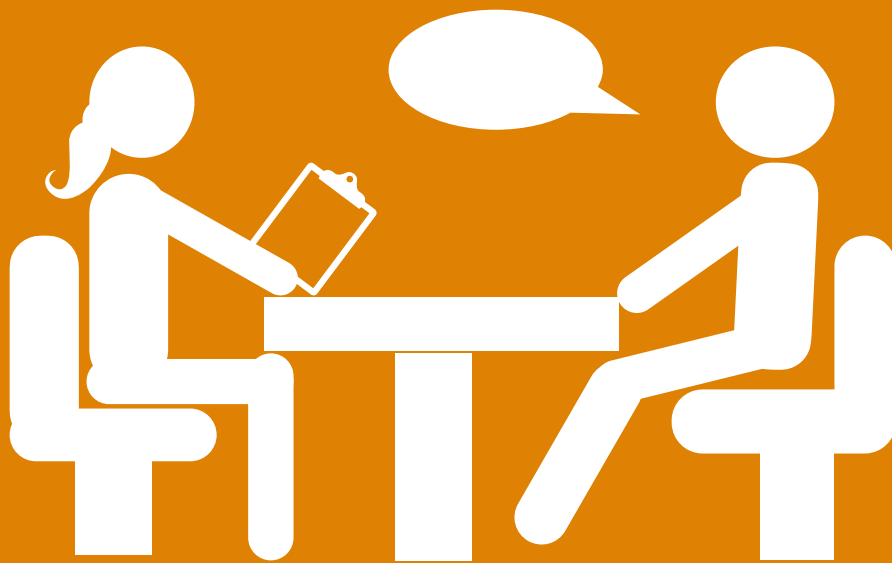




Christian Meditation in Schools



Interim Project Report: Teacher Interviews 2014

This report presents data from the first year of a longitudinal study investigating the impact of Christian Meditation in schools upon children's religious and spiritual development.

The research was led by the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University in partnership with Catholic Schools Office in the Lismore Diocese and Sydney Catholic Schools, along with the World Community for Christian Meditation.

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The views expressed in this publication do not represent any official position on the part of Southern Cross University or the partner organisations, but the views of the individual authors based on the research findings.

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Introduction

There is growing international interest in the potential of meditation type programs for improving student wellbeing in schools, including the use of Christian Meditation in Australian Catholic schools (Campion & Rocco, 2009). Christian Meditation is similar to the spiritual wisdom and practice at the core of other forms of meditation. It involves sitting still, with eyes closed, and focusing the mind by silently repeating the ancient Christian prayer word, Maranatha (Come Lord), gently returning the consciousness to the word when the mind drifts. Christian Meditation is described as offering the opportunity to simply sit in God's presence, through the stillness and silence of body and mind; to discover the true self through 'real participation in the reality of God' (WCCM, 2013). In contrast with the tendency for young people to drift away from religion in adolescence (Büssing, Föller-Mancini, Gidley, & Heusser, 2010; Engebretson, 2006; Fisher, 2006; Rymarz & Graham, 2006), the small body of research on Christian Meditation to date suggests that this form of personal, silent prayer is popular with children and young people (Campion & Rocco, 2009).

The Catholic School Offices of Lismore Diocese and the Archdiocese of Sydney (now Sydney Catholic Schools) approached the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University to undertake longitudinal research on the Christian Meditation program in schools in their Dioceses. The research aimed to identify the impact, over time, of Christian Meditation on the religious and spiritual development of children and young people in the context of Catholic education. The Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation provided advice on the project and confirmed the need for such a study. The research was conducted over three school years from 2014-16.

The final, full project report is now available entitled, 'Christian Meditation in Schools Consolidated Research Findings 2014 – 2016.' In addition, throughout the study, interim progress reports were prepared. Collectively, these form a suite of documents, as listed below. These can be located from the CCYP website (www.scu.edu.au/research-centres/centre-for-children-and-young-people/).

- 2014 Baseline Student Survey Report
- 2014 Report of Interview Findings from Year 4 Teachers

- 2015 Report of Interview Findings from Year 5 Teachers and Year 5 Student Focus Groups
- 2016 Final Student Survey Report

This document is the second interim report. It presents the data and findings from the teacher interviews conducted during the first year of the study.



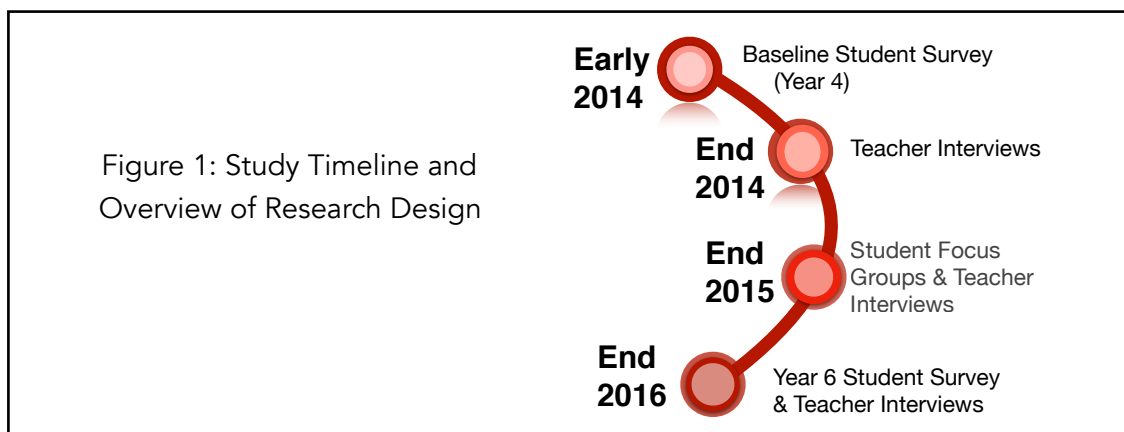


Research Design

The aim of the research was to identify the impact, over time, of Christian Meditation on the religious and spiritual development of children and young people in the context of Catholic education. Religious and spiritual development in this study was understood broadly, in line with contemporary notions of children's spirituality. This was reflected in the framework of four overarching research questions that guided the study. These were:

1. In what ways does Christian meditation shape children and young people's relationship with, and understanding of, God?
2. In what ways does Christian meditation shape children and young people's understanding of, and relationship with, self?
3. In what ways does Christian meditation shape children and young people's understanding of, and relationships with, others?
4. In what ways does Christian meditation shape children and young people's understanding of, and relationship with, the Catholic Church?

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to investigate the research questions. This comprised a pre- and post-program student survey, mid-way student focus groups and annual teacher interviews. The research began in 2014 with a cohort of Year 4 students (mean age 9 years) from 12 Catholic schools from across the Dioceses. The study then followed a substantial proportion of these students until the end of Year 6 (December 2016). The research design involved data collection at key milestones over the three school years, as indicated in Figure 1, below.



For further details on the overall research design please see the final report. This document focuses only on the teacher interviews in the first year of the project (the students' Year 4 teachers). The interviews were conducted towards the end of the Australian school year (November 2014).

Participants

Twelve schools were involved in the first year of the study, six from each diocese. Twenty five Year 4 teachers participated in training in Christian Meditation and facilitated the baseline student survey with their students at the beginning of the study. Seventeen of these teachers from across nine of the schools agreed to be interviewed. Four teachers (one male and three females) were from three Sydney schools and 13 teachers (four males and nine females) were from six Lismore schools.

Materials

The 30 minute interviews with the Year 4 teachers were semi-structured and covered three key areas: the teachers' perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on the children, their perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on themselves, and the issues involved in implementing Christian Meditation in schools and classrooms. The interview questions are shown in Appendix A.

