



LEARNING THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE:

At a recent conference I was asked about the identifying features of LUTHERAN education – and what makes learning different. Much had already been written but it was important to collate the ideas about learning in a Lutheran Educational setting.

Underpinning Ethos

Documented Lutheran Education values emerge from a Christian world-view draw inspiration from God's love demonstrated on the cross. We accept that the hurt and pain we personally and relationally experience exemplifies the innate flaws that Christians call sin. Yet, all is not lost. Redemption and healing is offered by a loving God in Christ. Grace. Freedom. Unconditional love as a free gift. And this story is worth sharing in an education setting because it informs our understanding of God, what it means to be human and how we can build effective relationships with others and take care of our planet.

Connecting with The Story informs our understanding of what it means to be human

"I believe that The Story that informs our understanding of what it means to be human is one of the most important things about the educating we do. It's more important that teaching a particular language or a particular set of historical or scientific facts or a particular theory. Its even more important than reading this or that particular author. It's important because it influences the decisions we make about all these other things, about why do do them and how we do them. But it's also more important because it shapes who we become, how we understand ourselves and what we will do and not do with the rest of the education we receive." Christenson, T. [2006] SchoolLink July

All humans are gifted uniquely to learn, care and serve.

Our understanding of what it means to be human helps us to recognize that all humans have unique gifts, talents and abilities [Bartsch, 2013]. "Each person is a unique creation of God and a person loved by God and all useful knowledge and learning is God's gift to people for their well-being". Therefore. Lutheran Education seeks to "develop the whole person [and] encourage all to strive for the best." Included is an emphasis on uniqueness and worth of individuals as well as a spirit of service reflecting God's action in our lives." Care for others, restoration of relationships and a sense of community feature as a central aspect of learning. [A framework for Lutheran Schools: Coverfold]

Educational Goals are common but purposes differ.

The *Declaration on Educational Goals for [all] Young Australians* outlines educational goals for all; "Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence [and] all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens" [p. 7, 8] However, a utilitarian tone can be found in the current rhetoric. The purpose of having these goals is to enhance Australia's ability to "compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation". This is because Australians need "knowledge, understanding, skills and values to take advantage of opportunity and to face the challenges ... with confidence [and] to ensure economic prosperity and social cohesion" [p.4]. But additional and deeper skill-sets are required to confidently confront diverse 21st century challenges that human-kind faces. Social cohesion is not an automatic outcome of a secular education.

We cannot assume that Education will automatically humanize [and bring cohesion to] its citizenry as a letter from a World War 2 concentration survivor eloquently explains:

"I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness: gas

chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education.

My request is: Help your children become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths or educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human."

–An excerpt of a letter written by a Holocaust survivor to educators, published in "Teacher and Child" by Dr. Haim Ginott, child psychologist and author. Downloaded 23.08.2016

<http://www.holocaustandhumanity.org/about-us/educational-philosophy/>

Education is more than improving results 'to compete' ...

Education practices serve people not paper-work. Recently, there has been an emphasis on league-tables and Australian students' performance. Everyone has an opinion to return to being amongst the best in the world at particular subjects. And yet, "Efficiency is not the same as effectiveness, Information is not the same as communication Measurement is not the same as meaning; Psychological constructs are not true identity, 'Being normal' is not what it means to have Life to the Full, Science and statistics do not tell us about Soul"... McCutcheon, F [2008] "Truths, Trends and Traditions in Lutheran Education: ACLE 2008]

The importance of 'learning about' and 'living in' community [and being neighbourly]

In addition, Lutheran Education's focus highlights communal participation that is 'other' focused. We become aware that the well-being of our neighbours matter. We are challenged by the question 'Who is our neighbor?' A good education aids students in a quest to discover just who neighbours might be – and to appreciate what neighbourly-ness looks like. Jesus story of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10:25–37] challenged the rich young man – and the story challenges us too. Rev. Noko [2005] proposed a global, neighbourly need bluntly: "One of the basic and fundamental purposes of education and educational institutions in the 21st century is the building of a 'good society' through the difficult process of transforming the 'human race' into a 'human family'.

Challenged to build social responsibility across all learning areas

As a result, educational topics matter. These topics have additional purposes not found in text books. Learning Area Discipline experts recognize that 'their' discipline has a responsibility to both educate AND contribute. This is call social responsibility and may be exemplified in the following ways:

- Someone else will benefit from students' learning besides themselves. One's vocation as learner is connected to a greater purpose.
- Knowledge & understanding of life-issues is developed. Students are building skills to scrutinize and advocate.
- Ethical and conceptual thinking is embedded
- Learning involves connecting with real people and real places and real needs where ever possible
- Students' findings are honoured and shared in the real world.

