation of the transmission process into two distinct orders

provided an inspiration and framework for this discussion of the transmission processes that take place **within** the school culture itself.

Structural transmission occurs when the features and content of founding traditions are deliberately and consciously integrated into the tangible, structural elements of the school; the “physical manifestation of the culture of the organisation” (Bush, 1995:136). These include such areas as the school organisation, its structure, policies and procedures; formal practices, for example, prayer before meetings; artefacts and certain features of the physical environment, for example, a chapel; formal curriculum, assemblies; special school events; school communication systems; official school symbols, and formal occasions of worship and ritual. **Non-structural transmission** occurs through interpersonal relationships; modelling; emotional environment or climate; unofficial symbols and rituals; unplanned events; spiritual experiences and informal communication between members; in other words, through the experiential, non-tangible aspects of culture (Table 2 for an outline of the characteristics of each category).

Some transmission processes may fit into both categories. Modelling, for instance, is structural when articles and stories of cultural heroes/heroines, past and present, are included in formal communication systems such as school publications and newsletters. Yet it is non-structural, in the sense that modelling may occur through the spontaneous, unconscious actions and behaviour of individual members of the culture. Transmission processes that have a structural and non-structural nature include occasions of prayer, worship, ritual and symbolism. They may be planned, deliberate ‘events’; that is, built into the structure of the school, yet may also occur informally and spontaneously within the Special Character culture.

The aim of structural transmission is the formal **articulation** of the core philosophy, values, beliefs, norms and expectations that underpin the school’s purposes, goals and activity. It teaches, communicates and informs members of the central features of the school culture. It is explicit and overt; planned and initiated by the school leadership or other key Special Character roles, for example, the Director of Religious Studies. It

communicates a 'known' content; that is, the body of traditional knowledge handed down to the culture from its founding traditions. It is hierarchical and authoritarian in nature, in the sense that the appropriateness, relevance and nature of the content are determined by the leader or communicator. It requires the openness and willingness of the member to learn and understand. However, in itself, structural transmission can neither guarantee acceptance of nor involvement with Special Character content nor effectively evaluate their quality. Members may remain passive and personally uninvolved. This view is supported by Neville (1994) who argues that:

Although cultural manifestations are valuable as reinforcement and reflection of the culture, they represent culture only at a relatively superficial level (Neville, 1994:348).

In other words, structural transmission **by itself** cannot determine the personal meaning members attribute to the content of founding traditions, nor even guarantee that such meaning will be found. By itself, therefore, it cannot transmit a living culture (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993).

A simple example of structural transmission in both research schools is the staff handbook that new teachers receive on appointment or prior to taking up the new position. It presents the history of the school and the 'story' of the founding community and its leader. The purpose of the school in the light of its Special Character is succinctly stated in the school's Mission Statement. It includes an outline of the core philosophy, values and beliefs of the school culture. The responsibilities of staff in relation to Special Character are listed, along with the policy, procedural and organisational content common to most schools. In brief, the handbook serves the purpose of presenting basic and important Special Character information to the new teacher. However, it cannot be assumed that the new member has understood the significance of its content for the school culture or its personal implications for his/her role within the school. He/she may therefore, be informed, but in terms of personal response to the Special Character cultural content may not necessarily be personally convinced, inspired or committed.

Table 2: Structural and Non-structural transmission

STRUCTURAL TRANSMISSION	NON-STRUCTURAL TRANSMISSION
Explicit and planned	Implicit and spontaneous
Grounded in external philosophy	Grounded in personal and communal philosophy
Appropriate for the transmission of knowledge and skill	Appropriate for transmitting values, norms and spirituality
Formal in nature: less personal	Informal in nature: more personal
Organisation and administration are major tools	Relationship and modelling are its major tools
Requires understanding, and conscious awareness	Is unconscious and need not be fully understood
Requires the co-operation of the receiver	Mutual exchange, experienced by both the receiver and the communicator
Is articulated	Is behavioural; not formally articulated
Reinforcement comes from repeated regular articulation	Reinforcement comes from renewed experience, maintained through contact and consistency.
Content is known rather than experienced	Content is experienced but may be known after reflection on the experience
May lose its influence once the receiver leaves the culture	Has a more pronounced and lasting influence e.g. bonding with the culture
Is basically hierarchical - i.e. content defined by dominant group or authority	Is communally centred: it has meaning for the group
Content is predetermined by others	Content cannot be predetermined: it is unpredictable, depending on the receptivity of the receiver and the situation.
Its sources of influence are power and authority	Personal qualities and integrity are its sources of influence
Has ability to educate	Has ability to transform
Is basically theoretical by nature	Is based on practice and action.
Applicable to other similar contexts	Is situated within a specific and unique context
Calls for obedience	Calls for personal response and receptivity
Is cognitive	Is affective
Tangible	Intangible
The receiver can remain passive and personally uninvolved	The receiver is motivated and stimulated to respond
Objective meaning	Subjective meaning
Provides cultural stability and continuity	Stimulates cultural energy and innovation
Less open to modification	Open to dynamic change
Operates consciously	Operates subconsciously/unconsciously
Relatively easy to evaluate effects	Difficult to evaluate effects

(O'Donnell, 2000)

Non-structural transmission communicates values, norms and beliefs, predominantly through the interpersonal relationships of members. Given its relational nature, it is fundamentally experiential and informal. Ideas, thoughts and feelings are shared within the ordinary interactions of members. However, there may be no explicit intent of teaching Special Character cultural content. The dynamic is more like that of an informal exchange through which members gain an experience of sharing culture and a better understanding of the meaning and significance of the Special Character nature of the Catholic school culture. Positive relationships between the communicator and receiver reinforce the effectiveness of non-structural transmission, especially when this is characterised by a spirit of mutual sharing.

The transmission of culture gains credibility through the modelling of Special Character values and norms by the communicator. In the case of Champagnat College, facing up to responsibility with courage, a willingness to be available to students and the importance of personal prayer are all evident in the lives and actions of highly admired staff members. These are also key elements of the Marist Character of the school. Similarly, in Mercy College, staff members demonstrate qualities of leadership, willingness to support the efforts of others, and generosity; qualities implicit in the Mercy College culture. Given that other students and staff of the respective schools expressed their appreciation of these attributes, it is clear that by reflecting such qualities and values in action, such role models unconsciously highlight their significance, 'inviting' other members to adopt similar values and attitudes into their own actions. Findings certainly suggest that non-structural transmission has the power to inspire a personal response and commitment from members, which, reinforced by other experiences and dialogue, may produce effects that endure within the culture as a whole.

In strong cultures, "a distinctive ethos pervades the whole organisation" (Morgan, 1986:139). If the transmission of Special Character culture, therefore, is to be effective, it needs to be transmitted through all cultural elements. All transmission processes are important. No single transmission dynamic can stand alone, since all serve to integrate and

reinforce the founding cultures, their philosophies and traditions within the school culture.

It is:

The sum total of the different components at work in the school which interact with one another in such a way as to create favourable conditions for a formation process (Vatican, 1988: Para #24).

What is formally taught in the Religious Education programme; what is communicated through school publications; what is included in school policy needs to be transmitted through members' experiences of relationship and daily life of the school. There is an interplay between structural and non-structural transmission elements; an interdependence between them. A successful whole school celebration of Eucharist, for example, the importance of which is stated in school policy, will require alterations to the daily timetable structure; be communicated to the school community through formal communication channels such as the newsletter, and require a spirit of co-operation amongst teaching staff.

In the light of the quality of care in both research schools, a hypothetical, but plausible illustration of the links between structural and non-structural transmission of Special Character culture is the encounter between a distressed student and a teacher. The student may have already been formally taught through the Religious Education programme that compassion and care are core values of the founding tradition and the school. In his distress, he seeks and finds a teacher who is respected by members of the school community as a strong, caring person, always willing to make time for his students. The teacher listens to the student, takes care of his immediate needs and promises to follow up with the school pastoral care network and the family. Formal teaching, that is structural transmission, may, therefore, have communicated the significance of care and compassion as core values of the school, but it is non-structural transmission in the shape of the interpersonal exchange that reinforces these as credible, authentic realities for that student. The experience brings about an active and affective response from both participants, although neither student nor teacher may be consciously aware that such a transmission of culture has taken place.

Together, then, both structural and non-structural transmission processes effectively transmit Special Character culture, fully integrating its founding traditions. Neither has dominance or priority, although each has different functions and features. Structural transmission, for example, ensures that the content of Special Character provides a stable framework that retains the integrity of the founding vision and relevance for members. Clearly articulated, it provides meaning that transcends time and location. Given their very tangible nature and high profile within the life of the school, however, structural transmission processes can easily be mistaken as the sum total of the cultural transmission. There is a danger that over-reliance on structural transmission could potentially lead to dogmatism, authoritarianism and rigidity, failing ultimately to reflect the experiential reality of school culture.

The dominant importance of relationships for research participants in Champagnat and Mercy Colleges suggests that non-structural transmission enhances the personal depth of meaning members gain from Special Character content and experiences, bringing also credibility and rigour to the structural transmission process. For example, prayer in Mercy College as a spontaneous response to personal and communal need reinforces the centrality of school worship. Teachers' commitment to good preparation and planning gives rigour to the school norm of setting high standards and clear goals. In its turn, Champagnat College as a friendly welcoming place can be evaluated against the experience of the next new student, teacher or visitor. However, without a strong structural foundation, transmission of culture based on experience and relationship alone can become too subjective, attributed only to the 'goodness' of each separate individual without being an implicit feature of the Special Character culture as a whole. By being reduced to individual personal qualities, there is surely a danger that Special Character content will lose its coherence, and in time, its integrity with its foundational vision and tradition.

The dynamics of cultural transmission is rather like a garden watering system. The main pipe or conduit (that is, structural transmission) is visible on the lawn. Its function is apparent. However, within the pipe, unseen, is a constant steady flow of water, powerfully and purposefully directed towards the sprinkler. This is non-structural transmission.

Without the pipe, the flow of water has no direction, no force, and no purpose. It simply dissipates into the surrounding area with the potential of causing real damage. Within a strong stable pipe, however, the flow is efficiently and effectively directed to the sprinkler where it can ultimately meet the garden's needs. The conclusion? Both the pipe and the flow are essential elements of the system. On its own, neither is effective. Structural and non-structural processes are both essential for the integrated transmission of Special Character culture. Without balance, cultural transmission will be ineffective and potentially damaging to the culture, creating confusion, ambiguity, loss of relevance and credibility.

Transmission and leadership

Transmission of the Special Character culture of the Catholic school is the responsibility of all members, but the roles of Principal and Director of Religious Studies are especially significant. Playing a major role in ensuring that structural transmission is established and maintained, these people are also significant cultural models, expected to demonstrate the qualities, values and attitudes consistent with the vision of the school's founding cultures (Pejza, 1984). This can be particularly demanding for Principals and Directors of Religious Studies who have assumed leadership from members of the founding religious order. They may feel that they need to 'prove their worth' as cultural and spiritual leaders. The responsibility of cultural transmission is an onerous one; not only must people in these roles be professionally competent, but they must also portray and embody in their lives all that the founding tradition represents. In other words, to be effective transmitters of Special Character culture, they must be charismatic leaders, gifted with a strong sense of the founding vision and commitment to it.

What are the implications for the Catholic school culture seeking new school leaders, when it can find applicants who fulfil the need for competency, but who lack knowledge of and ability to transmit the culture of the school? As Schein (1992) observes:

The problem with charismatic vision as an embedding mechanism is that leaders who have it are rare and their impact is hard to predict (Schein, 1992:229).

The difficulty of finding cultural and spiritual leaders who have a keen sense of vision is echoed in the following comment from Pejza:

Some people don't have a vision to begin with, while others can't articulate their vision clearly enough to excite people to follow them. Some never have the opportunity to exercise leadership and still others don't realise that they have available inner or external resources at their command (Pejza, 1984:10).

Ensuring that gifted, competent cultural leadership is available in the future is a major ongoing issue that needs to be addressed by Proprietors and Boards of Trustees of Catholic schools.

Linking as a support for the transmission of Special Character culture

The maintenance of strong links with individuals, groups and institutions associated with the immediate school culture and with Catholic education networks supports the school's efforts to transmit its Special Character nature to its community. Through such links as the Champagnat College Malaga and the Mercy Charities Trust, members of these two school cultures have the opportunity to develop their appreciation of Catholic and founding philosophies of education, enabling them to reflect on their relevance and influence within their own school culture. Strong links enable members to develop a richer sense of identity and belonging, building awareness that they are part of a much bigger vision and reality than that of their own school. As a Religious Education Adviser, this researcher engaged in local and national seminars and was a member of various education networks. In her experience, links maintained with others in the New Zealand and international network of Catholic schools contribute insights, perspectives and knowledge about Catholic education. The work of transmitting Special Character culture can take on a more purposeful and confident nature when it is shared with others engaged in such work. Difficulties or challenges faced by each Catholic school culture can be brought into a more global perspective, allowing members to gain a greater appreciation of the shared vision and mission of Catholic education.

The importance of maintaining continuity

From research findings, maintaining continuity, that is, the preserving of founding cultures appears to be an increasingly urgent task, given that the practical physical level of involvement by members of the founding religious orders is in decline. The task of ensuring that the integrity and content of the original vision upon which the school was established has now fallen on members of the school culture who are respected by others for their knowledge, understanding and deep appreciation of the founding traditions. These ‘guardians’ (Neville, 1994) of Special Character culture are often long-serving staff, who have had an extensive personal and/or professional association with the founding order and the school. They may also be people formally trained in the Catholic education system, bringing, to their work, a mature involvement with Catholic schools.

Within their school culture, cultural guardians are perceived as exemplars of its Special Character, living symbols of its core values and philosophy. Such people bring a passion and enthusiasm for the school culture. They are often deeply committed to the preservation of the Special Character culture of the school, working hard in its interests. They are important human assets for ensuring cultural continuity. In both research schools, the researcher met and spoke to people whose association with their schools spanned decades. She found these were the people who knew and shared such stories as that of the cross on the map at Mercy College and the history of the green sheds of Champagnat College. It was clear that these cultural guardians are instrumental in handing on the schools’ rituals, customs, celebrations, myths, stories, symbols and traditions, transmitted with new meaning and relevance for each generation of members.

Cultural guardianship, embodied in individuals or within groups, ironically also appears to have the potential to create tension within the school culture. When perceptions of what constitutes the ‘true’ founding vision differs from that of people in key Special Character roles, such as the Principal or Director of Religious Studies, cultural conflicts may develop within the school. Conflicting interpretations of what the founding vision signifies in terms of school policy and action may jostle for dominance. Individuals or groups may be convinced that they know and understand the Special Character features of the school. A

case in point, is the debate surrounding the Fully Funded Option proposed by the Government and its Ministry of Education. In deliberations of this issue, each party may sincerely consider the facts and their implications in the light of the Special Character philosophy, values and beliefs of the school. Yet each group in the debate may finally reach a different conclusion, convinced that theirs is a true reflection of the founding spirit. Such conflicts are difficult to resolve, since each group, in its own eyes, is right, having responded with integrity to maintain the continuity of the school's philosophical heritage.

Continuity is ensured through formal and informal induction of new members. Each new person who joins the school culture inevitably over time 'picks up' the philosophy, values, beliefs and norms of the school, through what participants in this research term a process of 'osmosis'. However, there is a danger that, without ongoing monitoring, they may either misinterpret the meaning or fail to recognise the significance of Special Character content. An induction system that has both structural and non-structural elements enables new members to explore their understanding of the Special Character of the school in a 'safe' environment, supported by accurate sources of information provided by the school and the guiding companionship of a mentor.

An induction programme that is on-going over a substantial period of time is important, according to Neville (1994). In her study of two Singapore secondary schools, she found that the induction of new members into the culture of the Catholic school was both "elaborate and meticulous" (Neville, 1994:291), recognising the needs of non-Catholic staff. She observes:

The induction is necessary because the culture of a Roman Catholic school for new non-Catholic staff is traumatically different from the culture of a government school (Neville, 1994:291).

Given the largely secular nature of New Zealand society, it could be argued that the experience of joining the staff of a Catholic school in this country might also be a somewhat difficult experience for many non-Catholic teachers. Two new teachers in the research schools, for example, shared their initial apprehension about whether or not they would 'fit' into the Catholic school context and their early confusion with regard to some

Catholic practices such as prayer. This research concludes that a thorough induction process is necessary to ensure that new members are not only fully informed but also fully orientated into cultural membership. Yet it was also found, as it was in some overseas research, that this is an area in Catholic school culture where little has been done:

We found few formal procedures to orient new staff to the school's mission. Rather the key seemed to be in the hiring process (Bryk *et al*, 1993:142).