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The research project was approved by the Southern Cross University's human research ethics committee (ECN 14-133; ECN- 15-303). All teachers who facilitated the baseline online survey with their Year 4 students at the beginning of the study were contacted by email and invited to participate in the teacher interviews (see Appendix B). As shown in Appendix B, the teachers were informed that their participation was voluntary, anonymous, confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequence. Emails were followed with a telephone call to make personal contact with each teacher. Some teachers exercised their right to dissent by opting not to participate in the teacher interview. Teachers who agreed to participate were asked to nominate a date and time to conduct the interview. Teachers' were advised that their reply emails were considered confirmation of their consent to participate in the interview.

The interviews were conducted by four researchers in accordance with teacher and researcher availability and teacher preference for either a telephone or face-to-face interview. Fourteen teachers were interviewed individually, but due to the request from one school with regard to their time constraints, three teachers were interviewed together. Each interview was audio recorded with the teacher/s' permission and transcribed for analysis, and each teacher was ascribed a pseudonym to protect their identity. The data is presented here under the headings and sub-headings from the interview schedule, for further analysis of the findings see the final project report.





Results

The results are presented under the key headings guiding the interviews: Teachers' perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on students, on themselves, and exploration of any issues involved in implementing Christian Meditation in the classroom setting. Under each of these overarching headings, the data is largely collated under the interview sub-questions.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Christian Meditation on Students

Students' Initial Responses to Christian Meditation

The teachers reported that students generally were open and enthusiastic to starting Christian Meditation in their classes. As the following quote demonstrates, the children's previous understandings and experiences with other forms of meditation often underlined their acceptance and willingness to practise Christian Meditation:

When we first introduced it most of the children thought it was quite lovely because they'd experienced some sort of meditation before, not necessarily Christian Meditation, but we'd done a lot of guided meditation and things like that. (Mary)

This prior experience with meditation was often linked with Religious Education programs at school or through family and community experiences, such as relaxation methods and yoga. This previous experience produced mixed ideas about what meditation is and some students asked questions about why they need to do it and 'why they had to say "Maranatha"' (Deborah). A minority of students resisted participation in Christian Meditation at school and questioned why they had to do it and for how long the class would be doing it for:

There were some at the beginning that were still in the mindset of, "Do I have to do this? This is boring." (Belinda)

They wanted to know why we were doing it and they wanted to know how it was going to help them. (Kim)

Many of the children who resisted the meditation practise struggled with closing their eyes and sitting still, and the teachers indicated that for some of these children this behaviour was in line with their wider behavioural or development issues. As shown next, some of these children settled into Christian Meditation well as they continued to practise with their class.

Students' Later Responses to Christian Meditation

The teachers largely reported favourable responses from the students as they gained experience with Christian Meditation. Many noted a positive change in the students' attitudes towards it:

Now... they actually look forward to it... they come in asking most days whether we're going to do it ...They obviously enjoy the process, which is great. (Anna)

They just love it. They come in and they know they just find their spot and then we just start. (David)

Several teachers related that their students anticipated the meditation, and reminded the teacher about it when routine was changed, indicating that the children enjoyed and valued the time to meditate in class:

I was out of class straight after lunch yesterday and when I came back in the children's comment to me was, Miss, we didn't do meditation. (Carol)

I forgot this morning. They were very quick to remind me that we haven't done that meditation. (Dianne)

If they've gone through the day and we're at 3:00 [PM] and I've forgotten, they're onto me, so that says something I think...I think it's part of their life that they really do value. (Deborah)

Teachers commented how the children had embraced the meditation practice and this was quite moving for the teachers to witness the change in the students' ability to be still and present:

Some kids are mind blowing, they just, they're elsewhere. It's quite amazing to watch. (Anna)

Quite a few of them go into it quite devoutly. (Dianne)

Other teachers commented that many of the students were more settled and able to focus on their school work immediately after practising meditation:

It's helped their learning because they come in and they're settled, they can focus better after that as well. (Christopher)

However, in most classes there were a minority of students who found the meditation difficult or who resisted practicing with the rest of the class. As the following comments from teachers indicate, the majority of these children did not disrupt the other students and were learning to be respectful of the process:

Still a few don't enjoy it. They will sit there and they will do it quietly but I don't think they're really participating. (Cathy)

I've got two or three kids that don't probably stick to what we are hoping they're doing, but at the same time they're respecting the space of others... (Christine)

All but one child is able to sit there ...he just finds it difficult to sit still and I've tried a few different techniques with him...So we tried him making the choice of just sitting in a space where there's no one around him...that's worked...he's gotten better over time. (Mary)

What Do Students Like the Most About Christian Meditation?

Most of the teachers believed that the students liked the quietness offered by Christian Meditation and the resultant calming effect. Some examples of their comments are:

Just the peace and quiet. The classroom's normally a pretty loud place to be. It's really refreshing in that way. (Scott)

I think the biggest thing that they're finding is they're just enjoying a moment for everything to be quiet. (Dianne)

I would say that the majority of them probably like that calming, soothing environment that it helps generate. (Heather)

Furthermore, the teachers perceived the students enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to stop and be still, as this was rare in their busy lives:

I think our lives are just so busy, even little kids, they're so timetabled that to have that opportunity to just, no one's talking to them, no one's expecting anything from them other than to just be still... (Sandra)

I think it's just that time in the day that they stop and...I think that's why they look forward to it...I think it's something they yearn for. (Deborah)

I think they've actually seen something in the value of stopping which is interesting for children that age. (Anna)

While the teachers perceived that the students were valuing the silence and stillness, this process was not without its challenges, as shown in the teachers' responses to the next question.

What Do Students Find Difficult About Christian Meditation?

Three key themes emerged in response to the question of what the students found most challenging about Christian Meditation: staying still, sitting upright and closing their eyes.

Staying still and not fidgeting was particularly hard for some children, with distractions from other children especially difficult to resist:

They couldn't sit still. There was no possible way they could keep their legs still or their arms still. They couldn't sit and say a mantra without either being interrupted by someone else moving, a noise happening in the classroom or children being silly. (Belinda)

Sometimes in the business of school life a door might knock or the phone might ring or there might be a student who is finding it difficult on a particular day to stay calm and settled and that might be a distraction to others. (Margaret)

Some teachers mentioned that it was difficult for their students to sit upright and meditate, and this may have been because they were used to laying down on the floor for relaxation techniques, or that they were sitting too tensely:

It's really difficult [for the students] to concentrate...The sitting up straight, the feet being on the floor...They may be sitting up but their shoulders are so tense and tight... (Belinda)

Other teachers spoke about how difficult it was for some students to close their eyes, and they explained that this was often because the students were concerned that other children were looking at them:

Closing their eyes. They were saying they feel embarrassed, like everyone is looking. I've explained that I'm watching to make sure everyone is not doing that and we've all got our eyes closed, no one is looking at you. (Dianne)

They do find that very difficult [closing their eyes]. It's a trust thing for a lot of them, having that trust in everybody else who is in the room to actually close their eyes...that everybody is doing the same thing. (Kim)

As noted by the above comments, development of trust is required when meditating with other students in the room. The Year 4 students in the present stage of the research are still developing their ability to be able to close their eyes and trust that other students are not looking at them. One of the key research questions of this research is whether the practice of Christian Meditation impacts on students' relationships with other people, and in this aspect is reported next.

Students' Relationships with Other People

The key theme emerging from the teachers' comments in regard to whether Christian Meditation had any impact on students' relationships with other people was that it was not possible to attribute any causal links at this early stage. The following comment reflects the response of many teachers:

I can't draw any links, it's very hard. There's been changes in behaviours, but it's hard to know, did it start at around that time, and did the meditation have any influence on that? I'm not sure. (Christopher)

One teacher commented that Christian Meditation was one factor in the range of Religious Education curriculum initiatives in the class that she thought was helping build the students' relationships with each other:

The whole RE aspect of the classroom is so important - ...leading them to be closer to each other and act like Jesus and grow together as friends... I think Christian Meditation just sits beautifully with that. (Deborah)

Two teachers from schools that had been practising Christian Meditation for longer (i.e., more than one year) commented that they noticed the students seemed calmer or more patient with other students immediately following Christian Meditation:

If we use the Christian Meditation as a starter then everyone is nice and calm. (Henry)

I think particularly after Christian Meditation they are very patient with one another in how they respond to each other or how they communicate with one another and they become very kind and caring and are more able to stop and listen to each other. (Margaret)

Overall, as most of the classes had only been participating in Christian Meditation for a few months the teachers did not feel able to attribute any changes in behaviour specifically to Christian Meditation, however some teachers' whose classes had been meditating for longer suggested promising links with closer, more considerate behaviours between the students following their meditation practice.

