

What kind of children are our schools really forming?

Across many schools today, education is increasingly surrounded by ceremonies, themed events, costly study tours, branded experiences, and compulsory extras. What often appears harmless or joyful can quietly train children toward consumption, display, and pleasure-seeking rather than wisdom, discipline, stewardship, and purpose before God.

In this timely Christian critique, the author examines school spectacle, hidden curriculum, parental authority, and the commodification of education. He calls parents, pastors, teachers, and school leaders to recover schooling that forms learners, not consumers.

Includes practical guidance on school culture, financial stewardship, curriculum integrity, and policy reform.



The author is a Servant of the Gospel, lecturer, postdoctoral researcher, and Christian entrepreneur whose work brings together biblical conviction, educational analysis, and cultural critique.

Forming Learners or Consumers?

WISDOM
TRUTH
DISCIPLINE
SERVICE

HOLY BIBLE
THEOLOGY
EDUCATION
PHILOSOPHY

School Spectacle, Pleasure-Seeking Culture,
and the Crisis of Christian
Educational Formation

Sixbert SANGWA



Open Christian Press

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Forming Learners or Consumers?

**School Spectacle, Pleasure-Seeking Culture,
and the Crisis of Christian Educational Formation**

Prof. Sixbert SANGWA

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DEDICATION

*To Christian parents, teachers, pastors, and school
leaders who still believe that children are not
consumers to be entertained but image-bearers to be
formed in wisdom, truth, discipline, service,
stewardship, and joy before God.*

EPIGRAPH

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.”

PROVERBS 22:6

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

ROMANS 12:2

Contents

Preface.....	vi
Acknowledgments.....	viii
Authorial Foundations and Research Trajectory.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The School as a Formation Machine.....	4
Chapter 2: The Rise of Spectacle in Contemporary Schooling.....	11
Chapter 3: Study Tours or Promenades?.....	17
Chapter 4: Ceremonial Inflation and the Misuse of Graduation Language	24
Chapter 5: The Child as Consumer.....	30
Chapter 6: Pleasure-Seeking and the Formation of Appetite.....	37
Chapter 7: The Parent, the School, and the Question of Authority.....	43
Chapter 8: Christian Schools and the Duty Not to Imitate the World.....	49
Chapter 9: Similar Practices That Require Careful Scrutiny.....	56
Chapter 10: Financial Stewardship and the Burden of Compulsory Extras	63
Chapter 11: Curriculum Integrity and the Age-Appropriateness Test.....	69
Chapter 12: Reclaiming Joy Without Consumerism.....	75
Chapter 13: A Policy Framework for Responsible School Activities.....	81
Chapter 14: Forming Children for Purpose, Not Pleasure.....	87
Conclusion.....	94
Practical Checklist for Parents.....	95
Practical Checklist for School Leaders.....	96
Model School Policy on Ceremonies, Study Tours, and Compulsory Extras	97
Sample Curriculum-Alignment Form for School Trips.....	99
Sample Parental-Consent and Fee-Disclosure Form.....	100
Sample Opt-Out and Non-Shaming Policy.....	101
Questions for Church Leaders and Christian School Boards.....	102
Glossary.....	103
Appendix: Relevant Prior Publications and Continuing Research Trajectory	104
References.....	107
Author Bio.....	113

Preface

This book began from a simple parental unease: many school activities that are presented as normal, necessary, educational, or celebratory now appear to be governed less by curriculum and more by spectacle. The unease is not hostility toward schools. Good schools remain among society's most important institutions. Good teachers give their lives to children with patience, creativity, sacrifice, and moral seriousness. Many school leaders carry heavy responsibilities, often with limited resources, demanding parents, regulatory pressure, and a world in which childhood itself is changing rapidly. This book is not written against them.

The concern is different. It asks what children are being trained to love when ordinary school life is repeatedly surrounded by paid ceremonies, loosely justified tours, performance culture, themed events, branded experiences, social display, and compulsory extras. A society may train children toward consumption without ever announcing that goal. It is enough to repeat practices that teach children to associate progress with applause, learning with outings, belonging with spending, and joy with entertainment.

The problem is not limited to Christian schools. It is visible across contemporary schooling, especially where education increasingly borrows the logic of marketing, event management, customer satisfaction, and social-media visibility. Yet Christian schools have a sharper responsibility. A school that names Christ should not merely copy the spirit of the age and decorate it with prayer. It should embody a different understanding of the child, knowledge, money, joy, achievement, and the good life.

This manuscript therefore offers a Christian educational philosophy and cultural-policy critique. It affirms joy, play, field learning, ceremony, and school community when they are purposeful and proportionate. It critiques excess, misnaming, compulsion,

financial carelessness, status formation, and the weakening of parental authority. Its central claim is simple: the school is always forming someone. The question is whether it is forming learners or consumers.

Acknowledgments

I give thanks to God for the gift of children, the responsibility of parents, the labor of teachers, and the privilege of Christian reflection on education. I am grateful for every educator who seeks to teach with integrity, every parent who asks patient questions, and every Christian school leader who understands that faithfulness requires more than religious language. It requires wisdom in practice.

Authorial Foundations and Research Trajectory

A Continuity of Concern

This book stands within a longer line of Christian educational reflection, public theology, and cultural critique. It does not arise from a private dispute with a particular school, nor from impatience with children, teachers, or legitimate celebration. It grows out of a consistent question that has marked the author's wider work: what do institutions, markets, technologies, curricula, ceremonies, and cultural habits teach human beings to love?

In earlier writing on modern education and spiritual discernment, the author warned that education can either serve wisdom or quietly train Christians to absorb secular assumptions without examining them (Sangwa, 2024b). In a related reflection on early education, media, and Christian family values, he argued that parental authority can be weakened when children are formed more deeply by institutional and media environments than by biblical instruction at home (Sangwa, 2024c). The present book carries those concerns into the ordinary practices of school life: fees, ceremonies, trips, photographs, branded experiences, and the subtle schooling of desire.

The book also extends the author's prior critique of hedonism. Earlier pastoral and theological reflections distinguished momentary pleasure from true fulfilment, insisting that the Christian life must be ordered by the kingdom of God rather than by appetite, novelty, and self-indulgence (Sangwa, 2024a, 2026a). That distinction is central here. School spectacle becomes spiritually dangerous not because pleasure is always wrong, but because repeated pleasure-centered practices can train children to seek stimulation without purpose and celebration without stewardship.

Education, Telos, and the Question of Mission

The book also dialogues with the author's academic work on pedagogy and mission. The critique of learner-centered pedagogy and moral relativism argued that educational theories are never morally empty: they can relocate authority from transcendent truth toward self-reference, technocratic efficiency, or peer consensus when detached from a biblical account of truth and virtue (Sangwa, 2025b). Likewise, the study of competency-based education warned that competence language can become thin when it is separated from knowledge integrity, local meaning, moral formation, and the deeper purposes of education (Sangwa, 2025c).

Mission-Driven Learning Theory is especially relevant. It argues that learning theories often refine the means of education while leaving the end, or telos, underdeveloped; by contrast, education should order knowledge and competence toward a discerned life mission before God (Sangwa & Mutabazi, 2025). This book applies that insight at the level of school culture. A ceremony, study tour, or special event should not be judged merely by whether it is enjoyable or popular. It should be judged by whether it helps children become people of truthful purpose, disciplined competence, stewardship, and service.

A Public-Theological Method

The method of this book is therefore integrative. It brings together biblical theology, educational philosophy, curriculum theory, child development, consumer-culture critique, policy analysis, and pastoral discernment. It reads school culture as formation. It treats fees, events, and activities not as isolated administrative matters but as practices that reveal a school's operative anthropology: what the school believes children are, what they need, what they should love, and what kind of adults they should become.

This authorial continuity should not be read as a closed system immune to correction. Christian scholarship must remain humble. If a claim is too strong, it should be revised. If a source is weak, it should

be replaced. If a school practice is better than it first appears, it should be acknowledged. Yet humility does not require silence. Where educational practices form children toward appetite, self-display, waste, or worldliness, Christian love requires clear and gracious warning.

Introduction

Education is never merely the delivery of content. Every school, whether public, private, secular, religious, elite, modest, urban, rural, old, or new, forms children through a pattern of life. A school tells children what is worth noticing, what deserves time, what deserves money, what deserves applause, what should be photographed, what should be rewarded, and what may be ignored. It may do so through the official curriculum, but also through the ceremonies it multiplies, the trips it names as academic, the fees it normalizes, the celebrations it makes compulsory, the brands it displays, the performances it rewards, and the moral habits it treats as ordinary.

The argument of this book is not that children should be deprived of beauty, laughter, travel, play, celebration, or wonder. That would be a poor theology of childhood and an even poorer understanding of education. Play can support development, imagination, language, cooperation, self-regulation, and emotional growth, as pediatric and developmental literature consistently recognizes (Yogman et al., 2018). Well-designed educational visits can help children observe, inquire, remember, and connect classroom learning with embodied experience. Ceremony can mark gratitude, communal memory, achievement, and transition. Joy is not the enemy of Christian education.

The danger lies elsewhere. The danger appears when schools slowly turn the culture of learning into a culture of spectacle. A ceremony becomes a paid performance. A study tour becomes a promenade. A transition becomes a graduation. An optional outing becomes socially compulsory. A school identity becomes a brand. A child becomes a performer. A parent becomes a financier of

institutional excitement. A community of learning becomes a provider of purchasable experiences.

This shift is especially serious because childhood is already surrounded by commercial pressure. The American Psychological Association's report on advertising and children warned that commercialism reaches not only homes and media environments but also schools (American Psychological Association, 2004). The American Academy of Pediatrics has described the digital advertising environment now surrounding children, including sponsored content, influencers, data collection, persuasive design, and personalized behavioral marketing (Radesky et al., 2020). In 2026, the Academy went further by describing children's lives within a wider digital ecosystem that can either support development or prioritize engagement and commercialization in ways that displace healthier behaviors (Munzer et al., 2026a, 2026b). If the wider culture is already training children as consumers, schools should be a place of counter-formation, not amplification.

The Rwandan and African context makes the question especially urgent. Rwanda's competence-based curriculum framework emphasizes deep, coherent, learner-centered formation, not entertainment for its own sake (Ministry of Education & Rwanda Education Board, 2015). Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan placed education within a national transformation agenda oriented toward human capital, skills, and development (Ministry of Education, 2018). Household education burdens and educational participation patterns remain matters of public concern and social equity, as national household data continue to document the lived conditions in which families educate children (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2025). In such a context, repeated compulsory extras cannot be treated as harmless. They are pedagogical, economic, moral, and spiritual matters. Theologically, the issue turns on formation. Scripture commands parents to impress God's words on their children in daily life, not merely in formal religious instruction Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Fathers are commanded to bring

children up in the training and instruction of the Lord Ephesians 6:4. Believers are warned not to conform to the age Romans 12:2, not to be mastered by covetousness Luke 12:15, not to love the world as an object of ultimate desire 1 John 2:15-17, and not to become people who are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God 2 Timothy 3:1-5. These texts are not narrow moral slogans. They provide a theological lens for understanding how practices train desire.

The central question, therefore, is not merely, “Is the activity enjoyable?” The better questions are: What does it form? What does it require? What does it normalize? What does it teach children to desire? What does it teach parents to accept? What does it reveal about the school’s view of education? What kind of society does it help build?

This book proceeds from the conviction that Christian education must be intellectually serious, spiritually faithful, socially responsible, and economically considerate. It must love children enough to form them for wisdom rather than appetite, stewardship rather than waste, purpose rather than distraction, gratitude rather than entitlement, service rather than self-display, and joy rather than pleasure-seeking.

The School as a Formation Machine

Education Beyond Information

A school is never a neutral container into which information is poured. It is a moral ecology. Its timetable, ceremonies, rewards, punishments, classroom routines, spending expectations, public displays, trips, songs, assemblies, photographs, and assessment practices teach children what kind of life is normal. The official curriculum may tell children to value discipline, critical thinking, and integrity; the lived curriculum may teach them that visibility, applause, entertainment, and social approval matter more. This is why the hidden curriculum remains one of the most important concepts in educational critique.

Philip Jackson's classic account of classroom life showed that schooling forms children through crowds, praise, power, waiting, routines, and institutional expectations, not only through subject matter (Jackson, 1968). Giroux and Penna (1979) later argued that the hidden curriculum links classroom life to wider social and political structures. The implication is unsettling but unavoidable: schools train children not only by what they say, but by what they repeatedly require. If a school repeatedly requires special outfits, frequent contributions, costly outings, staged performances, and public display, those practices become part of the curriculum of desire.

The school as a formation machine does not need to state its philosophy. The philosophy is visible in what it normalizes. A child who learns that every term must end in a party, every transition must be treated as graduation, every outing must be photographed, every achievement must be displayed, and every activity must involve a

financial contribution is being taught a view of life. That view may not appear in the syllabus, but it may be more powerful than the syllabus because it is embodied.

The Hidden Curriculum of Desire

The hidden curriculum is not always sinister. A school can quietly teach patience by expecting children to wait well. It can quietly teach stewardship by using resources modestly. It can quietly teach dignity by treating poorer children with equal honor. It can quietly teach truthfulness by naming recreation as recreation and academic learning as academic learning. It can quietly teach gratitude by celebrating without excess. But the hidden curriculum can also deform. It can teach rivalry, status anxiety, class distinction, impatience, vanity, debt-normalization, parental passivity, or the expectation that joy must be purchased.

The point is not that every ceremony or outing is corrupt. The point is that repeated practices form affections. James K. A. Smith (2009, 2016) has argued that human beings are not merely thinking creatures but desiring creatures shaped by habits, rituals, and liturgies. Although Smith writes largely about worship and cultural formation, the insight applies powerfully to schooling. Children do not simply learn ideas about money, achievement, and pleasure. They rehearse patterns that teach them what to want.

A school that repeatedly centers spectacle may become a secular liturgy of consumption. Children gather, dress up, perform, consume, receive applause, take photographs, compare, and return home expecting similar experiences in the future. None of this needs to be declared as a doctrine. It functions as practice. Theologically, this matters because Scripture treats the heart as the center of human direction Proverbs 4:23. If the heart is trained through repeated practices, then school routines are spiritually consequential.

Formation and the Moral Weight of Repetition

Moral formation depends on repetition. Aristotle's virtue ethics, later received and transformed within Christian moral thought, understood habit as central to character (MacIntyre, 1981). A person becomes just by doing just actions, patient by practicing patience, temperate by practicing restraint. Schools understand this when they teach reading, handwriting, punctuality, mathematics, classroom order, and respect. Repetition is how children become capable.

The same principle applies to consumer habits. Repeated unnecessary spending forms assumptions. Repeated spectacle forms expectations. Repeated applause forms appetite. Repeated comparison forms status consciousness. Repeated school-led consumption may make extravagance feel ordinary before children have learned to evaluate it morally. A child does not need a lecture on consumerism if his or her weekly environment quietly teaches that belonging means paying, performing, and displaying.