The importance of cultural congruence

Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991) argue that:

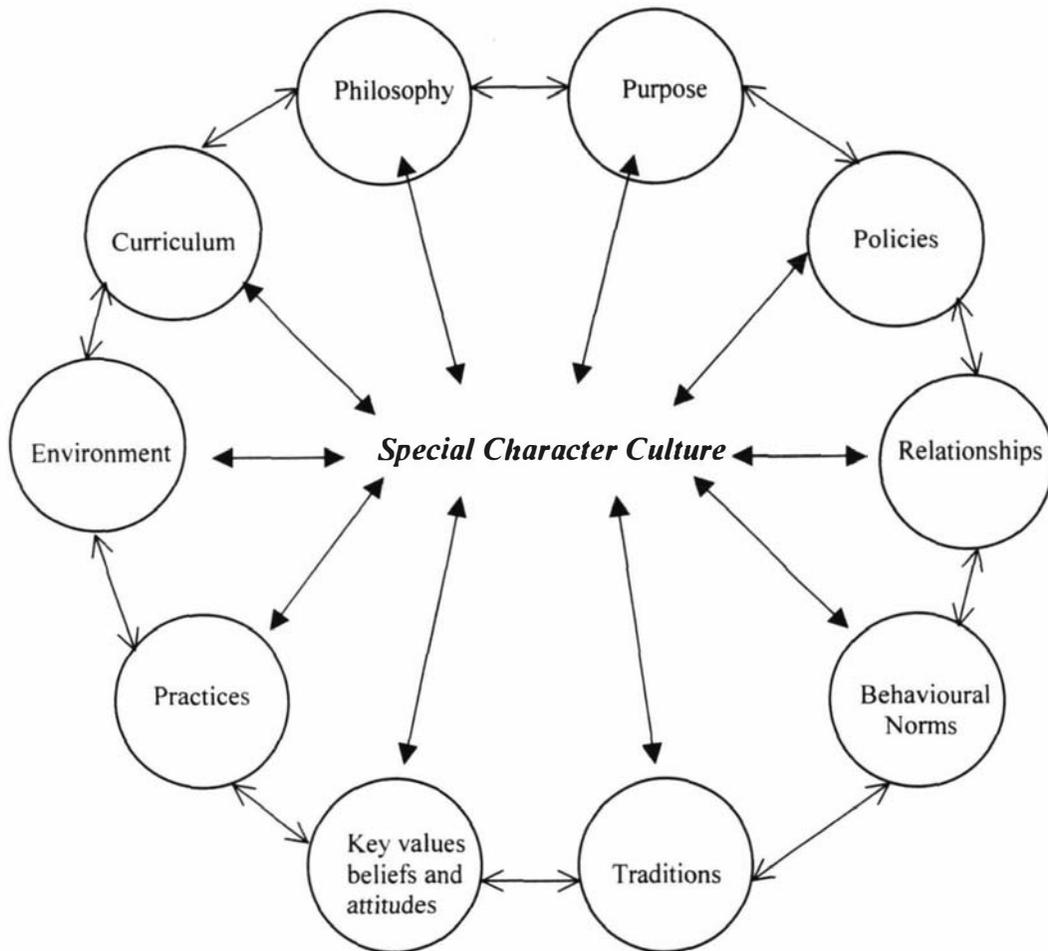
For a strong and co-ordinated culture, there needs to be a close correspondence between the intangible, foundational elements and the tangible outward expressions and symbols, between the espoused values, philosophy and ideology on one hand and the actual manifestations and practices on the other (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1991:174-175).

In other words, there must be a congruence between all the elements of the school culture in order for that culture to have authentic meaning for its members. "Where people say one thing and do another" (Morgan, 1986: 122), the school culture will be 'fragmented' (Morgan, 1986) torn by internal conflict, confusion and ambiguity; its creative energy dissipated (Keane & Keane, 1997). However, by contrast:

If a school's culture has coherence, that is, if there is a congruence between its vision and practices, then the school community is energised by its communal sense of purpose and commitment to quality Catholic education (Treston, 1992:5).

For Special Character schools such as the Catholic school, cultural congruence occurs when there is agreement or commonality between the core features of the four contributing cultures, particularly those of the founding traditions, fully integrated into the daily life and activity of the school (Figure 6). Congruence is maintained when the philosophy, ideology, values and beliefs of the contributing cultures are in a state of creative equilibrium. To achieve this, the school community needs to consistently evaluate its activity in the light of its founding vision, and the social and educational needs of its students. The school, therefore, exists in a kind of creative tension, illustrated in this comment by Bryk *et al* (1984):

Figure 6: Cultural congruence



(O'Donnell, 2000)

Balancing the emphasis on academics with a commitment to Catholic values and action can be a real dilemma for schools. It becomes necessary to both preserve the fundamental tradition and yet to interpret it anew for each new cohort of families and students and in the face of an ever-changing environment (Bryk *et al.*, 1984:29).

The Catholic school needs, therefore, to continually strive to maintain an appropriate and realistic balance between the religious elements of Special Character culture and the more

secular contribution of the social and educational contributing cultures (Roche, 1996; Keane & Keane, 1997). Pejza (1984) concludes that:

There will always be a tension between the sacred and the secular, between the school as an educational institution and the school as a faith community (Pejza, 1984:5).

Cultural congruence is the test of cultural credibility. It demonstrates consistency between what the school claims to value and represent and the real experience of those associated with it. Where there is congruence, the Special Character culture will encounter cooperation, conviction and commitment from members convinced by its authenticity and 'truth'. Its work will have a philosophical and cultural coherence and the transmission of its Special Character culture will be more effective. Without it, the school culture, however hard it claims to value its Special Character, may be confronted by scepticism, disbelief and even hostility from its members and community.

Three dimensions of cultural congruence

This research proposes that congruence occurs in three dimensions of school culture – internally, externally and temporally. **Internal congruence** is maintained when Special Character features are integrated throughout each area of school culture's internal activity and life. For example, it is evident where clear links can be found between the principles outlined in school policies and policy procedures in action or where core values outlined in school documentation are characteristic of members' interpersonal relationships and interactions. Internal congruence is maintained when there is a balance between structural and non-structural transmission processes; where what is stated formally is supported by what is done. It is a sign of integrity between the structural expression of Special Character content and the experience of members.

External congruence is maintained when there are appropriate and credible links between the culture of the school and the community it serves. In other words, when parents, students, staff, Catholic community, Proprietors and educational authorities and agencies have a shared perception of the school's philosophy, values, beliefs and purpose. It occurs when the education provided by the school is in tune with the needs of the community it serves and the educational vision it promulgates. For example, the degree of external

congruence would be in question if a school claimed to have a concern for justice and service, particularly for students who are socially and economically disadvantaged, yet demanded high levels of financial commitment from families in difficulties. Or if the school claimed to value partnership with the community, yet it failed to keep parents and other stakeholders informed.

How can a Catholic school be sure that it has congruence with its community? Although originally established by the Roman Catholic Church to provide a Catholic education for the children of Catholic families, the aim of the Catholic school is no longer so clearly defined. As fewer numbers of families maintain a regular association with the local Catholic Church, it cannot be assumed that they have selected a Catholic school for the education of their children for purely spiritual or religious reasons as Convey notes:

For some parents, the perceived quality of the academic program of a particular Catholic school is sufficient reason to send their children to the school; however, most parents want more from the school than just a good academic program. On the other hand, very few parents will send their children to a school that they feel is not going to provide a good academic education (Convey, 1992:343).

Although considerable research has been conducted overseas into the reasons parents choose Catholic schools for their children's education (Convey, 1992), little, if any, has been done in New Zealand. Without a sound investigation into parents' motivations for choosing a Catholic school, only a general impression of their understanding of and commitment to Catholic education can be gained, based on an initial enrolment interview between Principal and parents of prospective students. For example, in their study of Catholic high schools in the United States, Bryk *et al* (1984) found that a Catholic school's reputation for academic success was a major reason for its being selected by students and parents:

Many looked on these schools as a good economic investment; attendance would enhance one's chances of admission to a premier university and would ultimately increase the opportunities for getting a good job (Bryk *et al*, 1984:29).

This research found a high level of congruence between internal members' and external members' perceptions of the school, its nature and purpose. The religious and spiritual nature of the school, whilst not the only factor, was clearly significant in terms of the

reasons parents opted to enrol their sons and daughters. This was particularly so in Mercy College with its strong sustained links with local Catholic primary schools. However, family links and educational opportunities were also major factors in parental selection of the schools.

A lack of external congruence between a school and its local community would undoubtedly influence its sense of purpose, its policies, objectives, values, activities and environment. It cannot be assumed that parents, for instance, will offer much support in areas they consider to be insignificant or even irrelevant. In a sense, such a lack of congruence could indicate that the school culture is 'out of touch' with the values, purposes and goals of its external community. If such a situation were endemic at a national or diocesan level, it would surely signal an urgent need for dialogue between proprietors and other groups associated with Catholic schools, for the purpose of clarifying and perhaps, redefining, the vision, purpose and aims of Catholic education. Indeed, in their discussion of Catholic education in Australia, Keane & Keane (1997) express the belief that:

A clear vision of the purpose of the contemporary Catholic school needs to be re-established and communicated to the Catholic community. Then teachers, parents and students can share a common understanding and be able to regain a sense of direction and purpose (Keane & Keane, 1997:4).

Temporal congruence is apparent when features of the founding traditions are evident in the various features of current Catholic school culture, such as in the preservation of traditional values, beliefs, historical artefacts, symbols, stories, heroes, traditions, rituals and customs (Table 3). It is an outcome of successful patterns of cultural continuity, a sign that the founding tradition is appreciated by members as a "spiritual treasury" (Groome, 1998: 341) of an earlier wisdom.

Temporal congruence differs from internal congruence; that is, congruence **within** the transmission activities of the school. Temporal congruence is established when current features of the school culture can be accurately and authentically tracked back to their source, the founding traditions; that is, congruence of Special Character content back through time. In brief, temporal congruence is evident when one can say 'that was there

Table 3: Examples of temporal congruence in the research schools

MARIST FOUNDING TRADITION	CHAMPAGNAT COLLEGE CULTURE
Education as a means of freeing the individual from poverty	A decile 3 school, providing an education for students from low socio-economic areas Second chance education provided for some students
Marcellin Champagnat's teaching to his Brothers to 'first love the young people'	High levels of care for students evident
Practical approach to life and education	Assistance of students is often of a practical nature
Commitment to family and building positive relationships	School described as a 'family; close relational bonds between members
Focus on being 'present' to young people	High levels of staff involvement in extra-curricular activities
Belief in and commitment to vocation	Strong vocational approach to teaching amongst staff
Marcellin Champagnat as a role model who inspires others to continue his work	Marcellin Champagnat as a role model for staff and students

MERCY FOUNDING TRADITION	MERCY COLLEGE CULTURE
Motivation to 'make a difference' in the lives of the poor	Students exhorted to 'make a difference' in society
Catherine McAuley and her followers committed to the empowerment of women	Educational focus on the education of young women
Founder used her inheritance to fulfil her mission	Students urged to use their gifts and talents in the service of others
A community of women who led	Students given opportunities to lead within the school: an expectation that graduates will be future leaders
Strong sense of mission	Sense of mission and service amongst staff and students
People to be treated with dignity and respect	High levels of care for students and their dignity; strong positive relationships between staff and students
Catherine McAuley as a woman who loved life, fun and good humour	Spirit of celebration and fun maintained and valued by staff and students
A woman who challenged oppression in her society	Keen awareness of and respect for the rights of Others
Women with a down-to-earth philosophy, enhanced by strong skills in administration	A strong, well structured administration

(O'Donnell, 2000)

then; that is still here now'. Ultimately, it occurs when the spirit, vision and mission of the founding traditions are living, dynamic realities within the current culture of the school.

The integration of key features of founding traditions in each generation is effective only when those features remain relevant and alive for members of the school culture. There needs to be amongst members an appreciation that:

Tradition itself is something that evolved through historical circumstances, whose value and beauty preserve the welfare of the human community by adapting to emerging historical circumstances ... Yet, if tradition is to have vitality, it must be seen as the adapting core of a living culture, not a static text that remains unchanged (Starratt, 1995:84).

This view is supported by Sheldrake (1995) who observes founding cultures will retain their influence only if there is a "new synthesis between the tradition and its context" (Sheldrake, 1995: 86). As the features of the tradition are reinterpreted by the school culture to make meaning of the 'now':

The tradition rediscovers meaning, renews itself and take the risk of opening itself up anew to the concrete demands of the gospel in the present (Sheldrake, 1995:86).

If preserved for their own sake, without meaning for the current culture, the features of founding cultures lose their impact on the life and activity of the school, becoming instead remnants from a forgotten past. To benefit the school, they must retain something of the vitality and idealism that originally gave them 'birth', qualities illustrated by the energy, enthusiasm and passion invested in their school traditions by members of Mercy and Champagnat Colleges.

Summary

Special Character culture is transmitted to members through a range of dynamic interactive processes that can be categorised as structural and non-structural transmission. Each group fulfils its own function within the culture, but both categories need to be interdependent for effective transmission. To ensure that the school culture preserves its Special Character nature, it is essential that the cultural content of the founding traditions is fully integrated with the daily life and activity of the school; a responsibility that falls on all members of

the culture, particularly Special Character leaders within the school. A strong relational network within the Catholic education system and the wider community of the Roman Catholic Church supports the transmission and reinforcement of Catholic school culture. It is important that the school culture maintains continuity with its founding heritage, and congruence between its contributing cultures, its internal cultural reality, its external community and the content of its historical traditions. Cultural congruence is an indicator of integrity. Maintaining congruence is a process which creates a dynamic tension within the school culture as it strives to live up to the religious nature of its founding vision and the secular demands of New Zealand society and its education system.

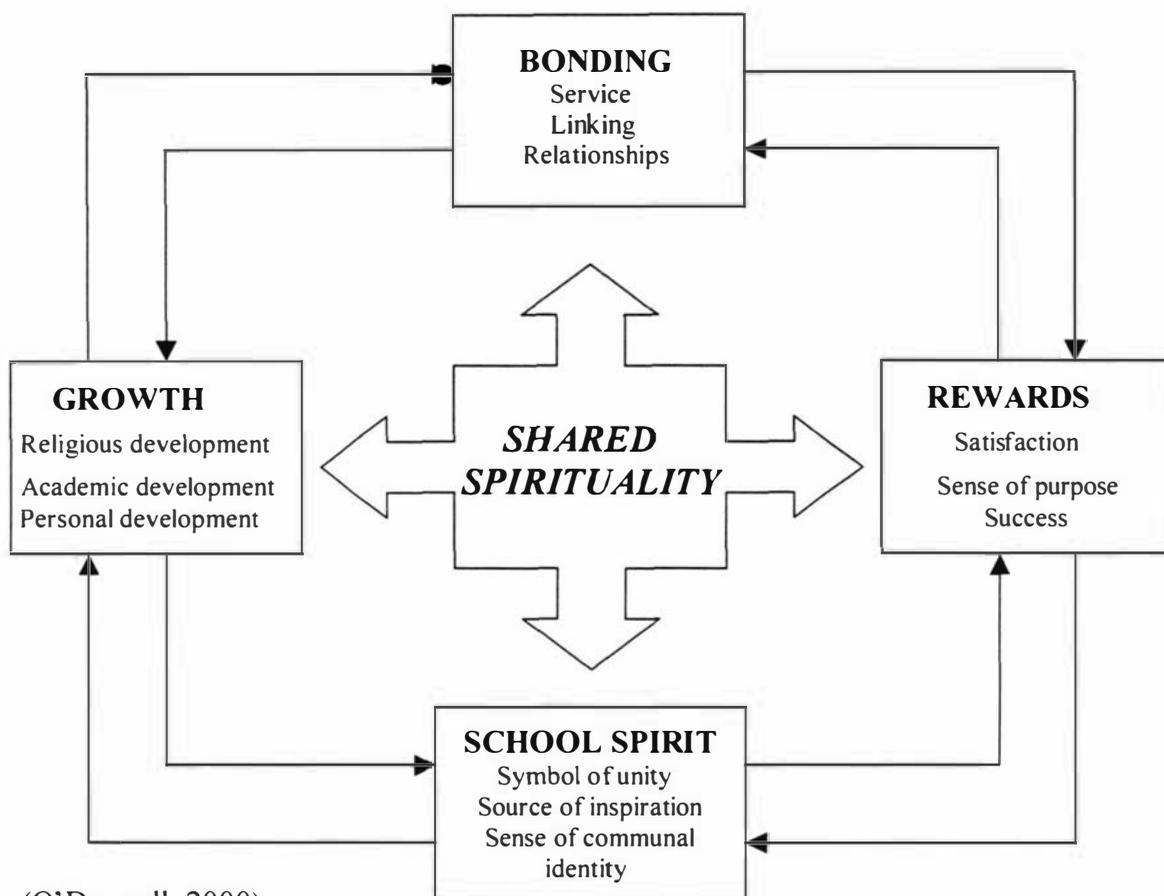
SHARED SPIRITUALITY

Catholic schools are involved in more than the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes designed to equip the student for citizenship and employment. Belonging within the culture of the Roman Catholic Church, they are concerned with the development of the human person in all aspects of his/her humanity.

The entire thrust of Catholic teaching is aimed at the integral formation of each student (Vatican, 1982: Para #28).

For Catholics, as for other Christians, the fullest experience of human life is to be found in relationship, with God and with other human beings. In the light of this fundamental belief, the Catholic school is concerned with the development of human spirituality and faith. This research proposes that, through the authentic and effective integration of its spiritual and secular natures, the school culture develops a unique spirituality shared by members, that brings benefits, not only for the development of the individual, but also for the whole organisation (Figure 7).