In this way, Social responsibility connected to learning enhances community well-being and students' civic-mindedness. Students develop a strong sense of belonging 'in and to' a community as a listener, a learner and a contributor.

"Inquiry, knowing and learning [that is] shaped by the question "How does this serve the needs of the world?" will be appreciatively different from knowing not accompanied by such a question... Learning shaped by the idea of vocation will be closely connected to service..."

Recognising our vocation[s]

The orders of creation enable us to see that God calls humans to view life from a **vocational perspective** and to recognize that all have multiple [paid and unpaid] vocational callings. [Bartsch, 2013]. Humans also have **multiple stations** [places of responsibility]. No station is higher or lower

than the other. [Bartsch, 2013]. It is into these circumstances that humans are **called to mutually serve**; all using and developing their unique gifts and talents [Bartsch, 2013].

During his era, Luther radically challenged the current thinking about vocation. At that time, vocation meant 'doing religious work'. Instead, Luther focused on recognizing vocational opportunities in the ordinariness of daily existence. Hence the multiple vocational possibilities for all humans; vocations such as Mother. Spouse. Daughter. Sister. Grandmother. Educator. Student.

The vocation of student is particularly important to those of us involved in education in some way. After all, if we [as educators] are life-long learners, the vocation of student must be recognized as ours as well. We honour and value all learners in our school communities. This is creational living.

Opportunities to serve are everywhere:

Vocation[s] are played out - not just in extraordinary acts ...but in the realm of the ordinary... In the often humdrum present... We are to love our neighbours... [Veith, 2002]

Therefore, we can develop this line of thinking further. Creational living and vocational thinking challenges a purely secular, utilitarian focus on education. There are further questions to be asked! Who chooses the knowledge we preference? Is education competitive and isolating as our students bury their heads in text books? How will all our students learn about community and community-building? Does the heart of the learner matter at all?

Lutheran Education's dual purpose for education

From this perspective, education has a dual purpose. First, education enables all students to develop gifts and talents and to learn optimally. Second, there is a social responsibility connected to learning that enhances community well-being. That is, all student-learning contributes to the common good in society; a common good focusing upon humanitarian and ecological needs. A vocational perspective [built upon a Christian understanding of what it means to be human] recognises that our world will always ache. Relationships will always need healing. There will be barriers when getting to know people who are different in some way. Redemption is offered by a loving God in Christ.

We respond in thankfulness. We are not saviours. We are servers. We serve with a thankful heart. Simultaneously [and together] we are respectful service-providers and service-recipients. We 'come as guest'. We seek our neighbours and desire to understand neighbourly-ness. And in so doing, learners of all ages can make a difference [just like the Samaritan did].

In a school setting, this perspective has the added benefit of enabling young people to develop a realistic understanding of their community and their world. Students build a strong sense of belonging as a listener, a learner and a contributor. Learning has a sense of the practical. It is experiential and purposeful beyond self. All build skills to ensure that community connections are empathetic, reciprocal and humble. Restorative and pastoral practices are central. Problem-solving is posed with purpose. Inquiring involves listening. Communicating requires humility and advocacy. The skills of critical and compassionate thinking have never been so needed as now.

We are ordinary... young and old... Service and Learning is an invitation for us all. Service-Learning is short-hand for learning that builds a heart for service together with the skills and knowledge to actively participate respectfully and relationally. Learning service in multiple contexts is important. Service-Learning as a school culture is to be embraced.

Service and neighbourly-ness is connected

We serve because, in Christ, that is who we are – servants. Therefore, we are called to service because we are real neighbours who 'show mercy to the one who was beaten up' Luke 10:37...

Christian and non-Christian alike are challenged to act out of a sense of their identity - either as human beings or the gifted children of God.... Their actions need to be taught as an expression of that identity rather than something that establishes that identity. It is the tree that produces the fruit not the fruit that makes the tree.

Schools are educational institutions that seek to equip people for life. Service-learning provides opportunity where empathy, a sense of compassion, practical skills and understanding can be developed. In a very real sense it should be seen as 'equipping the saints for works of service'.

Rev. T. Unger. LEA website.

<http://www.lutheran.edu.au/assets/Uploads/pr/web/Teaching%20and%20learning/Service%20Learning/A%20theological%20perspective/A%20theological%20perspective.pdf>

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