The Critical Friend Consultancy - A Catalyst for Missional Faithfulness in Christian Colleges & Schools.

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We hold that education, being a human enterprise, is inevitably religious…Belief is a basis of all learning…Christian education must be both education and Christian if it is to justify itself and successfully meet the secular challenge.
Henry Zylstra, 1951, p.39.

SECTION I: IMPORTANT BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

Misalignment between Mission and Practice in the Philosophically-Committed Realm of Education

Schools and their programs are always philosophically committed. Because they seek deliberately to shape the hearts and minds of students, such is the nature of schooling. The official direction of that commitment is normally revealed in an institution's mission and vision or goal documents – though it is common to find the practised philosophical direction to be somewhat at variance with the official statement. This alignment challenge is similar to the disconnect that one might find at times between the "official curriculum" of an institution that is recorded in its published statements, and the "operational curriculum" that one might observe in its individual classrooms. The concept was potently illustrated in the movie *Dead Poets Society* in the misalignment between what occurred in Mr Keating's classroom (played by Robin Williams) on the one hand, and the values and school mission frequently verbalised by the school's headmaster, and writ large on the school's banners, on the other.

The Value of Accreditations and Audits

Quality educational institutions, either by government mandate or by institutional preference, regularly submit their operations to quality control audits or accreditation procedures by professional bodies. These quality control collaborative inspections may:

1. act as catalysts for self-improvement;
2. assess the performance of an institution against standards identified by the evaluating authority;
3. provide reassurance for stakeholders such as funding bodies, denominational leaders, and parents that the institutions involved are adhering to specified standards;
4. provide a rich vein of publicity material that the institutions concerned can use when portraying in the public arena the quality of what they offer;
5. verify specifically the alignment between an institution's stated mission and vision and its actual practice.

Though many accrediting authorities claim to be objective, in reality this is not the case, because the whole concept of guiding principles makes objectivity impossible. In the same sense that schools and their programs are always philosophically committed, so too are the aims and directions of the accrediting and registering bodies that investigate the schools. As Bartholomew (2000) notes, "To claim to be free of philosophical presuppositions is simply to be unaware of them (p.12)." Or, as Jerome Bruner (1996) comments,

> Any choice of pedagogical practice implies a conception of the learner and may, in time, be adopted by him or her as the appropriate way of thinking about the learning process. For a choice of pedagogy inevitably communicates a conception of the learning process and the learner. Pedagogy is never innocent. It is a medium that carries its own message (p.63).

J. K. A. Smith (2009) puts it simply: "There is no neutral, nonformative education; in short, there is no such thing as a "secular" education (p.26)."

The Philosophical Bias Implicit in All Evaluative Procedures

According to their own beliefs and priorities, accrediting bodies espouse deliberate values and views about what makes up quality education, and what aspects of school life are worth reviewing. Thus they bring their own biases to bear on the process. Even the simple notion of quality assurance that is central to evaluative activities, assumes a particular screen that separates out some qualities from others, thus reflecting non-objective beliefs about the purpose and nature of effective schooling.

The implications of this recognition are profound for the purpose and quality of investigative procedures entered into by educational institutions, particularly with regard to the 5th purpose identified in the list above ("verify the alignment between an institution's stated mission and vision and its actual practice."). If an accrediting authority's own philosophical assumptions erroneously assume, for example, that schooling is a secular activity (that is, that religious principles and issues such as divine guidance and responsiveness to biblical principles have little place in policy determination, administrative decision-making, classroom practice, or institutional outcomes), then the investigations and reporting by those assessing bodies may give little emphasis to what they might view to be private and extracurricular institutional peculiarities. In so doing, at least as far as avowedly Christian, reformed institutions are concerned, the *a priori* reason for their existence, and the most fundamental objectives of the education that they offer, may be largely ignored, seen to be peripheral, and not reported upon. Furthermore, if, as often seems to be the case, accreditation priorities and procedures greatly influence a school's operational priorities, then the core reasons for a school's existence may be undermined by the very quality control procedures that are meant to verify and enhance them. It is instructive to note that, as early as the middle of the twentieth century, Professor William Jellema (1958) at Calvin College warned his own institution that Calvin's curricular structure was more responsive to parameters acceptable to secular external accrediting authorities than it was to the biblical concept of wisdom embedded in Calvin's founding vision.