Figure 7: The outcomes of Shared Spirituality



The nature of Christian spirituality

Sheldrake (1995) observes that:

Spirituality is one of those subjects whose meaning everyone claims to know until they have to define it (Sheldrake, 1995:40).

He warns against an over-simplification of the concept, reducing its meaning so that it “can all too easily become just another word for almost every human experience” (Sheldrake, 1995:6). However, he sheds some light on its meaning in his suggestion that:

What the word ‘spirituality’ seeks to express the conscious human response to God that is both personal and ecclesial. In short, ‘life in the Spirit’ (Sheldrake, 1995:45).

Christian spirituality is concerned with:

The whole of human life at depth ... A central feature of that spirituality derives its identity from a Christian belief that as human beings we are capable of entering into a relationship with God (Sheldrake, 1995:60);

Groome (1998) notes that:

The essence of our spirituality is our relationship – not only with God, but also with self, others and the world (Groome, 1998:330).

The development of personal spirituality within the Christian religious tradition is essentially connected, therefore, with relationship, faith and community; fundamental cultural features that were consistently evident in both research schools.

Communities of faith

Catholic schools place a major emphasis on the mystery and dynamic of interpersonal relationships. School culture is perceived as 'community' rather than 'organisation' as Sergiovanni explains:

In communities, for example, the connection of people to purpose and the connection among people are not based on contracts but commitments. Communities are socially organized around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them ... the bonding together of people in special ways and the binding of them to share values and ideas are the defining characteristics of schools as communities. Communities are defined by their centers of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of 'we' from 'I' (Sergiovanni, 1994:4).

A finding of this inquiry, the concept of the Catholic school as a community is also well established in other research (Bryk *et al*, 1984, 1993; Pejza, 1984; Lesko, 1988; Convey, 1992; Treston, 1992; Neville, 1994). The qualities of strong school communities create an environment that is conducive to the development of spirituality as reflected by Pejza (1984):

Effective Catholic high schools are value-orientated, grounded in a set of beliefs about the worth of each individual. They have a worldview that goes beyond self-interest. The thing which binds together the culture of the Catholic school and makes it work is an orientation toward personal goodness (Pejza, 1984:7).

However, the personal formation of young people within a Special Character school culture is not a private affair, involving only the individual. Grounded in relationships, personal formation involves the members of the school community as Starratt observes:

It has to be negotiated, agreed upon, and accepted by both students and teachers ... it is relational, always relational. It can never be an isolated, individual exercise; it is necessarily social (Starratt, 1995: 84).

To belong to a community that strives to nurture the spiritual and personal lives of young people is to be, consciously or unconsciously, involved. A teacher in a Catholic school cannot avoid such involvement since it is ultimately rooted in their relationships with others. As a member of the school community:

We form ourselves by the way we *all* act – that is, the community is a kind of collective super-teacher. Cumulatively, all teach all. The way we conduct our relationships forms us and by the example we give to one another, we are part of the community helping to form others, some of whom we do not know (Starratt, 1995:90).

In this light, therefore, the goal of the Special Character culture of developing in students a personal faith and spirituality inevitably influences the spirituality of **every** member, even if this is not expressed in religious terms. In short, a **shared** spirituality emerges as a feature of the culture.

Effective transmission of Special Character culture, grounded within the framework provided by founding cultures, creates for individuals and the school community, what Muus (1996) calls, a ‘master story’, a foundation for personal and communal faith and spirituality. Muus (1996) explains:

As individuals make meaning of life and of life’s experience, they develop for themselves a unique master or core story that incorporates their fundamental values and orientation towards life and serves as a guiding compass. The master story contains the crucial values that the individual draws upon to give meaning to his or her life ... Our master story also determines the group of people with whom we form allegiances and alliances and with whom we join in our effort to make meaning out of life. Such stories belong to communities as well as individuals (Muus, 1996:267).

The significance of a ‘master story’ for the development of spirituality is reflected in the findings of this research. The high levels of bonding between members of both Mercy and Champagnat Colleges and the strength of communal loyalty suggests that members personally and closely identify with the ‘story’ of the school culture. This is reinforced by

students' frequent reference to the friendships made during their years of attendance and their apparent confidence that these links will be maintained. Members themselves point to growth in personal faith and spirituality gained through their membership of the school culture.

It is clear from findings that cultural features such as shared values and purpose, relationship, symbolism, celebration, ritual, special events and modelling, touch the deepest experience of human life and shape a person's master story. They are capable of evoking thought, reflection and emotion; note, for example, the cultural impact of the Mercy and Champagnat College songs. Appreciated and shared, these features have the power to reinforce and enhance bonding. They have a sacred quality (Neville, 1994) and attempts to change these core expressions of culture will be met with a level of resistance which is in direct relationship to the strength and quality of their shared meaning for the group. They are spiritual expressions of cultural bonding and identity; capable of enduring even during times of conflict and stress. By implication, perhaps the converse might also be true. For a school lacking a shared spirituality amongst its members, is there a danger that cultural experiences will be shallow or superficial? Is it likely that, in extreme situations, such features might inspire cynicism and disillusionment when held up against the vision of the school's founding cultures instead of loyalty and pride?

A source of inspiration and cultural bonding

This research has found that a strong, shared spirituality has the power to motivate and inspire members. It shapes and consolidates the values and beliefs of the organisation, founded on a common philosophy grounded within the culture of the school. Individuals act from inner conviction, strengthened by their personal acceptance and commitment to the vision of the school and its founding tradition. When the majority of members share a similar level of personal vision adoption, a coherent sense of purpose is created, capable of being self-fulfilling and self-sustaining as it is translated into practical action. By becoming a lived reality in the lives of members, this spiritual energy is communicated to others, who in turn, are able to make a personal decision about where they stand in relation

to it. Those who cannot find points of personal agreement will be inevitably, either consciously or subconsciously, perceived as 'outsiders', as people who do not 'fit' the culture of the school (Neville, 1994). As a consequence, over time, cultural membership itself will be shaped by the shared spirituality of the dominant group as it attracts like-minded people and rejects those who oppose.

Shared spirituality appears to give rise to a strong communitarian experience of culture. People make close bonds with others in the school (Bryk *et al.*, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1994) that transcend status, gender, ethnic identity and age. In Catholic schools, there is an expectation that people will relate to each other as unique individuals, having the right to be treated with respect for their dignity. Teachers have a major influence on their students, beyond the normal activity of teaching and learning of academic disciplines.

In their daily interactions with students, they make concrete the meaning of a Catholic school and Catholic values. It is expressed in their religious practice, in their personal lives and in the dedication they bring to their teaching. Without a strong presence of teachers enthusiastically committed to building the school community, the spirit of the school would surely suffer (Bryk *et al.*, 1984:18).

The teacher who fails to live up to these expectations may be judged, not only for his/her perceived lack of interpersonal skill, but for their failure to live by the core vision of the school as a Christian community. This research found that there are high levels of confidence amongst students that their needs will be a focus of teachers' work, beyond that of the classroom. In their turn, teachers' expectations of student behaviour go beyond merely the maintenance of a positive learning environment in the classroom.

They are as concerned about the kind of person that each student becomes as about how much a student knows (Bryk *et al.*, 1993:97).

Behavioural norms are linked directly to the core Christian, Catholic philosophy, values, and beliefs of the school. In both cases, therefore, the bonds that develop between staff and students transcend functional co-operation. They are firmly grounded in a shared spirituality that ultimately influences the wider network of relationships within the school community.

Shared spirituality and school spirit

Shared spirituality within the culture of the school gives rise to a strong school spirit.

The energy and spirit of the organization, as well as its performance, is born out of culture (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993:34).

If shared spirituality is the fully integrated substance of the philosophy, values and beliefs held by members to be sacred, then school spirit is the **experience** of that unity of vision and mission. It is made real for members through core symbols such as the school motto, song and sacred traditions. In both research sites, school spirit is clearly a celebration of the living out, with integrity, those values, beliefs and norms that bond the unique Special Character culture with its Catholic community, past and present. In short, it is the affective outcome of sharing human meaning in relationship with others. Research findings show that it has the power to inspire pride and loyalty amongst members who speak of it as a heritage or legacy to be handed on, almost as if it were a visible tangible reality that requires no explanation, no definition; something intangible but powerful. In Champagnat College, this was particularly illustrated by the embodiment of the 'school spirit' in the Champagnat College Way, a code for living as a member of the school culture and a values touchstone for all.

A source of personal potential

Over time, an experience of shared spirituality has the potential to open up new possibilities for individual members of the culture in terms of the meaning they attribute to their personal lives and those of others. As each member compares and contrasts the meaning of human life that they have developed from their own unique life experience with the meaning provided by the shared spirituality of the school, they may find points of agreement which reinforce their personal spirituality. They may also discover points of difference which challenge them to seek new ways of being who they are. They gain an awareness of being part of something 'bigger' than an individual person, developing a sense of belonging to a human family whose search for purpose and direction is realised in the Christian way of life, its values, beliefs, morality and thinking. This interactive tension between the shared spirituality of the Special Character culture of the school and that of the

individual life has the potential to bring about a personal transformation, influencing future judgements and decision-making. It ultimately provides a blueprint for living as each person continues a process of conscious and subconscious interpretation of cultural meaning.

The shared spirituality of a Special Character culture provides an image of the human person against which the individual may compare his or her own actions, desires, motivations and actions. In other words, an experience of shared spirituality sets a standard and a model for each person, founded on the Catholic Christian tradition and its belief in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. However, faith and its effects on the spirituality of each person are ultimately dependent on the free, sincere and knowing choice of the individual. An experience of shared spirituality within the Catholic school is no guarantee that individual members, students or staff, will accept or commit to a Christian or Roman Catholic way of life. Raduntz explains:

Increasingly, today's youth are unwilling to accept religious and moral teachings as valuable simply because they come from religious authorities. They may be prejudiced to some extent by anti-institutional feelings, but they would like to explore the meaning and relevance of such teachings for themselves ... While the overall stance of the Catholic school is faith-commending, this does not imply the attempted imposition of faith or religious teachings. Most theological understandings of Christian faith presume that by nature it cannot be imposed. It remains a *hope* that students will develop personal faith and take up active Church membership (Raduntz, 1995: xxiii, xxiv).

Tensions between the school culture and other significant cultures to which each member belongs may not be easily or effectively resolved, creating for the person, a contradiction of meaning, a dichotomy of values, beliefs and norms. However, free to choose, students (and staff) select from their experience of Special Character education those elements or features that provide them with the greatest personal meaning. They may value those that resonate within them and their situation, rejecting those which simply do not fit or which, for them, lack authenticity and worth in relation to their experience of reality. For example, personal attitudes to relationship may be shaped by an experience of care and compassion within the school; attitudes to work may be influenced by the culture's modelling of service. However, as illustrated by two or three Mercy College students, the person may still not

accept the existence of God or adopt the religious practices and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

Evaluating spirituality

The very nature of spiritual development, a life-long intimate process, defies evaluation. How does one evaluate growth in goodness, holiness or relationship with God? Yet, if the development of faith and spirituality is a core purpose of Catholic education, surely it is important for parents, proprietors, and the wider Roman Catholic community to have some way of evaluating the contribution of the Special Character school in this area. This may seem to be a straightforward assumption. However, it raises other issues as Treston (1997) outlines:

The role of the Catholic school in nurturing faith raises questions about the role of the school within the teaching ministry of the church community and how faith development is understood by the Catholic community (Treston, 1997:10).

In other words, what is the role of the school in developing faith and spirituality when considered against the role of the family, the parish and the wider community and culture of the Roman Catholic Church? Can the school achieve what the family or parish cannot? In addition, how is faith development to be defined? Some members of the Church and the school culture may consider that a thorough knowledge of Church doctrine and dogma as contained in, for example, a Catholic catechism is an essential requirement for faith; others may hold that prayerfulness and the development of virtue is the key. Still others may argue that attendance at Sunday Eucharist is the most valid indicator of faith.

Statistical data, in this researcher's opinion, is an inadequate means of evaluating the spiritual outcomes of a Special Character education. Growth in the rolls of Catholic schools, for example, is not necessarily an indication of either the effectiveness of the school in the area of spiritual and faith formation or the value attributed by prospective parents to the spiritual or religious benefits of a Catholic education. Such growth could be attributed to demographic factors or the school's reputation for success in national external examinations. Neither can it be assumed that low numbers of young people regularly in

attendance at Sunday Mass are an indicator of failure on the part of the school to develop the faith and spirituality of its students. The issues involved in the evaluation of personal and spiritual formation, therefore, are complex, often confusing. Newton (1980) cautions against unrealistic expectations:

Catholic schools cannot produce a finished product; they can only exert a force which may alter the direction of the person who will continue to emerge throughout a lifetime as he/she encounters new challenges and opportunities for growth ... More and more we have come to realize that the production of Catholics who possess a once-and-for-all complete body of knowledge and practice is a wooden and unrealistic goal (Newton, 1980:5).

Currently, Catholic schools are developing self-review processes that attempt to evaluate the spiritual climate of the school culture. So too, the effectiveness of the delivery of the Religious Education curriculum in terms of teaching and learning in the classroom is a focus for school review. Both Champagnat and Mercy Colleges, for example, include Special Character as an integral part of their formal and informal self-review processes. Yet, how can schools know the long-term spiritual impact of their education on the individual lives of their students? Indeed, the answer may be that each school culture may never **really** know its effectiveness as a transmitter of Catholic culture and spirituality: its best efforts may always have the quality of 'an act of faith' in every sense of the word.

Summary

The Special Character culture of the Catholic school is intimately linked with the faith and spirituality of its members. The strength of this link determines individual and communal levels of understanding and acceptance of the philosophy, values, beliefs and norms implicit in the integration of the school's founding traditions. It also determines the degree to which members promote, uphold and protect these, based on their evaluation of its authenticity within the school culture. A high level of acceptance of and commitment to the Special Character culture of the school by its members creates a shared spirituality; an experience which bonds members together. This in turn may shape the personal spirituality of each member, enduring and influencing the individual long after they have left the school. However, the effectiveness of the school in relation to this individual and personal development may remain a mystery.

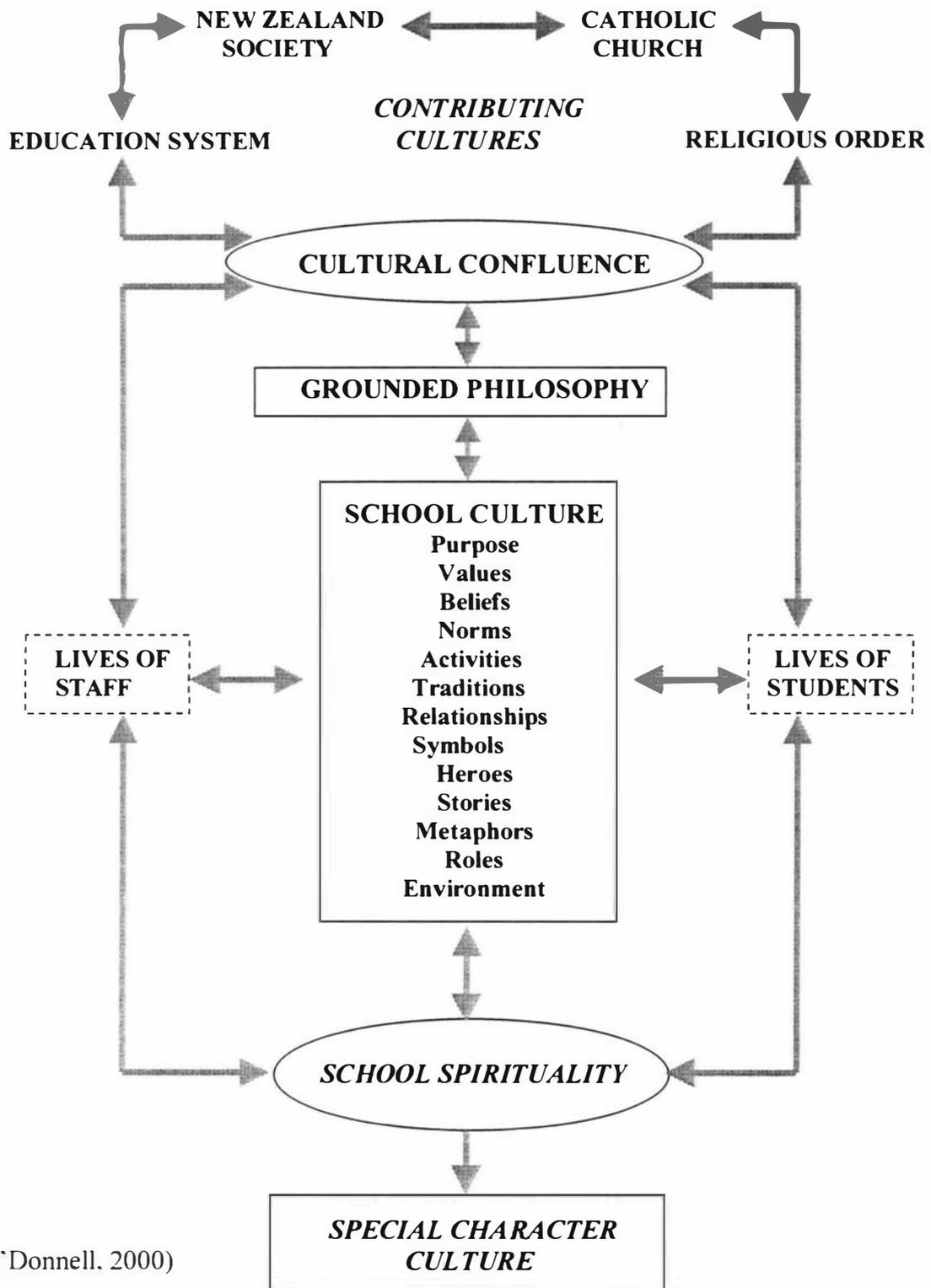
A GROUNDED THEORY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER CULTURE

The four themes emerging from this research and extrapolated above form the basis of a grounded theory of the Special Character culture with a focus on the New Zealand Catholic secondary school. Taken as a whole, they provide a theoretical framework that hopefully might enrich our understanding of the nature of Special Character schools and the education they provide. Figure 8 shows the complexity of the phenomenon and displays the interactive factors that give rise to such school cultures.