Students' Relationships with Themselves

The teachers were generally cautious in making causal attributions between Christian Meditation and students' relationships with themselves, using words like "maybe" and "could" as they carefully thought about their observations. Almost all teachers' ideas centred around the development of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-discipline as a result of learning to meditate and stay still and quiet for an increasing number of minutes.

It could be that they're building their self-esteem through the meditation because they're gaining something they didn't have before. They're realising that they can do some things for a certain amount of minutes and every day they're doing a little bit more or they're doing it a little bit better. (Belinda)

Maybe a confidence thing for some kids who can't sit still during classroom activities. (Christopher)

Just the discipline of it all. The discipline of being able to maintain quiet and keep your body still. (Dianne)

As a result of this increased self-discipline and self-confidence one teacher commented that the children felt a sense of pride due to their achievements:

I think they're proud that they can do this and [...that] over time we've come to increase the time. There's that sense of achievement... (Heather)

A second theme, mentioned previously, pertained to the belief that Christian Meditation assisted the students to feel calmer and more settled in themselves, with knock-on benefits for their ability to focus on their school work.

I think by the end of it they're a lot calmer. Settled and a bit more centred. (Scott)

Some children have made comments like, 'I really needed that today', 'I felt really good after that'...Some of the children have said they like how it calms them and gets them ready for learning... (Mary)

Students' Relationship with God

When asked whether the Christian Meditation had any impact on their students' relationship with God, the teachers commented that it was difficult to tell as they didn't directly ask the children about this and that the children had not articulated anything: *'It's really hard to do without having discussions with them as to whether they're feeling any different, whether they're building any relationship' (Christine)*. However, the teachers' comments did demonstrate their own higher order insights about the role of teachers in helping the students to make a connection with God. Some teachers commented that the Christian Meditation process helps the students understand about being present to God:

I think that they realise it's a time... when they can spend time with God ...just to be still in God's presence... (Deborah)

It gives them that two to five minutes to focus on God for that time, but I don't know whether they're building the relationship or whether it's just that yes, God's there. (Cathy)

Other teachers' comments explained that the meditation practice might help show students that their relationship with God didn't require any formal process: *'Maybe that relationship can be far less formal than what it's often perceived as...'* (Anna).

Some teachers articulated that Christian Meditation offered an opportunity for the students to be led to God. These teachers articulated that their roles include contextualising the practice of Christian Meditation for their students, for example

as part of other prayer and RE activities, and specifically using religious symbols to provide a literal, or more concrete focus on God during meditation:

I think a lot of it is putting it into a context is really important. I think setting up the context, putting it as a part of prayer....
(Dianne)

I found that I'm putting on the candle and saying 'the light of God is present'. The candle resembles that God is present with us when this happens. Kind of visual cues...[show] these are the ways that we communicate with God and when we are quiet we're getting that channel in this way... (Henry)

Students' Relationship with the Catholic Church

All of the teachers interviewed perceived that the students had not yet made the connection between Christian Meditation and the Catholic Church and they explained that it was not something they had had any explicit discussion with the students about. When reflecting more deeply on this question, some teachers commented that the Year 4 the students would likely think in concrete terms, and that because they had not experienced Christian Meditation as a part of the Mass, then they would not make any link.

I think they probably wouldn't see it as linked up because they probably don't have the experience in church...You're not going to hear the thing [chime] go off [to signal the start and end of meditation]. I suppose for them it's that literal... (Henry)

They see the church as a place that is God's house and they know that when they're in the church they need to be reverent. I don't know if they connect reverence with meditation or being with God. I don't think they're at that stage as yet. (Belinda)

Similarly, teachers commented that the students generally viewed the Church as a building, and do not yet wholly conceive of the Church as a community of people. For example, one teacher commented that for the students in Year 4 the Church is:

...Bricks and mortar...They probably don't recognise it [as a community of people]. When I stop and think about it I'm probably only recognising some of it myself. But hopefully it will lead to

those changes [in understandings of the Church] as it becomes more embedded in them. (Anna)

The Way Students Think about Prayer

The teachers strongly believed that the practice of Christian Meditation had given the students another avenue for prayer that does not involve words, speaking, or asking for something. The following comments are representative of all of the teachers' comments:

I think it has shown them that talking to God isn't just about having to come up with something to say... (Mary)

They understand now that prayer is not always making the sign of the cross and asking for something...Because at that age they tend to think of prayer as 'what can I get' or 'can you do something for me', so it's definitely opened up another...medium of prayer. (Christine)

It gives them the time to know that that prayer can be just stillness with God... (Deborah)

Furthermore, teachers commented that the students' experience of Christian Meditation has shown them that prayer is personal:

Prayer doesn't have to be formal, it can be informal and it's just between you and God... (Kim)

As shown below, many teachers commented that the timing of introducing Christian Meditation to the students followed their Year 4 unit on prayer, thereby assisting with the students' understandings of meditation as a form of prayer:

In our unit on prayer...we talked about that prayer isn't just speaking...that it can just be listening to God in your heart... (David)

One teacher's comment showed that for some classes, and some students in particular, their understanding that Christian Meditation is a form of prayer was dependent on the teacher explicitly communicating to the students that it is a way to pray:

I find I've got to model it really clearly. There are a few boys in my class who wouldn't have the foggiest if I asked them a similar

question...but when Isay 'this is prayer' and you can see how they respond when they understand it's prayer. It's communication. ...They get a little bit better with it, they see it and it slowly changes their attitude... (Henry)



Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Christian Meditation on Themselves

Teachers' Initial Responses

The teachers were asked to share their initial responses to doing Christian Meditation with their class. Three key ideas emerged. Some teachers talked about their concerns about fitting it into their schedule, '[I wondered] where am I going to put it? How am I going to fit it in?' (Andrew), but once they had worked out where to put it in their timetable they were open and positive about implementing it with their class.

In fact most teachers recalled being open to the idea, and some were particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of introducing Christian Meditation to their class. These teachers usually had a personal interest or previous experience with other forms of meditation or prayer and were curious to see the benefits it would have for the students and for themselves.

I was really excited. I do a lot of yoga and part of that is meditation... (David)

I was interested to see how it would affect me and how it would affect them [the students]. (Kim)

I was looking forward to it because we'd just done a beautiful unit on prayer and I thought this would be so lovely for the kids to just to take that time. (Deborah)

There were some teachers though who found the idea of implementing Christian Meditation extremely challenging, sometimes because of their perceptions that it would be difficult with the children they had in their current class, and sometimes for more personal reasons, as demonstrated by the following comments:

My initial reaction...21 boys, 9 girls, I just [thought] you've got to be joking! If you knew my boys...I can't do this...silent reading was a disaster, there was no way we were going to be doing meditation! (Anna)

The thought of sitting for five minutes with a group of children and being silent was just ridiculous. (Belinda)

Well, being very honest, David and I were a bit horrified with the current class that we're teaching....Personally I find [meditation] very very difficult...People mention the word and I start scratching... (Sandra)

In sum, many began the process with holding a tension between the potential that Christian Meditation might offer versus the difficulties it would present to instigate and implement effectively in the classroom.

Teachers' Later Responses

The teachers expressed a range of responses to doing Christian Meditation once they had been doing it with their class for several months. Some teachers spoke of the challenge of monitoring the children and being unable to close their own eyes and meditate, and this disrupted their own sense of enjoyment of the meditation process.

