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WHAT ARE THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE DOMINANT
EDUCATIONAL IDEOLOGY ESPOUSED AT
BETHLEHEM COLLEGE?

Volume 1

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ABSTRACT

This case study is an inquiry into a Christian view of Education. More specifically, what is sought in this research, are the characteristics of the dominant educational ideology held within a private interdenominational Christian school. An educational ideology represents the ideas and beliefs held in common by the members of the school regarding the arrangements for schooling in their particular context. Although a number of different ideologies may co-exist, it is the dominant ideology that is being sought in this study. A framework for the articulation of ideologies, most recently developed by Brown (1988), will be used as the basis for the analysis of this school's educational ideology. In this framework, an ideology is analyzed through the identification of distinctive features within several component theories which constitute the overarching educational ideology. These component theories include the school's view of: knowledge, its content and structure; learning and the learners' role; teaching and the teachers' role; the organisation of the learning situation; and its aims, objectives and outcomes.

The school used in this research is Bethlehem College in Tauranga New Zealand. Since its establishment in 1988, Bethlehem College has opened an Early Childhood Centre, Primary school, Secondary school and a Teachers College, presently catering for seven hundred students. Currently, it is developing plans towards greater involvement in adult education programmes, somewhat akin to Polytechnic and University courses. Moreover, the demand for student enrolments at Bethlehem College has had a waiting list in excess of four hundred students.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Between 1983 and 1992, a time when the total number of students enrolled in New Zealand schools was declining, nearly two-thirds of the newly registered schools were private schools. At present, over 83 per cent of the private schools in New Zealand have a religious affiliation¹. Since 1988, one group of religiously affiliated schools, interdenominational Christian² schools, have been established at a rate of two schools per year.

This phenomena is not unique to New Zealand. In England, United States and Australia, Christian schools are being established, and endorsed in the present social and political context. In a recent study of sixty five private Christian schools in England, Poyntz and Walford (1994) identified a group of, little known, private schools which they described as "new Christian schools" (p. 128). These schools have "very different educational purposes and philosophies from the bulk of the private sector" (Poyntz & Walford, 1994, p. 129). Moreover they stood aside from any national associations, such as the Independent Schools Information Service and the Independent Schools Joint Council (Poyntz & Walford, 1994; Walford, 1993). Further, Poyntz and Walford (1994) suggest that it is the social and political context, containing many policies associated with a political view known as the New Right, that is seen as a major factor in the rate at which these new Christian schools are being established.

In the New Zealand educational climate, where community involvement through greater managerial autonomy is steadily emphasised, there is little reason to

¹ In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education categorises private schools as having either an organisational or religious affiliation. The term, religious affiliation, is given to schools associated with (i) Christian traditions including Interdenominational schools, Anglican, Presbyterian and Pentecostal schools; and (ii) religions such as Hare Krishna and the Church of the Latter Day Saints. These schools are all private and, as such, do not include state funded Integrated schools. Integrated schools are those schools which have signed an integration agreement with the Ministry of Education under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975.

² For the purposes of this research, the term "Christian" will refer to an Evangelical Protestant world view.

suspect that the growth of private Christian schools will lessen. Moreover, if greater organisational support was to be established between these schools, New Zealand might experience significant growth in this area, not just in terms of the number of students enrolled in such schools, but also in the number of schools that are private, Christian, and interdenominational in nature.

There is very little literature in New Zealand on the educational ideologies of this type of Christian school. Overseas's literature suggests that these new Christian schools have tended to be more reactionary than being established on a different ideology of education.

In understanding the growth of these new Christian schools, an understanding of their particular educational ideologies is needed. It is the educational ideology that conveys the educational intent which undergird the beliefs and practises within the school.

To ascertain the school's educational ideology, techniques are needed which respond to the growth in understanding of the researcher and the data collected at each point. To this end, ethnographic techniques have been employed in this research. These techniques seek to illuminate the context of the school through an understanding of reality from the participants point of view.

This research focuses on Bethlehem College, a private interdenominational Christian school. Since 1988, Bethlehem College has experienced rapid growth in student enrolments. Presently, Bethlehem College has a Kindergarten, Primary school, Secondary school and a Teachers College. The Teachers College was established after four years of operation. The school has nearly seven hundred students with a waiting list of approximately two hundred students.

This research analyzes the educational ideology espoused by the management of Bethlehem College with the hope that their ideological position may offer greater understandings as to the rationale and purpose behind the establishment of other private Christian schools.