Christian parents and educators should therefore ask not only what schools teach but what they habituate. The question is not simply, "Did the child enjoy the event?" Many deforming practices are enjoyable at the moment. The better question is, "What did this practice rehearse in the child's imagination?" Did it rehearse gratitude, service, humility, wonder, skill, knowledge, responsibility, and worship? Or did it rehearse appetite, display, comparison, entitlement, and consumption?

The Public Consequences of Private Formation

Child formation is never merely private. A school system that normalizes constant expenditure helps form a society's economic imagination. A school system that normalizes performance culture helps form citizens who equate worth with visibility. A school system that normalizes entertainment as enrichment helps form learners who become impatient with the slow work of reading, thinking, practicing, listening, and serving. If schools form children for

appetite, the consequences appear later in families, churches, workplaces, politics, and public life.

This is why educational philosophy cannot be separated from social ethics. Dewey (1916, 1938) rightly insisted that education is linked to the kind of society being built, even though a Christian account must finally place education under the lordship of Christ rather than democratic pragmatism alone. Schools form citizens, neighbors, workers, parents, church members, and worshipers. They also form consumers. The question is which identity receives the deepest rehearsal.

A Christian account must go further still. The child is not merely a future worker or citizen. The child is an image-bearer before God. Education must therefore respect the child's whole person: mind, heart, body, conscience, imagination, relationships, and vocation. When schools become formation machines for consumption, they reduce the child. When they become communities of wisdom, they honor the child.

Formation Is Often Strongest When It Is Unnoticed

The strongest formation is often the formation no one names. A child may resist a formal lesson and still absorb the habits of the room. He may forget a written rule but remember how adults spent money, what they laughed at, what they praised, what they excused, and what they treated as normal. This is why institutional atmosphere matters. It is possible for a school to publish a values statement that honors humility while its culture rewards visibility. It is possible to teach responsibility while adults model financial impulsiveness. It is possible to require Scripture memory while the school calendar trains appetite.

This insight should make educators sober, not cynical. It means every school possesses formative power, including schools with modest buildings and limited resources. A teacher who begins class with order, attention, prayer, and clarity is forming children. A head teacher who explains a policy truthfully is forming children. A school

that apologizes when it mishandles a matter is forming children. A parent who asks a respectful question is also forming the school community by reminding it that truth and stewardship matter. The hidden curriculum can therefore be reformed. It is not fate. Schools can revise calendars, simplify events, rename activities honestly, reduce unnecessary costs, and explain learning purposes more carefully. They can also teach children why those changes are being made. In doing so, they turn reform itself into education. Children can learn that wise adults do not do something merely because others do it. They can learn that Christian courage sometimes appears as administrative restraint.

The Child's Loves as the True Curriculum

The word curriculum comes from a root idea of a course or path. A curriculum is not only a document; it is the path along which children are led. The most important question is not simply what children can recite at the end of the path but what they love after walking it. Do they love truth more? Do they love neighbor more? Do they love wisdom more? Do they love attention more? Do they love comfort more? Do they love money more? The answer reveals the deeper curriculum.

Smith's account of cultural liturgies is useful because it refuses the illusion that humans are only brains on legs (Smith, 2009, 2016). Children are not shaped merely by propositions; they are shaped by practices that aim their loves. A school ceremony, a trip, a competition, a uniform, a song, a public prize, a parent message, and a school photograph may all aim love. This is not mystical exaggeration. It is ordinary human formation.

Christian education should therefore evaluate activities by asking what love the activity trains. A study tour to a farm may train wonder, gratitude, and respect for labor. The same trip, if handled as a photo opportunity and picnic, may train consumption and distraction. A graduation ceremony may train gratitude for God's

faithfulness. The same ceremony, if inflated, may train vanity. The practice itself is not the whole issue. Its liturgical direction matters.

From Hidden Curriculum to Mission-Driven Formation

The hidden curriculum becomes more dangerous when the school lacks a clear account of telos. If the school does not know the final human purpose toward which its routines are ordered, it will usually borrow purpose from the surrounding culture. Market culture will offer customer satisfaction. Entertainment culture will offer excitement. Credential culture will offer status. Digital culture will offer visibility. Scripture offers something deeper: wisdom before God, love of neighbor, stewardship of gifts, and faithfulness in vocation.

This is why Mission-Driven Learning Theory matters for the present argument. If education orders knowledge and competence toward life mission under God, then every institutional practice must be tested by its contribution to mission rather than by its immediate attraction (Sangwa & Mutabazi, 2025). The question is not only whether an activity is harmless, but whether it forms mission-aligned habits. Does it teach children to steward gifts, discern calling, serve others, and endure meaningful difficulty? Or does it teach them to chase stimulation, recognition, and novelty?

Research, Policy, and Pastoral Note

A sober reform agenda should avoid two errors. The first error is romantic reaction, which assumes that every modern school practice is corrupt simply because it is new, visible, or enjoyable. The second error is naive adoption, which assumes that any practice becomes educational once a school organizes it. Neither approach is wise. Research, policy, and Christian discernment all require attention to purpose, evidence, context, and consequences.

International education policy increasingly speaks of competences, values, well-being, sustainability, accountability, and financial literacy (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2017, 2020; UNICEF

Innocenti, 2020). These emphases do not settle every Christian question, but they support the basic claim that education concerns the whole learner and the social conditions around learning. When school activities create unclear costs, weak alignment, or social pressure, they touch matters already recognized by educational policy as significant.

Pastorally, reform should be done without contempt. Many parents accept costly practices because they love their children. Many teachers organize events because they want children to enjoy school. Many leaders approve activities because they believe they are enriching the institution. Christian critique should expose the formative dangers while still honoring the people involved. The goal is not humiliation. The goal is repentance, wisdom, and better practice.

A useful pastoral question is this: if a child internalized the repeated message of this practice for ten years, what kind of adult would it help produce? That question slows the institution down. It forces adults to look beyond the event itself to the person being formed through it. Schools rarely damage children through one isolated activity. More often, they shape children through patterns. Therefore, reform should focus on patterns.

The Rise of Spectacle in Contemporary Schooling

From School Community to Experience Provider

Many contemporary schools now operate in an environment shaped by competition, branding, parental expectations, social-media visibility, and the logic of customer satisfaction. Public schools, private schools, international schools, faith-based schools, and low-cost private schools may differ in mission and resources, but all face pressure to appear active, modern, exciting, and marketable. In this climate, schools may begin to offer not only education but experiences. The school day becomes surrounded by ceremonies, performances, themed events, color days, character days, career-costume days, restaurant outings, fun days, school-branded clothing, photo packages, and trips marketed as enrichment.

Some of these activities may be useful when restrained and carefully designed. A child may remember a visit to a farm, museum, laboratory, historical site, library, workshop, or ecological area more vividly than a textbook page. A carefully prepared class presentation can build confidence. A thanksgiving service can cultivate gratitude. A modest end-of-year reflection can help children honor God's faithfulness. The problem arises when experience becomes the measure of school quality and when spectacle begins to displace the quieter disciplines that actually educate.

The pressure is intensified by digital culture. Schools now often compete through photographs, promotional videos, parent messaging groups, websites, and social media. Activities that photograph well

become institutionally attractive. Yet the things that educate most deeply often photograph poorly: careful reading, revision, memorization, laboratory discipline, number sense, pastoral correction, respectful disagreement, prayer, repentance, service, silence, and perseverance. A school under branding pressure may be tempted to showcase excitement rather than cultivate depth.

Spectacle and the Weakening of Educational Language

One sign of spectacle is the inflation of language. Recreation becomes study tour. Routine progression becomes graduation. Entertainment becomes enrichment. A party becomes social development. A play-park visit becomes experiential learning. A staged event becomes holistic education. These labels may contain partial truths, but when used carelessly they weaken educational language. Words become tools of justification rather than instruments of truth.

Curriculum theory teaches that aims, content, learning experiences, and assessment should be coherently related (Tyler, 1949; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In a competence-based curriculum, this coherence becomes even more important because learning is expected to develop knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and transferable capacities. Rwanda's competence-based curriculum framework emphasizes coherence across levels and the development of competences through meaningful learning experiences (Ministry of Education & Rwanda Education Board, 2015). If a school calls an activity educational, it should be able to show the learning outcomes, preparation, differentiation, and reflection that justify the claim.

The misuse of educational language does more than confuse parents. It trains children to treat learning lightly. If everything is study, then nothing requires study. If every outing is curriculum, then curriculum loses seriousness. If every transition is graduation, then graduation loses weight. Truthful naming is a small but important act of educational integrity.

The Market Logic Behind School Excitement

Educational spectacle often grows in market conditions. Parents compare schools. Schools compete for enrollment. Administrators may fear that sober academic formation looks dull beside a competitor's colorful event calendar. Promotional culture rewards schools that appear lively. In such a climate, a school may feel compelled to generate visible experiences even when its deeper academic work is sound.

Apple (2004) warned that education is never insulated from social and economic forces. Bowles and Gintis (1976) made a different but related argument: schools often reproduce wider social arrangements through their internal structures. Even when one does not accept every aspect of their analysis, the basic insight remains useful. School life can mirror the surrounding economy. In a consumer society, schools may become consumer institutions. In an image society, schools may become image institutions. In an entertainment society, schools may become entertainment institutions.

Christian education should be alert here. The church has long recognized that the world forms people through patterns of desire. The apostolic warning in Romans 12:2 is not only about obviously sinful acts. It is also about the shape of the age: its assumptions, loves, anxieties, measures of success, and patterns of conformity. A Christian school that copies the spectacle economy may be conforming even while teaching Bible lessons.

The Cost of Constant Excitement

Constant excitement has a hidden cost. It can make ordinary learning feel insufficient. Reading becomes boring if every week expects an event. Mathematics becomes dry if effort is not surrounded by novelty. Writing becomes burdensome if attention has been trained toward stimulation rather than sustained thought. Discipline becomes oppressive if children have been taught that school should continually entertain them.

This does not mean school should be grim. It means joy must be deeper than stimulation. Csikszentmihalyi's work on flow reminds educators that deep satisfaction often arises from focused engagement with meaningful challenge, not from passive entertainment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). A child absorbed in solving a problem, writing a story, singing with understanding, cultivating a garden, helping a younger learner, or reading Scripture with growing comprehension may experience a joy far richer than the excitement of spectacle. The task of education is to lead children toward those deeper joys.

Spectacle promises immediate satisfaction. Formation requires patience. A society that loses patience with formation will demand more spectacle. The school must decide which master it will serve.

Why Spectacle Feels Persuasive to Adults

Spectacle appeals not only to children but also to adults. Parents may feel reassured when a school appears busy. Administrators may feel pressure to show visible activity. Teachers may enjoy moments when children are excited and parents are pleased. Boards may believe that public events demonstrate institutional growth. In competitive school markets, visible liveliness can become a substitute for deeper evidence of learning.

This is why reform must be compassionate. Many leaders who multiply events are not malicious. They may believe they are serving children, satisfying parents, strengthening school identity, or keeping the institution competitive. Some parents may ask for exactly the kind of activities later criticized as excessive. The issue is not always bad motive. It is often unexamined formation.

A school can escape this cycle only by developing better indicators of quality. Instead of proving vitality through event photographs, it can show student writing growth, reading progress, science inquiry, mathematics reasoning, music development, service learning, teacher development, safety practices, parent education, and spiritual

formation. These may be less glamorous, but they are more faithful indicators of education.

The Economy of Attention

Spectacle thrives in an economy of attention. What can be seen quickly is rewarded. What can be posted is valued. What can be shared creates institutional memory. Yet education often requires attention to what is not immediately visible. A child's capacity to listen, revise, question, wait, practice, pray, and serve grows slowly. These things do not always attract applause, but they are the substance of character.

Schools should therefore protect attention. A crowded activity calendar can fragment the school year. Teachers lose instructional time. Children anticipate interruptions. Parents receive constant requests. Leaders become event managers. The center of school life shifts from learning to logistics. This shift may be gradual, but its consequences are serious.

A school serious about formation will sometimes choose fewer activities and better ones. It will prefer depth to frequency. It will refuse the fear that a quieter school is a weaker school. In reality, a school with fewer but more purposeful activities may offer children a richer formation than one that constantly performs vitality.

Research, Policy, and Pastoral Note

A sober reform agenda should avoid two errors. The first error is romantic reaction, which assumes that every modern school practice is corrupt simply because it is new, visible, or enjoyable. The second error is naive adoption, which assumes that any practice becomes educational once a school organizes it. Neither approach is wise. Research, policy, and Christian discernment all require attention to purpose, evidence, context, and consequences.

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Pastorally, reform should be done without contempt. Many parents accept costly practices because they love their children. Many teachers organize events because they want children to enjoy school. Many leaders approve activities because they believe they are enriching the institution. Christian critique should expose the formative dangers while still honoring the people involved. The goal is not humiliation. The goal is repentance, wisdom, and better practice.

A useful pastoral question is this: if a child internalized the repeated message of this practice for ten years, what kind of adult would it help produce? That question slows the institution down. It forces adults to look beyond the event itself to the person being formed through it. Schools rarely damage children through one isolated activity. More often, they shape children through patterns. Therefore, reform should focus on patterns.

Study Tours or Promenades?

Why Educational Visits Matter

A well-designed educational visit can be a genuine gift. Children can learn from museums, farms, historical sites, science centers, libraries, workshops, hospitals, courts, markets, ecosystems, industries, art centers, and places of public service. Such visits can help learners connect concepts with observation, language with experience, and classroom knowledge with the world beyond the school gate. Experiential learning theory rightly recognizes that concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application can work together in learning (Kolb, 1984). Situated learning also reminds us that knowledge is not merely abstract but connected to practices, communities, and contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Christian education has reason to value this. The created world is not an illusion to be escaped; it is God's world to be studied with reverence. Children can learn patience from a garden, stewardship from a farm, civic responsibility from a well-planned visit to a public institution, compassion from a service project, and wonder from nature. A Christian school should not fear embodied learning.

The issue is whether the visit is truly educational. An activity does not become a study tour because a school names it so. It becomes educational when its purpose, design, content, developmental suitability, reflection, and assessment serve learning. Without these elements, a trip may be enjoyable, safe, and memorable, but it should be called recreation, not curriculum.

The Curriculum Integrity Test

A genuine study tour should pass a curriculum integrity test. First, it should have stated learning objectives. These objectives should be specific enough that teachers, parents, and learners know what is being studied. Second, it should be age-appropriate. A nursery child, lower primary learner, upper primary learner, and secondary student do not process the same environment in the same way. Third, it should be aligned to the curriculum. The visit should connect to current or upcoming learning, not float as a disconnected event.

Fourth, there should be preparation before the visit. Learners should receive vocabulary, background, questions, safety expectations, and observation tasks. Fifth, there should be guided learning during the visit. Teachers should not merely accompany children as chaperones; they should help them notice, ask, interpret, and connect. Sixth, there should be reflection after the visit. This may include oral discussion, drawing, writing, reporting, presentations, projects, or assessment tasks appropriate to age.

Seventh, costs should be transparent and proportionate. A school should be able to explain why the chosen location, transport, food, entrance fee, and other expenses are necessary. Eighth, the school should provide differentiated learning for different age groups. A whole-school trip to one location may be possible, but only if the learning tasks are properly differentiated. Ninth, participation should be handled with pastoral care, especially where the activity is not academically essential.