The Impact of this Bias on Christian Institutions

The impact of this bias on Christian institutions needs to be considered in more detail. We accept the contention that one of the most important tasks of members of a school's controlling authority (its Board of Governors or Board of Trustees or Council) is to understand and devise appropriate policies that perpetuate and enhance their institution's mission and purpose, and to verify the percolation of that mission and purpose throughout the entire life of the institution. The following quartet of couplets has been used in recent years by Christian educational institutions at all levels and in several countries to summarise their God-directed mission and purpose. They seek to be:

- Christ-centered,
- academically rigorous,
- biblically-grounded,
- culturally engaging.

However, if an accreditation instrument assumes that education is neutral or secular, then at best, only two of these four couplets that fundamentally define Christian schools and colleges are the subject of deep investigation. Such instruments can provide no biblically-responsive, self-improvement motivation, and no reassurance to governing bodies, that the things that matter most in Christian institutions (the celebration of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all decision-making, all relationships and all subjects of the curriculum, and the equipping of students to function as His ambassadors in every aspect of the culture) are actually occurring. These instruments may give useful feedback in areas such as academic rigor, faculty qualifications, and resource adequacy, but these areas are not neutral, and the Christian institution will be short-changed if evaluative activities related to them also are not considered in the light of a Christian, rather than a secular, frame of reference.

In such situations, slippage may begin to occur in the commitment and practice of a Christian institution with regard to its fundamental *reason d'etre*. To be sure, wonderful statements of Christian commitment and direction might still appear in vision and mission documents (as was the case for many years in the now humanistic Harvard University), but just like the difference between official curriculum and operational curriculum already referred to, the dynamic driving force of these core commitments can become lost, and subordinated in reality to alternative, idolatrous presuppositions and practices. As Harry Blamires (1963) alarmingly observed several decades ago, "We are observing the sly process by which the Christian mind de-Christianises itself without intending to do so (p.69)." One would hope that an inquisitive visit to campus by empathetic, fellow Christian scholars who understand the catalytic linkages between Christian worldview and every aspect of the academic enterprise, would help avoid this unconscious diminution of Christian witness and enterprise in Christian academia.

An Example from the English Literature Curriculum

It is in part because of this situation where primarily instruments driven by a secular worldview are used to shape self-study and evaluate many Christian institutions that the following distressing situation was reported to the author in 2012 concerning an avowedly Christian college. The institution had a significant national profile and international reputation as a determined and respected Christian college. It adhered to the four guiding couplets mentioned earlier. It insisted that all faculty make a Christian profession and admit an allegiance to popular reformed statements of faith. But herein lay the tragedy: it was regularly evaluated and accredited only by external accrediting agencies which, though held in high regard in the accrediting community, considered good education to be secular and largely independent of religious bias, and which carried out accreditation practises and priorities in the light of that belief.

Accordingly, there was little incentive in the evaluative and self-improvement process to align educational practice with vision and mission. Despite attempts by its CEO to change the situation, the institution's controlling body was completely ignorant about this misalignment, and thus, though busy will all manner of things, the council members were failing to carry out their most basic responsibility. One distressing example of this was the situation where, in an undergraduate language course, a very senior professor required the pornographic text *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D. H. Lawrence to be a basic text. Sadly, this professor operated from a dualistic perspective and though of a cheerful disposition, the professor showed little capacity to think and teach in biblically discerning manner. The professor made sections from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* required reading not so that it could be critiqued in terms of the worldview of its contents, but (according to students responses) because the professor deemed the text to be readily available and a good example of quality English literature of its time.