New Zealand secondary schools exist within and are influenced by society in general and the education system in particular. Both of these cultural contexts shape the roles and purposes of schools, determining what is of greatest value. They provide a framework of philosophy, ideology, values and beliefs, interpreted by the school in relation to its own needs, challenges, aspirations and objectives of its members. The particular way in which each school defines and works towards its educational vision, and the meaning of that vision for each individual creates a unique school culture.

In this respect, New Zealand Catholic schools, as State Integrated schools, have a similar cultural framework to other secondary schools. They are, after all, schools within a national system of state education. However, the uniqueness of their culture is determined by more than the criteria of uniqueness applicable to any school culture. Their vision of education is founded upon the vision of life and education of two religious contributing cultures that are distinctive to Catholicism. These are the culture of the Roman Catholic Church at a variety of social levels; and, for schools established and owned by a Religious Order, the founding religious tradition of that Order as a subculture of the Catholic Church. Together, these have a catalyst effect on the influence of the other contributing cultures, creating a duality of purpose and vision for the Catholic school in New Zealand.

Figure 8: A model of the Special Character of the New Zealand Catholic secondary school



(O'Donnell, 2000)

All four contributing cultures together shape and influence the philosophy of life and education that characterises and motivates the individual school. A philosophy, however, cannot be simply adopted by a school nor imposed by an external culture. To have impact, it must have meaning for the members of the school culture; it must be seen as relevant, purposeful and essentially practical in relation to the school's unique cultural context. This philosophy, therefore, is **grounded** not merely in a theoretical sense but within the reality of each school context.

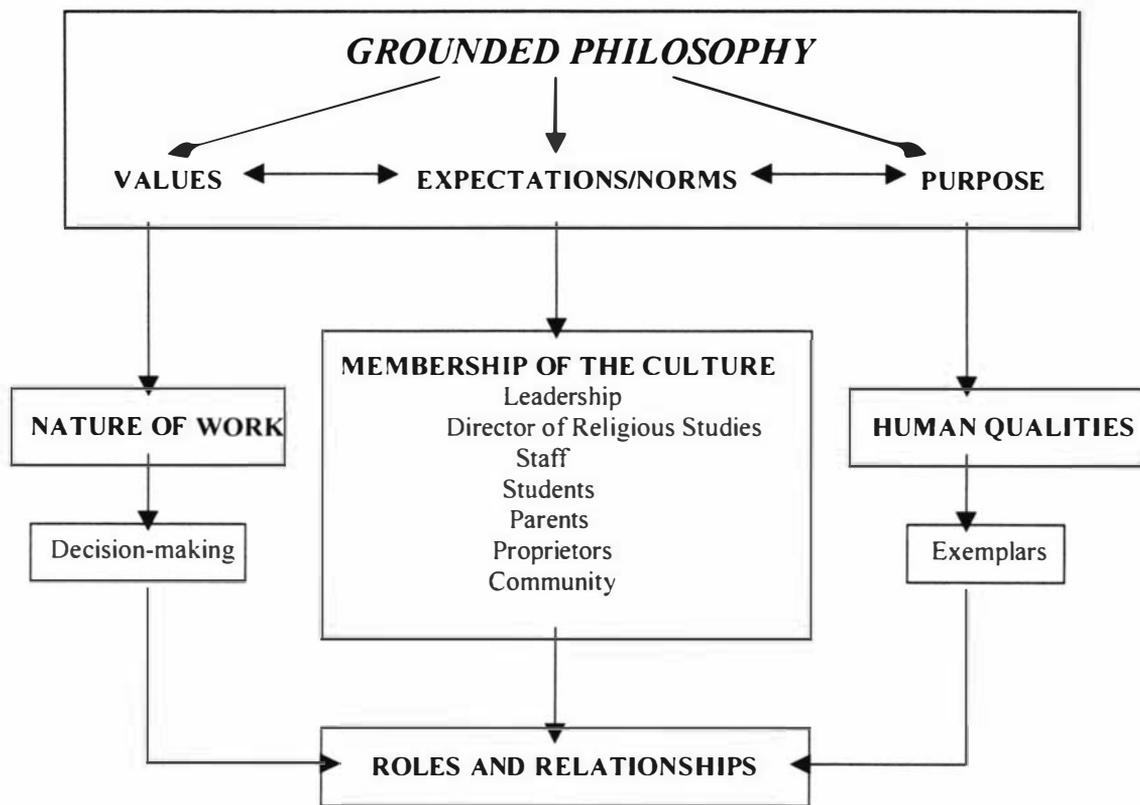
A grounded philosophy: that is, a philosophy with a Special Character, emerges from the confluence of the Catholic school's four interrelated contributing cultures. Functioning at a conscious level and at the level of basic assumptions, it gives structure and shape to **all** the cultural features of the individual Catholic school. It provides a vision of life, humanity and education, determines roles and relationships and influences the activity of the school (Figure 9).

The Special Character or distinctiveness of the philosophy is firmly rooted in the contribution of the religious founding cultures and traditions. Take these away, or reduce their influence, and the school loses its distinctive culture. Founding traditions, therefore, are of paramount importance, to be maintained as a living cultural reality within the life of the school, integrated fully in its structural and non-structural activity and transmitted to others.

It is people who create and maintain culture. In each school, individual people bring their own personal 'stories' to the culture, developed from their membership of and daily interactions within some or all of the school's contributing cultures. It is inevitable that as these unique individuals work and struggle together with the implications of the religious and secular nature of the school's grounded philosophy, they will colour it with their own unique meaning. Some may find greater meaning in one contributing element than in others. The Special Character school is engaged in a continual process of dialogue and reflection as members strive to maintain continuity and congruence between the secular nature of the school, its religious nature and its internal and external reality.

To maintain the distinctiveness of its culture and to be effective as a guardian of its founding heritage, the school needs to find a harmonious balance between the natures and demands of all four contributing cultures, albeit within the reality of a limited, imperfect and complex world. In other words, the key to integrity and success is perhaps the **process** itself, not necessarily through striving to achieve unrealistic expectations of human and cultural perfection.

Figure 9: The influence of a grounded philosophy



(O'Donnell, 2000)

A Special Character school culture that authentically lives out its religious nature, in harmony with its secular nature, provides for the spiritual formation for its members. As people share the common vision, values and goals implicit in such cultural integration, they

are bound together in relationship and spirit. A shared spirituality amongst students and staff will emerge as a cultural strength of the school, transforming individual lives and creating a school culture with a strong communitarian nature.

The process of maintaining integrity with the school's founding cultures and vision is complex and often 'messy'. However, the struggle, challenges and demands of the process itself are essential elements in maintaining and preserving the religious cultural features that make it distinctive. Given the complexities of modern life and education, perhaps it is the sincere commitment by members of the school culture that ultimately justifies the existence of the Special Character school.

CHAPTER NINE: RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of research findings and their implications for schools with a Special Character, this chapter proposes a range of recommendations for State Integrated schools, for Catholic education in particular, for the New Zealand Ministry of Education and for schools in general. Given that no research project can cover all relevant issues, recommendations for further research are also included.

STATE INTEGRATED SCHOOLS AND SPECIAL CHARACTER

A need for critique

The authenticity of a school's Special Character rests on the congruence between its philosophy, values, sense of purpose, beliefs and actions and those of its contributing cultures. By its very nature, the State Integrated school founded on a religious tradition operates in a context of dynamic tension between its dual purposes, that is, religious and secular. Its identity and its development as a culture, expressed through its religious practices and activities, inevitably exercise a practical influence on its operations as a learning and teaching institution. Priorities need, at times, to be 'juggled' to meet often-conflicting demands for time, finance and personnel. It is important, therefore, that each school engages in an ongoing evaluation of both its religious and secular activity to ensure that its responsibilities to both faith development and education are served to the best of its ability.

Self-critique

There is a need for each school to ensure that its core philosophy, values and beliefs are fully integrated in all aspects of its life as a culture. Boards of Trustees and school leaders

need to consider whether or not the school's strategic planning, policies, procedures and management systems include reference to its founding tradition(s) and reflect the religious values upon which the whole life of the school is founded. For example, is a Special Character report a regular feature of Board meetings? If so, does it have primacy on the agenda or is it at the end of the long list of other 'important' business?

Stakeholders and decision-makers need to have the courage to evaluate the religious and spiritual climate of the school, the quality of its relationships and the degree to which the school culture reflects a coherent, authentic and shared vision of life and education. When contradictions between what is articulated and what is experienced are perceived, the religious and faith growth of the school culture will be limited. The internal 'health' of Special Character culture depends on an honest, sincere and thorough self-critique. Unless a rigorous self-review process is undertaken regularly by the school, the sincere efforts of its members to promote and preserve the distinctive character of the school may at best, be limited, and at worst, be negated by ambiguity and contradiction.

Critique of other philosophies

It is vitally important that each Special Character school and its central education authorities maintain a critical stance on the secular educational philosophy, values and beliefs that impact on the life and operation of the school. As Keane & Keane (1997) observe in relation to Catholic education:

There are, of course, competing philosophies and views of the world. Pragmatic philosophies do not always sit with a religious view of the world. Some teaching approaches, management styles and attitudes, or assessment methods will not sit easily with Catholic values and philosophy. Faced with unacceptable approaches, Catholic educators have to be prepared to articulate their own stance, and strongly and creatively manage any tensions which arise when they perceive a collision of values (Keane & Keane, 1997:7).

New Zealand's current educational trend, as outlined in the context chapter of this thesis, presents a major challenge. Much that is contained in a market philosophy of education and its New Right ideology, promulgated over the last ten years in New Zealand, is on the surface compatible with that of Special Character education. For example, a concept of partnership and community involvement appears to sit comfortably with both. So too, the

need for efficiency, effectiveness and accountability can be argued in the context of justice. The idea of empowerment of the individual school to provide an education best suited to its community and respect for the rights and dignity of the individual appears to be in harmony. The goal of educational excellence and the call to serve others by using personal talents appear also to sit well together. However, whilst taking the 'best' of what a market focused philosophy may offer, it is important that such features are compared and contrasted with the educational philosophy upon which the school is founded and operates. A global acceptance of an external philosophy, however persuasive it might be, presents inherent and significant conflicts for the integrity of a Special Character culture.

An illustration from Catholic education

In terms of Catholic education, the findings of this research and that of overseas researchers, such as Bryk, Lee & Holland (1993), Grace (1995), Keane & Keane (1997) and Burford (1997), reinforce the belief that Catholic education is fundamentally concerned with the concept of 'common good'. There is an undeniable emphasis on striving for excellence, but not merely in an academic sense. A commitment to all aspects of personal excellence is rooted in a concept of service. The core message to students to care for and serve others is both explicitly expressed and implicitly modelled within the cultural life of the Catholic school. Freedom for the individual is perceived in relation to the freedom of others and constitutes the heart of justice as expressed within the Catholic school culture. In the interests of promoting freedom and the preserving of personal dignity, Catholic schools have traditionally and consistently maintained a preferential option for the education of the disadvantaged.

These concepts, values and beliefs do not sit comfortably with a view of education as a private affair, of excellence in terms of competition with others and of schools as providers of an educational product rather than as learning communities. The aim of Catholic schools is ultimately the development of the whole human person, including the spiritual. It is a long-standing problem that such aims inevitably conflict with an instrumental, functional view of education that places a dominant emphasis on the acquisition of skills and knowledge, in the interests of economic rationalisation. Grace (1995) expresses strong

views on the dangers for Catholic schools of too readily adopting a market approach to education. He states:

As Catholic schools respond to contemporary market values in education and to the issues of institutional survival which they generate, a conflict of values is likely to result. Stated in the starkest form, it could be argued that there is little market yield or return for schools which continue to operate a preferential option for the poor ... In other words, the space, identity and voice of contemporary Catholic schooling is now more directly challenged by market values than ever before in its history. In these circumstances, the critical question for Catholic school leaders is, can a balance be found between Catholic values and market values, or will market values begin to compromise the integrity of the special mission of Catholic schooling? Can Gospel values survive in the face of a more direct relationship with the market place? (Grace, 1993:161,175).

Traditionally drawing students from a wide geographical area, Catholic school rolls will always be subject to the choice of parents based on their perceptions of each school's reputation and success. In other words, to some extent, Catholic schools have always operated within an environment of competition. As State Integrated schools, Catholic schools have a responsibility to implement the educational purposes and goals of the Ministry of Education and are held accountable if they fail in that responsibility. Both of these factors bring pressure to bear on the life and activity of the Catholic school. It may be tempting to consolidate the school's progress and ensure ongoing future viability by adopting an assertive market approach to education and a corporate model of operation.

However, an uncritical acceptance of a market philosophy may bring more 'loss' than 'gain' for the Special Character culture of the Catholic school. The identity of the school as a supportive faith community may be subsumed by a drive for customers; the vocational energy and commitment of teachers by contractual pressure; a concept of partnership based on mutual and complementary responsibility by the need to establish value for money. If Catholic schools are to preserve and honour the authentic vision of education and the mission for which they were established, then school and educational leaders must maintain a critical approach to other philosophical positions. A failure to challenge ideas that may inherently contradict the principles of Catholic education may result in a far more fundamental risk; that is, a loss of the Special Character culture that makes Catholic schools so distinctive. Maintaining a critical response may add to the pressures and

tensions already implicit in the dual role of the Catholic school. However, as Keane & Keane (1997) note:

The greatest source of tension for Catholic educators may come if the functional purposes of education are over-emphasised to the detriment of its transcendent, ethical or moral purposes (Keane & Keane, 1997:7).

Staff appointments: The need for people who ‘fit’

Building a strong Special Character culture, “begins by hiring teachers who match up with the school’s vision” (Pejza, 1984:15). This is supported by Neville (1994) who argues that there is a need to:

Ensure a cultural fit between as many of the stakeholders as possible. This will have significance for hiring new staff, replacing existing staff during restructuring, and making appointments on school boards (Neville, 1994:400).

Boards of Trustees and school leaders of Special Character schools must be vigilant in how they conduct their appointment processes. They need to have a clear understanding of which appointment criteria are non-negotiable and be prepared to consider the nature and needs of the school culture and the applicant’s potential influence on that culture. In other words, the values, beliefs and basic worldview of each applicant are as important as their professional qualifications and skills in terms of their suitability for membership of the school culture. Boards and Principals may avoid much heartache (and headache!) later, if applicants are required to outline, in writing, their personal philosophy of education, their understanding of the significance of Special Character for the school and what they believe they could contribute. An awareness of the need to rigorously evaluate the potential personal and professional contribution of teachers is reflected in the following comment from Newton (1980):

Today, it is quite a legitimate question in an interview to ask a candidate, religious or lay, what he or she expects to contribute to the religious goals of the school or to ask a faculty member during the process of an annual evaluation, how he/she has contributed to the religious aims of the school (Newton, 1980:10).

A need for ‘in-house’ training

There is a need for each State Integrated school to clarify and transmit to its members the meaning, nature and content of its own distinctive ‘Special Character’. As members of the school culture work together to transmit the religious or philosophical traditions of the school and ensure their full integration within the life of the school and its activity, it is vital that they have a shared knowledge and understanding of its content.

Adequate training in the Special Character of each school, therefore, for individual members and significant groups of that school culture, is paramount to its preservation as a living reality. Continuity and congruence cannot be maintained if the transmission of the Special Character culture of the school rests on the shoulders of a minority of staff or Board members. Yet, unless they have had a sound and thorough training in this area, how can the others adequately and confidently fulfil their role and function within school culture? If these people are to be held responsible for supporting the Special Character nature of the school, then in justice, they should be fully informed about its content and significance, provided with practical guidelines on **how** to fulfil this responsibility.

A need for a formal induction process

An understanding of the meaning of the term ‘Special Character’ and its significance for individual school cultures was found in this research to be largely intuitive, emerging from members’ own experiences of Catholic education and/or their personal beliefs and value systems. In other words, there appears to be an assumption that when members of a school speak of the Special Character of their school, they all mean the same thing. Whilst acknowledging that new members inevitably learn about the school culture in a myriad of informal ways, it is important in the light of research findings that a long-term, substantial and supportive formal induction process should be established and maintained within each school. This process should be available to all new teachers, particularly those who are appointed to ‘tagged’ positions. It is also important that all staff, Board members, especially Proprietor’s representatives, students and parents have regular opportunities to

develop their knowledge and understanding. A formal system that enables new members, including students and parents, to learn about the Special Character features of the school with support from others, limits the potential for future misunderstandings, inappropriate expectations and conflict.