I have to be honest, I don't feel that I myself am meditating as deeply as I should be because I'm more of a caretaker role. (Cathy)

I really quite enjoy it...but as a teacher you still have to keep your head and eyes in the back of your head. (Mary)

However, the teachers were relieved when they observed their class progressing with the ability to sit still and close their eyes, as shown by the following teacher's comment, who described his class as a "socially high needs group":

I guess I was relieved because I thought it was just going to be an uphill battle...It hasn't been easy. (Scott)

Another teacher commented that she was enjoying the meditation more recently as the class made progress with their stillness, and was able to try to meditate more deeply herself:

I've actually been able to start to [meditate] with the children now that I've got them mostly with their eyes closed and they're engaged. ...Prior to that I had to have my eyes open because there were silly things going on in the background... (Kim)

Therefore, by the time of the interviews most teachers described that they enjoyed the meditation process with their class, and some were finding that observing the children's progress was deeply rewarding:

It's actually really nice and it's really rewarding watching how far they've [the students] come. There are some of them you just go 'wow'....it's a positive experience and it works for me because they're settled, they're calmer. (Anna)

I love it, absolutely love it. I feel that the children get a lot out of it. I feel that it's just as important as doing one of our key learning areas... (Belinda)

Personal Change

Some teachers found it difficult to answer whether they had experienced any personal change as a result of practising Christian Meditation with their class. This was partly due to the difficulty in being able to meditate fully, due to needing to remain in 'teacher mode' and monitor the behaviour in the classroom.

To tell you the truth I haven't actually been able to meditate with the kids. I've been more on crowd control. So I haven't actually [observed any personal changes]. (Scott)

Yet, some felt that the process of teaching Christian Meditation, including participating in the training day, had impacted them personally by reminding them to focus on the present moment:

...after being at that day...the training that we did, I'm probably now more aware of listening when there's no noise, and probably appreciating that more. I don't think I appreciated that enough before. (Christopher)

Furthermore, this appreciation for the silence and stillness sometimes fostered appreciation and reflection on the deeper purpose of education and teachers' roles with children:

[It] makes you appreciate the peacefulness that comes with Christian Meditation and it allows you to see another side of the students. Because school life can be really busy...and sometimes you don't get that chance to just be at peace and realise what we're really here for...in the business of school life you're just trying to achieve outcomes and more outcomes but the Christian Meditation just allows you to stop and think and to be at peace and I think it brings out the best in everyone. (Margaret)

Those teachers who were managing to either meditate with the children or had taken up practising Christian Meditation at home, described their own process in parallel with the children's meditation experience:

I've literally been growing with the kids on my own personal journey...in just that stillness, that quiet in my mind. (Sandra)

The following conversation between Anna and her interviewer demonstrate the mutuality of the learning process between teachers and their students through the practice of Christian Meditation in the classroom:

Anna: I probably should practice what I preach...[it's] made me very aware that I'm teaching them something that I actually struggle with myself. I struggle with being still. I struggle with stopping.

Interviewer: Has seeing what it's doing for the kids encouraged you to try it?

Anna: Yes. I haven't tried it but it's something that I've certainly been thinking, I need to be doing this, I need to make this part of my life. If these rowdy boys can come in and say we're doing meditation, I probably need to be doing this too.

This theme of mutuality of learning between the teachers and their students is further demonstrated by the following comment:

I think I'm guilty of not giving myself the time and I think that's what Christian Meditation is teaching us, that we should give ourselves the time...if I give myself a few minutes just to sit in silence, meditate, then everything seems clearer. That's really impacted on my life, out of the classroom. (Belinda)

Teachers' Relationships with other People

While some of the teachers commented that because they had not been able to meditate with the children they had noticed little or no impact on their relationships with others, some teachers did observe such changes. Henry said that during meditation time with his students he took the time to reflect on his 'family, girlfriend, people close to me.' Other teachers' noticed links between the practice of Christian Meditation in their class and how they related to their students, as indicated by the following comments:

I think I'd find that if I missed my eight minutes I cannot be as patient with the children. I can really notice the difference. (Belinda)

It's probably helped me ...to relate to the children because I can see just even for sixty seconds how hard it is for some little people, so I've probably been able to maybe be a lot more patient with those kids...(Deborah)

Other teachers commented that the practice of Christian Meditation had heightened their awareness and appreciation of the diversity, individuality, and different perspectives of others:

It has made me even more aware...that everybody has their own personal relationship with God... I knew that before but it's heightened that a little bit – my meditation will be very different to someone else. (Kim)

I think the meditation has given me the ideals that we all come from different places. We all have different problems in life but if we have that centre that we can come back to, and that's having that quiet time with God, that meditative time, then we can sort anything out, nothing is ever really too difficult. (Belinda)

The following conversation between Deborah and her interviewer indicates a sense of closeness and community that developed with her class in their spiritual journey:

Deborah: The class atmosphere has changed...Me and the kids together. The whole team. ...we're all doing the same thing. I can't think of any other time in the day where that would happen in the classroom. I think that's a really important aspect of it.

Interviewer: It's brought a sense of...

Deborah: Togetherness. Definitely a closeness... and because we value that we hope we can live like Jesus - a little bit closer to God through the whole experience.

Teachers' Relationships with Themselves

In considering whether the practice impacted upon their relationships with themselves, many teachers explained that the skill of meditating offered them a tool to help them relax and a way to cope in times of stress or difficulty:

I don't take down time, quiet time, I'll read a book or I'll watch TV and that's relaxing, but it's still not completely quieting your mind, is it? So no, I'm, as I said before, I'm on a learning journey with the kids here. (Sandra)

I guess I'm more positive in myself because I know I've always got that there behind me...I find if I'm stressed ...I can use Christian Meditation to help balance myself... (Kim)

I think it has deepened my knowledge of myself...I think after being unwell I just realised the massive importance of it... it's just made me realise...that I have to be doing [meditation] daily. (Dianne)

Several teachers reverted to how the Christian Meditation had impacted on the students when asked this question, indicating a struggle or tension between the professional and the personal aspects of their lives.

Teachers' Relationship with God

When teachers were asked whether Christian Meditation had any impact on their relationship with God their views were mixed. Some perceived no change, but others commented that the Meditation gave them another way of praying, and this had strengthened their opportunities to be in the presence of God.

I think so because I find it easier now and I know that it doesn't have to be formal... (Kim)

I've always has a personal strong relationship with God but I definitely think that has strengthened with meditation. I've often felt like, you've got to go to church to have that relationship but...it [can be] a more personal one. (Dianne)

The comment below from Margaret highlights her understandings of how Christian Meditation supports a mutual relationship which involves not only speaking to God, but also listening:

Just because we aren't speaking to Our Lord I always highlight [to the students] the importance that this is a time in which we stop and we listen to what God has to say to us and the importance of when we are in a relationship if we always did all of the talking then a mutual relationship would not exist and would be hard to

maintain. It is important for us to speak to Our Lord but it also extremely important to stop and allow God to talk to us. (Margaret)

Many of the teachers who experienced strengthened relationships spoke about feeling grateful for this opportunity in the workplace:

This has given us yet another form of prayer... I think it's given me an opportunity as a human being, not just as a teacher, to be able to form my relationship with God even though I'm at work in my professional faith with my professional face on, I'm still able to move myself into personal time with God. That doesn't happen in a lot of places. (Belinda)

Just having that extra connection, extra opportunity, those little moments, a couple of minutes here and there, I think it had just strengthened that relationship, that I think more often of God. (Mary)

Teachers' Relationship with the Catholic Church

Many teachers commented that this was a hard question to answer. They explained that they felt they already had close relationships with the Catholic Church and had established ways of praying and attending Mass, therefore implementing Christian Meditation in their classroom hadn't impacted on their own relationship with the Church. The following dialogue between the interviewer and three teachers highlight this standpoint:

Interviewer: What about your relationship with the Catholic Church, has that changed?