As if the novel's commitment to unbiblical relationships were not enough, the Christian professor concerned seemed blissfully unaware that Lawrence deliberately mocks Christianity and the Bible as a part of his narrative. His book portrays no holy joy in God-given sexuality as is recorded in the Song of Songs. Lawrence writes in salutation to odious extra-marital coitus that defies God and lampoons Scripture. Undergraduate students at a Christian college should not be immersed in such a cesspit. At the risk of being unseemly, but so as to be clear about its import, the following extract is provided as

an example from the text. At this point, Lawrence tells about an illicit sexual encounter between a man and his married lover. Christian readers will see that it is grossly offensive to God and his Word, and includes a deeply malevolent reference to Psalm 24 as Lawrence applies godly terminology to human urges and male and female sexual organs [caution: the following extract contains explicit material; underlining has been added by this author to draw attention to certain features]:

> The man looked down in silence at the tense phallos, that did not change.--'Ay!' he said at last, in a little voice. 'Ay ma lad! tha're theer right enough. Yi, tha mun rear thy head! Theer on thy own, eh? an' ta'es no count O' nob'dy! Tha ma'es nowt O' me, John Thomas. Art boss? of me? Eh well, tha're more cocky than me, an' tha says less. John Thomas! Dost want HER? Dost want my lady Jane? Tha's dipped me in again, tha hast. Ay, an' tha comes up smilin'.

> --Ax 'er then! Ax lady Jane! Say: <u>Lift up your heads, O ye gates, that the king of glory may come in</u>. Ay, th' cheek on thee! Cunt, that's what tha're after. Tell lady Jane tha wants cunt. John Thomas, an' th' cunt O' lady Jane!--'…Sharp soft waves of unspeakable pleasure washed over her as he entered her, and started the curious molten thrilling that spread and spread till she was carried away with the last, blind flush of extremity.

From the perspective of a secular accrediting authority, the use of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in an undergraduate literature class might be seen as being slightly risqué, but nevertheless as being acceptable since Lawrence's works rank as famous literature. Because of their secular worldview, these evaluators would have little sense of the profane violation that Lawrence's novel represents to Christians who take the Word of God seriously for all of life, including in areas such as literature and the wonderful gift of sexuality. They would be ignorant of the dynamic gospel impact of the Cultural Mandate, the Great Commandment, and the Great Commission on all of life including academia for the serious Christian. However, if insightful Christian evaluators were critiquing course design and classroom practice in this Christian college's undergraduate English Literature program, they surely would have drawn attention to this course's sacrilegious misalignment with the institution's Christian values, and might even have been able to help with suggestions as to alternative texts and worldview-consistent curricula and resources.

An Example from the Science Curriculum

Without going into too much detail, it seems to be widely accepted by many, that science is purely the result of rational enquiry and therefore religion has no place in the science classroom. In fact, accreditation reports in some jurisdictions have required Christian institutions to teach as if this were true, ruling that discussions about beliefs and intelligent design must not intrude into the science curriculum.

But this seemingly factual contention really is the reflection of a secular worldview and is a statement of belief. Secular scientist Professor D. M. S Watson (1929. p.95), one of the greatest evolutionary palaeontologists of his day, was gracious enough to acknowledge this reality when he told the British Association for the Advancement of Science that, "Evolution [is] a theory universally accepted not because it can be proven by logically coherent evidence to be true, but because the only alternative, special creation, is clearly incredible." What we have therefore, in many science classrooms, at the behest of secular evaluating authorities, is unexamined ideological fundamentalism masquerading as neutrality. Unfortunately, because of the power and bias of accrediting and registering bodies, a number of Christian schools have succumbed to this perspective in their science instruction, in direct contravention to their own core mission and values.

What to Do – the Emerging Value of a Critical Friend

The purpose of this discourse so far has not been to disparage secular evaluations and accreditations. For a host of reasons, often related to public perception and being salt in a pagan world, they do have their value for Christian schools and colleges. However, our contention is that they are singularly unable to provide deep insight into a Christian educational institution's vitality concerning its most cherished purposes. For this to occur, another evaluative stream is important – even indispensable – to

the faithful operation of such bodies. This requires an insightful and reflective audit stream where the core mission of the institution is understood and shared by an experienced and competent visitor or team of visitors.