Age Appropriateness and Developmental Honesty

Developmental honesty matters. Piaget's work on cognitive development, despite later refinements and critiques, remains a warning against assuming that young children think like adults (Piaget, 1952). Vygotsky's account of learning also reminds educators that children need mediation within a zone of proximal development, not mere exposure to complex environments (Vygotsky, 1978). A visit to a complex civic institution may be meaningful for older learners

studying governance, citizenship, law, or public administration. The same visit may be confusing for nursery children unless the purpose is very modest, concrete, and carefully mediated.

This does not mean children should never encounter serious places. It means educators should tell the truth about what the child can meaningfully understand. A child may learn that people gather to make rules, that public buildings serve citizens, or that leaders have responsibilities. But if the visit is presented as serious civic education without developmentally appropriate objectives, it risks becoming symbolic display rather than learning.

The same principle applies to play parks, restaurants, cinemas, malls, and leisure venues. These may be suitable for recreation, social bonding, or reward when used sparingly. But if called study tours without curricular justification, they train both parents and children to accept vague educational language. Recreation is not wrong. Misnaming recreation as study is the problem.

The Difference Between Exposure and Education

Schools often defend trips by saying children need exposure. Exposure can be valuable, but it is not the same as education. A child may be exposed to a parliament building, a museum, a park, a restaurant, a hotel, or a factory without learning much. Education requires interpretation. It requires questions, concepts, language, guidance, reflection, and moral framing.

Bruner (1960) argued that the structure of a discipline matters in teaching. Learners need help grasping the organizing ideas that give meaning to facts. In the same way, a school visit should not be a collection of impressions. It should help children understand something: how bread is made, how plants grow, how communities remember history, how laws are formed, how water is treated, how people serve the vulnerable, how animals are cared for, how markets function, how art communicates meaning, or how stewardship protects creation.

A Christian approach should add another layer. Children should not merely ask, “What did I see?” They should also ask, “What does this teach me about God, neighbor, creation, responsibility, work, humility, justice, or service?” Without such reflection, field learning can become tourism. With it, even simple places can become classrooms of wisdom.

A Modest Proposal

Schools should publish a one-page curriculum alignment form for every study tour. The form should state the topic, class level, learning objectives, curriculum link, age-appropriate tasks, expected evidence of learning, total cost, optional or compulsory status, safety provisions, and post-visit reflection plan. Parents should receive this before paying. School boards should approve the policy. For Christian schools, the form should include a spiritual formation question: what virtue, truth, or aspect of Christian discipleship does this activity cultivate?

Such a policy would not kill joy. It would protect it from manipulation. It would allow genuine educational visits to flourish while discouraging casual rebranding of leisure as learning. It would also honor parents by treating them as partners in education rather than passive payers of unexplained invoices.

Mixed-Level Trips and the Problem of Generic Justification

One of the most revealing tests of a study tour is whether the same justification is used for every learner. If nursery children, lower primary pupils, upper primary pupils, and older students are taken to the same place under one generic explanation, the school should pause. The problem is not that learners of different ages can never visit the same location. The problem is that they cannot be expected to learn the same thing in the same way.

A market, for example, may teach nursery children colors, counting, food names, and respectful greetings. It may teach primary children trade, weights, money, hygiene, and community roles. It may

teach older learners supply chains, pricing, entrepreneurship, ethics, taxation, and consumer behavior. The same location can serve many levels, but only if the learning is differentiated. Without differentiation, the trip is administratively convenient rather than educationally honest.

This principle protects schools from shallow enrichment language. It also helps teachers. When objectives are differentiated, teachers know what to prepare and observe. Parents know why they are paying. Children know what they are learning. The trip becomes pedagogy rather than movement.

When Recreation Should Simply Be Recreation

There is moral freedom in naming recreation honestly. A school may occasionally say, “We are taking learners for a recreational day to build friendship and rest after examinations.” That statement is truthful. Parents can then decide whether the cost is worthwhile. The school does not need to force academic justification where none exists.

Christian truthfulness should make this easier. If a thing is play, call it play. If it is rest, call it rest. If it is reward, call it reward. If it is study, demonstrate study. Misnaming may seem administratively useful, but it weakens trust. Parents who sense that a promenade is being called a study tour may begin to doubt the school’s other claims.

A truthful school culture also teaches children that categories matter. Play is good, but it is not the same as study. Study is good, but it is not the same as entertainment. Worship is good, but it is not the same as performance. Wisdom begins partly by naming things rightly.

Competence Without Purpose Is Not Enough

Competence-based education can be valuable when it strengthens knowledge, application, problem-solving, and responsible action. Yet

competence language can also become a convenient label for almost any activity if schools do not define outcomes carefully. The author's prior analysis of global convergence toward competency-based education warned that competence reforms can become thin when they are detached from conceptual clarity, disciplinary knowledge, community agency, and ethical purpose (Sangwa, 2025c). This warning applies directly to study tours. A school may claim that a trip builds communication, collaboration, creativity, or citizenship, but such terms must not become a fog that hides weak design. A genuine competence requires knowledge, practice, reflection, feedback, and evidence. If children return with photographs but no deepened understanding, no age-appropriate reflection, no vocabulary growth, no moral insight, and no connection to curriculum, the trip has not served competence. It has served movement, memory, and perhaps entertainment, but not disciplined formation.

Research, Policy, and Pastoral Note

A sober reform agenda should avoid two errors. The first error is romantic reaction, which assumes that every modern school practice is corrupt simply because it is new, visible, or enjoyable. The second error is naive adoption, which assumes that any practice becomes educational once a school organizes it. Neither approach is wise. Research, policy, and Christian discernment all require attention to purpose, evidence, context, and consequences.

International education policy increasingly speaks of competences, values, well-being, sustainability, accountability, and financial literacy (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2017, 2020; UNICEF Innocenti, 2020). These emphases do not settle every Christian question, but they support the basic claim that education concerns the whole learner and the social conditions around learning. When school activities create unclear costs, weak alignment, or social pressure, they touch matters already recognized by educational policy as significant.

Pastorally, reform should be done without contempt. Many parents accept costly practices because they love their children. Many teachers organize events because they want children to enjoy school. Many leaders approve activities because they believe they are enriching the institution. Christian critique should expose the formative dangers while still honoring the people involved. The goal is not humiliation. The goal is repentance, wisdom, and better practice. A useful pastoral question is this: if a child internalized the repeated message of this practice for ten years, what kind of adult would it help produce? That question slows the institution down. It forces adults to look beyond the event itself to the person being formed through it. Schools rarely damage children through one isolated activity. More often, they shape children through patterns. Therefore, reform should focus on patterns.

Ceremonial Inflation and the Misuse of Graduation Language

When Every Transition Becomes a Ceremony

Ceremonies matter. Human beings need rituals of memory, gratitude, grief, promise, and completion. A school community may rightly gather to thank God at the end of a year, honor diligent learners, bless candidates, recognize service, or mark the completion of a significant academic stage. Scripture itself gives weight to remembrance, feasts, covenants, public reading, and communal worship. Christian critique should therefore not oppose ceremony as such.

The problem is ceremonial inflation. This occurs when ordinary transitions are repeatedly treated as major public milestones requiring fees, special clothes, decorations, photographs, performances, and social pressure. A small closing moment becomes an elaborate event. A class transition becomes a graduation. A developmental stage becomes a public production. The language of completion is stretched until it loses seriousness.

Graduation traditionally marks the completion of a substantial course of study. When the term is extended too widely, it can teach children that movement itself deserves grand celebration. A child may begin to expect ceremony before mastery, recognition before perseverance, and applause before mature responsibility. That is not harmless. It shapes the moral imagination.

Achievement, Recognition, and Proportion

Education must distinguish encouragement from inflation. Children need encouragement. They need adults to notice effort, progress, kindness, courage, creativity, and perseverance. But encouragement becomes distorted when ordinary movement is treated as exceptional achievement. A wise school knows how to celebrate proportionately. Lickona's work on character education emphasizes that schools must cultivate moral habits, not simply reward visible performance (Lickona, 1991). If ceremonies reward display more than character, they may undermine the virtues they claim to support. A child who receives constant public recognition may learn to seek the stage more than the substance. Another child who is quiet, faithful, disciplined, or kind may learn that what matters is what photographs well.

Proportion protects meaning. A simple class thanksgiving can be beautiful. A school-wide closing reflection can be edifying. A transition from primary to secondary may deserve special recognition. A final-year graduation may carry legitimate weight. But when ceremonies multiply without clear purpose, they lose moral proportion and impose financial burdens on families.

The Theological Question of Glory

Ceremony is never spiritually neutral because ceremony assigns glory. It tells a community what deserves attention, honor, applause, and memory. Christian education must therefore ask: whose glory is being centered? Is the ceremony ordered toward thanksgiving to God, encouragement of learners, honor for teachers, and sober recognition of effort? Or is it ordered toward institutional branding, parental comparison, child performance, social display, and spending?

The Bible repeatedly warns against pride, ostentation, and misplaced treasure. Jesus teaches that treasure and heart are connected Matthew 6:19-24. Paul warns that godliness with contentment is great gain 1 Timothy 6:6-10. John warns against the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride in one's

possessions 1 John 2:15-17. These texts do not forbid communal celebration. They call celebration to moral order.

A Christian school should ask whether its ceremonies cultivate gratitude or vanity, humility or display, community or comparison, stewardship or excess. It should ask whether poorer children and parents are protected from shame. It should ask whether the event remains meaningful if no photographs are posted. It should ask whether the same spiritual and educational purpose could be achieved more simply.

The Social Pressure of Compulsory Celebration

Ceremonial inflation often becomes powerful through social pressure. A fee may be described as compulsory even when the activity is not academically essential. A costume may not be required officially, yet every parent knows the child will feel embarrassed without it. A contribution may be called voluntary but treated as expected. A parent may question the cost and be seen as difficult, uncooperative, or indifferent to the child's happiness.

This kind of pressure is ethically serious. Schools hold institutional authority over children. Parents often comply not because they are persuaded, but because they fear their child will be excluded, embarrassed, or disadvantaged. When schools use that pressure for unnecessary spending, they weaken trust. Christian schools should be especially careful. They should never use spiritual language, community belonging, or child emotion to pressure families into avoidable costs.

A fair policy should separate academic requirements from optional ceremonies. It should provide clear annual disclosure of expected costs. It should prohibit shaming or exclusion. It should allow modest participation without financial display. It should help children understand that dignity is not purchased through gowns, costumes, photographs, or parties.

Recovering Meaningful Ceremony

The answer is not to abolish ceremonies but to recover their meaning. A Christian school may hold a thanksgiving service at the end of the year, where students sing, pray, reflect, and honor God's faithfulness. It may hold a modest completion ceremony at true academic milestones. It may invite parents to witness learning exhibitions where children show projects, read essays, explain experiments, recite Scripture, present service work, or demonstrate skills. Such ceremonies can be deeply educational because they display learning rather than mere performance.

The test is purpose. What is being marked? Why does it matter? What virtues does it cultivate? What does it cost? Who might be burdened? What is the simplest faithful form? What would be lost if the event were smaller? What would be gained if it were more spiritually serious?

Ceremony should deepen meaning, not inflate appetite.

Milestones, Memory, and Maturity

Children need memory markers. A well-planned ceremony can help them remember God's faithfulness, honor teachers, thank parents, and recognize genuine growth. The danger is not memory but inflation. When too many ordinary moments become major ceremonies, memory itself becomes crowded. Children may remember the clothes and photographs more than the learning and gratitude.

A mature school can mark milestones without surrendering to event culture. For younger children, a brief class-based thanksgiving with songs, Scripture, prayer, parent visitation, and display of actual work may be more educational than a large ceremony. For older children completing a major stage, a more formal event may be appropriate, especially if it includes testimony, academic recognition, service reflection, and commissioning into responsibility. The form should fit the milestone.

The Christian calendar offers a helpful analogy. The church does not treat every Sunday as Easter, yet every Sunday matters. Some moments carry special commemorative weight. Others are ordinary but sacred. Schools need a similar sense of proportion. Ordinary progression is good. Major completion is different. Wisdom knows how to distinguish them.

The Danger of Premature Applause

Applause can encourage, but premature applause can weaken resilience. If children are repeatedly celebrated for ordinary movement, they may develop thin expectations of achievement. This does not mean adults should be harsh. It means praise should be truthful. Children are better served by honest encouragement than inflated recognition.

A child can be praised for effort, kindness, persistence, improvement, courage, and service without being treated as though every transition is a grand accomplishment. The language adults use matters. “We thank God for your growth this year” forms a different imagination from “You are graduating” when no substantial program has been completed. The first language encourages gratitude. The second may inflate status.

Christian educators should cultivate truthful praise. God is not honored by exaggeration. Children are not strengthened by flattery. They are strengthened by adults who name real growth, call them to deeper maturity, and teach them to receive encouragement with humility.

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The Child as Consumer

Consumer Formation Begins Early

Children become consumers before they become mature moral agents. They learn brands, preferences, comparison, possession, and status long before they understand economic systems. Research on consumer socialization has shown that children gradually develop consumer knowledge, persuasion understanding, product preferences, and material meanings through family, peers, media, and market environments (John, 1999; Valkenburg & Cantor, 2001). Schools therefore cannot pretend that spending practices are outside education. They enter the child's moral imagination.

Materialism is not merely owning things. Richins and Dawson (1992) described materialism as a value orientation in which acquisition becomes central, possessions become markers of success, and goods are associated with happiness. Chaplin and John (2007) found developmental patterns in children's materialism across childhood and adolescence. Kasser and Ryan (1996) associated extrinsic aspirations centered on financial success with lower well-being, and Dittmar et al. (2014) later found, across a large meta-analysis, that materialistic orientation is negatively associated with personal well-being. The Christian concern is therefore not sentimental. It is supported by psychological research and by Scripture's account of disordered desire.

When schools repeatedly require children to participate in paid experiences, children may learn that money is the medium of belonging. They may learn that a good school life means outings, costumes, parties, branded items, and display. They may begin to

associate joy with expenditure and progress with celebration. These lessons are rarely explicit. They are absorbed.

The School Market and the Child's Imagination

The consumer child is formed by more than advertising. The American Psychological Association (2004) noted the problem of commercialization in childhood and schools. Radesky et al. (2020) described digital advertising strategies that include influencers, sponsored content, data collection, persuasive design, and personalized behavioral marketing. The American Academy of Pediatrics' 2026 policy statement on digital ecosystems widened the frame by arguing that children's well-being is shaped by systems that may prioritize engagement and commercialization over health (Munzer et al., 2026a, 2026b). This wider environment matters because schools do not educate children in isolation from it.

A child may spend the evening in a digital world shaped by advertisers and the day in a school world shaped by branded events. If both environments teach that attention, identity, and pleasure revolve around consumption, the child's imagination receives a consistent lesson. The school should interrupt that lesson. It should provide a counter-environment where simplicity is dignified, learning is loved, service is honored, and not every good thing must be purchased.