Christine: [You are]... talking to three very churchy people here, so that's [a] hard [question].

Cathy: ...you do things in a certain way when you go to the Church, when you go to Mass every weekend you just tend to walk in and pray the way you've prayed, it has become 'you' and so I suppose it would be a mindset change to all of a sudden just [meditate]...

Carol: ...us older people are not very good [at using new ways to pray in Church].

In some ways this indicates a disconnect between Church and school. Another teacher's comment indicated that although they didn't perceive any change in their own already established and strong relationship with the Church, they saw the practice of Christian Meditation as very positive and meaningful but thought it needed to be promoted more by the Church:

I don't think it's changed at all. I think that it's great that Christian Meditation is another way of praying but I don't think it's something that the Catholic Church promotes enough. (Mary)

Other teachers said that learning to meditate had impacted on their relationship with the Catholic Church positively, with one teacher in particular commenting that her appreciation of the Mass was improved:

I think it has deepened my faith and my understanding...I appreciate the silence in the Church. I find it easier to actually sit and focus. (Heather)

Another teacher was appreciative of the Church's willingness to bring this new style of prayer to facilitate the students' spiritual development:

I ...thought it was nice that the Catholic Church was prepared to take this on board, and invest in helping children to make that connection with Church and faith and their own mental health too. (Sandra)

Similarly, other teachers commented that the Christian Meditation was new to them and they had not previously associated meditation with the Catholic Church. This opened up new appreciation for the Catholic Church and its history, as exemplified by the teacher's comment below:

I kind of didn't picture that to be Catholic. You know...the bells and the gongs and the silent sitting...it was a different experience, which...the monks and the brothers practiced... (Scott)

Furthermore, teachers appeared to be enjoying learning about the history of meditation in the Catholic Church:

That was fascinating to listen to [Christian meditation trainer's name] just talk about the history with the Tibetan monk learning

from the Christian side of it...I love the connection to... spirituality... (David)

I must say that the best thing I like about Christian Meditation is because it is so simplistic but the thing that is really important for me is that it is very much related and goes back to the history of the Catholic Church, like the Saints that used to meditate before us and I keep that very central when meditating or when speaking about Christian Meditation and ensure that the Catholic values are very much central to what we are doing.... The history of the Catholic Church... is coming alive today in the 21st Century which is great to see. (Margaret)

The Way Teachers Think about Prayer

Most teachers agreed that the practice provided them with a new form of prayer. Further, they commented that facilitating Christian Meditation in their classes had broadened their own understanding of prayer:

Prayer in the past has always been you asking for something, some sort of intercession. (Mary)

When I was growing up meditation wasn't considered a form of prayer ...I was always taught that we pray formal prayers, praying to God or talking specifically about something, petition or whatever sort of prayer we're offering, but it has changed the way that I think about it in terms that it doesn't have to be about anything in particular or it could just be silent. (Kim)

Some teachers responded to this question by reiterating the wellbeing benefits and their appreciation for the way meditation made them stop within the busyness of daily life:

My life is so busy it's good just to stop....it's been lovely just to have it in your workplace and then in your home life as well. (Deborah)

Usually I finish my day, I sit at my desk quietly and close my eyes and spend a few minutes before I go home because when we get home there's all these other things that have to be done...I look for those couple of minutes here and there... (Mary)

What Teachers Like Most about Practising Christian Meditation

Similarly to their responses about the students, the teachers commented that they liked that Christian Meditation offered an opportunity for silence and had a calming impact on them and the students. They also described that they liked how the students engaged with the practice:

The down time, the quiet time, the reflecting. (Scott)

Having that time just to be quiet, silent. (Kim)

The stillness and the quiet and the calm and it just gives them time just for the whole class...sometimes I can see they've asked for it because it's been after an activity that's been very full on. (Deborah)

I like the way the kids embrace it, I like how it can settle the class. I like that the kids ...sometimes think of it as a privilege. (Christopher)

One teacher commented that the stopping and the silence led to an awareness of breath, which she perceived had both spiritual and physical benefits:

I think just connecting with your breath too becauseit is a link to your spirit. You don't notice that unless you stop, you don't even notice if you're holding your breath or panting or breathing too fast and I think it is a link to your physical health as well. (Dianne)

Teachers also liked the 'simplicity of it...' (David), and the way it can be accessed by anyone at any time. They also appreciated its structure and resonance with Catholic teachings:

Even though it's broad and everyone can respond to it in their own way through their thoughts and feelings it's also in a sense structured because we're all calling out, 'Come Lord Jesus, be in our hearts, be with us, tell what your will is for us'. So even though it's broad and everyone brings their own personal experience to it, it's still in a sense structured and aligned with Catholic teaching which I think is central to the practice. (Margaret)

The sense of community and belongingness alluded to in Margaret's comment was explicitly expressed in a comment from Henry:

I like it when the kids understand, we get to the point...where we're cooperating in a kind of respect moment when we know why we're going to meditate and we're all going to respect each other by being calm and each person has got their own time to contemplate what candle represents... (Henry)

Teacher Challenges

When asked about the sorts of challenges they had experienced as a teacher facilitating Christian Meditation in their classroom, teachers mentioned a number of issues. These included the difficulty in finding the time, and remembering to do it:

Fitting it in, and not forgetting. (Christopher)

Making sure you have time to do it, that's why it's good to do it in the beginning of the day. (David)

Probably just committing to that, personally - not just with the kids, I know I need to do it daily. (Dianne)

Other teachers talked about the personal challenge of calming their own mind enough to meditate, particularly during the work day:

I think it's stopping. It's the brain. That's my biggest challenge...It would be stopping that thought process. (Anna)

On a personal level I think the most challenging part is to have those still moments in a busy day, in a busy life. It's hard for me to stop and think because my brain is constantly working. (Mary)

Switching off. Getting rid of all thoughts in my head... (Kim)

Others reiterated the challenge of entering the meditative state themselves when in a supervisory role in the classroom:

I find it difficult. I haven't been able to meditate myself because I need to watch them, I need to observe what they're doing so I myself have not got into the situation. (Andrew)

Because you're doing that with the class you can't, you feel like you can't always fully involve yourself because you're always keeping your eye out...seeing what is happening or making sure

that no other student is disrupting that experience for others.
(Heather)

Henry commented that in working with a diverse group of students it was challenging to facilitate all of the students' understanding of the purpose of meditation:

[It's] probably hav[ing] to [keep going] back to the whole process of getting them to have that joint understanding of what it's about. They ask lots of questions....you get this shared understanding underway but there's always one or two kids...who are not on the same wavelength and for whatever reason, language or processing ability, it's really a struggle for them...
(Henry)

Margaret found distractions in the rest of the school challenging and suggested a whole school approach would be helpful in this regard:

"...the business of school life and the distractions. Sometimes I wish it was a whole school initiative ...I noticed some schools have a sign that they put on their classroom door and say 'meditating now, please respect that' or 'do not enter'. We don't yet have that in our school and I think until it becomes a whole school initiative it's going to be a challenge ..." (Margaret)

Does the Way Teachers Engage with Christian Meditation Influence How the Children in their Class Approach or Experience It?