Seerveld made this point well in an address to faculty at Kosin University, a reformational Christian university in South Korea. Seerveld (2000) claimed that the mission of a Christian university should be to "give able men and women the structured time to experience an intergenerational crucible for reflective shalom, so as to generate the wisdom of God abroad (p.18)." It is self-evident that evaluators who do not share a pervasive commitment to Jesus Christ in their personal and professional lives would have little understanding of what Seerveld is saying, let alone be able to evaluate as to whether or not an institution's practice predominantly aligned with this missional perspective. The secular evaluator also would be powerless to provide biblically-founded concepts and paradigms to assist such a school in any realignment between vision and practice that may be required. Therefore, at least for some of its regular evaluations, the evaluator in Christian academia must have a similar worldview and empathetic sense of purpose to that of the institution he or she is evaluating. And this is where the concept of a critical friend becomes dynamic and important.

SECTION II: THE CONCEPT OF A CRITICAL FRIEND

At first appearance, the concept of a critical friend appears to be an oxymoron – the juxtaposition of two opposites. However, deeper reflection shows that genuine friendship involves both unconditional acceptance and constructive guidance, which are the two concepts that lie at the heart of audits and consultancies involving critical friends. As Brighouse and Woods (1999) comment, the critical friend paradigm lies between the extremes of hostile witness and uncritical lover. Because it seeks the best for the institution under examination, it caringly draws attention to both successes and failures, with the deliberate intention of seeking improvement and the best institutional outcome.

Costa and Kallick (1993) drew attention to the essential nature and benefit of the critical friend relationship:

> The role of critical friend has been introduced in many school systems that see themselves as learning organizations and know that learning requires feedback. A critical friend provides such feedback to an individual – a student, a teacher, or an administrator – or a group. A critical friend, as the name suggests, is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend (p.49).

The critical friend relationship works best in the following circumstances:

1. It is a peer relationship. The critical friend consultancy should be a conversation among equals where a two-way interchange of ideas can flow without the strictures of authoritative difference. The critical friend should be an experienced, analytical, reflective, fellow professional and effective communicator. The responsiveness of each party to the other should not be based upon subservience, but upon mutual respect, regard, and experience.
2. It is a trusted relationship. Vulnerability, openness, and trust should exist between the auditor and the auditee. This happens best when the consultancy occurs in a context unconstrained by hidden agendas such as any pre-existing desire to change school leadership.
3. It involves the commitment of time and energy. An effective critical friend consultancy cannot occur overnight or from a distance. It involves preparation, consultation with key stakeholders, a knowledge of the history and structure of the organisation, and a multi-stage investigative and consultative process (see below) ranging from general enquiry to action plan and follow-up.

4. In the context of this paper, it is indispensible that the critical friend have a deep understanding of the mission and objects of the audited institution, allied to a dynamic working knowledge of what this means for the organisation's policy formation, curriculum design, faculty appointment, organisational structure, political contexts, self-improvement, and stakeholder relationships. To be explicit, and this is at the heart of this paper, a critical friend relationship that drills down to the core mission and desires of an institution including their application to its practices and outcomes, requires a critical friend who is experienced and committed to the same core fundamental desires and worldview as the institution he or she is reviewing.

Butler, Krelle, Seal, Trafford, Drew, Hargreaves, Walter and Bond (2011), claim that the concept of a critical friend is "pivotal in identifying needs, facilitating the process of change, and ensuring a seamless integration with the core business, values, and objectives of the school." As scholars at Canterbury Christ Church University in the UK have noted (2011), a critical friend acts as "a sounding board, a new pair of eyes, is slightly removed from your work but understands it, is trusted and has your best interests at heart but can be relied on to be challenging, is a motivator, is reassuring, and models outcomes (p.2)."