Christian schools should be particularly attentive because they are not merely preparing children to navigate markets. They are forming disciples who must learn to live in the world without being owned by it. The command not to conform to the age Romans 12:2 requires concrete institutional practices. A Christian school that publicly teaches contentment while privately normalizing constant spending sends a divided message.

Status, Shame, and Social Comparison

Consumer formation is inseparable from comparison. When school activities require visible purchases, children compare. Who has the

better outfit? Who brought more money? Who attended the trip? Who has professional photographs? Who was excluded? Who arrived in a better costume? Who could not contribute? These comparisons may seem small to adults, but they can be large in the child's world.

Dittmar et al. (2014) showed that materialistic values are linked to lower well-being across many samples. One plausible reason is that materialism ties identity to unstable external markers. If worth is measured through goods, experiences, and display, the self becomes fragile. Children may become anxious, envious, proud, or ashamed. A school that multiplies visible consumption risks intensifying these dynamics.

The Christian response is not to shame wealth or romanticize poverty. Scripture does neither. It commands generosity, warns against greed, honors contentment, and calls believers to treat rich and poor without partiality. In school culture, this means refusing to make children's dignity depend on a parent's purchasing power. It means ensuring that no child is socially punished because a family declines an unnecessary event.

Financial Literacy as Moral Formation

Financial literacy is often treated as a technical skill: budgeting, saving, calculating interest, reading prices, and planning expenditures. These skills matter. OECD's PISA 2022 financial literacy volume assessed 15-year-old students' understanding of money matters in 20 countries and economies and emphasized the importance of preparing all students, especially those most in need, to make sound financial decisions (OECD, 2024). Yet financial literacy is also moral formation. Children must learn not only how money works but what money is for.

A school that teaches budgeting in class while pressuring parents into unclear extras undermines its own financial education. A school that speaks of stewardship while normalizing avoidable costs teaches contradiction. A school that calls every fee compulsory without principled distinction teaches passivity rather than discernment.

Children notice the economic world adults create around them. Christian financial formation begins with lordship. Money is not ultimate. Possessions do not define the person. Giving is better than display. Contentment is a discipline. Stewardship is worship. Debt, waste, envy, and show are not neutral. These truths should be embodied in school policy, not merely taught in Bible lessons.

The Consumer Child and the Loss of Purpose

The deeper danger is purposelessness. A child trained to seek experiences without reflection may become an adult who consumes without vocation. Pleasure becomes the measure of value. Difficulty becomes a problem to avoid. Ordinary faithfulness becomes unattractive. Such a person may struggle with the slow disciplines of study, work, marriage, parenting, church life, service, and prayer.

This is why the issue is not a small matter of school fees. It is a matter of anthropology. What is a child for? A consumer culture answers: to choose, purchase, enjoy, display, and upgrade. Christian education answers differently: the child is created by God, accountable to God, loved by God, and called to love God and neighbor. Education should help the child become wise, truthful, disciplined, skilled, generous, courageous, and joyful in the Lord.

The consumer child asks, “What do I get?” The formed learner asks, “What is true? What is good? How may I serve? What does faithfulness require?” Schools must decide which question they are teaching children to ask.

Consumption as Identity Formation

Consumer culture does not merely sell products; it sells identities. It tells children that they can become interesting, successful, admired, modern, beautiful, or important through what they possess and display. Schools may unintentionally reinforce this message when belonging is mediated through purchasable symbols: the right shirt, the right costume, the paid trip, the professional photograph, the special lunch, the branded item, the decorated ceremony. The child

who cannot participate learns one lesson. The child who can participate learns another. The first may learn shame. The second may learn entitlement. Both are being formed by the same system. A Christian school should not accept this as normal collateral damage. It should design activities so that children's dignity is not visibly sorted by parental spending.

A counter-consumer school can still have symbols. Uniforms, badges, school songs, and shared traditions can support belonging. But they should be stable, affordable, and mission-oriented. They should not multiply endlessly. A symbol that serves unity differs from merchandise that fuels consumption.

Desire and the Family Economy

School spending also enters the family economy of desire. A child returns home asking for participation, clothing, money, photographs, transport, snacks, or gifts. Parents then become mediators between school expectations and household stewardship. If the school has framed the activity as compulsory or emotionally necessary, parental refusal becomes difficult. The family must then absorb not only cost but emotional negotiation.

This is why school leaders should consider the household consequences of their decisions. A fee is not just a line in a circular. It becomes a conversation at home. It may become tension between spouses, anxiety for a single parent, comparison among siblings, or disappointment for a child. Schools that love families will not create such pressures lightly.

Christian stewardship is therefore communal. It is not enough to tell parents to budget well. Schools must avoid creating avoidable burdens. Families and schools share responsibility for resisting consumer formation.

The Commercial Child and the Digital Imagination

The consumer child is now formed across physical and digital environments. School events, advertising, influencer culture, branded identities, social media, and peer comparison increasingly reinforce one another. The child learns not only to buy but to see the self as a project to be packaged, displayed, improved, and validated. This is why school culture must be examined alongside media culture.

The author's earlier reflection on early education and contemporary media warned that Christian families can be displaced by educational and media ecosystems that claim formative authority without covenantal accountability (Sangwa, 2024c). In this book, that concern becomes concrete. When schools normalize purchasable belonging through trips, costumes, event clothing, branded items, and public display, they join the broader commercial formation of the child. Christian parents and educators must therefore treat consumption not only as an economic issue but as a pastoral issue of desire, dignity, and identity.

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Pleasure-Seeking and the Formation of Appetite

Pleasure Is Not the Same as Joy

Christian critique must begin with careful distinctions. Pleasure is not evil in itself. God created embodied creatures capable of tasting, laughing, resting, playing, singing, celebrating, and enjoying beauty. Scripture does not present holiness as misery. It commands rejoicing, thanksgiving, feasting in proper seasons, and delight in the Lord. The problem is not pleasure as creaturely gift. The problem is pleasure as ruler.

Joy is deeper than pleasure. Pleasure may arise from stimulation, novelty, comfort, food, entertainment, praise, or possession. Joy may include pleasure, but it is rooted in meaning, communion, gratitude, truth, and rightly ordered love. Paul could speak of contentment in circumstances of need and plenty Philippians 4:11-13. This contentment is not indifference. It is freedom from being mastered by circumstance or appetite.

A school culture centered on constant excitement may produce children who know many pleasures but little joy. They may be entertained without being nourished, celebrated without being formed, stimulated without being strengthened. Christian education must therefore recover a disciplined account of joy.

Lovers of Pleasure Rather Than Lovers of God

The warning in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 is severe because it describes a moral order in which people become lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of

God. The phrase is not a rejection of all delight. It is a diagnosis of disordered love. Pleasure becomes ultimate, God becomes peripheral, and religion itself may remain only as a form without power.

This text is especially relevant to Christian schooling because a school can retain Christian forms while participating in worldly appetites. It can pray before events that train vanity. It can quote Scripture at ceremonies that inflate status. It can speak of stewardship while multiplying unnecessary costs. It can sing worship songs while imitating the entertainment economy. The danger is not the absence of religion. It is religion without formative resistance.

Titus gives a different pattern: grace trains believers to renounce godlessness and worldly passions and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age Titus 2:11-14. The word train matters. Grace educates desire. A Christian school should be an institution where grace trains children toward self-control, not where religious language decorates appetite.

Appetite and Attention

Pleasure-seeking is closely linked to attention. What captures a child's attention shapes what the child values. The digital ecosystem intensifies this by designing environments to capture engagement (Munzer et al., 2026a, 2026b). But schools can also capture attention through spectacle. An event-heavy school calendar trains anticipation toward the next performance, trip, costume, party, or celebration. Ordinary learning may become a waiting room for the next excitement.

Deci and Ryan's work on motivation helps here. Self-determination theory distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and argues that autonomy, competence, and relatedness support deeper motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). External rewards and pressures can undermine intrinsic motivation under some conditions, especially when they shift attention from the value of the activity to the reward (Deci et al., 1999). In schooling, a constant culture of external excitement may weaken love for learning itself.

A child should learn that reading is good even without a prize, service is good even without a photograph, worship is good even without performance, and study is good even when difficult. The school that constantly packages learning with spectacle may unintentionally teach the opposite.

The Softening of the Will

Pleasure-seeking softens the will by lowering tolerance for difficulty. Learning requires effort. Character requires restraint. Skill requires repetition. Wisdom requires patience. Christian discipleship requires self-denial. A child who is regularly trained to expect school as entertainment may find difficulty intolerable. The will becomes accustomed to stimulation and resistant to perseverance.

This is not merely a psychological concern; it is spiritual. Jesus calls disciples to deny themselves. Paul compares the Christian life to training, discipline, and endurance. Proverbs honors diligence and warns against sloth. A school that forms appetite without discipline may produce academically capable children who are morally fragile.

Here Christian schools must be lovingly countercultural. They should not celebrate hardship for its own sake or make school unnecessarily harsh. But they should help children discover the goodness of disciplined effort. They should teach that not all worthwhile things are immediately enjoyable. They should cultivate the joy that comes after obedience, mastery, service, repentance, and perseverance.

Pleasure, Gratitude, and the Restoration of Desire

The answer to pleasure-seeking is not contempt for pleasure. It is gratitude and order. The created world is full of good gifts, but gifts become idols when detached from the Giver. A school can teach children to receive pleasure with gratitude, limits, and wisdom. A picnic can be thanksgiving. A game can teach cooperation. A trip can deepen wonder. A ceremony can honor God. A meal can become fellowship. The question is whether desire is ordered. Christian

formation should train children to ask whether a pleasure is lawful, wise, loving, proportionate, affordable, truthful, and spiritually helpful. This is more demanding than legalism and more liberating than indulgence. It refuses both joyless severity and careless appetite.

A school that teaches such discernment becomes a gift to parents and society. It forms children who can enjoy God's good world without being enslaved by it.

The Pleasure-Seeking Society and the School Calendar

A pleasure-seeking society does not arise only from obviously immoral entertainment. It can arise from ordinary institutions that continually lower the threshold for stimulation. If every season requires a special event, every achievement requires a ceremony, every class requires a fun day, and every memory requires a paid experience, children learn that ordinary life is insufficient. They may become restless when life is quiet.

The school calendar is therefore a spiritual document. It shows what the institution believes children need repeatedly. Does the calendar leave room for sustained learning, silence, reading, worship, service, physical work, and community responsibilities? Or is it crowded with interruptions that continually promise excitement? A Christian review of the calendar may reveal more than a review of the mission statement.

Schools should practice liturgical restraint. Just as the church orders seasons of celebration, repentance, waiting, and ordinary time, schools can order seasons of study, reflection, assessment, service, thanksgiving, and rest. Not every week needs novelty. Children need the grace of ordinary rhythms.

Training the Appetite Toward Higher Goods

Appetite is not eliminated by suppression alone. It must be trained toward higher goods. A child who loves only sweets does not become healthy merely by being denied sweets; he must learn to enjoy

nourishing food. A child who loves only spectacle does not become wise merely by canceling events; she must learn the joy of reading, creating, serving, discovering, and worshipping.

This is where teachers become artisans of desire. A good teacher can make a poem beautiful, a science experiment wondrous, a historical question morally serious, a mathematics proof satisfying, a Scripture passage searching, and a service project joyful. Such teaching requires more skill than organizing a fun day. It also forms deeper persons.

Christian schools should invest more in teacher formation than event production. A teacher with a formed soul and disciplined craft can give children joys that no promenade can provide.

Hedonism as Institutional Formation

Hedonism is often treated as a private lifestyle, but institutions can also train hedonistic expectations. They do so whenever they make stimulation normal, discipline secondary, comfort central, and pleasure the quiet measure of worth. A school does not need to teach hedonism explicitly. It need only make ordinary learning feel insufficient unless surrounded by entertainment and applause.

The author's prior work on hedonism argued that pleasure becomes spiritually destructive when it dethrones God, weakens contentment, and teaches the soul to confuse stimulation with fulfillment (Sangwa, 2024a, 2026a). The educational application is direct. A child repeatedly trained to expect special events may not become obviously immoral, but may become restless, entitled, and spiritually shallow. The child may struggle to receive the quieter gifts of reading, obedience, prayer, waiting, service, and ordinary faithfulness.

Research, Policy, and Pastoral Note

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is corrupt simply because it is new, visible, or enjoyable. The second error is naive adoption, which assumes that any practice becomes educational once a school organizes it. Neither approach is wise. Research, policy, and Christian discernment all require attention to purpose, evidence, context, and consequences.

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Pastorally, reform should be done without contempt. Many parents accept costly practices because they love their children. Many teachers organize events because they want children to enjoy school. Many leaders approve activities because they believe they are enriching the institution. Christian critique should expose the formative dangers while still honoring the people involved. The goal is not humiliation. The goal is repentance, wisdom, and better practice.

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The Parent, the School, and the Question of Authority

Parents as Primary Formers

Scripture places primary responsibility for children's formation on parents. The words of God are to be impressed upon children in the ordinary rhythms of life Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Fathers are instructed to bring children up in the training and instruction of the Lord Ephesians 6:4. These commands do not deny the value of teachers, pastors, elders, relatives, or communities. They establish that education is not merely a service purchased from an institution. It is a covenantal responsibility.

Schools are partners, not replacements. They may possess expertise in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, administration, and child development. Parents should respect that expertise. But expertise does not erase parental authority. A school may teach a subject; it may not quietly assume ownership of a child's moral identity, consumption habits, ceremonial culture, or family spending priorities.

This distinction is vital because many school practices enter family life. A fee affects household budgeting. A trip affects parental consent. A costume affects family values. A ceremony affects cultural expectations. A social-media post affects privacy. A compulsory celebration affects conscience and stewardship. Parents must therefore have meaningful voice.

The Institutional Pressure to Comply

Parents often comply with school demands because the school controls access, evaluation, belonging, and sometimes the child's emotional security. A parent who questions an expense may fear that the child will be viewed unfavorably. A parent who declines an outing may fear embarrassment. A parent who asks for curriculum justification may be treated as troublesome. This power imbalance requires ethical restraint from schools.

UNESCO's work on accountability in education emphasizes that responsibilities must be clear and that stakeholders, including governments, schools, teachers, parents, and communities, have roles in ensuring education serves its commitments (UNESCO, 2017). Accountability is not hostility. It is responsible clarity. A school that is accountable should welcome principled questions about costs, curriculum alignment, age appropriateness, and moral formation.

Christian schools should be models of such accountability. They should not spiritualize institutional convenience. They should not imply that questioning an activity is a lack of support for the school. They should not use parent groups to create indirect pressure. They should cultivate a culture where respectful inquiry is normal.

Consent, Conscience, and Cost

Parental consent should be real. It is not real if refusal leads to shame. It is not real if fees are added late without prior disclosure. It is not real if optional activities become socially compulsory. It is not real if parents are not given enough information to evaluate purpose and cost. Real consent requires transparency, time, alternatives, and protection from retaliation.

The conscience of parents must also be respected. Some parents may object to certain celebrations, expenditures, cultural practices, media exposure, clothing expectations, or public posting of children's images. Others may simply believe that a particular activity is unnecessary or unwise. Unless the activity is essential to the

academic program and properly justified, the school should not force compliance.