The value of cultural guardians

It is important that those people within the school community who have a deep and intuitive understanding of Special Character are valued and affirmed. Given the passion with which they serve the Special Character culture of the school, there is always the danger that the degree of commitment and devotion that they bring to their work will outstrip their energy and time. Without an environment of support and a sense of being valued, they may eventually experience personal and professional disillusionment or even ‘burnout’. The loss of such people from the school culture may result in a loss of continuity with the treasures of the past and limit the school’s ability to maintain cultural congruence with its core vision. The school risks compromising its foundational philosophy, purpose, values, beliefs and all the other cultural elements which make it distinctive. There is a danger that Special Character features will become over time, mere ‘add-ons’ to the activity and nature of the school culture, superficial ‘extras’ that lack meaning and relevance for members.

A Special Character position on the Senior Management team

One way of ensuring that the school gains from the experience, knowledge and wisdom of staff who are imbued with a sense of the Special Character of the school is to appoint a Director of Special Character with professional seniority. A person appointed to such a position might, for example, take responsibility for co-ordinating the orientation and induction of new members, staff, parents and students, into the school culture. They might also be responsible for developing and/or managing a school archive, including the history of the school and the organisation of significant Special Character events and practices. As a member of senior management, he/she would be available as a source of advice,

information and guidance in terms of general school activities, especially decision-making, and their impact on Special Character.

Build and maintain links with other Special Character schools

This research found that strong networks of groups, agencies and schools, relating and interacting at local, national and international levels provide a support for the preservation and development of Special Character culture. Teachers and school leaders have an opportunity to mix with others who share a common sense of identity and purpose, and often face similar issues and challenges. Each school does not have to ‘reinvent the wheel’; it can draw on the experiences and wisdom of others. The network enables schools to discover new solutions to old problems. Each school can be reassured by the realisation that it is not alone in facing these, gaining confidence in its own efforts. As Bryk *et al* (1993) note from their research of Catholic schools that these:

Benefit from a network of social relations, characterized by trust, that constitute a form of ‘social capital’ (Bryk *et al*, 1993:314).

Maintain and develop a sense of community

It is clear from the findings of this research that the experience of the ‘school as community’ is a factor in its success as a Catholic Special Character school. Participants consistently identified the communitarian quality of the Catholic school culture as a feature that attracts both new students and teachers, often sadly missed by those who leave. This finding is supported by Convey (1992) who notes that there is strong evidence that:

A sense of community dominates the culture of the typical Catholic school and plays a major role in the school’s effectiveness (Convey, 1992:340).

In the light of such findings, school leaders need to consider the communitarian needs of their school and plan for its development. The reasons are evident. Where the communitarian nature of the school is strong, the emotional climate is enhanced. The quality of relationships amongst members, which are a feature of Special Character culture,

creates a working environment that is positive and supportive. In short, a community-focused culture is a friendly inclusive environment where people matter. Whilst recognising that reality often falls far short of perfection, the concept itself sets before people an ideal of how they **should** relate to each other. Even as members strive to reach the ideal, the development of positive relationships between them is enriched.

It cannot be assumed, however, that a community spirit will automatically develop. As Newton (1980) observes in terms of the current changing context of Catholic schools:

As Catholic schools continue to change, there will be increased need to devote time and resources to maintaining the highly personal and communitarian spirit that has always been at the heart of Catholic education (Newton, 1980:4).

In other words, there needs to be an awareness of the importance of community building activities and a commitment to their development as an integral part of the school culture and an understanding that community building has the potential for sustaining and strengthening the school culture. This will demand time, energy and resources but it will ensure that the Special Character nature of the school remains a meaningful, enduring reality.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Several additional issues arise from this research. They affect not only the provision of an authentic Catholic education and the maintenance of Special Character, but also the preservation of a distinctive Catholic school culture for future generations. Some issues raised in this chapter are similar in nature to those discussed in overseas research, but the content and context outlined here provide a New Zealand perspective and discuss the implications for New Zealand Catholic schools.

Recommendations for Catholic education authorities

A need for clarification of purpose

This research has found that there is a need for further dialogue amongst Catholic educators, church authorities and other stakeholders to clarify the vision and purpose of Catholic schools in the light of a changing context within the Roman Catholic Church.

Reck (1991) observes:

The Catholic school should understand its identity before it can clarify its relationship with church and society (Reck, 1991:21).

But perhaps it is equally valid to argue that all stakeholders need to have an understanding of the identity and nature of the Catholic school in order to clarify **their** relationship with and expectations of the school. There is a need to determine whether the Catholic school is **primarily** an agent in the development of a new generation of Catholics. Or, given that many young people do not continue to practice their religion after leaving school, is it enough that their lives are influenced by their contact with a Catholic Christian school community that models the living out of the values and teachings of the Gospel? These are important questions and, given likely changes in the structure of the Church, for example, in parish organisation, that can only further confuse and complicate the situation, they have an urgent quality. Without a coherent process of clarification, there is a danger that the Catholic school will become, at least, overburdened with unrealistic and impossible expectations and, at worst, isolated from the Catholic community.

Monitor trends and changes in Catholic schools

Given that it is nearly twenty-five years since Integration and ten since the advent of *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange, 1989), it is unlikely that current Board members of Catholic schools would have been a part of the original process of Special Character definition and charter writing. However, individual schools and their Boards might now be engaged, as one of the research schools was, in revising school charters and/or reconsidering the Special Character of the school. In the light of such activity, it is recommended that

Catholic education authorities and/or individual proprietors provide guidelines to assist schools and to ensure that significant Special Character material is included. Without such support, there is a danger that critical information might be omitted, until eventually, over the duration of succeeding Boards, it might be lost forever to the detriment of the cultural identity, purpose and activity of the school. In addition, it is recommended that a national monitoring of staffing in Catholic secondary schools be resumed by the Catholic Education Office in order to ensure that there is a sufficient number of Catholic teachers, nation-wide at least, to support and maintain the Catholic Character of the school system.

Tagged positions

Whilst acknowledging the importance and difficulties of finding good Religious Education staff, it is clear that the issue for Special Character culture is far wider. Finding teachers who have a cultural fit with the distinctive culture of the school is an equally important task and challenge. This research, therefore, recommends that a new kind of ‘tagged’ position be established; one that focuses more specifically on the need for people who are ‘able and willing to support and develop the Special Character of the school’. People appointed with such a ‘tag’, however, also need to be provided with a role description that identifies a range of contributions that they might make.

A need for training of staff

For a strong culture, **all** staff members need to be able to work together with a shared philosophy and vision. Responsibility for supporting the Special Character of the school is not restricted only to Catholic teachers, as Newton (1980) observes:

More and more it has become clear that the explicitly religious goals of the school are not the responsibility of the religion department or the counsellors or chaplain or the members of the religious group that operates the school: rather they are the responsibility of all members of the faculty (Newton, 1980: 9).

The future of Catholic education in New Zealand, therefore, depends on the availability of suitably trained, motivated and committed teachers, Catholic and non-Catholic. This

research recommends that a basic course in the philosophy of Catholic education be a 'baseline' requirement for teaching in a Catholic school, either before or after appointment.

A need for a Catholic training college

To be a teacher in a Catholic school is to become a member of a distinctive culture. It is important, therefore, that young teachers new to Catholic education should fully understand and accept the nature of their professional and personal role within a Special Character culture. As Muus (1996) observes:

A teacher serves the model function and some pupils will imitate this behaviour regardless of whether or not the teacher consciously chooses them to do so. Teachers cannot limit their influence on students to academic instruction only, but must be aware that some pupils will be influenced by their personal habit, values or other non-academic activities (Muus, 1996:310).

For the transmission of Special Character culture to be most effective, it requires people who can **live** the culture, not merely work within it. It is recommended, therefore, that a national Catholic teacher training college be established so that Catholic and non-Catholic trainees who plan to teach in the New Zealand Catholic education system can experience firsthand the distinctive life and spirit of a Catholic educational community.

Recommendations for Proprietors

It is inevitable that the active, physical involvement of members of founding religious orders will continue to decline. In such a context, therefore, it is important for the preservation of that heritage, that Boards of Trustees, school leaders, teachers, students and parents are appropriately prepared for the time when the Sisters and Brothers of the order are no longer available to actively serve the school. In the light of this situation, it is recommended that individual proprietors of religious order schools set up and maintain historical archives that can be accessed by their schools. It is also important that Proprietor's representatives be adequately trained in the particular charism and tradition of the order. This could be accomplished through the creation of a position of Special

Character co-ordinator that provides an advisory and training service for schools and Board members.

EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE AND SPECIAL CHARACTER

In the light of this research, it is recommended that members of the Education Review Office be provided with a basic training in the nature and significance of Special Character for State Integrated schools. Whilst acknowledging the experience and skills that are undoubtedly developed through daily engagement in the reviews of schools, it is hard to see how reviewers can simply ‘pick up’ the nuances of meaning implicit in the complex nature of Special Character culture. Indeed, as this research shows, this is a difficulty even for members of those cultures. As an additional support and source of information for reviewers of schools with a Special Character, it is further recommended that an ‘insider’, that is, an adequately trained, experienced and credible member of the particular religious educational culture under review be co-opted into the review team.

ALL SCHOOLS

It is recommended that all schools explore and develop their own unique traditions and values. As this research has shown, a strong foundation of tradition engenders a sense of organisational identity, which even at its most basic level, enables members to bond, to belong. A school philosophy that integrates its past and its present develop a sense of ownership of the school amongst members. A spirit of loyalty and pride in the school is stimulated, motivating members to relate and work together as a ‘family’ or ‘community’. People gain a communal strength from ‘knowing who and what we are’. In brief, the power of identity has great potential for building and sustaining a committed team, bonded together by a common coherent purpose and vision.

Shared vision and philosophy promote high levels of professionalism amongst staff. Expected to support the clearly articulated and understood purposes and goals of the school, staff members are challenged to reach beyond the provision of their contracts; to find within themselves some degree of personal commitment to the vision of the school. As research findings reveal, people work hard, in exceptional ways, when they believe in what they do.

THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research has hopefully cast light on the nature and meaning of Special Character and its significance for the culture of the State Integrated school with a religious tradition, particularly within the Catholic education system. It has explored the process of cultural transmission and proposed a grounded theory of Special Character. However, it is important for the preservation, maintenance and future development of Special Character that further research is undertaken in New Zealand. This section recommends a range of research areas not covered by this project that are important for the ongoing development of knowledge and understanding.

General recommendation: Comparative study of Special Character

There is a need for greater understanding of the transmission processes involved in building a Special Character culture in a wider range of State Integrated schools such as those that have a philosophical tradition rather than religious. Qualitative research conducted, for example, in Catholic primary schools, in secular state schools and/or in the State Integrated Schools of other religious or philosophical traditions, would serve to develop, challenge and/or support the findings of this research. In so doing, an enriched understanding of such features as the importance of founding traditions and their influence on schools in general may be gained. It may serve all schools, Catholic or otherwise, to explore the ways in

which different schools cope with conflicting philosophies, and the subsequent demands and expectations of their stakeholders. In addition, focused research into the concept of schools as communities rather than organisations may assist schools in the building of strong cultures.

Research recommendations for Catholic education

Parental choice and expectations

As this research has revealed, it cannot be assumed that parents choose a Catholic education for their sons and daughters exclusively because of its religious nature. It is recommended, therefore, that further research into the reasons why parents select a Catholic education for their children and their expectations of the Catholic school needs to be conducted at a micro-level, by individual schools and at a macro-level by Catholic education authorities. This is essential to ensure that the education provided by the individual Catholic school and the system as a whole meets the needs of New Zealand students, their families and the Church. Without such information, it is hard to see how a true partnership between parents, school and Church can be established, given that each may have different goals and priorities.

The long-term outcomes of a Special Character education

The Catholic Church makes an ongoing substantial investment of its resources to maintain its system of Special Character education. It is surely important that the Roman Catholic community of New Zealand has a clear understanding of the outcomes and benefits of that investment for all stakeholders. Information gained from a longitudinal study of the long-term effects of a Catholic education on the lives, faith and work of former students may provide Catholic Church leaders with a firm basis for decision-making in their long-term planning. Such information may prove to be a valuable basis for consultation on the future of Catholic education. It may assist in the clarification of the mission of Catholic schools and their place within the Roman Catholic Church of New Zealand.

The impact of school growth on Special Character

The influence of roll size on the Special Character culture of Catholic schools appears to require further investigation. In the minds of participants in this research, perceptions of the school as a community were intrinsically linked with their perceptions of the school as 'small'. Given that close relationships are more likely to develop when a smaller number of people are involved with a school, enabling everyone to be known, should there, then, be an optimum size for the Catholic school? If not, how might a large Catholic school operate so as to maximise opportunities for the building of a genuine sense of community amongst members? A comparative study conducted in Catholic schools of varying sizes may provide important data about the impact of roll size on the nature and development of Special Character culture.

The nature of teaching in a Catholic school

To attract teachers to, or to retain staff already within, the Catholic education system, it may be necessary first to gain some understanding of how teachers, currently on the staff of Catholic schools, perceive the Special Character of the Catholic school and their role within it. Research in this area would highlight the strengths and contribution of teaching staff in Catholic schools, but also shed light on any limitations and weaknesses. An awareness of these and their impact on the Special Character culture of those schools would enable schools to more effectively determine their needs in terms of hiring of new staff. It may also provide valuable information for the design and content of Catholic teacher training.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the findings of this research that the phenomenon of Special Character as it relates to New Zealand State Integrated schools is both elusive in its nature and complex in its influence on the cultures of such schools. Indeed, Special Character could be said to embrace the head, heart and hands of the school, that is, its purpose, its sacred values and its core activities held in trust by each generation as a living heritage and blueprint for the

next. However, given the rapidly changing context of church, society and school in New Zealand, the transmission of Special Character culture must now make explicit what once was known implicitly. Members need to capture for themselves knowledge of the core content, an understanding of the nuances of meaning and an appreciation of the significance of Special Character culture. Only then will they be equipped to cope with the challenges that will inevitably confront their schools and to articulate clearly their shared sense of purpose and meaning. Without a shared conscious commitment to the preservation and promotion of Special Character, those very features and qualities that make the school unique and distinctive, and create within it a strong effective culture, are in grave danger of being lost forever.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Religious Order survey

THE SPECIAL CHARACTER AND CULTURE OF THE NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

For an overview of this Doctoral research project, please refer to the **Information Sheet** enclosed.

The objective of this survey is the collection of data on changes that have taken place in relation to school personnel and their influence on the Special Character of New Zealand Catholic secondary schools. As a member of a Religious Order traditionally associated with Catholic education in this country, you have knowledge and experience which can provide a valuable contribution to this study. You are therefore invited to complete the following questions.

Please note:

- **The information you provide will be used only for this project**
- **Your response sheet will be seen only by the researcher.**
- **You are invited to answer ALL questions, but you may leave out any questions that you do not wish to answer.**

Please post your response form in the stamped/addressed envelope provided.

Thank you for your assistance.
Susan O'Donnell

NAME OF RELIGIOUS ORDER: _____

1. How many schools were associated with your congregation ten years ago?
2. At that time, how many members of your congregation held full-time positions in these schools?
3. How many schools are you associated with now?
4. How many members of your congregation currently hold full-time positions at these schools?
5. How important is it that your congregation's tradition and charism be reflected in the school's Special Character?
(Please give reasons)

RELIGIOUS ORDER SURVEY RESULTS

DATE: Mid 1998

NO. OF SURVEY FORMS SENT: 13

NO. OF RESPONSES: 9

Question 1: How many schools were associated with your congregation ten years ago?

Question 2: At that time, how many members of your congregation held full-time positions in these schools?

Question 3: How many schools are you associated with now?

Question 4: How many members of your congregation currently hold full-time positions at these schools?

RELIGIOUS ORDER	1988		1998	
	No. of schools	No. of full-time positions	No. of schools	No. of full-time positions
RO#1	4	6	2	4
RO#2	2	4	1	0
RO#3	15	35	9	8
RO#4	2	10	3	8
RO#5	1	2	1	1
RO#6	2	9	2	0
RO#7	8	18	6	5
RO#8	4	18	4	6
RO#9	9	85	7	11
TOTAL	47	186	35	43

Note: Decline in number of secondary schools associated with these Religious Orders: 12 ie 27.6% decrease

Decline in number of Religious on the full-time staff of these schools: 143 ie 76.9% decrease

Question 5: How important is it that your congregation's tradition and charism be reflected in the school's Special Character? (Please give reasons)

Level of importance	RO 1	RO 2	RO 3	RO 4	RO 5	RO 6	RO 7	RO 8	RO 9
Important	•	•	•						•
Very important							•	•	
Paramount				•		•			
Efforts made					•				

Reasons	RO 1	RO 2	RO 3	RO 4	RO 5	RO 6	RO 7	RO 8	RO 9
Focus for school activity	•		•			•			
Provides sense of identity	•						•		
Maintains network of links with others				•	•	•			
Develops school spirit							•		
Provides a philosophical foundation		•							
Provides a model of spirituality							•		•
Basis for values								•	

Question 6: What formal arrangements exist between your congregation and these schools for the purpose of preserving that tradition and charism?
(Please detail)

Arrangements	RO 1	RO 2	RO 3	RO 4	RO 5	RO 6	RO 7	RO 8	RO 9
None	•	•			•				
Conferences/seminars for staff and/or Boards			•	•		•		•	
Liaison by Special Character coordinator			•		•				
Meetings between Proprietor and representatives			•						
Meetings between Board and Proprietor			•						
Annual Special Character reports						•		•	
Links with other order schools				•		•			
Order members on Board	•						•	•	
Order members in school staff									•
Student leadership training								•	
Formal system of communication							•		
Special Character appraisal systems								•	

Note: For RO1, the lack of formal association is related to the amalgamation of its four colleges with others. The participant observes that “Principals can be appointed that have never HEARD OF OUR ORDERS!” (RO#1).