Let us affirm again: genuine informed reflection and evaluation for the purposes of growth in a Christian institution, requires the investigation of an institution's beliefs and procedures by a competent professional who shares those beliefs and procedures but who is independent and sufficiently trustworthy to remark candidly upon what he/ she observes, and thus make informed recommendations and reports to appropriate stakeholders. These scholars are the best equipped to powerfully assess and nurture an institution's connection between biblically formed values and mission and their directive application in every aspect of the life of the school and its outcomes. It is by adopting this pattern, perhaps in addition to more traditional, secular procedures, that the hallowed mission and direction of Christian educational institutions can best be kept alive and flourish.

For this reason, under the chairmanship of retired Dordt College president Dr Carl Zylstra, a group of leading international Christian education professionals committed to an all-of-life-encompassing reformational worldview, concurred at a select gathering in the United Kingdom in 2011 that priority should be given to the development of a reformed identity educational consultancy along the lines of the critical friend model. Since then, various participants in that conference have moved forward in the draft development and implementation of this concept, leading to an initial critical friend reformed identity consultancy of the nursing progam at Ede Christian University in The Netherlands in March 2012. Furthermore, organisations such as Edserv International and the Squareinchgroup are equipping themselves as avowedly reformed, Christian educational resource centres, to assist in the development of patterns and provision of expert like-minded personnel who can help schools and colleges in implementing critical friend consultancies in their own institutions. Christian institutions interested in assessing institutional faithfulness and alignment, and also having a desire to confirm and revitalise their core missions and visions by receiving a critical friend consultancy, should feel free to check the websites of these groups and commence a conversation with them.

The reformed identity consultancy derivative of the critical friend consultancy model is a dynamic program that is still in development. However, some of the key stages of such a consultancy are identified in the following section.

SECTION III: THE CRITICAL FRIEND PROCESS – AN IMPLEMENTATION MODEL

Very little of the professional literature devoted to the concept of critical friends focuses primarily upon the issue of evaluating and strengthening the alignment between mission and practice. There appears to be even less scholarly discussion on using a critical friends consultancy to achieve this in

the context of Christian schools and colleges. Nevertheless, the literature available does provide some useful insights that can be applied to our particular usage of this technique. In their book, *The Critical Friend*, Butler, Krelle, Seal, Trafford, Drew, Hargreaves, Walter and Bond (2011), provide a fluid and helpful diagram that identifies forty-seven actions that may be a part of a critical friend consultation, correlated against important stages and goals of the entire activity (see table below).
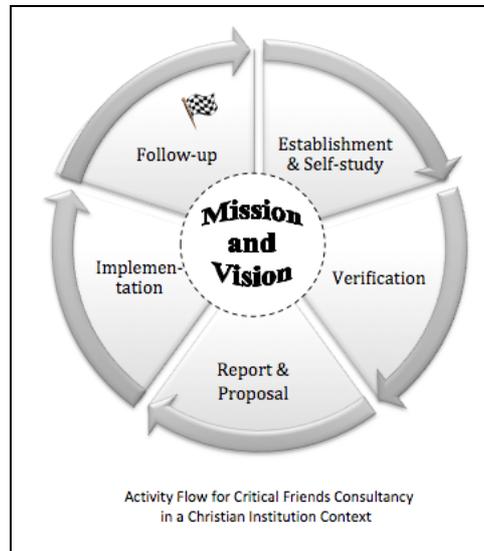

Figure 2: Framework for action
Figure from: Butler, Krelle, Seal, Trafford, Drew, Hargreaves, Walter, and Bond (2011).
The critical friend: Facilitating change and wellbeing in school communities.
Camberwell, Australia: ACER Press, p.33.