Financial cost is also a moral matter. World Bank and UNESCO discussions of education finance have increasingly emphasized the need to understand not only public expenditure but also household out-of-pocket burdens (World Bank, 2024). In contexts where families carry multiple education costs, repeated small charges can become significant. Schools must avoid creating hidden second fee structures through events and extras.

Parents Are Not Merely Customers

There is a danger in treating parents only as customers. Customer logic says the parent pays, the school provides, and satisfaction is measured by visible services. But Christian education requires a richer model. Parents are stewards. Teachers are servants of truth. Children are image-bearers. The school is a community of formation. Education is a shared vocation under God.

At the same time, parents should not use their authority selfishly. They should not despise teachers, demand entertainment, pressure schools into vanity, or measure school quality by spectacle. Parents can contribute to the very problem they later criticize. If parents reward schools that post more events, organize more trips, and stage more ceremonies, schools will respond. The market of expectations is not created by administrators alone.

Reform therefore requires parents to recover discernment. They must ask for strong teaching, moral seriousness, financial clarity, safety, and curriculum integrity rather than constant excitement. They must resist the temptation to compare their children's school experiences through social-media display. They must model contentment at home if they want schools to reinforce it.

A Covenant of Educational Trust

The best school-parent relationship is covenantal in spirit, though not in the same sense as God's covenant. It is built on trust, truth, transparency, and shared responsibility. Schools should disclose. Parents should engage. Teachers should teach. Children should learn. Boards should govern. Churches should support. Regulators should protect the public good. A practical covenant would include clear annual cost disclosure, parental consultation on non-essential activities, opt-out protections, privacy safeguards, curriculum-alignment forms, and a shared philosophy of celebration. For Christian schools, it should also include a theology of stewardship, simplicity, contentment, service, and parental responsibility.

Such a covenant would not weaken schools. It would strengthen them by replacing suspicion with trust.

Respectful Dissent as a Parental Duty

Parents sometimes fear that questioning a school is disrespectful. There is a disrespectful way to question, but there is also a faithful way. Respectful dissent may be part of parental duty when school practices affect a child's formation, family stewardship, or conscience. Silence is not always peace. Sometimes silence permits drift.

A respectful parental question might be simple: "Could the school kindly explain the curriculum objectives of this activity?" "Is this fee compulsory or optional?" "What alternative is available for children who do not participate?" "Could this event be done more simply?" Such questions need not accuse. They invite accountability.

Schools should train themselves not to receive such questions defensively. A parent who asks for clarity may be strengthening the institution. A school that cannot endure questions may already have a governance problem.

The Family as the First School of Desire

Parents cannot outsource the battle against consumerism to schools. The home is the first school of desire. Children learn from family spending, celebrations, media habits, birthday expectations, clothing choices, generosity, hospitality, and conversations about money. A parent who criticizes school extravagance while modeling status consumption at home sends a divided lesson. This does not require harsh minimalism. A Christian home can celebrate birthdays, travel, eat special meals, and enjoy gifts. The difference is interpretation. Parents can teach children to receive gifts with gratitude, share with others, save wisely, give generously, and understand that possessions do not define them. They can also explain why the family sometimes declines an activity, not from poverty of love but from clarity of values.

When home and school align around wisdom, children receive a stable formation. When they conflict, children receive confusion. This is why school-parent partnership matters so deeply.

Parental Authority in an Age of Institutional Substitution

Modern schooling can unintentionally substitute institutional authority for parental formation. This does not happen only through ideology. It can happen through calendars, fees, digital communication, event expectations, media consent, and parent-group pressure. Parents may remain legally responsible for their children while practically reacting to a culture designed elsewhere.

This is why Christian parents must recover gentle but firm agency. Earlier work on modern education and Christian discernment called believers to evaluate education through Scripture rather than merely through social prestige or secular assumptions (Sangwa, 2024b). The same principle applies here. Parents may respectfully ask whether an activity is curriculum-aligned, age-appropriate, financially necessary, spiritually wise, and truly optional. Such questions do not dishonor schools. They help restore the partnership that schools and families need.

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Christian Schools and the Duty Not to Imitate the World

A Wider Trend With a Sharper Christian Responsibility

The trend examined in this book is not limited to Christian schools. It is present across many contemporary schools because the pressures are cultural, economic, digital, and institutional. The entertainment economy, consumer branding, parental comparison, school competition, and social-media visibility affect many kinds of schools. A secular school may multiply ceremonies, trips, branded events, and extras. A public school may do the same. A private school may make such practices part of its market appeal.

Yet Christian schools carry a sharper responsibility because they claim a different Lord. They do not merely claim to offer education with moral values. They claim, implicitly or explicitly, that knowledge, childhood, money, authority, joy, work, and community must be understood under Christ. If that claim is true, Christian schools cannot simply mirror the surrounding culture.

The apostolic command in Romans 12:2 is institutional as well as personal. Individuals must not be conformed to the age; neither should Christian institutions. A Christian school that adopts the consumer habits of the age while maintaining Christian vocabulary is not neutral. It is confused.

Adding Prayer to Worldly Structures Is Not Enough

A Christian school may begin the day with prayer, teach Bible lessons, hold chapel, display Scripture, and celebrate Christian holidays. These

are good only if they belong to a coherent Christian educational vision. If the underlying school culture still forms children through vanity, rivalry, spectacle, and unnecessary consumption, then Christian language becomes decoration rather than direction. Wolterstorff (2002, 2004) argued that Christian education must be ordered toward life, justice, and shalom, not merely information transfer. Holmes (1987) insisted that Christian higher education must be intellectually integrated, not merely religiously adorned. Van Brummelen (2009) and Graham (2003) similarly emphasized that Christian teaching must shape the practices of the classroom. These insights apply equally to school culture. Christianity must govern the calendar, budget, ceremonies, trips, awards, discipline, relationships, and use of resources.

A school cannot be Christian only in content while worldly in form. The form teaches.

The Christian School as Counter-Formation

The Christian school should be a community of counter-formation. This does not mean it should be backward, joyless, aesthetically poor, or suspicious of all innovation. It means it should possess moral independence from the age. It should not adopt a practice merely because other schools do it, parents expect it, or it photographs well. It should ask whether the practice serves truth, wisdom, stewardship, love of neighbor, and worship of God.

Such counter-formation may require saying no. No to unnecessary fees. No to vague study tours. No to ceremonial inflation. No to social-media use that treats children as marketing content. No to parent pressure that shames poorer families. No to events that reward vanity. No to activities that cannot be justified pedagogically or spiritually.

But Christian counter-formation also says yes. Yes to deep learning. Yes to modest celebrations. Yes to well-designed fieldwork. Yes to service learning. Yes to Scripture-shaped wisdom. Yes to

cultural discernment. Yes to beauty without extravagance. Yes to play without consumerism. Yes to excellence without display.

The Witness of Simplicity

Simplicity is not mediocrity. A simple school can be academically excellent, spiritually rich, relationally warm, aesthetically thoughtful, and intellectually serious. Simplicity means that practices are governed by purpose rather than vanity. It means that money serves mission. It means that children are not trained to despise ordinary faithfulness.

Christian simplicity has deep biblical roots. Jesus warns against storing treasures on earth as ultimate security Matthew 6:19-24. Paul warns that those who want to be rich fall into temptation and that love of money brings many griefs 1 Timothy 6:6-10. John warns against love of the world 1 John 2:15-17. These warnings do not forbid excellence or beauty. They forbid disordered desire.

A Christian school that practices simplicity offers a prophetic witness. It tells children that dignity does not require display, joy does not require extravagance, learning does not require constant entertainment, and success does not require applause.

The Danger of Religious Branding

Christian schools can also fall into branding. They may advertise spiritual language while competing through the same signs of prestige as other institutions: expensive events, polished images, elaborate performances, and visible experiences. The danger is subtle. The school may begin to use children as evidence of institutional vitality. Their photographs become marketing assets. Their ceremonies become promotional material. Their joy becomes proof of brand strength.

This requires discernment. Sharing school life with parents is good. Documenting learning can be appropriate. Celebrating community can encourage. But when visibility becomes a measure of

worth, the school risks using children for institutional self-display. Christian schools should develop strict child-image policies, obtain meaningful consent, limit public posting, and ask whether online display serves the child or the institution. In an age of constant visibility, obscurity can be a spiritual discipline. Not every good act must be posted. Not every child must be displayed. Not every school achievement must become marketing.

Faithfulness as Educational Courage

Faithful Christian school leadership requires courage. It may disappoint parents who want more spectacle. It may appear less glamorous than competing schools. It may require explaining why some activities are unnecessary. It may require limiting fees. It may require reforming traditions that have become burdensome.

But such courage is pastoral. It protects children. It honors parents. It strengthens teachers. It clarifies mission. It refuses to trade formation for popularity.

Christian schools should not ask first, “What are other schools doing?” They should ask, “What does faithfulness require?” That question is enough to begin reform.

Christian Distinctiveness Must Be Visible in Practices

Christian distinctiveness cannot remain at the level of identity labels. It must be visible in practices. A Christian school should handle money differently, speak about achievement differently, treat poorer families differently, use children’s images differently, design ceremonies differently, choose trips differently, discipline desire differently, and define excellence differently. Otherwise, the Christian label becomes thin.

This does not mean Christian schools must be culturally strange for the sake of strangeness. It means their normal should be shaped by Scripture rather than market pressure. They may still hold sports

days, concerts, trips, exhibitions, and ceremonies. But the spirit, cost, frequency, and purpose of these activities should feel different.

Parents should be able to say, “This school is joyful, but not extravagant. Excellent, but not vain. Serious, but not cold. Beautiful, but not wasteful. Modern, but not worldly.” That is a compelling form of witness.

The Boardroom as a Place of Discipleship

The culture of a Christian school is often decided in boardrooms and administrative meetings before it reaches classrooms. Budgets, calendars, fee policies, media strategies, vendor contracts, ceremony plans, and trip approvals are spiritual decisions because they shape children and families. Board members should therefore treat governance as discipleship.

A board agenda might include a formation review: Which activities this term most clearly served our mission? Which created unnecessary pressure? Which costs surprised parents? Which events were more about image than learning? Which practices should be simplified next year? These questions turn governance into moral stewardship.

Christian school boards should include people capable of theological, financial, educational, and pastoral discernment. A board concerned only with growth, income, or reputation may unintentionally lead the school toward worldliness.

Educator Ministry and Institutional Witness

For a Christian educator, teaching is not merely an occupation. It is a ministry of truth, presence, formation, and witness. Work on a Christocentric framework for educator ministry has argued that pedagogy, vocation, and witness should be integrated rather than divided into sacred and secular compartments (Sangwa et al., 2026). If that is true for the teacher, it is also true for the school as an institution.

The Christian school's witness is carried not only by chapel services or Bible classes but by fee policies, trip design, ceremony language, attention to poor families, calendar restraint, privacy practices, and the humility with which leaders receive parental questions. A Christian school may be doctrinally orthodox yet culturally imitative if its practices train the same loves as the surrounding world. Faithfulness must therefore be visible in administration, not only in proclamation.

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Similar Practices That Require Careful Scrutiny

The Need for Discernment Rather Than Blanket Condemnation

Not every school event is wrong. Not every costume day is vain. Not every cultural day is shallow. Not every trip is a promenade. Not every celebration is consumerist. The aim of this chapter is not to provide a list of forbidden activities. The aim is to name practices that require scrutiny because, in some contexts, they can become vehicles of consumer formation, parental pressure, curriculum dilution, or spiritual confusion.

Christian discernment asks better questions than permission culture. It asks whether a practice is necessary, proportionate, truthful, affordable, inclusive, age-appropriate, curriculum-aligned, spiritually sound, and respectful of parents. It also asks whether the same learning or community goal could be achieved more simply.

The following practices may be good, neutral, or harmful depending on design. Their moral meaning is not fixed by the activity itself but by purpose, frequency, cost, compulsion, messaging, and formation.

Dress-Up, Costume, and Theme Days

Frequent themed dress-up days can become costly and competitive. Color days, career days, cultural days, sports days, historical character days, book character days, and holiday costume days may be used creatively to support learning. But when they require parents

to purchase special clothing or props repeatedly, they can create pressure and comparison. A career day meant to inspire vocation can become a fashion contest. A cultural day meant to honor heritage can become a display of expensive attire. A book day meant to encourage reading can become a costume parade detached from literacy. The curriculum question is straightforward: what learning does the clothing serve? If children dress as nurses, farmers, pastors, engineers, teachers, or public servants, do they learn about vocation, service, skill, and social contribution? If children wear cultural dress, do they learn history, language, meaning, and respect? If not, the event may be more theatrical than educational.

A better policy would limit frequency, require low-cost participation, allow homemade alternatives, prohibit shaming, and connect the day to learning tasks. Schools should explicitly say that expensive costumes are not needed. Teachers should model simplicity.

Beauty-Pageant Logic and Performance Culture

Some school events borrow the logic of pageantry: staged appearance, competition, audience applause, prizes, public ranking, and visual display. Talent shows, fashion shows, “king and queen” contests, photo competitions, and highly polished performances may be justified as confidence-building. Confidence matters. But performance culture can also train children to seek attention, compare bodies and appearances, and measure worth through public reaction.

Christian education should be cautious here. Children should be encouraged to sing, speak, act, create, debate, recite, and present. But performance should serve truth, beauty, courage, skill, and service, not vanity. The difference is not always visible from outside; it is shaped by preparation, language, criteria, and what adults praise.

A school can celebrate student gifts without creating a culture of self-display. It can honor excellence without turning children into spectacles. It can teach public speaking without rewarding narcissism.

School-Branded Consumption

School-branded T-shirts, hoodies, bags, caps, bottles, badges, and accessories can foster identity when used modestly. But when each event requires a new branded item, school identity becomes purchasable. Parents may be told that a shirt is needed for a trip, another for sports, another for a ceremony, another for a club, and another for a special day. Such practices create hidden costs.

Branding also shapes imagination. The child learns that belonging is signaled through merchandise. The school learns that identity can be monetized. The parent learns that participation requires purchase. These lessons deserve scrutiny.

A responsible school should keep branded items minimal, durable, and genuinely necessary. One reusable school shirt for trips may be reasonable. Repeated one-time branded clothing is harder to justify.

Restaurant Outings, Movie Days, and Entertainment Substitutes

Restaurant outings, movie days, mall visits, play-park trips, and entertainment days can be presented as social development or reward. Used rarely and transparently, they may be acceptable recreation. But they should not be confused with academic study. A restaurant visit could support learning if children study nutrition, hospitality, budgeting, etiquette, entrepreneurship, or food systems. A movie could support literature, history, ethics, or media analysis if carefully selected and discussed. A play park could support physical development or social bonding. But absent clear learning design, these are leisure activities.

The danger is not leisure. Children need rest and play. The danger is the schooling of appetite under academic labels. If entertainment is repeatedly misnamed as learning, children may lose the distinction between disciplined study and recreation. Christian schools should name leisure honestly and use it modestly. Truthful naming is itself formation.