The teachers' responses to this question showed consensus that the way in which teachers engage with Christian Meditation does influence how the children approach and experience it. However, the issue of participating versus observing students was again reiterated, as it was perceived this hampered teachers' ability to fully model meditation. Andrew and Christopher captured these concerns:

I don't know whether it's the time for us to meditate...We do have a duty of care....definitely we can be still, but I don't know about engaging with meditation ourselves with the kids in our care.
(Andrew)

It's quite hard as a teacher to fully embrace the meditation when you've got kids in your class who can disrupt the rest. So, I'll try

and initiate so the kids see me as if I'm meditating, but really you have to open your eyes and you get yourself out of that space, because you're trying to make eye contact with the [student] who's got his eyes open, that type of thing. (Christopher)

However, Dianne believed that it was possible to model the process of meditating, while still remaining alert to issues amongst the studentd:

I feel like I need to model, there was a big saying how you couldn't close your eyes because something might happen with the kids, but... you've got other senses as well, you'll pick up quickly. (Dianne)

As Dianne indicates, some teachers believed it was important to model the behaviour of meditation, even if they were unable to fully meditate themselves:

I had a peer environment observation and one of the comments was, 'It was fantastic how you modelled the children the process of the meditation so that it wasn't just you doing other things or sitting there watching them, you were actually part of it.' I think that's important because if we're expecting the children to participate we really need to be on the same page. (Mary)

I [do feel] uncomfortable to meditate myself because I have 30 kids in front of me but it was important that I was still, that I kept my body still and that I wasn't doing anything at my desk...I [also] don't want to sit there and watch them. I don't want to do that because...the kids will open their eyes because they think they're being watched. So...I purposefully sat there and looked at my desk or whatever, but I would look up every now and then just to see. (Andrew)

I think if you weren't doing it yourself...it would be complete failure. You have to be the role model. (Cathy)

100 percent...You've got to do it with them...It's like when they have silent reading...if the teacher does something else [the children will be distracted], but I think it's more important [than with reading] because it's simple and its personal. Boys see a male teacher so it's ...important [too]. (Henry)

Beyond the physical behaviours of modelling the meditation process, teachers believed that students could tell if a teacher valued Christian Meditation. Anna commented that although the students knew she was opening her eyes to check on them sometimes, they also knew that she valued Christian Meditation, and this valuing was what was important to convey to the students: *'They know I'm not doing it with them, but I think they know I'm behind it 100 percent'* (Anna).

Margaret commented that modelling extended beyond the physical to include a sense of reverence and the respect surrounding Christian Meditation:

Just like how we model being reverent at Mass, or how we model how important prayer is, and how we have to be so respectful during prayer and how we speak to God – the same things apply during Christian Meditation. It's important for a teacher to be a good role model and demonstrate to the students that this is a very important time...it sends a message to those kids who may not be on the same level as others that it's still important to be respectful of other people's silence and peacefulness. (Margaret)

Dianne believed that her passion and belief in Christian Meditation inspired the students – that they sensed her conviction and were open to learning it:

Just by me saying you can use this for the rest of your life, I'm really quite passionate about it, I think they definitely [thought], 'OK, we'll try this'. (Dianne)

A similar point was made by Deborah, who believed that the way she prioritised Christian Meditation and followed through when students requested it, conveyed to the students that she believed in it and it was important: *'When they request it I think I take it really seriously and we stop, and so it says to them, 'She really values this'.*

Issues Involved in Implementing Christian Meditation in Schools and Classrooms

This section of the interview began by asking teachers about the process of meditation in their class before exploring the issues involved with implementing the practice in the classroom setting (some of which had already been raised by teachers). Some teachers proffered solutions they had found were working well to overcome some of the barriers they had encountered.

What Word Does your Class use When Meditating?

The majority of teachers said their class used the word 'Maranatha' when meditating, with some classes preferring 'Come, Lord Jesus' because the students in Year 4 found it easier to use familiar words. A few teachers commented that they advised individual students who were from other religious backgrounds or non-religious backgrounds to choose a word relevant to them to use when meditating. One teacher provided an example of a child who was not religious choosing to say the word 'family' when he was meditating.

How Long Does Your Class Meditate For?

Teachers reported their classes meditating between one minute and ten minutes, with most classes averaging between three and five minutes at this stage.

How Frequently Does your Class Meditate?

At this point in the study, the majority of classes were meditating daily, usually at certain times during the day, such as first thing in the morning or after lunch. A few classes were meditating less often, ranging from three or four times a week to once a week.

Parents' or Other Teachers' Interest in Christian Meditation

Interestingly, teachers generally reported very few questions or feedback from parents. However, one teacher, who worked at a school that had been implementing Christian Meditation across the whole school for some years, made the following comment:

I have quite a number [of children with] emotional issues in the classroom, ranging from anxiety to depression, and these parents have told me their children have shared the meditation experiences

with them and that they have tried it at home and it has begun to alleviate some of these...anxiety problems... (Belinda)

The same teacher commented that:

...every class has a meditation bag that can be taken home. I send the meditation bag home to a student and they get to keep it two nights....whether they do it or not [with their parents] I don't know, but from what the children tell me they all want to [take home] the meditation bag again. They're all waiting for it. (Belinda)

One teacher, also from a school that had been implementing Christian Meditation at a whole school level for some time, did mention that:

The attitudes of the parents are a bit funny, I've found. Even though we put it in the context of what it is and why we do it and it's a part of our faith, [and that] it's not something that has been tacked on the side, even then there's been a few funny comments about that... the kids are fine with it, it's just a couple of parents... they expressed very clearly to us that their understanding [of meditation] was different. (Henry)

A teacher from another school expressed similar concerns, worry that the parents might not connect the practice to Catholicism:

[They might] think it's like an Eastern type of meditation...which is why at the Catholic level, at the Church level, it would be so great if [name of priest] introduced [Christian Meditation] on the Saturday night Mass... (David)

These comments suggest that some parents may require more information about Christian Meditation, its history, purpose and traditions to feel comfortable with their child doing it at school. They also highlight the importance of making connections between the Church and school life.

Some teachers who were implementing the practice at their school for the first time, indicated they that there had been some interest from their colleagues. One teacher mentioned that she had sent the Powerpoint slides which she uses for meditation to other teachers at her school, another teacher reported assisting a Year 6 teacher to implement it in their classroom, and another had been asked for details of how to do it by a few other teachers at her school.

Barriers to Implementing Effective and Consistent Practice of Christian Meditation in Primary Classrooms

Several key issues emerged regarding the teachers' perceived barriers to implementing effective and consistent practice of Christian Meditation in their Year 4 classrooms. As described previously, a lack of time was a commonly perceived barrier, particularly initially:

In the beginning I found it very difficult to put the time aside.
(Belinda)

Time. Definitely an overcrowded curriculum to try and find time...
(Heather)

Some teachers commented that lack of floor space was a barrier, as they needed to move furniture so that the children could comfortably sit on the floor in a circle for the meditation. Such preparation of the room took up valuable time, and some teachers allowed the students to remain sitting at their desks to meditate as a way around this.

At this stage of the research project most schools had not yet implemented Christian Meditation throughout the whole school and teachers working in these schools commented that noise and distractions from other classrooms were a barrier to effective implementation of meditation in their class:

You start meditation and suddenly there's a noise or there's a knock on the door.... (Andrew)

Even though the walls are soundproof-ish to a certain degree, you find yourself listening to the teacher's voice next door... (Sandra)

I think probably one of the only things that can be difficult is if other classes are moving. (Anna)

We actually made signs, my kids made signs...saying, 'Meditation, silence please'. [The children] stick them on the door when we meditate so no one interrupts us... (Cathy)

Teachers also commented that teacher's attitudes towards implementing Christian Meditation were a further barrier, highlighting the importance of the training day in preparing teachers to provide a consistent and positive approach:

I think the barriers are the teachers' resistance...Also, if you wanted to bring it into a whole school the leadership team has to be very supportive... (Carol)

The only barrier I can think of is maybe the staff taking it seriously and staff valuing it. I think ...it might be seen as another thing they've got to do... (Deborah)

What has Helped Most in getting Christian Meditation Under Way?