A distillation of Butler, Krelle, Seal, Trafford, Drew, Hargreaves, Walter and Bond's (2011) suggestions and other references, points to five key stages in the critical friends model as a catalyst for missional faithfulness in the Christian school. The stages are broadly linear in nature, but may also apply in a non-linear sense with feedback loops linking each stage with all others. For the purposes of clarity, the discussion below examines their primary linear character only. The stages, as represented in the following diagram, are:

1.   Establishment, clarification, orientation & self-study;

2.   Verification;
3.   Report & proposals;
4.   Implementation;
5.   Follow-up.

Follow-up

Establishment & Self-study

Mission and Vision

Implemen-tation

Verification

Report & Proposal

Activity Flow for Critical Friends Consultancy
in a Christian Institution Context

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Stage 1. Establishment, Clarification, Orientation, & Self-study

Subsequent to an initial enquiry by a responsible leader from the target organisation, the potential critical friend will lay the groundwork for the later stages. It should ensure that the organization's CEO and controlling body are fully supportive of the process so that, as DuFour, Eaker and DuFour (2005) assert, the critical friend process and its product can assist the administrator in developing habits of mind and practice among faculty in mission-aligned ways. Ideally, stage one should involve the establishment of a formal agreement or contract concerning the consultancy. Questions that will need to be discussed at this stage include the following:

1.   What factors caused the institution to consider a critical friends consultancy in the first place?
2.   What are the desired outcomes from the critical review process when the activity has concluded?
3.   What qualities is the institution looking for in the philosophical orientation and experience, and in the professional background and experience, of the critical friend?
4.   What is the institution's history, specifically with regard to the origin and maintenance of its mission and goal?
5.   What initial reflections can the CEO and members of the controlling body make about the goals and desired outcomes of the institution's current stakeholders and current student body compared to those of its founding stakeholders and students?
6.   In what ways are the mission and values currently celebrated and nurtured by and among
     a.   The controlling authority and CEO?
     b.   Existing and prospective faculty members in their personal understanding and classroom practice?
     c.   Parents?
     d.   Existing and prospective students?
7.   What is the proposed timeline for the consultancy?
8.   What proposed activities will be included in the consultancy (e.g. document review, stakeholder interviews, classroom observations, nature of the written and oral reports, future strategic planning, faculty professional development sessions, etc)

9. What is the agreed cost and fee structure for the consultancy? Activities such as this are resource-intensive and, including the professional services of the critical friend, could cost in a range from between US$300 to US$900 per day plus expenses for a three-to-six week commitment including followup, a substantial portion of which might be spent by the critical friend onsite in the institution.
10. To what degree do the members of the governing body view alignment between mission and practice to be their responsibility or to be a responsibility of the CEO?

Self Study – An aspirational expansion across stakeholders of the mission and vision.

Prior to the conclusion of this stage, the institution should undertake a significant survey of its stakeholders, and then produce a controlling-body approved, contemporary expanded explication of its mission and vision. This self-study will be different from standard accreditation documents. It will not explore existing school practice – that comes later. It will focus upon the desired nature of the relationship between the mission and vision statement on the one hand, and the institution's governance, enrolments, teaching, learning, reporting, relationships, promotions, forward planning, general administration, and outcomes on the other.

Remember that this should be an <u>aspirational</u> document that is reflective of the school community's ideals, rather than actual practice. Exemplars (all available online) that should be consulted to aid in this process include:
   o *The Cross and Our Calling*, produced by Redeemer University College (2002);
   o Dordt College's *The Educational Framework of Dordt College* (1993);
   o The statements on Covenant Christian School's *Why Christian Schools* website

As the following diagram illustrates, it will be a primary purpose of the critical friend to

(1) review the accuracy of this aspirational document in the light of the institution's mission and vision; (2) to assess the degree of its actual implementation within the community; and (3) to recommend strategies that will enhance the alignment between aspiration and practice in a manner that reflects and celebrates the mission and vision of the institution.

Components of Stage 1		One Component of Stage 2
Mission & Vision Identification & Clarification	Aspirational self-study showing an expanded, contemporary understanding of mission & vision	Review by the critical friend of the nature and accuracy of the linkage and alignment between (1) mission & vision; (2) aspirational self-study; and (3) on-the-ground practice

Stage 2. Verification
Now that the ground rules have been established, a clear idea of the actual meaning of the written mission and vision direction of the institution has been developed, and the aspirations of the educational community in the light of the mission and vision ascertained, the time has come for the critical friend to make an extended visit to the institution. The primary purposes of this second stage are to:
1. Establish the degree to which the words and import of the mission and vision statements are actually understood across the school community. As was outlined earlier, this requires the critical friend to be a follower of Jesus Christ; be experienced in educational leadership; possess a strong reformational understanding; be profoundly cognisant of the all-of-life character of the mission and vision statements; possess an analytical mind; be a clear communicator; be empathetic but provocative; have a dynamic concept of historical continuity; not be distracted but remain outcome-focussed; be robustly personable; and, true to

the character of a critical friend, be seen to be clearly dedicated to the ultimate increased faithfulness and vitality of the institution.