Question 7: What informal arrangements currently exist between your order and these schools? (Please provide examples)

Arrangements	RO 1	RO 2	RO 3	RO 4	RO 5	RO 6	RO 7	RO 8	RO 9
School symbols	•								
Names of buildings, teams, physical areas	•							•	
Included in school history	•								
Celebration of events in founder's life		•							
Visits to school			•				•		
System of ongoing communication			•					•	
Student activities provided by members				•					
Members informally involved with school				•			•		
Attendance at school functions					•	•	•		
Informal personal contacts						•			•
Gifts to the school						•			
Meetings with school leadership								•	
Input by members in Religious Education							•		

Question 8: What are your hopes for the Special Character of these schools?

Hopes	RO 1	RO 2	RO 3	RO 4	RO 5	RO 6	RO 7	RO 8	RO 9
Staff and Board engage in ongoing training and formation	•								
Special Character to be basis for all school activity		•						•	
Ongoing commitment to preserving and developing Special Character			•	•	•		•		
Students develop personally and spiritually					•	•		•	
Catholic Character preserved									•

Question 9: What are your concerns for the Special Character of these schools?

Concerns	RO 1	RO 2	RO 3	RO 4	RO 5	RO 6	RO 7	RO 8	RO 9
Lack of Board and/or staff understanding of Special Character	•		•						
Need for Special Character to permeate Catholic Education	•								
Loss of the Order charism and/or Catholic philosophy of education	•	•							
That people work together on Special Character				•					•
Domination of Market philosophy of education					•	•		•	
Future availability of people for Special Character leadership							•	•	

**INTERVIEW GUIDE – GENERAL
JANUARY 1998**

How would you describe this school generally?

What are its strengths?

What are its weak points?

What does the term ‘Special Character’ mean to you?

How would you describe the special character of this school?

What evidence would you point to prove this?

How do others associated with the school seem to respond to the idea of ‘special character’

- * the students
- * the parents
- * the staff
- * the leadership
- * the Board of Trustees

If you could choose a special character ‘hero’ for the school, who would it be and why?

How is special character in this school developed? protected?

How do new people find out about the school’s special character?

What are some of the important special character issues for the school?

How would you describe your own role in relation to the special character of the school?

What are your dreams for the school?

What are your fears and concerns for the school?

(also basic biographical questions)

INTERVIEW GUIDE - SPECIAL CHARACTER AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP APRIL 1998

What are the signs for you that students/staff/parents are 'picking up' the Special Character of this college? Give examples.

How important is it that the college's Special Character be maintained?
How important is it that it be preserved? Why?

What do you think will be necessary to preserve this college's Special Character for future generations?

What is the best scenario?
What is the worst scenario?

Who do you think is instrumental in preserving and maintaining the Special Character of the college?

Why?

What does a Catholic education offer -
Young people?
Their families?
The Catholic Church?
Society as a whole?

Why do you do this work?

INTERVIEW GUIDE - STUDENT TEACHERS JUNE 1998

Can you tell me a little about yourself?

How did it come about that this college was selected for your teaching experience?

What was your very first impression of the college?

How is this college different from other colleges you know?

What do you really value about this college?

How would you describe the culture of this college?

In your time at the college, what has made the greatest impact on you?

What seems to you to be the greatest challenge the college is facing?

How would you describe the staff at the college?

How would you describe the students?

What do you think it means when someone talks about the college's
'Special Character'?

What are the clearest indications that the college has a special character?

Can you share a story or event that would be the single most significant memory that you
will take away from your time here?

If you could change anything about the college, what would it be? Why?

What do you hope for the future of the college?

What would be the worst thing that could happen to this college? Why?

INTERVIEW GUIDE - STUDENT LEADERS GROUP JUNE 1998

First, can you introduce yourselves - your name? How long you've been at the college?
Why you came to this college?

What was it that struck you most when you arrived at the college?

How has the college changed since you first arrived?

What do you value most about the college?

How would you describe the college to someone who hadn't been here?

How would people know that this college has a Special Character?

Who is the best example of what this college stands for? Why?

Can you tell me any story which shows how you feel about the college?

What has this college done for your life?

What do you think needs to be changed? Why?

What does this college offer - Young people?

Families?

Church?

The community in general?

What is the most important memory of your time at the college that you will take with you at the end of the year?

INTERVIEW GUIDE - PARENTS

JUNE 1998

Who from your family attends or has attended this college?

Why did you send your children to this school?

How is this college different from other colleges you know?

What do you really value about this college?

What do you think it means when someone talks about the college's 'Special Character'?

Who is responsible for the Special Character of the college?
How do they support the Special Character?

How has being at this school helped your children?
How has this school helped your family?

How has this school helped other people you know?

How are parents involved in the college's life?

If you could change anything about the college, what would it be? Why?

What do you hope for the future of the college?

What would be the worst thing that could happen to this college? Why?

Appendix C: Senior student survey

SPECIAL CHARACTER AND CULTURE OF NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR STUDENTS

This college is one of two Catholic colleges in Auckland which are being studied as a part of a research project. The aim of the project is to discover what makes a Catholic secondary school different from other schools and why these differences might be important. As senior students of the college, your ideas and experiences can provide valuable information about the college. You are therefore invited to contribute to the study by completing the questions below.

- **The answers you give will be used only for this project**
- **Your response sheet will be seen only by the researcher.**
- **You do not need to write your name.**
- **You are invited to answer ALL questions, but you may leave out any questions that you do not wish to answer.**

When you have finished writing, please place your response sheet in your envelope, seal and 'post' your envelope in the box provided.

Thank you for your assistance.

* * * * *

1. How long have you been at the college _____
2. Why did you come to this college?
3. How is this college different from other colleges you know?
4. In your experience, what is really special about this college?
(Please provide examples, if you can, to show what you mean)

5. What do you think it means when someone talks about the college's 'Special Character'?

6. How has being at this school helped you?
(Please provide examples from your life to show what you mean)

7. How have other people you know been helped by attending this school?
(Please provide examples to show what you mean)

8. How would you describe your relationship with the Catholic Church?

9. How has this school influenced your personal faith?

Any other comments?

Thank you for your help
S. O'Donnell

SENIOR STUDENT SURVEY: CHAMPAGNAT COLLEGE

Date of survey: JULY 1998

Total number of returns: 59

Respondents: Year 13 students only

Responses have been grouped according to topic. Most students provided more than one point in their responses. As a result, except for Question One, responses from individual students may appear in more than one topic category. For the purposes of comparison, each table shows the spread of responses in each topic across the number of years those students have attended the school.

1. How long have you been at the college?

Yrs	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-
No	3	4	3	6	3	6	10	8	16

Summary: Of the total number of respondents, 40 indicate that they joined the student body in their Senior (Years 11-13) years at school. For the purposes of comparison, I have named this group, 'new' students. Of these, 24 began in their Year 14 class. Only 19 students attended the school for any period of time in their Junior (Years 7-10) years. Of these, 3 students are in their second year at the Year 13 level. I have called this group of 19, 'old' students.

2. Why did you come to this college?

Response	No. of years attending the college									
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	total
Educational reasons		2		1		2	1		8	14
Location: close to home	1	1	2	2	2		1		2	11
Family connection	1	2		2	2	1		1		9
Catholic school	1		1	1			1	1	2	7
Change of school						1	3		1	5
Sport						1			3	4
Personal choice			1	1					2	4
Religious reasons		1						2	1	4
School reputation							2	1	1	4
Friendship links			1	1				1		3
Overseas student						1	1	1		3
Small size						2				2
Parental choice							1		1	2
Traditional school				1						1
Cultural diversity								1		1
Single sex option									1	1
Negative response to question								1		1

Summary: Of the 59 students surveyed, 21 students offered more than one reason for attending the college; the remainder offered only one response to the question. ‘Educational reasons’ indicate that the school is perceived by students as providing opportunities to improve their academic performance, leading to the gaining of qualifications which will enhance their future career opportunities. Of the 14 responses in this category, 11 are from students who are relatively new to the school which tends to support the concept of ‘second chance education’ as a characteristic of the school. By contrast, those responses which point to the location of the school as being a reason for selecting the school are from predominantly ‘old’ students. This same group is also well represented in the responses claiming ‘family connections’ as a reason for enrolment with 7 out of 9 responses. Two responses state that the school is connected with “family roots” (CC16) and “family tradition” (CC46). In total, 11 responses indicate religious and/or Catholic reasons for attendance. Sport, decision to change schools, positive school reputation, accessibility to overseas students, small size of the school, parental choice and the availability of a single-sex environment are provided as reasons by only ‘new’ students. In other words, none of these reasons feature in the responses by ‘old’ students.

3. How is this college different from other colleges you know?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
Positive Relationships			2	2		3	3		5	15
School Spirit	1	1	1	3		2	2	2	2	14
Spiritual	1	1		1	1		1	1	3	9
Small size		1	2			2	1		1	7
Religious Education		1					2	3	2	8
'Family'			1	2			2	1		6
School pride		1	2	1			1			5
Catholic	1								2	3
Sporting success				1				1	2	4
Physical environment		1					1		1	3
Cultural diversity				1				1	1	3
Pacific Island links							1		1	2
Student behaviour							1	1		2
Cannot answer							1	1		2
Good leadership									1	1
Good teachers									1	1
Academic support									1	1
Lower fees								1		
Higher fees		1								1
More opportunities						1				1
Less opportunities					1					1
Discipline		1								1
Good reputation		1								1
Christian school		1								1
Marist	1									1

Summary: 'Positive relationships' within the school as a major difference between this school and others is named by 11 'new' students compared with only 4 who attended since their Junior years. The 15 students in this category describe those relationships as strong, friendly, respectful, unified, and supportive with a sense of equality between students. They also include relationships with staff in this positive light. Responses about 'School spirit' as an important difference fall almost equally between 'old' and 'new' students, and are closely linked with responses about 'School pride'. This was particularly so by 'old' students, whose comments place 'pride' in the context of loyalty to the school. Across all attendance levels, 'spirit' is linked with the 'family' nature of the school environment, sporting activities, and the Christian nature of the school, with one student responding that

the spirit of the school is connected with everything that happens in the school (CC23). Only 3 students, 2 of whom are 'new', saw 'Catholic' as a difference and only 1 student, in his/her second year at Year 13 indicated that the 'Marist' nature of the school was a difference, this linked with 'Catholic' (CC1).

4. In your experience, what is really special about this college?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
School spirit	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	2	2	17
Relationships	1	3		2	2	2	1	1	5	17
Care and support			1				2	1	5	9
Sporting success					1	1	1	1	2	6
Religious faith		1			1	1	1	2		6
'Family'		2	1				2			5
School pride	1						2		2	5
Polynesian identity			1				2	2		5
Know each other		1		2		1	1			5
Quality of teaching						1	1		3	5
Cultural diversity		1		1			1		1	4
Catholic nature				1					3	4
Welcoming		1		2					1	4
Small size				1						1
Happy students			1							1
Physical environment						1				1
Nothing									1	1

Summary: 'School spirit' and 'Relationships' dominate the responses with a total of 34 between them. The former is linked with pride in the school, sporting activities and the commitment of students to whatever they do. 'Relationships' in this question were described much as they were in question three, namely as strong, friendly, supportive and respectful but also as welcoming to new people, accepting of different races and cultures, caring, courteous and 'family' in a spiritual sense of being "Brothers and Sisters in Christ" (CC47) with "fellowship" (CC2) amongst friends. These responses were inclusive of staff, but were predominantly related to relationships amongst peers. Indications of strong peer support were reflected in such comments as "practically everyone knows each other" (CC46); "no enemies" (CC12); "camaraderie among friends" (CC21); "everyone looks after another" (CC37) and "when someone is down, the guys pick them up, by putting up their self-esteem" (CC9). A shared identity, that is Polynesian, featured as a factor in both the strength and nature of the relationships but also as a factor in the acceptance of other races and ethnic groups.

5. What do you think it means when someone talks about the college's Special Character?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
No comment		2	1		1	1	2	4	3	14
Misinterpreted question							4	1	5	10
School image	1			1	1		1		1	5
School pride			1	1	1	2				5
Difference from other schools				1		1			2	4
Respect		1		1			1			3
Marist character	1	1							1	3
School spirit				2			1			3
Achievements	1			1		1				3
Religious character	1							1		2
Student behaviour				1				1		2
'Family' nature				1			1			2
People					1				1	2
What school gives to students							1		1	2
Uniqueness							1		1	2
School motto									2	2
School code							1			1
No difference from other schools			1							1
Care and support									1	1
Catholic faith									1	1
Spirituality					1					1

Summary: Most students made an attempt at defining Special character but 24 students out of the total 59 either chose not to answer the question or seemed to misinterpret it. This suggests that perhaps the question was not sufficiently clear or appropriate to these students. The categories suggested by the other 45 responses were pretty much evenly split between 'old' and 'new' students. Overall, Special character was defined in terms of the perceptions that outsiders have of the school; respect and care as values of the school; school symbols such as the motto and code; the qualities and actions of the staff and students; with 6 responses which noted that Special character was a 'difference' or 'uniqueness' but did not specify their nature. The most significant group, with 10 students across the table, responded with 'School spirit' and 'School pride', suggesting a strong link between students' experience as members of the school and their understanding of Special character. Special character was linked with religion and/or the Catholic church by only 7 students and only 2 students, one 'new' to Year 13 (CC56), one 'old', made a link with 'Marist'. One student (CC2) made a connection with Marcellin Champagnat and 2 others

mentioned ‘brothers’ but it was unclear whether they were referring to the Marist Brothers or using the term in relation to the concept of ‘family’.

6. How has this school helped you?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
Developed relationships		1	1	1		1	2	2	6	14
Academic achievement			3	1	2	1	3	1	3	14
Personal success		3	1		1		3	1	3	12
Increased self-esteem	1	4	1	1		2	1		1	11
Developed spirituality	1		2	1		1	2	1	1	9
Developed skills		2	1		1	1		2	1	8
Personal change			2	2		1		2	1	8
No comment			1	1			1	2	1	6
Values development	1						1		3	5
Financial support							2	1		3
Teaching behaviour	1					1				2
Provided safety		1								1
Negative influence						1				1

Summary: Students’ responses indicate a strong perception that the school has helped them particularly in the area of personal development, with a combined total of 69 responses, as illustrated in the categories of developed relationships, personal success, increased self-esteem, personal change and behaviour, and growth in spirituality. By contrast, responses about academic achievement include being helped to reach potential, assistance with study and work routines. Four students state that the school helped them improve on previous results. Those who felt that they had developed new skills related these to personal growth and improved self-esteem rather than intellectual or academic development. Four responses point to practical assistance given to students, specifically the provision of a safe environment and financial support.

7. How have other people you know been helped by attending this school?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
No comment	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	5	23
Misinterpreted question	1			2		1	3	1	3	11
Personal change					1		2	1	2	6
Increased involvement			1						3	4
Improved learning			1						3	4
Career opportunities				2		1		1		4
Encouraged		1						1	1	3
More motivated			1				1	1		3
Safety provided			1							1
Not helped						1				1

Summary: This seems to be another question with which the students had some difficulty in answering. Thirty-four students either did not respond or seemed to misinterpret the question. Areas of ‘Personal development’ predominated with 16 responses overall, with students perceiving that others had been helped by the school to personally change, and enabled to increase their involvement in school life. They noted that students had been encouraged and motivated by the school. Eight responses overall related to improved academic achievement and career opportunities. However, all but one of these responses related the latter to Sports with Rugby League specifically mentioned. They gave the names of some sporting personalities as examples. The exception to this linked future success with the gaining of University qualifications.

8. How would you describe your relationship with the Catholic Church?

Response	No. of years attending the college									
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	total
Strong	1	1		1		3	1	1	6	14
No response	1		1		2	1	1	2	4	12
Christian identity				1		1	1	1	3	7
General association		1		2			1	2		6
Fair		1					1	2	1	5
Catholic identity		1	1			1		1	1	5
Good		1		1		1	1			4
Negative						1			2	3
Misinterpreted question							2		1	3
Inadequate				1			1			2
Irregular		1					1			2
Church supportive		1			1					2
Regular			1							1

Summary: Overall, 21 responses indicated a positive relationship with the Catholic Church. This was described as strong, good, regular and supportive. Students who named themselves ‘Christian’ rather than ‘Catholic’ nevertheless considered themselves to have a positive relationship with the Catholic church, particularly in terms of its similarities with their own tradition and faith. Those who claimed to have a general association valued Catholic teaching but had no personal involvement with the Catholic Church. Only 5 students named themselves as Catholic, but 33 of the responses gave no indication of church affiliation. One student perceived himself/herself to have a negative relationship due to disillusionment “with other pupils claiming to be catholic or christian - yet they are not really in their hearts due to foul language etc” (CC8).