Teachers agreed that the Christian Meditation in-service training day had been indispensable in helping guide them in facilitating the meditation in their school and classroom. The following comments attest to this endorsement of the training program:

Definitely the [training] day at was very helpful. The explanation and the discussion that we had... (Andrew)

I think as a teacher you can't be involved in Christian Meditation without having an understanding about it. If it was just a thing that was imposed upon you, you'd go, 'What is this? There's no point to it, I can't get the kids to be quiet', but if you've got that background knowledge and the value and the understanding it [is] much easier... (Mary)

Some teachers also described that it was helpful when more than one teacher was implementing it in the school at the same time, as they could be a source of support for each other:

If your children weren't going too well at the start, like they can't last 30 seconds...then you spoke to someone else and they said, 'Mine can't do it for that long either', you kind of felt alright – it's not just my class, it's not the way I've done it, it's something with all the children, so we're all going on the journey together... (Christine)

Some teachers noted that the use of symbols and tools to assist with meditation were helpful, such as Powerpoint slides which play sounds at regular time periods to signify when to start and stop meditating, the Christian Meditation app for the mobile phone, and the 'Meditation kit' containing chimes for the classroom. While

some teachers enjoyed using the app, others found it didn't work well for their class as the chime sounds only at one minute and not shorter intervals:

I didn't use the app because it was too long but I just went with the chime bar and to have something there because that in itself for the kids it's a symbol of meditation so they'll go and pick that up and say, 'here Miss', straight after lunch... (Carol)

Extending from this, teachers who involved the students in the implementation or set-up process found this to be a helpful way of transitioning into the practice:

Just participation. They want to do the meditation. It's set up so quickly and they know that if it's done quickly then they can get into their quiet space...they're responsible for setting up this meditation space, this ...quiet time with God...it's giving them ownership of that time as well. (Belinda)

Advice for Other Teachers and Principals

The teachers gave both practical and philosophical advice to teachers and principals who may wish to implement Christian Meditation in their classrooms and schools. Practical tips included starting slowly and remaining patient:

Start slowly...it's not going to work immediately...there are going to be children who will resist for months and months... (Belinda)

Don't get despondent when it doesn't succeed first up....Don't give up, keep at it and go slowly and enjoy the small successes because you will eventually get there... (Cathy)

It needs to be very short to start with...and we all started with [instrumental] music in the background to start with, to lead the children into being silent and it was a long process, we didn't just do it in a few weeks, it took twelve months before we were able to be silent for some classes. (Kim)

Other practical advice included the resources, timing, location and setting:

I think explaining the purpose really helped the older children. (Kim)

Doing it after lunch, or after a break, or at a time when you need the kids to settle... (Christopher)

I would encourage sitting at the desk...it helps those students who have that little bit of insecurity in closing their eyes... (Carol)

I get mine to move their chair back a fraction with hands in their lap so that they haven't got that proximity to things...I think it helps them with sitting up too because when they are sitting down [on the floor] they have their elbows on their knees (Christine)

We had the lights on and then after we'd been doing a few weeks one chose to turn the lights off and that made a big difference, a real impact... (Cathy)

Put a sign on the door to let people know we're praying, to not barge in... (Mary)

I think [reminding them of] the word each day, I always just say to them 'now remember our words are, 'Come Lord Jesus', don't just expect them to remember... (Carol)

Teachers also commented that a whole school approach would work best, not just in terms of reducing distractions, but because this offers a structure and collegial support and also conveys to students and others that Christian Meditation is valued in the school:

I'd like to see it across the whole school. Everybody, as soon as we come in after lunch... (Cathy)

I would like to see it through the whole school... [and] maybe... next year invite the parents in a couple of times to be witnessing what they children do. (Deborah)

Others thought that a whole school approach starting in infancy would help with developing students' ability to engage with the practice, and there was evidence of this in schools in which was underway:

We've found with the infants, like our Year 2 kids...who started in kindergarten, they're amazing. They can sit there in silence, they're all meditating, it's amazing to see. (Kim)

As part of a whole school approach, some teachers thought it was important to continue to reiterate the Catholic essence of Christian Meditation and to embed it within the students' religious education:

I think that if anyone is going to introduce Christian Meditation that you don't just introduce it as meditation, that you keep the Catholic values central to what [Christian] Meditation is really about and that you help students understand and appreciate the founders of Christian Meditation and the saints who used to meditate, why they used to meditate...and how that brought them closer to God. (Margaret)

Advice for the CEO/CSO

Teachers were asked if they had any feedback or advice for the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) or Catholic Education Office (CEO) in relation to implementing Christian Meditation across schools in their diocese. Generally, the teachers wanted to inform the CSO/CEO that Christian Meditation had been a valuable addition to their classroom, and one that the children were highly engaged with:

For them to know that it's been very worthwhile. (Anna)

Just how the children love it ...this is a child initiative in my classroom, [it] started off with CSO initiative, but now it's a child [led initiative]. (Deborah)

Teachers advised the CSO/CEO that they wanted Christian Meditation in schools to continue, and to be facilitated more broadly:

It is something I'd like to see in all Catholic schools... (Belinda)

I'd like to see it across our whole school. (Christine)

As expressed by the comment below, the teachers expressed concern that the implementation of Christian Meditation in schools would not be continued and maintained:

It would be sad to see, if this has been started, just to let it die a natural death. It needs to be maintained. (Cathy)

One teacher commented that he would appreciate a little more regular contact from the CSO/CEO as a way of supporting him and encouraging him to keep the practice going in his classroom:

It seems to happen a lot [that initiatives are started in schools and then not continued]. So, if they [the CSO] were to drop it off... or if you don't hear from someone [from the CSO] for a while....just a

little touch base on something that doesn't require anything from the teachers. But an email that said 'hope it's going well' or something like that... (Christopher)

Teachers wanted the practice of Christian Meditation to remain embedded in the teachings of the Catholic Church, and were concerned that without ongoing support and training for new teachers, the practice may lose its consistency, integrity and tradition. Other teachers were frustrated that they could not readily locate the resources they needed to facilitate Christian Meditation in their classrooms, and advised the CSO/CEO that this type of practical support would be much appreciated:

I think that they need to know that it is very valuable and it does impact on the students. I think if they really want it to take off they need to provide resources as well, like time for teachers to be shown what to do... I tried for months before I could get chimes and then I had to wait for months for them to come in... Maybe if the CSO has somewhere that we can go to order those things, support us in that way... (Kim)

While very willing and supportive of facilitating Christian Meditation in their schools and classrooms, some teachers queried its timetabling and requested that the CSO/CEO give attention and guidance regarding this concern:

Know where it fits within our day...when we have a review and compliance the timetables are checked and they don't add up, then there will be questions asked....what KLA does it fit into? That needs to be looked at, accommodated. (Andrew)



Summary

As the data reported above demonstrate, the interviews with Year 4 teachers at the conclusion of the first year of the research project produced rich, positive and helpful feedback with regard to the implementation of Christian Meditation in Catholic schools. In general, the teachers' responses indicate that the children have engaged very well with the meditation practice, with only a minority of children resiting it or being consistently challenged by the stillness and silence required. After some initial hesitancy with regard to how to fit it in their busy schedules and also questioning the children's ability to be still and silent for any length of time, there has also been an overall very positive response from teachers with regard to introducing the practice to their classes. Although the study is exploratory in its nature, several informative and encouraging key points emerge.

First, it is clear that the relationship between the teachers and their students is one of mutual influence and learning. As described in detail by the teachers, the children learn to meditate from observing their teachers modelling the postures, words, process and reverent attitude that are all components of Christian Meditation. The teachers comments also showed that through observing the children's engagement, progress, and motivation towards their meditation practice, the teachers were inspired to meditate by themselves outside of school hours and to further their own spiritual development. This mutual learning and the shared practice of the Christian Meditation, also promoted a sense of belonging and increased closeness between the teachers and the children in their class.

Second, the teachers' responses to the interview questions also conveyed a change in their understandings and views of children and their capabilities. Teachers frequently described that students were highly engaged with the meditation, and that they often requested and initiated the practice of Christian Meditation. Teachers' commented that the children would remind them when they forgot or had missed out on meditation, for instance if their routine was broken or the class schedule became too busy. Furthermore, many students enjoyed the responsibility of setting-up the meditation space in the classroom, with children taking roles of turning off lights, getting chimes ready, putting 'do not interrupt' signs on the door, or organising a class roster for such roles. Therefore, as one teacher explicitly

commented, where Christian Meditation had started off as an initiative of the Catholic Schools Office/Catholic Education Office, it had become a child-led process in some classrooms. Observing the children's deepening engagement and commitment to Christian Meditation, their progress and sense of achievement at being able to increase the time they were able to meditate for, and observing the children's devout and reverent practice of Christian Meditation, appears to have demonstrated more generally to the teachers that children are both capable and interested in spiritual development. This has the potential for teachers to take a more child-led and child-centred approach to other educational activities, and indeed to shift their view of children.