Fundraising and Charity as Performance

Schools often raise money for projects, charity, missions, emergencies, or institutional needs. Giving can teach generosity. Service projects can form compassion. But fundraising can become manipulative when children are pressured to collect money, compete publicly, or associate generosity with display. Charity can become performance when the poor become props for photographs or when giving is measured by visibility.

Jesus' teaching on giving warns against practicing righteousness to be seen by others. Christian schools should therefore handle charity with humility. Children can learn to give quietly, serve respectfully, and understand structural needs without turning compassion into publicity.

A strong policy would avoid ranking children by money raised, protect families from pressure, explain the purpose clearly, report use of funds transparently, and emphasize service over display.

Social-Media Posting of Children

School social media deserves special attention. Digital visibility has become a powerful driver of school spectacle. Photographs of trips, ceremonies, costumes, awards, and performances advertise institutional vitality. Parents may enjoy seeing their children online, but the child's privacy and dignity must be protected.

The digital ecosystem surrounding children is increasingly commercialized and datafied (Munzer et al., 2026a; Radesky et al., 2020). Schools should not add to this carelessly. A child cannot fully understand the future implications of public visibility. Parents may consent, but consent should be informed, specific, and revocable. Schools should avoid posting children in ways that expose names, vulnerabilities, locations, personal data, or embarrassing situations. Christian schools should ask a spiritual question: are we sharing this for the child's good, for parents' information, or for institutional image? If the answer is mainly branding, restraint is wise.

Parent-Group Pressure

Parent messaging groups and similar platforms can strengthen communication. They can also intensify pressure. A few parents may push for elaborate contributions, gifts, costumes, celebrations, or events. Others may comply silently. Schools may benefit from the pressure while avoiding direct responsibility. This is unhealthy.

Schools should set clear rules for parent groups: no compulsory collections without school approval, no shaming, no publishing lists of contributors for non-essential activities, no pressure against parents who decline, and no late surprise demands. Parent groups should serve communication, not coercion.

The Discernment Rule

For every practice in this chapter, the guiding rule is simple: if a school cannot explain the educational purpose, spiritual formation value, cost necessity, age appropriateness, and parental freedom attached to an activity, it should not impose the activity. If it can explain those things clearly, the activity may be defensible.

Discernment does not kill school culture. It purifies it.

Awards, Rankings, and the Public Manufacture of Worth

Prize-giving ceremonies also require discernment. Academic awards can motivate and honor diligence, but they can also narrow the school's definition of worth. If public recognition consistently goes to the already visible, high-performing, well-resourced, or confident children, other forms of faithfulness may be overlooked. A quiet child who serves classmates, perseveres through difficulty, tells the truth, improves significantly, or shows compassion may receive little attention. Christian schools should design recognition around a richer account of human dignity and virtue. They may honor academic excellence, but they should also honor growth, service, humility, courage, craftsmanship, responsibility, peacemaking, and

perseverance. Recognition should not become a mechanism for status hierarchy.

Even then, restraint matters. Not every virtue must be publicly awarded. Some goodness should remain known quietly to God, parents, and teachers. Children should learn that the deepest reward is not applause.

Holiday Events and Imported Cultural Scripts

Holiday celebrations can also carry imported cultural scripts. Some schools adopt events because they are globally visible, commercially attractive, or socially fashionable, without asking whether they fit the school's theological commitments or local culture. Costumes, gift exchanges, decorative expectations, themed parties, and seasonal performances may train children into consumer calendars more than Christian or educational rhythms.

A Christian school should examine every holiday practice. Does it teach truth? Does it honor Christ where Christ is named? Does it respect families? Does it require unnecessary spending? Does it confuse children spiritually? Does it serve learning or merely copy the market calendar?

The answer is not automatic rejection. It is discernment. Some cultural practices can be reinterpreted wisely. Others should be declined. In all cases, Christian schools should not be passive receivers of commercial calendars.

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Financial Stewardship and the Burden of Compulsory Extras

The Hidden Second Fee Structure

Many families plan for tuition, uniforms, books, transport, and meals. What often destabilizes them is the hidden second fee structure: ceremonies, costumes, trips, photographs, branded clothing, gifts, fundraising, parties, teacher-appreciation contributions, and late-announced extras. Each item may seem small. Together they can become burdensome, especially for families with multiple children.

Education finance discussions increasingly recognize the importance of tracking household education expenditure, not only government or donor expenditure (World Bank, 2024). This matters because the true cost of schooling is often felt at the household level. In Rwanda, national household survey data continue to provide important evidence about educational participation and living conditions, reminding policymakers and schools that education is experienced inside real family budgets (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2025).

A Christian account of education cannot treat financial pressure as a minor administrative detail. Money decisions reveal values. A school that multiplies avoidable costs forms families as well as children.

Small Fees Are Not Small for Everyone

A fee that appears small to one family may be significant to another. Even middle-income families may struggle when fees multiply across

children and terms. The social shame attached to non-payment can be heavier than the amount itself. Children may hear classmates discussing trips or events they cannot attend. Parents may feel embarrassed. Teachers may feel caught between policy and compassion. Christian schools should be especially attentive to this because Scripture repeatedly commands concern for the vulnerable, warns against favoritism, and calls God's people to generosity. James' warning against favoritism in assembly applies by principle to educational community. A child's dignity must not be linked to parental ability to pay for non-essential extras.

This does not mean schools must provide everything free. Schools need resources. Teachers deserve support. Events cost money. Transport costs money. Safety costs money. The issue is whether costs are necessary, transparent, proportionate, and morally governed.

Stewardship as Institutional Discipline

Stewardship is often taught to individuals. It should also be practiced by institutions. A school should ask whether it spends money in ways consistent with mission. It should avoid waste. It should resist prestige spending. It should choose simple alternatives when possible. It should disclose costs early. It should avoid emergency-style requests for predictable events.

The biblical theology of stewardship begins with the recognition that all things belong to God. Human beings are managers, not owners in the ultimate sense. This truth relativizes both wealth and institutional ambition. A school does not have the right to spend parental money carelessly simply because it can present a requirement. It must justify its requests before God and neighbor.

Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 6:6-10 is not directed only at individuals. Institutions can also love money, status, and display. They can also confuse gain with godliness. Christian schools should therefore build financial review into governance.

Transparency and Trust

Trust grows when costs are predictable. Schools should publish annual fee schedules that distinguish tuition, meals, transport, academic materials, compulsory academic activities, optional enrichment, and charitable collections. Parents should know early what they may be asked to pay. If an activity is added later, the school should explain why it was not anticipated.

Transparency also requires itemization. A study tour fee should show transport, entry, food, materials, and administrative costs. A ceremony fee should show venue, equipment, clothing, refreshments, media, and any honoraria. A vague total invites suspicion. A clear breakdown allows accountability.

UNESCO's emphasis on accountability in education supports this principle: stakeholders need clear lines of responsibility and credible information (UNESCO, 2017). In Christian schools, transparency should be more than regulatory compliance. It should be a fruit of truthfulness.

Compulsory, Optional, and Socially Compulsory

Schools should define categories carefully. A compulsory academic cost is one without which the child cannot reasonably complete the required program. An optional enrichment activity may be beneficial but is not necessary. A social event may build community but should not be treated as academic. A charitable contribution should be voluntary unless it is part of a clearly approved service-learning design, and even then families should not be shamed.

The most dangerous category is the socially compulsory optional activity. This occurs when the school claims an event is optional but creates conditions in which refusal harms the child socially. The language says freedom; the culture says comply. Christian schools should avoid this contradiction.

A non-shaming policy should be explicit. No child should be publicly identified, punished, mocked, excluded from regular

instruction, or treated as inferior because a family declines a non-essential activity.

Financial Education by Institutional Example

Schools teach financial literacy by example. If they plan poorly, parents learn that institutions may transfer poor planning to families. If they pressure families, children learn that money demands can override discernment. If they spend on display, children learn that image deserves resources. If they are transparent, modest, and mission-focused, children learn stewardship.

OECD's financial literacy work shows that young people need preparation for real money decisions (OECD, 2024). Schools should therefore align their money practices with the financial wisdom they claim to teach. A school cannot credibly teach budgeting while normalizing surprise levies. It cannot teach contentment while staging costly vanity. It cannot teach generosity while using shame as a fundraising tool.

Financial stewardship is not peripheral to Christian schooling. It is discipleship in institutional form.

Equity Is Not an Optional Add-On

Equity in school activity policy means more than allowing everyone to attend if they pay. It means designing school life so that participation in the core community is not dependent on repeated discretionary spending. A child should not feel that school belonging is always conditional on parental capacity to pay for extras.

This is especially important in societies where education is already a major pathway of hope and social mobility. Families sacrifice for schooling because they believe education can open doors. Schools betray that trust when they load non-essential costs onto parents without transparency or restraint. A school that serves the public good should reduce unnecessary barriers, not multiply them.

Christian theology deepens the concern. The poor are not problems to be managed; they are neighbors to be honored. The child from a modest home is not less worthy of joy, recognition, or belonging. A school culture that communicates otherwise has failed spiritually, even if it succeeds administratively.

Budgeting as Witness

A school budget is a theological document because it reveals what the institution values. How much is spent on teacher development compared with ceremonies? How much is spent on books compared with decorations? How much is spent on learning materials compared with branding? How much is spent on safety compared with spectacle? These comparisons may expose mission drift.

Christian school leaders should review budgets annually in light of formation. This does not mean eliminating all aesthetic or communal spending. Beauty matters. Hospitality matters. Celebration matters. But when the budget begins to serve institutional image more than educational substance, reform is needed.

Parents may not see the whole budget, but they feel its consequences through fees. Transparency builds trust when it shows that money serves mission.

Research, Policy, and Pastoral Note

A sober reform agenda should avoid two errors. The first error is romantic reaction, which assumes that every modern school practice is corrupt simply because it is new, visible, or enjoyable. The second error is naive adoption, which assumes that any practice becomes educational once a school organizes it. Neither approach is wise. Research, policy, and Christian discernment all require attention to purpose, evidence, context, and consequences.

International education policy increasingly speaks of competences, values, well-being, sustainability, accountability, and financial literacy (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2017, 2020; UNICEF

Innocenti, 2020). These emphases do not settle every Christian question, but they support the basic claim that education concerns the whole learner and the social conditions around learning. When school activities create unclear costs, weak alignment, or social pressure, they touch matters already recognized by educational policy as significant.

Pastorally, reform should be done without contempt. Many parents accept costly practices because they love their children. Many teachers organize events because they want children to enjoy school. Many leaders approve activities because they believe they are enriching the institution. Christian critique should expose the formative dangers while still honoring the people involved. The goal is not humiliation. The goal is repentance, wisdom, and better practice.

A useful pastoral question is this: if a child internalized the repeated message of this practice for ten years, what kind of adult would it help produce? That question slows the institution down. It forces adults to look beyond the event itself to the person being formed through it. Schools rarely damage children through one isolated activity. More often, they shape children through patterns. Therefore, reform should focus on patterns.

Curriculum Integrity and the Age-Appropriateness Test

Curriculum Is a Moral Contract

A curriculum is not merely a list of topics. It is a moral contract among the school, the child, the parent, the teacher, and society. It states, implicitly or explicitly, what knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and competences the school will cultivate. When a school uses time and money for activities weakly connected to curriculum, it must explain why. Time is not neutral. Money is not neutral. Attention is not neutral.

Tyler's classic curriculum questions remain useful: What educational purposes should the school seek? What experiences can attain these purposes? How can these experiences be organized? How can we know whether the purposes are being attained? (Tyler, 1949). Wiggins and McTighe (2005) made a similar point through backward design: begin with desired understandings and evidence, then plan learning experiences. These principles expose the weakness of many poorly designed school events.

If the activity comes first and the justification comes later, curriculum integrity is at risk.

The Age-Appropriateness Test

Age appropriateness asks whether the activity fits children's developmental stage, language capacity, emotional maturity, social understanding, safety needs, and curriculum level. A topic may be valuable and still not suitable in the same way for all ages. An

institution, historical site, business, ecological area, or cultural event may require different framing for nursery, lower primary, upper primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary learners.

Vygotsky (1978) helps us see that learning requires mediation. Children need scaffolding. They need adults to connect experience to meaning. A young child may benefit from concrete observation and simple language. Older learners may handle abstraction, systems, ethics, and critique. Sending all learners through the same event without differentiated tasks may be efficient administratively but weak pedagogically.

The test is simple: What will this age group understand before, during, and after the activity? What language will teachers use? What evidence of learning will be collected? What misconception might the activity create? What could overwhelm or confuse learners?

The Necessity Test

Not every beneficial activity is necessary. Schools must distinguish good, useful, enriching, optional, and essential. A school may say a trip is good, but parents may reasonably ask whether it is necessary enough to require payment. Necessity should be tied to curriculum, assessment, accreditation, or core formation.

A modest alternative may sometimes achieve the same goal. A virtual tour, invited speaker, school garden, classroom simulation, local community walk, parent professional talk, library project, or teacher-led demonstration may be cheaper and more age-appropriate than an expensive outing. Simplicity does not always mean inferiority.

Christian stewardship asks whether the same educational purpose can be achieved with less financial pressure. If yes, the more expensive option requires stronger justification.

The Evidence of Learning Test

If an activity is educational, there should be evidence of learning. This evidence should be age-appropriate. Nursery children may draw, retell, classify, sing, or identify. Primary children may write short reflections, label diagrams, present observations, or compare concepts. Older learners may produce reports, debates, projects, portfolios, policy briefs, or assessments. Evidence of learning does not need to be burdensome. It simply demonstrates that the activity was more than entertainment. It also helps parents see value. A school that cannot show what children learned should hesitate to call the activity academic.

This principle aligns with competence-based education, where learning should be observable through the application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (Ministry of Education & Rwanda Education Board, 2015). A field activity should make competences visible.

The Spiritual Soundness Test

For Christian schools, curriculum integrity includes spiritual soundness. The school should ask whether an activity supports or undermines Christian formation. Does it cultivate wonder at creation, love of neighbor, respect for work, civic responsibility, gratitude, humility, courage, service, stewardship, justice, or wisdom? Or does it cultivate vanity, envy, appetite, entertainment dependence, and self-display?

This does not mean every trip must be overtly religious. A visit to a farm can teach providence and labor. A visit to a hospital can teach compassion. A visit to a court can teach justice. A visit to a forest can teach stewardship. A visit to a business can teach vocation and economic responsibility. Christian integration does not require forcing Bible language onto everything. It requires seeing all things truthfully before God.

The school should also examine whether the activity conflicts with parental conscience, exposes children to unsuitable content, or normalizes values contrary to Christian discipleship. Where concerns exist, parents should be informed honestly.

The Ten Questions

Before approving any trip, ceremony, or special event, a school board or leadership team should ask ten questions: 1. What specific educational or formation purpose does this activity serve?

2. Which curriculum outcomes or character goals does it support?

3. Is it age-appropriate for each participating level?

4. What preparation will happen before the activity?

5. What guided learning will happen during the activity?

6. What reflection or evidence of learning will follow?

7. Is the cost necessary, transparent, and proportionate?

8. Is participation compulsory, optional, or socially optional but practically pressured?

9. How will children be protected from shame, exclusion, or comparison?

10. Could the same goal be achieved more simply, locally, or affordably?

If these questions cannot be answered, the activity should be redesigned or declined.