2. Determine how close to reality are the aspirational claims made in the self-study document and its summary, as developed in stage 1.
3. Engage in significant interactions with a sample of members from each stakeholder group through direct (group or individual interview, classroom observations, interactions with governing body members, teachers, students, and alumni) and indirect means (such as Likert scale surveys, reading of accreditation documents and school report cards). Note that it could be written into the contract that secretarial help be made available to the critical friend in order to facilitate this task.
4. Be able to access all records and files that may relate to his/her task, with the assurance that material of a confidential nature will be treated with appropriate sensitivity.
5. Be conducted in such a manner such that the essential relational character of education is celebrated. The informing and forming of students that occurs in Christian schools is based as much upon the lived-out witness and example of the teachers as it is on the contents of a textbook, computer package, or textbook. Therefore, understanding way the faculty comprehend and unpack a Christian worldview in their own disciplines and lives must be an integral aspect of the investigative work of the critical friend.

Stage 3. Report & Proposals

The strongly interactive character of stage 2 now gives way to a mix of interaction and report preparation in stage 3. Much of this stage will still be carried out in an on-campus manner, though some of the report presentation may be finalised from a distance. In the previous stage, the critical friend completed data gathering, and in this stage he/she now synthesises this material into a substantial report that includes clear evaluative
comments, both of commendation and criticism.

As well as including a review aspect, the report will look to the future, and should contain specific recommendations or proposals concerning further permeation and celebration of the mission and vision throughout the entire institution.
The report should be made available, as appropriate, to all relevant stakeholders, with due care being given to maintain anonymity of input where necessary. The report should be clear and honest, demonstrating the unique blend of unconditional support and unconditional challenge that characterises the critical friend concept.

It is recognised that a critical friend's report, however empathetic, inevitably will cause some unease within the investigated institution. It should challenge the status quo and indicate areas of thinking and operation that need revision. The uncertainty thus created should be explained and treated as a creative force – a motivator for development and improvement. Critical friends and institutional leaders would do well to become familiar with the literature concerning the role of cognitive dissonance or disequilibrium in promoting communal vision, missional alignment, and institutional change in educational settings. Caine and Caine (1997), Harmon-Jones (1999), Williston (2005), and Carter (2008) are among the many who recognise the strategic role of creating measured disequilibrium in causing growth. Jesus himself (John3:7) used it when he issued Nicodemus with the challenge that he "must be born again." Edlin (2009) provides a schema whereby disequilibrium can promote growth and an increased affinity among stakeholders with a Christian institution's core purpose. Despite its considerable value however, one must be especially careful about using disequilibrium strategies in "shame and honor" or Confucian cultures where harmony and at least surface consensus, allied to an unquestioning acceptance of authority, shape educational patterns. In these contexts, the extensive use of disequilibrium or cognitive dissonance can create an unanticipated volatility.

Stage 4. Implementation
The degree to which the critical friend consultancy extends into developing and implementing an action plan for strategic change will have already been addressed in stage one where the parameters

for the consultancy were established. However, in line with the best practice blend of summative and formative evaluation in education, and if the critical friend (individual or team) has developed an empathetic rapport with institutional stakeholders, then the external consultants could be strategic catalysts to assist institutional members in their realignment with their institution's core mission and values.