Another key finding centred around the tension between meditating and supervising when in the classroom setting. Many teachers commented that they were unable to meditate properly because of the need to monitor the children's meditation, and some teachers queried whether it was advisable to meditate alongside their class. Yet, the teachers agreed that it was important to model meditation for the children. This concern needs addressing during in-service training sessions, and discussion had as to whether it is possible and indeed expected that teachers will actually meditate with the children, or whether this is something they need to leave until outside of school hours. This tension between the professional and personal were evident in the teachers' responses when asked about whether and how Christian Meditation had impacted on them personally. Many teachers answered in ways that focused on changes they had noticed in the children, practical concerns or strategies they used in their professional roles as a teacher, and as such expressed tacit reticence about being too involved or affected personally by the meditation process.

Another explanation for the teachers' apparent reticence to answer about personal aspects may lie with difficulties in the conceptual framework of the research questions. That is, discussion of the fruits of Christian Meditation was aligned with the four research questions - the impact of meditation on understandings and relationships with God, self, others and the Catholic Church. However, these four concepts are implicit and are often unspoken, and therefore they are problematic to articulate and measure. A limitation of research in this space is difficulty in finding the language to operationalise the concepts of the fruits of meditation.

Notwithstanding this challenge with measurement, the teachers' comments do support that the majority of children were engaged with the meditation and also progressed with their practice. The findings suggest that Christian Meditation may

be accessible to all children, not just those of Catholic background, offering an inclusive form of practising spirituality, provides a more communal, relational and informal way to connect with the Catholic Church. Although, it was apparent that Christian Meditation challenged the traditional ways of prayer for some teachers

The findings reported above have implications for the cultural change agenda in Catholic schools. The links between attitudes and practices, and between the professional and the personal sit at the nexus of change. If these tensions can be worked through there would seem to be potential for Christian Meditation to provide a more inclusive approach to the spiritual development of children in Catholic schools.

With regards to the practical aspects, a full-colour 'Tips from Teachers' information sheet was generated from the above interview data. This is designed for teachers or schools beginning to implement Christian Meditation with children. It is freely accessible via: <https://www.scu.edu.au/research-centres/centre-for-children-and-young-people/our-research/>



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Appendix A: Schedule for Teacher Interviews

The following provides an outline for the 30-minute (approx.) semi-structured interviews with Year 4 teachers participating in the Christian Meditation in Schools research project.

Suggested introductory comments:

Thank you for meeting with me/us today. As you know, we are doing some research about the impact, over time, of Christian meditation on the religious and spiritual development of children. Specifically, this research is interested in whether and how Christian Meditation shapes children's understanding of, and relationship with God, with themselves, with others and with the Catholic Church. We are also interested in hearing about how teachers experience Christian Meditation and whether they perceive this influences how students engage with it. Finally, we're wanting to learn from you about any issues you've encountered in implementing Christian Meditation in your classrooms so that others can learn from your experience.

So, there are three parts to our conversation today:

1. Your perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on the children
2. Your perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on you
3. The issues involved in implementing Christian Meditation in schools/classrooms

1. Your perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on the children

(Can you tell me a little about how you perceive children's experience of Christian Meditation?)

- a) How did the children respond when you first introduced the idea of Christian Meditation? How do you think they were feeling about it? What did they ask about? What did they do?

- b) How do the children respond to Christian Meditation now that you've been doing it a while? What have you noticed about the way they approach it? Has anything changed?
- c) What do you think the children like the most about Christian Meditation?
- d) What do you think they find difficult?
- e) Do you think Christian Meditation changes the way students think about prayer?
- f) Do you think Christian Meditation changes the way the children act towards / think about / feel about other people? If so, how? [Prompt: what have you noticed about this]
- g) Do you think Christian Meditation changes the way students act towards / think about / feel about / themselves? If so, how? [Prompt: what have you noticed about this]
- h) Do you think Christian Meditation changes the way students act towards / think about / feel about / God? If so, how? [Prompt: what have you noticed about this]
- i) Do you think Christian Meditation changes the way students act towards / think about / feel about / the Catholic Church? If so, how? [Prompt: what have you noticed about this]

2. Your perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on you

(Can you tell me a little about your own experience of Christian Meditation?)

- a) How did you react when first introduced to the idea of doing Christian Meditation with your class?
- b) Now that you've been doing it a while how do you feel about meditating with the children?
- c) Has anything changed for you personally as a result of practising Christian Meditation with your children?
- d) Has Christian Meditation changed the way you understand or relate to others? If so, how?
- e) Has Christian Meditation changed the way you understand or relate to yourself? If so, how?

- f) Has Christian Meditation changed the way you understand or relate God? If so, how?
- g) Has Christian Meditation changed the way you understand or relate to the Catholic Church? If so, how?
- h) Has Christian Meditation changed the way you understand prayer? If so, how?
- i) What do you like most about practising Christian Meditation?
- j) What do you find most difficult or challenging? (on a personal level)
- k) Do you think the way you engage with Christian Meditation influences how the children in your class approach or experience it?

4. Issues involved in implementing Christian Meditation in schools/classrooms
(Can you tell me a little about your approach to implementing Christian Meditation in your classroom?)

- a) What word does your class use when meditating?
- b) How long does your class meditate for?
- c) How frequently does your class meditate?
- d) Have parents or other teachers asked any questions or provided any feedback about implementing Christian Meditation in your class?
- e) What do you think are the barriers to implementing effective and consistent practice of Christian meditation in primary classrooms?
- f) What do you think has helped most in getting Christian Meditation under way in your class/school?
- g) What advice would you give to other teachers /principals who wish to implement Christian Meditation in their classrooms/schools?
- h) What do you think the CEO/CSO needs to know about the use of Christian Meditation in their schools?

Appendix B: Email Invitation to Teachers

Dear [insert teacher's name]

We are writing to you in relation to your participation in the research on Christian Meditation in schools. Your assistance with this research is very much appreciated!

Thank you for facilitating this survey with your Year 4 students. We are gaining important insights into the religious and spiritual development of the children. We do hope you received the summary of the online survey findings (please let us know if this isn't the case). When we survey the students again in 2016 and conduct up focus groups (planned for 2015) we will be able to identify whether and how the practise of Christian Meditation has impacted on this aspect of their lives.

For now, though, the next step involves an interview with you about your experience of implementing Christian Meditation with your class. This will be quite informal and take about 30 minutes. If you agree, we would like to learn about:

1. Your perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on the children
2. Your perceptions of the impact of Christian Meditation on you
3. The issues involved in implementing Christian Meditation in schools/classrooms

Your participation in the interview is voluntary and anything you tell us will be anonymous and confidential. We will collate the information and write the findings in a report and publications, which you can access. No teachers' names, school names or students' names will be reported. While we are interested to hear your views and experiences, it is entirely up to you whether you wish to participate or not and you may withdraw from the interview at any time without negative consequences.

If you agree to take part in the interview please respond to this email and nominate a day and time you are available to be interviewed either by telephone, Skype or in person. Our preferred dates are between November 24 and December 12, 2014.

We are happy to talk with you before or after school, lunch times or evenings – whatever works best for you.

Donnah Anderson from the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) will be in touch with you soon by phone to confirm that you have received this email invitation and to discuss any questions that you may have about the interview process.

Thank you again for your involvement in this important project.



Anderson, D. & Graham, A. (2015). *Christian Meditation in Schools Interim Project Report: Teacher Interviews 2014*. Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University: Lismore, NSW, Australia.