The Difference Between Integrated Learning and Activity Accumulation

Schools sometimes defend many activities by appealing to holistic education. The phrase can be meaningful. Children are whole persons and need intellectual, spiritual, physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, and moral development. But holistic education does not mean

accumulating activities. It means integrating formation around a coherent vision of the person.

A school may have many events and still be fragmented. Another school may have fewer activities but deeper integration. The question is not how many dimensions of life are touched, but whether they are ordered toward wisdom. A sports day can teach discipline and teamwork. A poorly designed sports day can teach rivalry and display. A cultural day can deepen identity and gratitude. A poorly designed one can become costume competition. Holistic language must therefore be tested by formation outcomes.

Christian holistic education is ordered by love of God and neighbor. It does not merely develop capacities; it orders them.

Assessment Without Reductionism

Some educators may worry that requiring evidence of learning will reduce every activity to assessment. That concern is understandable. Not all learning is easily measured. Wonder, gratitude, courage, and humility cannot be captured fully in a worksheet. Yet the absence of crude measurement does not mean the absence of evidence.

Evidence of learning can be narrative, reflective, artistic, oral, practical, communal, or observational. Teachers can ask children what they noticed, what surprised them, what they learned about God or neighbor, what question remains, and what responsibility follows. Older learners can produce more formal reflections or projects. The goal is not bureaucratic proof but educational seriousness.

A school that never asks what was learned after an activity has likely treated experience as an end in itself. Reflection redeems experience from superficiality.

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Reclaiming Joy Without Consumerism

The False Choice

Critics of school spectacle may be misunderstood as opponents of joy. This is a false choice. The real choice is not between joy and seriousness. The real choice is between shallow stimulation and deep joy, between purchased excitement and formed delight, between entertainment dependence and gratitude.

Christian education should be joyful because the world belongs to God, truth is worthy of love, children are gifts, learning is a form of wonder, and fellowship is good. A joyless school misrepresents the Christian life. But a consumerist school misdirects joy by tying it to spending, display, and novelty.

The question is not whether children should smile. The question is what kind of joy they are learning to seek.

The Joy of Learning

There is a joy in understanding. A child who finally reads a difficult sentence, solves a mathematics problem, recognizes a bird, writes a clear paragraph, memorizes Scripture, sings in harmony, or explains an experiment experiences a joy connected to mastery. This joy is not cheap. It comes through effort. It forms confidence without vanity.

Hattie's synthesis of educational research emphasizes the importance of visible learning, feedback, teacher clarity, and the conditions under which students understand their own learning (Hattie, 2009). When children can see progress, they gain a joy deeper than entertainment. They realize that effort changes them.

Schools should therefore make learning itself visible and delightful. Exhibitions of student work, reading festivals centered on books rather than costumes, science demonstrations, mathematics challenges, service reports, Scripture recitations with understanding, and community projects can celebrate learning without turning it into spectacle.

The Joy of Service

Service provides another alternative to consumer joy. Children who visit the elderly, clean a community area, help younger learners, plant trees, support vulnerable families, write encouragement cards, or participate in carefully guided acts of mercy can learn that joy comes from giving rather than receiving.

Christian schools should handle service carefully. It should not become charity-as-performance. The vulnerable should not be used as props. Photographs should be limited. Reflection should emphasize dignity, justice, compassion, and humility. But when done well, service teaches children that life is not about self-display.

This connects directly to the Christian understanding of vocation. Children are not educated merely to advance themselves. They are educated to love God and neighbor through truthful, skilled, responsible service.

The Joy of Creation

The created world offers abundant low-cost learning. Gardens, trees, soil, insects, rain, seasons, animals, stars, local crafts, markets, homes, churches, roads, and neighborhoods can become classrooms. A school does not always need expensive destinations. It needs attentive teachers.

Education for sustainable development emphasizes knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors that enable responsible choices for the future (UNESCO, 2020). A Christian school can receive this concern within a richer doctrine of creation and stewardship.

Children can learn care for creation not only through large trips but through daily habits: reducing waste, planting, observing, repairing, cleaning, and giving thanks. Such practices form joy without consumerism. They teach children to notice what is already given rather than constantly seek what must be purchased.

The Joy of Simplicity

Simplicity must be taught as positive, not as deprivation. Children can learn that a simple thanksgiving service may be more meaningful than an expensive ceremony, that a homemade costume may be more creative than a purchased one, that a local walk may teach more than a distant outing, and that a quiet achievement may matter more than public applause.

Pieper's reflection on leisure reminds us that leisure is not mere entertainment but a posture of receptive contemplation (Pieper, 1952/2009). Christian education can deepen this insight by placing leisure before God. Rest, worship, contemplation, and gratitude are not consumer products. They are forms of receiving life as gift.

A school that teaches simplicity helps children resist the anxiety of comparison. They learn that less can be enough when purpose is clear.

The Joy of Worship

Finally, Christian education must recover worship as the deepest joy. The purpose of education is not merely employability, success, national development, or social mobility, though these have their place. The ultimate purpose is to live truthfully before God. Knowledge should lead to wonder. Skill should lead to service. Discipline should lead to freedom. Community should lead to love. Creation should lead to praise.

This is why Christian schools must be careful with pleasure-seeking. The heart trained to need constant entertainment may struggle with worship, which requires attention, humility,

repentance, gratitude, and reverence. The school should help children become capable of worship by training attention, contentment, and wonder. A school that reclaims joy without consumerism gives children something precious: the ability to delight in what is true, good, beautiful, simple, and holy.

Ordinary Faithfulness as a Joy to Be Taught

One of the most countercultural gifts a school can give children is the joy of ordinary faithfulness. Modern culture often teaches that meaningful life must be dramatic, visible, and constantly novel. Scripture honors a different pattern: daily obedience, quiet service, steady work, contentment, prayer, patience, and love. Schools can help children see that ordinary faithfulness is not small in God's sight.

This can be taught through classroom routines. Children can learn to care for books, clean spaces, greet others, help classmates, finish tasks, revise work, listen carefully, and pray sincerely. These practices may not look impressive on social media, but they shape souls.

A school that teaches ordinary faithfulness prepares children for real life. Most of life is not ceremony. Most obedience is not photographed. Most service is not applauded. Children who learn to find joy there are deeply blessed.

Beauty Without Luxury

Christian schools should not confuse simplicity with ugliness. Children need beauty: good music, thoughtful art, clean classrooms, ordered spaces, well-kept gardens, excellent books, reverent worship, and dignified ceremonies. Beauty can elevate desire toward gratitude and wonder. The issue is not beauty but luxury as display.

Beauty without luxury is possible. A simple chapel service can be beautiful. A handmade student exhibition can be beautiful. A clean classroom with well-displayed work can be beautiful. A school garden can be beautiful. A well-sung hymn can be beautiful. Such beauty teaches children that value is not dependent on expense. This is a

powerful antidote to consumerism. It teaches that the good, the true, and the beautiful can be received, cultivated, and shared without constant purchasing.

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isolated activity. More often, they shape children through patterns. Therefore, reform should focus on patterns.

A Policy Framework for Responsible School Activities

Why Policy Matters

Good intentions are not enough. A school may sincerely want to enrich children and still create burdensome, poorly aligned, or spiritually careless practices. Policy helps protect mission from drift. It gives teachers clarity, parents confidence, administrators accountability, and children protection.

A responsible policy on school activities should apply to ceremonies, study tours, themed days, branded items, fundraising, social events, media posting, and parent-group collections. It should be approved by school leadership or the board, communicated to parents, and reviewed annually.

For Christian schools, the policy should begin with a theological statement: children are image-bearers entrusted by God to parents; schools serve parents and children through truth, wisdom, and formation; money must be stewarded; joy must be ordered; and the school must resist worldliness in practice, not only in speech.

Annual Fee Transparency

The policy should require annual disclosure of all expected costs. This disclosure should distinguish tuition, meals, transport, uniforms, books, compulsory academic materials, optional enrichment, ceremonies, trips, photos, branded clothing, and charitable collections. Predictable events should not be announced as surprise demands.

Where costs cannot be known exactly, the school should provide estimates and ceilings. A cost ceiling protects parents from indefinite demands. Any change beyond the ceiling should require explanation and approval.

Transparency should also include the status of each item: compulsory academic, optional academic enrichment, optional social, voluntary charity, or parent-led activity. Vague categories create mistrust.

Curriculum Justification for Trips

Every study tour should have a written curriculum justification. The document should include class level, topic, objectives, curriculum link, pre-visit preparation, differentiated tasks, teacher roles, safety arrangements, post-visit reflection, evidence of learning, total cost, and alternatives for non-participants where applicable.

For mixed-level trips, each level should have its own learning objectives. A single generic paragraph should not justify the participation of nursery, primary, and secondary learners together. Efficiency is not pedagogy.

Parents should receive this information before payment. A school that cannot write a clear justification should reconsider the trip.

Ceremony Approval and Proportionality

Ceremonies should be approved according to purpose and proportionality. The policy should define which milestones may be marked formally: end-of-year thanksgiving, completion of nursery, completion of primary, completion of lower secondary, completion of upper secondary, or other significant transitions. It should distinguish closing ceremonies from graduations.

The policy should set limits on cost, clothing requirements, photography, decorations, gifts, and compulsory contributions. It should encourage modesty, spiritual substance, and learning display.

It should prohibit shaming children whose families cannot purchase extras.

A Christian school should ask whether ceremony directs attention to God, gratitude, effort, and community rather than vanity.

Optional Activities and Non-Shaming

The policy should define optional activities clearly and protect families who decline. Non-participating children should receive meaningful alternative learning or supervised school activity. They should not be punished, mocked, isolated, or publicly identified as unable to pay. Teachers should be trained in this policy.

Parent groups should not publish lists of contributors for optional activities. Children should not be used to pressure parents. Deadlines should be reasonable. Communication should be respectful.

This is not only administrative decency. It is pastoral care.

Social-Media and Child Protection

Schools should have strict media policies. Parent consent should be specific and informed. Public posts should avoid full names, sensitive information, embarrassing images, and unnecessary exposure. Parents should be able to withdraw consent. Children should be taught digital dignity.

The policy should ask whether each post serves communication, documentation, learning, or merely branding. Christian schools should avoid using children as marketing material.

Governance and Review

Policies fail when no one owns them. The school board or leadership team should review activities annually. Parents should be invited to provide feedback. Teachers should report whether activities met learning objectives. Financial reports should be available. Complaints should be heard respectfully.

A Christian school may appoint a formation review committee including administrators, teachers, parents, and a pastoral or theological advisor. Its task would be to ask whether school practices align with mission.

The aim is not bureaucracy. The aim is faithfulness.

A Summary Policy Statement

A responsible school activity policy may be summarized as follows: all school activities must be truthful in naming, clear in purpose, appropriate to age, aligned where academic claims are made, proportionate in cost, transparent in communication, respectful of parents, protective of children, inclusive of families, and consistent with the moral and spiritual formation the school professes.

Such a policy would not remove celebration from schooling. It would restore trust by placing celebration under wisdom.

Implementation Without Harshness

Policy reform should be implemented pastorally. If a school has long practiced elaborate ceremonies and frequent outings, sudden cancellation without explanation may create confusion. Leaders should teach the community why reform is needed. They should honor what was good in past practices while explaining why simplification better serves mission, equity, and formation.

Communication should be clear. Parents should hear that the school is not reducing care for children but strengthening it. Teachers should be supported, not blamed. Students should be helped to understand that joy does not require excess. Reform becomes more successful when it is framed positively: deeper learning, stronger stewardship, clearer curriculum, better protection for families, and more faithful Christian witness.

A transition plan may reduce events gradually, redesign trips, combine ceremonies, create reusable materials, and introduce new

learning exhibitions or service projects. Change is more credible when alternatives are constructive.

Auditing the Existing Calendar

A practical first step is a calendar audit. List every event, trip, theme day, ceremony, fundraiser, parent contribution, media campaign, and special requirement from the past year. For each one, ask: What did it cost? How much instructional time did it use? What learning or formation did it produce? Who was burdened? Who benefited? What could be simplified? What should be discontinued?

This audit should include teacher feedback. Teachers often know which events disrupt learning and which genuinely help. Parent feedback also matters, but it should be gathered carefully so louder or wealthier voices do not dominate. Children's voices may also reveal whether activities formed gratitude, stress, comparison, or joy.

A school that audits its calendar honestly may discover that reform is not about adding new burdens but removing unnecessary ones.

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Forming Children for Purpose, Not Pleasure

Returning to the Central Question

The central question of this book has been simple: are schools forming learners or consumers? The answer is not determined by mission statements alone. It is determined by practices. What schools repeat, require, reward, photograph, charge for, and celebrate becomes formative.

A school can teach noble words while rehearsing lesser loves. It can speak of excellence while rewarding display. It can speak of stewardship while multiplying costs. It can speak of curriculum while organizing promenades. It can speak of Christian values while imitating worldly spectacle. Or it can become a community where truth is loved, learning is disciplined, joy is ordered, money is stewarded, parents are honored, and children are formed for purpose.

The choice is not abstract. It appears in calendars, budgets, permission slips, assemblies, parent messages, trip forms, photo policies, and classroom routines.

Purpose as an Educational Category

Purpose gives coherence to education. Without purpose, activity multiplies. With purpose, activity is judged. A school that knows its purpose can say no. It can decline an impressive event because it does not serve formation. It can choose a simple activity because it serves

learning well. It can disappoint consumer expectations because it answers to a higher calling.

For Christian schools, purpose is rooted in God. Children are not educated merely to pass exams, earn salaries, compete globally, or achieve social mobility. They are educated to know truth, love God, serve neighbor, cultivate creation, steward gifts, discern falsehood, practice wisdom, and live faithfully in their generation. Academic excellence belongs within that calling. It is not separate from it.

This purpose is spiritually edifying because it gives children a life larger than appetite. They are not born to chase pleasure. They are made for God.

A Word to Parents

Parents must recover courage. Ask schools good questions. Ask for curriculum alignment. Ask whether trips are truly educational. Ask for cost breakdowns. Ask whether ceremonies are proportionate. Ask how children who do not participate will be protected. Ask how activities form character. Ask whether the school practices the values it claims.

But ask respectfully. Teachers and school leaders are not enemies. Many are trying to serve children under pressure. Your questions should be firm without contempt, clear without aggression, and oriented toward reform rather than embarrassment. A wise parent does not merely resist costs; he or she helps build a better educational culture.

Parents must also examine their own desires. Do not demand spectacle from schools and then complain that schools are spectacular. Do not measure school quality by event calendars. Do not compare your child through photographs. Do not train your child at home to love what you want the school to resist. Formation begins at home.

A Word to School Leaders

School leaders must recover mission. Resist the pressure to compete through entertainment. Build trust through clarity. Honor parents through transparency. Protect children from comparison. Support teachers in meaningful learning. Simplify ceremonies. Strengthen study tours. Limit unnecessary extras. Govern social media. Teach children to love learning. If you lead a Christian school, remember that your institution bears witness. You are not called merely to be successful in the school market. You are called to be faithful. A smaller, simpler, more truthful school culture may be more Christian than a glamorous one.