1. This could involve working as a member of the many professional learning community teams that will be established at this stage to examine the critical friend report, celebrate its commendations, and work hard on responding to the recommendations so that the mission and vision's Christian worldview priorities continue as the deliberate and overt directing force in the life of the Christian school or college.
2. This could involve assisting in the revision of core school documents such as policy documents, procedures and agendas for Board meetings, report card, publicity brochures and websites, recruitment resources and employment contracts, curriculum scope and sequence documents, parent newsletters, student guidance counselling documents, discipline procedures etc.
3. At the elementary and high school level, and since parents play a key role in shaping institutional patterns, the critical friend and his/her report may help in the development and delivery of mission-focused parent vision conferences that involve the whole school community.

Stage 5. Follow-up

It is all very well to submit to a critical friend consultation and peruse the resulting report and recommendations. The positive impact will only reach its constructive potential if specific action plans are developed, trialled, evaluated, and revised again as a part of an ongoing cycle, always actively monitored in the light of the institution's mission and goals or values. As previously discussed, the uncertainty created by the critical friends consultancy, if handled well in a culturally appropriate context, can be channelled in creative directions and can result in a more cohesive community that understands and champions its mission, values, and purpose.

By agreement, the critical friend may or may not be involved in the follow-up stage. It does however need someone to coordinate it and give it a sense of overall direction and purpose.

A Word about Alumni.

As well as involving teachers, board members, and existing students, this longitudinal activity should also involve alumni. Graduates are the living report cards of an institution. The way they live, work, recreate, and socialise in the world at large some years after graduation should be surveyed and correlated against the mission and vision of the school. If the institution has been true and successful to its gospel mandate of being Christ-centered, academically rigorous, biblically-grounded, and culturally engaging, then this should be obvious in the mindset and lifestyles of its graduates. The degree to which they have not conformed to this world but have been transformed by the renewing of their minds in their day-to-day cultural formation, will at least partly be a reflection of their education. Our institutions' true heroes should not necessarily be those who have risen to prominence in the public arena, but should be those who, like the heroes in Hebrews 11, have understood their gospel calling and have been faithful to it whatever the cost, in the areas of life in which God has placed them. We need to celebrate God's goodness in keeping them faithful, encourage them in their witness, hold them up as humble examples, and enlist our faithful alumnis' support in maintaining the biblical dynamic of our Christian educational institutions.

SECTION IV: CONCLUSION

External reviews or accreditations can be disruptive, time-consuming, expensive, and unsettling. And yet they are vital to validate what our schools are on about, and to provide a platform for institutional improvement. They also are philosophically committed. This means that their investigations and reports are only able to be valid within the context of the expertise and values of the investigators.

In many countries, the norm is for school and college evaluations to be conducted just by secular authorities – either government-appointed, or established as a result of the consensus of the professional bodies involved. If it is true, as Seerveld (2000) maintains, that Christian educational institutions "are communal human responses to God's call for educating a younger generation in the wonders of God's world (p.8)", this paper maintains that any profound institutional review that seeks to validate that missional commitment in the life of a school, or that seeks to provide stakeholders with an informed estimate of how faithful an institution is being to that vision, of necessity requires investigators who personally understand and have experience with that definition and goal.

Secular accreditations are important, and joint secular/Christian accreditations also have their place. But a regular, overtly reformational and foundational investigative procedure is indispensible for the vitality and faithfulness of a Christian educational institution that wants to maintain its godly vigor, its biblical direction, and its purpose of equipping young people to be God's culturally-engaging agents of hope and shalom in the 21st century global community. Only then can we know, as Zylstra (1951) affirmed in the quotation at the start of this paper, that our education "will be both education and Christian if it is to justify itself and successfully meet the secular challenge (p. 39)."

It is argued in this paper that a critical friend consultancy provides a way wherein the faith distinctives of a school that are embodied in its mission and values can be investigated and strengthened in every aspect of the life of the school. Such an activity can be a part of a broader school's reflective, self-improvement program. It will be less of an event and more a part of an ongoing process, and so will be both formative and summative in nature. It can be a barrier against an institution succumbing to the often subtle pressures of a dualistic, secular culture in academia, as well as providing it with a platform for the intellectual and practical pursuit of godly cultural formation among its administration, faculty, and students in every area of life.

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