9. How has this school influenced your personal faith?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
Better understanding of faith		2	1	2		1		1	4	11
Stronger		2	2			1	1	2	3	11
No response	1				1	1	1	4	2	10
Growth in spirituality		1	1	1	1	1	1		2	8
Misinterpreted question						1	3		1	5
Fair					1		2			3
Hasn't							1		2	3
Immensely				2						2
More involvement in church							1		1	2
Provided environment				1						1

Summary: Student predominantly perceived the school to have had a positive influence on their personal faith, as illustrated in categories such as ‘Better understanding of faith’, ‘Growth in spirituality’ and ‘Greater involvement’ with Church. Only 3 students reported that the school had had no influence. However, note once again the relatively high level of misinterpretation of the question and non-response.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Questions 3, 4 and 5 attempted to draw out their experience of the uniqueness of the culture and a more formal definition of Special character. A study of the responses to these questions reveal that overall, students as a body seem to define Special character in terms of the **culture** of the school. Topics listed fall into such categories as values, purposes, goals, metaphors, motto, code, image, relationships, people, norms, heroes, rewards, school activities and spirit. These categories bear a close similarity to various models of organisational culture.
- Students perceive attendance at this school as enhancing their educational opportunities. They anticipate academic and sporting success and commend the high levels of support they receive from teaching staff. They speak of their academic achievement however in terms of improvement; very few speak of success.
- ‘School spirit’ is described in terms of students’ perceptions that relationships between peers and between students and staff are positive. Sport is frequently offered as evidence of the peer support they experience. This is also supported by comments relating to an absence of violence at the school, and the care and support of peers and staff alike. This school is generally perceived by students as a ‘safe place’ where students are happy.
- Although few of the respondents identify themselves as Catholic, most perceive religion, in the general sense of spirituality, as a significant characteristic of the school’s culture. This is closely linked with relationships and growth in personal development, rather than formal religious beliefs and practices.
- The paucity of links between school spirit, relationships and Marist character is a surprise. I had expected that ‘old’ students would have mentioned the Marist connection after several years of attending the college. It may be that the Marist identity of the school is so taken-for-granted by students that they did not think of including it in their responses. However, many responses do describe the school in terms of its sporting achievements and its Polynesian, Catholic, Christian nature. This may suggest, then, that the students, whilst experiencing the Special character of the school and able to describe such experience, do not spontaneously equate this with the founding charism of the school. In other words, they’ve heard the ‘message’ but not the ‘story’.
- The emotional tone of many responses suggests that students feel a strong bond of loyalty to the school. This seems to be most deeply experienced on the sportsfield, during cultural events and in the chapel, particularly when singing the college song.

SENIOR STUDENT SURVEY: MERCY COLLEGE

Date of survey: October 1998

Total number of returns: 49

Respondents: Year 13 students only

Responses have been grouped according to topic. Most students provided more than one point in their responses. As a result, except for Question One, responses from individual students may appear in more than one topic category. For the purposes of comparison, each table shows the spread of responses in each topic across the number of years those students have attended the school.

1. How long have you been at the college?

Yrs	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-
No	0	28	2	11	2	4	1		1

Summary: The majority of students at Mercy College enrol at Year 7 and follow through to the secondary levels of the college. A small intake occurs at Year 9, with few students gaining entry at other levels. The composition of the student body therefore in Year 13 is stable and one would expect, well orientated into the Special Character of the college.

2. Why did you come to this college?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
Parental choice		15	2	3	1					22
Catholic		11	2	7		1	1			22
Links with other Catholic schools		12		3						15
School reputation		8		3		3				14
Family connection		8	1	3						12
Friendship links		6		2		2				10
Educational reasons		3			1					4
Change of school				2	1					3
Location: close to home		3								3
Small size		2			1					3
Single sex		2		1						3
Personal choice		2								2
School environment		1						1		2
Overseas student									1	1
Religious reasons				1						1

Summary: Given that the majority of students enrol at Mercy College for their Year 7&8 education, it is not surprising that 'parental choice' features largely in the reasons given for enrolment at the school. There is a significant link with the local Catholic primary school and the majority of the students who indicated this in their responses also mentioned the maintenance of friendships developed in their Primary years as a reason for selecting Mercy for their Year 7-13 education. Overall, it appears that most of these students expected as a matter of course to move to Mercy from this primary school. Parental choice seems to be founded on a desire for a Catholic single sex education, consolidated by the very positive reputation of the school in the local area.

3. How is this college different from other colleges you know?

Response	No. of years attending the college									
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	total
Religious education		13	2	3	1	1				21
Small size		13	1	5		2				21
Positive relationships		12	1	5	1	2				21
Everyone knows everyone		8		4	1					13
Single Sex		9		2	1				1	13
Catholic practices		7		1	1	1				10
Catholic		3	1	2	1	1			1	9
'Community/family'		4		3	1					8
Academic support		4		1	1					6
Spiritual		1	1	2		1				5
Emotional climate		2		1		1				4
More discipline		1		1					1	3
No comment		1						1		2
Beautiful environment				1		1				2
Sporting opportunities		1								1
Cheaper than other church schools		1								1

Summary: Thirteen of those who mentioned 'small size' also linked this with relational benefits, specifically the opportunity to develop friendships and the fact that individuals are known by other students and staff. The phrases 'they know my name', 'they call me by name' occurred frequently as evidence of close relationships within the school. Relationships were characterised by what is perceived as high levels of care and support for students. Relationships were generally described as friendly, close, comfortable, caring and supportive. They believed that strong friendship bonds were more likely to be sustained throughout their education at Mercy College. Only four students linked the quality of relationships with the Catholic identity of the school. No one mentioned the Mercy tradition as a distinctive feature of the school. Seven students believed that the small size of the school enabled the development of positive relationships between teachers and students, enabling the former to provide individual learning support. The spiritual nature of the school was perceived as providing a more holistic education. In other words, an education which was not only academic but also spiritual in so far as opportunities for prayer, reflection and worship were available.

4. In your experience, what is really special about this college?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
Relationships		11	2	7	1	1	1		1	24
'Know each other'		10		5	1					16
Small size		6		2	1					9
Teacher support		5		4						9
School celebrations		7	1							8
'Community'		5	1		1					7
Religious Education		4		1	1					6
No response		4				2				6
Sustained friendships		3		2						5
'Family'		2		1	1					4
Special atmosphere		2		1						3
School traditions		3								3
School spirit		1	1	1						3
Physical location		2								2
Social awareness		1		1						2
Music			1	1						2
Christian values		1								1
Faith development		1								1
Leadership opportunities		1								1
Catholic						1				1

Summary: Once again, the quality of relationships between students/students and students/staff features as a special aspect of the school culture. Students give practical illustrations of this eg having classes moved to a different classroom to accommodate a student recovering from surgery; praying for a student during a time of family bereavement. Eight students linked special school celebrations with their experience of care and friendship at the school. Only one student specifically identified the Catholic identity of the school as its most significant feature. Once again, no one mentioned the Mercy tradition.

5. What do you think it means when someone talks about the college's Special Character?

Response	No. of years attending the college									
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	total
Distinctiveness		7		8	2					14
People's actions		4		5		1			1	11
Community		6		1	1		1			9
Religious aspects		5		2	1					8
Catholic identity		3		1		2				6
Spiritual aspects		2	1	1		1				6
Relationships		2		2					1	5
Values		5								5
What school offers		3		1						4
Motto		2		1						3
The way the school presents itself		3								3
Atmosphere		2			1					3
Whole school		3								3
Mercy identity		1		1						2
No comment		1	1							2
Traditions		1								1

Summary: Students not only describe Special Character but also attempt to define it. Overall, they seem to be familiar with the term and have a good understanding of it, given that fourteen students define it as that which makes the school distinctive and unique. Special Character is linked with how members of the college community behave towards others suggesting that Special Character is perceived as a body of teaching and a set of values which provide guidelines for members of the school culture. Strong links, therefore, have been made between moral teaching, values, relationships and behaviour. Note: only two students link Special Character with the Mercy tradition.

6. How has this school helped you?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
Personal development		7	1	3	1				1	13
Personal confidence		7		5						12
Belief in the support of others		7		1	1	1			1	11
Strong relationships		3		5	1					9
Educational opportunities		5		1		1	1			8
Values development		4	1	2						7
New meaning in life		3		2		1				6
Awareness of others' needs		6								6
Faith development		3	1	2						6
Religious knowledge		2	1	1						4
No response		3				1				4
Preparation for future		2								2
Greater church involvement				1		1				2
Leadership opportunities				1						1

Summary: The majority of the responses focus on areas of personal development. It is interesting to note that only eight students saw 'educational opportunities' as a major contribution of the school to their lives. This may simply be because they take it for granted that this is a function of a school. Relationships again feature strongly in how students perceive the school's influence. They describe the benefits of attendance at the school in terms of how they have personally developed as a result of being part of a caring and supportive environment. 'New meaning in life', 'values development' and 'faith development' are all described generally in relation to spiritual growth, rather than involvement with the Catholic Church or personal religious commitment.

7. How have other people you know been helped by attending this school?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
No response		12		3		3			1	19
Personal support		5	1	2	2					10
Educational support		4	1	1	1		1			8
Did not understand		2		4						6
Personal confidence		1		2						3
Encouragement		2	1							3
Faith development		2								2
Values development		2								2
Religious knowledge		1								1
Support for community						1				1

Summary: The high number of non-response to this question may indicate an unwillingness or inability to perceive how other students have benefited from attending this school. Those who did respond were specific in their examples eg support from the school for serious personal, family or health problems.

8. How would you describe your relationship with the Catholic Church?

Response	No. of years attending the college									total
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	
Catholic		12	2	8	1	2				25
Irregular attendance		7		2						9
Not Catholic		3		1	1		1		1	9
Only through school		7	1	1						9
Regular attendance		4		4						8
Disagree with Church teaching		6	1	1						8
Strong		1		1	1	1	2			6
General belief in God		3		2						5
Church supportive		3		1		1				5
No response		1		2		1				4
Fair		3		1						4
Good		4								4
Negative		2								2
Indecisive		1	1							2
Inadequate		2								2
Generally Christian		1								1

Summary: Although 25 students indicated, either explicitly or by implication, that they were Catholic, they also expressed difficulties or disagreement with some aspects of Church teaching. They appear to have a perception of ‘church’ as institution with rules and regulations rather than as ‘community’ or ‘a people’; for example, they refer to church as ‘they’ or ‘them’ and appear to equate Church membership with regular attendance at Sunday Mass. They acknowledge a belief in God and in general Christian principles, rather than an acceptance of or commitment to the official institutional Church. Those students who indicated an ‘irregular attendance’ describe their involvement as only during Easter and Christmas time.

9. How has this school influenced your personal faith?

Response	No. of years attending the college									
	7+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1-	total
Better understanding of faith		9	1	4	2					16
Growth in faith		8	1	3					1	13
No response		3		2		3	1			9
Unsure		3		2		1				6
Very negative influence		5								5
Supportive		3		1	1					5
Greater participation		1	1	1						3
Hasn't				2						2

Summary: Those who indicated that they have experienced growth in faith describe this growth in terms of general spirituality rather than in participation in Church life or religious practice. They seem to perceive faith as 'personal' for each individual and do not relate it to community. The majority of those who responded that their understanding of faith had increased related this to the development of their own personal faith, but once again, this was not necessarily seen by them as acceptance of the teaching of the institutional Catholic Church.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The fact that only two students made any link between the Special Character of the college and the Mercy tradition may indicate that most students simply take this for granted. However, it may also indicate a lack of association between the philosophy and values of the Mercy tradition and students' spontaneous perceptions of what makes the school distinctive eg its strength in sustaining high levels of care and support experienced by students in their relationships.
- The frequency with which relationships feature in student responses may be the result of the timing of the survey at the end of Year 13 when students of this age are most conscious of their imminent departure from the school community where they have spent so many years. However, the relational links are so consistent throughout responses to a range of questions that it could also be taken as a valid indication of how they perceive the Special Character of this college. There can be little doubt that they appreciate those relationships expressed in terms of care for individuals from peers and staff alike.
- There appears to be an overall acceptance of Christian values by students. However, they seem to relate these only to their personal lives rather than any communal experience of Church. The college is perceived as supportive of personal spirituality, but there seems to be an ambivalence (and for several respondents, a hostility) towards the institutional Church, specifically its teaching and traditions which are deemed 'out of date'. Responses give an overall impression of articulate young women who have a thorough knowledge of Church teaching and are able to think critically about such teaching and tradition. The fact that most of these students have had a Catholic education since they were five years old tends to suggest that religion and religious education has been a major aspect of their overall educational experience, hence their ability to critique that faith tradition. In short, they appear well able to think for themselves in regard to faith and beliefs.
- Student responses indicate that the school has a very positive public reputation, particularly in the local community. Standards at the college are perceived in very positive terms. Several students name the school a 'good school' with strengths reflected in its strong discipline and high expectations of students in regard to uniform and behaviour. Generally, the college is perceived as offering sound educational support and individual encouragement, although students do not specifically describe the *quality* of classroom teaching. This may also be a 'taken-for-granted' area. There were no negative comments about the education offered by the college. Only two students responded negatively in relation to the religious nature of the college, and these same two expressed their rejection of organised religion in general and the Catholic Church in particular.

Appendix D: Master list of analysis codes

STAGE ONE CODING: MASTER LIST

What is Special Character?

DEFINITION	DEF
NATURE	SCNAT
MEANING	SCMNG
METAPHOR	META

What is transmitted? Special Character Content

PHILOSOPHY	PHIL
CATHOLIC	CATH
PERSONAL	PERS
EDUCATIONAL	ED
ORDER	ORD
PURPOSE	PUR
VALUES	VAL
NORMS	NRM
STAFF	SF
STUDENTS	STS

How is Special Character transmitted?

PRACTICES	SCPRACT
WORSHIP	WOR
PRAYER	PRY

RETREATS	RET
SCHOOL ORGANISATION	ORG
BOARD ACTIVITY	BOT
COMMUNICATION	COMM
ASSEMBLIES	ASS
SPECIAL EVENTS	SPEV
SYMBOLS	SYM
TEACHING	TCHNG
FORMAL	RE
INFORMAL	INFML
ENVIRONMENT/ CLIMATE	ENV
MODELLING	MOD
RELATIONSHIP	RELSHPS
SPECIAL FEATURES	SPFEAT
LINKING	LNKG
CONTINUITY	CONT

What are the effects of Special Character on the culture of the school?