Do not fear losing joy. Children do not need extravagance in order to flourish. They need love, safety, truth, discipline, beauty, friendship, Scripture, skilled teachers, good books, purposeful work, and wise adults.

A Word to Churches and Policymakers

Churches should take Christian schooling seriously as formation, not merely as institutional branding. Pastors and church boards connected to schools should ask whether school practices align with discipleship. They should resist the temptation to use school events primarily for institutional visibility. They should support policies that protect parents and children.

Policymakers and regulators should encourage transparency in school fees, protect parents from hidden compulsory costs, require clearer justification for school trips, promote child protection in school media use, and strengthen accountability. Education systems should not allow vague activity labels to obscure financial and curricular responsibilities.

The public good is served when schools educate rather than merely entertain.

Hope for Reform

The critique in this book is serious, but it is not hopeless. Many practices can be reformed without destroying school community. A school can reduce events. It can rename recreation honestly. It can align trips with curriculum. It can make costs transparent. It can protect opt-outs. It can shift from spectacle to service. It can celebrate learning instead of display. It can become more spiritually coherent. Reform begins with truth. The school must tell the truth about what it is doing. Parents must tell the truth about what they desire. Churches must tell the truth about what Christian formation requires. Children must be taught the truth that life is not measured by possessions, performances, applause, or pleasures.

The final aim is not austerity. It is freedom. Children formed in wisdom are freer than children formed by appetite. Children trained in stewardship are freer than children trained in waste. Children taught to love God are freer than children taught to love display. Children who learn deep joy are freer than children who depend on constant excitement.

The school is always forming someone. May it form children for purpose, not pleasure.

The Kind of Graduate Society Needs

The society most worth building does not need children trained merely to consume more refined experiences. It needs adults who can think, work, serve, build families, govern wisely, worship sincerely, care for the vulnerable, steward resources, resist manipulation, and endure hardship. Such adults do not appear by accident. They are formed through years of small practices.

A school that trains children to expect spectacle may produce adults who demand stimulation. A school that trains children to practice discipline may produce adults who can serve. A school that trains children to compare may produce adults ruled by status. A

school that trains children in contentment may produce adults capable of generosity. The social consequences are immense.

This is why the issue is not merely educational taste. It is civilizational formation. The habits of childhood become the assumptions of adulthood.

A Final Pastoral Word

Parents and educators should not respond to this argument with fear. God is gracious. Children are not ruined by one ceremony, one trip, or one poorly designed activity. Formation is powerful, but it is not mechanical destiny. Repentance, wisdom, and reform are always possible.

The call is not panic but faithfulness. Begin with what can be changed. Ask one better question. Simplify one event. Clarify one fee. Redesign one trip. Protect one child from shame. Teach one lesson on contentment. Replace one spectacle with service. Recover one ordinary joy.

Small reforms, repeated faithfully, become a new hidden curriculum. They teach children that another way is possible.

The Positive Vision: Purposeful Children, Not Anxious Performers

The final aim of this critique is not restriction but liberation. Children formed for purpose do not need constant spectacle to feel alive. They can receive ordinary life as gift. They can work without immediate applause, serve without a camera, learn without bribery, celebrate without vanity, and enjoy God's world without becoming enslaved to it.

Mission-Driven Learning Theory gives language to this constructive goal: education should help learners align gifts, competence, calling, community confirmation, agency, and stewardship with a life mission under God (Sangwa & Mutabazi, 2025). For younger children, this does not mean forcing adult career

language onto childhood. It means training the early habits from which purpose later grows: attention, gratitude, truthfulness, patience, service, courage, prayer, care for creation, respect for labor, and joy in meaningful learning.

Research, Policy, and Pastoral Note

A sober reform agenda should avoid two errors. The first error is romantic reaction, which assumes that every modern school practice is corrupt simply because it is new, visible, or enjoyable. The second error is naive adoption, which assumes that any practice becomes educational once a school organizes it. Neither approach is wise. Research, policy, and Christian discernment all require attention to purpose, evidence, context, and consequences.

International education policy increasingly speaks of competences, values, well-being, sustainability, accountability, and financial literacy (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2017, 2020; UNICEF Innocenti, 2020). These emphases do not settle every Christian question, but they support the basic claim that education concerns the whole learner and the social conditions around learning. When school activities create unclear costs, weak alignment, or social pressure, they touch matters already recognized by educational policy as significant.

Pastorally, reform should be done without contempt. Many parents accept costly practices because they love their children. Many teachers organize events because they want children to enjoy school. Many leaders approve activities because they believe they are enriching the institution. Christian critique should expose the formative dangers while still honoring the people involved. The goal is not humiliation. The goal is repentance, wisdom, and better practice.

A useful pastoral question is this: if a child internalized the repeated message of this practice for ten years, what kind of adult would it help produce? That question slows the institution down. It forces adults to look beyond the event itself to the person being

formed through it. Schools rarely damage children through one isolated activity. More often, they shape children through patterns. Therefore, reform should focus on patterns.

Conclusion

This manuscript has argued that costly ceremonies, loosely defined study tours, performative events, branded experiences, compulsory extras, and celebration-driven activities should be examined not merely as administrative matters but as practices of formation. The concern is wider than Christian schooling, but Christian schools must respond with greater clarity because their mission is to educate under Christ.

The critique has not been against joy, play, celebration, or experiential learning. It has been against consumerist formation, ceremonial inflation, curriculum dishonesty, avoidable financial pressure, and cultural imitation. A faithful school may celebrate, travel, perform, and gather, but it must do so truthfully, proportionately, and under wise moral governance.

The path forward is not complicated, though it requires courage. Tell the truth about activities. Align academic claims with curriculum. Protect parents from vague costs. Respect family conscience. Keep ceremonies meaningful and modest. Use trips for learning, not branding. Teach children to enjoy without indulging, celebrate without vanity, spend without waste, and learn without constant entertainment.

A society that forms children for appetite should not be surprised when adults become restless, entitled, consumerist, and purposeless. A school that forms children for wisdom gives society a better future. A Christian school that forms children for Christ gives them something better still: a life ordered toward truth, love, service, worship, and eternal purpose.

Practical Checklist for Parents

Use these questions when evaluating a school activity:

1. What specific learning or formation purpose does the activity serve?
2. Is the activity clearly aligned with the curriculum or honestly described as recreation?
3. Is it age-appropriate for my child's level of development?
4. Is the cost necessary, proportionate, and transparent?
5. Is participation truly compulsory, or is it optional but socially pressured?
6. What happens to children whose parents decline or cannot pay?
7. Does the activity cultivate wisdom, gratitude, service, humility, and discipline, or does it cultivate display and appetite?
8. Could the same goal be achieved more simply?
9. Has the school provided enough information for meaningful consent?
10. Does this practice support the culture I am trying to build in my child?

Practical Checklist for School Leaders

Before approving a ceremony, trip, themed day, or special event, ask:

1. Can we explain the purpose in one honest sentence?
2. Are we using accurate language, or are we calling recreation “study”?
3. Have we disclosed all costs early and clearly?
4. Have we protected poorer families and non-participating children?
5. Have we consulted parents where conscience, cost, or culture are involved?
6. Have we considered simpler alternatives?
7. Have we aligned the activity with curriculum where academic claims are made?
8. Have we considered spiritual formation, not merely enjoyment?
9. Would we still do this activity if no photographs were posted?
10. Does this practice strengthen or weaken our mission?

Model School Policy on Ceremonies, Study Tours, and Compulsory Extras

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all school ceremonies, study tours, themed events, social activities, and extra charges are educationally justified, financially transparent, age-appropriate, respectful of parents, protective of children, and consistent with the school's stated mission.

Principles

All school activities shall be governed by truthfulness, curriculum integrity, proportionality, stewardship, child dignity, parental partnership, and non-discrimination. Christian schools shall additionally evaluate activities according to biblical stewardship, simplicity, contentment, humility, service, and resistance to worldly conformity.

Fee Disclosure

The school shall publish an annual schedule of expected costs. Any additional fee must be communicated in writing with purpose, itemized cost, compulsory or optional status, deadline, and alternative arrangements where applicable.

Study Tours

No activity shall be called a study tour unless it includes written learning objectives, curriculum alignment, age-specific preparation, guided learning tasks, post-visit reflection, safety planning, and evidence of learning.

Ceremonies

Ceremonies shall be purposeful and proportionate. Graduation language shall be reserved for genuine completion milestones. Closing ceremonies, thanksgiving events, and transition recognitions shall be named accurately.

Optional Activities

Optional activities shall be genuinely optional. Children whose families decline participation shall not be shamed, punished, publicly identified, or academically disadvantaged.

Media Use

The school shall obtain informed parental consent before using children's images publicly. Public posts shall avoid unnecessary exposure and shall not use children primarily as marketing assets.

Review

The school leadership or board shall review this policy annually and receive feedback from parents, teachers, and students where appropriate.

Sample Curriculum-Alignment Form for School Trips

Item	Required information
Activity title	
Date and location	
Participating class levels	
Curriculum topic	
Learning objectives	
Age-specific tasks	
Pre-visit preparation	
Guided learning during visit	
Post-visit reflection	
Evidence of learning	
Total cost per learner	
Cost breakdown	
Safety arrangements	
Optional or compulsory status	
Alternative for non-participants	
Spiritual or character formation value	

Approved by: _____ Date: _____

Sample Parental-Consent and Fee-Disclosure Form

Dear Parent or Guardian,

The school proposes the following activity for your child. Please review the information carefully before giving consent.

Activity	
Class level	
Purpose of the activity	
Curriculum or formation link	
Date and time	
Location	
Total cost	
Cost breakdown	

Participation status

☐ Compulsory academic ☐ Optional enrichment ☐ Optional social ☐ Voluntary charity

Alternative arrangements if your child does not participate

Parent or guardian consent

I have read and understood the purpose, cost, and status of this activity.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Sample Opt-Out and Non-Shaming Policy

No child shall be punished, mocked, publicly identified, isolated, or treated as inferior because a parent or guardian declines a non-essential activity. Teachers shall provide meaningful supervision or alternative learning for non-participating learners. Parent groups shall not publish contribution lists for optional activities. School staff shall communicate with parents respectfully and privately regarding all financial matters.

Questions for Church Leaders and Christian School Boards

1. Does the school's activity culture reflect biblical stewardship?
2. Are ceremonies spiritually meaningful or mainly performative?
3. Are school trips curriculum-grounded and age-appropriate?
4. Are parents treated as partners or passive payers?
5. Are poorer families protected from shame?
6. Does the school use children's images responsibly?
7. Are we imitating the surrounding culture or forming children differently?
8. Do our policies help children love God, neighbor, truth, wisdom, discipline, service, and contentment?
9. Are teachers supported in serious academic formation rather than pressured to produce events?
10. Would our school culture make sense if judged by Romans 12:2 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5?

Glossary

Age appropriateness: The suitability of an activity for a child's developmental stage, language capacity, emotional maturity, safety needs, and curriculum level.

Ceremonial inflation: The expansion of ceremonies beyond meaningful academic or communal milestones, often creating unnecessary cost, display, or status pressure.

Consumer formation: The shaping of children to understand identity, belonging, joy, progress, and status through purchase, display, and consumption.

Curriculum integrity: The truthful alignment between a school's stated curriculum aims and the activities, assessments, and resources used to pursue them.

Hidden curriculum: The unofficial lessons children learn through school routines, expectations, power structures, costs, rituals, rewards, and institutional habits.

Pleasure-seeking: A disordered pattern in which immediate stimulation, entertainment, comfort, or self-display becomes a dominant orientation of life.

Promenade: A recreational outing presented or experienced primarily as leisure, even when labeled as a study tour.

Stewardship: Faithful management of resources, time, money, attention, authority, and opportunity before God and for the good of neighbor.

Study tour: An educational visit with clear learning objectives, curriculum alignment, age-appropriate preparation, guided observation, reflection, and evidence of learning.

Appendix: Relevant Prior Publications and Continuing Research Trajectory

This appendix identifies public works by the author that informed, anticipated, or intersect with the argument of this book. It is included not for self-promotion, but to clarify the intellectual and pastoral continuity behind the manuscript.

Education, Authority, and Moral Formation

Is Modern Education Empowering or Entrapping Christians? A Humble Inquiry into Spiritual Discernment asked whether modern education strengthens believers or trains them to adopt secular assumptions without biblical discernment (Sangwa, 2024b). Could Early Education and Contemporary Media Serve as Challenges to Christian Family Values? focused more specifically on parental influence, media environments, and the danger that children may be disciplined by institutions and screens more deeply than by home and church (Sangwa, 2024c).

Learner-Centered Pedagogy and Moral Relativism developed the academic version of that concern by arguing that pedagogical frameworks can alter authority structures in schooling and may encourage moral relativism when separated from transcendent truth and virtue (Sangwa, 2025b). This book applies the same principle to ceremonies, study tours, and compulsory extras: school practices do not merely occupy time; they move authority, shape desire, and define what children experience as normal.

Hedonism, Ease, and the Schooling of Appetite

Is Hedonism Undermining the Soul of True Fulfillment? and the later journal exhortation on hedonism distinguished momentary pleasure

from true joy and warned against the spiritual poverty of a pleasure-centered life (Sangwa, 2024a, 2026a). Hedonism by Design then carried the critique into educational history and policy, arguing that schooling can become a site where pleasure, self-sovereignty, relativism, and cultural nihilism are gradually normalized (Sangwa, 2025a).

The present book does not ask readers to accept every historical or cultural interpretation uncritically. It asks them to examine a practical and observable question: what happens when school culture repeatedly surrounds learning with entertainment, consumption, self-display, and compulsory celebration?

Competence, Mission, and Christian Educational Purpose

Global Convergence Toward Competency-Based Education for the Knowledge Economy examined the global diffusion of competency language and warned that competence can become thin when detached from knowledge integrity, local meaning, and ethical purpose (Sangwa, 2025c). Mission-Driven Learning Theory responded constructively by placing mission, calling discernment, formation, competence, alignment, agency, and stewardship at the center of educational design (Sangwa & Mutabazi, 2025).

This book brings those threads into primary and secondary schooling. A Christian school should not merely ask whether learners are active, entertained, employable, or publicly visible. It should ask whether they are being formed for truthful purpose before God.

Public Theology, Podcast Ministry, and End-Time Discernment

The author's podcast and teaching ministry regularly addresses stigmatized truth, end-time cultural trends, religions and doctrines, eschatology and geopolitics, and general Bible study (Sangwa, n.d.- a). The present book belongs to that same watchman tradition, but it is written in a policy-theological register. Its concern is not sensationalism. Its concern is the slow formation of children in a

world that increasingly makes self, pleasure, display, and consumption feel normal.

A Christian response must be spiritually alert without becoming harsh, evidence-based without becoming cold, and pastoral without becoming vague. Schools, parents, churches, and policymakers all need courage to ask what kind of people current practices are forming.

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