BONDING	BNDG
SCHOOL SPIRIT	SCHSP
PERSONAL/SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT	PERSP

TEACHERS WORK	TCHWK
BEYOND THE CALL	BEYND

SETTING

STUDENT BACKGROUND	STBGD
RELIGIOUS	REL
CULTURAL	CULT
ACADEMIC	ACAD
FAMILY BACKGROUND	FAM
STATISTICAL DATA	STAT
DEMOGRAPHY	DEMOG
FOUNDING TRADITION	TRAD
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	PHSEN
STAFF BACKGROUND	SFBGD

DATA REFERENCE CODES

MERCY COLLEGE	MCY
CHAMPAGNAT COLLEGE	CC
INTERVIEW	I
OBSERVATION	O
DOCUMENT	D
WHOLE SCHOOL	S
STUDENTS	STS

STAFF	SF
BOARD MEMBER	B
PARENTS	P
SCHOOL LEADER	A
FIELDNOTES	FN
STUDENT SURVEY RESPONSE	MCY#
	CC#
RELIGIOUS ORDER SURVEY	RO#

Appendix E: Data collection outline

CHAMPAGNAT COLLEGE

Observations

No.	DATE	TIME	EVENT
1.	11 May 97	9.00 -9.30	Special assembly for whole school
2.	11 May 97	8.30-9.00	Staff briefing
3.	19 June 97	11.00 - 12.00	Meeting with DRS and Principal
4.	1 July 97	7.30-9.15 pm	Zenith Club evening
5.	28 July 1997	7.30 - 8.00	PTFA meeting
6.	15 Aug. 97	10.45-2.30	Founders Day celebrations
7.	15 Oct. 97	12.25-3.00	Visit to RE class taken by student teacher
8.	15 Oct 97	12.25-1.15	Visit to staffroom
9.	21 Oct 97	10.00-11.30	RE class with DRS
10.	28 Oct 97	3.30-5.00	Parent/Teacher interviews
11.	4 Nov 97	8.45-10.00	RE class
12.	5 Nov 97	9.15-10.45	Class Retreat
13.	14 Nov 97	12.30-3.30	Senior Prizegiving
14.	20 Feb 98	9.00-9.30	School Assembly
15.	23 Mar 98	8.30-11.00	Staff briefing, assembly, RE class
16.	1 April 98	8.30-3.45	Interviews and Observation RE class
17.	1 April 98	8.30-8.45	Staff Briefing
18.	19 May 98	8.30-8.45	Staff Briefing
19.	25 June 98	2.00-3.00	Yr 10RE Student Teacher
20.	17 Sept 98	1.00-3.30	Informal observation - DRS meeting
21.	5 Oct 98	6.45-8.00pm	Presentation to Board of initial impressions from fieldwork
22.	7 Oct 98	2.00-3.00pm	Observation of school environment
23.	14Oct 98	8.20-10.00	RE lesson

Interviews

No.	Date	PARTICIPANT
1.	14 July 97	Director of Religious Education - Auckland
2.	22 July 97	Chairman of Board
3.	Mid-Aug	Informal - Secretary
4.	22 Sept 97	Informal – Director of Religious Studies/Principal/secretary
5.	6 Nov 97	RE teacher (a)
6.	20 Nov 97	RE teacher (b)
7.	16 Jan 98	Director of Religious Studies(a)
8.	19 Jan 98	Art teacher
9.	19 Jan 98	Principal (a)
10.	21 Jan 98	Principal (b)
11.	20 Feb 98	Informal - RE In-service Day
12.	11 Mar 98	Informal - CIT course AP
13.	12 Mar 98	Br S - Teacher
14.	1 April 98	Informal - Secretary
15.	1 April 98	HOD English
16.	1 April 98	Dean
17.	30 April 98	Informal - Staffroom
18.	30 April 98	Former teacher
19.	7 May 98	Informal - Staffroom
20.	21 May 98	HOD Maths/Form 6 Dean
21.	11 June 98	Principal (c)
22.	17 June 98	Parents in Tuckshop
23.	22 June 98	Student teachers from Christchurch
24.	25 June 98	Student teacher - Ex-student
25.	29 June 98	Director of Religious Studies (b)
26.	1 July 98	Student Prefect Leaders
27.	13 Aug 98	Board member
30.	7 Oct 98	Informal – school secretary
28.	9 Oct 98	School secretary
29.	19 Oct 98	Principal (d)
30.	28 Oct 98	Br F - Champagnat Partnership

Documentation

CODE	DOCUMENT DETAILS
Mst#1	History of Marcellin Champagnat - Marist Staff In-service day notes
Mst#2	Marist philosophy - see above
1	"A Principal reflects on 12 months in a Marist Brothers' College" MEdAdmin.
2	College prospectus
3.	1996 College Magazine
4.	1986 College Magazine
5.	1992 College Magazine
6.	1994 College Magazine
7.	1995 College Magazine
8.	Notice Boards in Staffroom 28 October 1997
9.	ERO report 1997
10.	RE Scheme 1997
11.	Staff Manual 1997
12.	Parents Newsletters 1997
13.	Principal's diary and calendar 1998
14.	1997 College Magazine
15.	Parents Newsletters 1998
16.	NZ Catholic Article 22 February 1998
17.	1997 Self-Review document
18.	Marist Brothers' community - Mission Statement
19.	Strategic Planning Meeting - 20 Nov 1997
20.	Drum Report "Doing Better the Things we do well" May 1991
21.	Policies 1997
22.	Board minutes 1997-1998
23.	Random selection of student reports 1997
24.	Major awards list 1998
25.	Entry for school in Education and Schools National index 1998
26.	Integration Agreement
27	College charter
28.	Letter to staff from ex-student
mst#3	Champagnat newsletter May 1998
mst#4	"A short life of Marcellin Champagnat" Noel Dennis
mst#5	OHT's for Champagnat Inservice courses
mst#6	"Strong Mind, Gentle Heart"
mst#7	"Lavalla" magazine April 1996

MERCY COLLEGE

Observations

NO.	DATE.	TIME	EVENT
1.	25 July 97	9.00-11.00	Mercy Day Mass
2.	25 July 97	11.00-11.45	Morning Tea after Mass
3.	11 Nov 97	9.15-11.00	Leavers Day Mass
4.	17 Feb.98	9.15-10.30	Dedication Mass
5.	17 Mar 98	10.00-11.20	Coin Trail
6.	25 Mar 98	8.00 - 4.00	Staff briefing, Classics class, Latin class, Mass, Opening Art block
7.	6 April 98	11.00-12.00	Year 9 RE class
8.	8 April 98	2.15-3.00	Holy Thursday Liturgy - whole school
9.	27 April 98	3.30-4.30	Staff meeting
10.	10 May 98	9.10-10.45	Year 9 Retreat
11.	20 June 98	1.00-2.30	Observation with student teacher
12.	24 July 98	8.45-3.20	Mercy Day - Founders day
13.	3 Aug 98	9.10-11.45	Year 12 RE class
14.	10 Aug 98	1.00-2.00	Special Assembly
15.	10 Aug 98	7.00-9.00pm	PTFA meeting
16.	12 Aug 98	1.35-2.10	Year 12 RE class with Alice
17.	20 Aug 98	10.15-11.35	Year 9 RE class with reliever
18.	25 Aug 98	11.00-1.25	Year 11 RE class with Anne
19.	1 Sept98	4.30-6.40	Board of Trustees meeting
20.	10 Sept 98	1.35-2.20	Observation of Year 13 RE class with student teacher
21.	8 Oct 98	9.15-3.00	Documentation Day
22.	2 Nov 98	1.00-1.45	Assembly - whole school
23.	16 Nov 98	1.25-2.10	Final assembly for leavers
24.	18 Nov 98	9.00-11.20	Leavers' Day Mass
25.	18 Nov 98	7.30-9.45 pm	Senior Prizegiving
26.	19 Nov 98	7.30-8.00pm	Senior Student Art Exhibition

Interviews

No.	Date	INTERVIEWS
1.	16Sept97	Informal - Principal - gaining entry
2.	25 Jan98	Informal telephone - office staff
3.	27 Jan98	Informal meeting - Principal
4.	11 Feb98	Informal meeting - Principal and DRS
5.	8Jul98	Informal meeting - Principal
6.	30Jul98	Principal (a)
7.	25 Aug98	Part-time RE teacher
8.	31Aug 98	RE teacher
9.	14 Sept 98	Principal (b)
10.	18 Sept 98	Director of Religious Studies (a)
11.	27 Oct 98	HOD/RE (a)
12.	29 Oct 98	Director of Religious Studies (b)
13.	29 Oct 98	Guidance counsellor
14.	29 Oct 98	Assistant principal
15.	30 Oct 98	Head of Student Council
16.	2 Nov 98	Teacher
17.	3 Nov 98	Staff representative on Board
18.	3 Nov 98	HOD English
19.	9 Nov 98	Board Chair
20.	11 Nov 98	HOD/RE (b)
21.	11 Nov 98	Parent representative on Board (1)
22.	13 Nov 98	Parent representative on Board (2)
23.	16 Nov 98	Proprietor's representative/ Mercy sister
24.	1 Dec 98	Mercy Charism Co-ordinator
25.	9 Dec 98	Student teacher
26.	11 Dec 98	Student leaders group
27.	14 Dec 98	Principal's secretary

Documentation

CODE	DOCUMENT DETAILS
1	1998 School schedule
2	Parents newsletters 7 Feb 1997-28 August 1997
3.	Newspaper article - New Zealand Catholic 31 August 1997 Reunion (a)
4.	Newspaper article - New Zealand Catholic 31 August 1997 (b)
5.	College Mass Liturgy sheet - Jubilee 25 July 1997
6.	1994 College Magazine
7.	1995 College Magazine
8.	1996 College Magazine
9.	Mass sheet for Dedication Mass February 1998
10.	Special Character Review Report 1998
11.	RE class questionnaire - 2 responses from students
12.	Prospectus 1998
13.	Evaluation Classical Studies class
14.	ERO Report February 1998
15.	Principal's Speech Opening of Art block 25 March 1998
16.	Noticeboard items
17.	Documentation Day material - 8 Oct 1998
18.	Minutes of Staff meetings
19.	Report to Board of Trustees on Retreats
20.	Council of Proprietors - AGM minutes 1998
21.	Student representative reports to Board of Trustees
22.	Special Character reports to Board of Trustees
23.	Principal's report to Board of Trustees
24.	Head of Department meeting minutes
25.	Staff Handbook 1998
26.	Newspaper article - New Zealand Catholic 4 October 1998
27.	Newspaper article - New Zealand Catholic 18 October 1998
28.	Newspaper article - New Zealand Catholic 12 July 1998
29.	Newspaper article - New Zealand Catholic 5 April 1998
30.	'Catherine McAuley: Her Story and Her Legacy' - Overhead transparencies
31.	PTFA minutes
32.	Fax from HOD/RE
33.	'Mercy College 2000 and Beyond' Development Plan 1998
34.	Documentation from Board of Trustees meeting - 1 September 1998
35.	Student Prayer
36.	Principal's remarks at Farewell Assembly for Year 13 1998
37.	'Our Mission' - Special Newsletter July 1998
38.	Combined College Development Appeal 1998

CODE	DOCUMENT DETAILS
39.	Entry in 'Excellence: NZ Education Directory' 1998
40.	Bookmark souvenir - Mercy Day 1998
41.	Leavers' Day Eucharist Liturgy sheet 1998
42.	Senior Prizegiving programme 1998
43.	Mercy Day Liturgy sheet 1998
44.	Selection of formal invitations 1998
45.	'Remembering Your Mercy' - History of Mercy Sisters in New Zealand

Appendix F: Sample of coded transcript

Respondent Well they try to compensate basically by being as patient as they can, with the circumstances they've got and by putting in a huge number of hours to compensate. You know in certain areas of the schools, staff put in a huge number of hours, not just with cultural and sporting things, but with the so called academic things to try and make up for those deficiencies by giving students extra opportunities outside the normal class room hours to get on with the work, but unfortunately there's only so many hours of the week and staff have only got so much time to do these things, it doesn't happen with all staff and that's quite norm, but some staff put in extraordinary hours in all those areas to help the kids. ^{Deficit the Call}

Interviewer Why do they do that?

Respondent Because teachers basically are professional people who see a need and they want to make a difference, I think it's as simple as that. ^{Purpose} One of the things we haven't touched on, and talking about this, is the schools vocation and when I first came here the job, a large proportion of the kids, I was going to say a majority, but a large proportion of the kids came from out of this area so as times gone on the areas changed dramatically and it's expensive in large part, there are few only a few Pacific Island ... home let alone live around this area, we getting people from all around [the city] who want to identify with this school. But one advantage we have got is because of the geography of where the school is and because of the really nice environment that because it's a nice environment and because ^{Environ.} we've probably got a tradition here and because the school has got success in the sporting ^{T. red.} cultural area, by and large there's mainly a positive feeling about the school, there's not the ^{climate} graffiti and there isn't the depressed feeling in the environment around the school like you get in other areas where these children often are coming.

Interviewer Hey do the students then have a sense of when they come here that they're getting a break?

Respondent I think they do, one of the strong reasons that the kids come to school if you're perfectly honest with the kids, I would say two thirds to three quarters of them is for social reasons, they feel safe, they come here, it's a safe environment and they meet their friends and there are many kids here who probably stay on too long at school, at the senior end, simply because they feel safe here and they've got nothing else to go on to, they haven't got the qualifications to get them in to tertiary education and they don't want to go to nothing, they've at least got a class here, teams and friends. So we're doing at the upper end of the school, if you're 12 or 13 for want of a better term, a type of baby sitting service, it's not baby sitting in a true sense but we're doing a, we're turning a lot of the kids, lot of kids coming from other schools at this new 11, 12 and 13 level and we're making reasonable citizens out of them, we're giving them because of the special character and the Catholic nature of the school we're helping I think to make them reasonable citizens with a set of values. ^{A safe place} ^{SC outcome}

Interviewer So that would be a positive outcome?

Respondent Very positive because after all there's many of these kids who know matter what you do, you can't turn them around academically there's an absolute limit to ^{st year!} how far they can go giving the student teacher ratio, the only way you're going to change and turn them around is when they've been out in the real world and got a job and found out what really makes it tick and how qualifications can make a difference and plus they've grown up two or three years, in that time as well, it's a growing up process.

Interviewer So could you see that good citizenship value being here, ultimately having positive effect on their future?

Respondent Absolutely yeah, no doubt, absolutely no doubt about it. It's something that you know I haven't got any figures to support with but I think most of the students, well I see as XXX huge number of students that go through that teething process at third form and fourth form of getting in to trouble going on daily report, disciplinary meetings and so on. I see them coming out the end, and at school, finally becoming reasonable

citizens at school, a few get lost on the way, but they'll come out the other end, for want of ^{support}
a better term, and they will be reasonable citizens who in most cases you don't hear
anything about getting in to trouble with the law later on, but when you saw them back at
third and fourth form you wondered where they were going to end up. And I think if I were
in a larger school, I think the school and the Board of Trustees goes to extraordinary St
lengths to try and keep a lot of kids who in a larger sector of school would get dumped. ^{support.}

Interviewer What influence would special character be half on ...

Respondent Well I think that the special character is the fact that it's a Catholic ^{sc}
school, that it's a Christian school, it's a huge influence on that in the forgiveness sense, ^{Nature} but
I think at times what I think what's happened in the last two years especially is that there's ^{forgive/}
been a forgiveness there but there's also been the sense of realities ^{harsh} come in to it, which is
very biblical, in the sense that there's certainly also got to be a point in time when you say,
hey look, we've given you enough chances this is the end of the road.

Interviewer And that's coming in now.

Respondent That's been here for the last three years I see especially, I think up until two
years ago, maybe three years, but certainly the last two or three years, with the present
Board, I think the Boards been in for three years but the present Board the first year that ^{Change}
they were in probably was a transition period, and it's a huge learning curve with respect to ^{Discipline}
disciplinary matters and I learnt some hard lessons.

Interviewer Do those two factors go together you feel, the forgiveness fact, bottom
line.

Respondent Yes, yep, but it's a very fine dividing line, ^{Discernment.} and what actually happened, at
the end of the road you've got the Board that has to decide now, if we had this, if we could
give this person, say to speak, or give this person, shouldn't use the word give, but if we
give this person another chance, is putting that person back in to the class room in the

school, going to be detrimental to the 300 other students there, is the rest of the school ^{class.}
strong enough to carry that person or has that student done so much that the school can't ^{justice}
carry any longer and we've got to say know.

Interviewer In terms then of the special character of the school, how explicit is that, say like for a staff, and fostering

Respondent How explicit is it

Interviewer I mean like you've said that there are if you like, the students are taken maybe from a family home situation when they meet at school they're going out with some strong citizenship five years if you like, you know, how does Fisher ... sort of contribute to that?

Respondent Well I think for one, the fact that twice a week the starting point of school on Monday starts in the chapel and towards the end of the week on a Friday you've got that chapel there where the schools altogether and we emphasize as a school that that chapel is a special place and no matter what your religion you would respect that as being a special place that it's a spiritual place. I think the dignity of that building and a set of rules and values and spirituality and a sense of ceremony comes out 95% of the time in the way the students respond in the simple ways just in their singing for example. I haven't been in a lot of schools. I haven't been in many schools at all at assembly time for many years, but I have heard that the variety of things that have happened in our assembly its easy for our students to sort of take it for granted because they've got no comparison, but I think it's extraordinary, the variety of things that happen in that chapel in assembly, and the visitors, and the attempts that are made to put people in front up there, but as well, the participation from a variety of students in the young chapel service, I think it's brilliant, it really seems to take that advantage.

Trans.

Symbol

Norms

Assembly

Special Character: its content.

KEY POINTS	CHAMPAGNAT COLLEGE	MERCY HIGH SCHOOL
<p><u>Values.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philosophy + purpose determine core values of the culture. Founding tradition provides system of core values for the culture. 	<p>Core - Values of Jesus Christ + Gospel Shape what is taught + morality, behaviour + action in terms of culture Core - respect, acceptance, care, loyalty Respect for ind. uniqueness + dignity - Inclusive nature Respect for religion + faith Belief in goodness of each person - self esteem affirmed - second chance - reconciliation Acceptance of individual p.33-37 High levels of care + concern - compassion Loyalty to school - pride in achievements affirmed. Hospitality - anger at injustice</p>	<p>Core values + action, decision-making + norms. Justice, mercy, compassion, hard work, integrity, hospitality, tolerance, competitiveness Reinforcing values of family + entry Social justice - modelled by order, staff + valued by staff + etc. Reconciliation offered 'offenders' Justice - in issues / in relationships Acceptance + care - characterises relationships compassion. Inclusive culture Sensitivity to need - 'going extra mile' Respect for ind - dignity + uniqueness demonstrated in interrelationships. Excellence - affirmed, worked for by BOT, staff encouraged in etc. Sense of pride in achievements. p. 30-36.</p>
<p><u>Norms.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values determine norms. 	<p>Support for each other - cooperation + help. Positive peer pressure to deal with conflict Helpful, encouraging staff working together Respect others - courtesy, applies to all Religion as normal - reverence taught + expected. Rel. bgd. of etc an advantage. Be honest - Represent school with pride + loyalty</p>	<p>Support each other - applies to all practical Take initiatives to do so. Be your best self - high personal stds. Expectations of staff + etc clear. Pp. working together. Take personal responsibility for self. Follow the rules - estd. routines. Religion normal part of school life - etc involved, sharing spirituality</p>

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